

China Unbound

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4 The frightened country and the geopolitics of insecurity

Fear is the most powerful enemy of reason... fear itself can quickly become a self-perpetuating and freewheeling force that drains the national will and weakens national character.

(Al Gore, 2007: 23–24)

Insecurity and national identity

Singapore's national identity has been strongly shaped by a crisis discourse centred on the struggle for survival and security. This discourse is geared towards reminding Singaporeans of the vulnerabilities associated with being a predominantly Chinese city-state surrounded by larger, densely populated, resource rich and potentially hostile Malay states. The acrimonious nature of Singapore's merger and separation from Malaysia, continued reliance on neighbouring countries for even the most basic of necessities such as water and food, experience of Indonesia's low-intensity Konfrontasi military campaign¹ and communal riots in the 1950s and 1960s, and persistence of regional ethno-nationalist sentiments have contributed to the PAP leadership's acute insecurity. These factors have, according to Deck, 'created a near paranoid cluster of communal security attitudes in Singapore' (Deck, 1999: 251). Driven by these insecurities, survival has become a 'one word political slogan' that has underpinned the PAP's reading of Singapore's many national challenges (Deck, 1999: 251; Chan, 1971: 48).

The survival discourse is particularly convenient for the authoritarian PAP government as it represents an effective means of rallying the masses behind a nationalist rhetoric that rationalises high levels of defence spending and compulsory military service. The unspoken but deep-seated fear of the more than 230 million Malays in the immediate region has been very effective in maintaining the culture of insecurity and shepherding the predominantly Chinese populace into line. In many respects, the security and sovereignty of the city-state have been subtly conflated with the continued political longevity of the authoritarian PAP government – implicit guardians of a Chinese dominated Singapore.

Consistent with the relatively large number of former military personnel in the civil service and PAP front bench and the persistence of compulsory military service, Singapore's national identity is strongly tied to maintaining the status of

the SAF as the most technologically sophisticated military establishment in Southeast Asia. Official National Day parades are routinely spearheaded by a procession of military and security services personnel, followed by other national movements deemed integral to the city-state's national identity. In the 2007 National Day parade, the PAP fielded a marching contingent displaying party flags but the same right was not extended to opposition parties.² An army museum was opened in 2007 with the aim of documenting the development of the army since independence and visually narrating the stories of young men who have served their country by their participation in compulsory military service.³ Not depicted in the narrative is the systematic exclusion of Malay men from military service and who continue to face institutionalised discrimination in the SAF.

Singapore, like other colonial settler societies, remains uneasy with the historical dispossession of indigenous land and insecure with the settler society's geographic distance from the 'mother country' (Burke, 2001: 261). In many of these societies, national identity is based on the representation of danger (Lawrence, 2006: 43) and a deep-seated distrust of neighbouring countries. The denial of indigenous traditional ownership of the land is supported by the reconstruction of a national history that reflects the triumphalist historical narrative of the colonial settler society. In keeping with this triumphalist narrative, Singapore's pre-colonial Malay history has been trivialised whilst the economic contributions of British colonialism and that of extra-regional immigrants have been celebrated.

The strategic culture of many colonial settler societies is strongly tinged by a tendency to 'perceive a threat where none exists, or, if one exists, to inflate its capacity to harm' (Hage, 2003: 49). Believing that they cannot defend themselves against regional threats, a 'great and powerful' patron is relied upon to deter possible incursions of regional 'others'. In return for this protection, the military adventures of the patron and its global strategic interests are often uncritically supported (Cheeseman, 1999: 273). Driven by a fear of being swamped by the national and regional 'other', immigration policies have been tailored to preserve the numerical preponderance of the dominant immigrant community. Singapore's immigration policy of maintaining the numerical dominance of the Chinese community, the White Australia Policy and Israel's open-door policy to the Jewish diaspora are reflective of the deep-seated fear of losing numerical dominance and being engulfed by the 'other'.

Distrust and fear of the 'other' allows politicians to shore up their political base and rationalise controversial policies that reinforce the politics of fear. They recognise that when fear dominates, rational analysis is blurred and unpopular or controversial policies are more readily tolerated without critical examination. In this environment of fear, the ability of the majority to empathise with the concerns of the 'other' is diminished, leading to profound deafness and blindness to the genuine grievances of the latter (Ramadan, 2006: 12). To deflect public attention and maintain social control, peddlers of fear are inclined to promote negative stories about the domestic, regional and extra-regional 'other'. Thus isolated incidents related to the 'other' have been repeated and projected in the mainstream media as an alarming trend without serious analysis. Carmen Lawrence has observed how the

exploitation of inherently racist and irrational fears by the conservative Howard government led to a misdiagnosis of Australian national security – paradoxically channelling a disproportionate misdirection of resources to programmes and policies which have delivered minimal benefits to national security (Lawrence, 2006: 3). The ‘war on terror’ has also presented fear mongers with the opportunity to revitalise the discourse of threat and the politics of fear.

Not all colonial settler societies exhibit an insecure strategic culture and strong reliance on a ‘great and powerful’ patron to guarantee their national security. New Zealand and Canada have long adopted independent foreign and security policies, exemplified by their opposition to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In Australia, the Keating and Rudd Labor governments made significant progress in strengthening socio-cultural and security ties with neighbouring Asia-Pacific countries. They recognise that deepening geopolitical and economic relations are reinforced by a deepening of socio-cultural ties. In coming to terms with the country’s history of indigenous dispossession and discrimination, in 2008 the Australian and Canadian governments issued a national apology to the indigenous community. In an act of moral rectitude, courage and leadership, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, on behalf of the Australian government, declared:

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on those our fellow Australians . . . We take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future . . . where we harness the determination of all Australians, indigenous and non-indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.⁴

This chapter highlights the significance of historical and socio-political factors in shaping Singapore’s national identity, strategic culture and security policies. It examines the dangers of ethnocentrism in shaping security policies and producing negative and exaggerated perceptions of the national and regional ‘other’. These perceptions have arguably contributed to a Singaporean national identity that is rooted in the culture of fear, paranoia and insecurity – a culture engendered and exploited by the authoritarian PAP government. This goes some way towards explaining why Singapore remains the only country in Southeast Asia to have compulsory military service, spends more than any other regional country in per capita terms on defence, uncritically supported the US in its invasion of Iraq, remains deeply embedded in the US security umbrella and suffers from a regional soft power deficit despite its myriad economic achievements.

Insecurity and the realist worldview of an authoritarian state

Insecurity remains the core theme of the realist school of international relations and is the main driver of Singapore’s security policies. In keeping with this worldview, security is strongly understood in national rather than international or human

security terms. Strongly framed within state-centric terms, realist notions of security are premised on the insecurity of other states (Burke, 2001: 240). As military strength is perceived as pivotal in determining a state’s leverage in the international community, hard power becomes not only an instrument but an end in itself (Burke, 2001: 242). As international relations is thought of in anarchic terms and characterised by aggressive competition, states are expected to prepare for war and engage in regional balancing with great powers to guarantee their security (Emmerson, 2005: 4). The dominance of the realist worldview in Southeast Asia has meant that concepts such as regional human security and autonomous regional security remain highly problematic due to the focus on the engagement of great or big powers (Jayasuriya, 1994: 415).

It is also worth noting that the realist subordination of ethical considerations has meant that questions such as: is it right? is it just? is it in the interest of humankind? are deemed irrelevant. This ethical vacuum has allowed the PAP leadership to collude with notoriously corrupt and repressive regimes such as the Suharto New Order and Burmese SPDC regimes, particularly if bilateral relations are thought to benefit the economic and strategic interests of the Singaporean state. Indeed, the former long-serving Prime Minister and current Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew has acknowledged that he provided economic and geostrategic advice to Burma’s Generals Ne Win, Khin Nyunt and Than Shwe (Lee, 2000: 361–362).

The Singapore leadership’s propensity to maintain close economic relations with authoritarian governments irrespective of their political legitimacy and human rights record explains its defence of the pariah Burmese military regime in international forums. Thawng Htun, Representative for UN Affairs of Burma’s government-in-exile, attributes the Singapore government’s attempt to water down a UN General Assembly resolution castigating the military regime for its violent crackdown on pro-democracy activists in 1988 to its considerable business connections: ‘Singapore is defending its investments at the diplomatic level, using its efforts at the UN level to promote its business links’ (Kean and Bernstein, 1998: 334). Benefiting from being one of the first countries to resume relations with the Burmese military regime after its bloody crackdown which left thousands dead, detained and displaced, Singapore became Burma’s largest trading partner and foreign investor in the 1990s. The non-government organisation Burma Campaign UK has listed 10 Singapore firms on its ‘dirty list’ of companies engaged in business with Burma.⁵

In the 1990s, more than half of Singapore’s investments in Burma were purportedly in partnership with Burma’s heroin boss Lo Hsing Han, head of the conglomerate Asia World (Kean and Bernstein, 1998: 331). The Singapore GIC chaired by Lee Kuan Yew has purportedly invested in the Myanmar Fund, controlled by none other than Lo and his son Steven Law.⁶ The GIC also co-invested with Asia World in the Traders and Shangri-La Hotels in Rangoon.⁷ Lo and his son have been able to set up businesses in Singapore despite Lo’s record as a convicted drug trafficker. He was arrested in 1973, sentenced to death but pardoned by the Burmese military regime. Upon his release in 1980, Lo not only resumed his business activities in Burma but also served as advisor on ethnic affairs to General Khin Nyunt. This is

unsurprising in view of the SPDC regime's reliance on the resources of drug barons such as Lo for its financial survival (Kean and Bernstein, 1998: 331).

Despite being denied a visa to the United States due to suspicions of drug trafficking, Law has been allowed to travel in and out of Singapore (Kean and Bernstein, 1998: 332). This is ironic in view of Singapore's reputation as the 'execution capital' of the world. The city-state's record for having the highest execution rate in the world is due in part to the government's tough stance on drug traffickers.⁸ Paradoxically, convicted drug barons and their associates have been allowed to enter the city-state and set up businesses while small time drug couriers and addicts are mercilessly executed by hanging (Rahim, 2004: 16–17).

SPDC generals and Burmese drug barons have purportedly exploited Singapore's bank secrecy laws to engage in money laundering activities and used the city-state as a financial haven and a commercial window to the world. In the early 1990s, the Burmese military regime allegedly laundered US\$400 million through Singapore banks to purchase Chinese arms. Tay Za, currently the wealthiest man in Burma, has offices in Singapore.⁹

The PAP government's close economic tie with the SPDC military regime is matched by an equally intimate security relationship. The Singapore government has allegedly sold guns, rockets, armoured personnel carriers and grenade launchers to the military regime. The arms were supplied by Allied Ordinance, a subsidiary of Chartered Industries, which is an arm of the state conglomerate Singapore Technologies. Singaporean companies have also provided computers and communications equipment to Burma's defence ministry and army. Skilled in the science of surveillance, the Singapore government has trained hundreds of the SPDC's notorious secret police and about 5,000 SPDC officials through the Singapore Cooperation Program.¹⁰ It has provided equipment for the establishment of a cyber war centre geared towards monitoring dissident activity. Built with the assistance of Singapore Technologies, the cyber war centre is purportedly involved in monitoring and recording foreign and domestic telecommunications such as satellite telephone conversations of Burmese dissident groups.¹¹

Realist technocracy

The realist foreign policy and security perspectives of the PAP leadership have been preserved by the omnipresence of Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew in Cabinet and the elevation of son Lee Hsien Loong to the Prime Ministership. Lee Hsien Loong served in the SAF for 13 years and attained the rank of Brigadier General and Chief of Staff when he retired from the military to run for public office in 1984, at the age of 32. Elected as an MP in the 1984 elections, he was promptly elevated to the position of Minister of State in the Ministry of Defence a year later. The following year, the 'meritorious' younger Lee was installed as a Minister for Trade and Industry, Deputy Prime Minister in 1990 and Prime Minister in 2004.

The PAP leadership's realist worldview has also been preserved by the steady injection of active and reservist SAF officers into key administrative, statutory

board, diplomatic and political positions and councils of higher learning. This process has been facilitated by programmes such as the dual-career scheme for SAF scholars which, from the early 1980s, allow President's and SAF scholars to be seconded to positions in the civil service or statutory boards. When retiring from the SAF, the scholars are also commonly appointed to senior positions in the public sector (Huxley, 1993: 7). This phenomenon has prompted Huxley to assert that by the early 1990s, Singapore's administrative state had evolved into a military administrative state (1993: 19). The career trajectory of the 'Mindef Mafia' (Deck, 1999: 253), which includes former Chief of Staff Brigadier General Tan Chin Tiong¹² and Lee Kuan Yew's sons Brigadier Generals (Reservist) Lee Hsien Loong and Lee Hsien Yang, is indicative of the trend towards 'militarising' the bureaucracy, government-linked companies and the executive.

In step with their colleagues in the Ministries of Defence and Home Affairs, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are also steeped in the realist worldview of the PAP leadership. Understanding international relations as being driven by a state of perpetual tension or conflict between sovereign states, Singapore's first and long-serving Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam is known to have subscribed to the adage, 'Each nation for itself' (Koh and Acharya, 2003: xvii). Former Foreign Minister S. Dhanabalan is on record for characterising international relations as resembling 'a Hobbesian state of nature, where each is pitted against all' (Koh and Acharya, 2003: xvii). Acknowledging that Singaporean diplomats are strongly imbued with realist notions of international relations, senior diplomat Tommy Koh lamented that they

have generally been indoctrinated by the theories of the realist school. They believe that the weight and influence of a country in the world are dependent upon a number of objective indices such as size of country, population, military and economy.

(Koh and Acharya, 2003: 237)

The realist worldview of Minister Mentor Lee, Prime Minister Lee and their military trained Cabinet colleagues have remained uncontested due in part to the technocratic orientation of most PAP Ministers. Many have been coopted into the PAP from the civil service without much political experience in the PAP or active engagement with civil society. In Singapore's authoritarian state, where opposition parties are weak and poorly represented in parliament, civil society emasculated and the public depoliticised, security related issues are 'taboo subjects in parliament and are often cloaked by a veil of secrecy' (Ganesan, 2001: 581). These issues are commonly perceived by the public as the preserve of the government and have generally gone unchallenged.

Jayasuriya (1994: 417) has attributed the lack of serious public debate on foreign and security policies to the unwillingness of Singapore based academics and policy institutes to directly challenge the PAP government. Research centres have been characterised as lacking genuine independence and unwilling to assume the role of intellectual agenda setters. Ideas for regional innovation are thought to primarily

emanate from the bureaucracy or the Cabinet, leaving policy institutes in the role of 'cheer leaders for government policy ... [who] march to the beat of the state drum' (Jayasuriya, 1994: 417). Jayasuriya has accused them of 'being highly responsive to the interests of the Singaporean state' and functioning 'as an interlocutor for the Singaporean state's regional discourse' (1994: 417). In the same vein, Jones and Smith (2002: 100) assert that Singapore based security studies scholars are akin to 'scholar bureaucrats' who are aligned with the state and thus reluctant to speak truth to power.

Realist notions of sovereignty

The PAP leadership's realist worldview has encouraged it to aggressively confront neighbouring countries particularly when Singapore's sovereignty is thought to be at stake. This stance is fuelled by the barely concealed belief that the larger Malay-Muslim states of Indonesia to the south and Malaysia to the north have not fully accepted the predominantly Chinese city-state's sovereign status (Leifer, 2000: 2) and are envious of its economic success. The assumption is that without a formidable defence capability, Singapore would be at the mercy of her Malay neighbours. Reflecting this view, a senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bilahari Kausikan observed that,

All too often, they focus on the fact that the majority of our population is Chinese and project upon us their own attitudes towards their Chinese populations. Sometimes our very success, our existence as a successful sovereign, independent, multiracial and meritocratic country is seen as a challenge to, or an implicit criticism of, other systems. Often the key issue is not what we do, it is what we are.¹³

Coloured by these views, even seemingly innocuous actions of Singapore's neighbours have been interpreted in a threatening light. Indicative of this realist paranoia, shortly after Singapore's separation, the PAP leadership described the republic in metaphoric terms as a 'valuable nut situated in a nut-cracker' (Singh, 1999: 275).

T.S. George contends that the PAP leadership's acute insecurity stems from the apparent willingness of some senior UMNO politicians during the tumultuous merger years to arrest Lee for acting against the national interest.¹⁴ This goes some way towards explaining the PAP government's request for the Malaysian security forces, located in Singapore since 1952, to vacate its barracks. In the ensuing tense bilateral exchange, the PAP government denied that Malaysia possessed the right to the bases in Singapore. Yet Article 5(3) of the Separation Agreement clearly states that

The Government of Singapore will afford the Government of Malaysia the right to continue to maintain the bases and other facilities used by the military forces within Singapore and will permit the Government of Malaysia to make

use of these bases and facilities as the Government of Malaysia may consider necessary for the purpose of external defence.

(Chan, 1971: 38)

With separation in 1965, the Malaysian government had paid rental, revised in 1972 and 1974, for the location of its security forces in the Woodlands naval base. However, when the rental was revised from S\$1.9 million to S\$6.1 million per year in 1991, negotiations broke down after the Malaysian government accused its Singaporean counterpart of pressuring the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) to relocate despite Article 5 of the 1965 Separation Agreement recognising the RMN base in Woodlands (Singh, 1999: 200). The RMN finally relocated in 1997 to Tanjung Penggelih in Johor amidst allegations by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad that the PAP government had repeatedly raised the rental to repossess the Woodlands naval base – indicative of its bad faith. Mahathir pronounced that the RMN had the right to stay put under the Separation Agreement.¹⁵ This point was reiterated to the author during an interview in Kuala Lumpur with Mahathir Mohamad in 2006.

The Singapore government has consistently advocated in international and regional forums that the violation of territorial sovereignty is an unacceptable conduct of international relations – a position rooted in the understanding that Singapore's sovereignty would not be guaranteed if such violations were condoned by the international community. Thus when Vietnam occupied Cambodia in 1979, ostensibly to oust the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime, Singapore led a vigorous ASEAN diplomatic campaign in the UN to condemn this occupation. The ethics of colluding with the genocidal Khmer Rouge in order to challenge the legitimacy of the Vietnamese backed Heng Samrin regime was secondary to the preoccupation with preserving the PAP leadership's realist notions of state sovereignty. Rationalising the PAP government's collusion with the Khmer Rouge, Singapore's former Foreign Minister S. Dhanabalan remarked,

The moral issue troubles many of us. But there were other issues at play. Who has the right to determine that a government or regime is evil and ought to be overthrown. The people of the country or some outside power? We held and still hold the view that it is the responsibility of a people to determine who and how they should be governed and that no foreign state has the right to determine what or which is a good government in another state.

(Dhanabalan, 2005: 42)

The idea that it is the responsibility of a terrorised and subjugated citizenry to be in a position to determine who and how they should be governed constitutes a major leap in logic. It is based on overlooking the Khmer Rouge's murderous record of systematically eliminating millions and depriving Cambodians of their basic political and civil rights.

Singapore and the regional security dilemma

The security dilemma in international relations literature commonly refers to states suspicious of the actions and policies of other states even though the intention of these states may in fact be benign. Suspicions can escalate into an arms race, or even war, particularly when states exhibit offensive postures by purchasing weapons with an offensive capability (Jervis, 1976) or shrouds its military equipment, organisation and capabilities in secrecy. This posture may be driven by the realist belief that the security of a state requires the insecurity of other states. In this environment, an arms race is often triggered off as states enhance their military capability to keep up with others believed to possess a more formidable military capability. In this classic security dilemma situation, states become more insecure despite their arms accumulation as the threatening image of other states becomes reinforced.¹⁶

Lee Kuan Yew has acknowledged in his memoirs that the rapid build-up of the SAF after separation in 1965 was strongly motivated by the fear of a Malaysian instigated coup against the city-state. Lee believed that there were senior elements within UMNO who deeply resented the PAP leadership and were capable of instigating military action against the city-state:

We had to deter and, if need be, prevent any wild move by the Malay ultras in Kuala Lumpur to instigate a coup by the Malaysian forces in Singapore and reverse the independence we had acquired . . . If anything were to happen to Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak would become Prime Minister and he could be made to reverse the Tunku's decision by strong-minded ultra leaders . . . The best deterrent to any Malaysian plan to regain control over Singapore was their knowledge that even if they could subdue our armed forces, they would have to keep down a whole people well trained in the use of arms and explosives . . . other powerful Malay leaders, like Syed Ja'afar Albar who so strongly opposed separation that he resigned as secretary-general of UMNO, might persuade Brigadier Alsagoff it was his patriotic duty to reverse separation . . . Keng Swee as defence minister worked feverishly to build-up some defence capability.

(2000: 22–27)

Indicative of the PAP leadership's acute Singapore's insecurity complex, a high five to six per cent of Singapore's GDP and 30 per cent of the total government expenditure is spent on defence – more than any other country in Southeast Asia.¹⁷ The city-state is one of the most militarised states in the world, with only Israel and Qatar spending more on defence in per capita terms.¹⁸ Singapore's status as one of the most densely defended states in the world (Huxley, 2000: xx) is compounded by the SAF's technological edge over its regional counterparts. The SAF's status as the most technologically sophisticated airforce in Southeast Asia is exemplified by the ability of its fighter aircraft to strike a target of up to 1,000 miles from a runway and its possession of sophisticated air-borne radar systems for early warning (Leifer, 2000: 3).

Singapore's neighbours are no doubt also concerned by its technological edge in crucial areas such as armour, medium range artillery, combat aircraft and missile-equipped naval craft.

In many respects, Singapore's technological prowess is driven by the need to compensate for its lack of strategic depth. The SAF's reliance on conscripts and reservists is offset by their extended period of intensive compulsory military service and re-training (Huxley, 2000: 30). Compulsory national service ensures that up to 10 per cent of the Singaporean citizenry are directly associated with the military¹⁹ and provides the SAF with a highly skilled standing force of approximately 59,000 troops (da Cunha, 1999: 454) and 300,000 reservists²⁰ who are called up for brief periods of training each year. In a constant state of national military preparedness, fuel, water and food rationing exercises are periodically held, roads can be used as emergency runways, air-raid systems have been installed, food stockpiles maintained and a civilian bomb-shelter programme in place.

Notwithstanding the PAP government's projection of Singapore as the Switzerland of Southeast Asia, the republic's formidable military capability is closer to that of Israel. Both have surpassed their neighbours in terms of the volume of firepower, technical skill, level of unit operational readiness and technological advantage. Instructively, the commitment to maintain Singapore's military edge over her neighbours did not recede with the conclusion of the Cold War in the late 1980s. This can be attributed to the belief that the city-state's potential sources of military conflict – Malaysia and to a lesser extent Indonesia – remained constant. If anything else, the cessation of the Cold War evoked greater insecurity as the primary rationale for a US military presence in East Asia had weakened (Singh, 1999: 283). In keeping with this enhanced insecurity, arms purchases from the US were stepped up.²¹

While other Southeast Asian states were pressured by the 1997 regional economic crisis to reduce their defence budgets, Singapore increased its defence spending significantly. In the financial year 1998–1999, and the following two years, its defence budget increased by 13 per cent (Huxley, 2000: 27). When other regional states had put on hold or cancelled their plans to modernise their military, Singapore took delivery of offensive F-16 fighters and 30 planes in 1998 (Collins, 2000: 104–105). Why the increased military expenditure at a time of regional demilitarisation and economic pressure? In addition to the deep-seated insecurity complex of the PAP leadership, Collins suggests that Singapore's enhanced militarisation was precipitated by a heightened sense of insecurity stemming from the unexpected ouster of the Suharto regime in 1998 and the rise of political Islam in Malaysia (2000: 105).

By 2000, regional militaries resumed their defence spending to pre-1998 levels,²² fuelled in part by the need to narrow Singapore's lead in sophisticated weaponry. Thailand purchased F-16s and Indonesia acquired Russian fighters.²³ Instructively, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia also expressed interest in acquiring diesel-electric submarines after Singapore acquired four refurbished Swedish diesel submarines in 2000 (da Cunha, 2001: 6). Raising the security concerns of neighbouring countries, Singapore's airforce superiority was strengthened further

when it signed the US-led Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) development programme in February 2003,²⁴ rendering the republic the only Asian country to participate in the program. Regional security concerns were aroused by the establishment of a new air base in Changi which houses 20 of the RSAF's most technologically sophisticated jets such as the F-16, B-52 and Fighting Falcon. These jets have enhanced capabilities like long-range fuel tanks, improved ground-mapping capabilities and an advanced targeting pod.²⁵ In 2005, 12 offensive F-15 fighters, which included advanced air-to-air missiles and satellite guided bombs, were purchased from the Americans. Particularly unsettling for neighbouring states was that these acquisitions provided Singapore with intermediate range anti-aircraft capability and ensured inter-operability with US forces in joint operations.²⁶

The SAF has since the mid-1980s moved from a 'poison shrimp' deterrence posture based on territorial defence to developing offensive oriented conventional capabilities. With these offensive capabilities, the SAF has the capacity to strike more than two hundred or more miles into enemy territory in coordinated ground-air operations with naval support for logistical systems (Deck, 1999: 250). This can be followed by the swift formation of beachheads in the adversary's territory (Deck, 1999: 250). This preemptive strike strategy is based on emasculating perceived aggressors in accordance with the logic that attack is the best form of deterrence. According to Deck, the strategic culture of the SAF and its preemptive strike strategy is premised on the questionable belief that 'equates fear with respect in subregional politics; they believe that the will and capacity to project power beyond their borders induces respectful fear in all potential adversaries' (Deck, 1999: 256). To augment this preemptive strike strategy, the SAF has apparently developed sufficient resilience to absorb the adversary's first strike (Huxley, 2000: 57).

The veil of secrecy surrounding details of the city-state's military acquisition, organisation and capabilities have undoubtedly fuelled the suspicions of neighbouring countries and escalated the security dilemma. It is difficult to ascertain the actual number of Singapore's combat aircraft as many of them are stationed overseas and thus not readily accounted for (Emmerson, 1996: 58). This secrecy is consistent with the tight control on information pertaining to security, defence and other issues. Reflecting this culture of secrecy, there is a dearth of detailed and coherent official information on the SAF released to the public (Huxley, 2000: xxi).

Since the 'war on terror', Singapore and other Southeast Asian states have steadily increased their defence allocations,²⁷ fuelling a 'slow-motion' arms race whereby one country's arms acquisition precipitates other countries to acquire arms (da Cunha, 2001: 5). Southeast Asia's security tensions and arms race can also be attributed to the failure in resolving long-standing regional territorial disputes and economic competition between regional states. Unlike other regional blocs such as the EU, ASEAN has yet to establish a regional arms register that requires reporting of current weapons holdings and domestic production. As such, the exchange of defence information among ASEAN states has been minimal.²⁸ The lack of exchange in regional defence information and ongoing expansion of military arsenals can be attributed to the long-standing bilateral tensions between ASEAN states such as Thailand and Burma and Singapore and Malaysia

(da Cunha, 2001: 5). It is worth noting that Southeast Asia's regional arms race mirrors the broader East Asian arms build-up ostensibly fuelled by China and Japan's shift towards a more outward defence posture.²⁹

Suspicious neighbours: the Singapore-Malaysia security counter-balance

Tim Huxley has asserted that tensions between Singapore and Malaysia constitute one of '... the most sensitive and unstable relationships between any pair of ASEAN members' (Huxley, 2000: 45). One manifestation of the deep-seated tension between Singapore and Malaysia is their competitive arms build-up. As noted above, Singapore's military build-up in the post-separation period has been rationalised as a means of pre-empting a possible Malaysian military action, purportedly favoured by anti-PAP elements in UMNO who deeply resented the PAP leadership's political machinations during the merger years.³⁰ Typifying the classic security dilemma, Malaysia's arms build-up has been fuelled by Singapore's aggressive preemptive strike option of invading neighbouring Johor in the event of a serious bilateral military conflict (Lee, 2000: 40). Beneath the semblance of military cooperation via defence agreements such as the Five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA), deep-seated suspicions persist. For example, during a joint-FPDA military exercise in 1970, the Malaysian government refused to allow Singapore tanks to cross the causeway (George, 1974: 171).

Unnecessarily suspicions have been fuelled by alleged SAF intrusions into Malaysian land and airspace. For example, in October 1987, the Malaysian government claimed that an SAF assault boat had intruded into a riverine area in Johor and accused the SAF of provocatively sending its soldiers into Malaysian territory on routine training exercises (Huxley, 2000: 45). Two years later, the Malaysian government detained nine spies accused of selling military secrets to Singapore. Instructively, this was not the first time that Malaysia had arrested spies allegedly working for the Singapore government (Huxley, 2000: 46). Rebuking Singapore for its alleged spying activity, Malaysia suspended all bilateral military exercises with Singapore in 1990. In the same year, Malaysia closed its airspace to aircraft from the Singapore Flying College and Singapore Flying Club following claims that they had conducted photographic reconnaissance over 'strategic' locations in Malaysia (Huxley, 2000: 46). It is worth noting that in early 1996, Australian intelligence officials alleged that Singaporean agents were engaged in covertly collecting intelligence on Australian military capabilities. Shortly after these embarrassing allegations, the RSAF's advanced flying training operation in Australia was relocated to France (Huxley, 2000: 200). The intrusions of Singaporean military aircraft into Malaysian airspace without authorisation have been perceived by Malaysian officials as a deliberate taunt by the Singaporean leadership emboldened by the belief that with US military facilities in Singapore, KL is not in a position to retaliate.³¹

Yet in September 1998, Malaysia did retaliate days after Singapore attempted to terminate the Malaysian Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) checkpoint

in Tanjung Pagar by revoking permission for the RSAF to use its airspace in South Johor. To underscore its dissatisfaction with Singapore's handling of the CIQ issue, permission for the RSAF to conduct navigational training over airspace in West Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak was also terminated (Nathan, 2002: 45). The annual Singapore–Malaysia Defence Forum, Semangat Bersatu joint army exercise and Malpura joint naval exercise were also called off in the late 1990s (Huxley, 2000: 213).

Emmerson has observed that the near doubling of Singapore's airforce between 1977 and 1984 had probably spurred Malaysia to rapidly expand its airforce (1996: 58). When Singapore purchased the AIM-120C advanced medium-range air missiles in 2000,³² Malaysia purchased the Jemas air-defence system and Astros guided missile.³³ Shortly after Singapore's purchase of the Sea Serpent-class submarine, Malaysia acquired an attack submarine.³⁴ The SAF is ahead of the MAF in most aspects of military capability since the early 1990s and its military equipment procurement initiatives are geared towards maintaining this technological edge. The SAF countered Malaysia's comparative advantage in artillery by acquiring in 2001 US Apache attack helicopters that are effective against tanks, armoured infantry fighting vehicles and multiple-launch rocket systems. To counter Singapore's attempt to blunt Malaysia's artillery leverage, the latter announced its intention to procure several surface-to-air missile batteries in 2001.³⁵ Between 2002 and 2003, Malaysia spent billions of dollars modernising its military hardware with new fighter jets, helicopters, weapons systems and submarines.³⁶

Malaysia's arms acquisitions has in no small measure been shaped by the knowledge that in any military encounter with Singapore, the SAF is likely to adopt a preemptive strike strategy by utilising its superior air-power to capture part of Johor (Huxley, 2001: 208). The SAF's preemptive strike strategy is strongly shaped by Singapore's Second World War experience which clearly demonstrated that the narrow Straits of Johor does not serve as an effective barrier to an invading force from the north. From Johor, the adversary is able to cut off water supplies and shell the city-state which would be unable to effectively defend itself once the adversary had secured part of the island due in no small measure to its lack of strategic depth.

It is an open secret that Singapore's preemptive strike strategy has long been played out in SAF staff college simulation exercises. These exercises include devastating the Malaysian Air Force on the ground before mounting further air-strikes; SAF commandoes securing Johor Bahru and the second link bridge; amphibious landings to position the SAF's elite Twenty First Division on Johor's coast and seizing a zone approximately 80 km into Johor to secure Singapore's water pumping stations at Skudai and Kota Tinggi. However, the success of this military operation would require Indonesia to remain neutral – a less than certain presumption in a post-Suharto Indonesia where relations with Singapore has been problematic. A second front would be made possibly by Brunei or Thailand allowing the RSAF to use their airbases (Huxley, 2000: 59–63).

A major flaw with Singapore's preemptive strike strategy is that a relatively minor dispute with Malaysia could potentially escalate into a full blown military

conflict. The SAF's strategy of pre-empting a potentially devastating first strike is strongly premised on the city-state's lack of strategic depth and need to preserve its water supplies in Johor. Thus, a minor dispute such as a Singaporean naval vessel firing warning shots at a Malaysian vessel in contested territorial waters could inadvertently trigger a serious crisis.

Even though Singapore's preemptive strike strategy is geared towards compelling neighbouring states to treat the city-state with circumspection (Huxley, 2000: 63), it may well have aggravated the arms race between Singapore and Malaysia and contributed to the militarisation of Johor – ironically making a military conflict between both states more probable. Malaysian military vigilance in Johor has also been fuelled by the claims of Johor's former Chief Minister, Mahyuddin Yassin Said that in the 1990s, Lee Kuan Yew threatened war with Malaysia if the city-state's water supply from Johor was cut off.³⁷ Reiterating these concerns, retired Malaysian Army General Zaini Mohamed has suggested that an escalating water dispute could well lead to military conflict due in no small part to Singapore's offensive preemptive strike strategy.³⁸ Demonstrating that KL has not taken Singapore's preemptive strike policy lightly, Johor's defences have been buttressed by the building of two large military bases from the late 1990s and a commando training camp built near Mersing in 2001 (da Cunha, 2001: 14).

The racialised security apparatus

It is an open secret that Singapore Malays have been excluded from full integration into the structure of the SAF. The exclusion of Malays from 'compulsory' national service for much of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and continued discrimination in the SAF despite the official rhetoric of the socially integrative nature of national service, can be attributed to the perception that Malaysia and to a lesser extent Indonesia are Singapore's most likely military adversaries. To be sure, the ethno-nationalist strategic culture³⁹ of the PAP leadership has not escaped political elites from Malaysia and Indonesia.

Determined to overturn the dominance of Malays in the military forces after separation from Malaysia, recruitment of Malays into the SAF was virtually halted after 1967, even though Malays made up 80 per cent of volunteers in the armed services. Malay officers and non-commissioned officers were systematically transferred from field command to logistics and support sections while others were retired or shut off from promotion (Huxley, 2000: 102–103). Walsh has observed that the PAP leadership's distrust and fear of Malays led it to 'sacrifice virtually all the experience and professionalism that had been built up before 1965 in exchange for a Chinese dominated military' (2007: 273). The paranoid distrust of Malays is demonstrated by the reliance of the SAF's intelligence services on ethnic Chinese proficient in Malay, rather than Malay personnel, to analyse Malay newspapers (Walsh, 2007: 273).

Since independence, Malay participation in sensitive areas in the SAF such as armoured and tank units, front-line combat infantry and the airforce have been restricted (Mutalib, 2002: 43). Continued discrimination of Malays in the more

'sensitive' wings of the SAF such as the air force was rationalised by Lee Kuan Yew in 1999 in the following way:

If for instance you put a Malay officer who's very religious and who has family ties in Malaysia in charge of a machine gun unit, that is a very tricky business... If today the Prime Minister doesn't think about this, we could have tragedy.⁴⁰

Driven by this paranoid geostrategic mindset, the first Malay air-force pilot was only appointed in 1992 and the first Malay fighter pilot in 2003.⁴¹

Reminding Singaporeans of the potential security risk posed by Malays, Lee has stated that '... our concerns about conflicting realities are real. We know of at least one case where foreign intelligence agencies approached one of our senior officers because he was Malay'.⁴² The geostrategic calculation underpinning this paranoid outlook was evident by Lee's assertion that

If there's an enormous disturbance in Malaysia, we are going to be affected. If there's an enormous disturbance in Indonesia, especially in Batam, the Riau Islands, we are going to be affected. It's a fact of life. We have to face the real world and the real world is unfair and unkind. It cannot be helped.⁴³

In regional terms, the PAP government's long-standing policy of restricting opportunities for Malays in the SAF has had the effect of signalling to the city-state's Malay neighbours that they remain the most serious military threat to its sovereignty – hardly the recipe for nurturing regional goodwill. The SAF's discriminatory policy serves to reinforce regional suspicions that the PAP leadership has nurtured a society that suffers from a siege mentality and is 'out of place' in the Malay World. Not surprisingly, these discriminatory policies have engendered Malay resentment and alienation with their second class status in a supposedly meritocratic society. They have also engendered the public perception that Malay loyalty to the country is suspect, thereby fuelling latent inter-ethnic tensions. Without doubt, the perception of dubious Malay loyalty to the country has been reinforced by the alleged discovery of a militant JI network in Singapore.

To be sure, compulsory military service was introduced in part from the awareness that the Chinese are traditionally disdainful of military service.⁴⁴ Without compulsory military service, the Singapore government would have faced major challenges in building a sizeable reserve army, leaving it reliant on a predominantly Malay military force (Walsh, 2007: 275). Why then have Malays traditionally identified with and participated in the military establishment? Jeshurun purports that Malays have, from the era of pre-colonial Malay kingdoms, accorded high status to human qualities such as bravery and the willingness to fight and die in defence of their land. This is demonstrated by the strong collective memory of the Royal Malay Regiment (RMR) who selflessly fought the Japanese in the Battle of Singapore in February 1942 (Jeshurun, 1999: 233). The RMR's fierce resistance against the Japanese has become folklore in Malaysia, but instructively is less well known in Singapore.

The SAF's system of training and promotion based on the rapid elevation of the predominantly Chinese SAF scholar officers⁴⁵ may have undermined the structural foundations and efficacy of the SAF in combat. Scholar officers make up a disproportionately higher percentage of senior officers, reaching the rank of major, lieutenant colonel or full colonel in only eight years. This process of fast-tracking, uncommon in other military establishments, has allowed operationally inexperienced scholar officers to be promoted ahead of the more experienced non-graduate regular officers (Walsh, 2007: 269–270). Yet Singapore's senior military officers are also one of the most highly paid military officers in the world despite their lack of operational experience (da Cunha, 1999: 457). The fast-tracking of operationally inexperienced scholar officers has prompted Walsh to question the ability of such senior officers to lead in a conflict against battle-hardened troops (2007: 268).

In geostrategic terms, there is a strong case to be made for terminating discriminatory policies against Malays in the SAF and promoting an ethnically representative military at the senior officer level. Stronger Malay representation, particularly at the senior levels, could assist in tempering regional perceptions that the discriminatory practices against Malays in the SAF is reflective of a Chinese dominated city-state that is distrustful of its neighbours. Regional resentment against the PAP government's discriminatory policies was clearly highlighted in 1999 when Indonesian President B.J. Habibie accused the Singapore government of being racist, pointing to its discriminatory policies against Malays in the SAF. A substantial number of senior Malay officers would help promote cross-cultural sensitivity within the predominantly Chinese SAF senior officer corps (Walsh, 2007: 276). An ethnically diverse SAF officer corp could well strengthen domestic security needs and assist in the efficacy of Singapore's regional peacekeeping and humanitarian operations (Walsh, 2007: 273). In many respects, the full integration of Malays into the SAF constitutes a barometer of Singapore's genuine regional integration and status as a genuinely meritocratic and multiracial society.

Siege mentality states in collusion

Singapore suffers from the reputation of being the Israel of Southeast Asia. Both are strongly driven by a fear and distrust of the national and regional 'other'. Engulfed by this siege mentality, both states have relied on the US as their 'great and powerful' patron, built up a military arsenal that is second to none in the region and institutionalised a total defence strategy⁴⁶ which discriminates against full Muslim participation in the military. Lacking in strategic depth due to their limited size, their military establishment is offensive in orientation and geared towards a preemptive strike against those assuming 'threatening proportions'. This strategy is based on waging war in enemy territory.

Like Israel, Singapore's settler society has not strongly identified, in socio-cultural terms, with the immediate region. Just as Israel is more strongly culturally enmeshed with Europe and the Western world, Singaporeans have been strongly encouraged to identify, in cultural terms, with Northeast Asians. Notwithstanding the realities of geography, these colonial settler societies do not see themselves as

This pro-Israeli outlook goes some way towards explaining the PAP's disinterest in the plight of Palestinians and close ties with Zionist leaning neo-conservatives in Washington.

In sharp contrast to the Singapore government's intimate security and economic relations with Israel, the Malaysian government has been consistently critical of Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank and treatment of the Palestinians. Indeed, Malaysia's trade with Israel was terminated with the passage of the 1977 Customs Prohibition Act. Parallels between the marginal status of Malays during the colonial era and the ongoing plight of the Palestinians have been drawn by Mahathir Mohamad, noting that Britain's willingness to jeopardise the birthright of Malays in colonial Malaya were akin to its policies in Palestine (Leifer, 1988: 345).

When Mahathir became Prime Minister in 1981, Islam became a major component in Malaysia's foreign policy.⁵⁴ Mahathir fully supported the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and under his watch Malaysia attained the distinction of being the only Southeast Asian country to accord full diplomatic status to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Mahathir also raised the Palestinian question on every appropriate occasion at the UN (Saravanamuttu, 2004: 312). UN Resolutions 238 and 242, which called for withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories, were strongly endorsed by Malaysia. It continues to lobby energetically in the UN for Israel to abide by UN resolutions, champion Palestinian self-determination and has contributed significant financial support and other forms of humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. Broadening the discourse on terrorism to include state terrorism, Mahathir defined terrorism as an act of violence committed against civilians by both state and non-state actors. This definition of terrorism would require Western governments to condemn both Islamic suicide bombers as well as Israeli security forces targeting Palestinian civilians (Nesadurai, 2006: 190). A United Nations sponsored conference on the question of Palestine was held in Kuala Lumpur in the early 1980s (Saravanamuttu, 2004: 207–208).

Malaysia's standing within the Muslim World was elevated when it joined the Islamic Charter of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1972 and hosted the fifth OIC Summit in KL in 1974 (Nair, 1997: 64). More recently, Malaysia has played a pivotal role in providing greater focus to the OIC through its chairmanship of the organisation. At the 2003 OIC Summit, in Malaysia's administrative capital Putrajaya, sensitive issues such as the lack of development in Muslim societies and the extensive influence of the Israeli lobby in the West were openly discussed by Mahathir Mohamad.⁵⁵

Realist realignments: from Whitehall to Washington

During the merger years, the PAP leadership maintained close security ties with the West⁵⁶ whilst appearing to be keen advocates of the non-aligned movement. Despite its janus-faced stance, it saw fit to chastise KL for not aligning more closely with the Afro-Asian camp, failing to establish relations with communist states, identifying with imperialist powers and supporting US involvement in the Vietnam

War (Fletcher, 1969: 68). This duplicitous stance was strongly driven by the Indonesian government's success in excluding Malaya from the 1961 Belgrade Summit Conference of Non-Aligned Countries and the 1964 Cairo Summit Conference of Non-Aligned Countries. The PAP leadership believed that unless KL made greater efforts to counter Indonesia's projection of Malaysia as a neo-colonialist creation, Malaysia would eventually be reduced to pariah status in the Afro-Asian community. In foreboding tones, Lee warned the Alliance leadership in the Malaysian parliament that 'External Affairs are a matter of life and death. Isolation from the growing body of Afro-Asian opinion and identification with imperialist and colonialist nations must in the end mean death' (Wilairat, 1975: 18).

In keeping with its rhetoric during the merger years, a non-aligned foreign policy stance was briefly maintained following Singapore's independence in 1965. For example, among the first to be informed of Singapore's independence were non-aligned heavyweights such as Egypt's Nasser, India's Shastri and Cambodia's Sihanouk. To defuse Afro-Asian suspicions about British military bases in Singapore, Lee made the outlandish assertion that when the British eventually terminated their defence commitment to Singapore, he would prefer the Russians rather than the US as a replacement (Wilairat, 1975: 40). The republic's non-aligned credentials were bolstered when Lee claimed that the CIA had surreptitiously obtained classified information from a Singaporean intelligence official in 1965.⁵⁷ Chan has suggested that the PAP leadership's anti-American rhetoric, which included the threat of entering into a defence arrangement with the Soviets, was little more than a Machiavellian ploy to pressure the British to maintain their bases in the republic (Chan, 1971: 44). This calculated ruse was acknowledged by Lee in his memoirs in the following way: 'The Russian move had given me a card to play. I hoped the Americans would encourage the Australians to remain in Singapore' (Lee, 2000: 517).

Despite its non-aligned rhetoric, the PAP leadership remained eager for the British to maintain Singapore as its regional military headquarters and preserve its bases in the city-state. Thus, when Whitehall announced its intention to withdraw East of Suez in 1967 and its bases from Singapore by 1971, the PAP leadership's Afro-Asian rhetoric was swiftly discarded in recognition that the non-aligned rhetoric offered few economic benefits (George, 1974: 165). Henceforth, an unequivocal pro-Western and US stance was adopted (Wilairat, 1975: 42). With the imminent British withdrawal east of Suez, the PAP leadership enthusiastically courted and encouraged the US to maintain a visible security presence in East Asia in the belief that as a benign hegemon,⁵⁸ it would contribute to the stability of the region. US bases in the Philippines were thought to have stymied Soviet military expansionism, contained Vietnamese aggression and checked the growth of regional powers such as China during the Cold War. Thus, during a visit to Washington in October 1967, Lee pledged full support of the US military offensive in Vietnam (Wilairat, 1975: 42). Impressed by Lee's unabashed support for the unpopular military intervention in Vietnam, President Johnson described Lee as 'a patriot, a brilliant political leader and statesman of the New Asia' (George, 1974: 164).

Courting Washington as a defence partner to ensure 'overwhelming power on our side',⁵⁹ the Singapore government provided logistical assistance to US naval operations for its military intervention in Indochina. In mid-1966 Singapore was offered as a rest and recreation base for US troops. As anticipated, this pro-US stance reaped economic benefits (Chan, 1971: 45). Singapore exported manufactured weapons to Vietnam (George, 1974: 165) and served as a ship-repair base for the US Navy (Wilairat, 1975: 70). By the 1970s, the city-state was the third largest exporter to South Vietnam. At the same time, the US had also become Singapore's main defence equipment supplier. Indicative of the city-state's location firmly in the US security orbit, by 1978 the US Navy was provided with access to Tengah Air Base for long-range patrol flights over the Indian Ocean (Huxley, 2000: 208).

This pro-Western security stance enhanced Singapore's status as an attractive foreign investment site, crucial for the city-state's rapid industrialisation. Singapore's position as a regional manufacturing base for multinational corporations was also expected to strengthen the commitment of Western economic interests to its security (Wilairat, 1975: 45). The strategic and economic benefits associated with embedding Singapore within the US orbit was acknowledged by former Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam in the following way: 'Though we want all powers to be present in Asia, we are closer to and feel safer with the Americans than with others. We make no bones about this ... They can provide much more for our economic well-being ...' (Chan and Haq, 1987: 493). Importantly, the close security relationship with the US was strongly premised on the need to pre-empt neighbouring countries from taking advantage of the city-state's vulnerability of being entirely surrounded by Malaysian and Indonesian territorial waters and having no access to the high seas other than through neighbouring waters (Huxley, 2000: 31). Belying this realist calculation Lee remarked in 1966 that 'in the last resort it is power which decides what happens and, therefore, it behoves us to ensure that we always have overwhelming power on our side' (Leifer, 2000: 5).

The PAP leadership's coveting of a 'great and powerful' patron has been reinforced by the periodic military assaults upon smaller states by larger neighbours. They include Indonesia's annexation of East Timor in 1975, Vietnam's incursion into Cambodia in 1978 and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. In these military conflicts, the Singapore government consistently registered its disapproval at various multilateral forums. For instance, the 1976 UN General Assembly resolution condemning Indonesia's annexation of East Timor was opposed by every regional ASEAN state except Singapore.⁶⁰ Singapore was also actively engaged in the campaign to deny international recognition to the Vietnamese backed Heng Samrin regime in Cambodia in multilateral bodies such as the United Nations.

The invasion of East Timor and Cambodia by larger neighbouring states strongly reinforced the PAP leadership's belief that the regional balance of power should not be in the hands of regional states (Leifer, 2000: 83). An externally guaranteed regional balance of power would effectively stymie Malaysia and Indonesia from dominating the archipelago region. The preference for an externally guaranteed regional balance of power explains the PAP leadership's initial lukewarm response towards earlier regional initiatives such as ASEAN in 1967 and ZOPFAN in 1971.

ZOPFAN's non-aligned ideal was only accorded lip-service support by the PAP government. By contrast, the 1971 FPDA which ties Britain, Australia and New Zealand to the security of Singapore and Malaysia has been enthusiastically supported.⁶¹ Inter alia, the FPDA has provided a multilateral forum for Singaporean and Malaysian armed forces to exercise on a regular basis.

The PAP leadership's preference for an externally guaranteed regional balance of power also explains its lack of enthusiasm for ASEAN's more recent shift towards a security community. The commitment to maintaining a US security presence in Southeast Asia was clearly demonstrated when it offered to host US military facilities following the expiration of their military bases in the Philippines in the late 1980s. The only other ASEAN state to closely subscribe to the Singaporean position of preferring an externally guaranteed balance of power in the region is Thailand. By contrast, Indonesia and Malaysia are inclined to support a regionally guaranteed balance of power managed by regional states (Emmerson, 1996: 70).

All the way with the USA

Relations between the PAP leadership and the more hawkish Republican Presidents such as Reagan, Bush Senior and Bush Junior have been particularly close. In 1981, Reagan sought Lee Kuan Yew's counsel about selling new generation aircraft to Taiwan. Lee was asked to convey a message to Chiang Kai Shek not to press the US for high-tech weapons at a time when US relations with China were sensitive. Again, in 1985, Lee was requested by Reagan to cajole Chiang into remaining in the Asian Development Bank (ADB) after Taiwan's designation had changed to Taipei following the PRC's admittance into the ADB (Lee, 2000: 528–533). Lee has also taken credit for playing a pivotal role in urging Reagan to terminate US support for Marcos when the latter had lost its legitimacy following the 1986 elections (Lee, 2000: 535). Relations with Bush Senior were also robust, with Lee apparently conveying messages on behalf of the White House to the PRC President Yang Shangkun (Lee, 2000: 540).

In recognition of his consistent support of American security interests and rapport with the conservative Republican leadership, the Nixon Centre in 1996 awarded Lee the 'Architect of the Next Century' (Chan, 2005: 115). Rodan and Hewison purport that close relations with the neo-conservatives in the George W. Bush administration stems from their appreciation of 'the role of certain authoritarian leaders in fighting a common enemy, as they did in the Cold War, but also their promotion of core values of social conservatism' (Rodan and Hewison, 2006: 106). Reiterating the value of Singapore's close relations with Washington, in 2005 the newly appointed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong described the US as

a decisive and benign influence in the region ... Neither China nor India can perform this security role of the US in Asia for many years to come ... Singapore has consistently supported a strong US presence in the region ... We also support the war in Iraq ... That is why we deployed ships, aircraft and

training teams to support the coalition mission, and currently have a KC-135 tanker there.⁶²

In contrast to Republican administrations, relations with Democrat Presidents and liberal institutionalists in Washington, who accord greater weight to multilateralism and issues pertaining to democracy and human rights, have been more problematic.⁶³ Yet, bilateral relations with Republican administrations have also periodically been strained when the PAP government's authoritarian crackdowns directly impinge on the political sensitivities of Washington. For example, when the Singapore government expelled E. Mason Hendrikson, Political Counsellor from the US embassy, in May 1988 for supposedly interfering in 'domestic politics', because of his contacts with opposition politicians, the George H.W. Bush administration retorted that consultations with opposition leaders constituted normal diplomatic practice. In a stern warning, the State Department publicly called for the issue to be brought to a close or accept the consequences of permanent damage in bilateral relations (Deck, 1999: 260). Following this warning, the PAP government fell into line – there were obviously larger issues at stake.

Singapore's role in preserving Washington's military presence in Southeast Asia led to the signing of a 1990 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) allowing the US expanded use of facilities to service its military aircraft at Payar Lebar Airport and naval vessels at Sembawang Wharves. Initially established in 1969, the US Naval Office in Singapore, based at Clifford Pier, was expanded. The US Air Force also established the 497th Tactical Fighter Training Squadron at Singapore's Payar Lebar Air Base to support visiting detachments (Huxley, 2000: 209).

The relocation of the US Southeast Asian logistics base, vital for coordinating supplies to the US Seventh Fleet, to Singapore was facilitated by the signing of another MOU in 1992. Consistent with this upgraded security relationship, a small number of US officers were appointed to posts within the SAF in the early 1990s (Huxley, 2000: 210). By the late 1990s, US aircraft and warships were given access to the upgraded Changi Naval Base. In effect, Singapore had become the hub for a series of bilateral exercises between the US Navy's Seventh Fleet and its Southeast Asian partners (Huxley, 2000: 210) and is an important link in the US security chain in East Asia – strongly premised on containing China. Huxley has observed that the increasingly intimate security relationship between Singapore and the US is tantamount to a quasi-alliance despite the absence of a mutual defence treaty obliging the US to defend Singapore (Huxley, 2000: 208).

Singapore's hosting of US military and naval forces without consulting her immediate neighbours generated considerable regional uneasiness, particularly since the 1990 MOU lacked transparency, due in part to its classified status.⁶⁴ That the hosting of US facilities contradicts the ZOPFAN ideal of transforming Southeast Asia into a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality was of some concern to Singapore's neighbours. Sensitive to this contradiction, Minister of State for Finance and Foreign Affairs George Yeo affirmed in October 1989 that 'Singapore endorses the ASEAN consensus to establish a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) over the long term. However, it also recognises that until this

is achieved, a continued US presence in Southeast Asia is desirable'.⁶⁵ Reminding her neighbours that Singapore was not offering a military base to the US, Lee Kuan Yew stressed in October 1989 that the republic was only extending facilities.⁶⁶ However, as the operational difference between facilities and bases has never been publicly defined, explained or debated, regional perceptions of Singapore hosting a *de facto* US base remain.

So as not to be out-manoeuvred by Singapore's close alliance with the US, the Malaysian and Indonesian government, have pragmatically extended limited facilities to the US military. From the 1990s, repair facilities were extended to US warships and warplanes at Lumut, near KL, and Surabaya in Indonesia. Soon, low-key arrangements for US warships and planes were made in other ASEAN states. Malaysia participates in annual bilateral military exercises with the US, code named Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT), and has extended military jungle warfare training to the latter (Sothy, 2003: 380). In 1991, Malaysia announced its willingness to expand the range, visits and repairs for US warships and planes and for the first time acknowledged the existence of the hitherto secretive 1984 US–Malaysian Bilateral Training and Consultative Group (BITAC) (Emmerson, 1996: 76). Defence Minister Najib Abdul Razak has acknowledged that Malaysia was keen 'to see a fair degree of American military presence in the region' because of its 'salutary countervailing effect' (Emmerson, 1996: 77) in terms of China's potential hegemony on regional security. Close intelligence and security cooperation with the US was demonstrated by Malaysia's assistance in the capture of Kuwaiti Wali Khan Amin, allegedly involved in the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing. The US has also extended military aid in the form of Foreign Military Sales Credits for defence purchases and the International Military Education Training programme (IMET) for Malaysia's senior defence personnel (Sothy, 2003: 380).

As a modern and rapidly industrialising Muslim dominated country, and thus a model for other Muslim countries, Malaysia is a valuable ally to Washington and an important player in the protracted 'war on terror' particularly in Southeast Asia. Malaysia's soft power credentials are demonstrated by its robust Chairmanship of the OIC from 2003–2006, brokering role between Muslim separatists in Southern Philippines and the central government in Manila, and influence with Muslim secessionists in southern Thailand. In recognition of Malaysia's soft power credentials, a counter-terrorism centre in KL is jointly facilitated by the American and Malaysian governments (Nesadurai, 2006: 192).

Uncritical support for the Iraq War

Singapore's reputation as Washington's staunchest ally in Southeast Asia has been buttressed by its unreserved support for the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq which invoked radically divergent policy responses in Southeast Asia. Supporters of the US-led invasion include Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand while Malaysia and Indonesia have been more circumspect. In contrast to these disparate regional positions, Southeast Asian states were generally supportive of

the UN endorsed Gulf War coalition formed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

As discussed earlier, the Singapore government's accommodation of US security interests in Southeast Asia has been strongly driven by an acute insecurity complex. This insecurity has contributed to an almost obsessive compulsion in maintaining a formidable military capability that is not only second to none in the region, but also shielded by the US security umbrella. Perceived as a benign presence in the Asia-Pacific, Lee Kuan Yew has regaled the United States for being '... the most benign of all the great powers, certainly less heavy-handed than any emerging great power' (Lee, 2000: 554).

Guided by a realist worldview that interprets international politics as a ceaseless Darwinist competition between states for power, the patronage of a great powerful nation is believed to offer an optimum insurance policy for the city-state. Inter alia, the premium paid for this US security protection is an uncritical support of US military adventures.⁶⁷ Moreover, Changi Naval Base has been particularly useful to Washington's security interests, as it is the only military facility in Southeast Asia that can accommodate American aircraft carriers.⁶⁸ Singaporean intelligence agencies have worked energetically with the US in procuring and disseminating intelligence on alleged regional militants and are thought to have rendered suspects for detention in Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere. Not surprisingly, the Singapore government's uncritical support for the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and cooperation with the US in the 'war on terror' has been viewed with suspicion by some of its neighbours.

Supporting the fictitious case for invasion

The hastiness with which the US-led invasion of Iraq was executed, even before the UN weapons inspection team had completed their investigations into the existence of Iraq's WMD capability, coupled with the spurious Al Qaeda-Iraq link, invoked global suspicions about Washington's underlying motives for the invasion. Speculations on the underlying motives include the promotion of US geostrategic interests and control of Iraq's considerable oil reserves (Rubin, 2003: 48). Indeed, the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) head El Baradei concluded in a report to the UN Security Council just before the invasion that: 'We have to date found no evidence or plausible indications of the revival of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq'.⁶⁹ These suspicions were stimulated further by the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) report entitled 'International Terrorism: War With Iraq', released in February 2003. Inter alia, the report asserted that the threat of terrorism would be made worse by military action against Iraq due in no small measure to the lack of evidence in supporting the claim that Saddam Hussein planned to use chemical or biological weapons in terrorist attacks or planned to pass them to Al Qaeda.⁷⁰

Others claim that the analysis by US intelligence agencies was skewed by political pressure and worst case analysis, and was strongly influenced by Iraqi exiles desperate for US intervention.⁷¹ In any event, Iraq's attempts at complying with UN

Resolution 1441 from late 2002 by allowing UN inspectors unfettered access to suspected WMD sites, cooperation in destroying dozens of Al Samoud missiles, and allowing key scientists to be interviewed, had scarcely any effect in deterring Washington's determination to go to war (Rubin, 2003: 52). This view has since been reiterated by the claims of former senior White House staffers, such as National Security advisor Dick Clarke, Press Secretary James McClelland and prominent investigative reporter Bob Woodward that President Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney and other neo-conservatives were single-minded in their determination to invade Iraq after the twin tower attacks on September 11, 2001 (Woodward, 2004). Apparently within hours of the September 11, 2001 attack, Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld was attempting to link Saddam Hussein with the attack. President Bush was also intent on linking Saddam Hussein's regime with Al Qaeda when there was no credible evidence to support this view (Gore, 2007: 108).

It has now become clear that virtually all the arguments the Bush administration assembled to justify the invasion of Iraq were based on falsehoods constructed by a campaign of mass deception. As Nobel Laureate and former American Vice-President Al Gore lamented: 'We were told by the president that [war] was his last choice. But it is now clear that it was always his first preference' (Gore, 2007: 104). The evidence that the invasion of Iraq was based on the Bush administration's determination to control scarce oil resources in the Middle East is compelling. Washington, through its influence on post-Saddam Iraqi governments, will now be able to exert greater pressure on OPEC. By 2007, the US backed Iraqi government had enacted legislation giving US and British oil companies a dominant role in exploiting Iraq's formerly nationalised oil reserves (Gore, 2007: 119).

Mirroring the global civil society mobilisation against the invasion of Iraq, protest rallies in many Southeast Asian cities were as large as their counterparts around the world.⁷² In Kuala Lumpur, more than 150,000 Malaysians gathered at a February 2003 peace rally organised by UMNO youth and addressed by Prime Minister Mahathir.⁷³ The Malaysian government saw the US-led invasion of Iraq as undermining key norms on sovereignty rights in international politics (Nesadurai, 2006: 190). Malaysian anti-war sentiments were matched by numerous rallies in Indonesia in the lead up to and after the illegal invasion of Iraq. In a March 2003 rally in Jakarta, more than 200,000 protesters, including senior politicians, gathered outside the US embassy.⁷⁴ Speaker of Parliament Rais lambasted the US as a 'ring leader of terrorists' while Vice-President Hamzah Haq accused the US of 'poisoning the world's worst human rights record and being the 'king of terrorists'. Reflecting the intensity of public anger against Iraq's invasion, President Megawati felt compelled to condemn the invasion in the strongest of terms. On March 20, 2003 she affirmed that her government

... strongly deplores the unilateral action taken by the Government of the United States of America and its allies, who have decided to go to war against Iraq ... military force against Iraq based on a unilateral decision constitutes an act of aggression which is in contravention of international law.⁷⁵

Megawati's stance reflected the apprehension of many Indonesians that the US-led invasion of Iraq would endanger the lives of Iraqi civilians, who had already suffered enormously under the more than decade old economic sanctions.

Notwithstanding the Philippines government's support for the US-led 'coalition of the willing', large protest rallies, often transformed into 'prayer rallies', were supported by various segments of Filipino society ranging from Church leaders, social activists, middle-class urbanites and concerned housewives. At a March 2003 'prayer rally' attended by 50,000 in Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin condemned the impending war for being illegal under the UN Charter and immoral under Christian principles. He urged President Arroyo to remain 'a faithful daughter of the Church' by declaring the Philippines neutral in the war on Iraq.⁷⁶ Similarly anti-war protests were held in Thailand, with politicians such as Thai Senator Kraisaak Choohaven expressing concern that the Thai government was drifting from its neutral foreign policy stance.⁷⁷

While civil society in Jakarta, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok was galvanised by major anti-war demonstrations, and several demonstrations held even in authoritarian China,⁷⁸ Singapore was conspicuous for being one of the few countries in the world where the case for Iraq's invasion was not publicly debated and anti-war rallies conspicuously absent. In Southeast Asia's most affluent country but governed by an authoritarian state, four Muslim civil society organisations courageously issued a joint statement urging the PAP government to oppose the invasion or abstain from supporting any military attacks on Iraq.⁷⁹ The PAP government's characteristic intolerance of even peaceful anti-war sentiments was demonstrated when two Muslim women waving anti-war placards outside the US embassy on 15 February, 2003 were promptly detained and questioned by police.⁸⁰ Four others who were supposedly carrying anti-war placards in a carrier bag were also detained. Embarrassed by the Singapore government's draconian response to peaceful anti-war demonstrators, US Ambassador Franklin Lavin remarked,

I don't see why a group of people who want to stand in front of my Embassy and tell me they don't agree with a policy of my country should not be able to do so. The right of peaceful expression of opinion is an important element of a successful society.

(Rodan, 2004a: 494)

It is worth noting that the PAP government's uncritical support for the Iraq war runs counter to the anti-war position of the major opposition parties and a large majority of Singaporeans who, via various polls, registered their opposition to the invasion of Iraq.⁸¹ Many Singaporeans also believe that the city-state's hosting of naval facilities to the US and support for the invasion of Iraq have undermined national security and rendered the city-state a terrorist target.⁸² Responding to domestic criticism of the PAP government's support for the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the Foreign Minister's Press Secretary Tan Lian Choo pronounced that

the government is not embarrassed by ... the so called 'glaring failure' of the Americans to find WMD. We have taken a strong, principled and consistent position on Iraq based on Singapore's national interests. Singaporeans cannot afford to strike postures fashionable with the oppositionist media in America and Britain at the expense of the security of Singaporeans ... A small nation in terrorist infested Southeast Asia does not have this luxury of libertarian posturing.⁸³

Tan's exaggerated portrayal of Southeast Asia as being infested with terrorists served to aggravate further the city-state's fragile relations with neighbouring Muslim countries. Chastising Tan for 'indulging in wild exaggeration' in claiming that Southeast Asia was infested with terrorists, opposition politician J.B. Jeyaretnam argued that the risk of global terrorism had only increased with the invasion of Iraq.⁸⁴

The strong anti-Iraq war sentiment in the Asia-Pacific was clearly evident during President Bush's Asia-Pacific tour in October 2003.⁸⁵ In a closed-door discussion with Indonesian policy-makers and community and religious leaders in Bali, Bush was apparently criticised for using terms like 'crusade' in describing the US-led 'war on terror'. He was also informed that the manner by which the war was waged had alienated Muslims.⁸⁶ To placate Indonesian anger with the invasion of Iraq, the beleaguered President pledged to channel US\$157 million to improve educational facilities in religious boarding schools in Indonesia.⁸⁷ Bush's Australian visit was similarly embarrassing particularly after he was heckled in parliament by Green Party Senators who questioned the right of the US to assume the status of the world's sheriff.⁸⁸ Recognising the anti-Iraq war sentiment of the Malaysian government and society, the White House was astute enough to bypass this important Muslim country during Bush's Asia-Pacific tour.

Daily media images of violence and bloodshed in Palestine and Iraq, coupled with UN impotence in the face of US unilateralism, has accorded some weight to the postulations of militant Islamist groupings that there is no other route to defend the *ummah* (global Muslim community) other than through *jihad* (holy war). US disregard for the dictates of international law, as exemplified by the invasion of Iraq without UN approval and tacit support for Israel's punitive actions against Palestinians have reinforced the *jihadi* sentiment. Capitalising on Muslim anger against the US-led invasion of Iraq in an attempt to enhance his *jihadi* credentials, convicted Bali bomber Amrozi pronounced, in March 2003 that the US invasion of Iraq had vindicated his involvement in the Bali bombings.⁸⁹ Ironically, the stature of radical Islamist cleric Abu Bakar Bashir has been boosted somewhat by the US-led occupation of Iraq. Upon his re-arrest on terrorism charges after serving an 18 month prison sentence in early May 2004, hundreds of Indonesians protested on the streets of Jakarta.

Short-term benefits and long-term costs

In solidarity with the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, Singapore not only provided the US military with access to its naval facilities but in July 2003 sent a team of 32 police officers to Baghdad ostensibly to train Iraqi police. After President Bush's 1 October, 2003 stop-over in Singapore, the PAP government announced that Singapore would be sending 192 troops to Iraq on a two month mission to help re-build the country. Singapore has also committed itself to sending naval ships to perform logistical tasks such as replenishing the supplies of other naval vessels operating in the Persian Gulf, conducting patrols and helicopter missions and assisting coalition countries inspect ships leaving Iraq.⁹⁰

The city-state's status as the third largest oil trading centre in the world and the region's oil trading hub suggests that it has an enormous stake in safeguarding oil supplies from the Middle East.⁹¹ Rewarding the Singaporean government for its support of Iraq's invasion, the much coveted US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (USFTA) was sealed in August 2003. Since the USFTA came into force in January 2004, bilateral trade had increased by 12.6 per cent in 2006.⁹² With 1,300 US firms in Singapore, of which 330 have based their regional headquarters in the city-state, the FTA is expected to make the city-state even more attractive to US investment, particularly the sought after value-added investments.⁹³ It is worth noting that Singapore is the second largest Asian investor in the US after Japan (Pang, 2007: 19).

Appreciative of Singapore's unflinching support since the Iraq invasion, the Bush administration announced that it would issue to Singapore radar-guided missiles for its F-16 fighter planes which were previously refused to Malaysia.⁹⁴ A Strategic Framework Agreement on Security and Defence to expand cooperation in counter-terrorism, joint-military exercises and defence technology has been signed.⁹⁵ Other tangible rewards for supporting the US in Iraq include the establishment of training facilities for the SAF in the US, delivery of state-of-the-art military hardware supplied only to the closest allies of the US and a Framework of Agreement (FOA), announced during President Bush's visit to Singapore in October 2003. The FOA is expected to enhance defence and security ties between both nations by the network of multilateral joint military exercises, policy dialogues and exchanges of defence technology. A joint research facility to fight emerging infectious diseases and bio-terrorism threats named the Regional Emerging Diseases Intervention (REDI) Centre is to be established in Singapore.

Despite the worsening security conditions in post-Saddam Iraq, the Singapore government sent military personnel, transport planes and support ships to Iraq without prior public debate on the propriety of this commitment. To be sure, the Singapore government's unequivocal support for the US-led invasion of Iraq has placed greater strain on its relations with neighbouring Muslim countries, reinforcing perceptions of the city-state as a satellite of the United States. Lee Kuan Yew's assertion in April 2004 that the US is the only country capable of combating terrorism⁹⁶ was challenged by Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar. He

reminded the Singaporean government that it could not effectively overcome terrorism by relying strongly on the US and should instead concentrate on regional and international initiatives. Raising the spectre of Singapore's seige mentality in a Muslim region, the Malaysian daily *Berita Harian* cautioned that,

Singapore's policy of over-dependence on the US in overcoming the issue of terrorism has raised suspicions and questions . . . concurring and cooperating with Israel in many areas, including military and developing intelligence gathering satellites, all Singapore's actions raise suspicions. Its sincerity in establishing regional ties is also questioned.⁹⁷

Regional perceptions of the PAP government as a satellite of the US were reinforced when Goh Chok Tong, during talks in Lisbon with Spanish leaders in December 2003, urged small countries to support the US-led occupation in Iraq.⁹⁸ Taking issue with Goh's statement, Malaysia's ex-army intelligence chief Abdul Rashid Raja Badiozama argued that small countries should not send their troops to Iraq as this would only give the US legitimacy for its illegal invasion of Iraq despite the failure to find weapons of mass destruction.⁹⁹

Singapore-Malaysia relations have been strained further by the Singapore leadership's invitation to the United States to patrol the Straits of Malacca without even consulting Malaysia or Indonesia beforehand. This invitation was issued despite an agreement in the early 1990s between Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia to participate in joint anti-piracy operations and maintain maritime safety in the Straits of Malacca (da Cunha, 2002: 142). The Indonesian and Malaysian governments were opposed to the US patrolling the Straits on the grounds that it would only make the region more susceptible to terrorist threats following the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. Rebuking the Singaporean leadership over the issue in mid-May 2004, Hamid cautioned 'If one kampong leader wants to impose his own view, that will be the end of ASEAN consensus . . . It is not for you to just invite a third country to protect the Straits'.¹⁰⁰ The Singapore government's fear of attacks by Al Qaeda and other regional militant groups¹⁰¹ against ships in the Straits of Malacca may be exaggerated. For example, the risk of a transiting ship being attacked was less than 0.1 per cent in 2003.¹⁰² Regional tensions were tempered somewhat by a new regional maritime security initiative, the Trilateral Coordinated Patrols Malacca Straits (MALSINDO), launched by the Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean armed forces (Rodan and Hewison, 2006a: 112).

Soft power deficit and vulnerability in the war on terror

Since late 2001, more than 30 Singaporeans have been detained under detention without trial laws and accused of being operatives for the militant regional JI network. Singaporeans have been fed with a steady diet of information by the mainstream press that these supposed JI detainees are guilty of the serious allegations against them, without the benefit of defending themselves in a court of law. Thus, when 15 suspected JI activists were arrested in December 2001 and accused of

planning to bomb US linked targets in Singapore, most Singaporeans appear to have gone along with this unproven narrative. By contrast, the 1987 detention without trial of 22 alleged Marxists was met with considerable public scepticism. Some held vigils in churches, questioned the existence of the ISA and called for the detainees to be charged in an open court. These examples of public resistance were not replicated in the post-2001 ISA arrests.¹⁰³

The few organisations that called for an open trial for the alleged JI operatives include the human rights body Think Centre and Muslim community organisation Fateha. Fateha came under severe government censure when its leadership asserted that the ISA detainees may have been motivated by the Singapore government's close alignment with Washington and Israel¹⁰⁴ and by the localised socio-economic and political grievances of the Singapore Malay community. This view has been supported by Sean Walsh who postulates that discrimination against Malays in the SAF has contributed to Malay perceptions of their second-class status, a reality which JI has exploited (Walsh, 2007: 274). The salience of localised Muslim grievances has been acknowledged by Workers' Party MP, Low Thia Khian, and somewhat surprisingly, PAP MP Shanmugan, in a 2003 parliamentary debate. Low stated that some Muslims felt discriminated against, their religion suppressed and that they were marginalised in society.¹⁰⁵ *Straits Times* journalist Tan Tarn How has also contradicted the PAP leadership's dismissal of localised socio-economic and political grievances in motivating the alleged JI detainees. He has pointed out that the Singaporean JI detainees were in reality more socially marginal than official statements suggest, as 19 of the 31 detainees possessed lower than O-level education. Tan asked,

what needs to be done to redress the situation for the Malays if indeed they are being marginalised and discriminated against? The onus so far has largely been placed on Muslims... But if their spiritual fervour is an effect rather than a cause of their marginalisation, then surely society at large needs to change in tandem with the Muslims to improve their situation.¹⁰⁶

Yet, Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng has continued to deny the significance of localised Muslim socio-economic and political grievances in Singapore's supposedly meritocratic society. Dismissing the gravity of Low, Shanmugan and Tan's concerns, Wong pronounced that 'the important thing is that in our society, if the person has a genuine problem, he has effective avenues for redress'.¹⁰⁷

The PAP leadership's denial of the significance of localised grievances, global Muslim resentment towards US foreign policy in the Middle East and the significance of socio-political factors motivating Islamic militants is consistent with other governments who have uncritically supported the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. These governments have encouraged their citizens to fear militants rather than understand the root causes driving Islamic militants. Inter alia, this focus on fear allows them to persist with security oriented approaches in the 'war on terror'. It also serves to justify the passage of draconian legislation and deflect Washington's human rights violations in Guantanamo Bay and Iraq. In effect, the lack of serious

analysis of the root causes of terrorism disentangles the position of Western governments in supporting Islamic militants such as Osama bin Laden to repel the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s and deflects the significance of national policies in fuelling the rise of Islamic radicalism. Carmen Lawrence aptly observes that

When people are made to feel threatened, they tend to simplify, and in this reduced psychological state, they regress, splitting the world into binaries; safe and threatening, good and evil, life and death... Partitioning the world into two contending apocalyptic forces adds nothing to our capacity to respond effectively to terrorism... We are encouraged to believe that we are confronting dark forces whose motivation is beyond understanding.

(Lawrence, 2006: 96)

The disastrous US-led invasion of Iraq and failure to stall the Al Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan suggests that the 'war on terror' cannot be won principally by relying on hard power. This approach is akin to 'trying to eliminate a cloud of mosquitoes with a machine gun' (Lawrence, 2006: 80).

Until early 2008, the PAP government had been relatively effective in projecting Singapore's image as Washington's most effective Southeast Asian security partner in the 'war on terror', with Lee Kuan Yew even accusing the Indonesian government of being lacklustre in its efforts to detain radical clerics and JI activists in the period leading up to and following the 2003 Bali bombings. However, this image suffered a major blow following the escape of alleged JI operative Mas Selamat Kastari from the high security Whitley Detention Centre in February 27, 2008. But how did Mas Selamat escape from a facility guarded by Nepalese Gurkha guards, enclosed by high fences and barbed wire and monitored by closed-circuit television surveillance cameras around its perimeter?

Mas Selamat's daring escape suggests that security in the high-tech detention centre and the wider authoritarian city-state may not be as efficiently managed as commonly believed. The failure to capture Mas Selamat despite unleashing the largest manhunt in Singapore's history and massive rewards for information leading to his capture suggests that the PAP government has failed to purge the local militant Islamist network. This failure is all the more surprising in view of the existence of draconian detention without trial laws, passage of new security laws, extensive security apparatus, state-of-the-art intelligence technology and public surveillance in the authoritarian state. Since the 'war on terror', new agencies such as the Homefront Security Office and the Joint Counter Terrorism Centre have been established ostensibly to improve inter-agency coordination (Rodan and Hewison, 2006a: 111). Mas Selamat's relatively easy escape from a toilet window has exposed gaping holes not only in the extensive web of state security agencies, but also flaws in its soft power intelligence capability. Can these flaws be attributed to an over-reliance on hard power, such as draconian laws, and a secretive intelligence and security apparatus that is distrusted and feared by the citizenry? Have the intelligence and security agencies in the authoritarian state been so politicised that their ability to engage in independent national security, as

distinct from regime security, assessments been compromised? Would a better understanding of the JI network have been attained if Mas Selamat and other JI detainees had been tried in an open court rather than subjected to the routine of interrogation and associated mental and physical torture as a means of extracting information? Have draconian crackdowns under the ISA and incarceration of alleged JI operatives only driven other local Islamic militants into 'hibernation' but likely to re-surface, particularly if localised grievances are not seriously addressed?

Importantly, Mas Selamat's escape appears to have jolted the Singaporean public out of its slumber, particularly in relation to the security policies of the PAP government. The escape has precipitated some public discussion on the security approaches of the authoritarian state, its support of the US-led invasion and disastrous occupation of Iraq, hosting of US facilities in the city-state and covert military ties with Israel as rendering Singapore a target of Islamic militants in the 'war on terror'. The naming of Singapore as an Al Qaeda target by captured Al Qaeda operative Khalid Sheikh Mohamed¹⁰⁸ has raised questions about the propriety of the PAP government's security paradigm reliant on an uncritical support for the military adventures of its 'great and powerful' patron.

Conclusion

The PAP government's security paradigm has been driven strongly by fear – of communists during the Cold War, communists in the 1960s and 1970s, radical Islamists in the 'war on terror' and a pervasive fear of the national and regional 'other'. This security paradigm has allowed the PAP government to construct a national identity based on a distrust of Singapore and regional Malays, maintain a military expenditure that is unrivalled in Southeast Asia and preserve draconian legislation that has buttressed the apparatus of the authoritarian state. In this security paradigm, human security considerations, such as 'freedom from fear' have been sidelined by the existence of draconian laws which deprive citizens of basic political and civil rights.

Ironically, Singapore's combat preparedness, formidable military arsenal, determination to maintain its military edge over her neighbours and intimate security ties with Washington and Israel have had the effect of enhancing regional insecurities, contributed to a regional arms race and exacerbated the city-state's regional outsider status. This security approach is not in Singapore's long-term interest particularly when its military (hard power) edge over its neighbours diminishes.

The PAP's security paradigm based on perpetuating a culture of fear has been instrumental in forging close security relations with the US. However, many Singaporeans are increasingly aware that the hosting of US naval facilities and support for the invasion of Iraq have undermined national security and rendered the city-state more vulnerable to terrorist attack. Moreover, relations with neighbouring Muslim countries have been undermined by regional perceptions of the city-state as an uncritical ally of Washington. Singapore's close security relations with Washington could also undermine future ties with China in the event of

a deterioration in Sino-US relations. Indeed, the old security paradigm based on a 'great and powerful' patron may no longer be relevant in the post-Cold War era characterised by a proliferation of non-traditional security threats.

Despite these pressures, the PAP government continued to support the Bush administration's disastrous policies in Iraq and the Middle East. Lee Kuan Yew has urged President Bush and senior White House officials in October 2006 to 'stay the course' in Iraq – supposedly to stabilise the country and transform the Middle East. Yet, would Lee allow Washington to similarly transform the political landscape in Singapore? Invoking the other disastrous US military adventure in Vietnam which resulted in the deaths of millions of Vietnamese and US soldiers and civilians, Lee has maintained that the Vietnam War had brought 'collateral benefits' to Asia as it supposedly 'created the conditions that enabled non-Communist East Asia to follow Japan's path and develop into the four dragons, followed by the four tigers'.¹⁰⁹

The PAP leadership's apparent difficulty in heeding the lessons of Washington's failed adventure in Vietnam and disastrous invasion of Iraq highlights the need for a new security paradigm. This new paradigm would require greater incorporation of human security considerations and cognisance of the silences, exclusions and blind-spots of the traditional security paradigm premised on a reliance on hard power. The quagmire in Iraq and Afghanistan and failures in the 'war on terror' highlight the need for an alternative security paradigm based on connecting 'our' security to the security of 'others'. Narrow perspectives of the national interest, as determined by the values and interests of political elites, have contributed to an insecure regional and global environment. These narrow conceptions of national security and sovereignty fail to seriously consider the importance of ethical engagement which transcends state boundaries (Burke, 2001: xiv). Normative ideals of justice, diversity, sustainable development, the demilitarisation of security and democratising security policy processes are in keeping with a more holistic vision of security. This alternative and holistic vision of security requires the exploration and interrogation of important aspects of national identity. For colonial settler societies, it involves reappraising who we think we are, rethinking the place of the indigenous community in the national imagination, reinterpreting the history of colonialism and nationalism and understanding the historical and political dynamics fuelling fears of the national and regional 'other'. It also requires the coming to terms with the geopolitics of location in shaping national identity.

- Amnesty International and the Lawyers Rights Watch, Canada, 20 July, 2001. Available at www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details. (Accessed 5 December, 2005.)
- 100 It shall be the deliberate and conscious policy of the Government of Singapore at all times to recognise the special position of the Malays who are the indigenous people of the land and who are in most need of assistance and accordingly, it shall be the responsibility of the Government of Singapore to protect, support, foster, and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, and cultural interests, and the Malay language (Section 152, Singapore Constitution).

4 The frightened country and the geopolitics of insecurity

- 1 Indonesia's President Sukarno believed that the Federation of Malaysia was a neo-colonial plot for British imperialism. In retaliation, Indonesia embarked on a campaign referred to as *Korfrontasi* with Indonesian commandos committing numerous acts of sabotage in Malaysia and Singapore.
- 2 Seah Chiang Nee, 'Filled With Passion', *The Star* (Malaysia), 13 August, 2007.
- 3 David Boey, 'Spirit, Commitment of NS Men is the SAF's Best Weapon: PM', *Straits Times*, 28 September, 2007. (Accessed 14 February, 2008.)
- 4 'The Nation Apologises', 13 February, 2008, Online Available at <http://www.newmatilda.com/print/2875>. (Accessed 14 February, 2008.)
- 5 They include three Singaporean banks and the Government-Linked Company (GLC) Keppel Corporation. See Ed Cropley, 'Singapore Distancing Itself From Myanmar-Analysts', *Reuters* (Bangkok), 30 October, 2007.
- 6 Connie Levett, 'Tough on Drugs, Soft on Drug Lords', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November, 2005.
- 7 Neil Lawrence, 'Singapore Shrug', *The Irrawaddy*, 1 August, 2002. Online Available at <http://www.irrawaddy.org>. (Accessed 20 December, 2007.)
- 8 Since 1991, Singapore has executed 400 people. See Baradan Kuppusamy, 'Death Penalty Stand at UN Leaves Many Angered', *Inter Press Service* (KL), 3 December, 2007.
- 9 General Than Shwe's son apparently sits on the board of Tay Za's company Htoo Trading. Refer to Thomas Bell, 'Activists Attack ASEAN Over Inaction on Burma', *Telegraph* (London), 22 November, 2007.
- 10 ALITSEAN Burma, Press Release, 'ASEAN Should Stop Passing the Buck on Burma', 25 October, 2007.
- 11 Eric Ellis, 'Singapore a Friend Indeed to Burma', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October, 2007.
- 12 Tan Chin Tiong was appointed as the Second Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1982 and by 1986 elevated to the position of Permanent Secretary, thereby exercising control over the police, civil defence force and the Internal Security Department (ISD). After a decade in Home Affairs, he was transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as one of the two Permanent Secretaries and in 2003 was catapulted to ASEAN's Secretary General. See Tim Huxley, 2000, p. 234.
- 13 Bilahari Kausikan, 'Small State's Big Challenge to Stay Vital', *Straits Times*, 2 September, 2005.
- 14 The PAP leadership had supposedly prepared plans to set up a government in exile in Cambodia should the UMNO leadership arrest Lee. See T.S. George, *Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974), p. 81.
- 15 *New Straits Times*, 14 March, 1997.
- 16 It is worth noting that this security dilemma framework is not only used by realist interpretations of international relations but also by those who work within the framework of critical security studies.
- 17 By contrast, Thailand spends 1.5 per cent, Malaysia 2.1 per cent and Indonesia 1.7 per cent of their GDP on defence. See 'Despite Small Size, Peace and Prosperity, Singapore is Heavily Armed', *Associated Press* (Singapore), 22 August, 2000.

- 18 Jake Lloyd-Smith, 'Sharp Claws', *South China Morning Post*, 14 January, 2003.
- 19 National service includes two and a half years of full time military duty and thereafter 13 years of annual training.
- 20 Seah Chiang Nee, 'NS Rumbblings on the Rise', *The Star* (Malaysia), 17 March, 2007.
- 21 Between 1994–2001, the US sold US\$5 billion worth of military goods and services to Singapore. Some of these offensive oriented military hardware include F-16s, Chinook helicopters, AH-64D Apache assault helicopters, Harpoon missiles for maritime patrol aircraft, air-to-air missiles, laser-guided missile launchers and Hydra 70 rocket torpedoes. Singapore has also leased military bases in Arizona and Texas and contracted pilot training services from the US Air Force and weapons manufacturer.
- 22 Shawn Crispin, 'Arms: On Their Marks', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 October, 2000.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Under the agreement, Singapore will participate in the System Design and Development Phase of the F-35 which is the world's most advanced multi-role fighter. 'Singapore Signs Up for F-35 Stealth Fighter Program', AFP, February 22, 2003.
- 25 Alexis Hooi, 'New Home for the Formidable F-16s', *Straits Times*, 30 November, 2004.
- 26 'Pentagon Announces Possible Sale to S'pore of Munitions for F-15 Fighters', *Agence France Presse* (Washington), 22 August, 2005.
- 27 In 2003/2004, Singapore's defence spending climbed by a further 0.6 per cent. 'Prepare for War If You Want Peace: Defence Chiefs', *Agence France Presse* (Singapore), 14 March, 2003.
- 28 Shawn Crispin, 'Arms: On Their Marks', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 October, 2000.
- 29 They include the introduction of a new generation of fighter airplanes capable of in-flight refuelling and two new classes of nuclear submarines. Shawn Crispin, 'Arms: On Their Marks', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 October, 2000.
- 30 Lee wrote in his autobiography that
... other powerful Malay leaders, like Syed Ja'afar Albar who so strongly opposed to separation that he resigned as secretary-general of UMNO, might persuade Brigadier Alsagoff it was his patriotic duty to reverse separation. The brigadier with his brigade could have captured me and all my ministers without difficulty ... Keng Swee as defence minister worked feverishly to build-up some defence capability.
See Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965–2000* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 2000), p. 31.
- 31 M.G.G. Pillai, 'One Sided Bilateral Agreement'. Online Available at <http://www.malaysiakini.com>. (Accessed 11 February, 2005.)
- 32 Ian Stewart, 'Arms Deals Signal Threat to Stability', *South China Morning Post*, 30 September, 2000.
- 33 Azmi Hassan, 'Best Personnel For Defence, Regardless of Race', *Straits Times*, 25 September, 2003.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 'KL Signs \$220m deal for 11 Army Choppers', *Straits Times*, 4 October, 2003.
- 37 Kimina Lyall, 'Political Islamism Rattles the Region', *The Australian*, 16 April, 2002.
- 38 Rene Ahmad, 'Water Dispute Can Lead to War: Ex-General', *Straits Times*, 4 February, 2002.
- 39 Allan Macmillan *et al.* refer to strategic culture as a 'distinctive and lasting set of beliefs, values and habits regarding the threat and use of force, which have their roots in such fundamental influences as geopolitical setting, history and political culture'. See Ken Booth and Russell Trood (eds), 1999, p. 11.
- 40 *Sunday Times*, 19 September, 1999.

- 41 Ho Ka Wee, 'Childhood Dream to Fly Comes True', *Sunday Times* (Singapore), 7 September, 2003.
- 42 Cited in Amit Baruah, 'Lee Sr Warns Malays Against Race Based Politics', *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 6 March, 2001.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 An old Chinese expression capturing the community's disdain for military service is as follows: 'One never uses good iron to make nails; good sons do not become soldiers'.
- 45 Scholar officers refer to SAF officers who are recipients of prestigious SAF scholarships based on their outstanding performance in the 'A' level exams.
- 46 Enunciated in 1984, the total defence strategy provides a comprehensive approach towards maintaining national security and encompasses non-military aspects of defence. They include psychological defence, social defence, economic defence and civil defence.
- 47 Amnon Barzilai, 'Israel Set Up Singapore's Army, Former Officers Reveal', *Haaretz* (Israel), 15 July, 2004.
- 48 Former PAP Minister Othman Wok has acknowledged that on a covert visit to Israel in 1970, he took on a fictitious name and was introduced as a journalist from Thailand. See Othman Wok, 2000, p. 204.
- 49 David Hawkins, 'New Singapore', *World Survey*, No. 38, February 1972, p. 3.
- 50 Caroline Gluck, 'America's Irreplaceable Ally', *Jerusalem Post*, 16 June, 2005.
- 51 Amnon Barzilai, 'Israel Set Up Singapore's Army, Former Officers Reveal', *Haaretz* (Israel), 19 October, 2000.
- 52 The Spike missile can be fired from either helicopter or tanks and is light enough to be used by infantry troops. Amnon Barzilai, 'Israel Set Up Singapore's Army, Former Officers Reveal', *Haaretz* (Israel), 19 October, 2000.
- 53 'Uneasy About Singapore's Spy Satellite Deal', *New Straits Times*, 26 July, 2000.
- 54 Prior to that, Malaysia's foreign policy had been strongly anti-communist and pro-Western in the 1960s and non-aligned in the 1970s.
- 55 Brendan Pereira, 'Warner US Ties Won't See Mahathir Hold His Tongue', *Straits Times Interactive*, 11 May, 2002.
- 56 The island's geographic location as a regional intelligence centre and status as a 'diplomatic window' by many foreign states who opened consulates and commissions that were staffed with senior diplomatic personnel nurtured the international orientation of Singaporean politicians and political activists. Their sensitivity to international developments and experience in international diplomacy was reinforced further by the relatively easy access to diplomatic missions and existence of local organisations that had established strong ties with foreign political organisations such as the Kuomintang, socialist and communist movements in Europe and Asia. See K. Wilairat, 1975, pp. 1-2.
- 57 It is worth noting that Singapore's non-aligned stance was initiated not by the PAP but by the island's first Chief Minister David Marshall who energetically championed the non-aligned movement following his election to government in 1955. Marshall's enthusiasm for the non-aligned movement was evidenced by his issuing of numerous statements supporting anti-colonial movements and Third World principles and leading goodwill missions to Indonesia in 1955 and the PRC in 1956. See K. Wilairat, 1975, p. 3.
- 58 Lee Kuan Yew has referred to the United States as the most generous and benign colonial power in Asia. He has also asserted that such traits were lacking in the Japanese. *Straits Times*, 8 June, 1996.
- 59 Lee Kuan Yew, Quoted in *The Mirror* (Singapore), 7 November, Vol. 2, No. 45, 1966, p. 5.
- 60 Singapore eventually succumbed to ASEAN's position of supporting Indonesia's annexation of East Timor.
- 61 The FPDA provides for the three extra-regional powers to consult one another in the

- event of a threat to the security of Singapore and Malaysia. See Derek da Cunha, 'Defence and Security: Evolving Threat Perceptions', in Derek da Cunha (ed.), *Singapore in the New Millennium: Challenges Facing the City-State* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), p. 142.
- 62 Lee Hsien Loong, 'Engaging a New Asia', *Straits Times*, 14 July, 2005.
- 63 The Clinton administration did request Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong to advise Suharto to accept the IMF's prescriptions on managing the chaotic Indonesian economy following the 1997 regional financial crisis.
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5 The politics of economic competition and cooperation

- 1 *Kiasu* is a Chinese word to describe a selfish anxiety disorder based on an obsessive fear of losing out to others.
- 2 *Balas dendam* is a Malay term which refers to the bearing of a grudge and acting in retribution for perceived past slights and injuries incurred.
- 3 Shortly after separation, the Malaysian government unilaterally terminated the currency inter-changeability pact, separated the joint stock exchange and rubber market, restricted log exports to Singapore and denied Singaporean access to jungle warfare training facilities in Johor. Bilateral tensions were aggravated further by Singapore's floating of the dollar, imposition of more elaborate restrictions on Malaysian cars entering the island and attempt to appropriate the initials of the former Malaysia-Singapore Airlines (MSA) with the launching of its own national carrier. See Michael Leifer, 2000, p. 71.
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