

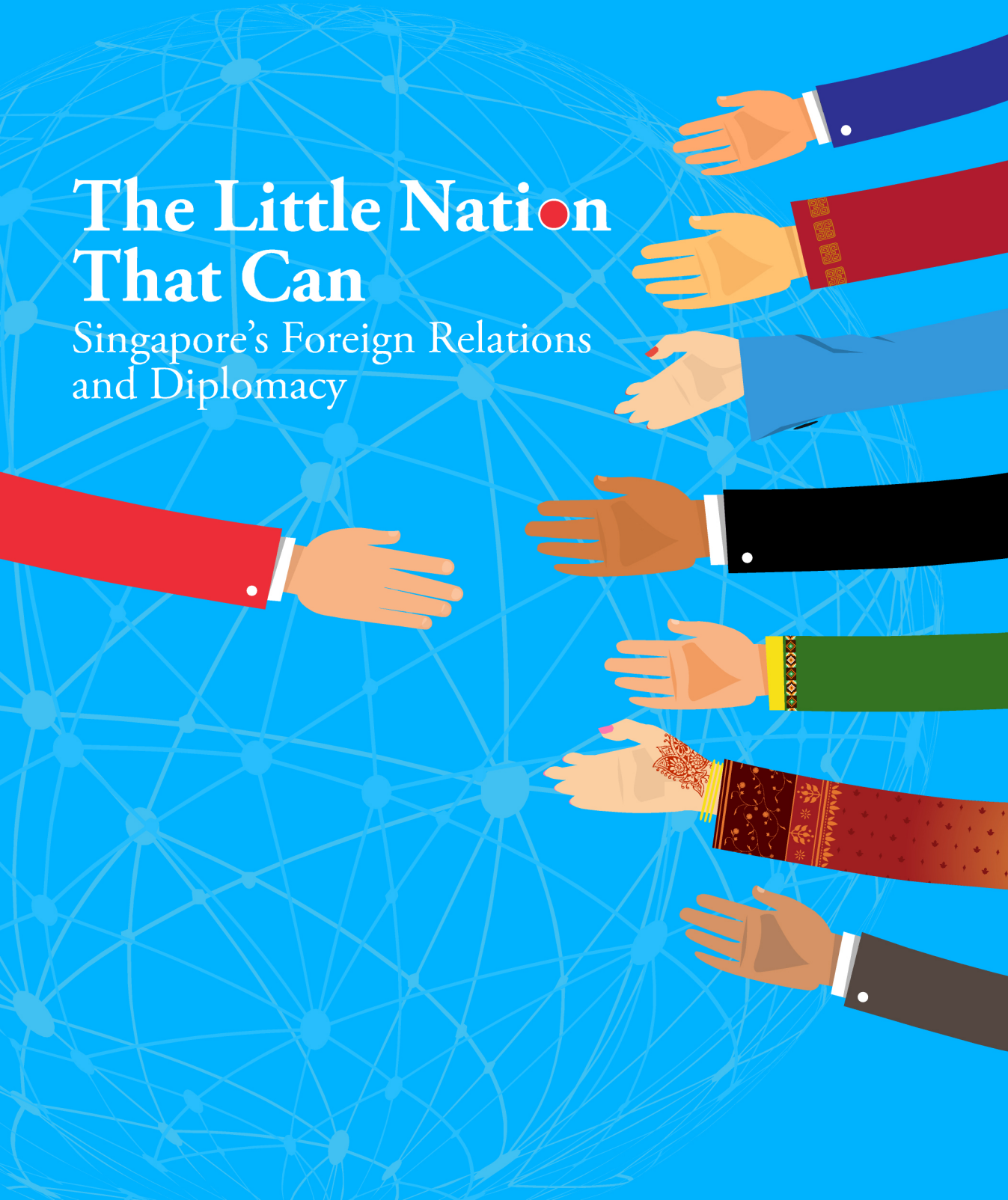
COMMENTARY

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE SOCIETY

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The Little Nation That Can

Singapore's Foreign Relations
and Diplomacy



Commentary:

Volume 26, 2017

The Little Nation that Can. Singapore's Foreign Relations and Diplomacy

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Foreword

We are at an inflection point.

A multipolar world order has emerged as China and India, two continental-sized economies, have plugged into the global economy and lifted hundreds of millions from abject poverty into the middle class. The enormous economic transformations will inevitably alter the geo-strategic tectonic plates. We hope to see an interdependent world – with a premium on win-win collaboration, economic integration and adherence to international law. But only time will tell.

The hitherto global consensus for free trade, mutual investments and economic integration is also fraying as manifest in recent electoral outcomes all over the world. The central political question will be how to resolve the trilemma defined by Dani Rodrik – getting the balance right between hyperglobalisation, national sovereignty and democracy.

The digital revolution is still in an early phase, with the emergence of digital oligarchs, increasing inequality and middle class anxiety about jobs and wages.

And race, language and religion continue to be abused to generate extremism and violence.

Singapore will have to manage our economic restructuring, political transition and diplomacy whilst these trends interact in our region. How we navigate this era of great promise and potential peril will define the next 50 years of Singapore's history and survival.

This diverse compilation of essays and commentaries on Singapore's foreign relations and diplomacy by NUSS is thus a timely one. Penned by Singapore's stalwarts in the diplomatic arena, many of whom I have had the privilege of working with, it encapsulates their personal experience and interpretations of Singapore's foreign policy across various regions, subjects and time periods. I hope that it will allow readers to gain a deeper understanding of what it takes for Singapore to remain relevant and successful in an increasingly uncertain world.

Vivian Balakrishnan

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Republic of Singapore

Mission Statement

To foster a lifelong relationship with NUS and the wider graduate community

At NUSS, a lifelong relationship with NUS and the wider graduate community is achieved through two mutually reinforcing thrusts:

- promoting the interests of its members and NUS; and
- contributing positively to Singapore's political and intellectual development and helping to cultivate a more gracious social and cultural environment.

As the foremost graduate society, NUSS strives to promote the interests of its stakeholders by providing appropriate platforms for all to socialise, build networks, improve connectivity and exchange ideas through a multitude of recreational, academic, political, social and cultural activities.



Editor's Introduction

The Little Nation That Can. Singapore's Foreign Relations and Diplomacy

Gillian Koh

Gillian KOH is Deputy Director (Research) at the Institute of Policy Studies, which is part of the National University of Singapore (NUS) where the area of civil society and its development is one of her research interests. An NUS alumna herself, she is proud to be a member of NUSS.

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In December 2016, I found myself in the company of two senior foreign diplomats, as well as business and community leaders, some of whom were Singaporeans. It was inevitable that the conversation would turn to how it came to be that Singapore's military assets – nine Terrex armoured vehicles – would be impounded by the Hong Kong Customs authority on 23 November.

The vehicles were bound for Singapore after the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) had conducted, as it had done in previous years, military exercises in Taiwan and the shipper APL transited in Hong Kong (HK), which is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. Customs officials alleged that APL did not have the requisite permits to take the vehicles through their port. SAF's army chief said the same logistics arrangement had been used in the past without encountering any difficulty.

In describing the situation, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang, referred not only to the need for Singapore to abide by the laws of HKSAR and cooperate with its government, but added, rather curiously:

The Chinese government has always firmly opposed countries that have diplomatic ties with China to have any form of official exchange with Taiwan, including military exchanges and cooperation.¹

¹ Sim, Royston, "SAF vehicle seizure: Shipping firm APL had used Hong Kong as transit point without issues, says Army Chief", 29 November 2016, *The Straits Times*.

² Sim, Royston, *Ibid*.

He added:

We asked that the Singapore Government strictly abide by the one-China principle.²

Framed in that manner, public chatter on this disturbing event was that China would no longer acquiesce to the military exercises Singapore had with the former's renegade state, Taiwan. Earlier in January 2016, Taiwan had elected a pro-Independence leader, Ms Tsai Ing-Wen, as president which raised the ire of the Chinese ruling elites.

In this relationship, who changed? Clearly Taiwan did. But over the lunch table, the argument was whether it was China that had changed, or Singapore. A fellow diner said it was Singapore; that it had been discourteous to China by commenting when China's claims to territories in the South China Sea and the development of some reefs there had been ruled unlawful by the Permanent Court of Arbitration empowered by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in July. This was in favour of the Philippines that had brought the action against China in January 2013.

According to some around the dining table, since Singapore had no claim to territories in the region, it seemed unnecessary and even audacious to have made a statement that it supported "the peaceful resolution

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of disputes among claimants in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including UNCLOS.”³

Then, a Singaporean business leader with interests in China described how his Chinese counterparts – not party elites but mere businessmen – had pressed him to account for the Government's statement. First, he noted how surprisingly widespread, fierce and negative the public reaction had been against little Singapore's position on the matter. In mammoth China, how and why would it matter and certainly, matter to people who were not presumably government elites?

Second, he shared his own response to the question – he told his counterparts to try to understand that Singapore has had its own disputes over territory that are of vital national interest. The only way Singapore could protect those interests, and indeed its very sovereignty, was precisely by relying on UNCLOS and what it represents – the international rule of law. He then explained to his Chinese contacts how Singapore fought its own dispute with Malaysia over Pedra Branca. This system of the international rule of law guaranteed freedom of navigation and overflight so critical to Singapore as a port city and global communications hub and therefore, it was important for Singapore to reinforce its support for the regime at every opportunity.

This stilled the conversation at the table. The Singaporeans knew what he meant. We were reminded that in the midst of the shifting geopolitical realities of our region, our country's viability as a sovereign people rests on the rule-based international order and, more critically, on citizens being able to recognise and defend our strategic interests; not cowed by might but standing up for our right to autonomy and independence. While we cultivate warm ties, country-to-country, government-to-government and people-to-people as we must given that we are a small nation-state that relies on free flows of trade and investment, these should be based on mutual respect and interests. Even if this Little Red Dot works hard to prove its standing, relevance and value to its friends, its citizens should not concede to anything less than that basic expectation – not to be bullied into submission. What is debatable is when and how this is conveyed, quietly, behind closed doors and only by the ruling elites, or when they are taken on, on the streets of China – can Singaporeans explain in a non-threatening, non-defensive manner, what our basic national interests are?

A few months earlier, the Prime Minister (PM) of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, had pre-empted the developments in the country's foreign relations with China by discussing the fundamentals in the country's policy given the geopolitical shifts

³ “MFA Spokesman's Comments on the ruling of the Arbitral Tribunal in the Philippines v China case under Annex VII to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Singapore) Press Room, 12 July 2016.

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in the region. At his National Day Rally Speech on 21 August 2016, PM Lee explained that Singapore had always kept ties warm with its neighbours, with the United States (US), as well as with a rejuvenated China that had grown, he said, in a “constructive and peaceful way”. More importantly, he shared that it was easier if the two powers were on good terms with each other which was what both said they were striving for but he added, “...life is never so straightforward”.

PM Lee spelled out three key interests for the country – the first, upholding international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes; the second, ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea; and third, ensuring a united and effective Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) so that every member's right to self-determination is assured. Singapore would have to support its ASEAN brothers whenever it is called upon to do so and certainly, strike the note of empathy when there are threats to a member or to ASEAN unity.

He added:

So, on the South China Sea, we have got our own stand, principled, consistent; different from China's, different from the Philippines or America. Other countries will persuade

us to side with them, one side or the other, and we have to choose our own place to stand, what is in our interest, calculate it, choose the spot, stand firm, we cannot succumb to pressure. I tell you this so that you will understand why we do what we do and why we have to stand up for Singapore's position. Sometimes, if you read the foreign media, including the PRC media, you will find articles criticising Singapore for not siding more with them, and I know some Singaporeans are concerned about these criticisms because they have foreign friends. PRC friends, business partners, academic colleagues, personal contacts. They may tell you any tension between Singapore and China will affect your business, affect your collaboration. I understand these concerns. We would like business and collaboration to continue, too, to flourish between Singapore and China and Singapore and other countries because these are arrangements which benefit both sides. If they are disrupted, both sides lose. But the Government has to take a national point of view, decide what is in Singapore's overall interests. We want good relations with other countries if it is at all possible, but we must also be prepared for ups and downs from time to time.⁴

We all recognise the on-going five-decade effort to broaden Singapore's international

⁴ Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2016 (English), <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/national-day-rally-2016>.

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ties and standing, whether through our contribution to global governance, multilateral free trade agreements, bilateral arrangements for cooperation and development, as well as all the cultural exchanges and people-to-people interactions, right across the world and not just in the Asian region.

For those of us who do not know the specific details of these international relations, we will at least be familiar and proud of the accolade that we are a country that “punches above its weight” – that we have an outsized international standing when compared to our puny physical size.

How precisely did we get to this point – to be known as the Little Red Dot that can nonetheless survive, thrive as a global city and be an influential member of the international community? What will the future bring as the geopolitical equation shifts with the rise and decline of global and regional powers? More critically, what role can and should ordinary citizens, business and community leaders play in ensuring that we sustain our relevance and reputation in that international community?

The developments described above and these questions are the inspiration and impetus behind this 2017 volume of *Commentary*, a journal published by the National University of Singapore Society (NUSS). It was designed, and the chapters were written, by people with a deep conviction that all Singaporeans can play a

role in ensuring that we continue to be that little nation that can – we can continue to thrive as an economy and society; we can navigate the ebb and flow of great power relations; we can make a contribution to global governance and be a positive force towards building a better world.

Not convinced? We find the world in Singapore all the time. We are a cosmopolitan society, and companies as well as people from all over the globe come here because they know they will be welcomed and that this is a safe, reliable and profitable place to locate themselves.

We also find Singapore in the world. At least 200,000 Singaporeans are registered as residing overseas but there are many more who take short sojourns, business attachments, run service projects and study outside the country. You will find Singapore brands in modern malls in major Asian cities including first- and second-tier cities in China. Singapore companies are taking advantage of the opportunities that emerging economies in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America offer. NUSS members, like the majority of Singapore professionals and business people, are well-travelled for all these same reasons.

The international exposure for ordinary citizens and not just business and political elites will most definitely grow. As the Singapore economy develops its external wing and builds new markets further afield, an increasing number of companies will venture out or become further integrated

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into global value chains. The National University of Singapore (NUS) is playing its part to prepare graduates and potential members of NUSS to think globally – it has established nine “overseas colleges” in what it calls “entrepreneurial hotspots” around the world. As students go out, how will they be received, what will they say about Singapore? Each, a self-confident ambassador of the little nation that has the can-do spirit, not one to be intimidated by the (lack of) size of our homeland, nor worried by the ups and downs of how other countries or their governments wish to view us? This is certainly what we hope for.

While an equal amount of effort is being made to ensure that Singapore is a home we are proud of, we know that to the extent to which we are feted for our economic vibrancy, social cohesion, technological progress and cultural attraction, foreign governments and companies will be attracted to build a relationship with Singapore and Singaporeans – we will have something to offer them as much as they will have something to offer us, be it a great base for operations, capital, thought-leadership and just friendship.

Just as the Chinese businessmen quizzing ours at the height of the Terrex issue could represent their country's national interest, how much more should we be aware of ours and be able to articulate this? How is our government expanding

the international space in which to secure our sovereignty? And how is it also extending trade and investment links as well as international friendships, bonds of trust and partnerships that form the overarching frameworks that will allow us to interact with the world around us?

What we present in this journal are chapters on our foreign policy orientation towards every key region and country in the world as well as our country's relationships with the key institutions – the United Nations and the Association of South East Asian Nations. The chapters are crafted to provide, in as economical a form as possible, a review of the history of the relationship that Singapore has had with a country region or institution, an assessment of the current relationship and a projection of that relationship into the medium-term future, a decade from now.⁵

The lead article is written by a very special contributor and a member of the NUSS Advisory Panel, Professor (Prof) Tommy Koh. Prof Koh's service to the nation as a diplomat spans almost the full history of the establishment of independent Singapore's foreign service. He was appointed as Singapore's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York in 1968, and worked to win friends and influence people on behalf of the new nation-state

⁵ Most of the essays in this journal were drafted in the first half of 2017.

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under the leadership of our country's first foreign minister, S. Rajaratnam. Right up to this day, he remains Ambassador-at-Large. It is apt that his essay comes first in this collection as he sets out the guiding principles of Singapore's foreign policy. He starts by asking that most fundamental question for Singaporeans: Is it true that small states must stoically accept bullying by their bigger neighbours? Is it a fate they must suffer?

I am not going to be a spoiler and tell you how Prof Koh, generations of Singaporean leaders and legions of diplomats have worked over five decades to ensure that the answer for Singapore is "no", but let us have no doubt about the effort that goes into enabling Singapore to do just that. Nothing is taken for granted. There is no blinding hubris even as others praise us for having arrived at first world status or that we punch above our weight in international diplomacy.

The chapters that follow Prof Koh's spell out in technicolour detail how that heavy-lifting was done and continues to be done; what effort goes into building goodwill and meaningful partnerships that Singapore has across the globe. The chapters also highlight the key policy decisions that had to be taken to normalise our relationship with some of the countries that we may have had a troubled past with – Indonesia and Japan for instance.

The chapters have been contributed by

senior, experienced current, and former members of our country's diplomatic corps, writing their reflections in their personal capacity. They are joined by leaders of other national institutions, scholars and public intellectuals including Ms Lee Huay Leng, who is a journalist by profession. It is a privilege to have all of them contribute to *Commentary 2017*.

We want to acknowledge the generosity of time extended to us by them including the former Non-Resident Ambassador to Brazil, who is now NUS Provost Chair and Professor (Practice) in NUS Engineering and NUS Business School, Rector of Residential College 4, Choo Chiau Beng who provides us with a conversation with *Commentary 2017* about Singapore's links with Latin America. He is an example of those savvy, battle-hardened business leaders who contend with the business and political risks of operating in faraway places that are unfamiliar to many of us.

Some of those who have contributed chapters have been involved in what is called "Track 1.5 diplomacy", where government officials interact with non-government actors to share perspectives or raise issues on foreign relations.

We also recognise that foreign relations of a country can be fostered through the efforts of ordinary citizens as well as through the sharing of culture across borders. As such, we are pleased to feature two very special chapters on how

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Singaporeans are making friends with people of other nations through humanitarian and service programmes, as well as cultural diplomacy.

This unique volume of *Commentary* closes with a chapter by Prof Khong Yuen Foong of National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. He was given the challenging task of providing a critical yet accessible look at the future of foreign relations for Singapore. In a succinct manner, Prof Khong explains the concept of the balance of power that has undergirds Singapore's foreign policy.

He highlights that the balance of power that afforded Singapore and the Asian region relative peace and security after the Second World War is not one of equality among the major powers, but of the preponderance of force by the United States (US). Given the rise of China and its drive to reassert control over what it deems to be part of its sphere of influence, there is an acute sense that a re-balancing is taking place.

Prof Khong's pointed commentary in this volume is this:

The question for Singapore's policymakers is whether to recalibrate their strategy away from US predominance, in favour of a bipolar balance of power (China-US), or in an

anticipatory move, to bandwagon strategically with the future superpower. I wager that in the years ahead, Singapore is likely to take the former approach.

In September 2017, PM Lee visited China and was granted meetings with four out of the seven members of China's Politburo Standing Committee at the time, including President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. He signalled that the bilateral relationship was in good order and yet, that it will have to change for it to stay meaningful. He said:

In the old days, China was in a different place. Singapore was able to play a different role because China had not yet opened up, and we were able to help them in the process... Now, they are in a much more developed situation (with) many more links to all the major players, but Singapore needs to continue to be able to add value to China in order for the relationship to be worthwhile for both sides.⁶

PM Lee's message that Singapore recognised China's progress and his signal that Singapore will re-orientate its approach to relations with it, must certainly have been gratifying to his hosts.

Because "times are a-changin'", (the title of Prof Khong's chapter), we hope NUSS

⁶ Lim, Yan Liang, "Singapore-China ties good but need to keep up with the times: PM Lee Hsien Loong", 23 September 2017, *The Straits Times*.

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members, friends and fellow Singaporeans will find what has been set out in this Introductory Chapter enticement enough to read *Commentary 2017* from cover to cover. Start, of course, with the chapters you feel directly connected to because you have professional or personal ties to those countries or regions discussed, but traverse the globe with us.

Just like the sharp, strategic yet winsome response that the Singaporean businessman gave to his Chinese counterpart, you too can be ready to be a great ambassador for our little nation, in season and out of season; after all, you are an integral part of the country that can do what it sets out to achieve. Don't let anything stop you.

Finally, we dedicate *Commentary 2017* to the men and women who have led the effort to represent Singapore far and wide, and secure our national interests within the international community in our country's 52 year history. They include the foreign ministers, from our first, the visionary Mr Rajaratnam to the current, the polymath Dr Vivian Balakrishnan who was so kind to contribute the Foreword. They also include the Ambassadors, like Prof Koh who first stepped into the role almost 50 years ago and is truly first among equals in the realm of global diplomacy; and the generations of diplomats and staff of Singapore's Foreign Service. They most certainly include those who are fostering strong people-to-people ties across borders through philanthropy, cultural exchange

and service programmes – the ordinary people doing extraordinary things. We salute your public service and most of all, your can-do spirit.

Chapter One

Singapore's Foreign Policy: A Pioneer Diplomat's Reflections

Tommy Koh

Tommy KOH is currently Ambassador-At-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is also Special Adviser to the Institute of Policy Studies, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Centre for International Law, Chairman of the International Advisory Panel of the Asia Research Institute, Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Master's Degree on Environmental Management, Rector of the Tembusu College and previously served as Dean of Faculty of Law, all bodies within the National University of Singapore (NUS). He is Co-Chairman of the Asian Development Bank's Advisory Committee on Water and Sanitation, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the SymAsia Foundation of Credit Suisse.

He was also Singapore's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) in New York, Ambassador to the United States of America, High Commissioner to Canada and Ambassador to Mexico. He was President of the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea and the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for and the Main Committee of the UN Conference on Environment and Development. He was the founding Chairman of the National Arts Council, founding Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation and former Chairman of the National Heritage Board. He was also Singapore's Chief Negotiator for the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement. He acted as Singapore's Agent in two legal disputes with Malaysia. He has chaired two dispute panels for the World Trade Organization. He is the Co-Chairman of the China-Singapore Forum, the Japan-Singapore Symposium and the India-Singapore Strategic Dialogue.

He is the recipient of several awards that recognise his contributions to Singapore and the world, the most notable of which was the award in 2008 of the Order of Nila Utama (First Class) from the Singapore government for the outstanding part he played as a member of the team representing Singapore in the Pedra Branca dispute with the Malaysian government.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

Singapore's Foreign Policy: A Pioneer Diplomat's Reflections

In his November 2015 S. Rajaratnam Lecture, Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong quoted an ancient Chinese saying which states: “Small countries have no foreign policy”. More recently, on 1 July 2017, the Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Kishore Mahbubani, wrote an opinion essay entitled, “Qatar: Big lessons from a small country” in *The Straits Times*. He stated that “small states must behave like small states” and quoted with apparent approval what Thucydides, an Athenian historian and general said 2,400 years ago – “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”.

Do Small Countries have Foreign Policy?

The first question that I would like to discuss is whether small states do or do not have foreign policy. My answer is that, in the contemporary world, all states, whether big or small, have foreign policies.

The United Nations (UN) has 193 member states. Of these, 107 can be described as small states as the size of their populations are below 10 million. In fact, I would argue that foreign policy is even more important for small states than it is for big states. Why? Because they are less self-sufficient and are more dependent on the world for their survival, peace and prosperity.

Should Small Countries Accept their Fate?

The second question I wish to discuss is

whether it is true that small states must accept bullying by their bigger neighbours stoically as it is their fate to suffer.

I would point out respectfully that we do not live in the world of ancient Greece. We live in the world of the UN, where there are laws and principles governing relations between states.

We have the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in which all states are represented and the principle of sovereign equality applies. In the UNGA, all states, big or small, have one vote. This allows small states to make big states account for their behaviour.

Objectives of Singapore's Foreign Policy

What are the objectives of Singapore's foreign policy? I would summarise them as follows:

- (i) to protect Singapore's sovereignty and independence;
- (ii) to protect Singapore's territorial integrity;
- (iii) to make Southeast Asia a region of peace and prosperity;
- (iv) to make the maximum number of friends and the minimum number of enemies;
- (v) to strengthen the rule of law;
- (vi) to promote the adherence to international law;
- (vii) to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes between states;

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- (viii) to be close to all the major powers by being relevant and useful to them;
- (ix) to champion free trade and open economies, and to oppose protectionism in all its guises;
- (x) to enlarge Singapore's political and economic space;
- (xi) to support and strengthen the multilateral institutions of global governance;
- (xii) to unite the small countries of the world; and
- (xiii) to be a good global citizen by, inter alia, sharing our knowledge, expertise and experience with other developing countries.

Is Geography Destiny?

Is it true that geography is destiny? I think it is true because Singapore cannot change its location at the heart of Southeast Asia. Many Singaporeans seem to be unhappy with our location. I do not share their sentiment. I am grateful that we are located in Southeast Asia and not in South Asia, the Middle East or South Pacific. On balance, and compared to the alternatives, I think Singapore is fortunate to be located in this region and not somewhere else.

The Importance of ASEAN

Since Singapore's destiny is inextricably linked to the fortune of Southeast Asia, our diplomatic objective is to support the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and, through ASEAN, to make our region stable, peaceful and prosperous.

ASEAN is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. ASEAN suffers from bad press and seems to have more critics than admirers. I would argue that the 625 million citizens of ASEAN have good reasons to celebrate the 50th birthday of their regional organisation. Why? Because ASEAN has kept the peace in Southeast Asia for 50 years. ASEAN has integrated its 10 economies into a single market and production platform. Collectively, ASEAN is also playing an indispensable role as the convener and neutral chairman of the region's institutions and networks.

Singapore and the Major Powers

I am often asked to explain our foreign policy vis-à-vis the major powers. My reply is that we are pro-United States (US), pro-China, pro-Japan, pro-India and pro-European Union (EU).

A small country like Singapore basically has two choices. It can decide to become an ally of one of the major powers. Singapore has rejected this option. It can also decide to be close to all the major powers but not be aligned with any of them. Singapore has chosen this option because we wish to remain independent and have maximum room for manoeuvre.

The challenge is to be very skilful and avoid giving the impression to any of the major powers that we are no longer non-aligned. For example, we must avoid giving China the impression that we are pro-US and anti-China, and avoid giving the US the

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impression that we are pro-China and anti-US. It is a delicate balancing act but it can be done.

China and the US

I was in Beijing in May this year to co-chair the annual China-Singapore Forum. At this public forum, held at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, a Chinese diplomat launched an attack on Singapore. He accused Singapore of being pro-US and anti-China. He cited the various things that the Singapore Armed Forces is doing with the US as proof of his accusation. In my response, I explained that Singapore is close to the US but is not an ally. I assured him that Singapore would never allow its relationship with any major power to be a cause of harm to China.

China and India

In a similar way, an Indian diplomat recently asked me why the Singapore government is supporting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by China. I should explain that India views the Chinese initiative with suspicion partly because the proposed Pakistan-China economic corridor would pass through Kashmir. Because of the deficit of trust between New Delhi and Beijing, India declined to participate in the Belt and Road Forum, which was also held in May in Beijing.

I explained to my Indian friend that Singapore has not become pro-China and anti-India. Singapore supports the BRI

because it would benefit the region and Singapore. This episode reminded me of the fact that we have to be very sensitive to the feelings of the major powers and be very careful in ensuring that what we do with one major power is not misinterpreted by another major power as an unfriendly act.

To be Relevant and Useful

The other challenge is to be relevant and useful to each of the major powers. I am happy to report that, despite its small size, Singapore has a comprehensive and substantial account with the US, China, Japan, India and the EU. It is a huge challenge for a small country to be able to do so.

Most readers would be surprised to learn that Singapore is the largest foreign investor in China and one of the top foreign investors in India. We have three iconic projects in China – in Suzhou, Tianjin and Chongqing. In India, we are embarking on a historic project of building a new capital, Amaravati, for the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The only major power that Singapore does not have a substantial account with is Russia. Singapore is seeking to rectify this by proposing to negotiate a free trade agreement with Russia and its partners in the Eurasia Group.

Forum of Small States

Singapore is realistic about the nature of

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the world we live in. However, we are not fatalistic. We do not accept that it is the fate of small countries to be bullied by bigger states.

One of the initiatives we have launched at the UN is to unite all countries that have population sizes of less than 10 million. We founded the Forum of Small States, which has a membership of 107. It is an important group at the UN. The big countries can ignore one small country, but they cannot ignore 107 small countries.

Global Governance Group

Singapore has founded another group at the UN called the Global Governance Group or 3G. The group consists of 30 small and medium-sized countries. 3G has established a cooperative relationship with the G20. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany invited PM Lee to attend the G20 Summit in Hamburg held in July this year, as a representative of 3G.

Many scholars of international relations are puzzled by one aspect of Singapore's foreign policy. They perceive the leaders of Singapore as adherents of the Realist School of International Relations. Realists worship power, especially hard power. They are generally sceptical, even dismissive, of international law. They cannot understand why Singapore's leaders attach so much importance to the rule of law and international law.

My answer to them is that the ideology of

Singapore is not Realism but Pragmatism. The rule of law and international law are important to the survival of small states. It is, for Singapore, a life and death issue.

A Good Global Citizen

I want to conclude by sharing about Singapore's quest to be a good global citizen. Addressing the UNGA in September 1965, soon after Singapore's admission to the UN, Singapore's Foreign Minister, S. Rajaratnam, said that Singapore believed in cooperation for development. He said that in time, Singapore would share its knowledge, expertise and experience with other developing countries.

We have fulfilled Mr Rajaratnam's promise by launching the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) in 1992, bringing all previous ad hoc training programmes under a single framework. Through the SCP, Singapore has trained over 100,000 officials from developing countries. Within ASEAN, we have made a special effort to help the four new members, namely, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

Singapore as a Thought Leader

Singapore has also tried to contribute to the making of a better world by launching initiatives in areas where Singapore has excelled such as our policies against corruption, on sustainable urbanisation, the protection of the environment, water and sanitation.

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Once every two years, Singapore hosts the Singapore International Water Summit and Cities Summit. In connection with the two Summits, we award the Lee Kuan Yew Water Prize and the Lee Kuan Yew Cities Prize. We have tried to be a thought leader on cities by establishing the Centre for Liveable Cities, the Centre for Sustainable Asian Cities and the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities.

We have also tried to share our experience of clean government and good governance through the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Singapore is also much admired for its inter-racial and inter-religious harmony.


By doing all these good deeds and by being willing to share our experience, we have gained soft power. The Soft Power 30 Index, a global ranking of soft power, places Singapore at number 20 in the world in its 2017 index. Japan and Singapore are the only Asian countries among the top 20.

Conclusion

I will conclude by saying that the world continues to be a dangerous place for small countries. The contemporary world is, however, a much safer place than the world of Thucydides and ancient Greece. The world is not perfect but it is not a lawless world. There are laws, principles and rules governing relations between and among states. There are multilateral institutions of

global governance.

As a small country, Singapore has developed the capacity to defend itself. At the same time, it works hard to strengthen ASEAN and keep Southeast Asia a region of peace and prosperity. It enjoys good relations with all the major powers. It is a leader of small and medium-sized countries. It is a good global citizen. For all these reasons, Singapore is a small country that punches above its weight.



Chapter Two

Singapore-China Relations: 2017-2027

Lee Huay Leng

LEE Huay Leng started her journalistic career at *Lianhe Zaobao* in 1994 upon graduation. She was with the paper for more than 20 years in different roles – Sports Reporter, Political Reporter, Hong Kong Correspondent, Beijing Bureau Chief, China Editor, News Editor and Deputy Editor, to name a few.

She now heads the Chinese Media Group of Singapore Press Holdings, which includes *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Lianhe Wanbao*, *Shin Min Daily*, the digital platforms *Zaobao.sg* and *Zaobao.com* and radio UFM100.3.

She graduated from the Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore and did her Master of Arts degree in Southeast Asian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She was a Rajawali Fellow at Ash Center, Harvard in 2010 and a Lien Fellow at Nanyang Technological University in 2014.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, she contributed this article in her personal capacity.

This article was translated from Mandarin by Han Lilin and Huang Huimin.

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Since the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between Singapore and the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to simply as "China") on 3 October 1990, bilateral relations between the two countries have enjoyed steady development with frequent high-level exchanges, close economic, cultural and educational contacts, as well as the establishment of government-to-government projects in Suzhou, Tianjin and Chongqing in China. Singapore ministers and local Chinese leaders jointly helm provincial Singapore-China business councils. Yet, the relationship between the two countries over the past 27 years has not always been smooth sailing.

Two Setbacks: 2004 and 2016

In 2004, diplomatic ties between Singapore and China fell into the doldrums for the first time. For nearly six months, interactions between the countries came to a near standstill due to the private visit by then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to Taiwan in July that year, when he called on the president of Taiwan at the time, Chen Shui-Bian. Beijing retaliated, making very clear its displeasure at what it perceived as Singapore demonstrating its support for the pro-independence movement represented by Chen. Negotiations on the Singapore-China Free Trade Agreement, which were due to begin, were affected. Chinese Ambassador to

Singapore, Zhang Yun commented on the incident in a media interview:

Hopefully the dark clouds surrounding the China-Singapore bilateral relations lift as soon as possible. I hope too that Singapore will, taking into consideration the long-term interests of both countries, proactively adopt practical measures to resolve the issue. After all, to quote a Chinese proverb, it falls on the one who created the problem to resolve it.¹

At a later occasion when he was already Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee explained the city-state's position regarding his 2004 Taiwan visit, saying:

One thing which isn't going to change is our approach to external relations. We seek to be friends with all countries, and especially with our immediate neighbours and the major powers. We pursue win-win co-operation with all countries who are willing to co-operate with Singapore, but that doesn't mean that we can always accommodate the views or the positions of other countries. When our vital interests are at stake, we must quietly stand our ground.²

Singapore stood its ground throughout the entire incident. Diplomatic relations only resumed gradually towards the end of that

¹ Interview with *Lianhe Zaobao*, 22 July 2004.

² Lee, Hsien Loong, National Day Rally 2004 (English), 22 August 2004, <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/newsroom/prime-minister-lee-hsien-loongs-national-day-rally-2004-english>.

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year when the leaders of both countries met at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting held in Chile.

In 2016, Singapore-China diplomatic ties faced another setback. That year, Singapore assumed the role of the coordinator for the ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations. Although not a claimant state, Singapore reiterated – as it has on several occasions on the South China Sea dispute – its interest in upholding international law and the principle of peaceful dispute resolution, preserving the right of freedom of navigation and maintaining a united ASEAN.

When the foreign ministers for ASEAN and China gathered for the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in the southern Chinese city of Yuxi in Yunnan province to discuss the dispute in mid-June 2016, a joint press conference was scheduled to be held by Singapore's Foreign Minister, Vivian Balakrishnan, coordinating minister for the ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations, and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi. However, a divergence in views between ASEAN and China ensued. Eventually, Minister Wang held the press conference alone, while Minister Balakrishnan left to "catch a flight".

Singapore's attitude towards the South China Sea dispute was not what China had hoped for; it appeared to China that

Singapore was taking sides with the United States (US) which it associated with the line of resolving disputes by taking them to international and multilateral bodies.

However, speaking on the issue at his National Day Rally speech on 21 August 2016, PM Lee stated:

So, on the South China Sea, we have got our own stand, principled, consistent; different from China's, different from the Philippines or America. Other countries will persuade us to side with them, one side or the other, and we have to choose our own place to stand, what is in our interest, calculate it, choose the spot, stand firm, we cannot succumb to pressure."³

Singapore has never wavered in its principles or attitude towards China, believing that this sends a signal to other countries that despite its small size, it is no pushover.

Amidst the South China Sea dispute, both countries have continued moving the Chongqing Connectivity Initiative – their third government-to-government project – forward. During the G20 Summit held in Hangzhou in September 2016, PM Lee and Chinese President Xi Jinping also reaffirmed the close cooperation and partnership between both countries.

In reality, Singapore's ministerial visits to

³ Lee, Hsien Loong, National Day Rally 2016 (English), 21 August 2016, <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/national-day-rally-2016>.

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China in 2016 were not smooth sailing – some meetings were cancelled and the reception by the Chinese counterparts differed somewhat from the past.

There has also been an increase in commentaries directed at Singapore by the Chinese media being circulated in both China and Singapore. Some on social media questioned the capability of the current Singapore government in the post-Lee Kuan Yew era.

For the first time since its inception, the annual meeting of the China-Singapore Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation – the highest-level forum between the two countries – was delayed in 2016.

The end of 2016 saw Hong Kong Customs detaining Terrex Infantry Carrier Vehicles belonging to the Singapore Armed Forces, while the vehicles were being shipped from Taiwan through Hong Kong en route to Singapore.

When diplomatic ties between Singapore and China were first established, Singapore's recognition of the "One China" policy meant that China had, quite understandably, no objections to "Operation Starlight", the codename for Singapore's military training programme in Taiwan where the Terrexes were mobilised, to continue. But by the end of 2016, the

winds had changed and bilateral relations between China and Singapore were put to the test.

The annual meeting of the China-Singapore Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation was eventually held at the end of February 2017. Having weathered a series of ups and downs, bilateral ties between Singapore and China are back on an even keel, but that does not mean that the relationship has reverted to that of the past.

Facing a New China

In reality, Singapore faces a China that is different from what it was ten years ago, and it is expected to change further in the next decade. Given the rapidly evolving international order and constant shift in the balance of global power, Singapore has to secure a firm footing in the international arena and strategise in order to respond effectively to change.

China is a very different neighbour to ASEAN under the leadership of President Xi. In contrast to the late Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping's previous strategy of "keeping a low profile" (韬光养晦), China now seeks to "build a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation".⁴ This, while "firmly safeguarding its sovereignty, security and

⁴ Wang, Yi, "Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation—China's Answer to the Question "Where Are the International Relations of the 21st Century Heading", 20 June 2016, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wj_b_663304/wj_bz_663308/2461_663310/t1376908.shtml.

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development interests”.⁵ President Xi has stated that:

China will not stir trouble, but is also not afraid of trouble. When China’s core national interests are affected, we must be able to draw the line and make our threshold known. As we make progress with our peaceful developments, there are many resources and methods to protect China’s national interests more proactively.⁶

This is China’s current attitude. Yet it has already resulted in ASEAN expressing, on several occasions, a preference for not having to choose sides amidst the growing US-Sino competition.

Political relations with China will affect economic ties. China, presently the world’s second largest economy, has become ASEAN’s biggest trading partner. China-ASEAN trade formed 15.2 percent of ASEAN’s total trade for 2015. In comparison, ASEAN’s trade with Japan and the European Union (EU) stood at 10.5 percent and 10 percent of its total trade volume respectively, while trade with the US formed 9.4 percent that year.

In the face of weak economic growth in the EU, coupled with political upheavals in the US and Europe, as well as the rise

of protectionism, President Xi’s One Belt One Road Initiative aims to link 65 countries in the network of trade routes and communications infrastructure, with China taking its place at the heart of the project. China’s influence on the global economy is significant, and it is expected that ASEAN’s reliance on China will only grow over the next decade.

At the same time, Singapore, with its open economy, is seriously evaluating its economic strategy for the future. How then will Singapore-ASEAN-China ties feature in this new strategy? Singapore has to decide on the nature of bilateral economic and political relations it should maintain with China to best serve its interests. This, in itself, is a challenge.

Singapore’s ability to develop adequate resources and talent to manage its relations with China wisely – with all of the latter’s sheer size, history and rising expectations of how it wishes to be addressed in diplomacy – will be a critical factor in shaping this important bilateral relationship.

For a long time, Singapore’s advantage has been in its team of able talent, adept at understanding Western politics and economics, and building strong networks. Its veteran diplomats who continue to

⁵ Wang, Yi, remarks at the 2017 New Year Reception Hosted by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Diaoyutai State Guesthouse”, 24 January 2017, <http://www.chinaembassy.org.sg/eng/jrzg/P020170126589245290169.pdf>.

⁶ Xi, Jinping, text of series of important speeches, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0715/c64387-25281813.html>.

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wield influence in the arena have all worked with the US. As Singapore maintains this advantage, it also has to focus on building a similar team that is able to understand China's politics and economics – and read the Chinese accurately. This is the key to Singapore being able to manoeuvre between the East and the West easily and effectively.

China has sent thousands of its officials to Singapore on study trips since the 1990s. Singapore, for its part, had once positioned itself as the bridge between China and its Western counterparts. However, with China's rapid development, this aspect of Singapore-China relations is also changing. We see – and will continue to see – Singapore hoping to send more of its students and youth to China on immersion programmes and professional internships.

Singapore's founding Prime Minister, the late Lee Kuan Yew had, on his numerous visits to China, been asked by accompanying journalists about the relevance of Singapore to China in the future and how sustainable any such relevance would be. However, it is really the younger generation of Singaporeans and leaders who will need to answer this question, which is, in turn, a crucial facet of future Singapore-China relations.

Both Singapore and China face unique conditions, whether in terms of geographical size, population make-up or historical systems. As China's economic prowess strengthens in the coming decade,

how will Singapore continue to convince China that there is value in maintaining the same close bilateral relations that the two countries have always shared?

Establishing Relevance to China Amidst a New Global Order

I am of the view that there are two aspects to Singapore's refreshed relevance to China. Firstly, Singapore, though small in size, is still able to find a role in which it can exercise influence within regional and international organisations. China needs peace for its development and has sought to become a more active participant in the international community through the same organisations. Singapore's value is therefore in its trustworthy reputation on the world stage and the task is explore how this can also be an asset to China.

Secondly, Singapore's ruling party has been able to continue to deliver effective governance in the face of constant change. While China cannot and will not completely emulate the Singapore model in this respect, it does look to Singapore as a test bed for political and governance models.

As we look to the future of Singapore-China bilateral relations, another area deserving of attention is that of the composition of Singapore's population. Ethnic Chinese form three-quarters of Singapore's population. In his memoir, Lee Kuan Yew recounted his words to Chinese

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leader Deng during their 1978 meeting:

[China] should have no problem getting ahead and doing much better than Singapore because [the Singaporean Chinese] were the descendants of illiterate, landless peasants from Fujian and Guangdong while they had the progeny of the scholars, mandarins and literati who had stayed at home.⁷

With this simple statement, Mr Lee skillfully highlighted the two countries' common "Chinese" element, while he simultaneously made the point that Chinese Singaporeans are different from their counterparts in China.

The fact that China had, at various points, shown interest in Singapore's political and governance models, is also linked to Singapore's majority Chinese population. Herein lies what sets apart China's bilateral relations with Singapore from those of other countries. It is for the same reason that Singapore's former Foreign Minister, George Yeo, had once openly described the two countries as "relatives", a term aptly used to promote bilateral relations.

Nevertheless, this commonality also belies hidden problems for bilateral ties: Singapore places great emphasis on its identity as a sovereign and independent nation with unique characteristics and a diverse population, as well as its own

interests to protect. Despite its deep cultural links with China, it has its own path of development. If China harbours, unrealistically, higher expectations of Singapore in comparison to other countries based on the latter's majority Chinese population, disappointment and dissatisfaction may be inevitable when reality falls short – adding yet another layer of vulnerability to the bilateral relations. Thus, how this commonality between the two countries is handled will affect the future of bilateral relations.

As Singapore examines its historical ties with China to help it better prepare for the future, it would do well to consider the run-ins between the two countries over the period of 2004 to 2017. In these 13 years, China's domestic politics has faced enormous change. How should Singapore evaluate its relationship with China in the the new world order and its domestic landscape, and what should it take away from the two bilateral spats?

In 2004, Communist Party of China (CPC) General Secretary Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao had just succeeded their predecessors. Fast-forward to today: the world watches as President Xi who has just completed his first term as CPC General Secretary, consolidates power and stands as a strongman on the international stage. US President Donald Trump's position on China has shifted considerably since his

⁷Lee, Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story – 1965–2000* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2000), p.662.

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inauguration in January 2017 – all these signal a new world order that requires delicate handling. To solely hold on to its principles during these times would mean even greater challenges for a small country like Singapore as it seeks to stand its ground and protect its interests.

In fact, at the Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation meeting between China's Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli and Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean in February 2017, China called for both sides to "...build up political trust and better align development strategies and interests between both countries while strengthening and enhancing the image of the other in the eyes of the domestic public."⁸

For the first time, China candidly shared what it perceived as gaps in the Singapore-China bilateral relationship and its expectations of Singapore. Notably, these points were never mentioned previously by China's official news agency in its reports on bilateral meetings. At the end of the meeting, Vice-Premier Zhang added that he hoped Singapore-China bilateral relations would "reach new heights, find new depth and achieve a new standard", highlighting the beginning of a "new" relationship.⁹

⁸ "张高丽会见新加坡副总理张志贤并共同主持中新四个高层合作机制会", 27 February 2017, *Xinhua News Agency*, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-02/27/c_1120537707.htm.

⁹ "两国高层级对话圆满落幕 "一带一路" 确立为新中合作新重点", 28 February 2017, *Lianhe Zaobao*, <http://www.zaobao.com.sg/special/report/singapore/sg-cn/story20170228-729902>



Chapter Three

Singapore's Relations with the United States of America

Daniel Chua

Daniel CHUA is Assistant Professor and Deputy Head of Graduate Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. His research focuses on the history of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, especially the US' strategic presence and foreign policy in the region. He is the author of *US-Singapore Relations, 1965-1975: Strategic Non-Alignment in the Cold War* (NUS Press, 2017) and his work has been published in *The International History Review*, *Asian Studies Review* and the *Australian Journal of Politics and History*. He is also a co-author of the volume, *ASEAN 50: Regional Security Cooperation through Selected Documents* (World Scientific Publishing, 2017) which is a compendium of official documents that relate to the role played by ASEAN in the security of Asia. An earlier version of this article was presented at a workshop generously supported by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

Singapore's Relations with the United States of America

The United States (US) is one of Singapore's more important economic and strategic partners. Both countries enjoy strong commercial ties through trade and investments, as well as a long-standing strategic partnership through defence cooperation.

The Three Guiding Principles

In the past 50 years of their formal diplomatic relations, Singapore has conducted foreign relations with the US based on three key principles. The first principle is non-alignment. Singapore adopted this approach when engaging the major powers during the Cold War, and maintains it towards the US today. Second, Singapore's relations with the US are guided by the principle of mutual benefit with regard to their respective national interests. Third, Singapore supports the economic and strategic presence of the US in Southeast Asia to provide a balance of power vis-à-vis the major powers that are in the region. Guided by these principles, the relationship between Singapore and the US has been strong and positive since Singapore's independence.

An interest-based, non-aligned relationship allows both countries to maintain a good working partnership despite occasional disagreements, which usually occur when it is perceived that the US is seeking to impose its set of liberal democratic values on Singapore society. Yet, US-Singapore relations have also been characterised by friendship and mutual respect among the

leaders of both countries, especially when matters relate to geopolitics, economics and security. The strength of personal links built upon clear policy principles has served the interests of both countries. By tracing key developments in US-Singapore relations since 1965, this article argues that the diplomatic relationship based on shared interests and mutual benefit strengthens US-Singapore bilateral relations, noting that these ties have endured major shifts in regional security since 1965.

Shared Strategic and Economic Interests – The Vietnam War Era

Contact between the US and Singapore dates back to the 19th century when Singapore was a colonial outpost in the Far East of the British Empire. Before the end of the Second World War, the US played a quiet role in Southeast Asia, often following the lead of European colonial authorities in the region. Focused almost entirely on trade, US-Singapore engagement did not have a strong emphasis on political relations.

During the Cold War, however, American involvement in the Vietnam War (1965-73) and the military withdrawal of Britain from Singapore and Malaysia (1968-71) elevated the significance of the US in Singapore. Singapore established formal relations with the US in 1966 shortly after the city-state separated from Malaysia in 1965. At the height of the Vietnam War, Singapore's then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, who was known for his deep understanding of

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regional affairs, and ability to speak perceptively and frankly to foreign interlocutors about Asia, lent his support to US policies in Vietnam.¹ Singapore, along with other non-communist Southeast Asian nations, appreciated that the US was holding the line in Vietnam against the spread of Communism in the region.

When Britain announced its military withdrawal from the east of Suez in 1967-68, Singapore, which had only recently emerged from hostile relations with its closest neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia, felt the need to engage the help of major powers to overcome its vulnerability. The US fit the bill because it had no territorial ambitions in the region and carried significant geopolitical and strategic weight in Southeast Asia after the Second World War. For the US, rendering assistance for economic development and political stability had become the most effective method for containing the spread of Communism in the newly decolonised Asian nations. At the height of the Cold War, America's strategy of containment and Singapore's need for security and economic survival were complementary.

As the Vietnam War raged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, American forces in Southeast Asia utilised former British naval and air bases in Singapore for the

maintenance and repair of US military vessels deployed in Vietnam. Revenue from the ship and aircraft repair facilities, as well as the supply of Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants to the US military, contributed significantly to Singapore's fledgling economy. American soldiers on Rest and Recuperation visits in Singapore also played a role in driving the city-state's hospitality and tourism industries.

More importantly, American businesses invested heavily in Singapore by setting up manufacturing plants and their regional headquarters on the island. To encourage US investments into Singapore, the US Agency for International Development protected American investors against losses that might arise from political instability in Singapore through an Investment Guarantee Program. With the US government underwriting investors' risks, US companies began to move their operations to Singapore.

The most significant contribution was made by Esso and Mobil, which combined to invest US\$105 million to build oil refineries in Singapore. In addition, the entry of US manufacturing companies into the city-state helped to move Singapore towards an export-driven economy.² Singapore's move towards the manufacturing sector not only generated revenue, but also provided jobs for a

¹ Chua, Daniel, W.B., "Becoming a "Good Nixon Doctrine Country": Political Relations between the United States and Singapore during the Nixon Presidency", *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 60, No. 4 (2014): p.534-48.

² Chua, Daniel, W.B., *US-Singapore Relations, 1965-1975: Strategic Non-Alignment in the Cold War* (Singapore, NUS Press, 2017), p.183.

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young workforce with a high unemployment rate of 14 percent. Singapore's economic stability reduced opportunities for communist groups to exploit social grievances; this economic condition buttressed the country's resilience against communist subversion. The US government was motivated to increase its economic cooperation with Singapore because the leadership here was one of the few Asian governments that was able to utilise US financial assistance for the building of its economy and remain incorrupt.

It was during the Vietnam War that the three key principles behind Singapore's relations towards the US evolved and became established. As a non-aligned country, Singapore had to manage its relations with all the major powers in an even-handed manner. Although the US had become a critical partner in Singapore's first 10 years of independence, the Singapore leadership cautiously kept Washington at arm's length to demonstrate neutralism – a term signifying non-alignment during the Cold War. Singapore also maintained trade and economic cooperation with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Much to the anxiety of the anti-communist Western powers, Singapore also made clear that the island's ship and aircraft repair facilities would be open to Soviet or Chinese vessels based on similar commercial terms. Being non-aligned,

Singapore did not enter into a mutual defence treaty with the US. US-Singapore strategic cooperation was never based on an alliance relationship, but on mutual benefit that served the commercial interests of both countries. Singapore kept an equal distance from the major powers because it saw the importance of having all powers balancing each other in the region. In the words of Singapore's first Foreign Minister, S. Rajaratnam, "our capacity to resist big power pressure would be greater if there were a multiplicity of powers present in the region."³

After the Vietnam War, during the presidencies of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, Singapore's economic and strategic cooperation with the US began to stabilise. In view of the critical role that the US played in international politics, Lee Kuan Yew made it a point to visit the US regularly to keep abreast with perceptions in Washington. By then, he had developed friendships with key American leaders in politics and government, and continued to provide advice on Asian affairs when invited to do so. His stature within the American leadership circles was evident when he was invited to address the joint session of the US Congress in 1985.

As with all bilateral relations, however, US-Singapore ties were not spared from occasional strains caused by differing points of view. From time to time, especially

³ Chan, Heng Chee and Ul Haq, Obaid (ed.), *S. Rajaratnam: The Prophetic and the Political* (Singapore, ISEAS Publishing, 2007), p.284.

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during the “Asian Values” debates in the 1990s, US academics and officials would comment negatively about Singapore, citing their views about the level of political and civic freedoms here, which were said to be part of a citizen’s basic rights in America. These comments drew rejoinders from Lee Kuan Yew and other Singaporean statesmen. In 1993-94, relations cooled significantly after then President Bill Clinton unsuccessfully pleaded for lighter punishment for Michael Fay, an American teenager who was sentenced to be caned for vandalising more than 20 cars in Singapore. Despite areas of differences, both countries remain focused on building a strong working relationship.

Defence Cooperation

Both countries have been able to optimise defence cooperation by ensuring that the element of mutual benefit exists within their strategic arrangements. For Singapore, the training spaces in the US are important to the development of the Singapore Armed Forces. The Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) has maintained five training detachments in the US under the Peace Vanguard Detachment since October 2001.⁴ Peace Carvin II and III F-16 fighter detachments are located at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, and Cannon Air

Force Base, New Mexico, respectively. A Peace Prairie CH-47 Chinook helicopter detachment is located in Grand Prairie, Texas; a Peace Guardian KC-135 jet tanker detachment is at McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas; and a Peace Vanguard AH-64 Apache helicopter detachment is located in Marana, Arizona. Training in the US is not only highly valuable to the RSAF, but it also enhances the interoperability of both armed forces.

Singapore and the US have been conducting bilateral military exercises since 1980, the longest being “Exercise Tiger Balm” between both armies. Their air forces have participated in joint exercises since 1990 under “Exercise Commando Sling”, and both navies have been conducting “Exercise Cooperation Afloat and Readiness Training” or what is called CARAT annually since 1995. Joint military exercises between the armed forces of Singapore and the US enhance the ability of both countries to work together in joint operations, such as in “multinational stabilisation and reconstruction efforts” in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden.⁵ Both countries have also established close working relations in the research and development of defence technology.

⁴ “Factsheet—About Peace Vanguard Detachment”, 13 May 2005, Ministry of Defence, Singapore, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2003/apr/09apr03_nr/09apr03_fs1.html.

⁵ “Joint Statement by US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and Singapore Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen”, 8 December 2015, Ministry of Defence, Singapore, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/2015/08dec15_speech.html#.WMDwIRhh1E4.

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By providing Singapore with military training and space, the US gained a forward operating facility in Singapore. When US bases had to move out of the Philippines in November 1992, the logistics headquarters of the US Seventh Fleet, Commander, Logistics Group, Western Pacific (COMLOG WESTPAC), relocated to Singapore. This arrangement was made possible by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Singapore and the US in 1990. Aimed at facilitating US presence in Southeast Asia, the MOU granted access to military facilities in Singapore which was expanded with the signing of an Addendum in 1998. COMLOG WESTPAC plans the resupply of food, ordnance, fuel and repair parts; it plans and manages US ship repairs in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Australia; and also coordinates more than 100 joint exercises annually within the operational area of the US Seventh Fleet.

During the George W. Bush administration in the US, counterterrorism became a shared focus in the US-Singapore strategic partnership. Singapore provided logistics support for US operations in Iraq in 2003-05 and participated in peace support

operations in Afghanistan with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in 2007-13.⁶ Strategic cooperation between the two countries deepened during the rise of terrorist threats in the region, culminating in the 2005 Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA).⁷ The SFA enhanced bilateral and multilateral military exercises and deepened the level of dialogue and exchange in defence intelligence. Ten years after signing the SFA, Singapore and the US signed an enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement in 2015, strengthening cooperation in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations, cyber-defence, biosecurity and public communications.⁸

More Recent Strategic and Economic Cooperation

Economic cooperation forms the second pillar of US-Singapore relations. In 2003, Singapore became the first Asian country to sign a bilateral free trade agreement with the US. Under the US-Singapore FTA (USSFTA), which came into force in January 2004, both countries commit to keeping their markets open, imposing no additional regulations against

⁶ Goh, Evelyn and Chua, Daniel, W.B., *Singapore Chronicles: Diplomacy* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies & Straits Times Press, 2015), p.62.

⁷ "Factsheet—The Strategic Framework Agreement", 12 July 2005, Ministry of Defence, Singapore, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2005/jul/12jul05_nr/12jul05_fs.html.

⁸ "Singapore, US Step Up Defence Cooperation", 8 December 2016, Ministry of Defence, Singapore, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2015/dec/08dec15_nr.html#.WBFdImOxrOQ.

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competitors based on their nationality.⁹ Since the establishment of the USSFTA, the volume of bilateral trade has increased by over 50 percent, reaching US\$47 billion in 2015. The US is also Singapore's largest source of foreign investments, pouring over US\$288 billion of capital into Singapore in 2015.¹⁰ Singapore was one of the four founding partners of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which the Barack Obama administration signed with 11 countries, including Singapore, in February 2016. However, in January 2017 the current US President, Donald Trump, pulled the US out of the TPP.

The nature of US-Singapore strategic and economic relations has been strong and is getting stronger. As a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Singapore plays a significant role in supporting US engagement with Southeast Asia. In regional issues that are critical to American interests such as the South China Sea territorial disputes, Singapore and the US have worked closely to preserve regional stability and adherence to international law. To promote US engagement in the region, Singapore also supported the US pivot to Asia announced as policy during the Obama administration. Nevertheless, changes in the global order such as the economic rise of China and its

concomitant strategic assertiveness; the Trump administration's protectionist trade policies and isolationist foreign policies; instability in the Korean Peninsula; maritime disputes in East and Southeast Asia; and myriad sources of non-traditional security threats will test the strength of the US-Singapore relationship.

Looking Ahead

Projecting out to the next 10 years from 2017 to 2027, Singapore's approach towards diplomacy with the US should still be based on the three time-tested principles. In fact, Singapore may need to keep even closer to the US because, under Trump, the US may re-evaluate its relations with allies and partners. If forced to abandon its non-aligned position, Singapore needs to consider its interests vis-à-vis other major powers in the region like China. The Trump administration may be able to appreciate the value that Singapore offers to the US if Singapore emphasises the building of a mutually beneficial relationship. In addition, constructive US engagement in Asia will continue to provide a balance of power in the region and, therefore, diplomatic space for small countries like Singapore to manoeuvre within. Singapore must work together with regional countries such as the other nine ASEAN members and the

⁹ Ong, Ye Kung, "An Intuitive Guide to the Services Chapter of the United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement," in *Economic Diplomacy: Essays and Reflections by Singapore's Negotiators*, ed. Lim and Liang (Singapore: World Scientific, 2011), p.171.

¹⁰ "U.S. Relations with Singapore", 14 October 2016, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2798.htm>.

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traditional US allies to keep America engaged in Southeast Asia. Finally, Singapore is well-positioned to build bridges between the US and China. Having established good working relations with these competing powers, Singapore should invest in efforts to strengthen trust between them and do what it can to minimise miscommunication, misunderstanding and miscalculation between Washington and Beijing.



Chapter Four

Singapore and the ASEAN Secretariat: A Marriage Made in Heaven

Kishore Mahbubani

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This article contains excerpts from *The ASEAN Miracle: A Catalyst for Peace*, and like the rest of the authors in this volume, he has contributed it in his personal capacity.

Singapore and the ASEAN Secretariat: A Marriage Made in Heaven

ASEAN is a living, breathing modern miracle.¹ It has brought peace and prosperity to one of the most difficult and diverse corners of planet Earth, the Balkans of Asia. In the process, one of the biggest beneficiaries has been Singapore, a modern, global city surrounded and protected by the ecosystem of peace crafted by ASEAN. My new book on ASEAN documents how this ecosystem was created.

One key reason why Singapore's economy is thriving is that we are at the epicentre of a relatively peaceful and increasingly prosperous region. Without ASEAN, we may find ourselves having to deal with continuing difficult relationships between neighbours, like those between Iran and Saudi Arabia, India and Pakistan, China and Japan, South Korea and Japan – the list could go on and on. Why do we not have dysfunctional bilateral relationships between any two Southeast Asian states? The simple, correct answer is ASEAN. Despite ASEAN's amazing success against all odds, it is fashionable for some Western scholars to rubbish the achievements of ASEAN. Western ignorance of Asia is not surprising. What is truly surprising is to see some Asians, including Singaporeans, join these

Western scholars in rubbing ASEAN.

Having benefitted so much from ASEAN, what is Singapore doing to repay ASEAN? The honest answer is that Singapore has done a lot. A lot of the political and intellectual leadership that has driven ASEAN's success has come from Singapore. However, even though Singapore has done a lot, it has not done enough. The time has, therefore, come for Singapore to reciprocate and present ASEAN with a big gift.

It will be very easy for Singapore to present ASEAN with a big gift. Singapore is very strong in one area where ASEAN is very weak. All Singapore has to do is share its strengths with ASEAN. And what is this area? Singapore is very strong in building its institutional capacity. ASEAN is very weak in developing its institutional capacity. Indeed, various studies have shown that the weakness of the ASEAN Secretariat is crippling ASEAN's ability to grow and develop.

The ASEAN countries have long been aware of the need to develop and strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat. Deepak Nair has documented how the ASEAN countries accepted the recommendations of the United Nations

¹ ASEAN, which is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations was established with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration on 8 August 1967 by five countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In 1984, Brunei joined it; in 1995, Vietnam became its seventh member; Lao PDR and Myanmar joined it in 1997; and in 1999, Cambodia became its 10th member. "ASEAN as a Living, Breathing Modern Miracle", <http://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-winter-2015—issue-no2/asean-as-a-living-breathing-modern-miracle>.

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Development Programme-funded five-member “Panel of Eminent Persons” on how to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat at the ASEAN Summit in Singapore as far back as January 1992.²

Twenty-two years later, the ASEAN leaders issued a special “Declaration on Strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat” on 12 November 2014. In it, they reaffirmed their “commitment” to strengthening ASEAN’s institutional capacity and “strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat”. Yet the ASEAN Secretariat remains miserably weak. The combined gross domestic product (GDP) of the European Union (EU) member states is six times that of ASEAN member states, and the budget for the EU institutions is 8,000 times larger. This huge disparity powerfully demonstrates how deprived the ASEAN Secretariat is of resources.

Many observers of ASEAN have commented on the weaknesses of the ASEAN Secretariat. In an article for the Council for Foreign Relations’ blog in September 2012, Joshua Kurlantzick said, “Many leaders in Indonesia and Singapore, the two most important ASEAN members, have started to see the downside of a weak secretariat. For these nations, one option in the face of a weak secretariat would be simply to engage with other world powers bilaterally, or

through other organisations like the G-20 or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a temptation both Indonesia and Singapore have indulged in.”³ Nair has documented in his 2016 paper, the periods when the ASEAN Secretariat was able to recruit talented staff and the periods when it could not.⁴ Clearly, the times when it could not attract talented staff were the times when it had relatively few resources.

So what can Singapore do? Ambassador Tommy Koh, my guru who has contributed the lead article in this journal, has always advised me to make three points when I want to make a good case for something. Let me, therefore, recommend three things that Singapore can do. First, it can make a national commitment to strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat. Second, it can create a new means of financing the ASEAN Secretariat based on the well-accepted United Nations (UN) principle of “capacity to pay”. Third, it can, through a process of osmosis, share its genius of developing strong institutions with the ASEAN Secretariat.

All this has to begin with a strong national commitment. Why is this commitment important? The simple reason is that most Singapore policymakers believe that the goal of

² Nair, Deepak, “A Strong Secretariat, a Strong ASEAN? A Re-evaluation”, *ISEAS Perspective*, Issue 2016, No. 8, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2016_8.pdf.

³ “Why ASEAN Will Stay Weak?”, 4 September 2012, <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2012/09/04/why-asean-will-stay-weak/>

⁴ Nair, Deepak, *Ibid.*

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strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat is “Mission Impossible”. Since the Secretariat is owned by 10 ASEAN countries, many in Singapore believe that it will be impossible for Singapore to single-handedly reform it. Indeed, I can predict the reaction of Singapore policymakers when they read this suggestion. They will respond with condescending sneers and say, “there goes Kishore, with another one of his wild ideas”.

Nevertheless, even with sneers on their faces, they should ask themselves how their contemporaries regarded some of the bold visions of our country’s founding fathers. When Dr Goh Keng Swee proposed an industrial estate in Jurong, he was greeted with a sneer. The estate was called “Dr Goh’s folly”. When the idea of creating a world-class airline surfaced, it was also greeted with a sneer. How could a country with no airspace create a world-class airline? And why did our founding fathers succeed? Because they had stout hearts and bold visions.

The sad truth about Singapore policymakers today is that their stout hearts have been replaced with faint hearts. We have created an ecosystem of risk-aversion, which discourages bold and risky initiatives. Clearly, any effort to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat is a bold and risky initiative. And it could fail. Since senior Singapore policymakers do not wish to touch anything that might fail, we are not likely to get any champion today for such a risky venture.

This is why we need a strong national commitment. Since Singapore is clearly a huge beneficiary of ASEAN’s success, it is a no-brainer that Singapore should try to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat. This is a decision that must be made at the highest level and implemented with a clear recognition that the mission might fail. But what would Singapore lose by trying and failing? And what would Singapore gain by trying and succeeding? Isn’t the decision obvious?

One open secret about Singapore is that it has for many years played a quiet but significant leadership role within ASEAN. The idea of an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) was germinated in Singapore. So too was the idea of an ASEAN Regional Forum. Similarly, it was our second Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, who first proposed the idea for an Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Yet, Singapore wisely decided that it was not a good idea to take too much credit for these initiatives as it would generate envy and resentment. Instead, it was happy to see other ASEAN states launch these initiatives. As a Thai journalist once commented pithily, whenever Singapore gets a new idea, Thailand becomes pregnant. It was Thailand that launched both AFTA and ASEM.

Singapore plays a valuable role for ASEAN by serving as an intellectual hub. Given its relative political stability and strong political leadership, it can suggest and promote far-sighted ideas. This is why Singapore’s short-

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sighted policies on the ASEAN Secretariat are truly puzzling.

The second step is to acknowledge that one reason why the ASEAN Secretariat is weak is because it has been deprived of resources. The ASEAN Secretariat has to service the 630 million people of ASEAN. Yet its total budget of US\$17 million in 2015 is smaller than the budget of Singapore's People's Association, which was S\$900 million or about US\$667 million in 2015 and served only four million Singapore residents.⁵ The EU Secretariat budget was an enormous €145 billion (S\$231.7 billion) in 2015 and it served 743 million people.⁶ ASEAN should not copy the EU but does its budget have to be 0.0103 percent of the EU budget?

Why is the ASEAN budget so small? The reasons are complicated but one clear reason is that ASEAN insists on the principle of equal payment by all 10 states. In the year 1976 when the ASEAN Secretariat was established, ASEAN had only five members. Their national capabilities were similar. Hence they agreed on the simple principle of equal payments to the ASEAN Secretariat to avoid squabbling over who should pay more and who should pay less. At that time, it was a generous gesture on the part of Singapore as it had agreed that despite its small population of 2.293 million, it would pay

the same amount as Indonesia, which had a population of 132.4 million, 60 times the population of Singapore.

By 2014, ASEAN grew to comprise 10 member states. The disparity between the 10 states also grew enormously. The GDP of Laos and Cambodia, for example, were US\$11.9 billion and US\$16.7 billion in 2014, respectively, compared to Indonesia's GDP, which stood at US\$888 billion or 74 times larger than the smallest ASEAN state's GDP. This immediately creates a structural problem, which stunts the growth of the ASEAN Secretariat. By insisting on equal payments, we are condemning the ASEAN Secretariat to permanently stunted growth, because the annual payments for the Secretariat cannot exceed the "capacity to pay" of the poorest ASEAN member state. To put it bluntly, Singapore is undermining its own national interests by adhering to this policy. This policy prevents ASEAN from growing naturally. As one of the biggest beneficiaries of the ASEAN ecosystem of peace, Singapore is shooting itself in the foot with this short-sighted policy.

So can we adopt a different principle to determine payments to ASEAN? Since the 10 ASEAN members have accepted this principle of "capacity to pay" for the UN, which is a far less important organisation to their national interests than ASEAN is,

⁵ "The fiction of a unified, harmonised Asean", 9 December 2015, *Financial Times*, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cba00b70-9dcf-11e5-8ce1-f6219b685d74.html>.

"Parliament: People's Association has to cater to more sophisticated population", 14 April 2016, *The Straits Times*, <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parliament-peoples-association-has-to-cater-to-more-sophisticated-population>.

⁶ "Budget", November 2014, European Union, http://europa.eu/pol/financ/index_en.htm

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why not agree on the same principle of “capacity to pay” for the ASEAN Secretariat? Fortunately, the ASEAN countries will not have to reinvent the wheel to determine how much each should pay the ASEAN Secretariat. There is a very simple mathematical solution. The 10 ASEAN countries should pool together the respective percentages they pay the UN Secretariat. In 2014, the 10 ASEAN countries paid the following percentages of the UN budget: Brunei – 0.026 percent; Cambodia – 0.004 percent; Indonesia – 0.346 percent; Laos – 0.002 percent; Malaysia – 0.281 percent; Myanmar – 0.010 percent; Singapore – 0.384 percent; Thailand – 0.239 percent; the Philippines – 0.154 percent; and Vietnam – 0.042 percent.⁷ Extrapolating from this 2014 figure, the contributions of each ASEAN country to the ASEAN Secretariat budget would be as Table A.

If we were to adopt this principle of “capacity to pay”, we could significantly increase the budget of the ASEAN Secretariat without worrying whether the poorest ASEAN member state could pay its portion.

An Asian Development Bank (ADB) report has also strongly recommended that ASEAN reconsider its principle of equal funding from all 10 members. It says: “It is

Table A

| | |
|-----------------|--------|
| Brunei | 1.75% |
| Cambodia | 0.27% |
| Indonesia | 23.25% |
| Laos | 0.13% |
| Malaysia | 18.88% |
| Myanmar | 0.67% |
| Singapore | 25.81% |
| Thailand | 16.06% |
| The Philippines | 10.35% |
| Vietnam | 2.82% |

clear that the way contributions are currently collected does not allow [for the] meeting [of] ASEAN’s increased financing needs. Anchoring funding on equal shares not only hampers budget growth; it also makes the group intrinsically dependent on external funding from international donors. In practice, while funds are typically available, donor and ASEAN priorities do not always match. Thus, ASEAN is unable to independently accomplish its plans and realise its strategies as decisions are distorted by accommodating requests from the many external stakeholders contributing to the association’s budget. If ASEAN is to become a mature and thriving institution, member countries should realise that the principle used in funding the budget is obsolete.”⁸ Since Singapore clearly has one of the most rational

⁷ “Assessment of Member States’ Advances to the Working Capital Fund for the Biennium 2014–2015 and Contributions to the United Nations Regular Budget for 2014”, 27 December 2013, United Nations Secretariat, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=ST/ADM/SER.B/889.

⁸ “ASEAN 2030: Toward a Borderless Economic Community”, 2014, Asian Development Bank Institute, <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/159312/adbi-asean-2030-borderless-economic-community.pdf>.

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governments in the world, it should take the lead in accepting this advice from the ADB and work on implementing the UN principle of “capacity to pay” for the ASEAN Secretariat. In the long term, Singapore’s share would continue to diminish as our economy will never grow as fast as those of our neighbours. Hence this formula is also in the long-term interest of Singapore. Table B below shows that Singapore’s share of ASEAN GDP is going to decline significantly from 12 percent in 2015 to 6.4 percent in 2030.

Table B⁹
ASEAN: The next horizon

The third step that Singapore can take to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat is the easiest. It can try to influence the working culture of the ASEAN Secretariat through

a process of osmosis. In short, all it has to do is share the excellent working culture of its institutions with the ASEAN institutions.

How can this osmosis happen? There are many simple steps that can be taken. Firstly, Singapore has an unusually good supply of senior civil servants, including permanent secretaries, who have retired relatively early, in their early 60s. They remain active and dynamic. The Singapore government can compensate them well and offer their services on a voluntary basis to the ASEAN Secretariat. This is not new. Other organisations have done this. For example, in 1964, retired American businessmen set up SCORE (previously known as the Service Corps of Retired Executives). They have provided their counselling services to more than 8.5

| | Population (million) | | GDP (US\$ billion) | | GDP per capita (US\$) | |
|-------------|----------------------|------|--------------------|-------|-----------------------|--------|
| | 2015 | 2030 | 2015 | 2030 | 2015 | 2030 |
| Brunei | 0.42 | 0.5 | 13 | 26 | 30,942 | 49,958 |
| Cambodia | 15.4 | 17 | 18 | 54 | 1,198 | 3,132 |
| Indonesia | 255.5 | 280 | 858 | 2,105 | 3,357 | 7,528 |
| Laos* | 6.9 | 8 | 13 | 32 | 1,838 | 4,160 |
| Malaysia | 30.5 | 37 | 294 | 694 | 9,657 | 18,619 |
| Myanmar | 52.5 | 54 | 65 | 254 | 1,246 | 4,683 |
| Philippines | 101.6 | 126 | 290 | 772 | 2,850 | 6,114 |
| Singapore | 5.5 | 6 | 292 | 356 | 52,744 | 59,578 |
| Thailand | 69 | 73 | 396 | 814 | 5,737 | 11,109 |
| Vietnam | 91.7 | 101 | 193 | 436 | 2,109 | 4,292 |
| Asean | 628.9 | 704 | 2,432 | 5,531 | 3,867 | 7,857 |

NOTE: *Based on International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook data as official country statistics are not yet available.

⁹ This graphic first appeared in *The Straits Times* in an article titled “Asean – the new growth frontier” by Jacqueline Woo, <http://www.straitstimes.com/business/asean-the-new-growth-frontier>.

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million clients. A 2009 study by SBA Entrepreneurship Education showed that SCORE's work helped to create an estimated 25,000 new jobs annually in the United States (US).¹⁰ It is also affiliated with the US Small Business Administration. In short, informal counselling can improve the performance of the ASEAN Secretariat.


Secondly, Singapore can also offer free training courses to ASEAN Secretariat officials in Singapore organisations. Singapore is blessed to have many excellent world-class training institutions, including the Civil Service College, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, the business schools at National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University, and INSEAD. It is in Singapore's national interest to use its Singapore Cooperation Programme funds to provide training courses in Singapore to ASEAN civil servants. The benefits will not be felt overnight. However, over time, the osmosis will happen and the working culture and efficiency of the ASEAN Secretariat will improve.

Thirdly, Singapore can also fund a study to assess the organisational health of the ASEAN Secretariat. Some of the leading consulting firms like McKinsey, Bain, Accenture or Oliver Wyman may even offer to do this pro bono. Such a study

will provide a baseline of where the ASEAN Secretariat is. It could also offer pointers on the areas of priority that could be worked on.

In short, despite the current assumptions of many Singaporean policymakers, the goal of reforming the ASEAN Secretariat is not "Mission Impossible". It will be difficult. We will also have to be very sensitive to the political currents at play in the ASEAN Secretariat. It is worth noting that Singapore has undertaken even more difficult assignments and succeeded back when our policymakers had stout hearts. Let us therefore use this exercise of reforming the ASEAN Secretariat to demonstrate that our policymakers still have, and will continue to have, stout hearts.

¹⁰ "SCORE Helps Create Jobs and Businesses as the Economy Recovers", SCORE Association, <https://pueblo.score.org/news/score-helps-create-jobs-and-businesses-economy-recovers>



Chapter Five

Singapore's Foreign Relations with Malaysia

K. Kesavapany

K. KESAVAPANY was Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia from 1997 to 2002. A career diplomat, he was, among other posts, Representative to Singapore's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, Non-Resident Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Special Envoy for the Asia-Middle East Dialogue Working Group on Political and Security Issues. He was Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and is currently the President of the Singapore Indian Association.

In 2001, he received The Public Administration Medal (Gold). In 2011, he was appointed Fellow of the Perak Academy for his distinguished achievements in promoting and strengthening ties between the people and Governments of Malaysia and Singapore, and supporting the cooperation between the Perak Academy and ISEAS.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

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As the late Dr Michael Leifer pointed out in his highly acclaimed book, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (2000), Singapore attained its independence in 1965 with two basic insecurities to cope with – political insecurity and economic insecurity.

Political Insecurity

Although Malaysian Prime Minister (PM) Tengku Abdul Rahman decided that Singapore should be ejected from the two-year-old political entity called “Malaysia”, some of his countrymen were not happy with that decision. Among them was the Secretary-General of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO, which was and continues to be the leading party of the governing coalition) Syed Ja'afar Abas, who resigned from his post on account of Singapore being allowed to go its own way. As Dr Leifer noted:

...there was a barely concealed fear [on the part of Singapore] that ultra-conservative Malay political forces in Malaysia would either come to power or become unduly influential within UMNO, in each case posing a threat to the new-found independence and distinctive social values of Singapore.¹

These and other factors, such as Malaysia seeking to entrench its military presence

on the island and the oft-repeated threat of cutting the supply of water from Johor, were instrumental in shaping Singapore's foreign and defence policies. One immediate ramification was Singapore's decision to build its armed forces with the help of Israeli military trainers disguised at that time as “Mexicans”. The potential threat of Indonesia and Malaysia ganging up to crush the infant state added impetus to this policy decision. With the introduction of National Service and a steady accumulation of defence assets, Singapore made it known that while its armed forces would not be a threat to anybody, it would be a “poisoned shrimp” if provoked.

As Singapore's first Foreign Minister, S. Rajaratnam, put it – which was repeated recently by the current Foreign Minister, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan who contributed the Foreword of this journal, – Singapore should be “friends with all and enemy towards none”.²

ASEAN

The formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 provided Singapore with a further opportunity to buttress its political and security forces. Although not involved initially in the discussions on the establishment of the regional organisation,

¹ Leifer, Michael, *Singapore's Foreign Policy, Coping with Vulnerability* (London, Routledge, 2000), p.52.

² Balakrishnan, Vivian, “Diplomacy of Little Red Dot: Past and Present”, remarks at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Townhall, 17 July 2017, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Singapore) Press Room, https://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/media_centre/press_room/pr/2017/201707/press_2017071703.html.

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both Indonesia and Malaysia recognised the necessity of including the island-state in their quest for regional cooperation.

One of the initiatives put forward by Indonesia and Malaysia was entitled: "Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN)". The aim of the proposal was for all major powers to leave the region and for all the states to govern themselves. While going along with the spirit of the proposal, Singapore indicated that its preference was for as many interested parties as possible to come in and develop a stake in the region, thereby ensuring that no single major power is able to assume a dominant position here.

In 1978, Singapore's position was vindicated when Vietnam, backed by the then Soviet Union, invaded Cambodia. Military intervention by the United States (US) stopped Vietnam in its tracks. On its part, Singapore led an ASEAN diplomatic offensive at the United Nations (UN) and other forums, to force the Vietnamese to withdraw from Cambodia.

In doing so, Singapore was entrenching a cardinal principle of its foreign policy – non-interference in the affairs of other states. As Dr Leifer put it, that principle was "a shield for sovereignty". By speaking out against all instances of foreign intervention be it Afghanistan, Western [Spanish] Sahara, Grenada and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Singapore has always sought to safeguard its own right to exist as a sovereign nation, in a region known

for strife and volatility.

Economic Survival

Along with the need to be left to find its own path as a sovereign nation, Singapore also had to ensure that it could stand on its own feet in economic terms. Few believed at the time that Singapore, bereft of its northern hinterland, could survive. In fact, the expectation of the leadership in Kuala Lumpur (KL) was that Singapore would soon ask to be re-admitted to the Malaysian Federation on any terms offered because it would find it a struggle, if not impossible, to be economically viable.

This was proven by the experience of the two years in Malaysia when Singapore was accorded the same economic standing as Penang, with the loss of its free port status. Also, there was no assurance that Malaysia would allow access to its market, both for securing national resources and for selling the finished products from Singapore's factories. Under the circumstances, it was clear that Singapore would have to go its own way and seek development through export-oriented foreign direct investment. Various initiatives, including the transformation of the British naval shipyards into commercial enterprises and the development of Jurong, helped Singapore to find its feet.

However, the primary concern was whether Malaysia would honour the Separation Agreement under which Singapore was given continued access to

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water from Johor. There was a perception in some Malaysian political circles that this critical commodity could be used to bring the fledgling nation-state to heel. Singapore made it clear that the Separation Agreement, which included provisions for the supply of water, was an international agreement that had been deposited with the UN. Therefore, any attempt to trifle with the Agreement would be taken as a hostile act. To make its position clearer, Singapore made it known that it would not hesitate to send its armed forces into Johor to secure the source of its water supply.

The water issue was to resurface again during the tenure of PM Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia. Attempts to resolve this and related issues ushered in a period of stress and strain in the bilateral relationship, with implications for foreign policy.

Given that I served as High Commissioner of Singapore to Malaysia from 1997 to 2003, I witnessed one of the most critical phases of this bilateral relationship. A positive start had been made in 1988, with the two prime ministers, Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Mahathir, agreeing to have all the outstanding issues between the countries resolved as a package. A memorandum of understanding was signed on four issues: water, gas, a ferry service and a new bridge. In 1990, a points of agreement (POA) on the railway issue was also concluded, with PM Lee and then Malaysian Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin being the respective signatories.

However, several attempts to clear the deck and put the bilateral relationship on an even keel came to nought. Difficulties over the negotiations of the package and the Malaysian Government's inaction over the POA led to an impasse. On the last point, Dr Mahathir took the position that as the agreement had not received his Cabinet's approval, it was not a valid document. Singapore stated that the negotiations on the POA had been conducted in good faith and agreed upon by none other than Tun Daim, one of Dr Mahathir's closest aides. It was only when a senior Malaysian Cabinet Minister, Dr Rais Yatim remarked that Malaysia would be laughed out of court if it kept insisting that the POA was not a legal document did the Malaysian side pay serious attention to the issue.

This change of mind came too late as Singapore, in accordance with the terms of the POA, had moved its Customs and Immigration facilities to Woodlands in July 1998. Incensed by what he perceived to be an unilateral action by Singapore, Dr Mahathir ordered retaliatory action — stopping the sale of sand and denying access to Singapore military aircraft to Johor's airspace. Action was also taken to cut off interactions at various levels, including the cessation of the games held between the civil services of both sides.

The only activity that survived was the annual golf game between the alumni of the University of Malaya (UM) and the National University of Singapore (NUS). This was on account of the chancellor of

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UM, the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (the Malaysian head of state) Sultan Azlan Shah's insistence that this on-going activity should not be disrupted. An avid golfer, he looked forward to the game every year, held alternatively in Malaysia and Singapore. His counterpart, the Chancellor of NUS and then President of Singapore, the late Mr S R Nathan, was also supportive of the golf game being held. Although a non-golfer, President Nathan rode a buggy and kept his counterpart company on the course when the game came to pass in 1999. The social interactions that followed cemented the relationship between the two heads of state. One hilarious moment that occurred was when the Agong's ball was lodged in the fronds of a coconut tree. None of all the royal commands could make the ball dislodge itself and fall to the ground! His sense of sportsmanship led him to take a penalty to drop a new ball into the game.

In contrast to this royal gesture of sportsmanship, the Singapore contingent to the Commonwealth Games in KL held in September in the year of the troubles, 1998, was jeered at upon entering the stadium at Bukit Jalil. This was due to the emotions that had been whipped up to show displeasure over Singapore's refusal to settle the outstanding issues.

Dr Mahathir's major irritation was over the fact that Singapore was continuing to pay the price of 3 sen per 1,000 gallons of water as stipulated in the Water Agreements. In a propaganda onslaught, Malaysian

researchers were enlisted to write articles comparing the price of a hamburger with the price that Singapore was paying for the water it was receiving from Johor. It was conveniently forgotten that Singapore was selling treated water to Johor at 50 sen per 1,000 gallons of water which the latter then sold to its people at RM3.95 per 1,000 gallons.

Singapore maintained the position that it was prepared to consider a revision of the price of water provided the other issues were taken into account.

The financial crisis that hit the region in 1997 provided the opportunity for a fresh attempt to work on the package of issues. Singapore responded positively to Malaysia's request for financial assistance. In return, it sought the purchase of water on a long-term basis, with an increase in pricing. However, the failure to agree on the quantum and terms for the financial assistance to be given by Singapore to Malaysia led to a discontinuation of the negotiations on the issue.

As for water and the other outstanding issues, several attempts were made to find a comprehensive solution, including two visits to KL in 2000 and 2001 by Lee, who had become Senior Minister (SM) by then. In a letter to SM Lee dated 21 February 2001, Dr Mahathir offered to sell raw water to Singapore at a "fair price" of 60 sen per 1,000 gallons in return for concessions on other elements of the package. Responding to the offer, and in a letter dated 23 April

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2001, SM Lee said that although there were some elements to be resolved on the water issue, if there was give and take on both sides, an agreement was possible. In this spirit, SM Lee undertook his second visit to KL in August 2001.

While the negotiations were in progress, the Malaysian Government, inexplicably, raised the asking price to RM3 per 1,000 gallons, making it 100 times more than the existing price of raw water. This amount was subsequently raised to RM6.25. Such arbitrary increases made it difficult to reach any common ground which led to a stalemate in the negotiations.

In the meantime, efforts by Singapore to increase its local supply of water began to bear fruit. Besides water imported from Malaysia, it moved towards self-sufficiency in its water requirements by obtaining water from desalination, NEWater and by the enlargement of supply from increased reservoir capacity. These measures, known as the Four National Taps strategy, led to the water issue – which had hitherto been a flash point in the bilateral relationship – being relegated to the background. Future talks on this issue would be on the basis of a “willing buyer, willing seller”. Singapore indicated that it would not seek a renewal of the 1961 Water Agreement with its expiry in 2010. Thereafter, the 1962 Water Agreement continues to be in force until 2061.

One of the contentious issues that was amicably resolved was the allegation by Malaysia in 2002 that Singapore had encroached into Malaysian waters in the northeast in its reclamation work. Singapore maintained that it was within its right to undertake such work in its own territorial waters. To defuse the build-up of tensions, both sides agreed to refer the issue to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in Hamburg, Germany. In January 2005, an independent group of experts formed on the order of the Tribunal reached a decision on the matter. The decision, which allows Singapore to carry on with reclamation works while cooperating with Malaysia to ensure navigational safety and environment protection, was accepted by both governments.

The joint statement issued on that occasion revealed a decided consciousness and commitment to resolve problems in an atmosphere of goodwill. An excerpt from the statement reads as follows:

The positive outcome of the meeting between Malaysia and Singapore delegations reflects the goodwill and cooperation which exist between them and their respective governments. This augurs well for the further strengthening of good relations between the two friendly, close neighbours.³

³ Joint Press Statement on the Case Concerning Land Reclamation by Singapore In and Around the Straits of Johor, by the Government of Singapore and the Government of Malaysia, <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=2005011402.htm>.

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Pedra Branca

The amicable manner in which the land reclamation issue was settled gave rise to hopes that the dispute over Pedra Branca could be similarly settled. Both countries agreed to submit the dispute concerning some islets in the north of Singapore to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) — an agreement that was signed in February 2003 and submitted to the ICJ in July that year. After a process that lasted 14 years in total from the time it was first raised, the ICJ delivered the following judgment in May 2008:

- Sovereignty of the Pedra Branca – Pulau Batu Puteh belongs to the Republic of Singapore.
- Sovereignty over Middle Rocks belongs to Malaysia.
- Sovereignty over South Ledge belongs to the State in the territorial waters of which it is located.

Although the spilt judgment of the court did not completely satisfy both countries, it was accepted with equanimity and grace. As Lee, who had become Minister Mentor (MM), put it in his Foreword to the book *Pedra Branca: The Road to the World Court* (2009) by Prof S. Jayakumar and Prof Tommy Koh:

Nonetheless, the Government has accepted the Court's judgment without

any qualifications. Whichever way the judgment went, it is better for bilateral relations that a conclusive judgment has been made. This allows us to put aside this issue and move on to the areas of cooperation.⁴

The latest 2017 twist to the Pedra Branca saga is the application of Malaysia to revise the 2008 judgment. It is a well-known fact that several quarters in that country have not accepted the ICJ's judgment. Singapore filed with the ICJ its written observations on the admissibility of Malaysia's application. Due process will follow. Once again, it is worth remembering MM Lee's words:

What is important is how both sides can manage and amicably resolve issues that must crop up from time to time because of our widespread interactions, without souring our long-term overall bilateral relationship.⁵

One other issue emerged at the time of Dr Mahathir's premiership in 2001 to roil the waters. This was when his government indicated it wanted the Causeway demolished and replaced by a bridge. Among the reasons cited for that was that the bridge was essential for the free flow of water. Unconvinced of the reasons given, Singapore was not forthcoming on the issue. Digging in his heels, Dr Mahathir announced that Malaysia would build a

⁴ Jayakumar, S. and Koh, Tommy, *Pedra Branca: The Road to the World Court* (Singapore: NUS Press and MFA Diplomatic Academy, 2009), p.xiii.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.xi.

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“crooked bridge” on its side of the Causeway. Before any action could be taken on the matter, Dr Mahathir resigned from the post of PM, after 22 years in office.

Abdullah Badawi

Abdullah Badawi, who had been a long-term Foreign Minister of Malaysia, upon assuming office as PM in October 2003, put emphasis on improving ties with Singapore as a priority. He felt there were some “low-hanging” fruits to be plucked. However, the decision not to proceed with the “crooked bridge” project earned him the enmity of Dr Mahathir. PM Abdullah also did not have the political clout to ensure that the agreement reached with Singapore on the sale of sand and the airspace issues could stick.

Najib Razak

In April 2009, Najib Razak took over as PM after Abdullah Badawi stepped down. Like his predecessor, PM Najib felt that a cooperative rather than a confrontational approach in dealing with Singapore could yield positive results.

With the railway issue out of the way, most of the bilateral problems that bedeviled ties between the two countries were resolved. This enabled both governments to look at positive avenues for cooperation, including the construction of a high-speed rail link between Singapore and KL.

Both sides have also entered into win-win

partnerships through the joint venture projects between Temasek and Khazanah in both Singapore and Iskandar Malaysia. The DUO and Marina One developments in the Ophir-Rochor and Marina South areas in Singapore will stand as concrete manifestations of Singapore-Malaysia bilateral cooperation. Action has also been taken to look at partnerships in other areas, such as environmental sustainability, religious extremism and containment of the menace of drug-related issues.

Conclusion

It is axiomatic that relations between two neighboring countries cannot be problem- or stress-free, especially if one of them is a smaller party or, as in the case of Singapore, a “Little Red Dot”. It is therefore incumbent on the part of our government and people to be alert to the challenges that could arise from time to time. However, when the atmospherics are good for mutually beneficial cooperation, as they are at present, we have to take full advantage of that.



Chapter Six

When Relationships Change: Singapore-Indonesia Ties after Suharto and the Importance of Growing Together

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Overview

In September 2017, Singapore and Indonesia marked 50 years of bilateral and diplomatic relations.

Bilateral ties during the years when President Suharto led Indonesia from 1967 to 1998 were generally constructive and positive. The exception was a five-year period after 17 October 1968 when two Indonesian marines, Harun Said and Usman Mohamed Ali, were hanged for the MacDonald House bombing in Singapore on 10 March 1965 at the height of *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation). That act claimed three lives and injured 33 people. On the day of the saboteurs' hanging in 1968, the Singapore Embassy in Jakarta was ransacked.

Bilateral relations improved after May 1973, when Singapore's then Prime Minister (PM) Lee Kuan Yew visited Indonesia and scattered flowers at the graves of the two marines. Javanese describe a visit to the graveyard as *nyekar*, a word derived from *sekar* or flowers. As part of a *tablilan* ritual of the Javanese, every visit to a grave must include the sprinkling of flowers – either rose or jasmine petals – to not only decorate a tomb but make it fragrant, thus allowing a peaceful rest for the deceased. This act is particularly significant as Indonesians believe in life after death. Flowers are not just for funerals but for life cycles. Sprinkling flowers can also mean seeking blessings for a future relationship.

Besides scattering flowers on the tombs of Usman and Harun, a wreath was also placed in Kalibata with a banner that said *Untuk pahlawan kemerdekaan RI dari P.M. Singapura* (For Indonesian Heroes of Independence from Singapore PM).

The cultural traditions of Indonesia play a very important role in daily life, and the building and maintaining of relationships is fundamental to creating a strong foundation for long-term cooperation. The bilateral relationship was certainly back on an even keel following President Suharto's visit to Singapore in 1974, and was resilient enough to weather Indonesian displeasure at Singapore's refusal to support its forced annexation of Portuguese Timor in 1975 by abstaining on the United Nations General Assembly vote on resolution 3485(XXX).

From the 1980s, there has been a sharp increase in the number of bilateral exchanges between the two countries in the realms of politics, defence relations, business, tourism, and student and community-based exchanges.

Bilateral trade and Singapore's emergence as a major investor in Indonesia remain the foundation of the relationship. For the first nine months of 2016, Singapore companies invested almost US\$7.1 billion (S\$10.1 billion) in Indonesia – double that for the same period in 2015. In 2015, bilateral trade between Singapore and Indonesia reached US\$58.7 billion, making

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Indonesia Singapore's fourth largest trading partner while Singapore was Indonesia's third largest trading partner.

Singapore companies have traditionally invested in the Batam, Bintan and Karimun free trade area as well as the industrial conurbation surrounding the capital Jakarta, *Jabodetabek*, which refers to the greater Jakarta metropolitan region. They should now also look out for economic opportunities beyond Jakarta. The Kendal Industrial Park near Semarang will be a useful starting point, with the hope that more companies will take the plunge to expand further eastwards to Surabaya and perhaps even Makassar. The city of Medan, located in the North Sumatra province, is another viable destination for Singapore companies. Ideally, to tap the investment opportunities created by the devolution of power from the central government to the regions, Singapore would benefit significantly through the establishment of more consulates in the provinces to supplement the two existing ones in Batam and Medan. Each consulate would become a regional focal point for the range of activities from investment to tourism. This would also strengthen "people-to-people" exchanges particularly student exchange programmes.

These links are set to improve as the Indonesian government, under the leadership of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, is committed to enhancing the country's business environment and

improving infrastructure thereby making the country more interconnected and opening up more investment and tourism opportunities. Last year, the country's World Bank ranking for the ease of doing business went up from 106 to 91 (benchmarked at June 2016), and its positive performance is testament to a government policy aimed at simplifying bureaucracy and cutting red tape.

A key focus for the Joko Widodo administration is developing infrastructure, with the government allocating 346 trillion rupiah (S\$35 billion) to the sector. There is now a Viability Gap Fund to provide private sector investment in infrastructure. Indonesia's focus on developing new infrastructure and improving existing ones will create opportunities for Singapore companies with relevant expertise in the utilities, communications, energy and transportation sectors.

Democratic politics in Indonesia raises new complications for the investment relationship. The election law mandates that an Indonesian president can only be elected for two five-year terms. Investment horizons are shorter compared to the Suharto era and investors must take into consideration the political environment and the priorities of each presidential administration when making their investment decisions. Hence, new strategies, deeper engagement, more understanding and enduring networks based on friendships are essential for a

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successful bilateral relationship in the post Lee-Suharto era.

Changing Indonesia, Changing Approach to Strengthening Ties

For Singaporeans used to predictable outcomes since the late 1970s, the collapse of the Suharto administration in May 1998 resulted in a more complicated domestic political scene in Indonesia and the need for them to refresh their approach towards it.

Peaceful transitions to democracy are desirable and Indonesia is a striking success story offering important lessons for countries embarking on such processes. At the time, however, there was a general fear in Singapore that Indonesia would balkanise in the wake of extreme economic and political pressures when President Suharto resigned during an economic crisis in 1998. After all, what would become of the entrenched interests built into his New Order regime, and how would any new regime counter the turbulence of Indonesia's hyper-fragmented society?

Those feared scenarios did not come to pass. Indonesia has been hailed as a success for its relatively smooth transition from authoritarianism to democracy, and an example of a Muslim-majority country with democracy, Islam, modernity and women empowerment. This achievement has become even more apparent as many analysts look to Indonesia as a model for

countries in the Middle East and North Africa which are wracked by conflict or have returned to non-democratic rule as hopes of the Arab Spring gave way to new patterns of authoritarianism.

However, Indonesia's journey was not straightforward. One of the main challenges was reaching a national consensus about what is best for the country and how to achieve it. Before 1998, there was general agreement among civil society activists on a number of reform priorities, such as limiting presidential terms, ending the dual-function of the military, reducing over-centralisation, reversing the dominance of the executive and eradicating corruption.

The B.J. Habibie administration following the Suharto era translated a reform agenda – which was essentially a list of what the people did not like about the New Order government and wished to be rid of – into more than 200 new laws and regulations, putting Indonesia well on its path towards democratic transition and decentralisation. President Habibie drew a line under the past by releasing political prisoners, revoking government control of the media, allowing freedom of expression and association, and lifting restrictions imposed by the New Order on political parties.

Four constitutional amendments were made during the period of the first democratically-elected legislature of 1999-2004. The constitutional amendments

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included stipulations that all members of parliament and regional representatives must be elected, thereby scrapping the military's allocated seats, as well as providing for the direct election of the President and Vice President. Much of the legislation was passed in haste, which meant that its quality in that early transition period was problematic. Several laws, such as the Regional Autonomy Law (No. 22 of 1999) and the General Elections Law (No. 4 of 1999) have since been revised a number of times. The four areas of reform involving the role of the military, relations between the key institutions of the state, centre-region relations, the role of civil society and the place of Islam in Indonesia's polity have direct impact on Singapore-Indonesia relations.

Impact of the Change in the Role of the Military

Throughout the Suharto era, the military had a social-political function, as well as a defence and security function. With *dwi-fungsi*, the military was omnipresent in Indonesian public life. It dominated the executive, had large numbers of seats in the legislature and was involved in business.

With Indonesia's transition to democracy, the military was gradually phased out of politics and business. Active military personnel are now banned from taking public office, and if they wish to run for an elected position, they must resign first. By the 2004 general elections, all members

of the legislature had to be elected; the military no longer enjoyed reserved seats in the legislature.

Besides being removed from politics, the military was also separated from the police. The military is now primarily responsible for national defence while internal security is the domain of the police. The military can be called upon to assist the police, but that call has to be made by the government rather than at the discretion of military commanders. Although there is still some way to go before the military becomes a truly professional force and an effective civilian oversight is achieved, it is now quite inconceivable that the military would resume political power in Indonesia. At the end of Suharto's rule, 40 percent of Indonesia's governors were in active military service or had retired from it. By 2013, that was a mere six percent. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this development, especially given widespread predictions in 1998 that it was only a matter of time that the country would see another military coup.

Due to the pivotal role of the military during the Suharto era, the relationship between the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) was a significant reference point for bilateral relations. Nothing emphasised the strength of this relationship better than the effective deployment of the SAF and Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) in response to the devastating tsunami disaster

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that struck Sumatra on 26 December 2004 which claimed some 168,000 lives in Indonesia, mostly in Aceh. SAF and TNI commanders, through bilateral exchanges, had forged personal relationships and were able to iron out operational matters effectively. “Operation Flying Eagle” involved 1,500 personnel, three supply ships, 12 helicopters and eight transport aircraft. While such relationships remained solid in the post-Suharto transition, government-to-government relations would prove more complicated.

The impact of this change was evident in the collapse of the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 2007. The collapse of the initiative – which was negotiated and concluded between the two governments in April 2007 – was a clear example of a changed relationship due to the clear separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial arms of the state, ending the domination of the executive. Even though the Indonesian presidential system allows for a powerful executive, the legislative branch has become equally powerful and is not just a rubber stamp it might have been in the past. The fact that the Indonesian Parliament, *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, opposed the DCA was a wake-up call to Singapore policymakers that any bilateral deal requiring ratification could prove difficult due to nationalistic or interest group pressures, making Indonesian government decision-making more challenging and time-consuming. These consequences are necessary

outcomes of what most Indonesians consider a positive move to democracy, and Singapore policymakers must make greater effort to study and internalise what they have learned to better manage bilateral relations.

The bilateral relationship has become more complex also because Indonesia’s political process has become more complicated by its unwieldy multi-party system where no party can obtain a clear majority. This has resulted in a presidential system with semi-parliamentary characteristics, manifest in a broad-based coalition Cabinet, with the President and Vice President elected by popular vote. This is a radical departure from the predictable outcomes of the New Order period. Hence it is worthwhile expanding our points of interaction with Indonesia.

While our Foreign Ministry will remain the principal driver of the bilateral relationship, yet considering the new balance of power that now allows the DPR greater powers and oversight over government agreements, should the Singapore Government consider creatively how best to deploy our parliamentarians to engage their Indonesian counterparts? The networks and friendships forged by our parliamentarians could moderate and perhaps even defuse the negative effects of nationalism and thereby clear potential political road blocks preventing the ratification of bilateral agreements. The primary focus seemingly has been the

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business and banking relationship. In this regard, the role of International Enterprise Singapore, the Economic Development Board, Sembcorp, DBS, the Singapore Business Federation and the Singapore Manufacturing Federation has been significant. Yet, by having such an overt business cast on the relationship, are we unwittingly reinforcing the stereotype in Indonesia that Singaporeans are primarily economic creatures thereby underpinning Indonesian perceptions that in the economic relationship, Singapore benefits at Indonesia's expense? In this context, adding new building blocks like the participation of parliamentarians and civil society organisations will substantiate people to people interactions and bring about greater balance in the bilateral relationship.

Impact of Decentralisation

Another major transformation was the devolution of power to the regions. The New Order was highly centralised – the most important decisions were made in Jakarta and there was little room for local initiative. Regional grievances against perceived domination and exploitation by Jakarta, including armed insurgencies in Aceh and Papua, led to the introduction of wide-ranging decentralisation policies. The restive provinces of Aceh and Papua were given special autonomy at the provincial level under which they were allowed to keep more of their revenues and adopt elements of local culture in public

life, such as Islamic law in Aceh. For the rest of Indonesia, regional autonomy is implemented at the district and municipal levels, with the aim of bringing public services closer to the people and strengthening local democracy. With regional autonomy, the central government only has full authority over seven areas: foreign policy, defence, security, justice, religion, and monetary and fiscal policies.

For the Singaporean government and business people used to doing business under the New Order – when it was possible to seal a deal through the backing of policymakers and business leaders in the capital and know it would be in force – today's highly decentralised Indonesia is undoubtedly bewildering in comparison. Power has not only been divided horizontally between the different branches of government, but also vertically, between the central, provincial and district administrations. In fact, Singaporeans would be wise to come to the realisation that there are two Indonesias to interact with – the first resides in Jakarta where the national government operates, and the second is the set of five-district local governments in the Riau Archipelago where much of Singapore's Indonesia-based external economy is located.

It is important to recognise that Indonesia avoided territorial disintegration in a period during which the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia (to name only a few) decided to dissolve their unitary states.

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To a large extent, this was due to the unprecedented programme of decentralisation launched in 1999, which silenced secessionist calls in Maluku, Bali, East Kalimantan and Riau. Together, democratisation and decentralisation allowed Indonesia's regions to express their local identities and formulate their own policy priorities – something that had been impossible under the centralist regimes that governed Indonesia since 1945.

Impact of Civil Society and Religion

A visible change has been the growing vibrancy of civil society. Indonesia has a lively press, one of the freest in Asia. Civil society organisations are active in community development, advocacy and policy research. Labour unions are many and vocal. Dealing with organised labour is a new challenge for Singapore businesses operating in Batam. Debates that had divided the country in the 1950s – particularly regarding the position of Islam in the state – have not been settled. Public debates and, at times, unruly demonstrations, have become common features of Indonesia's political life. Indonesians are also avid users of social media and have a penchant for airing their views in public.

One key issue that has not been settled has to do with the position of Islam in the state. When conservative Muslims descended on Jakarta in November and December 2016 seeking the prosecution of Basuki T'jahaja

Purnama, popularly known as "Ahok", for committing blasphemy over comments he made about the Koran in an election campaign, the spectre of the May 1998 riots loomed over the horizon. Purnama, a Chinese-Christian, was Jakarta's first non-Muslim governor in half a century. In fact, even before the former Jakarta Governor's blasphemy trial, religious intolerance, discrimination and attacks against religious minorities have been on the rise, especially since 2011.

The Setara Institute, a Jakarta-based organisation that monitors religious freedom, reported a rise in the number of acts of religious intolerance from 236 in 2015 to 270 in 2016, while religious freedom violations rose from 197 to 208 in the same period.

Twenty years after the advent of *reformasi*, new Muslim organisations that uphold sharia law are making their mark. These include the political party PKS and its student activist wing KAMMI; socio-religious movements that have evolved into mass organisations like Front Pembela Islam, Forum Umat Islam, and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia; and institutions like Majelis Ulama Indonesia, which were considered peripheral Muslim organisations at the start of Indonesia's democratic transition. They are now more influential and able to challenge mainstream Muslim organisations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Politicians and elites pander to such hardline groups for support

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without considering the long-term consequences for the country.

What this tells us is that despite significant changes to its political system, Indonesia still needs to find a steady and unchanging political equilibrium. There is no agreement among observers and ordinary citizens about the character of the state that emerged after 1998. There are those who view the post-Suharto state as a model of Muslim democracy that has proved to be more resilient than any of its Arab Spring counterparts. Others believe that Suharto's associates simply hijacked Indonesia's new democratic institutions and thus survived the transition unharmed. Yet others are convinced that the state is controlled by both old and new oligarchic forces, giving it a veneer of democracy.

Impact of Growing Nationalism

Complicated domestic politics in Indonesia and growing nationalism will have a significant impact on Singapore. These challenges have been manifested in a number of ways and have resulted in a more complicated bilateral relationship. A more populist form of democracy in Indonesia comes with undercurrents that cannot be ignored. While President Habibie's "Little Red Dot" reference to Singapore in 1998 has achieved iconic status in the city-state, do most Indonesians

understand the reference and the original derogatory usage of the term? Many Indonesian policymakers, even those who are generally friendly, have occasionally adopted the belief that a resource-poor Singapore benefits from exploiting Indonesia. The enduring reality of the size differential between the two states means that – since the Sukarno era – Singapore has to emphasise to Indonesia that our bilateral relationship is one of sovereign equals rather than one where Singapore is dependent on Indonesia.

From time to time, we observe rhetoric stressing that Singapore is dependent on Indonesia, pointing to some new instance of our ingratitude. Such attitudes colour Indonesian elite perceptions of Singapore. At times, they feel that Singapore has succeeded at Indonesia's expense and that little Singapore should be grateful for benefitting from Indonesia. For instance, when commenting on the haze, Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla said:

For 11 months, [Singapore and Malaysia] enjoyed nice air from Indonesia and they never thanked us... They have suffered for one month because of the haze and they get upset.¹

At the height of the haze season in 2013, then-Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Agung Laksono complained that

¹ "Indonesia's Vice-President Jusuf Kalla criticises neighbours for grumbling about haze", 5 March 2015, *The Straits Times*.

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“Singapore shouldn’t be behaving like a child and making all this noise”. He added that Indonesia would reject any Singapore offer of financial aid to assist in quelling the forest fires unless it was a large amount. When Singapore offered Indonesia a Haze Assistance Package including aircraft, helicopter, satellite imagery, SCDF fire-fighting teams and equipment while requesting concession maps and names of errant companies so that we could take action against them, these requests were either ignored or rejected.

Another incidence of insensitivity occurred in 2014 when Indonesia named a Bung Tomo-class corvette warship the *KRI Usman-Harun*, after the two hanged marines referred to at the start of this chapter, affecting bilateral ties between Indonesia and Singapore. In response, Singapore cancelled a series of planned inter-military activities and banned the warship from its ports and naval bases. It also withdrew its delegation from an international defence meeting in Jakarta after two Indonesian men at the event were seen dressed in the uniform of the *Korps Marinir* (Indonesian Marine Corps) as Usman and Harun. General Moeldoko, Indonesia’s military chief, apologised for the naming of the ship, which was accepted by Singapore in a statement by Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen.

The complexity evident in the bilateral relationship now means that the engagement on both sides must include a

variety of actors and be both top-down as well as bottom-up. Understanding these challenges, both countries have worked together to develop constructive engagement mechanisms. The Leaders’ Retreat and the Six Bilateral Economic Working Groups (6WG) Ministerial Meeting, hosted by Singapore’s Minister for Trade and Industry and Indonesia’s Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, covering cooperation in the Islands of Batam, Bintan and Karimun (BBK) and other Special Economic Zones (SEZs); investments, transport, tourism, manpower, and agri-business are important platforms to deepen bilateral economic cooperation between Singapore and Indonesia. Similarly, the formation of an Indonesia-Singapore Business Council will also add value, allowing businesses to network more deeply and understand opportunities on both sides.

Such initiatives have review mechanisms to ensure that the bilateral relationship is making good progress. More platforms, though, need to be established; the ones that go beyond the business relationship to ensure the development of deeper and enduring people-to-people networks, especially those that enable the younger generation of both countries to forge deeper relationships. That way, there will be constituencies in both countries to help stabilise the relationship if ever it hits choppy waters again.

Indonesia is expected to enjoy a

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demographic dividend in the mid-2020s meaning that it will have one of the youngest populations in Asia. This could either be a blessing — when the number of people of working age is higher than the number of dependents— that is the elderly and children, or a curse if the economy is unable to absorb the large numbers of young people entering into the workforce annually. Undoubtedly such a situation could prove to be a source of instability.

Just as important is the fact that we do not really understand how Indonesia will evolve with such a young population base many of whom will have very little knowledge of Singapore unlike their predecessors. Singapore needs to formulate strategies to engage this rising generation and more importantly understand the mindset of the new generation of young leaders who are starting to emerge since 2014 and is now replacing the Suharto era elite whose thinking we are familiar with.

Two Important Issues that will Shape Bilateral Relations

In future, two issues will continue to prove challenging for the bilateral relationship. The first has to do with the Singapore Flight Information Region (FIR) and the second has to do with assets and corruption. Indonesian politicians and military personnel have, on occasion, called for Indonesia to “retake” areas over Riau within

Indonesian airspace which have formed part of the FIR since 1946, when the International Civil Aviation Organization allocated the area to Singapore based on operational and technical considerations. The FIR assigned to Singapore includes some of the territorial airspace of Malaysia and Indonesia, and such overlaps are common in many parts of the world. For instance, Indonesia has responsibility for the airspace over Timor-Leste. In matters relating to sovereignty, we can never assume that rationality and cool heads will prevail in a dispute.

Indonesia has given itself a deadline to realign the FIR to accord with its sovereign interests. The 2009 Law on Aviation requires Indonesia to attain self-management over its airspace at least 15 years after the law enters into force, that is, by 2024. This date also coincides with a presidential election year. Politicians are likely to capitalise on nationalistic and sovereignty issues to gain popularity and attract votes in the election and thereby intensify hostility towards Singapore.

Indonesians argue that this is their sovereign right as it is part of their territorial airspace. Singapore has managed the FIR as a public good, focusing on operational efficiency and the safety of navigation in increasingly crowded skies. Some quarters of the Indonesian media frequently misrepresent Singapore’s management of the FIR,

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claiming that Singapore profits from air navigation charges, delays planes taking off or landing at Batam to accommodate Changi Airport's traffic, and discriminates against Indonesian airlines in flight level allocation. None of these allegations are true. In reality, fees collected by Singapore are remitted annually to Indonesia and there is proper accounting between the two countries, while traffic movements are handled solely on the basis of operational efficiency.

The collapse of the commodity boom, the inability to grow the economy at an average annual rate of at least seven percent required to absorb new entrants to the labour force, coupled by the inability to raise adequate revenue through efficient tax collection processes also has consequences for Singapore. Pressured by these shortfalls, Indonesian politicians periodically blame Singapore for harbouring alleged Indonesian "corruptors" and their "illegal funds" or accuse the Singapore Government of fudging trade statistics that hide the true scope of the "smuggling problem". In an interview on Indonesia's proposed amnesty for financial crimes, the former Indonesian Finance Minister Bambang Brodjonegoro, said, "We spend our time cursing corruptors but they are safe in Singapore."

He also cited a McKinsey study that estimated the value of Indonesian assets in Singapore amount to US\$300 billion.

In a July 2017 hearing before Parliament's Commission XI on Financial Affairs, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati claimed Indonesian wealth parked overseas amounted to about one quadrillion rupiah (about S\$102 billion), 60 percent of which was in Singapore. The figures quoted by Indonesian officials tend to fluctuate wildly. Indonesian officials also claim that Singapore has obstructed their finance-related investigations. Singapore, though, has consistently and publicly refuted such allegations, and has in fact been assisting Indonesia's investigation requests. There is a recent offer from Singapore to allow Indonesia access to the financial data of Indonesians in the country. Singapore and Indonesia are soon to sign a Bilateral Competent Authority Agreement to implement the Automatic Exchange of Information between the two countries.

The majority of Indonesians are unaware that in 1974, Pertamina won a case in a Singapore court relating to bribes from foreign contractors deposited in a Singapore bank operated by Pertamina employee Haji Achmad Thahir. The question is why does the Indonesian government not continue such a practice? Yet such claims will recur and the ability of alleged criminals to leave the country legally remains unaddressed.

Likewise in 2003, a spat ensued between the two countries over complaints made by the Indonesian Trade Minister about

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discrepancies in the trade statistics of the two countries. Discrepancies in the trade data statistics between two countries are primarily due to the different systems used to gather the figures. The situation is unsurprising as Singapore also has significant discrepancies in trade statistics with other countries including Malaysia, China and the United States. Singapore though does not publish trade data on Indonesia based on a mutual agreement by the then leaders of the two countries back in 1974. Since then, Singapore has handed the annual data to Indonesia and has no qualms should Jakarta choose to publish the data.

Conclusion

Singapore benefits when our neighbours enjoy political stability and economic growth. We need them to do well. Yet there are groups in Indonesia that do not share this sentiment. Their internal conflicts can also spill over into Singapore. As political contestation increases in Indonesia, Singapore has been an easy target to rally domestic support and deflect criticism. At the height of the Jakarta gubernatorial elections, social media was replete with references to the “plight” of Singapore’s indigenous community following Singapore’s separation from Malaysia in 1965, and what would happen if economically powerful Chinese-Indonesians became the dominant group in the Indonesian political scene. We cannot escape our neighbourhood.

Given that consolidating and institutionalising democracy is still very much a work in progress in Indonesia, we must broaden the base of our interaction with it, involving a new generation of Singaporeans with the skill sets to engage and operate in a complex cultural environment. The key is building personal relationships with a new generation of Indonesian leaders. From 2014 onwards, the Suharto generation of elites will have faded into the background. New linkages will have to be made with a rising generation of leaders through new platforms of interaction to keep in touch regularly, exchange views and discuss new developments.

Much has been said in this chapter about the need for Singaporeans to understand the changes that are taking place in Indonesia. Yet Singapore is also in the midst of change with the governing People’s Action Party undergoing leadership renewal, the economy undergoing structural changes, and the attitudes of Singaporean youth transforming society. Indonesians should also spend time learning about the changes taking place in Singapore. In this regard, funding should be made available to establish Singapore Studies in Indonesian universities to expose the next generation of young Indonesian leaders to new thinking about Singapore and thereby break the stranglehold of negative stereotypes.

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Of utmost importance is the need for Indonesia and Singapore to shape the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to meet new regional challenges. As the costs of doing business in Singapore grow, our businesses will need to take advantage of the provisions in ASEAN Economic Community platforms and expand further into Indonesia beyond traditional investment areas. In Indonesia, networks will prove more important than legalistic frameworks, and skill sets lost in an era of globalisation must be re-learned to take advantage of future opportunities.



Chapter Seven

Singapore's Excellent Relations with Post-War Japan: A Convergence of Interests and Values

Lam Peng Er

LAM Peng Er graduated with First Class Honours in Political Science from National University of Singapore (NUS). He obtained his master's degree at the Australian National University and doctoral degree from Columbia University. He then taught at the Department of Political Science, NUS. Since 2000, he has been with the East Asian Institute at NUS where he is currently Senior Research Fellow.

His primary interests are Japanese domestic politics and international relations. His articles have appeared in international journals including the *Asian Survey*, *Pacific Affairs* and *Japan Forum*. He is the author of several books including *Green Politics in Japan* and *Japan's Peace-Building Diplomacy in Asia: Seeking a More Active Political Role*, both published by Routledge. Dr Lam's latest edited book is *China-Japan Relations in the 21st Century: Antagonism Despite Interdependency* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). He is executive editor of the *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific: A Journal of the Japan Association of International Relations* (Oxford University Press) and the *Asian Journal of Peace-Building* (Seoul National University).

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

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In 2016, Singapore and Japan celebrated the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations.¹ In an epoch of great power transition and uncertainty in East Asia and the world, no one is truly prescient or clairvoyant about the future. But given the considerable convergence of interests and values, and a habit of cooperation and trust built between the city-state and Tokyo over the past five decades, their bilateral relations are likely to remain excellent in the foreseeable future. This article will first address the puzzle: why is this dyadic relationship so good despite the brutal occupation of the British colony of Singapore by the Japanese imperial military between 1942 and 1945? It will then examine the comprehensive relationship and evolving friendship between Singapore and Japan at both state and societal levels. Following that will be a consideration of the likely direction of Singapore-Tokyo relations from 2017 to 2027.

History Question

Unlike Northeast Asia, which is still bedevilled by its burden of history,

Singapore and Japan have buried the hatchet over historical issues. However, the Japanese Occupation of Singapore and the 1942 Sook Ching Massacre are still on the minds of many Singaporeans today. In that genocide, an estimated 25,000 to 50,000 ethnic Chinese men on the island were rounded up and summarily killed.² These latent war memories held by many elderly citizens erupted into shock and anger when the revamped World War II exhibition at the British surrender site (the former Ford Factory) was named Syonan Gallery in February 2017. The Japanese conquerors at that time renamed Singapore, “Syonanto” (Light of the South) – a name abhorrent to those who lived through the dark years of occupation, starvation, deprivation and disease. Following the public outcry, Communications and Information Minister Dr Yaacob Ibrahim apologised “for the pain the name has caused” and Syonan Gallery was quickly renamed “Surviving the Japanese Occupation: War and its Legacies” in the same month.³ This was a rare incident in which dormant emotions about the Japanese Occupation were rekindled and

¹ Koh, Tommy, “Japan, Singapore and 50 years of post-war friendship”, 26 April 2016, *The Straits Times*.

² Blackburn, Kevin, (2000), “The Collective Memory of the Sook Ching Massacre and the Creation of the Civilian War Memorial of Singapore”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 73(2)(279), p.71–90. On p.74-75, Blackburn writes: “Because no written records have been found, no one will ever know for certain how many Chinese the Japanese soldiers shot or bayoneted to death in isolated areas of Singapore, or machined gunned after being dumped at sea. Estimates of the number killed vary considerably, from the clearly conservative official Japanese figure of 5,000 to the undoubtedly exaggerated 100,000 rumoured amongst the Chinese community. However, Hayashi’s statement provides strong evidence for a figure somewhere between 25,000 and 50,000.”

³ Zaccheus, Melody, “‘Syonan Gallery’ renamed; Minister Yaacob Ibrahim apologises for pain that name caused”, 17 February 2017, *The Straits Times*.

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flared publicly. But it did not disrupt the long-standing cordial relations between Singapore and post-war Japan.

**Pragmatism of a Small State:
Receptiveness to Japanese Investments
and Good Practices**

A key reason for the good relations between Singapore and Tokyo can be traced to the pragmatic decision of then Prime Minister (PM) Lee Kuan Yew and his Cabinet to have future-oriented relations with a post-war Japan that had abandoned militarism. In 1966, the city-state accepted S\$25 million in war reparations from Tokyo to close the chapter on their painful past.⁴ Barely one year after its acrimonious separation from Malaysia, Singapore sensibly forged that accord to normalise relations with Tokyo and to attract Japanese multinational corporations, investments and management skills to create jobs and boost the local economy for national survival and domestic political stability. By the late 1960s, Japan emerged as the second largest economy in the world. It was also the lead goose in East Asia's flying geese model of economic development. The next echelon of flying

geese was the newly industrialising economies (NIEs) of Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Arguably, Singapore became a successful NIE because it embraced the Japanese model of state-led economic development based on export-oriented industrialisation.

Good bilateral relations were also due to Japan's conscious policy to improve diplomatic relations with Singapore and Southeast Asia beyond mercantilism since the articulation of the 1977 Fukuda Doctrine. Shocked by the violent anti-Japanese demonstrations that erupted in Bangkok and Jakarta when then Japanese PM Tanaka Kakuei visited those two capitals in 1974, Tokyo codified a new doctrine to improve its diplomatic relations with Southeast Asia. The Fukuda Doctrine (named after then PM Fukuda Takeo) has three tenets: Japan pledged that it would never be a militaristic power again; it would seek to diplomatically support the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a regional organisation; and it would adopt a "heart-to-heart" relationship with Southeast Asia.⁵ Singapore and the ASEAN states embraced the friendship paradigm offered by Japan.

⁴ Then Japanese Foreign Minister Shiina Etsusaburo visited Singapore in 1966 and reached an accord that Tokyo would provide a grant of S\$25 million. The media noted: "Japan and Singapore compromised over the name of a 1967 agreement on reparations for World War II, referring to the pact by the date it was signed without characterising its nature, according to newly declassified diplomatic documents". See: "Tokyo kept war redress out of '67 Singapore accord title", 25 December 2003, *The Japan Times*.

⁵ Lam, Peng Er (ed.), *Japan's Relations with Southeast Asia: The Fukuda Doctrine and Beyond* (London and New York, Routledge, 2013).

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In the 1980s, the city-state studied various aspects of the Japanese economic “miracle” and best corporate practices. Harvard Professor Ezra Vogel’s *Japan as Number One* was also required reading for the Singapore Cabinet.⁶ Indeed, PM Lee was a great admirer of the Japanese economic “miracle”, superb work ethic and group solidarity.⁷ In 1983, the Singapore police force launched the *koban* system based on Japan’s community-oriented neighbourhood police posts for good social order. The Japanese-inspired *kobans* are ubiquitous in Singapore today.

Common Strategic Outlook and Shared Values

Another important reason for the good ties between the city-state and Japan is their common strategic outlook and shared values in the global order. To be sure, Singapore is not a formal treaty ally of the United States (US), like Japan. However, Singapore has forged a close strategic alignment with the US that includes the provision of its Changi Naval Base for the berthing of US aircraft carrier fleet on port visits. Both the city-state and Japan perceive that a balance of power underpinned by

the US strategic balance in East Asia is benign and desirable. In May 2014, Singapore’s then Minister of Foreign Affairs K. Shanmugam affirmed that a strong US-Japan alliance is “good for China and the world”.⁸

Singapore and Tokyo share a similar outlook towards the territorial dispute in the South China Sea among six claimant parties: the rule of law, freedom of navigation, no use of force and a binding code of conduct for maritime disputes.

The city-state adopts an independent and even-handed foreign policy towards the major powers, which includes China and Japan. Singapore supports Tokyo’s quest for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council even though Beijing opposes it. However, Singapore criticised the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine (a symbol of militarism to the Chinese and Koreans) by PM Shinzo Abe in December 2013. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore noted: “Singapore regrets the visit by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the Yasukuni Shrine. Our consistent position has been that such visits reopen old grievances, and are unhelpful to building trust and

⁶ Professor Ezra Vogel intimated to me that then Prime Minister Lee invited him to be a resource person to discuss *Japan as Number One* with his Cabinet colleagues. Vogel noted that Lee did most of the talking on Japan on that occasion.

⁷ Lee, Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First - The Singapore Story - 1965-2000* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2000). See chapters: “Japan: Asia’s First Miracle” and “Lessons from Japan”.

⁸ Sim, Melissa, “Strong US-Japan alliance in interest of China and rest of world: Shanmugam”, 14 May 2014, *The Straits Times*.

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confidence in the region”.⁹ The city-state was among the first countries to join the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, even though Tokyo and Washington did not support it. While Singapore has excellent relations with Japan, it will not align with the latter against China. Neither will the city-state align itself with China against Japan.

Singapore and Japan are also great trading states that have cooperated bilaterally and multilaterally to promote free trade. The Japan-Singapore Economic Partnership Agreement signed in November 2007 was the first bilateral Free Trade Agreement signed by Tokyo with another country. Both countries were enthusiastic supporters of the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Unfortunately, the newly inaugurated Trump administration repudiated the TPP. Singapore and Japan can proceed with other TPP signatories (minus the US), but that will be “TPP-lite” without the largest economy in the world.

Besides a common security outlook and the shared values of regional order and free trade, both countries have also cooperated in cultural dissemination. In 2009, they established the Japan Creative

Centre (JCC) in Singapore to promote Japanese “soft power” in the region. The JCC has been actively organising exhibitions and events to showcase Japanese fine arts and tradition, innovation in science and technology, pop culture and *manga* (comics), lifestyle, design and food.

Good Societal Relations between Singapore and Japan

Historical reconciliation between Singapore and Japan paved the way for cordial relations between their citizens. There is also nostalgia among Singaporeans for Japanese icons that became popular on the island. When Yaohan, a Japanese supermarket chain, opened in Plaza Singapura in Orchard Road in 1974, it was Singapore’s biggest supermarket-cum-department store with many lines of efficient checkout counters. It was the island’s first one-stop modern shopping centre peddling culinary delights, including Japanese snacks.¹⁰ Indeed, it revolutionised shopping in Singapore. In the 1980s, *Oshin*, a Japanese television series based on the life of a Japanese woman who overcame many hardships, was very popular in Singapore. Interestingly, *Oshin* was loosely based on the biography of the mother of Wada Kazuo, the Japanese businessman who started Yaohan.

⁹ “Singapore regrets Japanese Prime Minister’s visit to Yasukuni shrine: Ministry of Foreign Affairs”, 29 December 2013, *The Straits Times*. Refer also to: https://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/media_centre/press_room/pr/2013/201312/press_20131229.html.

¹⁰ Chew, Hui Min, “Straits Times readers share fond memories of Yaohan shopping centres”, 1 June 2015, *The Straits Times*.

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In 1981, the Japanese Studies Department was established in the Arts and Social Sciences Faculty, National University of Singapore (NUS). Today, it is one of the largest area studies departments devoted to the study of Japan in the Asia-Pacific region. In recent years, more than 1,500 NUS undergraduate students annually enrol in that department to learn Japanese linguistics, business studies, sociology, anthropology, history, literature, religion, politics and international relations. In the 1980s and early 1990s, NUS also sponsored a few handpicked graduate students to pursue their doctoral degrees abroad to become Japan specialists in the fields of history, political science, literature and social anthropology. After obtaining their doctorates, they returned to teach and conduct research at that Japanese Studies Department as well as the same university's History Department, Political Science Department and the East Asian Institute. NUS also has an excellent Japanese library.

In the new millennium, Japanese culture has had greater mass appeal in Singapore beyond soap operas, *ikebana* and martial arts like *karate* and *judo*. Many Singaporean youths love J-pop, manga, *anime* (hand-drawn or computer animation), fashion and cosplay (costume play), where participants

dress up as their favourite fantasy characters.¹¹ In food-crazed Singapore, Japanese cuisine has become very popular, seen in the exponential rise in the number of Japanese restaurants. A leading food and beverage magazine noted in 2013:

According to Masayuki Yamashita, director-general of the ministry's (Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry) Food Industry Affairs Bureau, there are around 55,000 Japanese restaurants in the world, which is more than double the figure ten years ago. In addition, the number of Japanese restaurants in Singapore has increased to 880 from 180 over the last five years.¹²

It will not be surprising if the number of Japanese restaurants on the island were to cross the 1,000 mark in the next decade or two.

Singapore and Japan are also favourite destinations for tourists from both countries. In 2012, about 757,000 Japanese tourists visited Singapore.¹³ According to the Japan National Tourism Organisation, about 300,000 Singaporeans visited the country in 2015.¹⁴ There is also a large Japanese expatriate community in

¹¹ Yeo, Sonia, Sijia, "Cosplay Galore: Why Singapore is still into the cosplay fad", 15 July 2016, *Today*.

¹² "MAFF Brings Japanese Culture to Singapore: A series of events will be organised in Singapore to raise the profile of Japanese cuisine and culture", 30 December 2013, Asia Pacific Food Industry, <http://www.apfoodonline.com/index.php/bnf/item/269-maff-brings-japanese-culture-to-singapore>.

¹³ Khew, Carolyn, "Singapore back on Japanese tourists' map", 10 March 2014, *The Straits Times*.

¹⁴ Tay, Tiffany Fumiko, "'Off the beaten path' Japanese sites drawing more tourists", 4 June 2016, *The Straits Times*.

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Singapore that numbered around 35,982 in October 2014. The number of Singaporeans residing in Japan was 2,440 as of November 2012.¹⁵

The good people-to-people relationship between the city-state and Japan is evidenced by the spontaneous humanitarian assistance offered by Singaporeans when the coast of northeast Japan was struck by a catastrophic triple disaster triggered by a massive earthquake that led to a devastating tsunami and a nuclear meltdown at Fukushima in March 2011. By 2015, the Singapore Red Cross had disbursed over S\$35 million to various local projects to assist in the rehabilitation of that stricken region.¹⁶ This is one of the largest amounts raised by Singaporeans for humanitarian assistance abroad.

Singapore-Japan Relations: 2017–2027?

Bilateral relations between Singapore and Japan will be excellent in the next decade given their similar strategic outlook, mutual economic interests and shared values for regional order. Historical issues between them are unlikely to resurface, especially

when both sides have opted for a mutually beneficial future-oriented relationship. Even though there is asymmetry in the size of the two countries, Singapore is the largest Asian investor in Japan.¹⁷ As Singapore becomes more affluent, more Singaporeans will visit Japan to enjoy its culture, cuisine, hot springs and natural beauty.

Given the mediocrity of professional football in Singapore, the excellent J-League can be a model for the S-League. The J-League model is already there but the money necessary to nurture professional football in Singapore is not. Can the football fraternity in Singapore learn from Japan between 2017 and 2027?

It will be intriguing to ask whether the cultural relations between Singapore and Japan will remain asymmetrical in the next decade. Thus far, it has been fairly one-sided in the sense that many Singaporeans appreciate Japanese “soft power” and cultural products. But beyond tourism and food, can Singapore have more attractive offerings for Japanese consumers? Perhaps not, given their disparity in size and the

¹⁵ “Japan-Singapore Relations: Basic data”, 21 October 2015, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/singapore/data.html>.

¹⁶ “Singapore Red Cross delivers final rebuilding project in Japan after 2011 disaster”, 16 March 2015, *Today*.


¹⁷ The media noted: “Singapore is the only Asian country which has over a trillion yen – or S\$12.74 billion at Monday’s exchange rate – invested in Japan, according to the first official Japanese report on foreign direct investments in the country. That makes Singapore, already the biggest investor in China and India, the top Asian investor in the world’s third-largest economy, says *Invest Japan Report 2015* published last week by Jetro, Japan’s trade and investment promotion agency”. See Chuang Peck Ming, “Singapore emerges as top Asian investor in Japan”, 14 June 2016, *The Business Times*.

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relative lack of appeal of Singapore cultural products such as music, art, literature, fashion, movies and television series to the Japanese. It is an uphill task, but it is really up to the passion and talent of Singaporeans to create that appeal. Is the city-state willing to spend money to set up a Singapore Creative Centre (SCC) in Tokyo like its Japanese counterpart, the JCC in Singapore? What can a SCC showcase in Tokyo, Osaka or Kyoto that is interesting and mesmerising?

Singapore food probably has the greatest appeal to consumers in Japan. Given the huge numbers of Japanese tourists in the city-state over the past decades, there should be many fans of Singapore culinary delights in Japan. Singapore food is great, but are Singaporean entrepreneurs and chefs prepared to strike it out in Japan in greater numbers? Once, I went to a Singapore restaurant run by Japanese chefs in Kasumigaseki, the bureaucratic district of Tokyo. It served only two dishes: Hainan chicken rice and Singapore curry chicken. There was always a long line of office workers waiting patiently outside that restaurant during lunch time. I was very amused when I read the sign in Japanese outside the restaurant explaining that Hainan chicken rice is from Singapore and not Hainan Island in China.

In conclusion, my reading of (Japanese) tea leaves is that bilateral ties between Singapore and Japan can only improve in the next 10 years.



Chapter Eight

Singapore's Robust Relations with the Republic of Korea

Yip Wei Kiat

YIP Wei Kiat is currently Ambassador to the Republic of Korea and concurrently Ambassador to Mongolia. He joined the Singapore Foreign Service in 1993. After serving as a Country Officer covering Malaysia and Brunei from May 1993 to January 1995, he was appointed as First Secretary at the Singapore High Commission in Kuala Lumpur from January 1995 to January 1998. Upon his return to Singapore, he held the posts of Assistant Director at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs covering Malaysia and Brunei from February 1998 to January 1999 and Special Assistant to the Foreign Minister from February to December 1999. He then served as an Assistant Director covering Europe from December 1999 to January 2000 before assuming the appointment of Acting Deputy Director covering Europe from January 2000 to June 2001.

Upon completion of his postgraduate studies, he was appointed as Deputy Director of the Policy, Planning and Analysis Directorate III, a post which he held from June 2001 to January 2003. His assignment as Counsellor (Political) at the Singapore Embassy in Bangkok from May 2003 to January 2005 was followed by his appointment as Counsellor and subsequently as Deputy Chief of Mission and Counsellor at the Singapore Embassy in Beijing from February 2005 to December 2007. He was Consul-General at the Singapore Consulate-General in Shanghai from February 2008 to January 2012. Prior to his current appointment, he was Director-General of the Northeast Asia Directorate from February 2012 to August 2014.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

*Singapore's Robust Relations with the Republic of Korea***Bilateral Relations Based on Similar Development Experiences and Shared Interests**

A senior Korean diplomat once described Singapore as the “South Korea of Southeast Asia” and South Korea as the “Singapore of Northeast Asia”. At face value, such a description may not make much sense. After all, Singapore is an island and city-state of just 5.6 million residents. South Korea, on the other hand, has a land mass approximately 140 times the size of Singapore and a population that is almost 10 times larger. Singapore is a multiracial and multicultural society that thrives on its diversity, whereas South Korea is mostly homogenous and deeply steeped in Confucianism. The Korean economy is a manufacturing powerhouse dominated by heavy industries and large conglomerates, while Singapore is better known as a financial centre and services hub.

But if we take a closer look at the recent history of Singapore and South Korea in the 70 years since the end of the Second World War, the parallels between the two countries become more apparent. After regaining its independence from colonial rule in 1945, South Korea endured tremendous hardship during the Korean War and subsequently in rebuilding the country. The lack of natural resources meant that South Korea had to rely mainly on the fortitude and sacrifice of its people to develop the country. With diligence and determination, South Koreans transformed their homeland from one of

the poorest countries in Asia into the 11th largest economy in the world in just one generation. This “Miracle on the Han River” is no less remarkable a journey than Singapore’s own metamorphosis from a colony to self-governance and finally to a First World nation over a similar span of time. These achievements have earned both countries recognition as two of the “Four Asian Tigers” in the late 20th century and as role models for the emerging economies of today.

The similarities between Singapore and South Korea do not end there. Both countries are heavily dependent on international trade as a major driver of their economic growth. It is therefore no surprise that they are both strong advocates of free trade and an open global economy. South Korea has, to date, concluded 15 bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) covering 52 territories, while Singapore has implemented a total of 20 FTAs with 31 trading partners. These economic partnership agreements are regarded as building blocks to attaining the eventual goal of global free trade and investment. They also have a strategic value of promoting peace and stability through interdependence and ensuring that countries have a vested interest in each other’s continued prosperity and well-being.

In terms of foreign policy, Singapore and South Korea cannot escape from the geopolitical realities of being relatively small states situated in the midst of much larger

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neighbours with whom they have complicated and symbiotic relationships. While China is their most important economic partner by far, they have also benefitted enormously from the peace and stability provided by security umbrella of the United States (US) in the Asia Pacific for most of the last century. This benign external environment has allowed Singapore and South Korea to focus their energies and resources on economic development. Both countries have invested much diplomatic effort in maintaining a balance in their relationship with all their major partners who have a stake in this region. They are active participants in the network of overlapping regional cooperation mechanisms, which include the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-plus meetings, East Asia Summit and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

On the home front, the two societies share largely similar traditional value systems grounded in a strong work ethic and the prioritising of the collective good over individual interests. Great emphasis is placed on education, not only as a channel to pass on these values, but also as a means for every person to realise his full potential and achieve social mobility regardless of background. At the same time, Singapore and South Korea have also encountered similar growing pains in the course of their rapid development, including urbanisation bottlenecks, environmental concerns and demographic challenges.

These common development experiences, overlapping interests and similar perspectives across many domestic and international issues have been the foundation for the robust relations between Singapore and South Korea since formal diplomatic ties were established in 1975. The leaders and officials of both countries maintain regular contact and consult closely on bilateral and international issues. The Korean people hold the late founding Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, in high regard as a firm but visionary leader who was instrumental in guiding Singapore to its current achievements. As a young woman, the former President Park Geun-hye had assisted her father President Park Chung-hee to host Mr Lee's first official visit to South Korea in 1979. Her attendance at the state funeral service for Mr Lee in 2015 underscored the friendly and long-standing ties between the two countries.

Over the years, economic cooperation between Singapore and South Korea has expanded healthily in scope and depth. In keeping with their pro-trade economic strategies, the two countries concluded the Korea-Singapore FTA (KSFTA) in 2005. This landmark agreement was especially significant for South Korea as it was its first FTA with an Asian country and only the second it had concluded overall. Since then, two-way trade between Singapore and South Korea has grown by more than 200 percent. The two countries are currently among each other's top 10 trade partners. In recent years, Singapore has consistently

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ranked among the top three largest foreign investors in South Korea. This is a reflection of the confidence that Singapore businesses have in the resilience and prospects of the Korean economy. Meanwhile, more than 1,000 Korean companies have established a presence in Singapore, not just to cater to the local market, but also to partner Singapore-based businesses to explore opportunities in the region. South Korea's positive experience with the KSFTA has paved the way for it to go on to conclude similar agreements with ASEAN and many other countries.

Working Together, Regionally and Globally

In the regional context, Singapore and South Korea have proven to be solid partners, working hand-in-hand to achieve common goals. They subscribe to the adherence to international law as the basis for relations between countries including the resolution of disputes. South Korea values Singapore as a thought leader in ASEAN and as an initiator of such cross-regional dialogues as the Asia-Europe Meeting and the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation. It also appreciates Singapore's firm position on the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and unwavering commitment to implementing all the relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions in a timely manner. Singapore regards South Korea's alliance with the US as one of the main pillars of the security

framework that underwrites the peace and stability of the region. Singapore also welcomes South Korea's positive contributions to regional cooperation as an ASEAN Dialogue Partner. Both countries have pooled efforts and resources in initiatives to enhance ASEAN connectivity and capacity-building as well as in other issues of common concern such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and navigational safety in the Straits of Malacca.

Opportunities for Deeper Engagement and Cooperation

Looking ahead, rising nationalism and anti-globalisation sentiments will continue to complicate the international operating environment and present challenges for Singapore and South Korea. Populist politics and protectionism are growing as governments come under pressure from domestic constituents who have been displaced or feel they have been made worse off by the effects of globalisation. This does not augur well for major trading nations like Singapore and South Korea, whose economies are highly sensitive to shifts in external demand.

The silver lining is that many of the emerging countries in East Asia are still enjoying healthy rates of economic growth. Their relatively young populations and growing affluence offer opportunities for businesses seeking out new markets. There is room for Korean companies to take advantage of the single production base and single market presented by the launch

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of the ASEAN Community in December 2015. They can benefit from Singapore's status as a regional hub and collaborate with Singapore businesses and research institutes to develop new technologies, processes and products to better suit the needs of consumers in the region. This is a win-win outcome as Singapore can tap South Korea's strengths in science and technology, automation and robotics to augment its own efforts to overcome the constraints of physical size and limited manpower. In fact, some Korean companies have already started to take advantage of what Singapore has to offer. LSIS, a leading Korean energy equipment and systems company, is participating in a pilot project in Singapore to test micro-grid technologies based on sustainable energy with the eventual aim of deploying them to other countries in the region. Likewise, Hyundai Engineering and Construction has partnered with Nanyang Technological University to set up a joint research centre to develop urban solutions in areas such as the use of underground space, seawater desalination and innovative construction methods.

As open economies that embrace innovation and technological advances, Singapore and South Korea are experiencing disruptions that will continue to change consumption preferences and the way businesses operate. For instance, advancements in communications technology and expansion of mobile platforms have facilitated the exponential growth of e-commerce. This poses a major

challenge to retail players who have not evolved beyond their traditional brick-and-mortar mode of operations. But for companies that have been able to adapt to the changes, new opportunities have opened up. Giosis Group, the company behind the popular e-marketplace Qoo10, is an excellent example of collaboration between Singapore and South Korea to capitalise on the growing popularity of online shopping. A joint venture between eBay and the Korean founder of the Gmarket e-commerce platform, Singapore-based Giosis has expanded rapidly since it was established in 2010 to offer localised e-marketplaces in five territories in Asia apart from Singapore.

Another trend that Singapore and South Korea will have to contend with is the spread of extremist ideologies, terrorism and other non-traditional security threats such as cyberattacks. Both countries are particularly vulnerable by virtue of the openness of their economies and high degree of infocomm connectivity. These threats are not constrained by national borders and cannot be effectively dealt with through traditional security countermeasures or by countries acting alone. This is an area where Singapore and South Korea can share intelligence and experience, and pool their expertise with other partners to find the appropriate solutions.

There is also much scope for Singapore and South Korea to learn from each other's best practices in tackling domestic

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challenges given the similarity in their levels of social development. Two areas in particular have been the focus of many study visits by officials and civic groups of both countries. On the first, as the societies in Singapore and South Korea mature, the social contract between the government and the people has evolved. Individuals and the civil society now desire to have greater input into how issues that affect them directly are addressed. They wish to participate more actively in the way government policies are formulated and implemented. The public sectors of both countries are responding to this paradigm shift by emphasising people-centric governance and inclusive development. Another preoccupation is the changing population demographics in Singapore and South Korea. With total fertility rates hovering around 1.25, the populations of both countries are among the fastest ageing in the world. This trend has multiple cross-cutting implications for social and economic issues including healthcare, education, labour and social safety nets. To deal with these issues effectively, the government needs the cooperation and expertise of businesses, civil society and people. A good understanding of how other countries respond to the same challenges can also be useful.

In today's context, diplomacy and international relations are no longer the exclusive domain of governments and businesses with a multinational footprint. Public diplomacy has become equally important in shaping how countries and

their peoples perceive and deal with each other. South Korea has done very well in terms of enhancing its soft power and raising its international profile through *Hallyu* (Korean Wave). Many Singaporeans are becoming more familiar with Korean culture and society through Korean movies, television dramas and pop music. Koreans, on the other hand, are less exposed to Singapore and what the diversity of its multicultural society has to offer. Singapore's civil society and cultural groups can play a part in promoting better mutual understanding between the two countries through exchange programmes.

After more than four decades of engagement, relations between Singapore and South Korea have come a long way. Both countries have achieved a certain measure of success in their development such that they are able to have a voice and place in the international community that far exceeds what their size in terms of geography and population would otherwise command. However, past achievements do not guarantee future success. The road ahead for Singapore and South Korea is likely to be more challenging given their domestic constraints, an increasingly complex external operating environment and growing competition from emerging economies. While circumstances and conditions may change, the similarity in backgrounds and overlapping interests that both countries share remain valid. If Singapore and South Korea are able to capitalise on their complementary strengths and seize the opportunities

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presented, there is no reason why they cannot continue to be influential players on the international stage and play important roles in helping to set global standards.



Chapter Nine

Singapore-India: An Enduring Relationship

Gopinath Pillai

Gopinath PILLAI has had a varied career as an entrepreneur and diplomat. He is the Founding Chairman of the Management Board of the Institute of South Asian Studies, has served as Ambassador-at-Large in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since August 2008, and is Singapore's Special Envoy to Andhra Pradesh. He was Singapore's longest serving Non-Resident Ambassador to Iran between 1989 and 2008, and Singapore's High Commissioner to Pakistan between 1994 and 2001. He is also Chairman of the Indian Heritage Centre Advisory Board.

The Singapore government awarded him the Public Service Star Award (BBM) in 1999, BBM (BAR) in 2009 and The Meritorious Service Medal in 2015 for his manifold contributions to public service. The Indian government conferred on him the Padma Shri Award at the 2012 Republic Day for his efforts in bridging and advancing Singapore-India relations. He has also received awards from the National University of Singapore.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

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The relationship between India and Singapore is generally thought of as being problem-free, which means that there are no festering issues between them. In reality, it is more than that. It is a robust and multifaceted relationship that is long-standing and growing deeper with the passage of time.

The Past

The general context for that relationship is the fact that the interaction between India and Southeast Asia started long before the arrival of the European powers in Asia. Hindu and Buddhist states thrived in Southeast Asia. Even today, a festival called “Bali Yatra” (Journey to Bali) is celebrated in Odisha, the state formerly known as Orissa. Needless to say, the cultural aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism also permeated these societies. With religion and culture also came trade. Indian traders were deeply involved in the trade between China and the Indian subcontinent as well as West Asia.

With the coming of the European powers, the relationship took on a different character. The old kingdoms of India were no longer involved in Southeast Asia, but Indian traders and indentured labour followed their colonial masters to the region, especially Singapore and Malaya, which were part of the Straits Settlements governed out of India by the British.

After the First World War, larger numbers of merchants, apart from the

Chettiars from Tamil Nadu who came in the 1820s, arrived in Malaya and Singapore from different parts of India. These new immigrants included Gujaratis, Punjabis and Sindhis who settled in Singapore to set up franchises of their family businesses. As the Indian merchant community grew exponentially, other Indians came seeking job opportunities in Singapore too.

By the third decade of the 20th century when the independence movement was gaining traction in India, some of its leaders, like Jawaharlal Nehru, visited Singapore. The Japanese occupation saw Subhash Chandra Bose, one of the strident independence leaders of India, use Singapore as a base to build up, with Japanese help, the Indian National Army, which was to march to India to fight the British colonialists. This was the beginning of the anti-colonial struggle that eventually spread throughout Asia and Africa.

Prior to Singapore’s independence, its leaders developed relationships with Indian leaders, particularly Nehru. Singapore’s first Chief Minister, David Marshall, visited New Delhi. Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the first elected Prime Minister (PM), visited India more than once before 1965. One of the lesser known reports that I have heard is that when the leftist faction of Lee’s People’s Action Party broke away and formed Barisan Sosialis, leaders from both sides visited V.K. Krishna Menon, a somewhat controversial politician but a close advisor to Nehru, to explain their

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respective positions. This illustrates the depth of the relationship between Singapore and India on a people-to-people basis established even in those early years.

The Present

In 1965, when Singapore separated from Malaysia, India was one of the first countries to recognise its independence. Since then, Singapore and India have established strong strategic, economic, defence and political cooperation. Singapore has looked towards India as a strategic partner in Asia. Between 1968 and 2015, 10 bilateral agreements were signed, including the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) that came into effect in August 2005, the first of such agreements signed by India with any country. In 2015 and 2016, there were 13 ministerial and one presidential visit from Singapore to India, and eight ministerial visits from India to Singapore, as well as three from the leaders of Indian states.

India on its part has looked towards Singapore as its main promoter in establishing a dialogue with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Singapore's continued support resulted in India becoming a full ASEAN dialogue partner in 1995, when India joined the ASEAN+3. This expanded into the meetings regarding an India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, which was established in 2010. Singapore supported India's bid to be made a permanent member of the

United Nations Security Council, a move that is now backed by four of the five permanent members, namely the United States (US), United Kingdom, Russia and France.

Here are two specific areas of cooperation between Singapore and India.

Economic and Diplomatic Engagement

The 1990s to 2000 was the period that saw the deepening of cooperation between the two countries. One of the early pacts signed between Singapore and India was the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement in 1994. The tax treaty prevents double taxation of revenue that may flow between Singapore and India.

The two countries also signed the Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) agreement. The agreement laid out the parameters on how the two regional partners can combat terrorism and serious criminal violations. Both states have a legal system that stems largely from the English common law tradition. Their legal codes in the scope of criminal law and procedure are similar too. Moreover, Singapore's penal code, which was enacted in 1871, closely followed the Indian Penal Code of 1860. Therefore the MLA was signed to strengthen the close link between the prosecutorial and law enforcement agencies in each country. In 2007, Singapore and India mutually agreed to form the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) to exchange opinions on regional and global matters, as well as explore new

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areas for collaboration. Since then, the JMC has been held yearly and the two countries take turns to host it.

Singapore has also organised a number of exchanges with Indian politicians in recent years. The latest one was held in February 2014 when Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted six representatives of Indian political parties. The politicians took part in a roundtable discussion to explore pressing issues in India, such as the participation of youth in politics, female security, gender issues and corruption.

The framework of the Singapore-India relationship reached another significant milestone in August 2014 when the two countries agreed on the "5-S plank" that relates to five key areas, namely, trade and investment, air connectivity, smart cities, skills development and state focus.

Specifically, the "5S-I plank" aims to boost mutual trade and investment. The second plank, "5S-II plank" is on increasing air connectivity. The 1968 Air Services Agreement was reviewed in 2002 and 2005, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on air services arrangements was ratified in April 2013 to speed up bilateral connectivity. The "5S-III plank" on smart cities enabled Singapore to establish new links with Indian states like Andhra Pradesh. Singapore has also engaged the state government of Rajasthan to draw up concept plans for the development of townships in cities such as Jodhpur and Udaipur.

The fourth plank, "5S-IV" on skills development saw another MOU signed between Singapore's ITE Education Services and the Indian government in 2012. This MOU provided an outline to establish the Green Field World Class Skill Centre in Jonapur, New Delhi. Singapore is also collaborating with the state government of Rajasthan to set up the Centre of Excellence for Tourism Training. The fifth plank, "5S-V" is on state-level exchanges. Indian Chief Ministers from states such as Rajasthan, West Bengal, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have visited Singapore since 2014, many of which have been reciprocated by Singapore's ministers. Most recently, in May 2017, Singapore's Minister for Trade & Industry S Iswaran visited Andhra Pradesh to mark the appointment of two Singapore companies as master developers of Andhra Pradesh's new capital city, Amaravati. Singapore was also a partner country for the Resurgent Rajasthan Partnership (2015) and the Seventh Vibrant Gujarat Summit (2015). As such, the country's engagement with the Indian states is wide.

The relationship between the two countries was elevated to a Strategic Partnership level in November 2015 when Indian PM Narendra Modi visited Singapore to sign the Joint Declaration on a Strategic Partnership with his Singapore counterpart PM Lee Hsien Loong. A total of nine bilateral agreements were signed between the two leaders in the areas of maritime security, defence, cybersecurity, urban planning and narcotics trafficking.

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In October 2016, Singapore's PM Lee visited India to boost this already-robust relationship. The Joint Declaration on a Strategic Partnership was reviewed and three new pacts, including two in skills development, were signed by the two heads of government.

Defence Relations

Singapore and India have rapidly enhanced their defence and strategic relationship from the early 1990s. Since 1991, Singaporean naval vessels have frequently visited Port Blair in the Andaman Islands and since 1996, they have begun visiting the port city of Visakhapatnam. Similarly, ships from the Indian navy have been visiting Singapore frequently.

Since 1994, the two countries have been running annual naval training operations called Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW). The annual ASW, between the Republic of Singapore Navy and the Indian Navy, has developed in complexity and scope over the years.

Many high-profile visits by defence officials to each other's country have taken place between 1993 and 2003. In October 2003, the landmark Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) was signed by then Defence Ministers Teo Chee Hean for Singapore and George Fernandes for India. Intelligence-sharing, and personnel, joint naval, air and land exchanges between Singapore and India were made possible through this pact. Singapore's army and

air forces were given the green light to conduct training exercises on Indian soil — the first time India has allowed a foreign military force to do so. In March 2004, the Defence Policy Dialogue, a platform for the two countries to discuss defence cooperation, was set up. The militaries of the two countries have widened their defence cooperation by incorporating new military exercises.

Over the years, Singapore and India have shown reciprocity in enhancing their defence mechanism through joint exercises. The first joint army training with the use of artillery and armour units was launched in February 2004. That October, the inaugural air exercise code-named SINDEK 04 was held by the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) in Western India. SINDEK is now an annual air exercise for the RSAF to train with the IAF.

In 2007, the two countries signed the Joint Military Exercises agreement, which permitted Singapore's air force to train in Indian military bases in Kalaikunda and West Bengal for a five-year period. A year later, a three-week bilateral air force training session was carried out between Singapore and India.

Military officers from Singapore are regularly sent to India to attend courses in their military institutes. Since the September 11 terror attacks in the US, the two countries have cooperated on national security issues by sharing their intelligence

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on terrorism-related and security matters. Singapore has expressed interest in the idea of combined patrols with the navies of India and the US.

In November 2015, Singapore and India strengthened the defence relationship by reviewing the DCA. The revised DCA established a defence ministers' dialogue, strengthened bilateral collaboration in maritime security and enhanced collaboration between the two countries' defence sectors. The two countries signed nine agreements in total, which covered areas such as defence, civil aviation, culture, maritime and cybersecurity, to commemorate 50 years of bilateral ties.

The Future

Bilateral engagement between Singapore and India continues to deepen with regular high-level visits between Singaporean and Indian leaders.

Economic relations and the strengthening of CECA would be the most important aim of the two countries. Defence and security is another key feature of the bilateral ties between Singapore and India, with joint military exercises and training between the two armed forces. Indeed, as stated in the Joint Declaration: "India and Singapore will expand military and defence cooperation in areas of mutual benefit, and explore the possibility of further collaboration in defence technology, and co-development and co-production

between their defence industries", where both nations agreed to "explore expanding cooperation in maritime security and cybersecurity as well as in combating terrorism".

Technology is one of the main drivers of innovation in Singapore and it is spurred by Indian entrepreneurs, firms and start-ups choosing to host their base companies in Singapore. The city-state's access to international markets and its reputation as a financial powerhouse with favourable terms to investors and the ease of doing business will continue to draw Indian entrepreneurs to Singapore.

On the diplomatic front, Singapore and India will find stable and less prickly partners in each other in an otherwise turbulent world.

Conclusion

Singapore and India share a warm relationship built on mutual respect and constructive cooperation. Looking ahead, there is much reason to believe that the two countries will be able to strengthen and build on it. The next couple of decades will see significant changes in the political architecture of the world with Asia bolstering its position on the global stage. It is possible to envisage spheres of influence emerging with large countries competing for leadership. During the Cold War, Singapore and India were on different sides of the divide. Efforts must be made to ensure that this does not happen again.

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There is a positive role that can be played by nations that stay out of the fray, take objective positions and act on principles that benefit everybody. Hopefully Singapore and India will play that role.

One final point I would like to make is to express my desire to see greater depth in the economic engagement between the private sectors of the two countries. If Singaporean investors go to India expecting to see another Singapore, or Malaysia or China, they will be sorely disappointed. India has its own ways of doing things but with patience and understanding, Singaporeans can build lucrative businesses in India. I say this given my own experience in India. There are other Singapore companies like Sembawang and Ascendas that have done well in India too. If we go in only on the basis of fee-based participation and are not prepared to invest, success will be limited. India on its part must place greater emphasis on enhancing the ease of doing business and on promoting business integrity, which is the assurance that all investors want and need. I am optimistic that progress will be made in these areas over the course of time.

In 2015, at the launch of the Institute of South Asian Studies book on Singapore-India relations, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong opined that these relations would be “special”. India and Singapore share common ground as they function as regional hubs in South Asia and Southeast Asia respectively. Moreover, they share

strong common values, such as the commitment to rule of law, democracy and social justice. Hence, through political, economic and cultural cooperation, these two nations can metaphorically be the two end-points of the bridge that broadens the scope of Asian growth and influence as they link South Asia and Southeast Asia.



Chapter Ten

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Ong Keng Yong

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Mr Ong was High Commissioner of Singapore to Malaysia from 2011 to 2014. He served as Secretary-General of ASEAN based in Jakarta, Indonesia, from January 2003 to January 2008.

Mr Ong started his diplomatic career in 1979 and was posted to the Singapore embassies in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and the United States. He was Singapore's High Commissioner to India and concurrently Ambassador to Nepal from 1996 to 1998. From September 1998 to December 2002, he was Press Secretary to then Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Goh Chok Tong. At the same time, Mr Ong held senior appointments in the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, and the People's Association in Singapore. From 2008 to 2011, he was the Director of the Institute of Policy Studies at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

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On 23 December 2016, the 15-member United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2334 with a vote of 14–0. China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, Angola, Egypt, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, Uruguay and Venezuela voted in favour of the Resolution. The United States (US) abstained on the vote.

Resolution 2334 reaffirms that “the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace”. The Resolution demands that “Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.”

This is the first UNSC Resolution on Israeli settlements to be adopted in almost 37 years. While the Resolution did not include any sanction or coercive measure and was adopted under non-binding provisions of the United Nations (UN) Charter, Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* stated it “may have serious ramifications for Israel in general and specifically for the settlement

enterprise” in the medium- to long-term.¹ The Israeli government accused the administration of US President Barack Obama of orchestrating the passage of Resolution 2334. Israel subsequently retaliated with a series of diplomatic actions against some members of the UNSC.

In international law, there is the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 which makes it illegal for nations to move their own civilian populations and establish settlements in territories acquired in a war. A majority of UN member states consider the Israeli settlements to be illegal on that basis. On the other hand, Israel takes the view that these are not “occupied” but “disputed” territories because “there were no established sovereigns in the West Bank or Gaza Strip prior to the Six-Day War” in 1967.² This Israeli argument was rejected by the International Court of Justice in 2004.

Background

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is regarded as the most intractable dispute confronting the world today. In the early years, it was simply described as the fight between the Arabs and the Jews. Over the decades, the Israeli and Palestinian dimensions were cast as the international community tried to

¹ Ravid, Barak, “Understanding the UN Resolution on Israeli Settlements: What Are the Immediate Ramifications?,” 24 December 2016, *Haaretz*, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.761049>.

² “Disputed Territories – Forgotten Facts About the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” 1 February 2003, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFA-Archive/2003/Pages/DISPUTED%20TERRITORIES%20Forgotten%20Facts%20About%20the%20We.aspx>.

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narrow the wide-ranging conflict and focused on the main protagonists and the key possible solution. This involves the creation of two states: Israel and Palestine, existing side-by-side.

Many scholars have characterised the conflict as a fight for control of land in what is today's Israel, the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip facing the Mediterranean Sea. Others consider it a battle between Islam and Judaism as the respective holy places are in the contested area. In fact, several other religions also regard various places in Israel and the West Bank as sacred, and many of their faithful followers make regular pilgrimages to these locations.

To further complicate the situation, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also seen as a proxy of big power competition for domination of a vital part of the world geography. Western powers, led by the US, have been locked in a contest for influence and alliances in the Middle East. The Cold War atmospherics compounded the emotional, ethnic and religious elements of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and often heightened tensions, leading to armed hostilities in the occupied territories as well as terrorist attacks inside Israel. It was capitalism and democracy versus communism and conservative regimes. The rich oil and gas resources in the region and the strategic sea lanes connecting the Middle East with Europe, Africa and Asia make this region critical to the interests of the big powers.

Overall, it has resulted in the prolonged state of war and human suffering in what historians call the Fertile Crescent (stretching from the eastern Mediterranean coast to the land fed by the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and onwards to the Persian Gulf). The turmoil in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq as well as the rise of Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and other terror groups can be linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in one way or another. Indeed, many experts have argued that much of the trouble in the Islamic world and between Muslim and non-Muslim communities around the globe can be traced to the deep-seated differences of opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Singapore's Position

In a reply to parliamentary questions on 14 January 2013, Singapore's then Minister for Foreign Affairs, K. Shanmugam, provided a concise picture of Singapore's stand on the issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He reiterated the country's support for the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland. Singapore had previously issued a statement welcoming the proclamation of a Palestinian state in 1988. The Minister pointed out that there were approximately 19 resolutions on various Palestinian-related issues tabled each year at the UN General Assembly. Singapore had consistently voted in favour of all of them.

Mr Shanmugam said that Singapore abstained on certain votes for specific UN

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resolutions to maintain a consistent principled position. For example, Singapore believed that only a negotiated settlement consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 242 (adopted in 1967) could provide the basis for a viable, long-term solution. Resolution 242 called for the “establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East” that should include the “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict”.³

He stressed that both Israel and Palestine had legitimate rights and shared responsibilities. They must both be prepared to make compromises in order to achieve a lasting peace. Any unilateral action, be it by Israel or Palestine, to force a settlement of the issue would hinder, rather than facilitate, the peace process.

According to Mr Shanmugam, Singapore’s position on Palestinian statehood is based on certain principles and international law. As with all resolutions tabled at the UN, Singapore would vote based on its own national interests as an independent and sovereign nation, regardless of the position of others. He pointed out that Singapore’s position on this issue is well known to all parties and has not affected its close ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. ASEAN leaders had called on all parties to return to the negotiation table and resolve the conflict in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions.

³ The “recent conflict” in the resolution referred to the Six-Day War, which began on 5 June 1967, during which Israel captured much of what is currently known as the “Occupied Palestinian Territories”.

Mr Shanmugam added that Singapore has been contributing to Palestine’s development primarily through technical assistance under the Singapore Cooperation Programme, training Palestinian officials in fields that Singapore is strong in, such as public administration and urban planning. The Singapore government believes this is the best way for Singapore to make a difference to Palestine’s development. The Singapore government committed itself to continue to provide technical assistance to Palestinians in areas most relevant and impactful to their development (Note: Singapore has also set up a S\$10 million enhanced technical assistance package for Palestinians that includes postgraduate scholarships for Palestinian officials).

He remarked that Singapore welcomes efforts by the international community to contribute to the humanitarian development and reconstruction of Palestine. Singapore had also made voluntary monetary contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Most recently, on 20 February 2017, Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong reiterated Singapore’s long-standing and consistent position on the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including Singapore’s support for Israel’s right to live

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within secure borders and in peace, and also the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland. He called for restraint and compromise on both sides in order to achieve a lasting peace. He expressed Singapore's hope that the Israelis and the Palestinians would resume direct negotiation to find a just, durable and comprehensive solution to this long-standing conflict. PM Lee's policy statement was made during the official visit of Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu to Singapore from 20 to 21 February 2017.

Looking Ahead

The two-state solution is favoured by most member states of the UN, international bodies around the world and people in Israel and the West Bank/Gaza Strip.⁴ At the same time, the Israeli government demands recognition of Israel as a Jewish state and guarantee for its security. The gap between the two positions is huge. In the circumstances, no quick resolution of the dispute is imminent. Singapore must manage its relations with both Israel and Palestine patiently and skilfully.

⁴ Sherwood, Harriet, "The Two-State Solution in the Middle East – All You Need to Know," 28 December 2016, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/28/the-two-state-solution-in-the-middle-east-all-you-need-to-know>.



Chapter Eleven

Singapore and the Middle East

Nazirudin Mohd Nasir

Nazirudin MOHD NASIR is Senior Director of Religious Policy and Development at the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS). He completed a doctoral degree in the comparative study of Abrahamic religions at St Cross College, University of Oxford. Prior to that, he was trained in Islamic law at Al-Azhar University and international and comparative law at the School of Oriental and African Studies. He has published articles in the area of inter-religious dialogue and comparative religion. He is also a member of the Singapore Bioethics Advisory Committee and sits on the Panel of Community Advisors for Honour, Singapore.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

Singapore and the Middle East

Linkages between Singapore and the Middle East

From Tehran in the Near East to the coastal city of Casablanca in North Africa, what we collectively refer to as the Middle East is a vast region of diverse cultures, histories, languages and religions. Today, much of what we hear of the Middle East revolves around a single theme: instability, conflict and violence relating to Islam. The most recent foreign policy interpretation of this is the United States (US) President Donald Trump's executive order early in his presidency to ban citizens of seven Muslim countries (six of which are in the Middle East) from entering the US.

However, the region remains actively connected to the world through economic cooperation, trade deals, as well as cultural and religious ties, and that is the same with Singapore. In 2013, Singapore became the first country outside the Middle East to sign a Free Trade Agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which comprises six Middle East countries. Singapore companies are collaborating on many very large projects with the GCC. Is there more beyond trade that binds societies and nations in the Middle East with our own?

Our historical linkages with the Middle East go back to as early as the 18th century. The first local Arab communities hailed from

the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, more specifically from the Hadhramaut region in Yemen.¹ These scholars-cum-traders, who brought Islam to Singapore, soon established religious endowments known as *wakafs*, and built mosques and religious seminaries called *madrasahs* after settling on the island.

The local religious elite was initially trained in these seminaries, and many then pursued higher education at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. This tradition of learning in the Arab world continues today, with Muslim students enrolled in various tertiary institutions in the region and more than 500 Singaporean students in eight Middle East countries.

The location of holy sites of pilgrimage as well as ancient cities of historical significance to Muslims provide another important religious and cultural bridge between Singapore and the Middle East. The haj pilgrimage to Mecca, participated by an average of 800 Singapore Muslim pilgrims annually, serves as an important diplomatic bridge between Singapore and Saudi Arabia. Beyond the ambit of the Singapore Muslim community, our diplomatic relations with the region began early, from independence in 1965, to facilitate travel, business and study. In 2016, Singapore celebrated its 50 years of bilateral relations with Egypt for instance.

¹ Mobini-Kesheh, Natalie, *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900–1942* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999), p. 21.

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These positive examples of diplomatic relations and religio-cultural ties take place against disconcerting Middle East geopolitics. Over the last few decades, the region has become one of the most unstable in the world. Each of its different geographical regions – the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, North Africa and the Gulf states – has seen conflicts, sectarianism and terrorist activities. The most heart-wrenching images that have emerged from these are of young children suffering from the current wars in Iraq and Syria, which have ushered in one of the worst humanitarian crises in history. With the political quagmire that the Middle East is in, one cannot be blamed for surmising that the region is on the precipice of an imminent collapse, which certainly leaves little prospect for growth and progress.²

The geopolitical challenges facing the Middle East not only have serious global repercussions, but are extremely complex and deeply historical. They harken back to failed policies of, and interventions by, imperial powers and colonisers in the early 20th century, as well as to more recent catastrophic political misjudgments on the part of Western powers. Under autocratic and repressive regimes that soon ensued in fledgling states, there was little chance that its societies could truly taste progress. Further, the deeply entangled spheres of religion and politics have raised its

geopolitical turmoil to new levels. Different Muslim factions and communities have either become privileged or persecuted depending on who rules. Public opinion and reactions are often swayed, as it were, by religious polarisation. Reflecting on the British Mandate system in Iraq after the First World War, a writer reminds us that the modern political situation there has its origins in the political manoeuvrings of the post-war period. More worryingly, he observes, history looks poised to repeat itself.³

The scale of current conflicts and crises eclipses the developmental stories that equally characterise the potential and aspirations of Middle East societies. After all, the region is home to around 411 million people. It is an important part of our contemporary world and the global community, and the historical cradle that gave birth to three of the world's largest faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the context of Muslim societies, the Middle East's influence on Islam and Muslims in other parts of the world is intuitive, given that the Prophet of Islam, the language and content of its scripture, and the faith's normative teachings originate from this region. Religious ideas and figures of Middle Eastern origin continue to be among the foremost sources of reference for Muslim communities around the world, disseminated ever more quickly today

² "Risks and Instability in the Middle East and North Africa in 2016", (Center for Strategic & International Studies, <http://www.csis.org/analysis/risks-and-instability-middle-east-and-north-africa-2016>).

³ Dodge, Toby, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (London: Hurst & Company 2003).

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through social media and the Internet. In fact, the militant group that we know of today as the Islamic State (ISIS) expanded its influence both in the physical and digital worlds by exploiting the sacredness of the Middle Eastern lands and religious narratives linked to them as a key part of its ideology. As its physical territory diminishes, ISIS will seek to cause carnage in other parts of the world by radicalising more minds with its poisonous ideology, as seen from the recent spate of terrorist attacks on European soil.

No doubt the security threat that emanates from its geopolitical situation has become a top global concern, and thus warrants the unequivocal attention of every nation and society that takes peace and stability seriously. However, beneath these crisis-laden headlines are social realities and developments with transformative potential, to which the former President of the US, Barack Obama, directed the world's attention in his speech in Cairo in 2011.⁴ It was, after all, a profound grassroots fervour for reform that swept several Middle East cities that had led to what was once optimistically called the "Arab Spring".⁵ On many fronts, Middle Eastern societies are not averse to modernising and adopting more liberal ideas. Much of its population is well-travelled, desires freedom and liberties, and understands the imperative of affirming

fundamental human rights. In some parts of the Middle East, civil society is growing despite considerable resistance from more authoritarian governments. The desire for democracy is thus very much alive in the Middle East, although large parts of its population are bereft of the essential requirements to make it work effectively.

Some parts of the region have embarked on a path of modernisation, and this will open up new vistas and opportunities for countries with a solid track record in nation-building. The prospect for such collaborations, especially as more stable economies push forward their economic agenda, is promising for a country like Singapore.

Developing Deeper and More Impactful Engagement with the Region

Whilst trade remains a key impetus, a broader engagement with the Middle East continues to be an important agenda. Singapore's successful policymaking makes further partnership with the region a tantalising prospect for many of its nations. This is especially in the realm of education, given its potential to offer hope for a better future in the Middle East. In both the formative years of learning and in higher education, Singapore has established itself internationally, ranking high in terms of the academic achievements of students.

⁴ Lynch, Marc, "Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 94, No.5, September/October 2015.

⁵ Yom, Sean, "Arab Civil Society after the Arab Spring: Weaker but Deeper", 22 October 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/arab-civil-society-after-arab-spring-weaker-deeper>.

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The situation in the Middle East is starkly different. Despite major improvements over the last five decades, many countries still fare relatively poorly in the quality of schooling as well as research at tertiary levels.⁶ Yet, it must not be forgotten that cities in the Middle East used to be the centres of intellectual and cultural renaissance. Baghdad, Beirut and Cairo were just some of the thriving metropolises of intellectual exchange and trade in the region. The right educational infrastructure, coupled with a liberal atmosphere that cultivated critical thought, had allowed for the religious and political elite to raise the intellectual pedigree of their societies to new heights in those cities. In fact, most of the universities in these places were open to exchanges with Western scholars. At one point, eminent European orientalist scholars such as the Hungarian Ignaz Goldziher and the French Louis Massignon studied at the feet of Al-Azhar's *sheikhs* in its eponymous mosque. If the past is any indication, then the potential for the Middle East to develop its education sector with the right partnerships and infrastructural investments is real.

In order to be an effective partner, however, there is a need for a deeper cultural appreciation of the Middle East and a better assessment of its geopolitical developments. Singapore has taken a very important step to this end by setting up the Middle East Institute in 2007. Such

institutions play an important role in keeping policymakers up to speed on the developments in the Middle East and the ways in which its societies can be properly understood. For example, several pertinent questions relating to religious developments there that shape policies and colour public perceptions are: Is the Middle East heavily influenced by radical ideologies, particularly those of ISIS and Al-Qaeda? Do Middle East societies accept the idea of a religious caliphate and reject the notion of nation-state? Are they becoming increasingly conservative and overcome by literalist leanings such as *salafism*? The implications of the answers to these questions, one way or another, are serious not only for how we understand the Middle East, but on how we can anticipate the impact on local developments, especially in the realm of social cohesion and communal relations.

In very recent times, it can be observed that both governments and civil groups in the Middle East are equally worried about such problematic tendencies taking root in their societies. Some major initiatives at a regional level attest to the common goal of building social cohesion and harmony across different communities and pushing for a more progressive religious agenda. These include the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority

⁶ Education in the Middle East and North Africa, 17 January 2014, The World Bank <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/brief/education-in-mena>.

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Communities, signed by Muslim representatives from more than 120 countries, and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies based in the United Arab Emirates. These initiatives have seen the collaboration among governments, non-government organisations and individual religious figures and scholars. Singapore has an important role of contributing to the conversation on social harmony. It offers a working model for social harmony and cohesion through policies, laws, practices and education that is worthy of exploration by other societies.⁷ No doubt there are diverse ways to achieve peace and stability across communities, and the specific circumstances of different societies must be taken into account. However, conversations between nations and people on this common theme can only benefit all parties.

In the middle term, the future of the region lies much in the outcomes of its geopolitical conditions, especially in Iraq and Syria. The implications of these are grave, especially in how Middle Eastern societies respond and collaborate with other parts of the world on developmental and progressive agendas. In small but meaningful ways, Singaporeans can contribute towards a brighter future for the Middle East. With a more nuanced understanding of the region and its people, we will realise that their aspirations

converge with ours. Our expertise in technology, education systems and governance, and our experiences in fostering social harmony will go a long way in contributing towards a more stable, successful region and an important part of the modern world.

⁷ Koh, Tommy, "Singapore: Multiculturalism's Success Story", 16 September 2004, http://www.lkyspp2.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/sp_tommykoh_Singapore-Multiculturalism-Success-Story_16-Sep-04.pdf.



Chapter Twelve

Singapore-Australia Relations: The Role of Historical Ties, Personalities, Values and Interests

Eddie Teo

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He joined the Singapore Public Service in 1970 and served in various capacities, including Permanent Secretary (Defence) from 1994 to 2000 and Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister's Office) from 1998 to 2005. He was concurrently Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister's Office from 1998 to 2000.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

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On 12 October 2016, the Australian Parliament provided an occasion for the governments of Australia and Singapore to highlight the close friendship the two countries enjoy when Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong delivered his address – the first by a Singapore head of government. Australian PM Malcolm Turnbull welcomed PM Lee as “a great friend of Australia”. Bill Shorten, the Leader of the Opposition, said that “Australia has no closer friend in Asia than Singapore”. A year earlier, then PM Tony Abbott spoke of bilateral ties going beyond friendship; he envisaged Singapore to be “family in the years and decades to come”. PM Lee’s speech that October was equally warm and friendly, recalling his personal encounters with Australians he had come to know over the years.

What accounts for this obvious warmth and close bond between two countries that, at first glance, would seem to be better characterised by their differences than similarities? Australia’s geography, demography and sociopolitical culture are quite different from Singapore’s. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) trains in Australia precisely because Singapore is so small and Australia is so big. Australia, the lucky country, has mineral resources aplenty, while we need to import even our drinking water. While we are both multicultural, our ethnic groups do not all come from the same countries. We speak English and share a common British colonial past, and we have inherited British

institutions such as a parliamentary system of government and rule of law. But our concept of democracy is not exactly the same, and we have made changes to our inherited political and judicial systems. Our cultural and sociopolitical attitudes also differ. Australians are said to be egalitarian to a fault and exhibit the “tall poppy syndrome”. Singaporeans value success and support meritocracy, even if its strict observance results in inequality.

The Impact of History

What historical ties exist between our two countries, and how strong and sustainable are they? In their public speeches, our leaders will invariably mention the loss of 1,700 Australian lives in the defence of Singapore in the Second World War – in order for both sides to note and appreciate the significant sacrifice made. Australia’s military role during *Konfrontasi* and in the Five Power Defence Arrangements are often highlighted as well. These resonate with the families and friends of those who died defending Singapore, but memories of the past will fade with time and with each new generation. The young in Singapore are blissfully unaware of our tumultuous history of regional conflict; we should not expect young Australians to be any more knowledgeable. A bilateral relationship between the two countries based on history alone will therefore not be sustainable or enduring.

The fact that Australia was one of the first

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countries to recognise and establish diplomatic relations with Singapore, after Separation, is something we note and appreciate. But that this decision was made based on a hard-headed calculation of Australian interests is clear from a close reading of published, previously confidential, correspondence between Canberra and Australia's missions in Kuala Lumpur (KL), Singapore, Jakarta and London.¹ Australia had doubts about how steadfast London would be in standing up to Indonesia, given Britain's intention to curtail defence commitments east of Suez, and also thought the bottom had fallen off Britain's post-colonial grand plan, viz. Malaysia, with Singapore's exit from the Federation. Canberra was worried that President Sukarno of Indonesia would craftily seduce an independent Singapore, and was uncertain how Singapore would respond. Australia doubted that KL and Singapore could work with each other after Separation given the emotional antipathy between the two governments. In view of such uncertainties, Canberra concluded that Australia should direct itself to the implications of Separation, by "not indulging in gloom, exhibiting goodwill to each of the entities, maintaining good relations with each and working with other countries to assist Malaysia and Singapore to make the separation a new beginning in the task of living together and developing

their strength and common interests."²

While historical ties help bind nations, it is also true that an absence of any historical baggage of shared traumatic differences can shape present relations. Hence, it may well be that Singapore has an easier relationship with Australia than it has with its more immediate neighbours, partly because it does not have to temper deep-seated memories of difficult bilateral problems encountered by previous generations of political leaders. The policy differences between Singapore and Australia have mostly been over commercial matters and are not ideological, cultural or historical. Such issues are, as a rule, easier to resolve through compromise, and we can both move on from them faster.

Personalities

It is true that the two major milestone agreements signed between Australia and Singapore were made when both countries were headed by leaders who got on particularly well with each other. The first, signed in 1996, was a joint declaration called A New Partnership and was initiated by then PMs Paul Keating and Goh Chok Tong. Keating described Goh as "an impressive leader and his own man". He said that he valued Goh's friendship highly

¹ Dee, Moreen, *Australia and the Formation of Malaysia: 1961-1966* (Barton, A.C.T.: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2005).

² Ibid, p.468.

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and his “calm, sensible and balanced advice”. To Keating, the Australia-Singapore relationship was “one political relationship which really did benefit from high-level engagement by political leaders”.³

Likewise, those who witnessed the personal interactions between former PM Abbott and PM Lee Hsien Loong would immediately have noticed a warmth and rapport between the two leaders. It was thus not surprising that the second milestone agreement, the Singapore-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, was signed in June 2015 during PM Abbott’s first official visit to Singapore.

Looking further back, our founding PM, the late Lee Kuan Yew, also got along well with all the Australian prime ministers he knew, with the possible exception of Gough Whitlam. I personally witnessed the mutual respect and friendliness between the late PM Lee and PMs Bob Hawke and Paul Keating when he had private lunches with them during his last visit to Australia.

However, while good personal chemistry between leaders is very important for bilateral relations between two countries, the level of Australia-Singapore relations would not be so strong if other factors had not been in play over the years. Just as a bilateral relationship based on history alone will not endure, one based only on

personalities will also not last because when leaders change, their countries’ policies are also likely to change. This is all the more so when the change of prime ministers in Canberra has accelerated in recent years after John Howard.

Values

While Singaporeans seem quite happy to explain bilateral ties between countries in terms of stark realpolitik, Australians seem somewhat more reluctant to portray Australia’s relations with other countries in the same way, without any reference to values. Hence, in his recent speech, PM Turnbull spoke not only of our like-mindedness, shared interests and complementary strengths, but went on to attribute the closeness between Australia and Singapore to “similar national characters” and “common human qualities”.

Officials from Canberra occasionally bemoan Singapore’s transactional approach to relationship-building. In the same breath, however, these officials are among the first to praise the shared pragmatic approach that the two countries adopt in dealing with each other, as well as the ability to speak frankly with each other, especially on differences in policy. They should be assured that Singapore’s pragmatism is based on a strong adherence to long-tested principles, aimed to ensure Singapore’s

³ Keating, Paul, *Engagement – Australia Faces The Asia-Pacific* (Sydney, 2000), p.164.

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continued independence, prosperity and survival. One such principle is our strong belief that consistency and steadfastness in foreign policy issues and relationships are vital if Singapore is to retain its credibility and respect in world affairs in the long term. Even if, as a small nation, Singapore has to be agile and nimble in its pursuit of foreign policy goals, we are mindful that this should not be done at the expense of acting like we are short-term opportunists.

Another key principle is our belief that the observance of international law is critical to safeguarding the interests and sovereignty of small states. This was what motivated Singapore to play a pivotal role in negotiations at the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea and to seek to resolve our bilateral problems with Malaysia through legal means.

In dealing with each other, Singapore and Australia do not seek to convert each other to their differing views on governance or political processes. However, a few Australian academics and journalists have been critical of what they perceive to be Singapore's allegedly undemocratic or draconian system of governance. In recent years, such voices have quietened down and this has minimised the need for either government to deal with such issues officially. Both governments have learnt that while such controversies need to be addressed when they surface from time to time, they should not be allowed to damage

the overall good relations between the two countries. In short, values are important but they should not trump interests.

As more and more Singaporeans and Australians visit each other's countries to work, study and relax, our people have developed close friendships and family ties. Australia remains a favoured country for Singaporeans to migrate to for varying reasons. In recent years, among the top reasons for Singaporeans to migrate there are a yearning for more space, a different lifestyle and better work-life balance, both for themselves and their children. As of 2011, there were 48,646 Singapore-born people in Australia. Australia's attraction is understandable, given that three of the world's 10 most liveable cities are in Australia. In recent years, we have learnt to do more to reach out to our diaspora and better tap on the goodwill that still exists among many former Singaporeans. By keeping in touch with Singaporeans living and working in Australia, we also give them an opportunity to return if they so wish.

Interests

The most compelling factor that accounts for the close relationship between the two countries is common interests. Lee Kuan Yew put it quite bluntly:

Australia's geostrategic goals are similar to Singapore's. We both view a US military presence in the region as vital

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for maintaining the balance of power in the Asia Pacific region and good for security and stability, without which the rapid economic growth of the region would not have taken place. Viewed against this larger backdrop, our differences over trade and other matters were insignificant.⁴

It is a sign of the times that nowadays, both Australia and Singapore are more circumspect in describing their common desire to see the continued defence presence of the United States (US) in the region. For instance, while PM Lee made a passing reference to a “benign” US, PM Turnbull made only an oblique reference to it in their October 2016 speeches to the Australian Parliament referred to at the start of this chapter.

Singapore has always welcomed China’s rising prosperity and has participated in its economic development and projects such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the One Belt One Road Initiative. Given China’s more assertive foreign policy and defence posture in recent times, relations between Singapore and Australia will henceforth have to be played out with an eye on how China perceives our military and defence relationship, and its links to the US’s strategic goals. If the US strategy to pivot towards Asia has already caused so much angst and suspicion in Beijing, the

tough talk on trade during Donald Trump’s US presidential election campaign – and indications of shifting a long-standing position on Taiwan made right after his election – will cause China even greater anguish. We have to take note of what changes the new US administration will make in its policy towards China, and how China will respond or react.

One thing is for sure – the common goal of pursuing free trade and keeping our economies open will be challenged now that the US has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. When the geopolitics in the region shifts, small countries must reassess where their national interests lie. Regional countries, which are price-takers rather than price-setters, will have no choice but to recalibrate the orientation of their foreign policy accordingly. Of course, how and when Singapore recalibrates will also determine how others regard our reliability as long-term partners and friends.

Bilateral cooperation is something both countries have greater control over than geopolitical shifts among the big powers, and both can and should work hard to enhance the relationship in the future. Australia and Singapore understand that the primary trade-off in interests is between training by the SAF on Australian soil and Singapore’s facilitation of Australia’s outreach into Asia. Here, the

⁴ Lee, Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story — 1965-2000* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2000) p.431.

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Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is key in that Australia's support of the organisation and active participation in ASEAN-based fora help its effort to reach out to Asia and gives it a voice in the evolving regional power infrastructure.

In the defence arena, Singapore is aware that any assistance in the military training area given by Canberra has to be adequately paid for, and that local ground sentiments have to be assuaged to gain greater support and acceptance domestically. For instance, over the years, our urban-raised troops have learnt that the environmental concerns of rural Australia are matters that need special attention. It has also been helpful that SAF soldiers have been disciplined, well-behaved and do not cause problems locally. Benefits have to flow both ways in any defence, security, intelligence and technological cooperation between our two countries. In the highly sensitive areas of intelligence and defence technology, cooperation can only increase when mutual trust grows. From time to time, Australia may want the SAF to share its military burden in faraway places in the world, and Singapore will have to respond, but within its capacity to help and only when it serves Singapore's interests to be there.

In economic matters, given both countries' political stability and strong rule of law, trade and investment will grow if there are profits to be made. To succeed, Singapore companies in Australia will need to continue to be conscious of local corporate

sensitivities and understand that over there, high-profile Singapore government backing of such entities is sometimes regarded as unfair competition. Singapore corporate leaders realise that to do business in Australia, their companies must welcome Australian participation in top management and provide significant job opportunities for the locals.

Conclusion

The close ties between Australia and Singapore should never be taken for granted. So long as the relationship between the two countries is based largely on national interests, it will be that much more sustainable. It requires hard work and close engagement among leaders and officials, support from our own people and a constant search for new areas of cooperation that add value to the totality of our relationship. In today's more uncertain world, the imperative for a small country to have close friends – natural or otherwise – will be even more urgent and important. Australia will surely continue to be a friend Singapore values and needs.



Chapter Thirteen

Singapore's Relations with Europe

Tan York Chor

TAN York Chor is currently Group Director of International Relations in the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore. He joined the Singapore Civil Service in 1985 and worked in various capacities in the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He served as First Secretary in the Singapore Embassy in Paris (1991–1993), Counsellor in the Singapore Embassy in Bangkok (1993–1994), Counsellor in the Singapore High Commission in Canberra (1997–1999), Minister-Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative in the Singapore Permanent Mission to the United Nations (UN) in New York and concurrently, Deputy High Commissioner in the Singapore High Commission to Canada (2002–2005). At the Ministry headquarters, he was Director/Europe (March 2006–May 2007) and concurrently Director/International Economics (April–October 2006), and Director/International Organisations (April–November 2007). He was Singapore's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva from November 2007 to November 2010. From January 2011 to July 2015, he was the Ambassador of Singapore to France and Portugal. From July 2015 to February 2017, he was Director/Special Duties in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

*Singapore's Relations with Europe***The Tenets of Singapore's Foreign Policy**

When Singapore joined the United Nations (UN) on 21 September 1965, then Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam delivered a crisp but profound statement to the UN General Assembly. While his speech was concise, he said much about Singapore and what it wanted to be to itself and to others, and he encapsulated with remarkable clarity of mind the tenets of Singapore's foreign policy. He stressed that Singapore wanted peace and friends, had no capacity to make war on anybody, and looked to the UN for security (i.e. in providing a rules-based framework of international behaviour). He noted that "small countries like mine" "place our hopes in the integrity and effectiveness of the United Nations", and the well-being, security and integrity of Singapore could be assured only on the basis of three principles of the UN Charter:

- Preservation of peace through collective security.
- Promotion of economic development through mutual aid.
- Safeguarding the inalienable right of every country to establish forms of government in accordance with the wishes of its own people.

It is the measure of this Singapore statesman that just 43 days into Singapore's independence and his role as its first Foreign Minister, he had already thought out vividly the "what" and worked out the

"how" of Singapore's foreign policy, which serves us to this day. It is based on our core interest of improving our people's lot through growing our trade and the economy, and on the basic fact of our multiracial and multicultural make-up. He even shared that this special make-up "has made us somewhat sceptical of those who preach the superiority and exclusiveness of one culture and one race. In a multiracial society, one soon learns that no one people has a monopoly on wisdom and that one's own culture is not without flaws. This not only breeds tolerance for different viewpoints, but also a readiness to learn and borrow from the accumulated wisdom of other people." He spoke about the compatibility of independence and interdependence of peoples and nations – one can cherish independence without denying the reality of interdependence or embracing the myth of absolute sovereignty. He stated Singapore's readiness to share, through modest offers of assistance as a country not endowed with natural resources, the experience and knowledge it has acquired as a highly urbanised community: if we obtain help from others, we must be ready to help others as much in return. He also explained Singapore's choice to be non-aligned because friendship should not be conditional on the acceptance of common ideologies, friends and foes. "Singapore does not wish to be drawn into alliances dedicated to imposing our way of life on others," he elaborated and added:

We have no wish to interfere in the

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affairs of other countries or tell them how to order their life. In return we ask other countries to be friendly with us even if they don't like the way we do things in our own country.¹

He nevertheless warned that Singapore “would not be indifferent to basic issues of right and wrong or evade from taking a stand on matters which it considers vital lest it displeases some member nations, including those it has close ties with.”

The principles in Rajaratnam's statement along with his later call for Singapore to become a global city have guided how Singapore develops its relations with other countries and regions.² Whereas Asia-Europe history had been one of confrontation for over 2,000 years, with “either the hordes of Asia sweeping across Europe to subdue it or the barbarians of Europe storming Asia to carve out empires”, he believed a cooperative relationship between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Economic Community (EEC, which is now the European Union or EU) would have a decisive impact on world trade and even on universal issues of war and peace.³

As Singapore's relations with Europe mature, one can discern three distinct

periods in how they have engaged each other.

First 25 Years of Relations with Europe (1965–1990)

Singapore's first post-independence years were focused on survival, with an urgent imperative to get things right internally and externally. The country pragmatically kept what was good; for example, the government continued to heed the advice of Dutch economist Dr Albert Winsemius on economic strategy, and it valued the Five Power Defence Arrangements, which included Britain. But amidst continuity, there was change, such as the need to build a viable defence force and an effective foreign service. Winsemius taught Singapore to be open to investments by foreign businesses. He personally helped persuade Royal Dutch Shell to invest in the country. Singapore was also open to learning from others – even after deciding on Israeli help to build its armed forces, it adapted aspects of defence philosophy from Finland and Switzerland. In urban planning, which was integral to Singapore becoming a global city, Polish master-planner Krystyn Olszewski served as Chief Designer of Singapore's Comprehensive Long-Term Concept Plan. We see the legacy of these wise Europeans all around us today.

¹ Statement of His Excellency Mr S. Rajaratnam, Foreign Minister of Singapore, at the General Assembly on 21 September 1965 on the occasion of Singapore's admission to the United Nations.

² Rajaratnam, S., speech on “Singapore: Global City” to the Singapore Press Club on 6 February 1992.

³ Rajaratnam, S., speech at dinner given in honour of Federal Republic of Germany Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher on 28 April 1977.

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Singapore values its growing relevance and international standing in the UN, other international organisations and ASEAN, as well as its relations with other states. Denmark, Italy, France, Germany, Britain and the Netherlands were among half the countries that, in 1965, established diplomatic relations with Singapore. To prepare its exit from the initial low-skilled-jobs phase, Singapore turned to France and Germany (along with Japan) whose companies led in the higher-value electronic, semi-conductor and consumer goods industries. They agreed to partner Singapore's Economic Development Board (EDB) to establish the French- and German-Singapore institutes to help train Singaporeans in skills needed by their companies, which then invested in production in Singapore. Through this process, Singapore plugged into the global value chains of these companies and gained market access in these top five global economies. Singapore also valued learning and attracting investments from the exceptional smaller Nordic countries. From the late 1970s, the EDB's Stockholm office worked with Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark.

It is vital for a small state with little margin for error to have an accurate reading of the big powers in world politics. Singapore was lucky to have leaders with great intellect and acumen – beginning with founding Prime Minister (PM) Lee Kuan Yew – who were able to work out the big picture in global geopolitics. They became sought after by world leaders as interlocutors who

could explain the East to the West, and vice versa. France and Germany held useful perspectives outside the Anglophone world. In his memoirs, Mr Lee noted that “French leaders impressed me by the quality of their intellect and political analysis”. In 1964 – no doubt realising that China, the “sleeping lion” as described by Napoleon, was waking up – France, under then President Charles de Gaulle, moved to establish diplomatic relations with China, well ahead of other Western countries. Mr Lee developed good relations with several British leaders, but also with France's Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Raymond Barre, François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac, and Germany's Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl. Giscard, Schmidt and Barre were, in the 1980s, among the first seven statesmen/thinkers invited to deliver the prestigious Singapore Lecture, the leading Singapore public lecture series inaugurated by Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman in 1980.

The year 1972 marked Singapore's maiden leadership on an issue at the UN. Singapore successfully persuaded a disparate group of states on how the proposals presented at the time for coastal states in the Seabed Committee were in reality detrimental to our interests, and united them in opposition. With their support, Singapore tabled its first resolution at the General Assembly, which passed against concerted opposition by larger countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Canada and France. Eventually, Singapore's UN Ambassador, Professor Tommy Koh,

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provided leadership to the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea, guiding it to a successful conclusion. These contributions to a rules-based UN earned Singapore much respect.

Vietnam's 1978 Christmas invasion of Cambodia, in violation of the UN Charter, saw Singapore, with ASEAN, lead a decade-long epic diplomatic battle against Vietnam. A key aspect of that campaign was to ensure that the developed world, including Western Europe, maintained its economic and aid embargo on Vietnam until it quit Cambodia. Anyone, including interested Europeans, who followed how, against high odds, the Cambodian factions opposing Vietnam forged a coalition and how freedom and self-determination for Cambodians were eventually won, would recognise Singapore's crucial and successful role. However, being in the lead against Vietnam, Singapore could have irked non-communist Western progressives for whom Vietnam had been "their folk hero, an object of adulation, emulation and contemplation" in opposing Western imperialism.⁴ A Singapore experienced a slew of attacks by rabid elements of the Western media and academia, which provoked the democratically elected Singapore Government to push back as it refused to bow to their dictates on how Singapore should order its life.

Second Period of Relations with Europe (1991–2010)

With Germany reunited, the Soviet Union crumbling, the Cold War ending and China on a back foot after the Tiananmen turmoil sent shocks through its political system, the second period of Singapore's relations with Europe began. This took place against the backdrop of liberal triumphant "End of History" hysteria as democracy and Western "universal values" were perceived to have prevailed over everything else. Attempts to use the UN's norm-creation processes to impose universal acceptance of Western standards gathered momentum. However, the Western powers did not leverage Singapore, and Singapore was able to take an independent position to stand its ground across the philosophical divide, in particular, opposite its European friends, which made things prickly at the level of diplomats. Singapore's able and articulate expression of an alternative to the more absolutist views of some Western human rights advocates inevitably cast Singapore, in the early 1990s, as the chief protagonist and leading anti-liberal voice of Asian values.

In 1994 came another clash: after removing its death penalty, Italy immediately spearheaded a pious push to abolish capital punishment worldwide. At the UN General Assembly, it tabled a draft resolution co-sponsored by all EU members. Singapore

⁴ Rajaratnam, S., speech to the University of Singapore Students' Political Association on 23 November 1979.

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found itself, by default, leading a disparate group of retentionist states in opposing the draft. Singapore deployed the lobbying skills that it had honed over the years to persuade many states that were caught in-between to support a judicious “killer” amendment. To the shock of the co-sponsors, who were intransigent, with some threatening to cut aid to recipient countries that failed to support the draft, the proposed amendment was adopted, which led to the resolution being defeated as a whole. Nevertheless, from time to time, the EU and its fellow abolitionists would resurface in various forms on this issue that still divides us.

By the early 1990s, many developing countries began to look to Singapore for development assistance. To help others and to share our experiences, the Singapore International Foundation was created in 1991, and the Singapore Cooperation Programme, which was formally launched in 1992, has since trained over 110,000 foreign participants. Singapore also began to seize opportunities to forge Third Country Training Programmes (TCTPs) with developed countries to assist developing countries. To date, Singapore has TCTPs with France, Germany and Norway that are fairly active, as well as with Britain, Denmark, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Hungary.

During this period, Singapore widened its links with Europe as a wave of former Central Eastern European countries sought recognition and friendship. In rapid

succession, Singapore established diplomatic ties with the Baltic states, Slovakia (after Czechoslovakia split into two states), Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia (formerly known as the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Singapore also exchanged business missions with former Warsaw Pact countries to explore opportunities. While most of “old” Western Europe became busy with its new East, Finland, to its credit, looked beyond to develop an Asia strategy as it prepared to join the EU in 1995.

Singapore supports stronger ASEAN links with other regions. The EU became ASEAN’s first Dialogue Partner in 1977. Unfortunately, it took time to overcome the donor-recipient mindset of some countries on both sides. The relationship was also marred by differences, until 1997, over East Timor and Myanmar. In 1994, Singapore’s then PM Goh Chok Tong assessed that Europe and Asia would benefit from new multifaceted links flowing from an Asia-Europe Summit. Seeing the strategic value of this initiative, France brought its EU partners on board, while Singapore persuaded its ASEAN partners (including new member Vietnam), and China, Japan and South Korea. The modalities were discussed and agreed in record time. In March 1996, Thailand hosted the first Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), of which an off-shoot is the Singapore-based Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), to promote mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people

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exchanges. Since then, 11 ASEM Summits have been held every two years (the latest, in Mongolia, in 2016) while over 600 ASEF initiatives have brought together youths, students, teachers, academics, researchers, artists and media professionals from Asia and Europe.

Since the 1990s, three developments brought Singapore new interactions with developed countries. First, rising globalisation meant that policies that were before deemed to be domestic were no longer so. Second, as Singapore evolved, its people-centred interests grew more varied and complex. It saw value in how other countries address similar challenges. As European countries are actually quite dissimilar, informed by different histories and experiences, there was much to learn from them, for example, on policies for inclusive growth, higher fertility, the environment, heritage, culture and the arts. Third, Singapore's rich talent pool, strong intellectual property protection and commitment to research (starting with the Science Park in the mid-1980s) attracted foreign interests in pursuing research and development in Singapore. To achieve wide-ranging goals, diplomacy became a whole-of-government job that involved all relevant Singapore entities developing strong ties with European countries in diverse areas.

Third Period – 2011 and into the Future

Singapore's latest outstanding performance in numerous fields like education (as

reflected in school, university and think-tank rankings), and cutting-edge research and solutions (including in smart city and defence science and technology), has impressed many advanced countries. Moreover, tiny Singapore is an economic partner of the EU – it is the second largest Asian investor and the fifth largest investor globally outside of the EU; it is also many EU countries' third Asian trade partner (after China and Japan). At the same time, Europe's problems have rendered European countries less critical of others and they increasingly treat Singapore as an equal partner. For instance, during its 2011 G20 presidency, France invited Singapore to participate as a guest, and Germany did the same when it hosted the G20 summit 2017. France in 2012 also surprised Singapore by proposing a strategic partnership, which was Singapore's second such partnership, after that with the US. In 2015, for Singapore's 50th anniversary, it chose to hold its largest cultural event abroad where else but in France – the country which, par excellence, lives and breathes culture. Singapore Festivarts, which saw more than 70 events held in a dozen French cities, brought the French people a fresh perspective of Singapore. More generally, the rise in travel links between Singapore and Europe, as well as cultural, educational and youth exchanges, offer European and Singaporean citizens opportunities to visit and experience each other's homelands.

The European community in Singapore, growing strongly since the late-2000s, also

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helps people-to-people links. In 2014, Madam Jacky Deromedi, who has resided in Singapore for decades, was elected French Senator representing French nationals outside France in a large span of the world including Singapore. Lately, Friendship Groups, or Group of Friends of Singapore, have also emerged in the European Parliament and the parliaments of countries such as France, Poland, Portugal, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and Estonia. These groups have exchanged contacts and visits with Singapore parliamentarians.

In 2017, the EU turns 60 while ASEAN turns 50, and they celebrate the 40th anniversary of their dialogue partnership. Looking beyond 2017, Europe may continue to grapple with the Brexit process, the rise of nationalism and populism, and terrorist threats. Singapore would wish Europeans and their leaders well in tackling these issues, because we are grateful for Europe's contribution to our nation's development and also because we will all gain if Europe succeeds as part of the broader global, geopolitical community. The greater uncertainty, in the US and the world, calls for deeper and wider Asia-Europe cooperation. In collaboration with the Singapore Manufacturing Federation, the Enterprise Europe Network launched its Singapore Centre in 2016, which has already facilitated more than 200 business-to-business meetings and expressions of

interest.⁵ The EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, when it passes the complicated EU process and is implemented, will spur EU-Singapore relations.

⁵ From the *Report of the Committee on the Future Economy*, Box Article 7.1, p.59. http://www.gov.sg/~media/cfe/downloads/mtis_full%20report.pdf.



Chapter Fourteen

Thinking about Russia: A Personal Perspective

Bilahari Kausikan

Bilahari KAUSIKAN is currently Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore. From 2001 to May 2013, he became the second Permanent Secretary and subsequently Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has served in a variety of appointments, including as the Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York and as Ambassador to the Russian Federation.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

*Thinking about Russia: A Personal Perspective***Singapore-Russia Relations – An Overview**

What should we think of Russia? It is not a country that looms overly large in the consciousness of most Singaporeans. But it is not a country we can ignore either. Russia is a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a Nuclear-Weapon State and a major energy producer. Russia is the world's largest country, spanning 11 time zones, comprising an eighth of all the land on the planet, about 77 percent of which lies in Asia.

During the Cold War, Singapore and the former Soviet Union were on different sides of the ideological divide. Among some issues, we opposed the Soviet-supported Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and we stood at the forefront of resistance to attempts by the Soviet Union and its allies to hijack the Non-Aligned Movement. Yet even then, Singapore's relationship with the Soviet Union was never just adversarial.

During a 1971 visit to the Soviet Union, our first Prime Minister (PM), Mr Lee Kuan Yew, was asked by then Soviet PM Kosygin about the possibility of Soviet ships using our facilities. PM Lee did not dismiss the request but agreed that a Soviet team could study the matter, causing some consternation in the United States (US), Britain and Australia as the Soviet Navy was then in the midst of a

major build-up of its Pacific Fleet. In the event, the Soviet Pacific Fleet was not allowed to use our facilities but from 1972 onwards, Soviet fishing and whaling vessels were regularly dry-docked at Keppel's shipyards.

This laid the foundation of a relationship between Keppel and Russia that survived the collapse of the Soviet Union and endures to this day. In 2008, Keppel delivered two icebreakers – the first built in a tropical country – to LUKOIL, one of Russia's largest oil and gas companies that is closely aligned to the Kremlin and among the largest global producers of oil and gas. The icebreakers are now operating in Russia's Barents Sea in the Arctic. Keppel has also built four extreme weather supply and rescue vessels for LUKOIL, which are now operating in the Caspian Sea.

In 2011, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed the formation of a "Eurasian Union" of former Soviet republics. In January 2015, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) – an international organisation for regional economic integration – was created. Then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton condemned it as a move to "re-Sovietise the region". President Putin denied that this was his intention. But even if it was the case, how would the EAEU hurt Singapore's interests? Since 2015, Singapore has pursued a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with all five members of the EAEU. We hope to

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conclude and ratify the agreement in 2018 – an ambitious goal, but not an impossible one.

Russia, the most important economy in the EAEU, is not a major trading partner for us. But neither is it inconsequential. In 2016, Russia was our 24th largest trading partner with total volume of trade amounting to S\$4.5 billion. Although trade with Russia fell by more than 40 percent between 2015 and 2016 – largely, I think, due to Western sanctions and low oil prices as crude oil has consistently formed the bulk of our trade – it grew at an annualised rate of more than nine percent between 2007 and 2016. There is potential for further growth, which will certainly happen should sanctions be eased.

Moscow wants Singapore to play a role in the development of the Russian Far East (RFE), which President Putin described in 2012 as “the most important geopolitical task” facing Russia. In 2009, during his state visit to Singapore, then President Medvedev lobbied for investments in the RFE. In 2014, I attended a “Track 1.5” conference comprising official and non-official participants in Moscow aimed at exposing investors to development plans for the

RFE. Singapore was the only Southeast Asian country invited. The other delegates were from China, Japan and South Korea. There has been some Singapore investment in the RFE, but the figures are not high and what we can do will always be dwarfed by bigger countries. Rather, Singapore’s value is in it being a “reference investor” whose participation gives confidence to others, much for the same reason why three Chinese Presidents have asked us to do projects in China.¹

Russia gave early support to Singapore’s candidature to be an Observer in the Arctic Council. We joined as a hedge against significant shifts in trade routes, given that global warming may make the Arctic seas navigable throughout the year. If we are to play a role in these new sea routes, we must work with Moscow. Note also that Russia has vital interests in Central Asia, in particular, Kazakhstan through which the land routes of “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) must pass. OBOR is, for now, more an aspiration and the challenges of turning it into reality are manifold. But like the Arctic Sea routes, OBOR has the potential to significantly reorient global trade patterns. To play a role in

¹ In February 2015, Changi Airport Singapore, together with two Russian partners, won a contract to develop and manage Vladivostok International Airport and has taken an equity stake in it. There is a high-level Russia-Singapore Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) co-chaired at the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) level on both sides. The only other similar bilateral mechanism we have at this level is the China-Singapore Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation, also co-chaired at the DPM level.

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OBOR, we should work with both Russia and China.²

Russia is not in the first tier of Singapore's foreign policy priorities; but nor is Singapore high among Russian priorities which – notwithstanding current official rhetoric about a shift to the East – lie westwards. Russia has always affirmed itself in relation to the West, not Asia. It has turned eastwards only when rejected by the West. The real value of our relations with Russia is more subtle and cannot be understood only by referencing trade and investment statistics. What is that?

Engaging Russia Effectively by Understanding It

The pragmatism that has characterised our relations with Russia since Soviet times serves both economic and strategic interests. It underscores the independence of Singapore's foreign policy and the determination to serve our own interests, even though we are friendly towards the West. This is particularly important at a time when the US and China are working towards a new *modus vivendi* with each other and other countries in our region. Although both deny it, the two powers are

seeking to undermine each other's influence in Southeast Asia. It will become increasingly difficult to maintain a balance between Washington and Beijing.

Today, it pleases China and Russia to describe their relationship as a “strategic partnership”. In reality, there are serious underlying tensions in Russia-China relations. But both are uncomfortable with an American-dominated order. China may not admit it publicly, but what we do with Russia and other countries that are not aligned with the West will certainly be noticed in Beijing. In diplomacy, the shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line.

To continue to play the game optimally requires the cultivation of a particular cast of mind. In so far as most Singaporeans think about Russia, they do so on the basis of Western media reports and Western assessments. Such reports and assessments must be treated with caution and viewed sceptically and critically. Developments in Russia – even if not always as perplexing as in Churchill's famous description, “a riddle in a mystery inside an enigma” – are usually more complex than they appear, and Western assessments are made on the

² Singapore is committed to OBOR. The projects in Chongqing we undertook at President Xi Jinping's request are intimately connected to OBOR. An 11 May 2017 *Financial Times* article entitled “China's new ‘Silk Road’ falls in 2016” concluded that “Among BRI [Belt and Road Initiative] countries, the leading investment destination in 2016 was Singapore ...” A People's Republic of China Ministry of Commerce article published on 22 February 2017 on the Ministry's official WeChat news account, revealed that Singapore accounted for one-third of China's total investments in BRI countries. This figure was repeated in an article by a Ministry of Commerce official published on the Ministry's official WeChat news account on 31 May 2017. The same article said that Singapore's investments in China accounted for 85 percent of total in-bound investments from BRI countries.

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basis of interests and assumptions that may be irrelevant to our interests even when they are not entirely wrong.

When Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014, Singapore condemned the move as a matter of principle. As a small city-state in a less than totally salubrious neighbourhood, we cannot view unilateral changes of internationally-recognised territorial boundaries with equanimity. Also, as a matter of principle, we did not go along with unilaterally-imposed sanctions by the Americans and the European Union (EU). As a general rule, we comply only with legally-binding sanctions imposed by the UNSC.

I happened to be in Ukraine in December 2013 and on several occasions, visited the Euromaidan demonstrations where people took to the streets to protest against the Ukrainian government's decision not to sign the association agreement with the EU. In one instance, I listened to an EU politician speak rousing to the crowd of freedom, democracy and human rights, encouraging Ukraine to, in effect, "join the West". I thought immediately of Hungary in 1956 when the West, then led by the US, encouraged the Hungarians to rise against the Soviet Union, and later watched with folded arms when Moscow predictably and brutally crushed the revolt. In 2013, it was the EU that took the lead

and when Moscow reacted, dragged in a reluctant US.

No Russian government can meekly allow Ukraine to be lost to the West. What would follow? A North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership? This sequence of events was indeed lurking in the calculations of some EU members.

The heart of Russian culture lies in *Kievan Rus* and Russia has important strategic interests in Ukraine that are ignored only at one's peril.³ One may not approve of President Putin's methods, but that Russia would respond in some way was entirely predictable. It was utterly feckless of the EU to encourage Ukraine to move into the Western camp without either the capability to deter a Russian reaction or respond effectively when Russia reacted.

The West has demonised President Putin. This is a mistake. His essential goals are twofold: to keep Russia a coherent polity and, to adapt a phrase from the leader of another major power, to "make Russia great again". While one may debate his methods, these goals are not illegitimate; they are shared by many, I think most Russians, whose troubled history has caused them to fear disorder – *bespredel* – over authoritarianism. He is responding to long-standing Russian interests and acting within a venerable Russian political tradition.

³ Kievan Rus was a loose federation of East Slavic tribes occupying the approximate modern territory of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia in the late 9th to the mid-13th centuries. These three countries regard Kievan Rus as their cultural ancestor. Orthodox Christianity came to these countries through Kievan Rus.

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Except for a relatively small westernised urban elite, President Putin remains very popular in Russia.

Also, the West has chosen to forget that in the early 1990s, as the Soviet Union disintegrated and its successor states, particularly Russia, struggled with the transition, the primary Western concern then was the dangers arising from the collapse of a nuclear superpower. I was Ambassador to Russia during a part of this period and I recall asking a Western defence attaché what was his greatest fear – “control of tactical nuclear weapons” was his reply, and there were hundreds if not more of such weapons only vaguely accounted for. Then US President George H.W. Bush even publicly urged Ukraine not to pursue “suicidal nationalism”.

The Clinton administration that followed made a fundamental strategic mistake by treating Russia as a defeated power whose interests could be disregarded. Promises explicit or implied made by the West to Gorbachev were ignored when NATO expanded eastwards. The former US Central Intelligence Agency Director and Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, admitted in his memoirs that the West badly underestimated the extent of Russian humiliation at the end of the Cold War and wrote of how the “arrogance” of Western government officials, politicians, businessmen and academics in telling Russians how to conduct their domestic

and foreign affairs “led to deep and long-term resentment and bitterness.”⁴

Another “reset” in Russian relations with the West will not be easy. Russia may be on a long-term downward economic and demographic trajectory and sanctions are hurting, though perhaps not as much as the West hopes. To adapt a quote from Adam Smith, “there is a great deal of ruin in a big nation”. For the foreseeable future, Russia has sufficient political will and muscle to secure its interests in Ukraine and Syria, and make the West pay a price for ignoring them. Of course, Russia has serious weaknesses. What will happen after President Putin passes from the scene is unclear. There will almost certainly be a political crisis of some degree and duration. The virtues of order may then become apparent to the West again. Russia will never be a Western liberal democracy.

It is not clear to me that the eastward expansion of NATO and sanctions are, objectively, in Western interests. They were more emotional reactions: first, driven by the hubris of victory in the Cold War and second, by a desire to preserve some sense of amour propre when confronted by impotence to reverse Russia’s intervention in the Ukraine. Certainly they are not in Singapore’s interests.

The core of NATO lies in Article Five of the founding treaty, which holds that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

⁴ Gates, Robert, *Duty, Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), p.157.

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Will the US and the EU really risk nuclear war to defend Estonia or the other Baltic states, or Montenegro in the Balkans? Eastward expansion of NATO has degraded the credibility of NATO deterrence. NATO is a central pillar of the Transatlantic Alliance, which in turn is a crucial component of the current world order. The erosion of NATO's credibility has only added to global uncertainties and undermined the current order, which is the foundation of the security and prosperity of us all.

Sanctions have not forced any change of Russian policy towards Ukraine. I doubt they ever will. Sanctions have only increased Russian dependence on Beijing, to which Moscow is now in substance, if not form, a junior partner. Is this in Western interests? I do not think that Russia will forever be content to be junior partner to China. We should deal with Russia with that in mind, however distant that day may seem. It is in the interest of Singapore and other ASEAN countries to see the emergence of as many independent poles as possible in East Asia as possible as this promotes an omnidirectional state of balance and increases our room for manoeuvre.

Much of what the West finds unacceptable in Russian policy is not unique. Former Secretary of State John Kerry condemned the Russian intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea as unacceptable 19th century behaviour in the 21st century, meaning that it was obsolete. But was it, in principle, very different from the 2003

unilateral American intervention in Iraq? And it is not unknown for the US, China and other major powers to try and influence the domestic politics of other countries as Russia is now accused of in the 2016 US presidential elections. We cannot change Western policy or attitudes towards Russia, but we must try to understand Russian behaviour independently, and clinically define our own interests.



Chapter Fifteen

Latin America - A Continent to be Discovered More Fully

Choo Chiau Beng

CHOO Chiau Beng was Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador to Brazil from 2004 to 2016. He was Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Keppel Corporation from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2013. Before that, he was CEO of Keppel FELS from 1983 to 2008, and Chairman and CEO of Keppel Offshore & Marine from 2002 to 2008. Upon his retirement on 1 January 2014, he was appointed Senior Advisor to the Board of Keppel Corporation. That July, he was appointed by National University of Singapore (NUS) as Provost's Chair and Professor (Practice) in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and Department of Management and Organisation, NUS Business School. At the same time, he was also appointed as Rector of Residential College 4 of NUS. He was conferred the Public Service Star (BBM) in August 2004, Meritorious Service Medal in 2008 and NTUC Medal of Commendation (Gold) Award in May 2007.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed his thoughts in this interview in his personal capacity.

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Conversation with Professor Choo Chiau Beng, the former Non-Resident Ambassador to Brazil.

Commentary: *What is the first thing that comes to mind about Latin America?*

Choo: It is very far away, and our air route to Latin America has always been difficult until recently.

Previously, to go to anywhere in Latin America, you had to travel through Europe; for instance, via London, Paris, Frankfurt, Madrid or South Africa. While you can now fly non-stop to London or Paris, it wasn't too long ago when you had to stop in the Middle East to get to Europe. From Europe, you might even have to go through Miami or New York, and you know what that is like with the United States (US) Customs.

Now with Emirates and Qatar Airways, you make a stop in the Middle East and head out straight to Latin America.

Commentary: *In your case, what is the best route out to Brazil?*

Choo: I used to take a Singapore Airlines flight from Barcelona and then to Sao Paulo, but it is still a long flight. And if Brasilia or Rio is the final destination, I would take another flight out of a domestic terminal.

Commentary: *So your first thought is the issue of connectivity?*

Choo: Yes, it is connectivity, but in the early days, people got there by ship. Yet there are Chinese and Japanese who have been living in Latin America for a long time. Why? When the Chinese and Japanese were emigrating because of population pressures and wanted to seek opportunities elsewhere, they took a chance and headed to North and South America. There was a lot of emigration to Latin America, and today you will see Chinese in Cuba, Peru, Chile and some parts of Brazil.

Commentary: *Once we get through that daunting journey, what are the key things we should know about the continent?*

Choo: You must understand that Latin America is not one country but many countries. The basic difference lies between Brazil – which was a Portuguese colony and where people speak Portuguese – and the rest, which were colonised by Spain and where the lingua franca is Spanish.

Next is the size and key activities of the respective economies. Brazil is the biggest economy in Latin America by size, and the land is fertile. Argentina used to be a big economy too, primarily because it was a large exporter of beef and wheat to Europe, which made it very rich. Then it came under socialist Peronist policies which resulted in its decline.

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Brazil is currently in turmoil politically and economically – as a big producer of oil and ores, it is affected by the downturn in the prices of these. On the political front, with corruption scandals at the highest levels, many senior politicians have been implicated. The public prosecutors and judges are highly independent, and members of Congress and the administrators are not immune from prosecution. To explain: Democracy as practised in many parts of the world translates to high expenses by the parties and candidates in the media, people, for travel and campaigns, and the raising of such huge funds may be legal or illegal.

Another feature of Latin America are the huge social and economic divides between the rich and poor, or the haves and have-nots, in these large continental countries. Hence many of these countries are prone to unsustainable populist or socialist policies when the democracy of “one man one vote” becomes the politics of the country.

By the way, did you know that the Brazilians have a manufacturing base of note? They export aeroplanes like the Embraer, which competes with the Canadian Bombardier. They make commuter planes that take 70 to 100 people, and use American parts and engines to assemble them there. Brazil also has very large automakers – Volkswagen, Ford, GM are all there, and have a large market. And, of course, Brazil has oil and gas.

Actually, I should highlight that Colombia is opening up very nicely. Medellín is one of the most liveable cities in the world. It is also one of the biggest exporters of fresh flowers to Europe because of its high altitudes.

Of course, Latin America is famous for different forms of music: Samba, bossa nova and lambada all originated in Brazil. Cuba invented the mambo and the som from which rumba, cha-cha-cha and salsa developed. Tango originated in Argentina.

Then there’s football – a very egalitarian sport where the poor can become great footballers – and the strong Latin America league. Don’t forget the literary giants who have come from Latin America, too.

Commentary: *How did you prepare yourself for the venture there?*

Choo: Keppel has been in Brazil for a long time. Since I visited the country often, the Singapore’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) approached me to be a Non-Resident Ambassador (NRA) to Brazil, and I did not mind doing so. There are NRAs in many Latin American countries, such as Peru, Chile, Argentina, but not in Colombia and Venezuela.

Commentary: *Why would business leaders here be interested in Latin America?*

Choo: For a long time, it was an underdeveloped market for us. We

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wanted to diversify and we sought out opportunities in Latin America. They have a lot of natural resources. In the southern hemisphere, they export fruit to Singapore. Then there's the Patagonian Toothfish, or what we know as the Chilean Seabass; the meat is the same as cod. They also raise salmon in Chile.

Latin America, which extends all the way to North America and includes Mexico, presents a lot of business opportunities. Many Japanese, Korean and Chinese businessmen who went there a long time ago have been successful.

Commentary: *It seems like the Latin Americans do not mind working with Asians then?*

Choo: I will admit that their business culture and tax systems are quite different. To move there, you need a lot of understanding, patience and skill. Many of the Latin American countries are federal systems so there are state governments, in addition to the national government and a medley of taxes. Look at International Enterprise Singapore, which is present in Brazil and Mexico – it is tough to promote that region to Singapore businesses.

You can make do with operating in English and likewise for diplomatic work. But to live there, you need to know the local language.

There is also a free trade organisation called CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), which was formed in 2010 to facilitate greater trade integration and comprises 33 member states. There is FEALAC (Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation), which consists of 36 countries from East and Southeast Asia and Latin America, and provides a platform for greater interaction between the two regions.

Some ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) states have had a long presence there like Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand.

Finally, there are also people-to-people ties, with many Singaporeans visiting Latin America for holidays.

Commentary: *Are these people-to-people ties increasing?*

Choo: MFA encourages the relationship. We host journalists from the continent so that they can learn more about Singapore and write about it.

Commentary: *How about at the level of the man in the street?*

Choo: Well, the tourists from our part of the world like to visit sites like Machu Picchu in Peru, Iguazu Falls in Argentina and its capital city Buenos Aires, the Amazon rainforest in Brazil, and the region of Patagonia – a huge area like a tundra and rather interesting.

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Commentary: *What are Singapore companies doing in Latin America?*

Choo: Singapore buys a lot of meat from Brazil and Chile. We have companies there sourcing fishmeal in Peru. Chile also has copper. Argentina is just as fascinating as Brazil with the Andes, great wine and beef. Colombia has good engineers and architects, and there are quite a few of them here in Singapore.

More importantly, Keppel and Sembcorp have shipyards in Brazil, with some Singaporean staff based there. ST Engineering and Olam have businesses in the region too.

Commentary: *What is the status of our formal diplomatic relationship with Latin America?*

Choo: We have formal diplomatic relations with all of Latin America. Chile, Argentina, Peru, Mexico and Brazil are represented by ambassadors and we have missions there.

We have no conflicts and share common interests with Latin American countries, especially in the United Nations (UN). We are non-aligned countries. They support us in the International Maritime Organization – which is a UN body that is responsible for ensuring the safety and security of international shipping – and we support them too. It is the same for our engagement with the International Civil Aviation Organization. When they aspire to be in

the UN Security Council, we support them. There is mutual support in many ways.

We are a little island-state with no agricultural base, and they do not feel threatened by us. They see us as a hub for reaching out to the rest of Asia, besides China. China has direct links and is an important trading partner; it is very active in mining, metals, agriculture, particularly, trade in soya bean. Huawei, the Chinese telecommunications company, is everywhere in the region.

Commentary: *Are there more reasons why we should foster stronger relationships within the region?*

Choo: There is more headroom for us to do things with Latin America, but it is not easy as their political systems are quite different from ours and their economy and currency can be relatively volatile. Currencies fluctuate all the time, even though they are pegged to the US dollar. It can be said that the capital of Latin America is not in Latin America; it is Miami the nearest major US city to the region.

One also has to be careful about the local laws. You need partners to find your way around, but both Temasek and GIC have investments in the region.

It is a complex environment to operate in, and smaller companies will find it difficult to go out there unless they have

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the stamina; the businesses cannot be run by remote control from back here in Singapore.

Commentary: *Generally, if we want to strengthen our ties with Latin Americans, what must we do?*

Choo: The key point is not to preach to them. We don't think that we can teach them anything, but we can offer them training if they ask for it, through the Singapore Cooperation Programme for instance.

The country that is closest to us in terms of governance is Chile. It is an open economy and the Chileans are believers of free trade. It may have to do with their long coastline – they are more prepared to trade. It was Chile, along with New Zealand and Singapore, who were the initial drivers of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.



Chapter Sixteen

Singapore's Relations with Africa

T. Jasudasen

T. JASUDASEN currently serves as Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and to the African Union. He was High Commissioner to the United Kingdom (UK) (with concurrent accreditation as Ambassador to Iceland and Ireland) from 2011 to 2014, and to Malaysia from 2006 to 2011. He served as Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar from 2004 to 2006, and to the French Republic (with concurrent accreditation to Portugal, Spain and Israel) from 1997 to 2004.

He was awarded the Public Administration Medal (Gold) in 2011 and the Public Administration Medal (Silver) in 1990. He was conferred the Ordre des Palmes Académiques in 2002 and the Légion d'honneur in 2004 by the French government. In 2010, the Sultan of Pahang (Malaysia) conferred on him the Darjah Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang, which carries the title "Dato". He received the Honorary Freedom of the City of London award in 2013.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

Singapore's Relations with Africa

Introduction

At first glance, it is not blindingly obvious that Singapore's earliest links with Africa began well before the arrival of the Western colonial powers into Southeast Asia. Trade in goods was the primary focus of Africa-Southeast Asia interactions, conducted mainly through intermediaries, who were usually Arab and Indian traders. Ivory, spices and precious minerals were some of the items traded.

The colonial era saw the dissolution of these trading links. New ones emerged with the long sea route to Europe going around the Cape of Good Hope. Trade was conducted through European and Indian intermediaries. When the Suez Canal, which bypasses Africa was opened in 1869, the networks among the Asian and African colonies were already quite well established. One enduring example of this close interaction was the introduction of many African trees and plant species into Singapore by enthusiastic colonial administrators.

Though we were trading partners, direct contact between Singaporeans and Africans was minimal. But this changed after the Second World War. We witnessed a post-war surge of students from Africa and Asia going to the United Kingdom (UK) to train as colonial officials and professionals, which led to Singaporeans and Africans meeting, discussing and inspiring each other for national independence. Our first

generation leaders like Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Mr S. Rajaratnam built enduring relationships with many of Africa's first generation leaders; relationships that lasted through the post-colonial period and indeed their lifetimes. In fact, our warm ties with Africa grew from Mr Lee's one-month visit to 17 African countries in 1964.

Afro-Asian leaders regularly met in various Third World international fora like the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation, Non-Aligned Movement, and Commonwealth. These meetings provided opportunities for travel to each other's countries, and many of these impressions have been captured by Mr Lee in his memoir, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965-2000* (2000). Through these meetings, leaders exchanged best practices with and provided mutual support for each other across a range of political and economic issues. Then, that sense of Asian-African solidarity was a major driving force that brought us together.

Unlike in Asia, the African post-colonial transition, exacerbated by the Cold War proxy wars, saw bloody conflicts erupt along tribal, ethnic, linguistic and religious lines. Africa lost ground while East Asia, despite its uneven growth, surged ahead. The end of the Cold War, the arrival of a new generation of African leaders and conflict fatigue brought peace to most of Africa. The peace dividend has resulted in a surge of African economic growth. Today, the African lions are running as fast as the Asian tigers.

*Singapore's Relations with Africa***The Three Pillars of our Africa Policy**

Africa is a vast continent comprising 54 countries, with 49 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The World Bank estimates that the population of SSA will grow to 2.8 billion by 2060, from 873 million in 2010. The size of the African market is, therefore, enormous, although a large infusion of foreign capital and skills will be needed to maximise this potential. Singapore, with its limited resources and skills base, remains keen to tap into Africa's growth, and our Africa policy reflects the steps taken to achieve this.

The focus of the first and primary pillar of our Africa policy is developing good diplomatic and political relations. In a nutshell, poor relations close doors, while good ones open doors that can help facilitate better linkages – be they landing rights for Singapore carriers, taxation and investment treaties or visa-free travel for tourists and businessmen. Our ministers and senior officials travel regularly to Africa to build these political ties. But while we try to reach out to as many friends as possible, given the small size of our government, it is physically impossible to visit every African country, even once a year!

Development Through Capacity-Building

The second pillar of our Africa policy is a deep commitment to help Africa achieve development through strengthening its

capacity-building. The future of Africa lies not just in hard infrastructure, but in harnessing its demographic dividend. In 2015, the United Nations (UN) estimated that Africa's ranks of youth aged between 15 and 24 that stood at 226 million was set to increase by 42 percent in 2030. Speaking at the 2015 Asian-African Summit in Indonesia, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong explained that Singapore was "paying it forward" by actively supporting capacity-building programmes in regions such as Africa. This is because Singapore had benefited from technical assistance early in our independence.

Currently, we share our developmental experience around the world under the ambit of the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), which was established in 1992 and has since trained over 100,000 officials worldwide. The SCP offers a platform to facilitate the exchange of ideas through technical cooperation programmes, covering areas such as education, governance and economic development. To date, over 8,900 African officials have benefitted from the SCP. Singapore also partners other organisations, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency and the World Bank, to reach out to SSA countries.

A new area of focus is in urban development and governance. As Africa undergoes rapid urbanisation, rural-to-urban migration will place greater pressure

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on governments to develop urban infrastructure, such as affordable housing, transportation, clean access to water and sanitation. In light of this, the Singapore Government hosted the Sub-Saharan Africa High-Level Ministerial Exchange Visit in August 2016, where 10 ministers from Africa studied our efforts at sustainable urban development, including public housing, water management and sanitation. Together with UN-Habitat, Singapore also launched the International Leaders in Urban Governance Programme to share best practices in urban policy, planning and legislation with our African partners.

Economic Engagement

The third pillar is broadening and deepening Africa-Singapore economic relations. African leaders are keen to strengthen trade and investment links, and move away from old perceptions of being aid-driven. We have responded and taken steps to build our economic engagement with Africa.

At present, there has never been a better alignment of interests for us to work together economically. The African Economic Outlook 2016 report estimated that Africa was the world's second fastest growing economy in 2015, registering growth at a continental average of 3.6 percent, trailing behind only emerging Asia. Encouraging deeper trade and investment ties between Singapore and Africa makes sense for both sides.

Singapore has accelerated its economic engagement with Africa, particularly during the past few years. To encourage greater business and investor interest in Africa, Singapore has hosted four editions of the Africa-Singapore Business Forum, bringing together business and government leaders to discuss opportunities for trade and investment.

In addition, the essential legal economic frameworks – such as those that put into place protections on investment – are critical building blocks to encouraging businesses to venture into Africa and provide assurances to investors. For example, in 2016 alone, Singapore added to our growing pool of treaties by signing four new agreements: the first is the Air Services Agreement with Nigeria; the second and third are the Bilateral Investment Treaties with Nigeria and Mozambique; and the fourth is the Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation with Ethiopia. We expect to conclude and sign more agreements by the end of 2017 as these reflect Singapore's continuing efforts to increase our investment and trade ties, as well as people-to-people links with the continent.

The Infrastructure to Execute our Africa Policy

In support of our enhanced engagement with Africa, Singapore has diplomatic representation to 17 African countries as well as the African Union. We have two resident embassies in South Africa and

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Egypt, while the remaining countries are covered by Non-Resident Ambassadors who travel to Africa regularly to cultivate good ties with key government leaders and support our business missions. There are also six resident African embassies in Singapore, with more than 20 African Ambassadors accredited from neighbouring countries. These diplomatic linkages greatly assist in two-way communication.

To further build our business knowledge of countries with strong economic potential in Africa, International Enterprise Singapore (soon to become Enterprise Singapore) has opened two Overseas Centres (OC) in South Africa (covering southern Africa) and Ghana (covering western Africa). A third OC in Nairobi, Kenya (covering eastern Africa) will be opened later this year. These OCs offer our companies ground support when venturing into southern, western and eastern Africa, and help expand our networks and understanding of the local operating environment. Back home, the Singapore Business Federation and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have jointly established the Centre for African Studies at the Nanyang Business School to help companies understand Africa through seminars and talks. The Centre also facilitates executive programmes for African business students at NTU.

What's Next

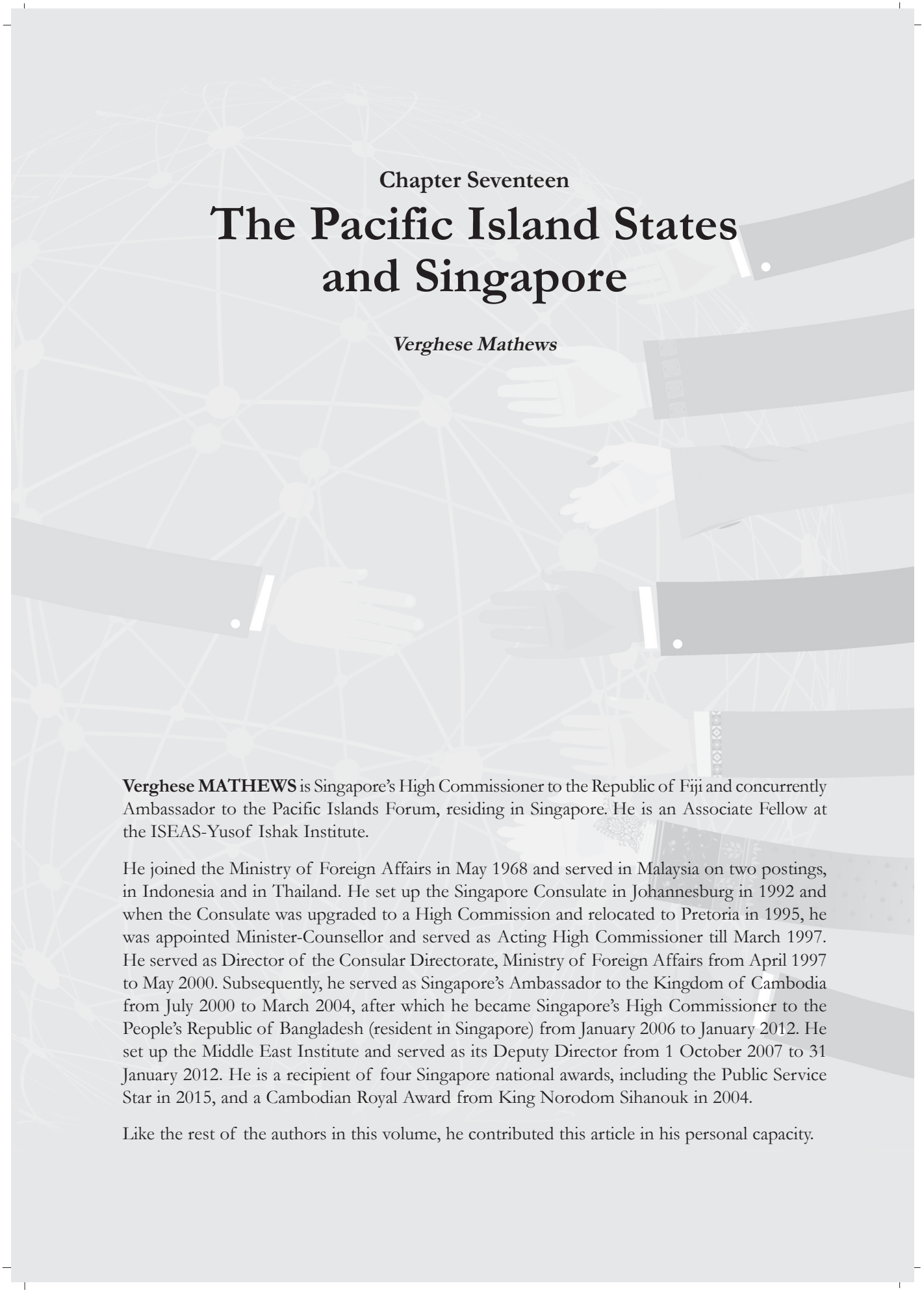
As Africa is a vast continent at various stages of development, it is particularly

important for traders and investors to consider “fit and focus”. At present, the sweet spot appears to be eastern Africa; it is one of the fastest growing regions in Africa at 6.3 percent in 2015, far above the SSA average of 3.6 percent. Countries such as Ethiopia, Tanzania and Rwanda were identified by Business Insider Singapore as three of the world's fastest-growing economies in 2015, with Kenya already a strong diversified economic powerhouse. Singaporean companies can tap into growing opportunities in sectors such as oil and gas, ports, aviation, fast-moving consumer goods, information technology, banking, urban planning, water management and logistics.

As we look ahead, it is worth noting that our total trade with Africa hit S\$8.3 billion in 2016, and the stock of direct investment abroad to Africa as of end-2015 was a healthy S\$2 billion. But there is more room for growth for our companies as Africa presents itself as an attractive alternative to other regional markets that may be getting more expensive or declining. Indeed, there is an increasing number of small and medium-sized enterprises that are starting to look towards Africa, seeking to join our larger companies such as Surbana Jurong, Hyflux, Olam, Wilmar, Tolaram, Pavilion Energy and Pacific International Lines, which have a presence in Africa. The fact that we see an expansion in direct air links – starting with only Johannesburg in South Africa

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and which now include Port Louis in Mauritius and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia – is testament to the potential for greater connectivity between Singapore and Africa. Although our partnership is old and spans several centuries, it is timely for us to renew our interest and vigour in our relations with Africa. I am optimistic that we now stand on the cusp of a relationship with Africa that will grow and deepen both economically and between our peoples.



Chapter Seventeen

The Pacific Island States and Singapore

Verghese Mathews

Verghese MATHEWS is Singapore's High Commissioner to the Republic of Fiji and concurrently Ambassador to the Pacific Islands Forum, residing in Singapore. He is an Associate Fellow at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in May 1968 and served in Malaysia on two postings, in Indonesia and in Thailand. He set up the Singapore Consulate in Johannesburg in 1992 and when the Consulate was upgraded to a High Commission and relocated to Pretoria in 1995, he was appointed Minister-Counsellor and served as Acting High Commissioner till March 1997. He served as Director of the Consular Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs from April 1997 to May 2000. Subsequently, he served as Singapore's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia from July 2000 to March 2004, after which he became Singapore's High Commissioner to the People's Republic of Bangladesh (resident in Singapore) from January 2006 to January 2012. He set up the Middle East Institute and served as its Deputy Director from 1 October 2007 to 31 January 2012. He is a recipient of four Singapore national awards, including the Public Service Star in 2015, and a Cambodian Royal Award from King Norodom Sihanouk in 2004.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

The Pacific Island States and Singapore

The Pacific Island states did not factor in Singapore's foreign policy considerations for quite some years after its independence, and understandably so.

As described elsewhere in this volume, Singapore's national interests, following its sudden and unexpected independence and having been thrust into a turbulent Southeast Asia, were necessarily focused elsewhere.

The unending mantra of the time was "survival". Singapore needed to quickly become sufficiently relevant to other countries for them to be interested in its survival or at least to give it a second thought.

Singapore had no delusions about itself. That was an amazing attitude, often taken for granted and given insufficient recognition then and even now. We knew who we were – small, inconsequential and unable to influence anybody. We knew where we wanted to go, but we simply lacked the wherewithal for the arduous journey.

The thought of one day being a leading civil aviation or maritime nation, of enjoying double-digit growth or of earning a reputation of being clean and green was as far away from our considerations and drawing boards as the Pacific was.

Singapore chose to look strategically at the developed countries and reached out to them for survival. The leading

economies were unquestionably crucial for the much-needed investments and the equally critical task of training of our people – the two prime objectives in the survival mantra.

Despite the deliberate choice to look at developed economies, there was no denying even then that our core interest would invariably be our immediate neighbours. But there was little comfort to be found among them in the early years. The newly formed Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was itself only a fledgling organisation, which was equally unsure of its relevance or its own survival. Regional organisations that predated ASEAN had been short-lived and quickly forgotten.

In this context of great uncertainty about ourselves and the ASEAN region, the Pacific Island states were quite understandably not on the radar.

This paper examines the genesis of Singapore's interaction with the Pacific region, which was itself poised for changes that we did not fully understand.

Singapore presently has diplomatic representation at a Non-Resident Ambassadorial level with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) countries, comprising the independent states of Melanesia (Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands and Vanuatu); Micronesia (Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau) and Polynesia (Cook

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Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu). Singapore has no resident diplomatic mission in any of the Pacific Island states.

While there was some contact on the sidelines of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM), early links with several of the Pacific countries were almost non-existent. One reason was that several of them were not independent states when Singapore became independent.

However, as a region, the Pacific was certainly known to Singaporeans albeit superficially, thanks to movies and books such as *South Pacific*, *Mutiny on the Bounty* and *Blue Hawaii* with Elvis Presley!

Fijian soldiers were prominent in the Malayan Campaign and in the process, gave Singaporeans and Malaysians some pointers on rugby and athletics. In Singapore, for example, Joe Levula held the 100 yards sprint record for several years and earned the nickname “The Flying Fijian”, which the Fijian national rugby team later adopted for itself.

At a state banquet in Suva, Fiji on 9 April 1986, our first Prime Minister (PM), the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, told his friend and founding PM of Fiji, the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara:

Not long ago, your troops were in Malaya helping them and Singapore fight the communists. Your forces have left a legend behind. We will always remember the friendly disposition of your soldiers. We also recall that they excel in the field of sports. One who comes in mind easily was Joe Levula, who held all the sprint records in Singapore, and on the rugby field was off like a hurricane when he got the ball.¹

Reaching Out to the Pacific

As Singapore progressed over the years, so did our diplomatic reach. The first diplomatic representations we had in the Pacific were with Fiji and PNG. In the initial years, our High Commissioner in Canberra, Mr A. P. Rajah, was concurrently the Non-Resident High Commissioner to those two countries.

In 1997, Singapore upgraded its diplomatic representation to Fiji by appointing Mr Lee Chiong Giam as the first roving, Non-Resident High Commissioner to Fiji. This decision was part of a broader government decision to review our diplomatic strategy such that we could increase our diplomatic representation and relieve some of our resident heads of mission of concurrent accreditations to allow them to focus on deepening bilateral ties in their countries of residence.

¹ Lee, Kuan Yew, speech at the banquet hosted by the Right Honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Prime Minister of Fiji in Suva, 9 April 1986, p.3, <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/lky19860409.pdf>.

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Singapore's decision to establish diplomatic representation to Fiji was based largely on the assessment that we could derive tangible economic benefits from closer cooperation. There was strong two-way trade with exports that predominantly comprised petroleum products, while imports from Fiji comprised mainly sugar. The Fijian market may have seemed small, but our trade agencies assessed that there was potential to expand existing trade. Apart from economic cooperation, Fiji and Singapore also had a good record of technical cooperation. Fiji regarded Singapore as a model of development and was interested in learning about its administrative, financial and diplomatic arrangements.

In the case of relations with PNG, our embassy in Jakarta was concurrently accredited to Port Moresby from 1976 to 1982. Singapore's first roving High Commissioner was again Mr Lee Chiong Giam, who served from 1982 to 1999 while residing in Singapore.

PNG was Singapore's sixth largest trading partner at the time and there were good prospects for two-way trade. While the overall trade volume was small in the 1970s, trade was growing at a steady pace – S\$21.8 million in 1970 to S\$34 million by 1973. Exports largely comprised petroleum products; imports comprised mainly hides and skins, coffee, cocoa and industrial machinery.

Moving Further Afield

In 2011, Singapore decided to accredit

Non-Resident Ambassadors (NRA) to regional organisations and the first three groupings were the ACP countries – the African countries, the Caribbean community and the PIF. This was an altogether new arrangement, with the NRA being accredited to the country where the Secretariat of the regional organisation is located. As the Secretariat of the PIF, for example, is in Suva, our NRA presented his credentials to the President of Fiji to assume duties as Singapore's High Commissioner. He then called on the Secretary-General of the PIF with a letter from our Foreign Minister, seeking concurrent accreditation as Ambassador to the PIF.

This was welcomed by the individual PIF member countries, which rightly read it as an important step forward in bilateral relations. Singapore has benefited much as well. It is now able to interact with the Pacific Island states in their own capitals and has since had a far better understanding of the individual Pacific countries and their respective preoccupations. We had depended far too long on information from secondary sources, which were not without biases.

The Singapore Cooperation Programme

In the troubled years after our independence in 1965, Singapore benefited greatly from technical assistance provided by several developed countries and international organisations. The assistance laid the foundation for

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Singapore's industrialisation and development.

Singapore recognised first-hand the importance of capacity-building and human resource training and has advocated such technical assistance to developing countries under the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP). More than 110,000 government officials from more than 170 countries have participated in the SCP since its establishment in 1992. Of these, more than 4,300 officials were from the Pacific Island states, with Fiji, PNG and Samoa accounting for the highest numbers.

Pacific Island state officials hold Singapore's customised programmes in high regard and generally think they have much to learn from how Singapore has managed its development process given our similar status and constraints as Small Island Developing States (SIDS). On Singapore's part, its technical assistance to the region also stems from its enlightened self-interest to maintain goodwill with the Pacific Island states as a key voting bloc for international candidatures.

The most common courses attended by Pacific Island state participants are on finance, economic development, public administration, civil aviation, and information and communications technology. Programmes held in partnership with other developed countries and major aid agencies, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency and International Monetary Fund, also see a

high attendance by Pacific Island officials.

In September 2014, at the third International SIDS Conference in Samoa, Singapore unveiled a three-year technical cooperation package for SIDS. This package was renewed in 2017 and comprises the following: 150 civil aviation fellowships at the Singapore Aviation Academy; 30 fellowships for the Maritime Public Leaders' Programme organised by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore; and customised training programmes in any area of interest by the requesting SIDS country.

The Changing Pacific Island States

The Pacific Islands we thought we knew are changing. The 14 countries that make up the island-states of the Pacific are now determined to have their voices heard. They realised, a bit too late perhaps, that they had to grasp the initiative themselves to be visible, to be heard and to be counted. They were no longer willing to hold their breath. The PIF – the regional grouping that they were all members of, together with far larger and more powerful neighbours Australia and New Zealand – did not, in the Pacific calculation, allow them to express their interests adequately.

The climate change debates in Paris and Rio presented the island-states the opportune platform and the reason to grasp the nettle. They were becoming increasingly frustrated sitting at the same table in the PIF with donor countries

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and long-time benefactors Australia and New Zealand, which did not identify with the smaller islands on the way forward to address the challenges of climate change. Australia and New Zealand would not, for example, support the push by the island-states for the climate warming limit to 1.5 degrees.

Former Kiribati President Anote Tong, a mover and shaker in the Pacific, was not amused and declared:

We expect them as bigger brothers, not bad brothers, to support us on this one because our future depends on it.²

Fiji PM Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama separately criticised Australia for failing to meet its international obligations on climate change and famously chided:

Rather than side with us, Australia in particular is siding with what I call the coalition of the selfish, those industrialised nations, which are putting the welfare of their carbon-polluting industries and their workers before our welfare and survival as Pacific islanders.³

It was clear that the smaller islands were determined to be heard particularly on issues such as climate change and sustainable development. Urging his

compatriots to stop looking at themselves as small islands people and to begin regarding themselves as big oceans people, Palau President Tommy E Remengesau warned:

Talking and talking and talking is already past. Planning is good but planning, planning and only planning is a setback. I think we now need to act.⁴

Meanwhile, the glass ceiling of direct and indirect control by Australia and New Zealand had already been cracked, if not shattered, and much credit for this and for the subsequent attitudinal shift among the Pacific Island states must go to Fiji, whose PM Bainimarama went on a calculated offensive after his country was suspended from the PIF and from the Commonwealth in 2010.

In a 2017 publication, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, editors Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte explained the shift in the way the Pacific Island states engaged with regional and world politics. They quote Anote Tong, who considered it “‘a paradigm shift’ in ideas about how diplomacy should be organised and on what principles it should operate”.⁵

The University of the South Pacific’s Fulori Manoa, whose postgraduate research is on

² “Pacific island leaders agree to disagree on climate change” Commentary, 11 September 2015, *Brisbane Times*.

³ “Fijian PM places Australia among ‘coalition of the selfish’”, 7 May 2015, *News.com.au*.

⁴ Pratibha, Jyoti, “Talk time over, need to act now”, 16 March 2017, *Fiji Sun*.

⁵ Fry, Greg and Tarte, Sandra, *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (Canberra, The ANU Press, 2015), p.3.

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Pacific diplomacy at the UN, believes that “Nauru’s chairmanship of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Fiji’s successful chairmanship of The Group of 77 and China in 2013, and Samoa’s hosting of the Third International Conference of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in 2015” as well as the Pacific Island states “making it into important UN committees and taking up leadership roles” were telling signs of their rise in prominence of the Pacific Islands.

Manoa makes the important point that much of the growing recognition of the Pacific Islands is due to their organising and working themselves as the Pacific SIDS or PSIDS – PIF member countries minus Australia and New Zealand. She argued that PSIDS “gained impetus and superseded the PIF as the main body for Pacific country organising at the UN”, given “differing interests with Australia and New Zealand, necessity, logic and Fiji’s suspension from the PIF.”⁶

The Way Ahead

Whether PSIDS will evolve even further or whether it will falter along the way is presently not in debate. The focus of PSIDS has been to play a crucial role at the UN Global Oceans Conference in New York in June 2017 and the all-important COP23, with PSIDS in leading roles and

spearheading the discussions. The Pacific has several illustrious climate-change champions, including former President Anote Tong, former Foreign Minister the late Tony deBrum, President Tommy Remengesau and PMs Bainimarama, Henry Puna and Enele Sopoaga. The list goes on. The main difference now is that these leaders have decided to lead from the front.

The path is also now open, as Fry and Tate point out, for “the use of alternative, island-only groupings and the forging of closer relationships with non-traditional partners” as well as a “greater political commitment to ‘act regionally’”.⁷

Singapore’s relationship with the Pacific countries will, naturally, continue to grow in the coming years, especially with PSIDS playing an important role on the UN floor. There will be greater contact at the people-to-people level with increasing air links. The national airlines of PNG and Fiji both fly twice a week from their capitals to Singapore, with Fiji considering a third flight per week. These direct flights, which cut down flying time and the need to transit in Australia or New Zealand, will be more attractive to Singapore tourists.

While Singapore’s major foreign policy interest will continue to be centred on its neighbourhood in Asia, there is a need to raise two-way awareness of the Pacific


⁶ Manoa, Fulori, “The New Pacific Diplomacy at the United Nations: The Rise of the PSIDS”, *Ibid*, p.91.

⁷ Fry, Greg and Tarte, Sandra, *Ibid*, p.15.

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Islands. To illustrate this, the Cook Islands celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence on 4 August 2015, four days before Singapore celebrated its own 50th anniversary. Both were joyous occasions, though with extremely few exceptions, citizens of both countries were blissfully unaware of the celebrations in the other country. That was an opportunity lost to profile the Cook Islands in Singapore and vice versa.

The younger Pacific Islanders will be the harbingers of change. In recent months, cinemagoers from Nairobi to Nuku'alofa have enjoyed that lively Walt Disney 2016 tale of *Moana*, the daughter of a local chief, who braved the ocean to save her doomed people to the telling refrain of, "We have forgotten who we are. We are an ocean people. We are great voyagers." Yes, indeed.



Chapter Eighteen

Singapore and the United Nations

Vanu Gopala Menon

Vanu Gopala MENON is currently Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia. He is a career Foreign Service Officer, having joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in June 1985. His previous assignments include that of Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from August 2011 to October 2014, Singapore's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) in New York from August 2004 to August 2011, and as Singapore's Permanent Representative to the UN and World Trade Organization in Geneva from December 2001 to August 2004.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

Singapore and the United Nations

When the United Nations (UN) was founded in 1945, it had 51 member countries. Today, the number has more than tripled to 193. Every newly independent state seeks entry into the UN almost as a first order of government business. Its seat in the UN is its most fundamental confirmation of its membership in the community of nations. Singapore was no different. We joined the UN on 21 September 1965, just a month after becoming independent. More than half the UN membership is composed of small states such as Singapore, with a population of less than 10 million people. For many small states, the UN is an important part of their foreign policy; Singapore is no different, and has always been a strong supporter of the UN. The UN represents an international system based on rules. A world governed by a system of norms and codes of conduct that treat each state equally is clearly better for small states than the law of the jungle. The challenge remains convincing the great powers, which have the wherewithal to act unilaterally, that such a system is not only for the common good but also in the national interest of each of them.

Singapore's Reputation and Standing at the UN

I had the honour of serving at the Singapore Mission to the UN in New York twice – as First Secretary for three years and later as the Permanent Representative for seven years. I also served as Singapore's Permanent Representative

to the UN in Geneva for three years. In all these years, I heard mainly praise and expressions of respect for Singapore, our economic success, our foreign policy and our positions on various issues. There are constant requests to learn from Singapore and to emulate our model of development. This respect for Singapore and our economic success have been good for our diplomacy. It has helped to open doors and continues to do so. Because you are seen to be representing a successful country, people do not mind giving you time and listening to your views. Singapore's views are taken seriously by other diplomats and the UN Secretariat. The challenge, if any, is not to allow the praise and flattery to get to your head. You have to constantly remind yourself that as a small country, nothing should be taken for granted and that you have to continually work hard to make your mark at the UN. That means diligently attending meetings and participating seriously in the many time-consuming negotiations that take place at the UN.

Another reason why Singapore is taken seriously at the UN is that we are prepared to get into the trenches and fight for what we believe in. Most delegations also know that we are not easily intimidated, not even by the larger and more powerful countries. Our occasional public run-ins with some of the major powers left many convinced that we are a courageous and principled delegation, prepared to stand our ground and state our positions frankly even if this means upsetting some of our close bilateral

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partners. On more than one occasion, members of some of the smaller delegations have told us that they wished they could be as outspoken as us, but that they could not do so for fear of retribution from the developed countries through withdrawal of trade preferences, technical assistance or financial aid. The fact that we are not an indebted nation or dependent on anyone for financial or technical assistance makes it easier for us to conduct our foreign policy in general, and especially at the UN where you have to deal with a diverse range of contentious issues.

Moreover, because we are small and non-threatening, and because of our good links to both the developing and the developed world, we are often asked to facilitate inter-governmental negotiations at the UN and to play a bridging role between various parties. Singapore has generally done well in facilitating such negotiating processes. We have been successful because our delegates have not only been hands-on during negotiations, but have consistently demonstrated over time that they have the intellectual capacity and political sense to broker compromises that benefit the wider UN membership. During my time in New York, the Singapore Mission played a critical role in a number of important and successful negotiations at the UN – the creation of the Human Rights Council, the conclusion of the UN Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the creation of UN Women, the High-Level Conference on the World Economic and Financial Crisis, and various global governance issues.

We also had the honour of chairing the Credentials Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2010–11. Membership of the Credentials Committee is decided by the President of the UN General Assembly, in consultation with the Legal Office, and comprises mainly small countries. Our experience in the Credentials Committee proved more challenging than usual, as we had to deal first with the credentials of Cote d'Ivoire and later Libya, both of which had new governments installed during the course of the UN session. There was the question of whether the government that had taken power in Tripoli after the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi should be recognised by the UN. As for Cote d'Ivoire, the incumbent President, who lost in the election, initially refused to hand over power to the winner, raising the question of whether he had the authority to appoint his representative at the UN. We handled these difficult issues well, but more importantly, our position as Chairman of the Credentials Committee gave us a unique role and perspective vis-à-vis the Permanent Five (the members of the Security Council, namely China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States (US)), all of whom had a major interest in both these issues.

Against this assessment of our standing vis-à-vis the UN, I would like to specifically touch on three initiatives in which Singapore either took the lead on or played a key role.

Singapore and the United Nations

The Forum of Small States (FOSS)

The first initiative of note is the Forum of Small States (FOSS). It is an informal, cross-regional group of UN member states with a population of 10 million or less. Chaired by Singapore since its inception in 1992, the group's aim is to facilitate information sharing on issues of importance to small states. Its activities are largely confined to informal briefings on a diverse range of topics. There are currently 107 members in the group.

There is widespread acknowledgement in the UN that by virtue of our chairmanship of FOSS, we are a key advocate of small states. More importantly, we have succeeded in keeping the grouping loose and informal, thereby allowing the small states to discuss a variety of sensitive issues candidly, but without feeling pressured to take a common group position. This has allowed each small state to update itself on where the rest of us stand on particular issues, whilst preserving space for their respective national positions. FOSS' strength lies in its flexibility and its diversity (with the membership of FOSS spanning both developed and developing countries).

Over the years, as FOSS has become better noticed by the wider UN membership, we have had requests from various players – including key UN ambassadors, UN Secretariat officials and even the Secretary-General – to address the grouping. During the run-up to the election of the Secretary-General in 2006 and 2011, almost every

candidate (including the immediate past Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon) asked to address FOSS.

We have also been helped by the fact that the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly have quite regularly referred to FOSS in their public comments. As a result, FOSS has not only gained name recognition, but also convinced many that we are indeed a “force to be reckoned with”. It has given the small nations of the UN – the so-called “little five feet high nations” (a term US President John F Kennedy once used to refer to small states) – a louder voice and a more prominent standing at the UN than they would otherwise have had.

Small 5 or S5

The second initiative that Singapore has been involved in at the UN is the “Small 5” or “S5”. In 2005, Switzerland took the initiative to bring together a group comprising Singapore, Liechtenstein, Jordan and Costa Rica with the objective of achieving an improvement in the working methods of the UN Security Council (UNSC). We went along because we have always argued that an expansion of the UNSC alone was not good enough and that the effectiveness of the Council depended primarily on its working methods, which needed to be more consultative and transparent. The initiative took off and caught the imagination of the wider UN membership after the five nations were able to issue a paper entitled,

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“Improving the Working Methods of the Security Council”. The wider UN membership took note of our efforts and started to refer to this group as the “Small Five” as opposed to the Permanent Five (P5). Thus, the S5 was born.

For the next six years, there was widespread acknowledgement that the S5, with its paper, ideas and persistence, had made a contribution to the discussion on UNSC reform. This is not to say that the P5 had gone soft and agreed to change their working methods. On the contrary, this is the one issue on which they have consistently demonstrated a common resolve to block meaningful progress on, despite their many substantive differences on political issues of the day.

The P5’s preference had generally been to keep their decision-making processes under wraps as this gave them greater control over the proceedings and eventual outcomes. But pressure from the S5 gave impetus to the then-moribund UNSC’s Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, whose professed aim was to enhance and streamline the working methods of the Council. On the pretext of appearing open-minded, the P5 also met informally on a few occasions with the S5 to discuss working methods.

However, things came to a head in 2012 when the S5 decided to table a General Assembly resolution on the working methods of the UNSC. The P5 reacted

angrily to what they perceived was an attempt by the S5 (and the UNGA) to impose on them a set of working methods that would have engendered greater transparency to the discussions of the UNSC, but which would have circumscribed their flexibility to manoeuvre behind the scenes. Hence, they lobbied aggressively to block the resolution and managed to get the S5 to back off. This was the death knell for the S5 initiative.

It was a major setback for UNSC reform because until then, no discussion on this topic had occurred without some mention of the S5 initiative. The sad but telling part was how easily the vast majority of UN member states could be pressured by the P5 to ditch an initiative that they had strongly supported and would have been in their interest as well. It showed how raw power can still rule at a body like the UN, where member states often delude themselves into believing that each one has an equal voice and say on important matters! It left me convinced that reform of the UNSC is unlikely to take place any time in the foreseeable future. If we cannot convince the P5 to show a modicum of greater transparency in the way they operate in the UNSC, what hope is there of seeing any expansion of the Council’s membership? There is essentially no impetus for reform of the Council.

Global Governance Group (3G)

The third initiative that Singapore has been involved in at the UN is the Global

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Governance Group (3G). The 3G was formed in response to the revival of the G20 by the US in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. While the G20 helped to bring together the major economies to tackle some of the immediate problems afflicting the world economy at that time, it also raised a number of questions in the area of global governance. These included how decisions were going to be made in the future on global issues, what the G20 process might mean for the UN and how the decisions taken by the G20 might affect the rest of the world. While the G20 was taking decisions supposedly on behalf of the rest of the world, these were made without any consultation with countries affected by the G20's decisions.

As a result, we decided that we should convene a group of small and medium-sized countries to see how we could work together to raise our issues of concern to the G20 and try to promote a better and more inclusive system of global governance. All of us in this informal grouping felt that, since the G20's decisions had implications that went beyond its membership, we should aim to influence the G20 by developing a constructive dialogue on coordination and cooperation between the G20 and the rest. That would, in turn, hopefully encourage the G20 to take into account the interests of the wider UN membership, the vast majority of whom had no say in the G20 process.

The subsequent issuance of a joint 3G paper in March 2010 (as a UN document)

entitled "Strengthening the Framework for G-20 Engagement of Non-members" helped to consolidate the standing of the 3G and attracted new countries into its midst, which now has 30 members. The G20 members have started to take the 3G quite seriously. The G20 Troika (which is the three past, present and future countries that have the rotating chair of the G20 annual summit) now engage 3G ministers annually in New York. Clearly, the G20 is an important and indispensable forum for discussing economic and financial issues, even if it is not representative of the wider UN membership. If the UN ignored the G20, the UN would be marginalised. Similarly, if the G20 ignored the UN, the G20 would lack legitimacy. The 3G, despite its limitations, has helped to build a soft bridge between the G20 and the UN, a point acknowledged by many at the UN, including several G20 members. It has also helped to give the G20 process a certain *locus standi* with the wider UN membership. As the convenor of the 3G, Singapore has also been invited to almost all G20 Summit meetings since 2010.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with three observations about the UN and its importance to Singapore:

First, operating at the UN, just like in any organisation, requires a great deal of teamwork. It is not a one-man affair. In this regard, the Singapore Mission in New York has earned an excellent reputation at

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the UN because of all the dedicated and excellent officers we have. All of them have made significant contributions in their own way. Every time I meet my counterparts at the UN, they would sing nothing but praise for our officers.

Second, every diplomat is expected to develop a range of contacts. The only difference at the UN is that, unlike a bilateral posting, you will be dealing with the entire world and not just one or two countries. You need to get to know not just your ambassadorial counterparts, but also some of the more junior officers in other missions. The reason for this is that you will inevitably be dealing with these more junior diplomats during the various negotiating processes at the UN, where everyone is on an equal footing, irrespective of whether you are an ambassador or not. It is always best to be friendly with everyone and not judge anyone by rank. Moreover, many of these young diplomats will go far in their careers, sometimes becoming foreign ministers, prime ministers and presidents in their countries. Never overlook or underestimate anyone, especially at the UN. You can never tell who will be helpful to you some day, either at the UN or elsewhere!

Third, notwithstanding its many achievements, you often hear criticism of the UN from various quarters, questioning the value and relevance of the organisation. In some ways, such attacks have intensified

after the UN's failures to prevent the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda, the debacle of the Second Gulf War, and more recent developments in the Middle East, especially in Yemen and Syria. Such criticism is unfair in that we have to be realistic about what the UN can and cannot do for its members. The UN was not designed to solve every problem facing humanity. It can only achieve what its members, in particular the P5, allow it to do.

In this context, we are not going to be able to replace the UN with another institution that can bring together all the countries of the world to promote our collective interests. For all its imperfections, the UN gives us a construct to do just that and promote international cooperation.

As the illustrious former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld characterised it in 1954:

The UN was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell.¹

¹ Hammarskjöld, Dag, address at University of California Convocation, Berkeley, California, 13 May 1954.



Chapter Nineteen

Connecting and Collaborating to Change the World: Diplomacy in the Palms of Citizens

Jean Tan

Jean TAN is Executive Director of the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), a non-profit organisation dedicated to international peace-building and development. Prior to joining the SIF, she held senior positions in the ministries of Manpower, Foreign Affairs, and Information and the Arts. She is a graduate of the National University of Singapore and was awarded the Singapore Government Merit Scholarship to pursue her postgraduate studies in the United States. In her spare time, she volunteers on the boards of the Global Public Diplomacy Network as well as SG Enable, an agency dedicated to serving persons with disabilities. She is also active in various work groups of the International Forum on Development Service, a global network of volunteer-driven development agencies.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, she contributed this article in her personal capacity.

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In early 2017, when it looked like Singapore was never getting back its military vehicles that were seized by Hong Kong Customs, citizen bloggers turned to people diplomacy. Penning catchy Singlish songs, they humorously pleaded with China to return our nine “Terrex Chia”. The videos went viral.¹ Shortly after, Hong Kong released Singapore’s military hardware.

Perhaps people diplomacy did not exactly save the day, but gone are the days when international relations was the exclusive preserve of foreign policy professionals and statesmen. Today, media-savvy citizens connect readily online on a number of complex cross-border issues to export ideas, influence opinions and develop solutions.

Is people-to-people diplomacy the future of international relations, given today’s connectivity and dynamics? Clearly, traditional diplomacy or the kind of quiet negotiations between governments still play a central role in the management of relations between nations. However, individuals, academia, businesses and civil society also initiate discourse and action at the grassroots level. These “non-state actors” help draw attention to issues and considerations that, in a world where change is rapid, may have been overlooked by the government.

Accordingly, countries that bring their

citizens into the fold and proactively engage the publics of another state in order to build mutual trust, respect and a shared future, have the edge. They tap into the growing influence wielded by non-state actors and, together with state-driven initiatives, enrich the tapestry of relations between nations.

Across the globe, nations are indeed investing heavily in public diplomacy. Public diplomacy refers to the transparent means by which countries communicate with publics in other countries, as opposed to foreign governments, in order to inform and influence.²

Typical activities include citizen exchange and visit programmes, cultural promotion and media broadcasting. The United States (US) Department of State spent S\$2.4 billion on public diplomacy in fiscal year (FY) 2015. To foster cross-cultural relations, the annual budget of the British Council was S\$1.9 billion in FY2016, while the Japan Foundation’s funding exceeded S\$242 million in FY2015. In delivering aid diplomacy, the Japan International Cooperation Agency spent S\$1.9 billion, while the budget of the United Kingdom’s Volunteer Service Overseas was S\$132 million in FY2016.

Increasingly, more countries are proactively

¹ Oon, Alvin, video titled “Give Me Back My Terrex Chia” (YouTube, 2017); Mr Brown, video titled “Give Us Our Terrex Back” (YouTube, 2017).

² “Defining Public Diplomacy”, USC Centre on Public Diplomacy, <https://usepublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-pd>.

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developing their soft power. As China’s global power grows, for instance, Beijing is investing billions to reshape its image. To improve perceptions abroad and allay fears that its rise is a threat, China set up 475 Confucius Institutes in 120 countries to teach Chinese and showcase Chinese culture, launched CCTV International, a 24-hour English channel broadcast in six languages around the world, and pumped US\$50 billion (S\$67.8 billion) into the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which it founded.

Compared to other countries, Singapore’s public diplomacy efforts do not benefit from state-funded largesse. In Singapore, public diplomacy is not prominent in policy deliberations. And while there are ad hoc elements of public diplomacy – such as post-disaster relief efforts and technical aid, in addition to country branding or national marketing – we lack a coherent and strategic national framework for public diplomacy.

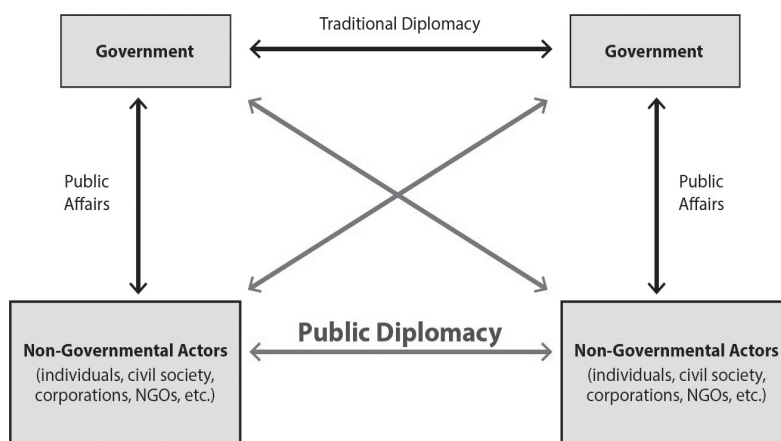
Instead, Singapore’s public diplomacy has expanded beyond state-centric activity to involve more private actors, partners and networks. Citizens, be it youth, women, social and religious leaders or business professionals, and non-state actors – such as think tanks, community-based

groups and international non-governmental organisations (NGO) – have stepped up to close the gap. Today, several of them engage foreign audiences in the pursuit of their own goals, communicate credibly and engage meaningfully with publics abroad, and thereby advance international diplomacy practices of their own.

One among many such non-state actors is the Singapore International Foundation (SIF). But before I discuss its approach to world engagement, I would like to elaborate on the forms of public diplomacy that have evolved over time, to provide important background to this area of work.

Dimensions of Public Diplomacy

Whereas traditional diplomacy is limited to interactions between government officials, public diplomacy involves both state and non-state actors engaging foreign publics in a transparent manner. The diagram below illustrates the



Source: Suto, Ryan, J., “Diagramming Public Diplomacy, ver 2.0”, 2011³

³ <http://www.ryanjsuto.com/2011/02/diagramming-public-diplomacy-ver-20.html>

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relationships between key institutions (boxed). The communication that occur between institutions – as shown by the grey arrows – is considered public diplomacy.

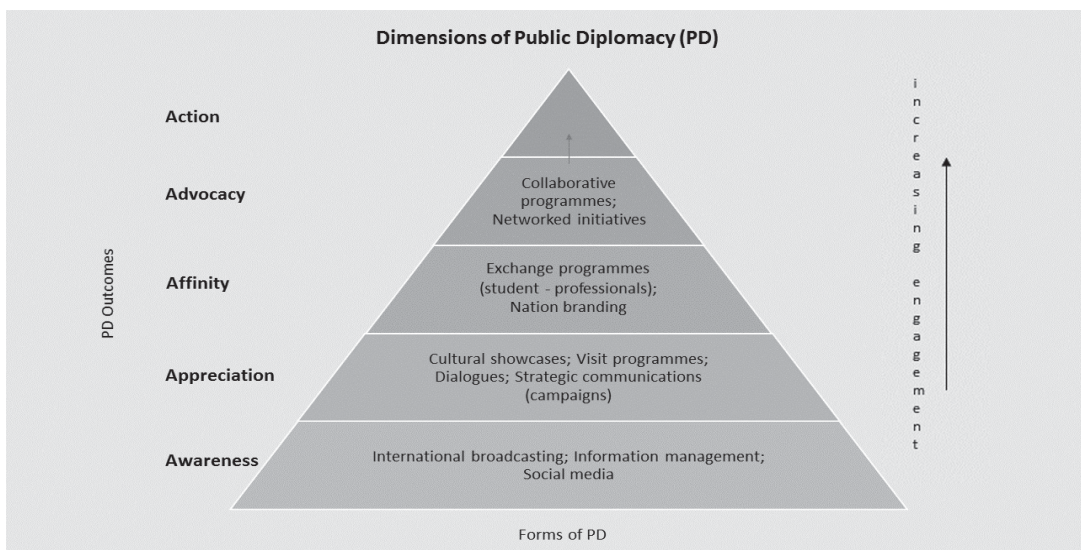
Public diplomacy takes many forms. It includes direct or mass media communications, people-to-people exchanges through the arts, business, sports and scholarly platforms, international cooperation programmes and other collaborative initiatives.

At its core is the task of building *awareness*, understanding and an *appreciation* of a nation's values, culture and policies; it entails fostering mutual respect and *affinity* through the exchange of ideas, skills and experiences; and works by inspiring *advocacy* and *action* through collaborative and relational programmes that strengthen ties and trust between communities.

Relational Strategies in a Networked World

The SIF is a non-profit organisation dedicated to strengthening people-to-people relations across borders. Its vision is “making friends for a better world”. The work of the SIF is premised on the belief that when people from different parts of the world work together, they gain insights that bridge social and cultural divides, and the sharing of ideas and resources inspires action and enables collaboration for good.

The SIF also recognises that many of today's social, economic and environmental issues are complex and cut across continents. Likewise, the interest groups that form around these issues often interact with similar cause-based networks forming multiple hubs, and influence flows in multiple directions.⁴ This complexity in



⁴ Zaharna, R.S., Arsenault, Amelia and Fisher, Ali (Eds), *Relational, Networked and Collaborative Approaches to Public Diplomacy: The Connective Mindshift* (Routledge 2013).

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today's interconnected world demands that we work together in new ways to engage global publics. These should be ways geared towards relationship-building and should support structures of action that create social impact. The forms of engagement should be designed to help forge a common understanding of global challenges and foster collaborative problem-solving. In short, these strategies should seek to harness the power of networks for positive change.

In charting its way forward, the SIF has adopted such a relational and collaborative approach in its efforts to engage with and change the world. This approach seeks to enable genuine cooperation with interconnected communities that deliver social value. To fulfil its mission, the SIF runs a number of programmes under four broad thrusts, namely Good Business, Volunteer Cooperation, Cultural Exchange and Our Better World. Notably, all of its programmes are designed to *connect communities, enable collaboration and effect positive change*.

Diplomacy of Deeds

One example of a “force for good” is the SIF’s international network of 700 young social entrepreneurs. This growing community of young changemakers is bound by a shared vision to pioneer solutions to social problems for systemic

change, and has launched social enterprises in over 13 countries. Singaporean Jamon Mok, for instance, aims to alleviate poverty through social impact travel. He connects travellers with local craftsmen, providing both a unique travel experience while supporting the livelihoods of struggling communities. His social enterprise, Backstreet Academy, has benefited communities in 13 countries and helped forge greater intercultural understanding.

Development actors, including international volunteers, form yet another important “network of empowerment” in international relations. The SIF’s Volunteer Cooperation programme supports positive and sustainable development in Asia, while fostering greater cross-cultural understanding. Skilled Singaporean volunteers work collaboratively with their overseas counterparts to transfer skills, generate new knowledge and innovate. They build individual and institutional capacity in the areas of healthcare and education. Together, they educate and empower local master trainers, who in turn become catalysts for long-term change in their communities.

A recent study commissioned to evaluate the impact of international volunteering discovered that the unique value-add of a people-centred development approach lay in the friendships that volunteers formed across cultures.⁵ Skilled international

⁵ Lough, Benjamin, *Global Partners for Sustainable Development: The Added Value of Singapore International Foundation Volunteers* (SIF, 2016).

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volunteers were trusted, liked and well-motivated for effective person-to-person teaching and engagement. Volunteers' motivations and attitudes had an instrumental value for capacity-building and positively contributed to development outcomes. Researcher Benjamin Lough said:

...with a focus on relationships, IVCOs [international volunteer cooperation agencies] have a solid value case for developing collaborative and engaged partnerships. This partnership focus potentially differentiates the value of IVCOs and volunteers from other development actors.⁶

He concluded that “based on its relational emphasis, international volunteering is particularly well-suited to achieve the capacity-building and partnership-building aspirations of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 17”.⁷ To truly value the contributions of volunteer-driven development, he advised that “donors and decision-makers need to place a higher value on intangible constructs such as friendship, compassion, inclusion, enthusiasm and trust”.⁸

⁶ Lough, Benjamin, *Ibid*, p.30.

⁷ The United Nations SDG Goal 17: Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development. Specifically:

- Capacity-building: Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships: Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

⁸ Lough, Benjamin, *Ibid*, p.43.

Cultural Diplomacy

Yet another collaborative network is our community of artists. The SIF engages a diverse and talented group of artists to share Singapore's multiculturalism and creativity with world communities. Under its Arts for Good initiative, Singaporean artists contribute to positive social change through collaborations with international artists, as well as galvanise greater community involvement in sustainable development. Their work is premised on the belief that the arts and culture can aid sustainable development, particularly in fostering inclusive communities, promoting sustainable urban living and enabling livelihoods.

Digital Diplomacy

“You're changing this world...one story and one life at a time” is how one community member described Our Better World (OBW), the SIF's digital storytelling initiative. Leveraging the power of digital media to connect communities and inspire collective actions globally, OBW's aim is to harness digital disruption for social impact.

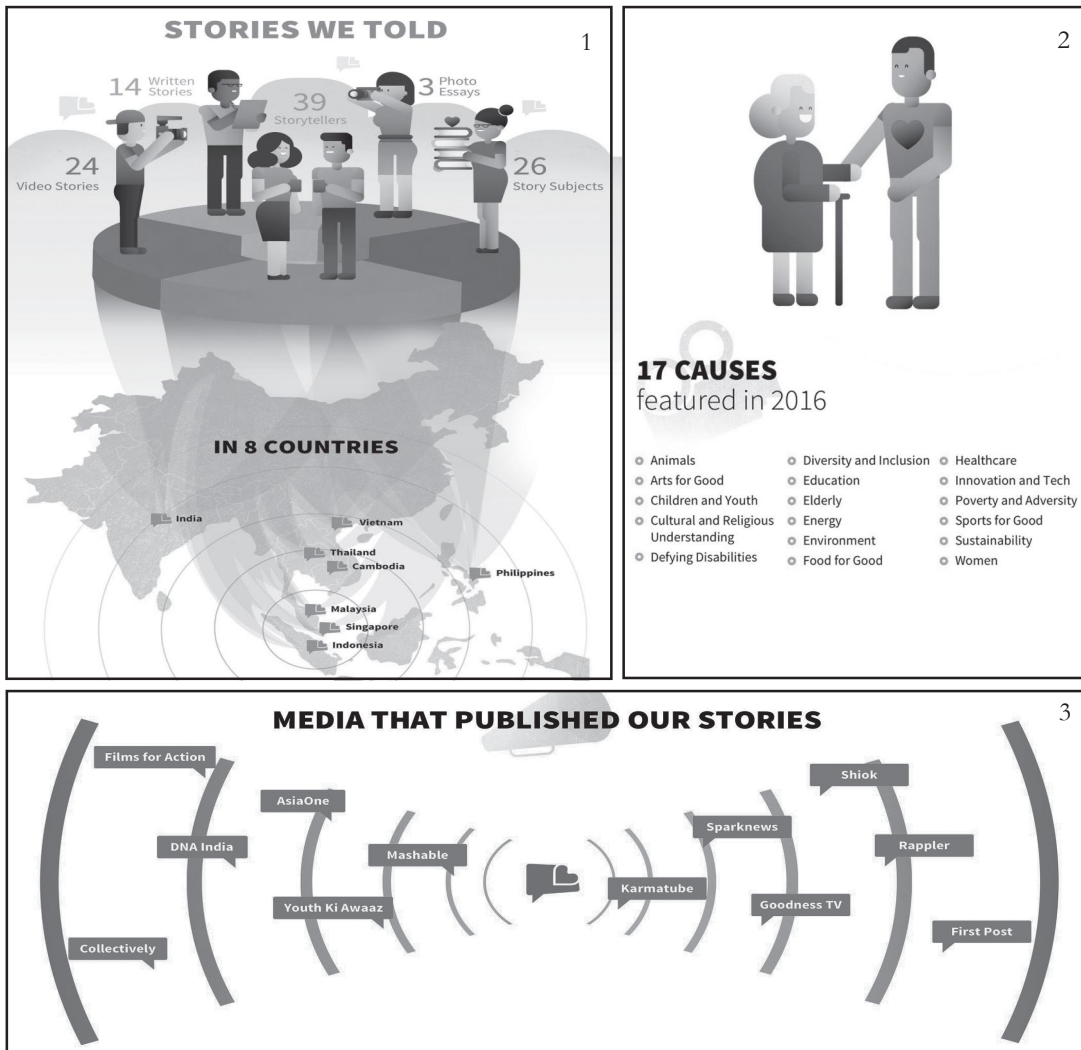
OBW's hypothesis is that out of 100 percent

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of online audiences, five percent are already doing good and another five percent never will. Its target is the 90 percent of online audiences who are not doing anything yet. On the other hand, many non-profit organisations across Asia are doing good work in their communities, but they lack the capability or resources to market their cause. By

telling their stories, OBW aims to inspire the 90-percenters into action. Today, OBW has an annual viewership of 18 million and an active global community of 500,000. Based on a recent survey to measure OBW’s impact, four in five of the people who viewed OBW’s stories felt inspired to contribute to the social cause, and two in three actually took

OBW Impact 2016: Potential of Digital Networks




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4

AFTER SEEING OUR STORIES

9 in 10 became more aware of people doing good in Asia



4 in 5 felt inspired to contribute to social causes

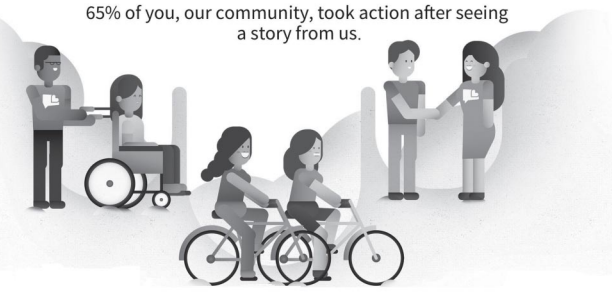
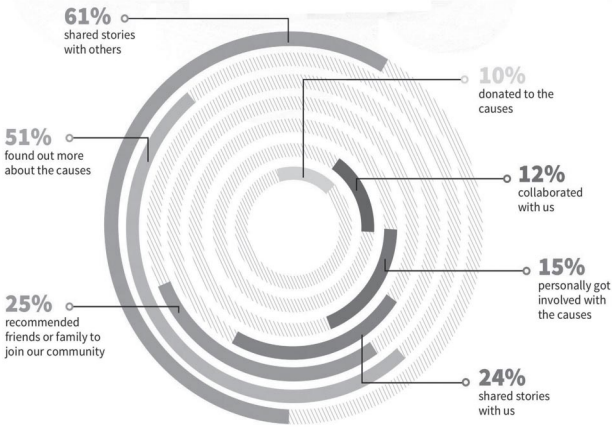


2016 Community Survey


5

ACTIONS YOU TOOK

65% of you, our community, took action after seeing a story from us.






| Action | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| shared stories with others | 61% |
| found out more about the causes | 51% |
| recommended friends or family to join our community | 25% |
| shared stories with us | 24% |
| personally got involved with the causes | 15% |
| collaborated with us | 12% |
| donated to the causes | 10% |



How a Dog's Belief in a Child Helped Her Believe Too

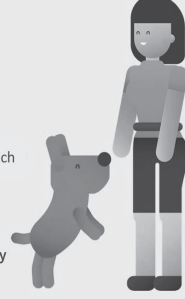
Pawsibility uses Animal Assisted Therapy and Animal Assisted Play Therapy to counsel children and youth ages 4 to 20 years old in Singapore on their social emotional development.

-  **14 to 47** increase in monthly queries
-  **9 to 58** increase in monthly volunteers for Save our Street Dogs outreach

[View Story](#)

"We love the video. You've really captured Telly's personality and her spirit."
Maureen Huang
Founder, Pawsibility

"A beautiful friendship between Telly and Jarene."
Theresa Tang



6

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7

Your Internship Could Change Girls' Lives

Voice4Girls in India conducts fun activity camps where adolescent girls from marginalised communities learn to negotiate for their rights and futures, and keep healthy and safe.

- 400+ sign-ups as counsellors** in one month
(in the past, this number of sign-ups took them two years)
- Media Coverage** on *Times of India*

[View Story](#)

"As a result of the story, we were able to hire 15 counsellors, enabling us to reach out to another 1,100 girls. It helped us immensely in starting our operations in two new states."
Sharanya Gautam
Assistant Director, Voice4Girls

"Very constructive and wonderful initiative!"
Bhola Gurjar

Source: www.ourbetterworld.org


action. That is certainly a social movement online. The diagrams on the previous pages and above indicate how impactful the OBW community was in 2016.

The Role of Citizens in Foreign Relations

As the SIF expands its work overseas, so too will the need for more Singaporeans to participate in its programmes. As citizen ambassadors, they can help carry the Singaporean spirit of volunteerism abroad, bridge communities through the arts and culture, contribute to sustainable change through social entrepreneurship, and share powerful stories that inspire community action for good. Similarly, like-minded civilians and communities overseas, connected to and collaborating with Singaporeans, can form networks of social impact to build a better world. In this way, global citizens contribute in

meaningful and significant ways to strengthening international understanding and development.

Governments and foreign ministries today would do well to keep pace with changing trends in global engagement. Given the growing influence of citizen diplomats and how new global actors have impacted the way countries conduct foreign relations, governments should move beyond traditional diplomacy to construct and conduct relations with publics overseas as well as facilitate networks between non-governmental groups at home and abroad. Citizen diplomats are needed to help their countries strengthen their standing with global publics because today's publics are vocal, involved in and shape international issues. The good news is that Singaporeans are indeed increasingly active in reaching out to their counterparts in foreign countries and aspire to engage them in mutually beneficial ways.



Chapter Twenty

The Museum as Cultural Diplomat

Chong Siak Ching and Teo Hui Min

CHONG Siak Ching has been the Chief Executive Officer of the National Gallery Singapore and Head of the Visual Arts Cluster (VAC) Singapore since April 2013. The VAC comprises the Singapore Art Museum, Singapore Tyler Print Institute and the National Gallery Singapore. Prior to this, she was the President and CEO of Ascendas from 2001 to March 2013, and was recognised as Outstanding CEO of the Year at the Singapore Business Awards 2009 for her leadership and dynamism in establishing Ascendas as Asia's leading provider of business space. She is currently Chairperson of the Singapore Note and Coin Advisory Committee, Director on the Board of Singapore Press Holdings and Mandai Park Holdings Pte Ltd. She sits on the Board of the National Arts Council. She is a member of the Advisory Board at Nanyang Business School and a member of the Yale-NUS College Governing Board. She is Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Republic of Chile.

TEO Hui Min is from the International Partnerships Department of the National Gallery Singapore. She is currently the Project Manager of the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art Annual Conference, which was hosted by the Gallery in November 2017. She has written for exhibitions such as "Artists Imagine a Nation" (2015), which focused on Singaporean art from the 1940s to the present, held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts. Prior to joining the Gallery, she was a specialist in Southeast Asian art at an international auction house.

Like the rest of the authors in this volume, they contributed this article in their personal capacity.

The Museum as Cultural Diplomat

Expressing the aspiration and intent to play a role beyond the shores of Singapore, the vision of the National Gallery Singapore – which we are both associated with – is for it to be a visual arts institution that inspires and engages our people and our *neighbours*, creating a dialogue between the art of Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world. In working with our peers to deepen the knowledge and understanding of the art of Southeast Asia and presenting it to the world, the Gallery seeks to play a bridging role through regional and international collaboration in an approach that is underpinned by the tenets of our country's foreign policy.

The identification of culture as a component in the presentation of Singapore as an attractive space for foreign investment and talent is evident in past programmes of Singapore's museums. Allow us to name, for example, the signing of a framework between Singapore and France to enhance cultural cooperation in 2009 that led to "Christian Lacroix: The Costumier" (2009) exhibition being brought to the National Museum of Singapore from the Centre National du Costume de Scene, France. There was also "Between Multiple Worlds: The Peranakan Chinese in Southeast Asia" (2011) brought from Singapore's Peranakan Museum to Musée du quai Branly. Culminating with "Reframing Modernism" (2016) at the Gallery in partnership with Centre Pompidou, such exhibitions provide the opportunity to exhibit masterpieces of Southeast Asian art in comparison and

context with loans from these institutions. In these instances, the museum also becomes a space for cultural diplomacy – "Reframing Modernism" was opened in March 2016 by our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan together with then French Ambassador to Singapore, Mr Benjamin Dubertret, and senior representatives from Centre Pompidou. Such cultural cooperation underpins and complements other agreements across economics, innovation and politics.

Beyond the clear results of a strategic and meaningful employment for Singapore's foreign policy, cultural diplomacy also has a crucial role within Singapore in the context of its multicultural society. Indeed, the strategic hand of some of Singapore's key diplomats was at play in the 2005 Cabinet decision to dedicate two of Singapore's most historic buildings – City Hall and the former Supreme Court – to the people of Singapore as their National Gallery. One of the initiators, Professor Tommy Koh, went on to chair the international judging panel that selected the architectural firm appointed to re-purpose the two buildings into the Gallery. The allocation of two buildings that feature strongly within the national consciousness serves as a repository and symbol of national visual culture, emphasising the importance of culture in negotiating Singapore's national identity and sense of cohesion. As the Gallery strives to position itself as a visual arts institution within the wider global museum circuit, the moniker

The Museum as Cultural Diplomat

of a “national” museum prompts reflection on the role of the museum as a diplomat – it serves the foreign and domestic policy objectives of our nation in parallel tracks.

Culture and Diplomacy in Singapore

To investigate how museums function as cultural diplomats, it is useful to first take stock of what the terms “culture” and “cultural diplomacy” refer to within the context of Singapore.

A review of early policy in Singapore, beginning with the *Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (1989)* reveals a dual approach towards culture in relation to the economic and humanist merits that a robust cultural policy might provide.¹ Despite a desire to realise both realist and idealist goals, what resulted was a disproportionate amount of attention given to the benefits of culture as part of our external image-branding as a nation. Emerging from this is a continuing debate surrounding “hardware” and “heartware” that is symptomatic of a nation founded on principles of pragmatism and realism.

To avoid a definitional quagmire, and for the purposes of this discussion, we can perceive culture as a holistic term encompassing the visual and performing arts, heritage, history, architecture, food and

all components that constitute an understanding of how a single society might come to identify and present itself to its citizens and the world. Diplomacy, while generally understood as the external relations of a country at the government-to-government level in the form of foreign diplomacy, also has a component of domestic diplomacy that is particularly relevant in the context of multicultural Singapore. We will endeavour to address both notions of diplomacy in the wider conversation about the museum as cultural diplomat.

Although culture is acknowledged as an important means of national self-presentation, in Singapore’s past it was approached with less urgency than that accorded to concerns such as economics, defence and education since the country gained independence. The position that culture is secondary rather than inherent to the experience of the individual and community was articulated in the 1989 Report referred to earlier which justified a discussion of cultural policy based on the notion that “with more time for leisure and rising affluence, Singaporeans are now turning to the finer things in life”.² Even then, the economic merits of culture were mapped out as the main justification for a turn to culture. The desire to become a cultural hub was understood through the

¹ *Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts*, April 1989. In the report, the four justifications presented for the importance of culture and arts are: (a) broaden our minds and deepen our sensitivities; (b) improve general quality of life; (c) strengthen our social bond; (d) contribute to our tourist and entertainment sectors.

² *Ibid*, p.11.

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lens of economic benefits, such as attracting foreign investment and talent, and the boost to tourism if Singapore were to successfully present herself as a rich cultural environment. Having identified the development of a tangible and exportable culture as a key driver of image-branding, the *Renaissance City Report (2000)* (slightly more than a decade after the recommendations of the 1989 Advisory Council report) confidently articulated a notion of cultural diplomacy as “the enhancement of country-to-country relations through cultural exchanges”.³

External Cultural Diplomacy

Culture has undoubtedly been a feature of Singapore’s foreign policy through government-level support of cultural exchange. The Singapore en France – le Festival in 2015 spanned three months and presented more than 70 events across several key cities in France; it was an international showcase of Singapore’s artistic talents that sought to build a deeper and broader understanding of the multi-faceted culture of Singapore amongst French and international audiences. Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), the National Heritage Board and the National Arts Council (NAC) alongside French partners, the festival echoed the earlier Spotlight Singapore series that took place

in Hong Kong (2006), Tokyo (2006), Moscow (2008), Cape Town (2011), and Bratislava and Prague (2012). The MFA and MCCY also jointly manage the Cultural Diplomacy Fund to support the participation of Singaporean artists at international platforms, in line with NAC’s decision to return to the Venice Biennale in 2015 after a hiatus in 2013, and the securing of a long-term lease for the Singapore Pavilion. These examples highlight the concerted effort Singapore has made towards the internationalisation of artists and institutions in a strategy to develop an image of Singapore; these are investments in cultural diplomacy to broaden our bilateral relations.

Beyond the exporting of culture for national branding and international presence however, a more strategic awareness of the opportunities that culture can create for diplomacy can complement existing initiatives. Cultural sites (museums, heritage buildings, public monuments, etc.) are not only sites for the presentation of national identity, but also a means through which we can express our attitudes towards other cultures.

The role of the museum as foreign diplomat comes increasingly into play where cultural sites are frequent stops on diplomatic tours. Myanmar State Councillor Aung San Suu Kyi’s visit to Singapore in December 2016 was marked

³ *Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore*, 9 March 2000, Ministry of Information and the Arts, Singapore.

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by her opening of the exhibition “Cities & Kings: Ancient Treasures” from Myanmar at the Asian Civilisations Museum, alongside Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong. Museums become sites of “unofficial political relationship-building” – creating spaces where relations can be affirmed and negotiated without the need for direct political discourse.⁴ The Gallery, too, has been on the itinerary of many visiting dignitaries. Other examples include the occasion when PM Lee hosted the Princess of Thailand, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn at the Gallery in January 2016, and when President François Hollande of France brought his delegation to the Gallery during an official visit to Singapore in March 2017.

If done right, the respectful and nuanced representation of another culture can speak volumes of a willingness and ability to appreciate the unique contexts and attitudes that form the backdrop for public policy. Seen from this perspective, culture is in no way secondary or peripheral to foreign policy, but inherent in that it forms the context and basis for strengthening ties among countries.⁵ The Singapore-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership agreement signed in 2016 goes beyond economic integration and defence cooperation to promote people-to-people ties through cultural exchange. In conjunction with

this, an Australia-Singapore Arts Group has been set up, with funding, to promote exchanges of artists and collaborations between arts groups and cultural institutions. Having culture incorporated as an essential component of bilateral agreements marks a new and positive direction in the conduct of foreign policy.

In turn, the institutions that the Gallery chooses to work with and how it conducts those relationships are undertaken with the awareness that its staff will be viewed as representatives of the country. The focus of national foreign policy in promoting the regional cohesion of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and maintaining our distinct autonomy as a small state in the global context of international players, is very much in line with the Gallery’s vision of becoming an active and respected player in the global museum circuit, while working to contribute to the scholarship and presentation of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art.

Beyond the efforts at internationalisation through the export of culture, and despite the appearance of what indeed, by any standards, qualifies us today as a cultural hub (with our internationally regarded museums and galleries, world-renowned performing arts spaces, an emerging art market and ever-increasing options for the

⁴ Bound, Kirsten, Briggs, Rachel, Holden, John, Jones, Samuel, *Cultural Diplomacy* (London, DEMOS, 2007), p.12.

⁵ Ibid, p.20.

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education of artists and art professionals), there is also scope to enhance cultural diplomacy at the domestic level.

Internal Cultural Diplomacy

Much has been said about the inherent value of culture in helping to foster a strong national identity, and this is especially relevant in the case of multicultural and multiracial Singapore. Having only recently celebrated our 50th year as an independent nation, we have seen various targeted efforts at national integration as well as debates about the articulation of a Singaporean identity, ranging from the annual National Day Parades and composition of national songs, emphasis on racial harmony in schools and the employment of national symbols and landmarks, to the discussion on the utility of Singlish and the legacy of local cuisine.

What we might explore is the unique position of the museum as a space for the articulation of cultural identity that is at once distinct and yet encompassed within the broader national framework. Museums dedicated to specific communities, such as the Peranakan Museum, the Indian Heritage Centre or the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, present particular experiences and histories, while broader institutions, such as the National Museum of Singapore or the Asian Civilisations Museum, serve as spaces for the negotiation and aggregation of culture at the national and regional levels.

These spaces provide opportunities for individuals to encounter their own culture and the culture of others within the context of Singapore. Just as our national identity is based on a careful maintenance of balance, our representations of culture in the context of museums need to be similarly nuanced.

With the opening of the Gallery, and the opportunity to meaningfully exhibit our national collection, there emerges a responsibility that the subjects, artists and modes of representation adequately resonate and engage with the experience of being a Singaporean. This can be done through a curation of works that present key themes or subjects that are already regarded as iconic, such as Cheong Soo Pieng's ubiquitous "Drying Salted Fish" (1978) which uses Chinese ink and watercolour on cloth, and also through an inclusion of works by lesser-known artists or on subjects that are not as well-known, and yet present crucial perspectives of what it means to be a Singaporean and Southeast Asian. In the current context, we are part of the search for new visual signifiers for the nation beyond nostalgic images of the Singapore River, old Chinatown, coolie labourers and Samsui women. It is here that the museum can play a crucial role in the shaping and re-shaping of a visual manifestation of Singaporean identity.

In acknowledging the potential and responsibility of museums as arbiters of culture, there is a need to continually address the relative success of the museum

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as a social space. Only when the museum is regarded as a social space by the community it seeks to engage can it successfully create conversations about identity through art. Cultural diplomacy when deployed in the domestic context has the potential to play a crucial role in mapping and shaping the constantly shifting internal and external perceptions of national identity. Even as we continue to embark on and enliven efforts at strategically employing culture where it might create opportunities for the advancement of our foreign policy objectives, we must be conscious of the changing demographics and attitudes of our small state.

Concluding Thoughts

In considering the crucial role of culture in engaging citizens internally as well as enhancing our bilateral relations, cultural diplomacy should become the mainstay in the strategy towards building domestic and foreign relations. As we move towards this direction, we must invest in our cultural institutions, build skilled and respected professionals, and promote creative industries as well as communities of participants and supporters of culture.

Functioning within a wider system of cultural institutions, museums must make a concerted effort to utilise culture as a means for the negotiation of national identity, working together to provide meaningful presentations and platforms. At the same time, when negotiating

international agreements or partnerships at the level of foreign policy, cultural cooperation must be incorporated into the suite of policy objectives. To achieve this, it is essential to involve our cultural institutions, professionals and practitioners in the process of identifying potential areas for successful collaboration and contribution. This will then help to present a nuanced and directed approach in our discussions with foreign partners as we seek to establish ourselves as a well-informed and nimble participant of global diplomacy.



Chapter Twenty-One

Singapore and the Preponderance of Power

Khong Yuen Foong

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Like the rest of the authors in this volume, he contributed this article in his personal capacity.

*Singapore and the Preponderance of Power***“Times are A-Changin”**

How are we to understand Singapore’s strategic choices, past, present and future? I suggest that historically, Singapore’s leaders have found greater strategic comfort in an “imbalance of power” that favours the presence of the United States (US) in the Asia-Pacific region. Singapore believes that it is the preponderance of US power that has kept the region peaceful and stable. This is despite the frequent use of “the balance of power” terminology to portray the military and economic presence of the US in the region. Yet, as one of the most vocal supporters of China and India’s rise, Singapore also seems to be facilitating the rising powers’ prerogatives to “check and balance” the existing hegemon. This “checking and balancing” is acceptable insofar as it does not displace the US as the predominant power.

Changes are afoot, however. The economics-driven shifting power distribution – from West to East – threatens to dethrone US predominance. The “America First” agenda of its President, Donald Trump, is also likely to facilitate the erosion of the US’s hegemonic position in Asia and beyond. China is the power best poised to replace the US as the predominant power in Asia in the next two to three decades, assuming that it maintains its current economic trajectory and that its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) takes off.

The question for Singapore’s policymakers is whether to recalibrate the country’s strategy away from US predominance, in favour of a bipolar balance of power (China-US), or in an anticipatory move, to bandwagon strategically with the future superpower. I wager that in the years ahead, Singapore is likely to take the former approach.

Explaining the Established Policy of Preponderance

Singapore’s foreign policymakers are among the most avid and articulate users of “the balance of power” vocabulary to make sense of their strategic environment. From the founding fathers – Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Keng Swee, S. Rajaratnam – to second- and third-generation leaders such as Goh Chok Tong, Wong Kan Seng, Lee Hsien Loong and George Yeo, the imperative of maintaining the balance of power in Asia seems deeply etched into their strategic consciousness. For instance, in discussing the future of US-China relations, Lee Kuan Yew argued that:

Prudence dictates that there be a balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region... Peace and stability... in the Pacific still depend on a balance of power.¹

Rajaratnam articulated the same perspective in his personal diary where

¹ Allison, Graham, Blackwill, Robert, D., Wyne, Ali, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master’s Insights on China, the United States, and the World* (Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2012), p.39.

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he wrote:

Where there is a balance of power, there is less danger of small nations being conquered by a big one.²

More recently, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong have both used the balance of power metaphor in describing the strategic environment in Asia. As they put it, “The rise of China is tilting the balance of power in Asia” and “a stable regional order... requires consent and legitimacy in the international community together with the balance of power”.³

As these pronouncements indicate, the balance of power is about achieving an equilibrium or rough equality of power among the key players, each checking the other so that no one dominates. In such an environment, Singapore’s autonomy and political independence – like that of its Southeast Asian neighbours – will be secured. This is the conventional understanding of the balance of power and

its payoffs.

But Singapore’s leaders have also employed the balance of power to denote something quite different. As PM, Lee Kuan Yew was of the view that “America’s core interest requires that it remains the superior power in the Pacific”.⁴ His successor, Goh, believed that “the US will remain a key, indeed the dominant, player well into the 21st century”.⁵ Lee Hsien Loong has similarly opined that “the US remains the dominant Pacific power. The Pacific Command and the US 7th Fleet are a powerful force in being, and a key factor for peace and stability in the region.”⁶

In these passages, the balance of power refers to a situation (often the status quo), where the US is the preponderant power. In other words, policymakers are describing and expressing a preference for an imbalance of power, an imbalance that favours the US. It is US hegemony that has been responsible for the peace and stability enjoyed by Asia since the late 1970s. Michael Leifer provides an apt description

² Kwa, Chong Guan (Ed.), *S. Rajaratnam on Singapore: From Ideas to Reality* (Singapore, World Scientific Publishing Co Pte Ltd and Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2006), p.7.

³ Moriyasu, Ken, “Goh Chok Tong — South China Sea disputes cannot be settled by might”, 30 May 2016, *Nikkei Asian Review*, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Goh-Chok-Tong-South-China-Sea-disputes-cannot-be-settled-by-might>.

Lee, Hsien Loong, speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue, 29 May 2015, <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/newsroom/transcript-keynote-speech-prime-minister-lee-hsien-loong-shangri-la-dialogue-29-may-2015>.

⁴ Lee, Kuan Yew, speech at the US-Asean Business Council’s 25th Anniversary Gala Dinner in Washington DC, 27 October 2009, <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/newsroom/speech-minister-mentor-lee-kuan-yew-us-asean-business-councils-25th-anniversary-gala>.

⁵ Goh, Chok Tong, speech at the Asia Society Conference in Bangkok, “Constructing East Asia”, 9 June 2005, https://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/media_centre/press_room/sp/2005/200506/speech_20050609.html.

⁶ Lee, Hsien Loong, *Ibid.*

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of Singapore's notion of the balance of power in his seminal book on Singapore's foreign policy:

Since Britain's withdrawal in the 1970s, and despite clashing with Washington over political values, the USA has long been the preferred primary source of external countervailing power... For Singapore, balance of power is a policy which discriminates in favour of a benign hegemon as opposed to one which guards against any potential hegemonic state.⁷

A policy that discriminates in favour of a hegemon is a policy in favour of preponderance. Singapore's leaders believe that it is this preponderance of US power that keeps the peace in Asia. The assumption is that a preponderant and benign US dissuades potential challengers from taking it on: the US is far too strong and has too many allies and friends (like Singapore) to make it worth any upstart's while to challenge it. This strong disincentive for others to challenge the US is what makes the region stable and peaceful, and in that sense, conducive to Singapore's security and well-being.

A major component of Singapore's foreign policy since the end of the Cold War has been to do its part in ensuring a strong US military and economic presence in the region. When the US withdrew from its bases in the

Philippines, Singapore was among the first to offer the US use of its naval and air bases. Malaysia and Indonesia followed later in allowing the US to use their naval facilities. Bilaterally, Singapore deepened its relations with the US through a series of agreements in free trade (2004), strategic framework cooperation (2005), strategic partnership dialogue (2012) and enhanced defence cooperation (2015). Multilaterally, Singapore facilitated US membership in forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asian Summit (EAS). Singapore was among the most vocal supporters of the US pivot to Asia and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), suggesting, for instance, that the former would not be credible without the latter.

Singapore's preference for US military preponderance, however, is conducted in an adroit and measured way, taking into consideration the balance of power principle. A believer in the balance of power would welcome China and India's rise, as Singapore does, so that over time, we arrive at a multipolar Asia with the US, Japan, China and India checking one another to approximate the erstwhile power equilibrium. But the rate of China's rise and Japan's political-strategic stupor since the 2000s (until Shinzo Abe became its premier for the second time in 2012) has led to a situation where China is the only credible peer competitor to the US.

⁷ Leifer, Michael, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 26.

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China's Rise and Singapore's Recalibration to a True Balance of Power

So, times are a-changin', as they say. While it remains clear that the US will remain militarily superior for some time to come, it is increasingly being eclipsed by China in economics. China's economy is expected to overtake that of the US around 2030. China has already replaced the US as the number one trading partner of most in Asia. Many countries, from Cambodia to Malaysia to Australia have prospered from trading with China and have either moved closer to China in diplomatic-political terms, or found it prudent to be more sensitive to China's interests in the region. With the US withdrawing from the TPP, most in Asia are looking to alternative regional initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), where China will perform a leading role.

Even more significant is Chinese President Xi Jinping's BRI, which seeks to connect East Asia, Central Asia, Africa and Europe through a series of infrastructure projects, including railways and ports. Through BRI, China has stumbled onto its most formidable soft power attribute: offering infrastructure and connectivity to the 60-odd countries over three continents that need these the most. Although there are formidable obstacles to the realisation of BRI, it has caught the imagination of

many. Can any Southeast Asian country afford not to be involved? If BRI comes to fruition, China, through economic means, would stand to "win friends and influence people".⁸

The question for Singapore is whether, after 30 years of comfortable sailing with a US preponderance strategy – which has proven to be a remarkably successful strategy in ensuring Singapore's security and prosperity – the time has come for a recalibration on the primacy issue. Recalibration might be particularly daunting precisely because the existing strategy has been so successful.

As China catches up with the US and as their geopolitical competition intensifies, Singapore has three options. First, maintain the existing strategic posture of favouring US predominance but engage China economically. This option is more feasible than commonly assumed, despite the recent contretemps between China and Singapore. China may chafe at the way Singapore invokes international law and freedom of navigation of the seas (which China sees as "the American line"), or the way Singapore and others have couched the (now aborted) TPP in terms of ensuring that the US continues to set the rules of the economic game, but China remains acutely aware that it is still far behind the US militarily. Moreover, given China's low per capita income (compared to the US) and recent economic slowdown, it is not a

⁸ Carnegie, Dale, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (London, Vermilion, 2012).

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given that it will overtake the US economically, or that it is clear what that overtaking actually means. China's best strategy is still to hide its strength and bide its time for the next 20 years.

The second option is to move away from an approach that favours US preponderance to one that emphasises a balance of power. In practice, this means a US that shares power with China in Asia, in part because it is urged on by its Asia-Pacific allies (such as Australia and Thailand) and strategic partners (such as Singapore), and in part because the US is no longer content to provide the public goods associated with being the hegemon in the region. But the most important reason for "sharing power" – resulting in a G2 or bipolar balance – will be because of China's growing hard and soft power. As I have argued above, if BRI takes off, more countries in the region and beyond will be drawn into China's economic orbit, much like Western Europe and East Asia were drawn into the US's during the Cold War. A consequence of this "growing with China" is that they are also likely to align themselves with China in political and strategic ways. If this happens, the US will have fewer steadfast allies and reliable partners in the region, and it will have to accommodate China's yearning for equal footing with it.

The third option is to anticipate the eventuality that China will replace the US as the hegemon. In one of the last

interviews that Lee Kuan Yew gave, two Harvard academics asked whether it was China's intention to replace the US as the superpower in Asia and perhaps the world. Lee's answer was unequivocal:

Of course. Why not? They have transformed a poor society by an economic miracle to become now the second-largest economy in the world... The Chinese will want to share this century as co-equals with the US... It is China's intention to be the greatest power in the world. The policies of all governments toward China, especially neighbouring countries, have already taken this into account.⁹

Lee's remarks implied that China would be satisfied with "co-equality" with the US this century; replacing the US as the "greatest power" on Earth could be postponed till the next century. Assume, for the purposes of argument, that China is less patient and will seek to overtake the US as the preeminent power around 2050. The question then becomes: should one cast one's lot – in the medium term (the next decade) – with the future hegemon?

Chinese think tanks and diplomats are already invoking the shadow of the future to counsel Singapore and others about the wisdom of correctly anticipating who represents the wave of the future. The implication here is, of course, that it is China, not the US.

⁹ Allison, Graham, et al, *Ibid*, p. 2-3.

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Although I have described Singapore as the classic anticipatory state elsewhere, my hunch is that this third option would be considered premature by Singapore's policymakers. The real choice is between the first two options. I would not be surprised if, in the next decade, Singapore moves from a "US as preponderant power" approach to one of "US-China power sharing" – call it a *true* balance of power – approach. If, for the next few decades, what China wants is to be considered as an equal to the US in Asia, it might be a situation that most in Asia, including Singapore, are ready to countenance.



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