THE SECURITY OF SMALL STATES: SINGAPORE'S CASE

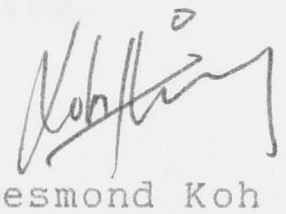
BY

DESMOND KOH CHEE HING

A SUBTHESIS IN PART FULFILMENT OF
THE MASTER OF ARTS (STRATEGIC STUDIES)
PRESENTED TO
THE STRATEGIC AND DEFENCE STUDIES CENTRE
RESEARCH SCHOOL OF PACIFIC STUDIES
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

MAY 1990

I certify that this subthesis is my own original work and that all sources used have been duly acknowledged.

Signed: 

Desmond Koh Chee Hing

15 May 1990

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my academic supervisor, Dr Leszek Buszynski and the Secretary of the Master degree course, Tina Lynam for their help and guidance during my stay at the SDSC.

This piece of work is dedicated to my parents, Koh Hong Thew and Ho Siew Hong, and to Eunice.

THE SECURITY OF SMALL STATES: SINGAPORE'S CASE

CONTENTS i

ABSTRACT

How do small states survive as independent political entities in the jungle of international politics? What are the conditions or strategies for survival? These are some of the issues examined in this paper with particular reference to the experience of Singapore.

Singapore has survived since 9 August 1965 as an independent political entity in a region not unaccustomed to the political demise of small states or armed conflicts since the Second World War. Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesian 'Confrontation', the French and American military involvements in Indochina, the Sino-Vietnamese war, Thai-Laos border armed conflicts, and most recently the Spratleys armed conflict between China and Vietnam, are salient examples. The region is also replete with irredentist violence of varying degrees.

Singapore's strategy for survival rests largely on the combination of intrinsic strength (a credible self-defence capability) and a strategy to harness as much 'derivative strength' (regionalism, alliance, diplomacy, et cetera) as possible. As will be argued, a small state can never hope to defend itself against a bigger power on its own and would need to derive additional strength for its military and

deterrent posture through various devices like an astute foreign policy, regionalism, and the manipulation of extra-regional interests.

The strategy for survival for a small state however is not without its costs. Small states with their innate deficiencies in material and manpower resources have to bear a disproportionately higher cost for their security. Also, they have very little influence over international or regional developments and are usually left to react to changes in their strategic environment. Such is the case of Singapore.

INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS OF SMALL STATE SECURITY

Small states1 in general face greater and more acute challenges to their security than larger states.2 Security is a multi-dimensional concept, broadly encompassing military, political and economic elements. In its military sense, security is the ability to deter or repel armed attack. In its political sense, security is orderly, effective government free from intimidation, subversion, or political violence. In its economic sense, security is material sufficiency, fair distribution, and the prospect of adapting to changing conditions in an orderly manner.3 What concerns us here is basically the <u>military</u> security of small states.

In an international system characterised by the absence of any central authority, the larger powers with greater material and human resources have a distinct advantage over the smaller ones. For a small state like Singapore, the

---

1. See Michael Handel, <u>Weak States In the International System</u>, London: Frank Cass, 1981, pp.3-65 and David Vital, <u>The Survival of Small States</u>, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp.1-12 for a good discussion of some of the difficulties in the classification of small states.
2. A possible counter-argument to that assertion is perhaps that the superpowers, given the possibility of mutual nuclear annihilation, have a much more acute security dilemma than the small state.
3. Steve Hoadley, <u>Security Cooperation in the South Pacific</u>, Peace Research Centre Working Paper No.41, p.1. It must be noted that these 'different' elements of security are not distinct quantities but are mutually reinforcing variables. For example economic insecurity can exacerbate or lead to political instability and <u>vice versa</u>.

vital question is therefore one of survival. As Brigadier-General (Reservist) Lee Hsien Loong puts it, "How do weak states survive, as integral political entities, in a hostile and inhospitable world? That is the question."4

The business of survival for small states is an extremely onerous one. The price which small states have to pay for survival is disproportionately high, given the innate deficiencies in material and human resources. Survival may be wrought by military and diplomatic strategies. The practical problems and constraints Singapore faces in ensuring its survival as an 'integral political entity' forms the subject of this paper. Using Singapore as a case study, this paper analyses some of the difficulties small states face in their quest for survival.

What are the constraints on defence faced by small states in general? The constraints on defence for a small state stem primarily from any or all of the following three fundamental disadvantages, namely, small territorial size, small population and limited resources. These constraints have important strategic implications.

---

4. BG Lee Hsien Loong in a speech at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs on 16 October 1984. Straits Times, 6 Nov 1984, p.20.

Firstly, small territorial size means the absence of strategic depth in the defence of a small state. As Handel puts it:

> States controlling only a small space are more vulnerable to attack, especially surprise attack. Having no strategic depth, strategic withdrawal is out of the question; they have little or no room to maneuver and face the danger of being quickly overrun; they are unable to "trade space for time" in order to reorganise their defenses and continue to fight. The loss of the first battle can mean the loss of the whole war....Defense in depth is not a viable strategy.5

Secondly, a small population would necessarily mean a smaller military force. Soldiers lost in battle also cannot be readily replaced. The cost of fielding all able-bodied citizens and the best minds for the defence of the country is a deterioration or decline of the country's economy. In the case of a `citizen army' like Singapore's, a prolonged all-out conflict may even destroy the economy.6 Hence, the strategic imperative is for a small state to fight a quick and decisive war, if deterrence and diplomacy fail.

Thirdly, the constraint of limited resources is axiomatic. It limits the number of choices open to the

---

5. Handel, op. cit., pp.70-71, quoting Panayotis Pipinelis, "Integration, Detente, and the Small Countries'" in Nato Letter, 15 (November 1966), p.10.
6. The then Defence Minister of Singapore, Dr Goh Keng Swee remarked that mobilising of Singapore's reserve brigades into action would "tear the guts out of the civilian economy." See Straits Times, 7 Aug 1971.

leaders of small states in all matters of the state. In terms of defence, it precludes high self-sufficiency in weapons and ammunition production; hence a high dependence on foreign sources of supply. This dependency renders a small state vulnerable to external coercion and blackmail in times of conflict. Moreover trade routes may be disrupted or blockaded by the hostile power(s) in times of conflict, preventing much needed military supplies from reaching the small state.

In sum, the constraints imposed on the defence of a small state means that it has a much narrower margin of error, both in peacetime and in war. Any strategic mistake can be fatal. As David Vital puts it

> ....where the consequences of error are catastrophic and the margin of error is extremely small, political and intellectual talents of a very high order are needed if catastrophe is to be avoided....The failings and errors of the leaders of great powers can be disguised and compensated for by the organisational and material resources they can bring to bear....But the errors of the leaders of minor powers have immediate and unmistakable consequences and are only too often beyond repair; and there is no disguising them.7

Fortunately for small states, the strategic deficiencies engendered by their natural endowments (or the lack of them) may be mitigated by certain measures. The

---

7. Vital, op. cit., p.12.

lack of strategic depth for example means that the small state must never be caught by a strategic surprise. This requires comprehensive and effective intelligence of potential threat(s) and an ever ready armed force. Constant vigilance is vital. Its military forces should also be highly mobile and be capable of being mobilized and deployed in the shortest time possible. For a small state with "no space to trade for time", time is very crucial and may partially compensate for the lack of space. Its strategy must therefore stress rapid deployment of forces to prevent the enemy forces from achieving even a toe-hold on its territory. And if the enemy forces do achieve such a lodgement, a highly mobile force would allow the small state to open another front at the rear of the invading forces.

The quantitative deficiency of the armed forces may be mitigated by universal conscription and qualitative enhancement of the available forces. Universal conscription is one way of tapping all available human resources for the defence of a small state. Small states like Switzerland, Sweden, Singapore, et cetera all have conscription armies. Effective and comprehensive training of available military personnel would also improve what Klaus Knorr calls "the military worth" of the armed forces,

> Military worth means expected overall military effectiveness, and this value depends on many qualitative factors....obvious that most qualitative factors are unconnected with size of country....8

Acquisition of technology-intensive as opposed to manpower-intensive military hardwares would also reduce the manpower demands on the small state's military while improving the military worth of the forces.9

All these measures are of course contingent on the availability of resources. The constraints of limited resources may either be mitigated by external aid and/or more effective utilization and allocation of the country's available resources. What is required is astute planning. For example the high dependence on external military supplies may be alleviated by the creation of local arms industries with a view for the export markets so as to reap the benefits of the economies of scale. Sweden, Switzerland and Singapore are again good cases in point. Such local arms industries will ensure that in times of conflict, the small state would have at least a limited independent capacity to replace weapons and ammunitions lost in combat.

Moreover, every small state's defence problems must be considered within its strategic milieu. It is well nigh

---

8. "Klaus Knorr: Constraints on the Defense of a Small Country" in The Defense of Small and Medium-sized Countries, Center For Strategic Studies Paper no. 17 August 1982, Tel Aviv University, pp.2-3.
9. Ibid., p.7.

impossible to generalize with sufficient accuracy on the problems of small state defence other than on some very broad principles like those discussed above. Every small state's unique strategic milieu would confer additional advantages or disadvantages to its military defence. Handel refers to a weak state's "external or derived" strength10 while Vital proposes that "the capacity of the minor power to sustain conflict with a great power depends...on contingent factors and on contingent advantages and capabilities...."11

The constraints placed on a small state's defence however, mean that in military terms, small states in general are defenceless against a determined military onslaught by a bigger power. It is important to note that such a determined military effort may range from an outright conventional attack to low-level military harassments without any formal declaration of war. Hence, it is obvious that a small state cannot hope to survive for long if it bases its security solely on military defence. Military defence has a vital role to play in the overall national security strategy for a small state. A credible defence force ensures that the small state is capable of at least inflicting a considerable degree of damage on any potential predator. That would not only complicate the risk calculus of any intending predator but would also ensure that the

---

10. Handel, op. cit., pp.68-70.
11. Vital, op. cit., p.9.

predator does not easily accomplish a military fait accompli before the possible intervention of powers friendly to the small state under threat.

A small state must therefore also rely on an arsenal of derivative strengths to ensure its security. These derivative strengths may range from alliance with an external big power (Israel and the United States of America), to a policy of strict armed neutrality (as in Switzerland). There is a wide and varied range of political, economic and diplomatic measures which a small state may adopt to ensure its security.12 How and what measures a particular small state may adopt will depend largely on its strategic position or environment.

These measures however usually carry with them high political, economic and/or military costs.13 Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union in the 1960s might have ensured its security vis-a-vis the United States; but it is also arguable that it had put Cuba under greater risk of U.S. military actions. For example, had the U.S. invaded Cuba during the Cuban Missiles Crisis in 1962, Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union would have brought it disaster, even if the Soviet Union were to retaliate against the U.S. by striking at Turkey. The danger of smaller

---

12. Such measures as taken by Singapore will be the focus of our discussion in Chapter Four.
13. See David Vital, The Inequality of States, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, pp.3-7.

alliance partners becoming proxies or pawns in big powers' rivalries is very real. The point is that every policy choice entails a certain cost to the small state; be it political, economic and/or military.

Singapore's strategy for survival is largely predicated on two synergistic components: a credible defence force and a foreign policy tuned to the nuances of the game of balance of power. As argued earlier, small states can only manage a relatively inferior military force, and more than any other powers, they have to rely heavily on derivative or contingent political and diplomatic factors as well.

Chapter Two will examine Singapore's strategic environment with regard to the management of Singapore's security. Chapter Three will then discuss the problems of defence faced by Singapore. Finally, Chapter Four will examine the derivative factors important to Singapore's security.

CHAPTER TWO : SINGAPORE'S STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

A stark feature of Singapore's strategic environment is its geographical minuteness in relation to its immediate neighbours. Singapore's population size is also dwarfed by that of Malaysia and Indonesia. This great geographical and demographic disparity is rendered even more conspicuous by the contrasting ethnic composition of Singapore's population with that of its immediate neighbours. Table 1 below highlights the differences between Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia in terms of geographical and population sizes; while Table 2 shows the ethnic compositions of the respective populations.

Table 1 : Relative Territorial and Population Sizes

	Territorial Size	Population
Singapore	618 sq km	2,690,000
Malaysia	329,758 sq km	16,920,000
Indonesia	1,919,443 sq km	170,200,000

Source: Country Profile 1989-90 Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1990.

Table 2 : Relative Ethnic Composition of Populations

	Chinese	Malay	Others
Singapore	75.9%	15.2%	8.9%
Malaysia	31.8%	57.7%	10.5%
Indonesia	3.0%	96.0%	1.0%

Source: Country Profile 1989-90 Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1990.

Singapore's relative economic affluence also marks it out from the region (see Table 3 below). Singapore's per capita income is four times that of Malaysia and twelve times that of Indonesia. And as an island-nation that services the export and import activities of the neighbouring countries, Singapore is the focal point of regional commerce. These factors have combined to project Singapore as the "odd boy" of the neighbourhood.

Table 3: Relative Economic Figures in US Dollars

	GNP	Per Capita Income
Singapore	17.97bn	6,431
Malaysia	26.34bn	1,636
Indonesia	86.47bn	530

Source: Asia Yearbook 1988, Far Eastern Economic Review.

Compounding the factors of scale, ethnicity and economic development, are the legacies of recent history.

Singapore's separation from Malaysia in August 1965 climaxed a period of volatile ethnicity-centred politics while part of the Federation from September 1963 to August 1965. Separation was in essence the product of an irreconcilable contest between two visions for an independent Malaysia, namely, the United Malay National Organisation's (UMNO) vision of a Malay-dominated political system based on the concept of the "bargain" and the People's Action Party's (PAP) vision of a "Malaysian Malaysia".1

The PAP's campaign for a 'Malaysian Malaysia' threatened the political dominance of the Malays who regarded themselves as bumiputras ('belonging to the soil') and hence the rightful sole proprietor to the country. This assertion of Malay political dominance was fuelled by the Chinese dominance of commerce and wealth in the country. Retaining political dominance was seen by UMNO as necessary to the eventual re-distribution of economic wealth in the country - hence the subsequent introduction of the New Economic Policy under the UMNO-led government. The issue which broke the federation was the ethnic hostilities between the Malays and Chinese stirred up by the different

---

1. See Diane K Mauzy (ed.) Politics In the Asean States, Kuala Lumpur: Maricans, Undated, pp.151-160 for a concise analysis of the tumultuous politics of that period. The concept of the 'bargain' postulates that political power in Malaysia should reside with the bumiputra Malay race in return for the granting of Malaysian citizenship to the non-Malays. The 'Malaysian Malaysia' argument however contends that all Malaysians are equal and that Malaysia should not be organised on the basis of any structural racial discrimination.

political parties. The then Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman decided that in order to avert a major racial flare-up, Singapore had to leave the federation.

However, if Singapore's separation from Malaysia was meant as a desire on the part of the Malaysian Prime Minister to excise what he perceived to be a cancerous growth on the Malaysian body politic, it was perceived by the Singaporean leaders as a direct threat to the survival of Singapore. As Michael Leifer puts it, separation "was not an expression of separatism but of rejection....survival became the watchword of State and of policy."2

Singapore's security was also earlier contested by the then Indonesian President Soekarno's adventuristic campaign of konfrontasi against, ironically, Singapore's merger with Malaysia and the Borneo territories of Sabah and Sarawak. That konfrontasi episode revealed to the Singaporean leaders the danger of Singapore's security being subverted by the policies of a revolutionary regime in the neighbouring countries. Indeed when prompted, Singaporean leaders have alluded to such a fear of irrational leaders coming into power in the neighbouring countries.3 In the words of BG Lee Hsien Loong, "...Singapore cannot imagine what it would

---

2. Michael Leifer, "The Conduct of Foreign Policy" in Sandhu, K and Wheatley, Paul (eds.) Management of Success, Singapore: ISEAS, 1989, p.968.
3. Straits Times, 24 Jul 1988, p.1.

be like to have an obscurantist irrational government in charge of the far shores of the Straits of Johor."4

Singapore's immediate security concerns are therefore tied to the policies and actions of Malaysia and Indonesia. Hence it is imperative to examine Singapore's relations with Malaysia and Indonesia in the context of Singapore's perception of its security concerns.

Singapore-Malaysia

Singapore and Malaysia have been described as constituting a "single strategic entity".5 According to the Chief of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), Lt-Gen Winston Choo, "one lesson of the Malayan Campaign in World War II that still holds is the indivisibility of the defence of Malaysia and Singapore, and the fact that the countries are now two sovereign nations does not change this."6 The indivisibility of the defence of these two countries being "an inescapable consequence of geography."7 A recognition of this indivisibility in the area of air defence has been institutionalised under the Integrated Air Defence System

---

4. Straits Times, 21 Jul 1988, p.24.
5. This point has been reiterated frequently by Singaporean leaders, including Goh Chok Tong, Lee Hsien Loong and the Chief of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), Lt-Gen Winston Choo. Straits Times, 23 March 1989, p.23. The Malaysian Armed Forces Chief, General Tan Sri Hashim Mohammed Ali has also alluded to this indivisibility of the defence of the two countries when he spoke at the SAF's Temasek Club in September 1988, Straits Times, 21 May 1989, p.1.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

(IADS) which operates under the umbrella of the Five-Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA).

Tentative steps have also been taken with regard to bilateral joint exercises involving ground troops. In May 1989, a first-ever one week joint land exercise between the armed forces of Singapore and Malaysia codenamed Semangat Bersatu or Unity in Spirit, was held at the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI).8 It was hailed as a milestone in the defence relations between the two countries as the previous land exercise involving troops from the two countries were conducted under the auspices of the FPDA and only once, in 1970 (Exercise Bersatu Padu), was it conducted in West Malaysia.9 In October 1989, the armies of Singapore and Malaysia held a second joint exercise in Sarawak. It appears that these bilateral land exercises would be held on an annual basis.10

Singapore-Malaysian relations are however still characterised by the historical baggage of deep-seated resentments which the quest for Malaysia had aroused. When Singapore became independent, it fashioned its own society according to the principles of multi-culturalism with emphasis on racial integration. But in Malaysia, the government took the opposite track, it created a

---

8. Straits Times, 21 May 1989, p.1.
9. Ibid.
10. Straits Times, 25 May 1989, p.17.

constitutional and political basis for the continued dominance of the Malays over other groups in society. Singapore's economic progress also out-stripped that of Malaysia over the years. What emerged today are two extremely close geographical neighbours who share a common history and common social and cultural links, but with almost contrasting worldviews and values. For Singapore, its economic progress and extensive links with the West have resulted in an outlook that is basically 'North' in nature; whereas in Malaysia, its high dependence on the export of certain basic commodities and the extractive nature of its economy align it with the aspirations of the 'South'. Singapore is also decidedly pro-Western in its international orientations, but Malaysia still hankers after the image of a Third World advocate. The close physical, historical and cultural bonds which could have been assets for the development of good neighbourly relations, when juxtaposed with the contrasting worldviews and values, can become areas of political and emotional contentions.

Islam is also a potential source or force of political conflict between Malaysia and Singapore. Islam is closely tied to the culture, traditions, and communal identity of the Malays in both Malaysia and Singapore. As the Malays in Singapore constitute only a minority of about 15.2% of the population, Islam has never been a crucial issue of national politics in Singapore. In Malaysia however, where political

power reposed in the majority Malay race (57.7%), the politicisation of Islam is perhaps inevitable, especially when different Malay-based political parties compete for the votes of the Malay electorate. The politicisation of Islam in Malaysia can quite easily spill-over into the Malaysia-Singapore relationship. For example, Israel's President Herzog visit to Singapore11 developed into a major political issue between Malaysia and Singapore precisely because anti-zionism had become an issue of Malaysian politics. For a Malay politician in Malaysia, the failure to protest against the Herzog visit to Singapore would undermine his or her own political standing among the Malay electorate. At the same time, these Malay politicians, conscious of the impact which statements critical of Singapore can have on the Malay electorate, often resorted to 'Singapore-bashing' to advance their political fortunes. The Herzog visit and the Malays-in-the-SAF controversy12 were heavan-sent opportunities for these Malay politicians in Malaysia. The political rumpus

---

11. The Israeli Head of State Chaim Herzog visited Singapore from 18-20 November 1986. That official visit aroused adverse and at times hostile reactions from various political, religious and social groupings in Malaysia. Charges that Singapore had become a "bastion for Zionism in Southeast Asia" and threats to cut off Singapore's water supplies from Johor were heard during the din.

12. This controversy arose as a result of BG Lee Hsien Loong's statement , in response to a question during a 'meet the people' session, that Malay soldiers in the SAF are not allocated certain sensitive positions because "we live in Southeast Asia....If there is a conflict and the Singapore Armed Forces is called upon to defend the homeland, we don't want to put any of our soldiers in a difficult position where his emotions for the nation may come into conflict with his emotions for his religion..." That statement further soured a already strained relationship following the Herzog visit. See the Straits Times, 25 Mar 1987, p.1.

created by the Herzog affair and the controversy regarding the question of Malays in the SAF reveals the sensitive nature of the political relationship between Singapore and Malaysia.

Another factor which contributes to the difficult Singapore-Malaysia relationship is the fact that not all Malaysians are convinced that the build-up of the Singapore Armed Forces is not directed specifically at Malaysia. The popular 'Johor scenario' postulates the invasion and occupation of Southern Johor by Singaporean forces in the event of an armed conflict between the two countries. Hence the argument goes, Singapore maintains a highly mobile force structure, especially its 350 AMX-13 light tanks and nearly 1,000 armoured personnel carriers as well as the concentration on high-powered 155mm artillery. That Malaysia should perceive such a security threat from the build-up of the SAF is understandable but unrealistic. Given Singapore's minute size and almost total dependence on external trade and supplies of food and water (the latter mainly from Johor), the last thing which any Singaporean leader would want is a war. As BG Lee Hsien Loong put it in July 1988 before the Harvard Business School Alumni Club of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur,

> Suppose...by an accidental turn of events, Singapore found herself in charge of the southern parts of West Malaysia. How could 2.6 million Singaporeans occupy a vast territory many times the size of Singapore? How could we control the large, diverse and spread out population, several times larger than Singapore's? How would we handle sensitive and delicate religious and communal issues, in which we have no experience whatsoever, without violent reactions? Immediately Singapore would discover that she had simply added to her problems, both internally and internationally, and would wish a return to status quo ante. So any Singapore government would be crazy to try it.13

Hence, a more accurate and realistic characterisation of Singapore's security planning is that it sees any landward military threat as naturally coming via the Malaysian peninsula and hence the strategic imperative to meet such a threat before it reaches the Johor-Singapore Causeway. Whether the identity of the hypothetical landward threat is Malaysia or a third country is quite academic because the security planning of any country proceeds on the basis of its own perception of its security environment in which geography plays a prominent, if not dominant role. The facts of geography alone dictate that Singapore needs a highly mobile force to meet any landward threat before it reaches the island.

The period from the outbreak of the Herzog controversy in late 1986 till October 1987 when the Prime Ministers of

---

13. Straits Times, 21 Jul 1988, p.24.

the two countries met in Vancouver proved to be a trying time for Singapore-Malaysian relations. In October 1987, Prime Ministers Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Mahathir Mohamad met in Vancouver following the Commonwealth Heads of States Meeting to discuss bilateral relations. Dr Mahathir told the Singapore Prime Minister that "while he wants better relations with Singapore, he hopes the climate for these relations would not become inhospitable because the two countries run one-man-one-vote system."14 Dr Mahathir then said that Singapore should approach its problems "in a more circumspect or wider perspective, taking the feelings of Malaysian Malays into consideration."15 Mr Lee Kuan Yew "took note" of what Dr Mahathir had said.16

It appears that the brief period of soured bilateral relations had a somewhat therapeutic effect on the thinking of the leaders from both sides of the Causeway. It became realised by the leaders of Singapore and Malaysia that that bilateral relationship is of utmost important to the security and national interests of the two close neighbours and should therefore not be taken for granted. Instead conscious efforts should be made to "narrow differences" and enlarge the "common grounds".17 As BG Lee Hsien Loong puts it, Singapore and Malaysia "are not opponents playing a game of chess, but partners playing a game of bridge. The

---

14. Straits Times, 20 Oct 1987, p.32.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Goh Chok Tong, Straits Times, 26 Feb 1990, p.1.

objective is not to checkmate the other player, but to win as many tricks together as possible."18 That realisation was followed by a series of initiatives to enhance the level of cooperation between the two countries. These included the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Sale of Water and Gas to Singapore, the first ever State visit to Singapore by the Malaysian King since Separation, and the identification of various areas of economic and military cooperation.

The younger generation of Singaporean leaders led by Goh Chok Tong and BG Lee Hsien Loong seem to have come to the view that Singapore's security and continued prosperity are closely tied to the security and economic well-being of Malaysia and Indonesia. It is in Singapore's interests to create a web of interdependent economic, political and security relationships with Malaysia and Indonesia. Hence the concept of a "triangle of growth" encompassing Singapore, Johor and Batam.19

Singapore-Indonesia

Singapore's relations with Indonesia are not marked by the same kind of emotions and contentions as that with Malaysia. In a sense, Singapore-Indonesia relations are more on an even-keel and are more "rational", ie., based on mutual benefits and pragmatic calculations. Perhaps the

18. Straits Times, 21 Jul 1988, p.24.
19. Goh Chok Tong, Straits Times, 21 Dec 1989, p.3.

main factor being that Indonesia does not consider Singapore as a threat now or in the future.20 Given its vast geography and huge population, Indonesia can take a more detached attitude towards Singapore's military build-up. Indeed, Soenarso Djajusman opined that "one day, when Malaysia's population became big enough," it would have the same attitude as Indonesia's in this matter and would no longer regard Singapore as a threat."21

From Singapore's perspective, whatever legacy may remain from the konfrontasi episode is the reminder that the political stability and character of the ruling regimes in the neighbouring countries can have an important bearing on the security of Singapore. The lesson being that Singapore must never take its security and peace for granted; it must always prepare its defence so as to cope with the worst case scenario of having revolutionary (be it religious or nationalistic) regimes right at its doorsteps. The Soeharto leadership in Indonesia with its emphasis on national economic and social developments has created much confidence and trust in Singapore towards its largest neighbour. Indeed Lee Kuan Yew has on many occasions publicly singled out the stabilising impact of the Soeharto leadership on ASEAN security and stability. Therefore, the political uncertainties surrounding the Soeharto succession is a

---

20. Straits Times, 10 Feb 1990 quoting Indonesian Ambassador to Malaysia Soenarso Djajusman.
21. Ibid.

source of concern for Singapore, especially if the political heat generated by the competition for the Presidential office results in a throw-back to the nationalistic era of Soekarno.

For the present however, Singapore-Indonesian relations have gradually expanded over the years and have blossomed in the last year or two. This positive trend may be attributed to the "personal chemistry" between Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and President Soeharto of Indonesia as well as pragmatic calculation of mutual benefits if areas of cooperation are expanded and enhanced. As Ambassador Soenarso Djajusman opined, Indonesia needed to be friendly with Singapore for practical reasons, especially for the purpose of trade.22

In the field of security cooperation between Singapore and Indonesia, the most recent and positive expressions being the joint development and operation of the Siabu Air Weapons Range near Pekan Baru in Sumarta and the signing of the Army Memorandum of Understanding allowing the SAF "almost unlimited access" to train on Indonesian soils.23 In return Singapore will allow Indonesia access to its military technology in for example, the use of Singapore's simulators.24 Other joint efforts may include the maintenance and servicing of the F-16s and the upgrading of

22. Straits Times, 10 Feb 1990.
23. Straits Times, 23 Mar 1989, p.1.
24. Ibid.

the Skyhawks, which are common to the Air Forces of the two countries.25 According to an experienced observer of the Indonesian scene, Yang Razali Kassim, for "the budget-starved Indonesian Armed Forces, co-operation with Singapore is a cheaper way to develop some of their own facilities and spread the costs of maintaining military hardware."26

For Singapore, such extensive cooperation would serve to increase the stake which Indonesia (and for that matter, Malaysia), has on the well-being of Singapore. By tieing the interests of Indonesia and Malaysia together with those of Singapore, Singapore has in a way increased the probability of Indonesia and/or Malaysia coming to its assistance in the event of a military threat from another power (most likely in the form of low-level harassments or interdiction of Singapore's maritime traffic to exert political pressure on the Singaporean government of the day). At the same time and more importantly, such a "spiderweb" (Try Sutrisno) of mutually beneficial relationships would reduce the probability of either Indonesia and/or Malaysia wanting to destroy Singapore, either directly through an outright invasion or indirectly by subverting Singapore's security or economic interests.

---

25. Straits Times, 27 Apr 1989.
26. Ibid.

Strategic Significance of Singapore

Singapore's location at the crossroads of maritime and air traffic between the Indian and Pacific Oceans endows it with a degree of strategic significance insofar as the major powers with interests in such maritime and air traffic are concerned. The observation made by Yuan-li Wu in 1972 remains valid:

> To a Pacific-oriented nation, Singapore is the gateway to the Indian Ocean and Western Europe. To an Indian Ocean-oriented or European nation, Singapore is the gateway to the Pacific....Therefore, all great powers and maritime trading nations that value unimpeded passage between the two oceans have an interest in the maintenance of this condition, although the degree of this interest varies from country to country.27

Singapore therefore possesses an intrinsic strategic significance, the implications of which are twofold: Firstly, Singapore must ensure that the major powers have a minimum interest in seeing a viable and independent Singapore acting as a gateway for unimpeded maritime and air traffic between the Indian and Pacific Oceans; and secondly, following the first condition, Singapore may become an object of competition amongst the great and regional powers if it is deemed to be unable to defend itself against external encroachments or military pressures. Singapore's international orientation therefore has to be such that the

---

27. Yuan-li, Wu, Strategic Significance of Singapore: A Study in Balance of Power, Washington, D.C.: Foreign Affairs Study 6, December 1972, p.5.

minimum interests of the major powers are best accommodated if Singapore's political and economic status quo is maintained.

Insofar as Singapore's strategic perceptions are concerned, they appear to be:

a) As an extremely small state, Singapore faces a theoretical military threat from Indonesia and/or Malaysia - the threat being measured in terms of objective military capabilities and the capacity to sustain armed conflicts;

b) Any invasive threat from a power other than Indonesia and Malaysia either:

i) has to occupy Peninsula Malaysia first. Powers with sufficient or potential manpower resources to conduct such a landward invasion of Singapore via Peninsula Malaysia are China, India, Vietnam, Burma and Thailand, or

ii) it must have the maritime capability to project its forces to Southeast Asia. Powers which possess that capability are the Soviet Union and the United States, and in the late 1990s, possibly regional powers like China, India and Japan.28

---

28. At the ruling PAP Convention on 25 February 1990, Goh Chok Tong opined that if there is a power vacuum resulting from the US withdrawal from its military bases in the Philippines, regional powers would emerge. These regional powers are China, India, Japan and "perhaps Indonesia". According to the heir-apparent to Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, the best long term bet is Japan, as its strong economy would allow it to develop political influence and military muscles. Straits Times, 26 Feb 1990, p.18.

Hence there is a perceptible hierarchy of potential threats facing Singapore.29 That hierarchy of potential threats is clearly coterminous with the proximity of the states to Singapore. In this regard, the first circle of potential threats has to be from Malaysia and Indonesia. The second circle of potential threats would involve the powers capable of launching a landward invasion via Peninsula Malaysia, viz., China, India, Vietnam, Burma and Thailand. The next rung of potential threats would be from the superpowers and regional powers with a highly developed maritime capability.

For Singapore therefore, its military defence efforts have to serve two broad strategic functions, i.e., be sufficient in deterring an armed conflict with Malaysia and/or Indonesia; and, be able to work in concert with the armed forces of Malaysia and/or Indonesia in the common defence against an external threat. For a small state like Singapore therefore, the policy of deterrence has its practical limitations.30 To be sure, possession of a credible military capability is of vital importance and

---

29. An important point of clarification is perhaps necessary at this juncture. Threat perception is generally a function of two elements, viz., perceived capability and perceived intention. However, when threat perception is used in the context of this paper, it refers simply to perceived capability and does not impute any intention on the sources of perceived threats. Hence the allusion to "potential threat" instead of "threat".

30. Goh Chok Tong has alluded to the limitations of a policy of deterrence for Singapore. See the Straits Times, 5 Dec 1988, p.1.

makes great strategic sense; but that has to be supplemented by increasing its arsenal of derivative strengths as well. These derivative strengths include ensuring a favourable regional balance of power and increasing the stake regional countries (especially Malaysia and Indonesia) may have on the continued well-being of Singapore.

The Singapore government is aware that Singapore needs to "make provision against the possibility of only a middling, not a big, power attack".31 As Dr Goh Keng Swee stated in Parliament in December 1968,

> ...if a really major threat develops, say an invasion by 50 divisions or a threat to deliver a nuclear attack, then a situation arises which concerns not only ourselves but all the major world powers. An assault by 50 divisions or a nuclear threat can only be mounted by a super-power, or by countries acting with the connivance and support of a super-power. As such, other super-powers will be drawn in and the resolution of a conflict of this scale will rest with the giants.32

Hence Singapore's quest for a military deterrent capability must be measured against lower level threats that may arise from smaller powers rather than the big powers. However, even the acquisition of such a limited defence capability can pose serious difficulties for a small state, as the next chapter will highlight.

---

31. Lee Kuan Yew, Straits Times, 20 Jul 1967, p.1.
32. Straits Times, 4 Dec 1968, p.9.

CHAPTER THREE: A MILITARY DETERRENT CAPABILITY

Singapore attained its independence on 9 August 1965 as a consequence of its separation from the Federation of Malaysia. Separation meant that Singapore now had to take care of its own defence. The continued presence of the British military bases in Singapore provided a temporary security umbrella while the infant state took steps to build an independent defence capability. The British however gave notice to the Singaporean leaders that the days of its military presence in Singapore were numbered. As a result, the quest for a military deterrent capability gathered pace and urgency. Lee Kuan Yew stated that

> ...by 1972, we must demonstrate that we have the wherewithal to make it extremely unpleasant for anybody contemplating taking liberties with us...1

At the time of separation, Singapore had only two regular infantry battalions, viz., the First and Second Singapore Infantry Regiments (1 SIR and 2 SIR). The strengths of these two battalions were enervated by the transfer of some soldiers to the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) and besides, the two battalions had been trained mainly for internal security functions.2 The Navy consisted

---

1. As quoted by Dick Wilson, The Future Role of Singapore, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1972, p.61.
2. The Singapore Armed Forces, Public Affairs Department, Ministry of Defence Singapore, 1981, p.18.

of two old ships, the RSS Panglima and the RSS Singapura and there was no Air Force to speak of.

From such a small motley of personnel, equipment and military expertise, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) was to be created. At the beginning, the emphasis was on creating in the shortest possible time a semblance of an independent defence force. Such a force was deemed necessary for Singapore in order "to deter other nations from attacking it, to help maintain internal security, to assist in the development of national self-confidence, and to purchase its place in any future regional military alliance".3 Above all, it was Lee Kuan Yew's conviction that

> You can have the best of political climates, but if the power to sustain your position is not there, then you must lose. In the last resort it is the power which decides what happens, and therefore, it behoves us to ensure that we always have overwhelming power on our side.4

A credible deterrent capability is thus deemed as essential for safeguarding Singapore's security and prosperity. Possession of such a capability provides a ballast not only for Singapore's foreign policy, but also for Singapore's nation-building and economic development.

---

3. Dick Wilson, op. cit., p.61.
4. Alex Josey, Lee Kuan Yew: The Struggle for Singapore, Sydney: Augus and Robertson, 1974, pp.278-9.

Once the decision was made to proceed with the building up of the SAF, the difficult tasks of planning and implementing the plans had to be faced. In this regard Singapore's defence build-up has been conditioned by a number of constraints. Some of these constraints are similar to those attendant to small state defence5 while others are peculiar to Singapore.

Deciding on the Type of Armed Forces

The first issue to be resolved was what type of armed forces should Singapore develop. At least four options were considered, namely,

a) a small, highly-trained regular army;

b) a large regular army;

c) a small regular corps supplemented by a volunteer reserve; and

d) a small regular corps supplemented by a conscript reserve.6

The major constraint faced by the Singapore leadership then was the financial and economic costs of maintaining an effective armed forces. A small, highly-trained regular army is financially feasible but strategically lacking because of its small size. A large regular army is out of the question due to the exorbitant costs involved, both

---

5. Some of these general constraints are discussed in Chapter One above.
6. The Singapore Armed Forces, op. cit., p.18.

financially and in terms of the opportunity costs to the civilian economy. A small regular corps supplemented by a volunteer reserve appears viable but a volunteer force inevitably lacks the type of professional expertise required for a modern armed forces.

The choice of a small regular corps supplemented by a conscript reserve was eventually adopted. Moreover, conscription or 'National Service' was also viewed right from the beginning as a vehicle for nation-building and for the inculcation of values deemed essential for the progress of Singapore, namely "values like discipline, loyalty, leadership and other useful qualities".7 As a SAF publication puts it,

> ...an army based on a model of a regular corps supplemented by a conscript reserve would not encroach excessively on the financial and manpower needs of the nation as a whole, while meeting the numerical requirements as rapidly as possible....It was also hoped that this model would serve as a vehicle to develop patriotism and help create a national identity through the development of a multi-racial army with no communal loyalties but rather one commitment to the defence of the nation.8

The then Foreign Minister, S. Rajaratnam, in a speech in 1967 remarked that the government's goal was "to make every citizen a soldier". He also said that under the

---

7. Dr Goh Keng Swee's budget speech, Straits Times, 4 Dec 1968, p.1.
8. The Singapore Armed Forces, op. cit., p.18.

National Service scheme, "the "tragedy" that had befallen many newly-independent countries - military dictatorship - could be avoided". Said Rajaratnam,

> Where defence is put solely in the hands of a professional army, the army sooner or later becomes a law unto itself. It becomes a ruling caste. But where, as under our scheme, the able-bodied civilians are also trained soldiers, a military takeover becomes pretty remote.9

In Search of Foreign Expertise and Assistance

In its search for foreign assistance, Singapore was "somewhat forced" to choose the Israeli advisers "because several countries side-stepped (Singapore's) approaches for assistance."10 According to Singapore's current Ambassador to the United Nations, Professor Chan Heng Chee, "assistance was discreetly sought from non-aligned Asian and African countries but the response was poor as many of them had reservations about assisting an unknown state in the sensitive area of defence. Eventually, the government of Israel responded and the first Israeli mission arrived at the end of 1965."11 The Israeli advisers were in Singapore

---

9. Straits Times, 2 Sep 1967, p.4. On 29 August 1972, Rajaratnam again alluded to the point that a large professional army carried with it "the threat of an army take-over", Straits Times, 29 Aug 1972, p.9.
10. Straits Times, 15 Apr 1974, p.14.
11. Chan Heng Chee, "Singapore" in Zakaria Haji Ahmad and Harold Crouch (eds.), Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.140.

on a strictly advisory capacity and they numbered some forty-five at the height of their presence in 1969.12

The need to seek foreign help in building up Singapore's defence force reveals a weakness faced by small states in their quest for military security as this dependence on foreign assistance has its political costs. Singapore had to seek assistance from other non-aligned states because as a newly independent state "fresh from the yoke of colonialism", Singapore's international credibility and political standing would be adversely affected if it were to bask under the friendly tutelage of a Western power. Indeed Indonesia insisted that the continued presence of the British military bases in Singapore made it a neo-colonialist outpost. President Soekarno's aggressive military policy of konfrontasi in the early 1960s was proclaimed as preventing the consolidation of the neo-colonialist edifice of Federation between Singapore, Peninsula Malaya and the British Borneo territories.

---

12. The presence of the Israeli defence advisers was first broached in the local press on 14 April 1974. See the Straits Times, 14 Apr 1974, p.1. The Israelis helped to conceptualise the National Service scheme and the build-up of the Singapore defence forces was modelled after the Israeli Defence Forces whose fast and compressed training system also met the needs of Singapore then in creating a deterrent force rapidly. The Israeli advisers helped set up the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute and were also involved in the development of each arm of the armed forces as well as certain specialist functions like logistics, training, general staff and the setting up of the Armed Forces Technical Institute.

More importantly, Singapore's acceptance of the Israeli assistance continues to colour the perception of Singapore by its immediate Muslim neighbours, particularly Malaysia. The Israeli connection has the unfortunate effect of making Malaysia and Indonesia project their perception of Israel onto Singapore. Hence the popular, though inaccurate13, analogy of Singapore as aspiring to be an "Israel of South-East Asia".

That Singapore recognizes the political and diplomatic side-effects of its security association with Israel is underlined by its continued support for the United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338 regarding the Palestinian question and the public downplaying of that Israeli connection. As recently as February 1990, Lee Kuan Yew alluded to the more appropriate Swiss model of defence for Singapore as compared to the Israeli's.

Perhaps it is true that Singapore was "somewhat forced" to accept the choice of Israeli advisers. Given the dire security situation in which Singapore found itself after separation, the imperative to create a credible defence capability overshadowed whatever political costs were entailed. Twenty-five years hence, Singapore possesses a

---

13. The most obvious difference between Singapore and Israel is that while Israel's existence has, till recently,been disputed by the Arab states, Singapore's existence is accepted internationally and regionally, Singapore is an active member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

professional military establishment unrivalled in the region in terms of professionalism, technical expertise and equipment. Perhaps the time has arrived to mitigate the political "unwisdom"14 of invoking the Israeli assistance in the building up of the SAF.

Military-Civil Society Relations

The acceptance of the role of the armed forces by the society at large is vital to the functioning of a citizen-army. As such the relationship between the military and society has to be symbiotic and well-nurtured. With barely twenty-five years of independence, Singapore faces difficulties in nurturing that symbiosis.

One major problem which Singapore faced in the early years of its defence build-up was the absence of a strong military tradition. Though military voluntarism has been a part of Singapore's pre-independent history, beginning with the formation of the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps (SVRC) in 1854, the acceptance by the dominant Chinese community of military service was slow in coming.15 As early as 1952, the British colonial government tried to create a local armed militia for the purposes of internal security. In 1952, the British passed the National Service Ordinance and

---

14. Dick Wilson, op. cit., p.67.
15. Patrick M. Mayerchak, "The Role of the Military in Singapore" in Edward A. Olsen and Stephen Jurika Jr. (eds.), The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies, Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986, pp.171-2.

"the concept of national conscription was introduced to Singapore amidst strong protests and demonstrations from Chinese school students."16 This policy was discontinued after only a year and Patrick Mayerchak attributed this failure to the lack of enthusiasm among the Chinese community for military service.17 Chan Heng Chee also observed that the traditional attitude of the dominant Chinese population is best summed up by the adage, "Good iron is never made into nails and good sons are never made into soldiers".18

Thus, when National Service conscription started in 1967 for independent Singapore, the government had to launch a concerted campaign to promote the idea of national defence and national defence consciousness among the people. By 1971, however, the then Defence Minister, Dr Goh Keng Swee was still lamenting that "a great deal remains to be done before the military profession can occupy the honoured position that it does in modern states".19

Subsequently the government attempted to raise the social status of the soldier in Singapore by inducting some of the country's best brains into the military through the SAF scholarship scheme.20 Hence the concept of the scholar-

---

16. Chan Heng Chee, op. cit., p.140.
17. Mayerchak, op. cit., p.171.
18. Chan Heng Chee, op. cit., p.142.
19. Straits Times, 2 Jul 1971, p.1.
20. Chan Heng Chee, op. cit., p.145-8.

officer. Both the Prime Minister's sons set the example by joining the SAF as scholar-officers. Other measures to attract and retain talent in the SAF and hence to raise the social status of the military, include the so-called "Wrangler" system21 and constant salary revisions so that the remuneration of the scholar-officers in the SAF would keep pace with the private sector.22

This need to foster a sense of defence consciousness, a vital quality for the effective functioning of a citizen-army, is more acute for Singapore because its population is mainly of migrant stock. The so-called migrant mentality of self-centredness or the pursuit of self-interest is definitely not conducive to the creation of a sense of national commitment. Hence the government tried to impress upon the people of Singapore that it is in their enlightened self-interest to see that Singapore has the means to protect its wealth and ensure Singapore's continued prosperity. A credible defence capability is seen as the ultimate guarantor of Singapore's wealth and a positive factor in encouraging foreign investments in Singapore.23

---

21. The Wrangler system singles out about 10% of the SAF regular officers for special responsibilities and promotion if they measured up to the tasks given. It gives outstanding young officers the opportunity to develop their full potential at earlier stages of their careers.
22. Chan Heng Chee, op. cit., pp.147-8.
23. Dr Wong Lin Ken, the then MP for Alexandra, remarked that without the armed forces "foreign investors would write off Singapore as an attractive economic zone", Straits Times 21. Jan 1970, p.1.

A less publicised but more sensitive problem is the issue of Malays in the SAF. As Mayerchak puts it

> In the late 1960s Singapore's military establishment was heavily dependent on the Malay minority and when national service was introduced in 1967, many Chinese families sought exemption for their sons. Because of the racial problems between Malays and Chinese in neighboring Malaysia, from which Singapore had been ejected, Singapore could not accept a Malay dominated military establishment.24

This issue of Malays in the SAF came to the fore in 1987 following BG Lee Hsien Loong's off-the-cuff remark that Malay soldiers were not allocated certain sensitive positions in the SAF. This issue was again raised in Parliament on 14 March 1990 during which BG Lee Hsien Loong noted that there were now more Malay officers and section leaders in the SAF. In 1984 there were 87 Malay national servicemen undergoing section leaders training while the figure for 1988 was 169. Likewise while in 1984 there were only 13 Malays undergoing officer's training, in 1988 the figure was 50. Also, in June 1989, the Sword of Honour for the best officer cadet was for the first time awarded to a Malay national serviceman.25 BG Lee Hsien Loong then cautioned that integration in the SAF must follow and not lead integration in society. "Therefore we proceed

---

24. Mayerchak, op. cit., p.176. Also see Stanley S. Bedlington's "Ethnicity and the Armed Forces in Singapore" in Dewitt C. Ellinwood & Cynthia H. Enloe (eds.), Ethnicity and the Military in Asia, New Jersey: Transaction, Co, 1981, pp.242-264.
25. Straits Times, 15 Mar 1990, p.18.

cautiously...as Singapore society becomes more integrated, the SAF will bring Malays into more areas of service."26

The preceding remark is interesting in revealing the thinking of the Singapore government regarding the role of the SAF as a vehicle for nation-building. BG Lee's statement seems to indicate that instead of the SAF being the harbinger of the development of a new "national identity"27, ethnic integration in the SAF is actually held conditional to the level of ethnic integration in Singapore society.

Constraints of Small Geographical Size

Like all small states, Singapore also has to cope with the limitations arising from natural deficiencies in territorial size, population scale and resources. Singapore's responses to the threat of surprise attack given its tiny territorial size are reflected in a highly mobile force structure28, emphasis on electronic reconnaissance and early warning systems, and rapid mobilisation of its reserves.

---

26. BG Lee Hsien Loong, Straits Times, 15 Mar 1990, p.18.
27. The Singapore Armed Forces, op. cit., p.18.
28. See Appendix behind.

In the words of BG Lee Hsien Loong,

> The armed forces of a small nation may be confined to a small area even before the war has started, but that does not mean they are defeated even before the war has started. Nor does it mean that the battle will be confined within the borders of the defender. Such artificial limits make no sense in all-out war.

Singapore's military occupation by the Japanese during the Second World War reveals the non-viability of the strategy of static defence for Singapore. In fact, Dr Goh Keng Swee, in a speech to Parliament in 1968 opined that "the sensible thing to do, if there is today a repetition of an offensive of this nature against Malaysia and Singapore, is to send our troops to fight on the beaches of Kota Bharu and by the Slim River alongside Malaysian forces rather than wait for the invading army to reach the Causeway."29 Hence SAF's operational strategy in war is based on the rapid deployment of its forces outside Singapore in the event of conflict, i.e. `Forward Defence'.30 According to some Malaysian observers, "the SAF's operational strategy for preempting the threat from the north continues to be guided by the principle of forward defence, which embodies the doctrine of `preventive attack'."31

---

29. Straits Times, 4 Dec 1968, p.9.
30. See also Chin Kin Wah's analysis of the two "unstated features" of Singapore's defence strategy, i.e., strategic mobility and forward defence. Chin Kin Wah (ed), Defence Spending in Southeast Asia, Singapore: ISEAS, 1987, pp.202-3.
31. Shuhud Saaid, "The Singapore Armed Forces: Part One, Girding up for `Total Attack' through `Total Defence'" in the Asian Defence Journal, Feb 1987, p.7.

Singapore's acquisition of four very expensive E-2C or Hawkeye AEW airplanes at a cost of S$1 billion (US$550 million) underlines its concern with the danger of sneak attacks on Singapore and hence the need for an effective early warning system. Goh Chok Tong had this to say regarding the acquisition of the E-2Cs:

> ..in November 1979...a Vietnamese-hijacked airplane flew into our airspace, escaping our radar until it was quite close to Singapore. What if it were a hostile plane? What would have happened if, in a hostile situation, a hostile aircraft can come this close before it was detected?....if you are caught with your pants down, you lose the whole city." 32

The other strategy which small states can use to compensate for the inability to "trade space for time" is that of rapid mobilisation of reserves. Singapore holds regular mobilisation exercises to test the effectiveness of its recall system. There are two types of mobilisation, namely, open and silent. Open mobilisation relies upon the mass media to spread the mobilisation message whereas silent mobilisation relies on telephones and radio-pagers to call up the reserves. The aim is to get the recalled reservists report to their units within six hours of the activation of the mobilisation order.33

---

32. Straits Times, 17 Mar 1984, p.18.
33. Straits Times, 8 Apr 1989.

The paucity of training grounds for its armed forces arising from the geographical size of Singapore, means that major training exercises have to be conducted overseas. Singapore trains its troops regularly in Taiwan, Australia, Brunei and from 1989, in Indonesia. Singapore maintains a training detachment of about 500 troops and 5 UH-1 helicopters in Brunei. Overseas training facilities, however, are subject to the vagaries of political developments and are extremely expensive to maintain. For example, Singapore's training facilities in Taiwan may become a contentious issue for the Chinese government when talks for the establishment of diplomatic relations with China were to begin. Singapore's recent agreement with Indonesia which allows the SAF to train on Indonesian soil perhaps reflects a general concern at possible Chinese objection to the presence of Singapore's training facilities in Taiwan.

Constraints of Small Population

With a population of about 2.6 million people, there is a definite constraint on the level of mobilisable strength of the SAF. This small population base is compounded by progressively declining birth rates. As Chin Kin Wah has noted, "the 1985 intake of national servicemen comprised mainly those born in 1967, a year which saw 50,560 births. Based on the present fertility rate, Singapore would only have 37,000 births in the year 2000 and 29,300 by the year

2030."34 Coupled with an aging population, the SAF faces serious manpower constraints in the coming decades.35 See Table 4 below for a breakdown of the relevant population statistics.

Table 4: Singapore: Population Projections

Year	1985	2000	2020	2030
Population	2,558,000	2,900,000	3,014,000	2,912,000
Number of Births	42,484	37,000	31,800	29,300
Aged 0-14 Years	624,000	595,000	468,000	438,000
Aged 15-59 Years	1,735,000	1,992,000	1,844,000	1,644,000
Aged 60 and Above	199,000	313,000	702,000	830,000

Source: Adapted from Chin Kin Wah, op. cit., p.218.

The government has responded at two levels. At the general societal level, it has encouraged Singaporeans to produce more children, reversing the erstwhile restrictive population policy.36 At the level of the SAF, the responses have been to privatise wherever possible, maintenance and other support activities. This is to ensure that the progressively declining supply of national servicemen is

34. Chin Kin Wah, op. cit., p.218.
35. Mayerchak, op. cit., p.178.
36. Immigration, especially from Hong Kong, has also been encouraged in an attempt to make up for the projected population shortfall.

better utilised for vital combat and operational functions.37

However, privatising maintenance work and commercialising support activities are not sufficient to cope with the declining national servicemen manpower. BG Lee Hsien Loong, in an interview published in the February 1990 issue of the Armed Forces Journal International, revealed that the SAF "may have to restructure combat units to make them smaller but more flexible, supplied with weapons and equipment to produce the same firepower using less manpower."38 An example of utilising more manpower efficient weapons systems would be the locally-developed 155-mm FH-88 howitzer which uses eight people compared to the 16 for the older 155-mm howitzers. However there is a limit to this process of substituting machine or firepower for manpower because ultimately manpower forms the backbone of any effective fighting force. Clearly therefore, there is a very real constraint on the growth of the SAF even if material and financial resources permit. The manpower constraint will be a major factor stunting the expansion of the SAF in the coming decades.

---

37. Straits Times, 25 Jan 1989, p.16.
38. Interview with BG Lee Hsien Loong, Armed Forces Journal International, February 1990, p.52.

Allocation of Resources for Defence

The allocation of national resources for defence in Singapore is devoid of the intense inter-services and bureaucratic tussles that are prevalent in countries with strong traditions of inter-services rivalries or countries where the military exerts predominant influence or in some cases even control over the civil political structure and processes. In Singapore, the control of the military by the civilian authority is undisputed and unchallenged. Together with the absence of any strong military traditions among the populace, the role of the military has been confined to that of its professional arena. Moreover, the civilian government has all along seen it fit to constantly allocate substantial level of national resources for the military. The current level allocated stands at about 6% of the GNP which in dollar terms is S$ 3.468 billion or US$ 1.9 billion.39 Moreover, as observed by Chan Heng Chee, "contacts between top ranking military leaders and civilian political leaders will take place on budget allocations and discussion of strategic matters, but the distinction between 'political' and 'military' areas of responsibility will be maintained."40

With a thriving economy based primarily on tertiary services and a GNP of more than US$ 20 billion and the third

---

39. The defence budget for 1990 as presented to Parliament, Straits Times, 15 Mar 1990, p.18.
40. Chan Heng Chee, op. cit., p.154.

highest per capita income in Asia (after Japan and Brunei), Singapore is more fortunate than most other similarly small states when it comes to allocating national resources for defence. However the small population base also means that in per capita terms, Singapore, like all small states, will have to bear a disproportionate financial burden for defence. This is reflected by the fact that Singapore ranks highest in terms of per capita defence spending in the whole Asia-Pacific region:

Table 5: 1987 Per Capita Defence Expenditure in US$

Singapore	:	463	South Korea	:	134
Australia	:	316	Malaysia	:	51
Taiwan	:	245	Thailand	:	32
New Zealand	:	241	Philippines	:	13
Japan	:	207	India	:	12
North Korea	:	195	Indonesia	:	8

Source: extracted from the 1989 Annual Reference Edition of the Pacific Defence Reporter. There are no precise statistics on Brunei's defence spending; but the oil-rich micro-state (population: 345,048 in 1989) has spent substantial sums of money on procurement of military hardwares since attaining its independence from Britain in 1984. Funds totalling US$1.275 billion are reportedly being made available (See Military Technology Jan 1990, Vol XIV Issue 1).

Per capita defence spending however is not an accurate indicator of the military strength of a country because a

country with a huge population like India can have a very low per capita figure on defence spending and yet it possesses a formidable military establishment. What per capita figure in defence expenditure does indicate however, is the disproportionate financial burden on defence borne by states with small populations. As Goh Chok Tong puts it, "Defence weapons cost the same to a poor country as to a rich country. There is no discount just because you are poor."41

The challenge for the SAF therefore is to make sure that every dollar allocated for defence is well-spent and justified. Hence the SAF's policy of buying major new equipment and weapons systems only when it is absolutely necessary, preferring to retrofit and upgrade existing inventory. One very good example is the retrofitting and upgrading of the RSAF's A4 Skyhawks. According BG Lee Hsien Loong, the Ministry of Defence had two options with the Skyhawks: either to phase them out or modernise the Skyhawks and use them for another 15 years.42 Moreover, buying a whole new fleet of aircraft overnight would be "not only exorbitantly expensive, but also politically insensitive and unwise."43 What emerged is a new version of the A4, dubbed the `Super Skyhawks' for their greater performance capacity

---

41. By "poor", Goh Chok Tong was refering to the relative paucity of national resources available to smaller states. Straits Times, 17 Mar 1984, p.18.
42. Straits Times, 2 Mar 1989, p.1.
43. Straits Times, 2 Mar 1989, p.1.

and new advanced functions and features. The Super Skyhawk uses the advanced F-404 engine (similar to that used by the far more sophisticated F/A-18 Hornet), giving it 30% more power than the old J65 engine. New avionics also give them more flexibility in terms of functions and delivery of firepower. In sum, the successful retrofitting programme has given the A-4s another lease of life of about 15 years. Moreover there are economic spin-offs from the retrofitting programme in that since the A4 Skyhawks are the mainstay of the region's many air forces, the success of the Singapore's programme may mean more income earnings for the Singapore aircraft industry.

This brings us to the so-called "Fourth Service" of the SAF, namely, the local defence industries. As a small state Singapore can never hope to be self-sufficient in the whole spectrum of weapons and defence equipment production. Hence Singapore strives for self-sufficiency only in a few basic areas like small ordnance, small arms, and in the area of retrofitting imported weapons systems and equipment to meet the specific needs of the SAF. Of late the defence industries have moved into marine construction (like the missile corvettes) and production of larger weapon platforms like the FH-88 155mm howitzers. However, the local defence industries cannot hope to survive or be cost-effective if they only serve the needs of the SAF because the latter is

relatively speaking only a small market. As BG Lee Hsien Loong puts it,

> While our defence industries were created to provide a degree of in-house capability to support our armed forces, their guiding operational principle is commercial viability. The SAF is too small to absorb the capacity of our defense industries. In the early years, it absorbed 70% of the industries' output. Even with the growth of the SAF, this has dropped to 40%, and will probably fall even further. The industries must therefore, look beyond the SAF to international markets for business.44

Conclusion

In all fairness, it may be argued that Singapore's successful build-up of a credible defence capability does not represent the 'norm' in small states' quest for security. Perhaps Singapore's 'success' in this regard is largely because it has been left in peace since independence to fashion its own political, economic and military sinews. Singapore's sovereignty and territorial integrity have not been seriously challenged by other larger powers. The plight of Cambodia today represents the unfortunate example of a small state whose security had been successfully challenged by a larger neighbour. Even if Cambodia in 1978 had had the military equipment and armed forces of the current level of Singapore, it would still have been subdued by Vietnam. Hence, having the military wherewithal for a

44. Armed Forces Journal International, February 1990, p.52.

small state is not the only solution or safeguard from political extinction.

Singapore's possession of a credible military capability therefore is no guarantee of its continued peace and security. Measured against the military resources of its neighbours, Singapore certainly has a formidable military machine for its size. And the latter is an important point. No matter how efficient and resourceful Singapore may be in the area of military defence, it cannot escape from the realities of its geographical and demographic size. Singapore can never hope to outlast the military staying power of countries much bigger than itself.

Moreover, Singapore's geographical and demographic compactness and its high dependence on external trade and investments make it particularly vulnerable to low-level or low-intensity military harrassments. A repeat of the type of low-level military harrassments a la konfrontasi, would have serious repercussions for the Singaporean economy. Disruptions of the sea lines of communications (SLOCs) around Singapore's waters through mining, piratical harrassments or blockade, would threaten the lifelines of the Singapore economy as well.

Singapore therefore needs a complimentary foreign policy that seeks to maximise the stakes which other powers

would have on the continued well-being of Singapore and also other measures to enhance its deterrent posture. In short, Singapore needs to possess as much derivative strength as possible.

CHAPTER FOUR : DERIVATIVE STRENGTH

It's an axiomatic point that as a small state, Singapore's independent self-defence capability can never be sufficient when faced with external threats from powers bigger than it. In fact Lee Kuan Yew stated that "The biggest threat to Singapore is that any threat will come from someone bigger than us".1 Hence the imperative to acquire as much derivative strength as possible to supplement its intrinsic military capability. As Michael Handel puts it,

> Weak states must learn to "draw on" or "borrow" the strength of other states. They will try to manipulate and commit, if they can, the strength of other states (mostly great powers), in order to secure their own interests. There are two major ways in which the weak states can recruit the support of other countries. They may either enter into a <u>formal</u> alliance with other states, or they may reach an <u>informal</u>, though not necessarily less helpful, understanding with partners sharing common interests.2

In this regard, the emphasis of Singapore's strategy has been on the informal approach. Even within the more formal mechanisms like the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Five-Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), the guiding motif has been the element of

---

1. Quoted by Leszek Buszynski, "Singapore: A Foreign Policy of Survival" in <u>Asian Thought & Society</u>, New York: East-West Publishing Company, Jul 1985 Vol. 10 No. 29, p.133.
2. Michael Handel, op. cit., p.120 (emphasis original).

informality. Singapore has good reasons for such a strategy. Besides the fear that any formal pact, especially one of a military nature, might arouse tensions both within and outside the pact, a formal alliance would mean a diminution of Singapore's independence because as a small state, its say within any formal alliance is bound to be less than equal to that of the bigger powers who can commit greater resources. As S. Rajaratnam stated in his first major foreign policy speech to Parliament on 16 and 17 December 1965, "...when a small country like Singapore aligns itself with a big power, there is no doubt as to who keeps in step with whose policies".3

Singapore's general approach has been to encourage competing and countervailing extra-regional interests in the continued well-being of Singapore and regional stability. Encouraging such a constellation of interests and influences would give Singapore more room to manoeuvre. It is a truism of the game of balance of power that when big powers compete for influence and power, small states can have greater bargaining power vis-a-vis these great powers.4 At the regional level, Singapore seeks to 'twin' its destiny with those of its closest neighbours, namely Malaysia and

---

3. See S. Rajaratnam: The Prophetic & The Political, a collection of selected speeches and writings by S. Rajaratnam as compiled and edited by Chan Heng Chee and Obaid ul Haq, Singapore: Graham Brash, 1987, p.284.
4. See Michael Handel, op. cit., pp.175-187 for an analysis of the position of small states in the context of a balance-of-power system.

Indonesia. Through a process of identifying some of Singapore's national interests with its neighbours' and the creation of a web of interdependent economic relationships, broad areas of common interests may be derived. These areas of common interests not only serve as a basis for confidence building in bilateral relationships but also for mutually beneficial economic relations.5

In terms of formal membership, Singapore is a member of the FPDA, ASEAN, the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the British Commonwealth. With close relevance to Singapore's immediate security concerns are the FPDA and ASEAN, which shall be the focus of the following analysis.

The FPDA was conceived in 1971 as a replacement to the defunct Anglo-Malayan Defence Arrangement of 1957.6 The FPDA groups together Malaysia, Singapore, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand in a loose defence compact which provides for mutual consultation in the event of a threat to the security of either Malaysia or Singapore without however, any explicit commitment to their defence. When formed in 1971, it was meant to fill the void left behind by the departure of British forces from the region and it

---

5. See chapter two above for an analysis of the 'triangle of growth' concept between Singapore, Johor (Malaysia) and Batam (Indonesia).
6. See Chin Kin Wah, The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: The Transformation of A Security System 1957-71, Cambridge University Press, 1983, chapter 9.

brought Malaysia and Singapore time to build up credible defence capabilities.7 The FPDA is not a formal military alliance with a command structure for war-time contingency like NATO or the WARSAW Pact. It also does not have a full-time command structure in peacetime; its modus operandi being a series of annual meetings and joint military exercises among the various partners.8 The absence of a command structure allows Malaysia and Singapore to continue to claim their non-aligned status and moreover, it would not be in the interest of the extra-regional powers to agree to an open-ended commitment to the defence of Singapore and Malaysia. Such a minimal commitment by the extra-regional powers to the security of Singapore and Malaysia however, is viewed in the wider context of being a function of the overall U.S. policy and interests in Southeast Asia and as Lee Kuan Yew said in 1978, "Whether it (FPDA) will continue to have any relevance depends not simply on Australia and New Zealand, but on the US, her policies and posture in the Pacific and Indian Ocean".9

The continuing relevance of the FPDA to Singapore's and regional security is best summed up by Brigadier-General (Reservist) Lee Hsien Loong:

---

7. BG Lee Hsien Loong, Armed Forces Journal International, op. cit., p.50.
8. Straits Times 12 Dec 1989, p.18.
9. Quoted by Obaid ul Haq , "Foreign Policy" in Jon S.T. Quah, Chan Heng Chee & Seah Chee Meow (eds.), Government and Politics of Singapore, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.287.

> It is a political and psychological deterrent to any potential aggressor, who will not only have to consider the combined strength of the armed forces of Singapore and Malaysia, but also the possible involvement of Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom and, through them, their friends and allies. This "imponderable" is at the core of the FPDA's deterrence.10

The FPDA however, is more than a political arrangement. Under its auspices, the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) has been formed which provides for the combined defence of the Malaysia-Singapore air space. The IADS comes closest to an institutionalisation of the concept of the 'indivisibility' of defence between the two states.11 The involvement of the extra-regional powers also provides a non-sensitive format for the armed forces of Singapore and Malaysia to work together. Such a functional defence relationship between Singapore and Malaysia contributes in an important manner to the building of confidence in bilateral and defence relations between the two neighbours. Hence Singapore has sought to derive additional strength in terms of the deterrent value of the FPDA as well as in combining defence resources with Malaysia under the IADS.

However, as the smallest 'power' within FPDA, Singapore sees the need to earn its rightful place as an equal partner in the arrangement. As the FPDA means more to Singapore's

---

10. Armed Forces Journal International, op. cit., p.50.
11. See chapter two above.

security interests than to the extra-regional powers, Singapore is doing more than any other partners to try to keep the FPDA in existence. Singapore therefore participates actively in the FPDA by committing two F-5 squadrons to the IADS. In a period of receding tensions in superpower relations and tight fiscal priorities in Australia, New Zealand and Britain, Singapore fears an abandonment of the FPDA by these extra-regional powers. Singapore seeks to continually engage the security interests of these extra-regional powers by constantly 'reminding' them of the continued relevance of the FPDA to regional security. Singapore also tries to pre-empt the possibility of these extra-regional powers abandoning the FPDA as a result of a perception by the electorates of the extra-regional powers that the FPDA is a drain on their respective national defence resources and thus skewing their respective defence priorities. Singapore does not wish to create an image of a small state getting a 'free ride' through the FPDA, knowing full well that such a perception can lead to an early demise of the arrangement especially in a probable scenario of the extra-regional powers no longer perceiving the FPDA as essential to their own security concerns.

However, if the extra-regional powers see that their involvement in the FPDA does not distort their own national defence priorities, the probability of their continued support for the FPDA would be greater. For example,

Australia only needs to maintain a rolling deployment of one or two of its warships in the region and the presence of an F-18 squadron based in Tindal, Northern Australia. Such a deployment of its defence assets goes a long way to underpin Australia's diplomatic posture and interests in an area coterminous to its security boundaries as spelt out by the 1987 White Paper on Defence.

ASEAN was founded in August 1967 to promote regional cooperation among the states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore.12 ASEAN was founded against the backdrop of a post-Soekarno era in Indonesian and Southeast Asian politics. ASEAN, as Leszek Buszynski points out, "symbolizes the Indonesian commitment to a regional stability which is intended to foster the conditions favourable for economic development of the region".13 As an explicit Indonesian commitment to regional stability, ASEAN was welcomed by Singapore; but there also existed in Singapore apprehensions that ASEAN "might serve as an alternative vehicle for Indonesian ambition".14 As the smallest founder member of ASEAN, Singapore assiduously tries to avoid the development of an ASEAN that leaves the management of regional order and security solely in the hands of regional powers. Such a form of exclusive

---

12. Brunei joined ASEAN on 7 January 1984, a week after being granted its independence from Great Britain.
13. Leszek Buszynski, op. cit., p.133.
14. Michael Leifer, "The Conduct of Foreign Policy" in Sandu & Wheatley (eds.), op. cit., p.970.

regionalism will leave Singapore with very few alternatives in the pursuit of its foreign and security policies.

Initially, Singapore perceived ASEAN as simply an expression of a corporate idealism - a desire for the ideals of regionalism. Singapore was cognisant of the practical difficulties in achieving Southeast Asian regionalism. As S. Rajaratnam opined in 1970,

> The fact is that the theory of regionalism finds itself caught in a [...] contradiction - the effort to reconcile the theory of regionalism with the practice of nationalism....When it comes to translating the objects contained in the Declaration into action, it is not regional interests but national interests which become the primary consideration. This has been so in the case of ASEAN. Regionalism, by and large, remains a convenient device for promoting national interests - for resolving national problems.15

Singapore's perception of the utility of ASEAN and regionalism began to change in the mid-1970s. The oil crisis impressed upon Singapore the vulnerability of its high dependence on international trade and commerce and the need to partially overcome this handicap through a recourse to regional resources and cooperation. The American strategic retreat from Indochina also threw open the regional arena to other large and not so large powers like the USSR, China, Vietnam and India. Regionalism within

---

15. Chan & Obaid, op. cit., p.297.

ASEAN became a shelter at a time of international uncertainty. The improvement of bilateral relations with Malaysia and Indonesia following Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's first official visits to Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta in March 1972 and May 1973 respectively also contributed to the shift in Singapore's perception of regionalism and ASEAN. In 1975, S. Rajaratnam declared that the historical "significant moment" had arrived for ASEAN and he argued,

> If the performance of ASEAN has been disappointing so far, it is not because it has not achieved anything but because it has failed to fully and successfully exploit its real potentialities....we have been driving a high-powered Rolls-Royce at thirty miles an hour to carry weekly groceries [p.321]....There are limits to what national solutions can do to overcome our mounting economic difficulties. We are compelled by the economic realities of today to find solutions at three levels - national, regional and international. For the remedies to be effective there must be harmonisation of solutions at all these three levels [p.323].16

Hence a recourse to regionalism was deemed necessary to overcome Singapore's vulnerable position in the international system. Through ASEAN, Singapore has been better placed to make its views heard on the world scene - both at the United Nations General Assembly and through the ASEAN post-ministerial conference dialogue sessions with the major Western Nations. An example of how Singapore was able to utilise the collective strength of ASEAN unity to force a

16. Ibid.

bigger country to modify an economically harmful policy to Singapore was the case of Australia's 1979 International Civil Aviation Policy (ICAP).17

The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 proved to be a watershed for the development of ASEAN. The communist victories in Indochina had a galvanising effect on the non-communist governments of ASEAN. The first ASEAN Summit was held in Bali in 1976 and amongst other things, a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation was signed. The 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation upheld the principle of national sovereignty18 in the conduct of relations between the signatories and as Michael Leifer puts it, "For Singapore, the smallest member of ASEAN, this collective commitment represented an important measure of assurance and encouraged a stronger commitment to ASEAN to the extent that it had

---

17. Australia sought to monopolise the Europe-Australia air traffic by imposing a heavy tariff on passengers stopping over in Southeast Asian capitals. Such a policy would hurt Singapore most as the bulk of the stopover traffic is in Singapore. A collective ASEAN opposition led to the modifications of some of the more objectionable aspects of ICAP.

18. Article 2 of the Treaty states that "In their relations with one another, the high contracting parties shall be guided by the following principles: (a)mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; (b)the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; (c)non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; (d)settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means. Renunciation of the threat or use of force; and (e)effective cooperation among themselves.

tied its (ASEAN's) cohesion and viability to a proclaimed public philosophy".19

As a small state, Singapore perceives regionalism as a double-edged sword. Strong regionalism unaccompanied by a public commitment of the larger partners to the sanctity of national sovereignty might lead to a diminution of Singapore's independence; yet, regionalism if conducted on the basis of equality between the constituent members and respect for the sanctity of national sovereignty, is an important source of derivative strength. Singapore's perception of regionalism shifted from the former view in the early years of ASEAN to the latter view as a result of the developments in the early 1970s described above.

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 struck a hard blow at the most sensitive chord of the security perception of a small state like Singapore - the armed invasion and occupation of a small state by a larger neighbour. ASEAN became a vehicle for Singapore to project its strongest objection to Vietnam's violation of the "cardinal principle of the society of states".20 Again, Singapore has derived additional strength for its diplomatic position through a united 'ASEAN' diplomatic posture over Cambodia. Had there not been an ASEAN, Vietnam would probably have been able to get away with a military and

---

19. Sandhu & Wheatley (eds.), op. cit., p.974.
20. Ibid., p.975.

political fait accompli in Cambodia and Singapore would be left to assess the implications for its own security of the precedent set by Vietnam. The importance of ASEAN in this context to Singapore's security interests is obvious.

Though ASEAN relies primarily on political means to achieve its security needs, there also exists extensive informal bilateral security links between member states. For example Singapore holds regular bilateral military exercises with Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. The Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) also trains at the Clark Air Base in the Philippines. The other members of ASEAN also conduct regular bilateral military operations and exercises with each other.

ASEAN however has resisted any moves towards a regional formalisation of these extensive bilateral security links for at least two reasons. Firstly, the creation of an ASEAN military bloc would willy nilly lead to a military polarisation of Southeast Asia which is already politically polarised between the non-communist ASEAN and communist Indochina. Such a development can only lead to an increase in the probability of a regional armed conflict. Secondly, ASEAN members have differing strategic perceptions with regard to the source of its potential threat. While Indonesia and Malaysia perceive an economically and militarily resurgent China as the greater threat to their

security; Thailand (especially before the advent of the Chatichai government), sees China as a natural geo-strategic ally to counter the more immediate threat to its security boundaries arising from Vietnam's military consolidation in Indochina. Michael Leifer puts it thus, "ASEAN's corporate position barely concealed mixed interests, in particular over the indirect association with China in challenging Vietnam".21

The extensive informal security links between the ASEAN states however have created a de facto regional security community. As the then (June 1980 - Sep. 1988) Singapore's Foreign Minister S. Dhanabalan said, "There is no policy of formal regional military cooperation among the ASEAN countries, but they are not unmindful that the informal web of bilateral collaboration and cooperation among their armed forces would improve their odds in dealing with unfriendly powers. Through this network, Singapore makes a modest contribution to regional security".22

Singapore has also depended on a stable regional balance of power among the big powers to underpin its security and economic development. In this regard, Singapore makes no bones of the fact that it sees a western

---

21. Michael Leifer, "Cambodian Conflict - The Final Phase?" in Conflict Studies 221, Centre For Security and Conflict Studies, May 1989, p.4.
22. S. Dhanabalan, "Singapore in Southeast Asia", People's Action Party 30th Anniversary Issue, 1984, p.111.

military presence as more conducive to its security concerns than a predominant Soviet or Chinese presence. As S. Rajaratnam stated in an interview with Chan Heng Chee and Obaid ul Haq,

> Though we want all powers to be present in Asia, we are closer to and feel safer with the Americans than with the others....Our connections are close with America, our economic relations are with America. They can provide much more for our economic well-being, whereas Russia can give us very little. Our cultural orientation is towards the West, and we make no pretence about it.23

The United States military bases in the Philippines are viewed by Singapore as instrumental for regional security and stability. Singapore hence watches with great apprehension at the possible removal of these bases.24 That Singapore seriously values the U.S. military presence for its own security is reflected by Singapore's gesture, announced in August 1989, to make available more of its military facilities and services for U.S. forces in the region. Singapore must know that it was risking regional censure in such a move as it runs counter to the Malaysian much-cherished ideal of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and

---

23. Chan Heng Chee and Obaid ul Haq, op. cit., p.493.
24. See Desmond Ball (ed.), US Bases in the Philippines: Issues and Implications, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 46, 1988. Especially chapter by Leszek Buszynski, "ASEAN and the US Bases in the Philippines" for an analysis of the role of the bases in the context of regional security and stability.

Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia.25 Also, Indonesia cannot openly support such a stance by Singapore as it also runs counter to Indonesia's aspirations for leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement. Moreover, it contradicts the Indonesian-inspired 1967 Bangkok Declaration that all foreign bases in Southeast Asia are only temporary in nature.

The controversy aroused by Singapore's offer to host some U.S. military facilities reveals fundamental differences between Singapore and its larger neighbours, especially Indonesia and Malaysia with regard to regionalism. As described earlier, Singapore as a small state views regionalism as a double-edged sword. For the larger states, especially Indonesia as the largest regional state, the presence of the superpowers in the region poses, if not a threat, then at least a hindrance to its regional interests. These regional interests may be expressed by a desire to be the prime manager of regional order and security. Hence Indonesia constantly puts forth the view that regionalism in its ideal form should exclude the super and extra-regional powers. The presence of the U.S. military bases in the Philippines is accepted so long as they are not considered a permanent fixture of a regional

---

25. In 1973, ASEAN adopted a resolution accepting the principles of ZOPFAN. Singapore's position, however is that until such time as conditions for the setting up of such a zone are obtained, it is best that the western powers be encouraged to stay in the region.

security arrangement. No doubt Indonesia does see the stabilising impact of the U.S. military presence but only so long as the Soviet Union remains a relevant military factor in the region. Hence accepting the U.S. presence in the region is simply a matter of strategic expedience rather than a preferred policy choice. Indeed the Jakarta Post reflected that given the fundamental changes in East-West relations, a "rare opportunity" has arrived for Southeast Asia to work out a "new security setting with a much lower equilibrium of the superpowers' presence".26 But for Singapore at least, the U.S. presence is a development it conscientiously tries to promote. As BG Lee Hsien Loong stated in Parliament on 14 March 1990, it is in Singapore's strategic interest to have the U.S. in the region "for as long as possible".27 It should be noted however that Singapore's offer to host some U.S. military facilities is also seen by certain sections of the Indonesian and Malaysian security establishments as a positive factor in regional security because the U.S. military presence is privately acknowledged as a necessary balance to the Soviet naval forces in the region.

Singapore hence has to constantly walk the tightrope of deriving collective strength from being part of ASEAN regionalism and yet preventing the development of an exclusive regionalism which can be inimical to its political

26. Straits Times, 9 Aug 1989.
27. Straits Times, 15 Mar 1990, p.18.

independence and even security. The price of obtaining derivative strength through ASEAN regionalism is less freedom to order its own national priorities. Malaysia and Indonesia have constantly charged that Singapore's actions like the Herzog visit and the offer to host some U.S. military facilities, are detrimental to ASEAN unity and as a Malaysian national daily the Berita Harian Malaysia argues, "...it is true that the final say lies with Singapore, but in the context of ASEAN, matters of the region should be discussed first so as to reach agreement among the ASEAN countries".28 The crux of the issue is that "matters of the region" are viewed differently and at times even contrastingly, from the national perspectives of Singapore and its larger neighbours. And in so far as regionalism is simply a vehicle for attaining respective national priorities, such differences with regard to the interpretation and substance of regionalism are bound to arise from time to time.

Also, exclusive regionalism is anathema to Singapore's economic development and prosperity. Singapore does not see an intra-ASEAN bloc as a viable option; hence the limited progress in intra-ASEAN economic cooperation. As S. Rajaratnam puts it, "the only relevant economic system which can give us a reprive or save us, is the global economic system....there cannot be salvation by...five ASEAN

---

28. Straits Times, 9 Aug 1989.

countries getting together and solving their economic problems within the walls of regional cooperation. The weak combining with the weak need not add up to strength. The weak can strengthen themselves only by plugging collectively into the global economic system."29

At the international level, Singapore's ability to influence strategic developments is practically nil. What it can do as a small state is to encourage the rule of law and support for the United Nations. Singapore believes that "without the United Nations, the world would be an even more anarchic and dangerous place...(it) ensures some measure of law and order, even when both are flouted by members from time to time".30 As a small state, Singapore has a vested interest in supporting the international norms which have obtained after the Second World War - norms like the right of self determination, rights of sovereign territorial integrity, the growing equality of states in international organisations and the increasing disapproval of the use of naked force between states, especially by a big power on a small one. These "new norms" are indeed conducive factors in aiding the survival of small states in the world today.31

---

29. Interview with Chan Heng Chee and Obaid ul Haq, op. cit., 1987, p.498.
30. Ibid., p.515.
31. See Michael Handel, op. cit., pp.265-277, Appendix B: "The `New' International Norms of Conduct Among States and the position of Weak States".

CONCLUSION

Singapore's strategy for survival can thus be analysed from three levels, namely national, regional and international. At the national level lies the attainment of a credible military capability. That intrinsic strength has to be augmented by the derivative strength of regionalism and the involvement of extra-regional interests in Singapore's continued well-being and security. However, regionalism is viewed as a vehicle to attain national objectives, i.e., regionalism as an utilitarian concept; hence tensions inevitably exist between Singapore and its larger neighbours with regard to the involvement of extra-regional interests in the management of regional security. At the international level, Singapore is dependent on international trade and commerce for its economic survival. The encouragement of a free trade system and open markets in the West as well as support for international norms of the rule of law form the substance of Singapore's limited ability to influence world affairs and developments.

Success in the management of Singapore's security is measured by the absence of the need to invoke the destructive power of the SAF. The failure of Singapore's security planning would be obvious once the need to invoke the SAF arises. As a tiny city-state, there can be no return to the status quo ante if Singapore were to be involved in an all-out military conflict with any potential

aggressor. Hence it is the writer's contention that Singapore needs to rely heavily on non-military mechanisms of security as well. Building the conditions for stability and peace in the region through economic cooperation, diplomacy and regionalism is just as important as preparing for the at best Pyrrhic victory in war.

Appendix: Singapore's Military Force Structure

According to the 1989 Annual Reference Edition of the Pacific Defence Reporter, some relevant aspects of Singapore's highly mobile force structure are as follows:

ARMY

Light Tanks	350	AMX-13
APC	720	M-113
	30	V-110
	250	V-150/-200 Commando
Towed Arty. (155mm)	38	Soltam M-71
	16	M-114A1 & "some FH-88"

NAVY

Missile Craft	6	Sea Wolf (FRG Lurssen-45)
Patrol Craft	6	Independence/Sovereignty
	1	Endeavour (trg)
	1	Panglima (trg)
	12	others (under 100 tons)
Amphibious	5	Endurance LST (US LST-511)
		[capacity:16 tanks/200 troops]
	8	mechanized landing craft

* Singapore is acquiring six West German Lurssen-designed, 600-ton, Type 62 missile corvettes.

AIR FORCE

Ground-attack Fighters	
4 squadrons	63plus A-4S/S1
	13plus TA-4S/S1
	29 Hunter F-74
	4 T-75
* 8 F-16s delivered in early 1990	
Fighters	
2 squadrons	33 F-5E
	9 F-5F
Airborne Early Warning	4 E-2C
Transport Aircraft	
2 squadrons	4 C-130B
	6 C-130H
	6 Skyvan 3m
Transport Helicopters	
3 squadrons	6 AS-350
	24 UH-1B
	16 UH-1H
	4 AB-205
	3 AS-332B
	19 AS-332M

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Note

Relatively very little academic research has been done on the area of Singapore's defence and security. The 'sensitive nature' of the topic and the lack of public debate on the topic mean that the researcher has to rely heavily on government speeches and statements as a paramount source of information. As the defence-policy formation process is very much a governmental preserve, the government has been very frank and forthright in revealing its thinking in its public pronouncements. Such speeches and statements are always highlighted in the national English daily, the Straits Times; hence the need to rely heavily on the Straits Times in writing this paper. The small number of in-depth analyses by academics and observers are confined to the occasional journal article or a chapter of a book.

General References

Michael Handel
Weak States in the International System
London: Frank Cass, 1981

David Vital
The Survival of Small States
London: Oxford University Press, 1971

The Inequality of States
Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967

Klaus Knorr
The Defense of Small and Medium-sized Countries
Tel Aviv University, August 1982

August Schou & Arne O. Brundtland (eds.)
Small States in International Relations
Stocklom: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1971

Otmar Holl (ed.)
Small States in Europe and Dependence
Austrian Institute for International Affairs, 1983

John Garnett (ed.)
Theories of Peace and Security
London: St. Martin's Press, 1970

Sheila Harden (ed.)
Small is Dangerous: Microstates in a Macro world
London: Francis Pinter, 1985

Caroline Thomas
New States, Sovereignty and Intervention
London: Gower, 1985

In Search of Security: The Third World in International Relations
Boulder, Colorado: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987

Trygve Mathisen
The Functions of Small States in the Strategies of the Great Powers
Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1971

S. Spiegel
Dominance and Diversity: The International Hierarchy
Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1972

C. Holbraad
Middle Powers in International Politics
London & New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1984

R.L. Rothstein
Alliances and Small Powers
New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968

SINGAPORE

K. Sandhu & Paul Wheatley (eds.)
Management of Success
Singapore: ISEAS, 1989

Wu Yuan-li
Strategic Significance of Singapore: A Study in Balance of Power
Washington, D.C.: Foreign Affairs Study 6, Dec 1972

Dick Wilson
The Future Role of Singapore
London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1972

Singapore Ministry of Defence
The Singapore Armed Forces
Singapore: Public Affairs Department, 1981

Alex Josey
Lee Kuan Yew: The Struggle for Singapore
Sydney: Augus and Robertson, 1974

Zakaria Haji Ahmad and Harold Crouch (eds.)
Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia
Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985

Edward A. Olsen and Stephen Jurika Jr. (eds.)
The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies
Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986

Dewitt C. Ellinwood & Cynthia H. Enloe (eds.)
Ethnicity and the Military in Asia
New Jersey: Transaction, Co, 1981

Chin Kin Wah
The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: The Transformation of A Security System 1957-71
Cambridge University Press, 1983

(ed.)
Defence Spending in Southeast Asia
Singapore: ISEAS, 1987

Chan Heng Chee & Obaid ul Haq (eds.)
S. Rajaratnam: The Prophetic and the Political
Singapore: Graham Brash, 1987

Richard Clutterback
Conflict and Violence in Singapore and Malaysia
London: Graham Brash, 1984

Jon S.T. Quah, Chan Heng Chee & Seah Chee Meow (eds.)
Government and Politics of Singapore
Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985

John Drysdale
Singapore: The Struggle For Success
Singapore: Times, 1984

Diane K. Mauzzy (ed.)
Politics In the Asean States
Kuala Lumpur: Maricans, undated

J. Soedjati Djiwandono & Yong Mun Cheong (eds.)
Soldiers and Stability in Southeast Asia
Singapore: ISEAS, 1988

Robert O. Tilman
Southeast Asia and the Enemy Beyond
Boulder & London: Westview Press, 1987

T.J.S. George
Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore
London: Andre Deutsch, 1973

Williard A. Hanna
The New Singapore Armed Forces
American Universities Fieldstaff Reports,
Southeast Asian Series, vol.21, no.1, 1973

Mohammed Ayoob & Chai-Anan Samudavanija (eds.)
Leadership Perceptions and National Security:
The Southeast Asian Experience
Singapore: ISEAS, 1989

David Hawkins
The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: From AMDA to ANZUK
London: United Services Inst. for Defence Studies, 1972

Charles E. Morrison & Astri Suhrke
Strategies of Survival: The Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Smaller Asian States
Brisbane: Queensland University Press, 1977

Bilveer Singh
Singapore: Foreign Policy Imperatives of a Small State
Singapore: Centre For Advanced Studies, 1988

Ong Chit Chung
The Landward Defence of Singapore, 1919-1938
Singapore: Centre For Advanced Studies, 1988

Tim Huxley
The ASEAN States' Defence Policies, 1975-81: Military Responses to Indochina
Canberra: SDSC Working Paper no.88, 1984

ARTICLES

"From the Boardroom: Brig. Gen. Lee Hsien Loong" (Interview)
Armed Forces Journal International
February 1990

Leszek Buszynski: "Singapore: A Foreign Policy of Survival"
Asian Thought & Society
Jul 1985, vol 10, no.29

Kishore Mahbubani: "Singapore as a good citizen of the International Community"
Mirror
15 Apr 1988

Chan Heng Chee: "Winning Friends Who Understand"
Mirror
1 Sep 1988

Michael Richardson: "ASEAN Tightens Military Bonds"
Pacific Defence Reporter
May 1988

Michael Richardson: "Singapore: The Poison Shrimp"
Pacific Defence Reporter
Jun 1985

Geoffrey Harris: "The Determinants of Defense Expenditure in the ASEAN Region"
Journal of Peace Research
1988, vol. 23(1)

Khong Kim Hoong & Abdul Razak Abdullah: "Security Co-operation in ASEAN"
Contemporary Southeast Asia
Sep 1987

Keith Thomas: "Singapore's Defense Forces"
Asia-Pacific Defense Forum
12(2) 1987

Lau Teik Soon: "Political and Security Trends in the ASEAN States"
Asian Affairs
Fall 1986

Seldon W. Simon: "Davids and Goliaths: Small Power-Great Power security relations in Southeast Asia"
Asian Survey
Mar 1983

C.E. Diggine: "The Problems Of Small States"
The Round Table
1985 (295)

Shridath Ramphal: "Small Is Beautiful But Vulnerable"
The Round Table
1984 (292)

George H. Quester: "Trouble in the Islands: Defending the Micro-States"
International Security
Fall 1983, vol.8, no.2

Shuhud Saaid: "The Singapore Armed Forces: Girding up for 'Total Attack' Through Total Defence"
Asian Defence Journal
February 1987

Shuhud Saaid: "The Singapore Army: 'A Flaming Sword in the Righteous Cause of National Survival'"
Asian Defence Journal
June 1987

J.D. Singer & M. Small: "The Composition and Status Ordering of the International System: 1815-1940"
World Politics
January 1966, vol.18

Wu Yuan-li: "Planning Security for Small States: Lessons From Singapore"
Pacific Community
July 1972

J. Alford: "Security Dilemmas of Small States"
The Round Table
1984 (292)

M. Faber: "Island Microstates: Problems of Viability"
The Round Table
1984 (292)

PERTINENT NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES AND PERIODICALS

Straits Times (Singapore's national English daily)

Pointer (A SAF monthly for officers dealing with strategies, operations, politics, etc.)

Pioneer (A SAF general publication mainly for the 'other ranks' dealing usually with news and developments within the SAF)

Pacific Defence Reporter

Asian Defence Journal

Jane's Defence Weekly

Far Eastern Economic Review

Defence and Foreign Affairs

Asiaweek