

part of the region and exhibit an 'in the region but not of the region' mentality. Sharing similar worldviews and security concerns, the colonial settler societies of Singapore and Israel are not surprisingly 'natural allies' embedded in the US security umbrella.

While Singapore's very close relationship with the US may have caused some unease in KL and Jakarta, her close ties with Israel has generated considerable resentment particularly amongst Muslims in the region. Like Israel, Singapore's technological and industrial sophistication, formidable military capacity and close ties with the United States have enabled it to assume a status beyond its restricted land area and population base. This status is underpinned by Israel's proven and Singapore's potential ability to inflict damage out of proportion to its size in a military conflict with neighbours.

Singapore's close relations with Israel can be profitably understood within the context of Singapore's post-separation attempts to build a defence establishment. In particular, when India, Egypt and Switzerland declined Singapore's request for assistance to build up its fledgling armed forces, Israel was forthcoming. This must have greatly pleased Lee Kuan Yew and Defence Minister Goh Keng Swee who were most impressed by Israel's ability to overpower her larger Muslim neighbours in several wars. The parallel threat perceptions of both colonial settler societies has been acknowledged by former PAP Minister Othman Wok in the following way: 'Israel was not a big country and was surrounded by hostile neighbours. We were in a similar position' (2000: 205).

By the end of 1965, an Israeli military delegation headed by General Ya'akov Elazari arrived in Singapore to model the SAF on the Israeli Defence Force.<sup>47</sup> Just as Israeli military advisers and their families based in Singapore posed as Mexicans, Singaporean officials visiting Israel assumed a fictitious identity.<sup>48</sup> Not surprisingly, Israel's role in building up Singapore's military establishment aroused regional suspicions. For example, in a meeting with Lee Kuan Yew in the early 1970s, Indonesian General Sumitro, Commander of the Internal Security Department, had apparently asked why the Singapore government had engaged Israeli military advisers and instructors. Recounting this meeting, Singapore's former ambassador to Indonesia wrote, 'He (Sumitro) feared that Singapore would develop similar policies to Israel's in Southeast Asia' (Lee Khoo Choy, 2005: 80).

In line with the Israeli security model, the SAF has been transformed from a small force of regulars and volunteer reservists into a citizen force based on compulsory national conscription and reservist service (Huxley, 2000: 11). Selected senior military personnel have apparently been sent to Israel for training. Reminiscent of Israel's policy of excluding Palestinians from 'compulsory' conscription, Singaporean Muslims were excluded from 'compulsory' military service for more than a decade. The Israeli stamp on the broader Singaporean polity was demonstrated by the appointment of Israeli advisers in the formative years of the National Trade Union Congress and the National Youth Training Institute.<sup>49</sup>

Indicative of their close strategic cooperation, most of Israel's arms sales to Singapore are in the form of joint military ventures with Singapore financing much of Israel's research and development and arms exports to it. Singapore has

purchased Israeli anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles and until a few years ago, Singapore was the Israeli defence industry's largest customer<sup>50</sup> of arms and weapons systems.<sup>51</sup> Both countries have cooperated in the development and manufacture of military hardware such as the Spike anti-tank missile.<sup>52</sup> They have jointly developed surveillance and intelligence gathering satellites, with Israel providing the technology and Singapore the funds. Inter alia, this project will enable Singapore to develop its own space programme.<sup>53</sup> Following the Israeli military model, Singapore has fused commercial and strategic concerns, with the setting up of Chartered Industries in 1967 and subsequent evolution into Singapore Technologies (Kwok, 1999: 58). Israel's and Singapore's cutting-edge arms industries have enabled both countries to maintain their military superiority over Muslim neighbours.

Regional apprehensions towards Singapore's intimate ties with Israel were evident when the Singapore government invited Israeli President Chaim Herzog to the republic in 1986. Weeks before the arrival of Herzog, Muslim organisations mobilised against the visit. Despite Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei's deliberate refusal to establish diplomatic ties with Israel, Herzog's visit to Singapore, without prior consultation with neighbouring countries, revealed the PAP leadership's lack of diplomatic sensitivity. Regional tensions were aggravated further when the Filipino government, in a gesture of regional sensitivity, hastily cancelled Herzog's visit to the Philippines (Nair, 1997: 229). When it was clear that the PAP government was intent on following through with Herzog's visit despite regional pressure, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei registered their protest by recalling their heads of mission from the city-state during Herzog's visit to Singapore in November 1986. Angered by the visit, Singapore was denounced as a 'second Israel' in the Malaysian Malay language dailies (Nair, 1997: 227). The virulent regional protests constituted the lowest point in Singapore's relations with her neighbours since 1965 (Singh, 1999: 214). These protests were fuelled by regional perceptions that the Singaporean leadership valued its diplomatic relations and extensive military links with Israel over her neighbours. Reiterating these concerns, Malaysia's Deputy Defence Minister Abdullah Fadzil Che Wan in 1999 urged the Singapore government to be more sensitive to Malaysia's concerns about its military cooperation with Israel (Andrew Tan, 2004: 51).

Relations with Israelis have shaped the city-state's foreign policy orientation on Palestinian self-determination and the Middle East in general. Lee Kuan Yew has frankly acknowledged that when the 1967 Arab-Israeli war broke out, Singapore was keen to appease Israel.

... we were relieved the Israelis were not defeated or our SAF would have lost confidence in their Israeli instructors. When the UN General Assembly was debating the resolution to condemn Israel... Keng Swee saw me to press Raja to direct our UN delegate not to vote in favour of the resolution or the Israeli's would leave... We had to stand up for the right of small nations to exist... We abstained and the Israelis did not leave.