

**Strategic perceptions from  
Indonesia, Malaysia  
and Singapore  
1989 - 1992  
and the implications for  
Australia's security policies**

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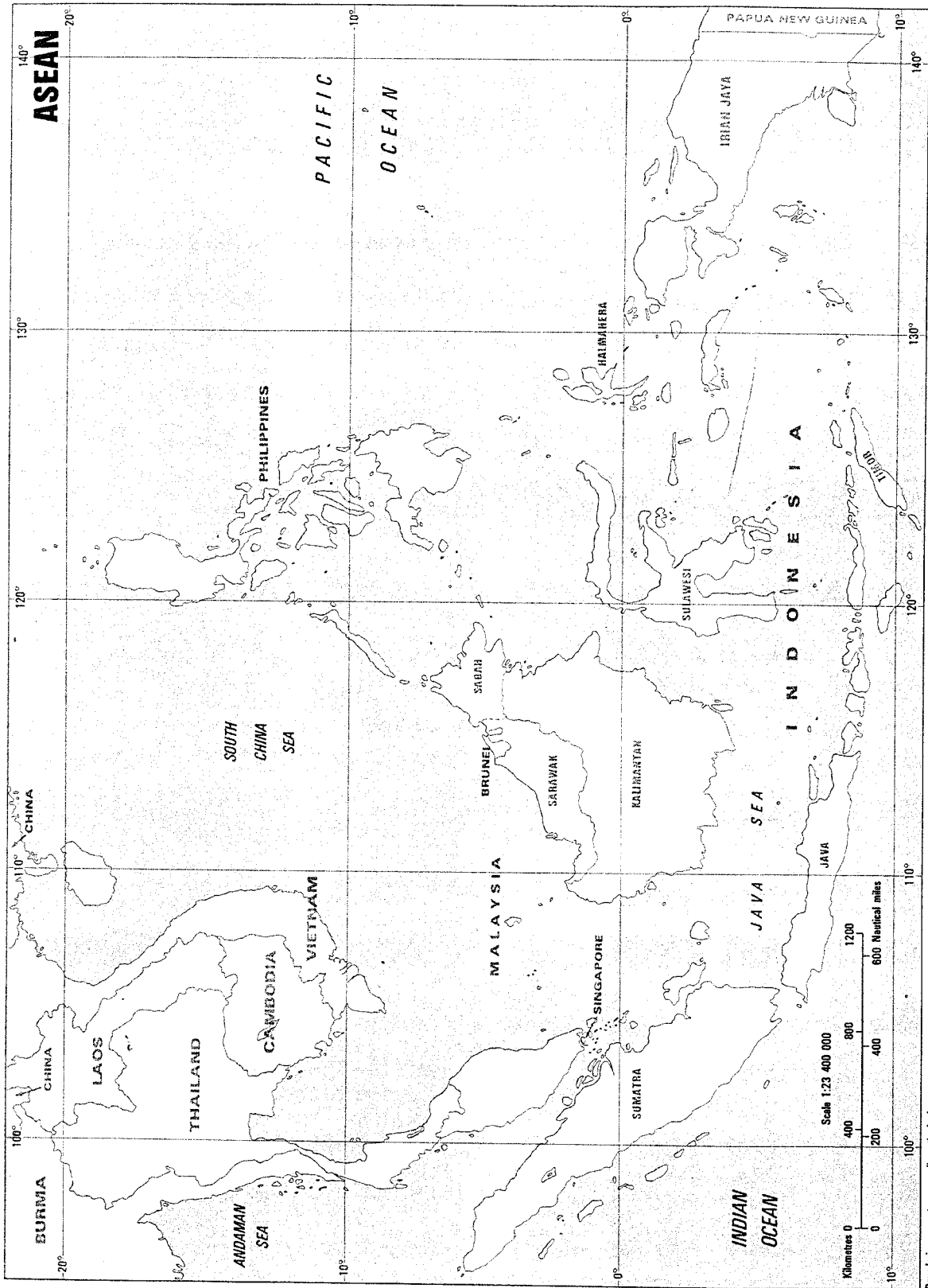
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Boundaries are not necessarily authoritative  
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## Introduction

Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore are of key strategic importance for Australia. These three nations form the geographic and arguably the political core of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The growing resilience of ASEAN over the last quarter of a century has been a major factor in Australia's secure strategic outlook. In addition, the Indonesia - Malaysia - Singapore triangle lies across the most feasible military approaches to Australia. Hence strategic cohesion in this triangle greatly reduces the prospect of any kind of military threat to Australia. As the Australian Government said in The Defence of Australia 1987<sup>1</sup>:

the northern archipelagic chain...is the most likely route through which any major assault could be launched against Australia. [Hence] developments in the archipelagic states, especially Indonesia, are of great strategic significance to us.<sup>2</sup>

Just as important as developments in the archipelago to our north are the strategic perceptions of the nations located there. As the editor of The Indonesian Quarterly said:

Indonesia and Australia have different perceptions, historical backgrounds, traditions, and cultures which in turn have led to differences in value and behaviour. Differing perceptions usually affect the relationship between countries. Accordingly, Indonesia's perceptions on Australia determines its policy vis-a-vis Australia and vice versa...disregarding or exaggerating another country's perceptions is bound to create tensions.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from avoiding tension, an understanding of regional perceptions is essential for achieving other key strategic

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as 'the 1987 Defence White Paper'.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defence, The Defence of Australia 1987, A.G.P.S., Canberra, 1987, 15

<sup>3</sup> The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XX, no. 2, 1992, 128-129.

objectives of Australia. The Defence of Australia 1987 states that a principal national defence interest is "the promotion of a sense of strategic community between Australia and its neighbours in our area of primary strategic interest."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Foreign Minister Senator Gareth Evans' 1989 statement on Australia's Regional Security states that an essential element of "comprehensive engagement" with Southeast Asia is to participate "actively in the gradual development of a regional security community based on a sense of shared security interests."<sup>5</sup> Developing a sense of "strategic community" or "shared security interests" is clearly not possible without an appreciation of the strategic perceptions of regional nations.

A survey of regional strategic perceptions per se would cover a broad spectrum. Robert O. Tilman, for example, in Southeast Asia and the enemy beyond - ASEAN perceptions of external threats<sup>6</sup>, examines ASEAN nations' perceptions of the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Japan and Vietnam amongst a wide range of potential threats. The following study, however, looks at regional perceptions from the perspective of Australia's security policies. First, it looks at perceptions of key factors in regional stability. An awareness of key influences on regional stability as perceived by our neighbours is important for Australia's central foreign policy aim, ie "the maintenance of a positive security and strategic environment in our region".<sup>7</sup> Second, the study examines perceptions of the United States. The United States

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Defence, op. cit., 22.

<sup>5</sup> Senator Gareth Evans, Australia's Regional Security, Canberra, 1989, 44.

<sup>6</sup> Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Senator Evans, op. cit., 1.

is likely to remain a major military ally of Australia. It will therefore be of continuing strategic importance for Australia to be aware of attitudes towards the United States in the region. Finally, the study looks at the view Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have of Australia itself, including specific perceptions of our security policies.

It is not the case, of course, that Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore themselves have 'perceptions'. Rather, the views of a range of individuals represent the perceptions of each nation. Individual perceptions can vary. Indeed, one of the main findings of this study is that there is a divergence in attitudes towards the United States and Australia on the part of different elements of government and society, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia.

In considering whose perceptions to take account of, the views of those who decide national policy are obviously the most important. The opinions of national leaders, however, are not always accessible. While Singapore's leaders, especially Lee Kuan Yew, have regularly offered their views on a multitude of issues, other national leaders - particularly President Suharto of Indonesia - have been less forthcoming. Apart from other government ministers and officials, this study also presents the views of members of the academic community, and opinions put forward in leading newspapers and journals. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, there is generally greater scope for academics to influence government decisions than is normally the case in Australia. Moreover, attitudes in the wider community form the context in which

national decisions are made. Hence it is important to be aware of wider opinion in the three countries.

This study concentrates on strategic perceptions from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in the years 1989 to 1992. This was a period when Australia's approach to regional security was consolidated. After The Defence of Australia 1987 set out a program for defence self-reliance, Foreign Minister Senator Evans released his 1989 statement on Australia's Regional Security, which explained Australia's overall regional security approach. In considering the implications for Australia's security policies, the study draws on these two documents, plus the recently declassified 1989 government document, Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s<sup>8</sup>. It also looks at various initiatives and statements on regional security made by Senator Evans since 1989. In addition, it looks at the alternative policies put forward in the Liberal/National Coalition's 1992 document, A Strong Australia - Rebuilding Australia's Defence.<sup>9</sup>

It is not the role of this study to debate the merits of the security policies adopted or advocated by the Australian Government or the opposition Liberal/National Party Coalition. For example, the argument put forward by some Australian critics that The Defence of Australia 1987 represented a return to an aggressive 'Forward Defence' strategy<sup>10</sup> is not analysed in detail. Such views do have some significance for this study to the extent that they influence perceptions in regional countries of Australia's security policies. This

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8 Australian Government, Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s, Canberra, 1992.

9 Federal Liberal Party/National Party Coalition, Canberra, 1992.

10 See, for example, G. Cheeseman, 'Over-reach in Australia's Regional Military Policy', in G. Cheeseman, St John Kettle (eds), The New Australian Militarism, Sydney, 1990, 73-92.

study's main focus, however, is not the rationale for Australia's current security approach, but the extent to which strategic perceptions from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in the years 1989 to 1992 might affect that approach.

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## Chapter 1

### Factors in regional stability 1989-1992

For Australia, the stability of Southeast Asia is a key factor in our security. The growing economic and political stability of Southeast Asia since the mid-1960s - in particular the success of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - has made a military threat to Australia from the region most unlikely, and a threat to Australia from a major external power improbable. It has also made our major trade routes, especially with our largest trading partner, Japan, more secure. As The Defence of Australia 1987 stated, "We share a common concern with these countries to strengthen regional stability and to limit the potential for external powers to introduce tension or conflict."<sup>1</sup> For Australia to contribute to greater regional stability, it is important to be aware of factors that regional countries see as significant for a stable strategic environment.

Since perceptions by individuals in each nation vary, a comprehensive list of factors seen by each country as influencing regional stability is not feasible. Instead this chapter indicates a range of factors perceived as important by those with some influence over Government policy or national opinion in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defence, The Defence of Australia 1987, A.G.P.S., Canberra, 1987, 6.

One factor in regional stability not covered in this chapter is the military presence of the United States in the western Pacific. Because of the range of attitudes towards the United States in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore - and because of the significance of the United States alliance for Australia's security approach - this is dealt with separately in Chapter Two.

### **The view from Indonesia**

A description of strategic perceptions from Indonesia is more correctly a description of perceptions from Jakarta. National leaders and opinion makers are concentrated in Jakarta and look at events and issues from a Jakarta perspective. For these people, because of the long struggle to achieve and maintain national unity, Indonesia itself constitutes most of what is seen as the "region". The other countries of ASEAN and Southeast Asia form the rest of this region, with the looming figure of China as the backdrop.

### **Indonesia's national resilience**

A belief in Indonesia's predominant and growing role in Southeast Asia, together with the challenge of maintaining Indonesia's own unity, produce a perception that Indonesia's national resilience - as senior Foreign Ministry official Dr Hasjim Djalal said - is "vital for regional stability."<sup>2</sup> For Indonesia, national resilience means:

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<sup>2</sup> Jakarta Post, 15 February 1990.

the capability or ability of a country, in all fields of national endeavour, to withstand and overcome all forms of outside interference and adverse influence which are harmful to its development, either in the ideological, political, economic, socio-cultural, or military areas.<sup>3</sup>

As Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said:

What is required is the development of the political, economic and socio-cultural strengths which together constitute a nation's real capacity to endure and to withstand threats to its integrity, viability and security.<sup>4</sup>

According to Jusuf Wanandi, Chairman of the influential Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, "Indonesia, on its part, has a high self-image and tends to view itself as being in a central position."<sup>5</sup> This perception has been reinforced by the economic success of the Suharto years, which justifies, in the eyes of prominent Indonesians, an enhanced role for their nation in international affairs. Dr Hilman Adil, senior analyst at the Indonesian Institute for Sciences, believes that "overall achievements of four consecutive Five Year Plans and...the first 25 year long term development program have provided the country [with] a firm foundation to widen its foreign policy options."<sup>6</sup> In the opinion of the Jakarta Post, there is:

definitely a more assertive sense of confidence, mainly as a result of the buoyancy of the private sector...but partly also as a reflection of national pride over the fact that Indonesia, as a large archipelagic state, has managed to maintain its national unity when a host of other developing countries are plagued by centrifugal forces that are endangering their national cohesiveness.<sup>7</sup>

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3 Dr Hasjim Djalal, senior Indonesian Foreign Ministry official, quoted in Jakarta Post, 15 February 1990.

4 Ali Alatas, "The Emerging Security Environment in East Asia and the Pacific - an ASEAN perspective", Address to the National University of Singapore Society, Singapore, 28 October 1992, 9.

5 Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship," The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XX, no. 2, 2nd quarter 1992, 161.

6 Jakarta Post, 9 October 1989.

7 Jakarta Post, 22 May 1990.

Indonesia's success calls for "a more outward looking posture...capable of anticipating Indonesia's prominent position in the region."<sup>8</sup>

Given this belief in Indonesia's central role in regional affairs, it follows that threats to Indonesia's unity and cohesion are seen as threats to regional stability as a whole. As Indonesian armed forces (ABRI) spokesman Brigadier General Nurhadi Purwosapturo said in November 1992, "The challenge is not from outside but inside".<sup>9</sup> Indonesian Defence and Security Minister Murdani stated in September 1990 that recent global political changes had alleviated external threats to Indonesia's security, but that internal difficulties remained potential sources of tension.<sup>10</sup> In the same month, ABRI chief General Try Sutrisno said that within the next two years Indonesia would be faced with multidimensional threats "related to racial, religious, and ethnic conflicts....Our people are still vulnerable" to such subversive activities.<sup>11</sup> At a seminar in August 1990, speakers stated that Indonesia was "vulnerable to serious internal conflicts...due to its pluralist nature in terms of ethnic groups, races, religions, and provincial traditions."<sup>12</sup> Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said Indonesia would not support separatist movements in Southeast Asia because of the influence this could have in his own country. "We know the danger of separatism is to us all", he said.<sup>13</sup>

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8 Jakarta Post, 5 October 1989.

9 Telegraph Mirror (Sydney), 2 November 1992.

10 Jakarta Post, 10 September 1990.

11 Jakarta Post, 19 September 1990.

12 Jakarta Post, 14 August 1990.

13 Far Eastern Economic Review, 11 July 1991.

There are signs that the economic success of Indonesia in recent years - whilst a major factor in growing national confidence - has also, paradoxically, led to some concerns for national stability. The Indonesian economy has experienced sustained growth in the last decade with the diversification away from oil revenue being particularly impressive.<sup>14</sup> But there is a perception that this growth is mainly benefiting the West Java region and the Chinese commercial community. There is a fear that such perceptions could create support for separatist movements or lead to racial conflict. There are frequent public references to the "widening gap between the rich and the poor."<sup>15</sup> In May 1992, President Suharto conceded that the nation's rapid industrial development had increased the gap between the rich and the poor. He said he was confident, however, that "...by holding on to the noble value of the Pancasila ideology we will be able to overcome the development challenges before us."<sup>16</sup> Mazurki Darusman, a senior Golkar MP, believed that Indonesia's largest foreign investor, Japan, had played a large part in creating a socio-economic gap in Indonesia. This was because Japanese investments had been concentrated in Jakarta and West Java.<sup>17</sup>

Indonesia's economic progress, together with the global trend towards democratisation, is also producing calls for greater political openness, in particular a review of ABRI's role in national affairs. This is also a challenge for Indonesia's national cohesion. The head of the political science faculty at the University of Indonesia, Professor

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14 Straits Times, 17 August 1990.

15 see eg. Jakarta Post, 19 September 1990.

16 Indonesian Observer, 26 May 1992.

17 Straits Times, 19 May 1990.

Juwono Sudarsono, told a military audience in August 1990 that:

The obsession for national unity upheld by the state apparatus, especially army officers who use...[their] badge in the name of national interest, must be more tolerant and open.<sup>18</sup>

ABRI recognises the pressure for reform. Army Chief of Staff, General Edi Sudrajat, has said that better educated Indonesians want a change from "the foot-stomping, father-knows-best leadership style"<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, ABRI has indicated that it is not ready to relinquish political control,<sup>20</sup> and that it wants to ensure that any changes are tightly under its control, particularly any alterations to its own *dwi fungsi* role. In response to claims that ABRI will inevitably have to redefine its role with the decline in communism and the lack of any external threat, General Sutrisno asserted that communism was still the greatest danger to Indonesia.<sup>21</sup> General Sutrisno warned that "ABRI and the people will never hesitate to crush anyone trying to endanger the nation's unity and ideology."<sup>22</sup> General Sudradjat warned an Army audience in August 1990 to be vigilant in the face of elections scheduled for 1992 and 1993. "The general elections should proceed in a safe, smooth and orderly manner, and be won by the New Order", he said.<sup>23</sup> The Indonesian Government appears uncertain about how to respond to pressure for greater political openness. In August 1990 there were statements by

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18 Jakarta Post, 31 August 1990.

19 International Herald Tribune, 10 August 1990.

20 Ibid.

21 Jakarta Post, 19 September 1990.

22 Straits Times, 12 June 1990.

23 Jakarta Post, 10 August 1990.

Government ministers that there would be less Government censorship of local and foreign media reports<sup>24</sup>. But by later that year, restrictions were being applied again.<sup>25</sup>

### **The role of ASEAN**

Indonesia considers its security to be intimately linked to that of its neighbours. In May 1990 the Jakarta Post referred to "the strategic need for our large archipelagic state, with growing national interests, to establish a secure and conducive geopolitical environment."<sup>26</sup> Hence Indonesia seeks to promote "regional resilience". According to Dr Hasjim Djalal, this involves elevating "our concept of national resilience to a regional level", including assisting the national stability of neighbouring states, and encouraging "co-operation between the countries of the region [and] their sense of solidarity on various issues of common concern".<sup>27</sup> Indonesia's support for ASEAN continues to be the most important element in its promotion of regional resilience. According to President Suharto "without ASEAN, the region will not be stable."<sup>28</sup> Foreign Minister Ali Alatas stated in October 1992 that "mutually beneficial socio-economic cooperation, through ASEAN, constitutes...a vital ingredient for national and regional stability".<sup>29</sup> As Dr Hasjim Djalal said, "Our commitment to regional co-operation, particularly

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24 Far Eastern Economic Review, 6 September 1990

25 Far Eastern Economic Review, 6 December 1990 and 13 December 1990.

26 Jakarta Post, 28 May 1990.

27 Jakarta Post, 15 February 1990.

28 Straits Times, 31 March 1989.

29 Ali Alatas, op. cit., 9.

through ASEAN, constitutes one of the main pillars of our foreign policy."<sup>30</sup>

For Indonesia, the growing cohesion of ASEAN over the last 25 years has strengthened the region's capacity to resist interference by external powers such as China. ASEAN also provides a legitimate diplomatic and political avenue for Indonesia to assert its leadership of the region. In addition, support for ASEAN demonstrates to regional nations that Indonesia will continue to play a stabilising role in Southeast Asia. It also helps assure Indonesians themselves that their country will not return to the destabilising international approach that characterised the last years of the Sukarno era.

In Indonesia's view, it is the links between regional military establishments that form the heart of ASEAN co-operation. These help maintain good relations despite the public and sometimes quite heated disputes that occur in the political field between ASEAN members. Vice-Admiral Soedibyo Rahardjo, ABRI's Chief of the General Staff, said in early 1992 that closer security links within ASEAN create a "spiders web" of co-operation that would help ensure regional stability.<sup>31</sup> In recent years, Indonesia has placed special emphasis on its military relationships with Singapore and Malaysia.<sup>32</sup> Minister for Defence General Murdani was the instigator of meetings between the Chiefs of Staff of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in 1988 and 1990.<sup>33</sup> He was

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30 Jakarta Post, 15 February 1990.

31 M. Richardson, "Indonesia-US get together", Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, April-May 1992, 31.

32 See Singh, Bilveer, "Confidence Building Security Measures in Southeast Asia", Strategi vol 1, no 1, Kuala Lumpur, February 1992, 27-47, for a list of bilateral military exercises involving Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia between 1980 and 1990.

33 Straits Times, 24 March 1989.

also the prime mover behind two landmark military agreements with Singapore in 1989.<sup>34</sup> In January 1991 Indonesia and Malaysia signed an agreement for joint air patrols to safeguard security in the Malacca Strait.<sup>35</sup> In early 1992, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding calling for collaboration in defence industries and more joint programs in logistics, training exercises, and temporary exchanges of personnel.<sup>36</sup>

For Indonesia, an important aspect of intra-ASEAN military co-operation is its largely informal and low profile nature. Consistent with its 'free and independent' foreign policy, Indonesia does not support formal ASEAN wide defence cooperation. According to Jusuf Wanandi:

the existing scheme of [military] co-operation - or the lack of a formal ASEAN scheme - [has] brought about quite encouraging results and could become the basis for multilateral co-operation when the need arises in the future....[however] such co-operation [will be] defensive in nature and will not take the form of a military pact.<sup>37</sup>

Vice-Admiral Rahardjo agreed that multilateral co-operation would be possible without ASEAN becoming a defence pact. He said the aim should be for the six ASEAN states to develop "one standard of tactical and operational procedures which can be used jointly if needed."<sup>38</sup> An important consequence of this for Australia, according to Wanandi, is that this type of multilateral cooperation:

will not disrupt any military co-operation that individual members of ASEAN have with outside parties,

<sup>34</sup> Straits Times, 27 April 1989.

<sup>35</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 31 January 1991.

<sup>36</sup> Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, April-May 1992, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Jusuf Wanandi, op.cit., 166.

<sup>38</sup> M. Richardson, op. cit., 31.

such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements or bilaterally with the United States.<sup>39</sup>

When Alexander Downer, defence spokesman for Australia's Liberal/National Party Coalition, visited Indonesia in July 1992:

Indonesian military officials reaffirmed their government's position that security in Southeast Asia should be enhanced through bilateral defence links rather than a formalised multilateral security structure.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to military links, Indonesia sees personal rapport between the political leadership of ASEAN countries as highly important for the stability of the grouping. "All the leaders of ASEAN...belong to what is called the decisive factor for regional stability", remarked Sabam Sirait, a member of Indonesia's Supreme Advisory Council, in August 1989.<sup>41</sup> As with military ties, the special effort put into maintaining close personal links on a political level with Malaysia and Singapore indicates Indonesia's priorities within ASEAN. The lengthy periods for which Lee Kuan Yew (until late 1990), Mahathir and Suharto have been in power has assisted links between Indonesia and its immediate neighbours. In the case of Indonesia-Singapore relations, the perception of new Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong as a member of the 'old school' of regional leaders has helped maintain a stable relationship. Of course, personal relations between the leaders of the three nations will not always run smoothly. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in August 1992 that President Suharto was not comfortable with Mahathir's forthright international

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39 Jusuf Wanandi, op.cit., 166.

40 Australian, 6 August 1992.

41 Straits Times, 23 August 1989.

approach.<sup>42</sup> There is also some concern in Indonesia about leadership transition in the three countries. The Review reported in October 1992 that former foreign minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja regretted that modern ASEAN leaders were too "cerebral", took things too seriously, and had abandoned the old clubby atmosphere.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Indonesia has taken care to develop close ties with the emerging generation of leaders, and to reassure them of its regional intentions.<sup>44</sup>

The importance in Indonesia's eyes of personal ties between national leaders indicates that the personality of Suharto's successor - and his rapport with regional leaders - will be seen in Indonesia itself as a key factor in future regional stability.

#### **Indo-China/ASEAN relations**

In terms of the stability of Southeast Asia as a whole, the central issue perceived by Indonesian officials and academics is the future relationship between ASEAN and Indo-China. Indonesia is concerned to end the division between the communist and non-communist blocs in Southeast Asia. ASEAN's security interests in the larger sense, according to Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, would be enhanced if Southeast Asia ceased to be "perennially divided between ASEAN and Indo-China."<sup>45</sup> Dr Hasjim Djalal stated in February 1990 that:

political stability in Southeast Asia as a whole would be a 'mirage' without commensurate political stability in

42 Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 August 1992.

43 Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 October 1992.

44 see, for example, the meeting in early 1989 between President Suharto and Goh Chok Tong, then Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, Straits Times, 31 March 1989.

45 Pacific Defence Reporter, 1991 Annual Reference Edition, 25.

Indochina and the development of cooperative relations between the non-communist ASEAN and the socialist countries of Indochina.<sup>46</sup>

According to the Jakarta Post:

it is not to Indonesia's geopolitical interest if a kind of dichotomy is established in our subregion, due to the existence of an ASEAN which enjoys a steady economic growth, and an Indochina that is stagnant.<sup>47</sup>

There is particular interest within Indonesia in encouraging Vietnam to build positive regional relations. In Indonesia's view the isolation of Vietnam has caused an imbalance in its economic development compared to ASEAN. This has the potential to prompt further waves of boatpeople seeking refuge in the ASEAN countries. Indonesia supported the hard line of Thailand and Singapore on the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia for the sake of ASEAN unity, but privately favoured a more conciliatory approach. As the Jakarta Post said in October 1990:

Based on the parallel trends shown by their respective anti-colonial struggles, Indonesia has always shown great sympathy and understanding towards Vietnam's position, even when the rest of the world tended to treat it as a pariah of the international community of nations.<sup>48</sup>

President Suharto's visit to Vietnam in November 1990, the first by an ASEAN leader since 1975, indicated Indonesia's keenness to encourage Vietnam to contribute to regional resilience through membership of ASEAN. This was despite the belief of other ASEAN countries that fundamental political changes and the development of a market economy had to occur before closer involvement could be considered.<sup>49</sup> Agreements

46 Jakarta Post, 15 February 1990.

47 Jakarta Post, 11 October 1990.

48 Ibid.

49 Transcript from ABC Radio, International Report, 22 November 1990.

on economic, scientific and technical co-operation were signed during Suharto's visit, and in a joint communique Suharto and Vietnamese Prime Minister Do Muoi expressed confidence that efforts at national reconstruction and development would enable Vietnam to play "an enhanced role in regional and international affairs."<sup>50</sup> Suharto's initiative helped lead to the decision at the ASEAN summit in January 1992 to invite Vietnam (and Laos) to accede to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Co-operation.<sup>51</sup>

Joint development of resources in the South China Sea is seen as a potential means of assisting Vietnam's economy whilst at the same time drawing it into the Southeast Asian community. This appears to have been one motive behind Indonesia's sponsorship of workshops involving all the claimants to the Spratly islands in the South China Sea.

Indonesia's interest in a stable, economically resilient Vietnam is not only the result of a concern for regional stability per se and a feeling of common colonial experience. Fostering a sound relationship with Vietnam also boosts perceptions of Indonesia's regional role. It helped Indonesia, for example, play a greater role in resolving the major security issue for Southeast Asia over the last decade - the Cambodian civil war. In addition, there is a perception in Indonesia that a resilient Vietnam is needed as a buffer against possible aggression by China.

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<sup>50</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 24 November 1990.

<sup>51</sup> Singh, Bilveer, "After the Summit: The Way Forward", ASEAN-ISIS Monitor (Kuala Lumpur), No.3, April 1992, 3.

### China's international approach

Of the major Asian powers outside Southeast Asia, Indonesia sees China as the major influence on regional stability. While Indonesia's relations with Japan are important for reasons of trade, aid and investment, and a watchful eye is kept on India's naval program, it is China that has a pervasive influence on Indonesia's strategic outlook. In Indonesia's view, China's national policies have a considerable effect on both the domestic and external factors in regional resilience. Professor Juwono Sudarsono explained at an Indonesia-Vietnam Conference in late 1990 that:

our relationships with China extend beyond our external relations with this most important political state for Southeast Asia....Because our relations with China penetrate deep into the political and social psyches of our respective nations, the manner in which we handle [these] relations...is of utmost importance to the development of nation building in our respective nations.<sup>52</sup>

Hence normalisation of relations with China in August 1990 was seen as central to the greater international role that many Indonesians felt their nation should play. It was also regarded as essential given Indonesia's perception of China's key role in future regional stability. Thus President Suharto's visit to China in November 1990 was described as "the most significant...since he became head of state and government."<sup>53</sup>

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52 Jakarta Post, 29 October 1990.

53 Jakarta Post, 11 October 1990.

*China and the stability of Southeast Asia*

Normalisation of Indonesia-China relations in 1990 and China's diplomatic campaign to woo ASEAN after the 1989 Tiananmen incident encouraged some positive Indonesian perceptions of China's contribution to regional stability. However, a fundamental concern remained in Indonesia about Chinese policy over the longer term. "The emergence of a congenial China is not something we should take for granted," remarked the Jakarta Post on the occasion of the visit by Chinese Premier Li Peng to Indonesia in August 1990. According to the Jakarta Post, if Southeast Asia remains:

plagued by intra-regional problems...it would be all too tempting for [a] modern and assertive China to treat parts of Southeast Asia as its quasi special economic and political zones.<sup>54</sup>

For some in Indonesia, China's approach on the Cambodian problem and its willingness or otherwise to give up armed support for the Khmer Rouge, has been a test of whether it is prepared to play a constructive role in regional stability. As the Jakarta Post said in August 1990:

the Cambodian conflict is now reduced...to a testcase of whether China is willing to place more importance on its longer-term interests in Southeast Asia, rather than continue harbouring its grudge against Vietnam.<sup>55</sup>

With a solution to the Cambodian conflict,

Positive cooperation between China, the world's most populous country, Indonesia, the greatest country in Southeast Asia, and Vietnam, the most important country

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<sup>54</sup> Jakarta Post, 13 August 1990.

<sup>55</sup> Jakarta Post, 1 August 1990.

in Indochina, will really contribute significantly towards durable peace and stability in this region.<sup>56</sup>

In the opinion of Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, normalisation of Indonesia-China relations would help the search for peace in Cambodia and promote political stability in the region as a whole.<sup>57</sup>

There is concern in Indonesia about China's naval program and the prospect that, as in 1988, China might again use military force in the South China Sea. In June 1991, the International Herald Tribune reported that Admiral Sunardi, strategic policy adviser to the Indonesian Minister for Defense, said that China "had the potential to become a major military power and appeared intent on securing control of the South China Sea."<sup>58</sup> Apprehension about the southward movement of Chinese military power gives Indonesia a strong motive to seek a co-operative approach to the dispute over ownership of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, even though it is not a claimant to the islands. Hence Indonesia's disappointment in 1992 when one of the regional workshops it organised on this issue was undermined by renewed Chinese assertiveness over the Spratlys. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported that "One Indonesian critic felt that China was out to sabotage Jakarta's initiative on managing conflicts in the South China Sea".<sup>59</sup>

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56 Jakarta Post, 20 November 1990.

57 Straits Times, 16 August 1990.

58 International Herald Tribune, 14 June 1991.

59 Far Eastern Economic Review, 13 August 1992.

*China and Indonesia's internal stability*

Indonesians have difficulty separating perceptions of China's national policies from their attitudes towards ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Of Indonesia's population of 184 million, around 5-6 million are of Chinese origin. Approximately 300,000 of these are 'stateless', being neither Chinese citizens under Indonesian law nor Indonesian citizens.<sup>60</sup> This group was unable either to renew their Chinese passports or to leave Indonesia legally following the suspension of formal diplomatic ties between Indonesia and China in 1967.

Indonesians of Chinese origin face a range of restrictions resulting from a complex mixture of racial mistrust, economic jealousy, fear of communism and fear of China. Although the proportion of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia is much less than in Malaysia (3% compared with 32%), racial tension is arguably greater in Indonesia. The activities of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have largely been confined to the business sector. Defence Minister Murdani warned that segregation of ethnic Chinese could endanger national unity. "We [have] let them play in economic fields only", he said.<sup>61</sup> In November 1990 Home Affairs Minister Rudini denied there was any prohibition on Indonesians of Chinese descent enrolling in the armed forces or civil service. The Jakarta Post commented "In the past an unofficial restriction was believed to have been imposed on the descendants to enter either one of the

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<sup>60</sup> Jakarta Post, 9 August 1990 and 31 August 1990.

<sup>61</sup> Straits Times, 17 August 1990.

institutions."<sup>62</sup> Ethnic Chinese have also faced a strict quota system in universities and have had little, if any, role in party politics. Despite calls by some in the military such as Murdani to allow greater participation by ethnic Chinese in national affairs, there are still strong doubts in Indonesia about the loyalty of Indonesians of Chinese descent, especially those in the "stateless" category. This is connected with a belief that ethnic Chinese - supported by Peking - were heavily involved in the events of 1965, and a continuing apprehension that China might attempt to use ethnic Chinese to promote communism in Indonesia.

The execution in February 1990 of members of the Indonesian communist party (PKI) imprisoned since 1965 indicates that anti-communist (and hence anti-Chinese) pressures are still significant. The head of Indonesia's Defence Ministry Research Institute, Sukarto, warned at the time that despite the decline of communism in eastern Europe:

It is not impossible that [former communists] will seize on the new, more sophisticated form of communism. If that happens, it is going to be a major challenge for our national vigilance in the future.<sup>63</sup>

When Chinese Premier Li Peng met President Suharto in Jakarta on 7 August 1990 he pledged that the Chinese government would never utilise the services of ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia for its own interests. He also told Suharto his government had no relations with former members of the Indonesian Communist Party.<sup>64</sup> China, according to Li Peng, would adhere to the "Dasa Sila Bandung" (10 principles of

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<sup>62</sup> Jakarta Post, 20 November 1990.

<sup>63</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, 13 March 1990.

<sup>64</sup> Jakarta Post, 8 August 1990.

Bandung) including non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, respect for territorial sovereignty, non-aggression and the use of peaceful means to settle international disputes.<sup>65</sup> Despite these assurances, the Straits Times Jakarta correspondent reported that:

even following the re-establishment of ties on August 8, several quarters here had often expressed the view that Beijing might make use of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia for its own ends.<sup>66</sup>

There were fears that with normalisation of Indonesia-China ties, China's influence over Indonesians of Chinese origin might increase. As the Jakarta Post said:

Apparently there is some concern in this country that the resumption of a normal diplomatic relationship with China would enhance the role of Indonesians of Chinese descent with the consequence that their influence, not only in the business sector, would widen significantly.<sup>67</sup>

As the publicity given to Li Peng's assurance on non-interference with Indonesian affairs indicated, the Government was anxious to allay these fears. Hence State Secretary Moerdiono was not impressed when two weeks after normalisation, around 5,000 ethnic Chinese applied to accompany Indonesia's team to Beijing for the Asian Games. The Straits Times reported that Moerdiono "...was visibly annoyed...when he asked why there were so many people eager to go."<sup>68</sup> "We should not do things which will only cause misunderstandings amongst ourselves" he said.<sup>69</sup> An "Indonesian of Chinese descent" was reported as saying:

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<sup>65</sup> Jakarta Post, 9 August 1990.

<sup>66</sup> Straits Times, 11 October 1990.

<sup>67</sup> Jakarta Post, 13 August 1990.

<sup>68</sup> Straits Times, 28 August 1990.

<sup>69</sup> Jakarta Post, 23 August 1990.

It does not help given some of the concerns expressed about normalisation and its effect on Indonesians of Chinese ancestry. Those who did not favour normalisation at this time will say 'See, we told you so. See how the Chinese here are reacting.'<sup>70</sup>

Perceptions of the loyalty of ethnic Chinese are also not assisted by their relative economic success as a group in Indonesia. Normalisation of relations with China occurred at the same time as an economic boom in Indonesia. The Government's emphasis on fast economic growth appeared to have most benefit for the powerful Chinese owned conglomerates.<sup>71</sup> In May 1990, the Jakarta Post said:

there is an increasing concern that the fast growth, caused by deregulation measures, among other things, is giving too great an opportunity to groups that already possess modern entrepreneurial skills and have access to the main sources of information - generally speaking, those of Chinese ancestry - thus giving rise to a feeling of unfair competition and the creation of a gap between the very advanced and the lagging. Such a development could be a cause for concern if this dichotomy coincided with the existing racial divisions in our society.<sup>72</sup>

Shortly after Li Peng's visit, the spokesman of the United Development Party warned that if indigenous businessmen were not given more leeway to develop their commercial activities, the ethnic Chinese would soon monopolise the economy and control the government as a whole. Indigenous businessmen had to be given protection "lest they be devoured by the aliens", he said.<sup>73</sup>

Recent initiatives by President Suharto have not helped reduce economic jealousy of the Chinese community. In January

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70 Straits Times, 28 August 1990.

71 Sunday Times (Singapore), 29 July 1990.

72 Jakarta Post, 22 May 1990.

73 Jakarta Post, 10 August 1990.

1990 Suharto called for the large business conglomerates owned by ethnic Chinese to transfer twenty-five per cent of their shares to indigenous co-operatives.<sup>74</sup> This was an attempt to increase his popular appeal in the lead up to the 1993 Presidential elections. An elaborate and highly publicised ceremony was arranged for late July 1990 where the ethnic Chinese conglomerate owners transferred shares to the pribumi co-operatives.<sup>75</sup> Apart from increasing his popularity by capitalising on latent anti-Chinese feeling in Indonesia, this initiative does not appear to have been unconnected with normalisation of relations with China less than two weeks later. Together with the execution earlier in the year of former PKI activists, it indicated to the general public the government was not moving too close to China by re-establishing formal diplomatic links. Whilst Suharto may have succeeded in doing this, his initiatives also helped maintain the Chinese question as a divisive issue in Indonesia.

Some two years after normalisation, the commercial dominance of ethnic Chinese was still being referred to by senior leaders, including Economic Minister Radius Prawiro. "A certain ethnic group has dominated the country's business life ranging from retail business and marketing to the ownership of capital goods," he said. He urged Chinese business groups to help smaller ones run by indigenous Indonesians. "The problem is", he said, "how to cope with the gap [between the rich and poor] and maintain national unity, so that social jealousy can be avoided."<sup>76</sup>

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74 Far Eastern Economic Review, 29 March 1990. See also Straits Times, 2 July 1990.

75 Sunday Times 29 July 1990.

76 New Straits Times, 27 March 1992.

In May 1992 the Indonesian Government signed a memorandum of understanding with China on the "stateless" Chinese issue. China expressed its willingness to issue passports to ethnic Chinese in Indonesia to allow them to return to the motherland.<sup>77</sup> Indonesian Minister of Justice Ismail Saleh encouraged Indonesians of Chinese origin to do just that.<sup>78</sup>

Perceptions of China and those of Chinese race in Indonesia also affect Indonesia's perceptions of its ethnically Chinese neighbour Singapore. Links between Singapore and China will always attract a degree of suspicion in Indonesia. As the Far Eastern Economic Review reported in October 1992, "Singapore's support for a closer ASEAN - China relationship is seen by Jakarta as making Singapore a possible Trojan horse for Peking in the region."<sup>79</sup>

In Indonesia's eyes, therefore, China's future policies have considerable potential to affect both Indonesia's own national cohesion and the stability of Southeast Asia as a whole.

#### **Indonesia/Papua New Guinea relations**

The Jakarta Post suggested in August 1990 that Indonesia's relationship with Papua New Guinea was "in concrete terms at least of equal significance" to resumption of diplomatic ties with China.<sup>80</sup> Indonesia has placed considerable emphasis in recent years on developing a more

<sup>77</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 16 May 1992, 11.

<sup>78</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 23 May 1992, 11.

<sup>79</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 October 1992.

<sup>80</sup> Jakarta Post, 8 August 1990.

constructive relationship with Papua New Guinea. A steady improvement in Indonesia-Papua New Guinea relations led to the signing of a "Treaty of Mutual Respect, Friendship and Co-operation" in 1987.<sup>81</sup> Former Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, on direction from President Suharto, adopted a "non-patronising" approach to Papua New Guinea. "The head of state always asked that we should not act as a big brother and not throw our weight around in settling problems with Papua New Guinea", remarked Mochtar during the fourth Indonesia-Papua New Guinea Conference in 1990.<sup>82</sup> These conferences, first held in 1984, have played an important role in improving understanding between two countries whose ruling elites have little in common ethnically or historically.<sup>83</sup>

A co-operative relationship with Papua New Guinea is important for Indonesia because of the perceived potential for developments in Papua New Guinea to affect Irian Jaya and Indonesia's other eastern provinces. As Jusuf Wanandi has said, "For Indonesia, its relations with Papua New Guinea affect the development of Irian Jaya and its relations with other South Pacific nations."<sup>84</sup> A "pan-Melanesian" movement, in Indonesia's view, would have Papua New Guinea as its natural leader. Such a movement could influence the Melanesian populations in Irian Jaya, East Timor and the Moluccas. A good relationship with the Papua New Guinea leadership helps ensure any such movement does not receive support from the Papua New Guinea government.

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81 The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XX, no. 2, 2nd quarter 1992, 159.

82 Jakarta Post, 7 August 1990.

83 The Indonesia - Papua New Guinea Conferences are organised by Jakarta's Centre for Strategic and International Studies. Participants include officials, academics, businessmen and media representatives from both countries.

84 Jusuf Wanandi, *op. cit.*, 157.

A sound relationship with Papua New Guinea is also important for Indonesia's attempts to control the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM), one of the few remaining active separatist movements in Indonesia. Indonesia has successfully concluded a number of agreements with Papua New Guinea in recent years which enable more effective action against the OPM as well as increasing links between the armed forces of the two countries. These include the establishment in August 1989 of a joint security committee to handle border problems, the renewal of the "Basic Agreement on Border Arrangements" in April 1990, permission in November 1990 for "hot pursuit" by Indonesian forces into Papua New Guinea territory, a "status of forces" agreement in January 1992<sup>85</sup> and a memorandum of understanding in May of the same year under which soldiers from both countries would work side by side on civic programs in Papua New Guinea<sup>86</sup>. In Indonesia's view, these agreements strengthen an important aspect of regional stability. Home Affairs Minister Rudini stated in August 1990 that:

One of the tremendous achievements is, in my view, the creation of a stronger basis and improved procedures to cope with issues related to our border problems...A solid relationship between Papua New Guinea and Indonesia can indeed be a bridge for the creation of greater inter-regional co-operation.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Post-Courier (Port Moresby), 14 January 1992.

<sup>86</sup> Post-Courier (Port Moresby), 14 May 1992.

<sup>87</sup> Jakarta Post, 9 August 1990.

### The view from Malaysia

Malaysia's view of its "region" differs from that of Indonesia. Malaysians do not have a perception that their nation is the leading power in Southeast Asia or that Malaysia itself constitutes most of the region. Hence unlike Indonesia, Malaysia does not see its own internal stability as a key factor in the stability of its wider region.

### Indonesia's regional approach

Malaysian officials and academics recognise the pervasive influence of Indonesia on the stability of their region. In Malaysia's view, Indonesia retains the potential to be a variable factor in regional stability. Despite the commitment to national and regional stability demonstrated throughout the Suharto years, there is uncertainty in Malaysia over the future role Indonesia sees for itself in Southeast Asia. In August 1990 Malaysia's Deputy Foreign Minister warned that regional disputes between Malaysia and its neighbours could flare up into political or military conflict. "The Indonesian confrontation against Malaysia in the 1960s is ample proof of this reality", he said.<sup>88</sup> Memories of Confrontation and an appreciation of Indonesia's current influence lead to concerns in Malaysia about the future policies of their large neighbour, especially after President Suharto steps down.

While there has been some political tension in Malaysia-Indonesia relations in recent years, this has been set against

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<sup>88</sup> Straits Times, 17 August 1990.

a background of increasing cooperation, including in the security field. Malaysia would like Indonesia to recognise that it has a "special relationship" with Malaysia. However, at the second "Malindo" (Malaysia-Indonesia) dialogue at Bogor in January 1990, Indonesia rejected Malaysia's suggestion that there was a form of Malay and Islamic unity between the two nations. As Jusuf Wanandi had said previously:

'Unity in diversity' is the essence of Indonesia's Pancasila, whereas Malaysia stresses...Malay primacy in its ruku negara....Pancasila dictates that Indonesia is neither a secular nor a religious state, [whereas in Malaysia] Islam...is the religion of the politically dominant Malays. It is the official state religion."<sup>89</sup>

The scheduled three day conference in Bogor ended in failure a day early, amidst vocal anti-Malaysian protests (caused by the execution of an Indonesian national for drug offences in the Malaysian state of Sabah).<sup>90</sup>

Some Malaysians believe Indonesia is jealous of the economic success of its "little brother" Malaysia. There have been warnings of divisive commercial competition, particularly over palm oil exports. Malaysia feels that Indonesia has benefitted from Malaysia's expertise to take some of Malaysia's markets.<sup>91</sup> B.A. Hamzah from the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in Kuala Lumpur said in October 1992 that ASEAN was "witnessing a more assertive Indonesia".<sup>92</sup> There is a similar view in Jakarta about Malaysia. Prime Minister Mahathir's proposal for an East Asian Economic Grouping, according to the Far Eastern Economic

<sup>89</sup> Jusuf Wanandi, "Indonesia-Malaysia bilateral relations", The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xvi, no. 4, October 1988, 456-458.

<sup>90</sup> New Straits Times, 16 February 1990; Far Eastern Economic Review, 1 March 1990.

<sup>91</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 1 March 1990.

<sup>92</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 October 1992.

Review, was not well received in Indonesia. The Review said that "Indonesia's perception is that Mahathir has ridden roughshod over ASEAN's hallowed house rules of (prior) consultation and consensus."<sup>93</sup>

Malaysia and Indonesia, however, have developed mechanisms for managing disputes that arise between them. A Malaysia-Indonesia Joint Ministerial Commission was set up in October 1991 because of the number of issues concerning the two countries. These included an influx of illegal Indonesian workers into Malaysia, border demarcation questions, the delimitation of overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones, and the need for a joint hydrographic survey of the Malacca Straits.<sup>94</sup> The most serious issues, however, were the question of refugees coming to Malaysia from the Indonesian province of Aceh, and the dispute between the two countries over ownership of Sipadan and Ligatan islands off the east coast of Borneo.

Around 200 Acehnese villagers, fleeing from an Indonesian crackdown on the separatist movement in their province, landed in Malaysia in April 1991, seeking political refugee status. Despite considerable domestic sympathy for the Muslim refugees, Malaysia agreed to return them to Indonesia. "Our primary concern is to maintain the good relationship between the two countries," said Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The Acehnese refugees were "a bit reluctant to return and we are now persuading them to do so."<sup>95</sup> The Acehnese were returned to Indonesia because, in Foreign Minister Badawi's

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<sup>93</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 August 1992.

<sup>94</sup> New Straits Times, 8 October 1991.

<sup>95</sup> New Straits Times, 11 October, 1991.

words, the extensive global changes in recent years means "we will need co-operation among neighbouring countries."<sup>96</sup>

Another incident in September 1992 demonstrated the commitment of Malaysia to good relations with Indonesia. A documentary screened on Malaysian television accused Indonesia of gunning down unarmed civilians in East Timor and of forcibly occupying the territory. Members of Indonesia's Parliament said this was tantamount to intervention in Indonesia's domestic affairs.<sup>97</sup> Malaysia acted quickly to defuse any friction over this incident. The Malaysian Government clearly distanced itself from the screening. As Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba said, "The screening of the film may be a result of a mistake by one or two Television Malaysia staff."<sup>98</sup> Prime Minister Mahathir conveyed an apology to President Suharto, and Information Minister Mohamed Rahmat flew to Jakarta to personally apologise to his Indonesian counterpart, Minister Harmoko. For his part Harmoko said he accepted the broadcast had been the result of an "editorial slip-up" which had occurred without the Malaysian Government's knowledge.<sup>99</sup>

The dispute over Sipadan and Ligatan islands, however, was not so easily resolved. As the Secretary-General of Malaysia's Foreign Ministry, Datuk Ahmad Kamil Jaafar said, "It won't be easy for us to solve the problem. It has been with us for the last 22 years."<sup>100</sup> The Sabah state government was concerned that the dispute over the islands had the

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96 Ibid.

97 Canberra Times, 29 September 1992.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 New Straits Times, 9 October 1991.

potential to lead to a serious rift with Indonesia. Sabah's Chief Minister Kitingan directed that there should be no more development of tourist resorts and other facilities on Sipadan to avoid worsening the dispute. "We cannot have too much infrastructure on the island," he said.<sup>101</sup> The Joint Ministerial Commission failed to resolve the dispute, as did a special three day working committee attended by senior officials from both countries. Hence despite the importance it places on good relations with Indonesia, disputes over territory will still provoke a nationalistic response from Malaysia. "Malaysia has been working on the basis that the two islands are its territory", said Datuk Jaafar.<sup>102</sup> It would be wrong, however, to read too much into this dispute. The issue first arose in 1968 and had been largely dormant until 1991 when its re-emergence could be seen - paradoxically - as a sign of improved relations. "Now that we have established a very good relationship, we feel that the matter could be discussed in a friendly manner," said Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas<sup>103</sup>. Moreover, the day after the Malaysia-Indonesia General Border Committee failed to resolve the matter in January 1992, the two nations announced they would be increasing military co-operation, including more combined exercises and increased officer exchanges.<sup>104</sup> A formal memorandum of understanding providing for increased military co-operation was signed in February 1992.<sup>105</sup>

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101 New Straits Times. 18 October 1991.

102 New Straits Times. 10 October 1991

103 New Straits Times. 12 October 1991.

104 New Straits Times. 28 January 1992, and 29 January 1992.

105 New Straits Times. 19 February 1991.

### China's policies

Malaysia's view of China reflects the view from peninsula not East Malaysia. According to Professor Zakaria Haji Ahmad from the University of Kebangsaan Malaysia, "this territorial division [between peninsular and East Malaysia] in effect translates as a country that is actually two not only physically but also spiritually".<sup>106</sup> Hence the greater racial harmony in East Malaysia (which produces a more relaxed perception of China) is not reflected in the Malaysian Government's view.

A concern to preserve the Malay homeland against the encroachment of ethnic Chinese, together with resentment at the economic success of Chinese both in Malaysia and elsewhere in the region, remain important influences on Malaysia's perception of China. The history of racial tension in peninsular Malaysia (where ethnic Chinese comprise approximately thirty three per cent of the population<sup>107</sup>) means the ruling Malay elite retains an underlying mistrust of China itself, whatever the shifts in ideology or approach of the Beijing regime. As one Malaysian commentator observed, Malaysia is "more anti-China than...anti-communist."<sup>108</sup> Anti-communism, however, also remains an important influence on Malaysia's perceptions of China. National leaders cannot easily forget forty-one years of insurgency by the Communist

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106 Zakaria Haji Ahmad, "Malaysian foreign policy and domestic politics: looking outward and moving inward?", in R. Scalapino et al (eds), Regional dynamics: security, political and economic issues in the Asia-Pacific region, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta, 1990.

107 H. Osman-Rani, "Malaysia's New Economic Policy After 1990", Southeast Asian Affairs 1990, Singapore, 1990, 204.

108 Noraini Haji Abdullah, "Leadership in Malaysia: Security Perceptions and Policies", in M. Ayooob and C. Samudavanija (eds), Leadership Perceptions and National Security, Singapore, 1989, 143.

Party of Malaysia (CPM), whose membership was almost entirely ethnic Chinese. The insurgency ended formally only in 1989. Moreover, for many years it was nominally led from Beijing by the CPM chief, Chin Peng.<sup>109</sup> There is a concern in Malaysia that China still desires to use the "overseas Chinese" to promote its ideology, and that elements of a Chinese "Fifth Column" remain in Malaysia. In October 1990, the chief of the Malaysian Defence Force warned that communism was not dead, despite the changes taking place in Eastern Europe.<sup>110</sup>

The legacy of the MCP insurgency is also reflected in apprehension about growing links between Thailand and China. The MCP used bases in southern Thailand for operations in Malaysia. There is a concern that growing Thailand - China ties could again create the danger of communist infiltration over Malaysia's northern border.<sup>111</sup>

After the Tiananmen incident in mid-1989, Malaysia initially feared that domestic turmoil in China might lead to "expansionism or foreign adventure."<sup>112</sup> By 1990, however, the economic and diplomatic isolation of China by Western nations led China to adopt a more co-operative approach towards Southeast Asia. In Singapore in August 1990 Chinese Premier Li Peng offered to join efforts with Southeast Asian nations to develop the natural resources of the Spratly islands. As Dr Noordin Sopiee, the head of Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies, said "That could be a very

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109 Gordon P. Means, "Malaysia in 1989. Forging a plan for the future", Southeast Asian Affairs 1990, Singapore, 1990, 201-202.

110 Straits Times, 4 October 1990.

111 J. Mohan Malik, "Nuclear free Southeast Asia - the China factor", Current Affairs Bulletin, vol. 65, no. 10, March 1989, 20.

112 L. Buszynski, "Southeast Asia", in Klintworth G. (ed), China's crisis: the international implications, Canberra papers on strategy and defence, no. 57, 1989, 101.

important confidence building measure."<sup>113</sup> Normalisation of relations between China and Indonesia in 1990 was also seen by Malaysia as a positive development, especially Li Peng's assurances that the Chinese government would not use ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia for its own interests, and that China no longer maintained links with local communist parties.<sup>114</sup>

By 1992, however, Malaysia's latent fear of China was reconfirmed. Elements within China reversed the conciliatory approach of Li Peng on the South China Sea. In February 1992, China passed the Territorial Waters Act reaffirming its sovereignty over the Spratly islands and reserving the right to use force there. Malaysia's Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi expressed surprise at the move. "We must avoid military conflicts at all cost", he said.<sup>115</sup> The New Straits Times saw China's new law as "a legal basis for military action against countries which encroach on its territory."<sup>116</sup> Malaysia's Minister for Defence said it was particularly significant that China had sanctioned the use of force in the South China Sea, although he cautioned "it would appear that this declaration by the Chinese assembly is more for domestic consumption, rather than for external purpose."<sup>117</sup> The chief of Malaysia's armed forces, General Tan Sri Hashim Mohamed Ali said "We want conflicting...claims ...settled peacefully. However, if the claimant decides to use force, we have no alternative but to protect our

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113 Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, October 1990, 19.

114 Ibid.

115 New Straits Times, 1 March 1992.

116 New Straits Times, 26 June 1992.

117 Minister of Defence, Malaysia, Keynote address, Chief of the General Staff Conference, Darwin, April 1992, 21-22.

sovereignty to the last drop of blood."<sup>118</sup> In May 1992 China signed a deal with the United States oil company Crestone for development of an area in the South China Sea also claimed by Vietnam.<sup>119</sup> "What worries many observers", said the Far Eastern Economic Review, "is the Chinese pledge to use force if necessary to protect Crestone's concession."<sup>120</sup> There were reports that China was taking steps to ensure it could implement this pledge. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in April 1992 that the deputy commander-in-chief of the Chinese Navy said China would develop advanced weaponry and adjust its strategy to protect its claims in the South China Sea.<sup>121</sup> Reported military acquisitions included the purchase of advanced SU-27 fighter bombers and air to air refuelling technology, and negotiations with Ukraine for the purchase of an aircraft carrier.<sup>122</sup> China's development of Hainan island as a major naval base and air base (within range of the Spratly islands for the SU-27s) was another cause of concern. China confirmed its hardline approach at a regional conference on the South China Sea in Indonesia at the end of June 1992. "Any intervention by any state outside the region will certainly complicate the problem," said an official from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>123</sup>

The Territorial Waters Act, the concession granted to Crestone and China's development of power projection capabilities caused dismay in Malaysia. As the Far Eastern Economic Review reported:

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118 New Straits Times, 12 March 1992, 7.

119 Far Eastern Economic Review, 9 July 1992, 14.

120 Ibid.

121 Far Eastern Economic Review, 16 April 1992.

122 Sun Herald (Sydney), 26 July 1992.

123 Sydney Morning Herald, 4 July 1992, 19.

Some of the ASEAN countries...perceive China's actions as being expansionist, aggressive and certainly not in the spirit of the stated policy of peaceful, joint development.<sup>124</sup>

Malaysia was one of the prime movers behind the joint declaration on the South China Sea signed by ASEAN foreign ministers at their annual meeting in July 1992. The declaration called for resolution of disputed claims by "peaceful means, without resort to force"<sup>125</sup>. "It is important that China knows the way we feel", said Datuk Badawi. Datuk Badawi was not impressed by China's response that it "appreciated some of the basic principles" in the declaration. "The beautiful (Chinese) statement on policy doesn't reconcile with what's happening on the ground", he said.<sup>126</sup>

Concern over its inability to protect its claims in the Spratlys was cited as the motive for Malaysia's interest in purchasing ex-Soviet MIG-29 advanced combat aircraft. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported that:

the Russians have offered a delivery period of nine months, which could give Malaysia the enhanced deterrent capability it wants by the end of 1993....There is the feeling here, more so than anywhere else other than Singapore, of the need for a deterrent capability.<sup>127</sup>

In addition to new Air Force capabilities, there were also plans for the Royal Malaysian Navy to acquire new ships and equipment. The Straits Times reported that it was Malaysia's maritime disputes, especially the Spratlys, but also Sipadan

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124 Far Eastern Economic Review, 9 July 1992.

125 Far Eastern Economic Review, 13 August 1992.

126 Far Eastern Economic Review, 6 August 1992.

127 Far Eastern Economic Review, 23 July 1992.

and Ligatan (with Indonesia) and Pedra Blanca (with Singapore) that were behind these planned acquisitions.<sup>128</sup>

Even if the planned improvements to its air force and navy are achieved, however, a key issue for Malaysia will remain how to deal with China's military forces, especially the Chinese Navy. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in July 1992 that Malaysian defence sources had no illusion about the efficacy of any ASEAN country successfully challenging China. The Review quoted an Australian defence expert as saying "The United States thinks China's deployment is obsolete. But which ASEAN country has the capacity to detect submarines or counter stand-off missile technology?"<sup>129</sup> Recent Chinese military improvements and its assertive approach on the Spratlys have increased concern in Malaysia about China's regional approach "post-Deng". As Minister for Defence Najib said, "as Beijing is still modernising her military forces, regional states will view any change in her foreign policy with concern."<sup>130</sup>

### **The role of ASEAN**

Malaysia is closely aware of the contribution of ASEAN to the stability of its region. In the opinion of Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, head of strategic studies at Malaysia's Armed Forces Defence College:

the formation of ASEAN in 1967...provided some form of confidence and stability externally, as far as Malaysia and Singapore were concerned. The setting up of this Association was influenced primarily by the problems

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128 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 25 July 1992.

129 Far Eastern Economic Review, 23 July 1992.

130 Minister of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 19.

which existed in the 1960s, involving Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, which created some degree of instability in Southeast Asia. Although ASEAN was formed with socio-economic dimensions in mind, there was no doubt that it was political expediency that had brought the five nations together. It could be argued that the formation of ASEAN had brought regional stability...despite the ongoing Vietnam War.<sup>131</sup>

Malaysia remains strongly committed to ASEAN and continues to see it as an important factor in regional stability in the post-Cold War World. As Malaysia's Chief of Defence Force said, "ASEAN must always be ready to assume a greater role in the maintenance of peace and stability in the region. It has the credentials to do so."<sup>132</sup> In May 1990 Malaysia's Foreign Minister Dato Abu Hasan Omar stated:

ASEAN has [proved] its usefulness both in promoting intra-ASEAN co-operation and in promoting regional stability...ASEAN will continue to be the cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policies.<sup>133</sup>

According to former Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam, Malaysia's view is that:

We live in an inter-dependant world. We must concentrate on Southeast Asia because our immediate and long-term future lies in ASEAN. Intra-ASEAN relations are most crucial and our collaboration with ASEAN nations will ultimately determine our future.<sup>134</sup>

Shortly before the Fourth ASEAN summit in January 1992, the New Straits Times summarised what it saw as ASEAN's role in regional stability:

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131 Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, "Five Power Defence Arrangements: two decades and beyond," Strategi, vol. 1, no. 1, Kuala Lumpur, February 1992, 49.

132 Hashim Mohd Ali, Gen Tan Sri, "Prospects for defence and security cooperation in ASEAN", Strategi, vol. 1, no. 1, Kuala Lumpur, February 1992, 8.

133 Dato' Hassan Omar, "Malaysia's foreign policy in the 1990s", ISIS Focus (Kuala Lumpur), no. 63, June 1989, 22.

134 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 18 July 1992.

ASEAN...with its concept of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) has enhanced regional security through many discussions on regional issues. It has successfully functioned as a defacto counterweight to the Indonesian bloc during the years when security threats were emanating from this bloc. As a mechanism for moderating intra-ASEAN tensions and threat perceptions, it has also been successful. All this without a formal defense alliance like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation...clearly, ASEAN is a stabilising force in the Asia-Pacific region and is poised to play a greater role.<sup>135</sup>

There were concerns in Malaysia that with the end of the Cambodian civil war (or, more precisely, with the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1989), ASEAN members would no longer have a motive for maintaining the unity of the grouping. It was felt that more would need to be done to present a picture to countries such as China, Japan and India of a cohesive regional entity. In November 1989, Noordin Sopiee suggested an alternative avenue for promoting ASEAN unity. If ASEAN, he said, could ensure that the new Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation Forum (APEC) is "based on existing ASEAN machinery", then APEC "could provide one of the essential unifying issues that will cement us together in the way that the Cambodian issue has done in the last ten years."<sup>136</sup>

Since it has boundaries with all of the other ASEAN members, the association will continue to be an important tool for Malaysia in managing its regional relations. "Benign and cooperative relations between neighbouring states go a long way towards keeping the region free of tension and conflict", said Malaysia's Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi in June 1992.<sup>137</sup> Malaysia has a series of ongoing disputes with its

<sup>135</sup> New Straits Times, 21 January 1992.

<sup>136</sup> Jakarta Post, 4 November 1989.

<sup>137</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 27 June 1992, 10.

neighbours, including the claim to Sabah by the Philippines and the associated question of large numbers of illegal Filipino immigrants; the Limbang salient question with Brunei; the support given to Thai separatists in the northern border region of peninsular Malaysia; disputes with Indonesia over Sipadan and Ligatan islands and Acehnese refugees; and the continuing political, racial, religious and territorial squabbles with Singapore. As Datuk Badawi said, "For some of us, our most demanding relations are those with our neighbours."<sup>138</sup> Malaysia realises the value of ASEAN for regional stability in these circumstances. As General Hashim said in an article in early 1992:

ASEAN has been successful this far to avoid and resolve conflicts between members of ASEAN. The potential for conflicts has always been subdued in the larger interests of the ASEAN grouping.<sup>139</sup>

It would require a conscious decision to sacrifice ASEAN unity on the part of Malaysia or one of its neighbours for armed conflict to result from any of the disputes listed above.

In Malaysia's eyes, its volatile relationship with Singapore demonstrates the value of wider groupings such as ASEAN. Although there is a perception that the underlying relationship has been strengthened in recent years (especially through growing economic and security ties) there is also concern over the increase in public disputes between the two countries. The visit to Singapore by Israeli President Herzog in 1987, Brigadier General Lee's questioning of the loyalty of the Malays in the Singapore Armed Forces in 1988) and

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Hashim Mohd Ali, Gen Tan Sri, *op. cit.*, 2.

Singapore's offer of military facilities to the United States in 1989 - amongst other issues - all caused political, religious and racial tension between the two nations. Such problems are considered manageable at present, particularly because of the personal contacts between the leaders of Malaysia and Singapore. There is uneasiness in Malaysia, however, about the situation over the next ten years when a new generation of leaders will come to power. As Datuk Badawi stated in August 1989, every time a political controversy arises between Malaysia and Singapore, a "dependable old boys network" of graduates from the old Raffles College and University of Malaysia in Singapore acts to solve the problem. However:

the new generation of leaders...have not gone through the same shared experience...(they) will not share the same kind of understanding...of our common destiny...I am quite concerned about this development because the new generation is more nationalistic...they may quibble over pebbles, not realising that it is more important to take care of the mountain.<sup>140</sup>

Former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam shared Badawi's concern:

I worry when I see the new leaders in Singapore and Malaysia responding to events in both countries not in the manner handled by the old guard. If this level of tolerance is lowered, we are going to have problems. Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia must always realise the need to nurture and encourage their young leaders to have constant contacts. They must get rid of any ignorance which they have about each other because such ignorance can lead to prejudice.<sup>141</sup>

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140 Datuk Abdullah Badawi, Malaysia - Singapore relations, Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore, 1990, 12,13.

141 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 18 July 1992.

Other Malaysians stated more bluntly that it was Singapore's younger leaders that were to blame. National Front member of parliament Wan Hanafiah Mat Sainan said in May 1992 that younger leaders in Singapore did not have sufficient respect for historical and blood ties with Malaysia. This could:

be clearly seen from recent actions taken by them against Malaysia...when Singaporeans rushed to Johor for shopping, they introduced such regulations as the half-tank ruling. Recently, Singapore wanted to introduce a levy on motorcycles belonging to Malaysians working there.

Hanafiah described such decrees as 'opportunistic'. He said that:

Malaysians are now asking how far Malaysia will tolerate Singapore. We dare to criticise Western powers which are arrogant but when our own neighbour acts in the same manner, we remain silent.

Hanafiah urged the Malaysian government to take a tougher stand against Singapore, "because we do not want Singapore to become another Israel."<sup>142</sup>

Provocation, however, did not come only from Singapore. Youth leaders in Malaysia were also doing their bit to stir the pot. In May 1992, the leader of the Parti Islam (PAS) youth wing announced plans to erect a Malaysian flag on the island of Pedra Blanca.<sup>143</sup> Singapore has administered Pedra Blanca for 150 years but Malaysia claims ownership of the island. Malaysia's older generation tried to defuse the issue. "I think you should take not notice of this group of people", said the Chief of Defence Force, General Tan Sri

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<sup>142</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 2 May 1992.

<sup>143</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 13 June 1992.

Yaacob Mohd.<sup>144</sup> Prime Minister Mahathir said PAS was merely trying to extract political mileage out of the issue. "My advice to PAS is not to look for trouble through meaningless, symbolic gestures", he said.<sup>145</sup>

The regular friction between the two nations, and Malaysia's concern over the capacity of a new generation of leaders to manage the relationship, indicate why Malaysia sees value in ASEAN. The membership of Malaysia and Singapore in wider groupings such as ASEAN and the Five Power Defence Arrangements ensures that bonds remain between them despite the occasional disputes that inevitably arise.

Malaysia's perception of the contribution of ASEAN to regional stability can be contrasted with that of Indonesia. Indonesia tends to see its support for ASEAN primarily as a means of demonstrating its own commitment to a benign international approach. Malaysia, on the other hand, places more emphasis on ASEAN as a means of constraining disputes in the region, especially those between Malaysia and her own neighbours.

As in Indonesia, however, there is a perception in Malaysia that military links are the key to the cohesion of ASEAN and to its contribution to wider regional stability. The chief of Malaysia's armed forces, General Hashim, said in early 1992 that "ASEAN has contributed greatly to the security of its members and the region as a whole through the interlocking web of defence and security co-operation".<sup>146</sup> The recent history of Malaysia-Singapore relations supports

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144 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 30 May 1992.

145 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 13 June 1992.

146 Hashim Mohd Ali, Gen Tan Sri, op. cit., 8.

General Hashim's assertion. At the same time as the Pedra Blanca dispute and other acrimonious debates between the two countries, joint Malaysia-Singapore land exercises were recommenced after being suspended for three years.<sup>147</sup> The importance of military ties in maintaining workable relations with Singapore was demonstrated by Malaysia's attempts to reduce public disquiet about Singapore's developing defence capabilities. In September 1992, General Yaacob Mohd stressed the benefits for the region of Singapore's growing defence capacity. ASEAN countries, he said, regarded each other's strong defences as a bonus rather than an 'arms race':

We welcome any effort to improve the armaments and ability of each of the armed forces....We are very happy with the air force of Singapore, because we do not have enough aircraft ourselves....When it comes to the crunch, we are quite confident that Singapore can come to our assistance. So, we look on it as a bonus.<sup>148</sup>

As with Indonesia, Malaysia's support for intra-ASEAN military ties does not extend to formal region-wide defence co-operation. Defence Minister Dato' Najib explained in March 1992 that while Malaysia supported discussions on security:

this cannot be seen as a prelude to the enhancement of ASEAN as a security alliance....We do not want to create a situation which will draw reaction from certain quarters on the establishment of a defence pact or alliance on a multilateral basis....Neither do we have a common perception of the threat...where is the threat coming from?<sup>149</sup>

As the New Straits Times pointed out:

There is no need for an ASEAN military pact to further strengthen regional security....the best way to do it is through bilateral co-operation. This means more

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147 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 25 April 1992.

148 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 26 September 1992.

149 New Straits Times, 1 March 1992.

consultative and joint mechanisms to focus on issues such as international dadah trafficking, regional disaster management and territorial demarcation disputes...there is no need at least for now, for any larger or more formal arrangement.<sup>150</sup>

While Malaysia sees ASEAN as an essential tool for the maintenance of good regional relations, there are dangers in over-reliance by Malaysia on the grouping. Malaysia's apparent belief that ASEAN unity will necessarily be regarded as paramount by its neighbours does not encourage resolution of intra-ASEAN disputes. For example, Prime Minister Mahathir has said Malaysia will not have full diplomatic ties with the Philippines until the Sabah claim is dropped.<sup>151</sup> This means there is no agreed maritime border between the two countries. Hence there will continue to be no coordinated patrolling to curb illegal Filipino migration to Sabah (the number of illegal migrants was recently estimated at 300,000 out of a total population in Sabah of only 2 million<sup>152</sup>) or to prevent alleged support from Sabah for separatist movements in the southern Philippines. Malaysia appears to believe that because of the commitment of the Philippines Government to ASEAN and regional stability, it will continue to ignore nationalist elements who do not wish to drop the Sabah claim. This may be so, and it may also be the case that attempts to resolve such disputes could actually increase the risk of serious tension. Nevertheless, while the dispute remains unsettled, the potential for a serious altercation with the Philippines will also remain.

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150 New Straits Times, 21 January 1992.

151 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 26 September 1992.

152 Ibid.

### Indo-China and the regional order

Malaysia shares the concern of Indonesia to draw the nations of Indo-China, especially Vietnam, into the regional order. According to Prime Minister Mahathir, "an economically prosperous Vietnam will make for a strong and stable Southeast Asia."<sup>153</sup> Like Indonesia, Malaysia believes that the economic development of Vietnam will help avoid another wave of refugees from that country. As of April 1992, there were still some 11,500 Vietnamese boat people in Malaysia, of whom 9,000 were classed as economic refugees.<sup>154</sup> When Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet visited Malaysia in January 1992, he agreed with Dr Mahathir "about the importance of solving the Vietnamese refugee problem which Malaysia was facing...[he] agreed that the matter must be treated with the utmost urgency."<sup>155</sup> When Mahathir visited Vietnam in April 1992, he spoke of his desire to forge "a truly formidable force of peace, progress and stability in the entire region."<sup>156</sup> Accompanied by one hundred businessmen, Mahathir signed a range of bilateral commercial agreements during the visit.<sup>157</sup>

Like Indonesia, Malaysia sees Vietnam as a buffer against China. During Mahathir's visit to Vietnam, an accord was signed covering overlapping claims in the South China Sea. This served as a demonstration of solidarity against the

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<sup>153</sup> New Straits Times, 21 April 1992, 2.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 30 April 1992.

Chinese claim to the whole of the South China Sea. Mahathir and Vo Van Kiet also made clear their interest in joint development of resources in the South China Sea.<sup>158</sup> Joint development offers the prospect - from Malaysia's point of view - of a more resilient Vietnam tied into a stable Southeast Asian order and contributing to the resilience of the region against external pressure from China.

### **Economic development and cooperation**

The importance Mahathir placed on Vietnam's economic progress demonstrates that in Malaysia's eyes, economic development and cooperation are important for regional stability. As Minister for Defence Dato Sri Najib said in April 1992:

Another positive development is the impressive economic growth of the regional states, especially amongst ASEAN states...Economic prosperity of regional states will certainly contribute to the well-being of the region by allowing us to be more self-reliant in defence and ensuring continued political stability.<sup>159</sup>

According to Foreign Minister Datuk Badawi:

For Malaysia and ASEAN, the rapid changes following the end of the Cold War hold both challenges and uncertainties...growth and prosperity in the region can only be nurtured through economic co-operation, and therefore, there is a need for more intensive collaboration...These economic linkages will help reduce the income and wealth disparities between countries and contribute to long term peace and stability in the region.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> New Straits Times, 21 April 1992.

<sup>159</sup> Minister of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 17.

<sup>160</sup> New Straits Times, 12 April 1992.

### The view from Singapore

Singapore's geographic vulnerability produces a keen perception of the factors that contribute to a stable region, and to Singapore's own security within the Malay archipelago. Whilst not seeing itself - as Indonesia does - as the leading influence on the region, Singapore believes that through its own policies it can encourage a more stable region. Singapore focusses on specific factors which it believes benefit regional stability and develops policies to encourage and nurture these. Malaysia and Indonesia, in comparison, whilst perceiving similar factors as important for regional stability, do not develop policies to capitalise on these in the systematic way Singapore does.

### The economic development of Southeast Asia

Singapore believes that the consistent economic growth in Southeast Asia in recent years has been one of the most important factors in the growing stability of the region. In the opinion of Singapore's leaders, economic growth of the ASEAN nations has made "security in the region very much less a worry."<sup>161</sup> Because of the importance Singapore attaches to economic growth for regional stability, there is concern at events that might affect this. In his 1990 National Day Rally speech, Prime Minister Lee warned that from Singapore's point of view the economic implications of the Gulf crisis placed the world "on the brink of a possible disaster."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Straits Times, 27 August 1990.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

Singapore perceives particular benefits from its growing trade and investment links with Indonesia and Malaysia. Between 1987 and 1988 Singapore's direct investment in Indonesia increased four fold.<sup>163</sup> Malaysia's 1987 decision to allow Singapore to deal directly with state governments led to a sustained increase in trade between the two countries (with an average growth rate of 26 per cent between 1987 and 1990).<sup>164</sup> In August 1990, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew announced plans for the Singapore Government to invest in the stock markets of its neighbours, with the aim not only of encouraging further regional economic growth, but as a direct contribution to the political cohesion of the Malay archipelago. In Singapore's view, Lee said, economic initiatives such as this are central to "the beginnings of a sound good relationship with both Malaysia and Indonesia."<sup>165</sup>

The "Growth Triangle" concept linking Singapore with Johor in Malaysia and the Riau province in Indonesia in a special trade and development zone was a specific initiative designed by Singapore to increase the strategic stability of its immediate neighbourhood. As Singapore's Minister for Trade and Industry Lee Hsien Loong said in July 1990:

Integrating the economic development of [the] Riaus with Singapore...gives each country a stake in the prosperity of the other. This makes it much more likely that the two countries will enjoy good relations, whoever [is] in charge in Singapore and in Jakarta.<sup>166</sup>

According to the Straits Times:

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<sup>163</sup> Straits Times, 13 July 1989.

<sup>164</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 13 October 1990.

<sup>165</sup> Straits Times, 27 August 1990.

<sup>166</sup> Jakarta Post, 18 July 1990.

The likely pay off [from the Growth Triangle] is not only faster growth for all three parties but also better regional security, as a result of greater prosperity and economic interdependence.<sup>167</sup>

Singapore's encouragement of regional economic growth is also related to the issue of race relations. Singapore feels that the racial issue retains the potential to affect regional stability, particularly if there is an economic downturn affecting the non-Chinese races in Malaysia or Indonesia. The possibility of racial tension spilling over into Singapore remains one of the island republic's greatest fears. Economic co-operation with its neighbours helps Singapore avoid this possibility.

Like Indonesia and Malaysia, Singapore believes that closer economic ties between ASEAN and Indo-China would contribute to greater regional stability. In August 1990, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew said Southeast Asia would be very different if "Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos also join the growth group...with mutual growth, there will be less friction."<sup>168</sup> Even at the height of its vocal opposition to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, Singapore permitted private trade with Vietnam. In late 1990, Singapore indicated that with the anticipated political settlement in Cambodia it would lift the official ban on investment in Indo-China.<sup>169</sup> Singapore, however, has been more reluctant than Indonesia and Malaysia to encourage political ties with Indo-China, especially Vietnam. For many years Singapore regarded Vietnam as a Soviet surrogate, a legacy of the Cold War which has not entirely disappeared. In addition, Singapore's cultural and

<sup>167</sup> Straits Times, 30 June 1990.

<sup>168</sup> Straits Times, 27 August 1990.

<sup>169</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 13 October 1990.

racial ties with China - which produce a more positive view of Chinese policies - mean that unlike its neighbours, Singapore does not see Vietnam as a buffer against potential Chinese aggression.

### **The role of ASEAN**

While Singapore stresses the importance of economic growth for regional stability, there is also a recognition that the reverse is true. "For trade, investments, we require a peaceful, stable environment," said Lee Kuan Yew in 1990.<sup>170</sup> For Singapore, a key element in the peace and stability of its surrounding region has been the political cohesion of the ASEAN grouping. Singapore sees continued ASEAN unity as central to its future security. Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong stated in February 1990 that with the projected reduction in the United States presence:

only a more united Association of Southeast Asian Nations would ensure that small countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei continued to prosper.<sup>171</sup>

With the outcome of the Gulf crisis unclear, Goh stressed to a conference of ASEAN MPs in September of the same year that "If the worst happens, and the world reels in recession and instability, ASEAN will act as a stabiliser for its member countries."<sup>172</sup>

Potential threats to ASEAN unity are of concern to Singapore. In Lee Kuan Yew's view, ASEAN's political unity

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<sup>170</sup> Straits Times, 27 August 1990.

<sup>171</sup> Antara News Service (Jakarta), 5 February 1990/A.

<sup>172</sup> Straits Times, 12 September 1990.

was due to a common fear of communism, which underpinned its formation in 1967 and greatly strengthened its unity after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978.<sup>173</sup> With the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia in September 1989, Singapore believed ASEAN had lost a key motive for continued unity. Singapore thought Thailand had already undercut ASEAN unity by independently seeking to build economic relations with Indochina. "The Thai concept of Suwannaphum, or Golden Peninsula, looks towards Indochina rather than the region as a whole", remarked Lee Hsien Loong in July 1990.<sup>174</sup> Earlier, Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng had told his ASEAN colleagues that "We will have to find new rallying points."<sup>175</sup>

Singapore has actively encouraged economic co-operation as a replacement unifying force for ASEAN. In 1990 Singapore called for ASEAN governments to use natural market trends to build intra-ASEAN trade and investment, an area where ASEAN's achievements to date had been "modest".<sup>176</sup> Pressure from Singapore ensured that the Fourth ASEAN summit in January 1992 had a strong economic theme. At the summit, the ASEAN leaders agreed to establish an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) by 2008. They also signed a tariff reduction agreement to pave the way for AFTA. In the opinion of a Singapore political scientist:

While political-security challenges from outside had in the past unified (ASEAN), it would appear that the end of the Cold War has made the new economic challenges posed by protectionism, especially by the Single European Market...and the North America Free Trade Area...the new source of unity among the ASEAN states. Thus, those who predicted the death or disarray of ASEAN following the

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173 Far Eastern Economic Review Asia 1990 Yearbook, 62.

174 Jakarta Post, 17 July 1990.

175 Far Eastern Economic Review Asia 1990 Yearbook, 62.

176 see remarks by Lee Hsien Loong, Jakarta Post, 17 July 1990.

settlement of the Cambodian problem would be disappointed.<sup>177</sup>

While economic pressure from European and North American trade blocs is now an important unifying factor for ASEAN, another unifying force came from China's renewed assertiveness in the South China Sea. Although Singapore has less fear of China than her neighbours, she supported ASEAN's declaration on the South China Sea in July 1992, not least because of the potential effect of conflict over the Spratly islands on the prosperity and welfare of the region. China's moves in the South China Sea, according to Wong Kan Seng, "conflict with 20th century realities".<sup>178</sup>

While, in Lee Hsien Loong's words, "The new Singapore leaders will continue to give priority to ASEAN"<sup>179</sup>, this is not to say that Singapore will depend on this one factor alone for its strategic security. Singapore invokes as many external factors as possible to bolster its fragile geo-strategic position.

#### **Indonesia and the Suharto approach**

Singapore believes Indonesia's leaders have a central role in determining the stability or otherwise of its strategic environment. As Lee Hsien Loong said in 1990:

we should not neglect fundamental factors which have underpinned ASEAN's stability and tranquility over the last 20 years, and on which ASEAN's success continues to depend. One such factor has been Indonesia's focus on

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177 Singh, Bilveer, "After the Summit: The Way Forward", op. cit. 2-3.

178 Far Eastern Economic Review, 6 August 1992.

179 Jakarta Post, 17 July 1990.

economic development and co-operation with its neighbours...This has had a great deal to do with the character and outlook of President Suharto and his firm personal commitment to ASEAN.<sup>180</sup>

Singapore awaited the possible stepping down of Suharto in 1993 for signs that a commitment to stability had been institutionalised in Indonesia. Lee Kuan Yew said in August 1990 that:

it is a matter of supreme importance to us how the succession in Indonesia takes place...it is important...that it is a constitutional process. Otherwise the great advances made in...25 years may well be thrown away.<sup>181</sup>

Singapore acknowledges the efforts of Suharto to institutionalise his personal commitment to national and regional stability through the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI), the National Assembly, and the state ideology Pancasila. "If the institutionalisation is secured before he leaves office, ASEAN will thrive and prosper", Lee said in August 1989.<sup>182</sup>

It is not only the manner in which Suharto's successor comes to power, but the personality of the new leader which will be important for regional security in Singapore's eyes. Memories of Sukarno and Confrontation, and a belief that Suharto personally has been largely responsible for regional stability, mean that Singapore's leaders will see the character of a future Indonesian President as a major influence on the region. As Lee Kuan Yew remarked, "remember in all new countries the character and personality of the

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180 Jakarta Post, 18 July 1990.

181 Straits Times, 27 August 1990.

182 Straits Times, 21 August 1989.

leaders count for a great deal in deciding bilateral relations."<sup>183</sup>

### **Singapore's defence policies**

Singapore believes its own defence policies contribute to a more stable, less threatening region. Defence development encourages regional countries to follow a peaceful international approach by demonstrating that any threat to Singapore could not be lightly undertaken, and defence diplomacy adds to regional cohesion by building co-operative military relations with neighbouring countries.

#### *Defence development*

The invasion in August 1990 of small, prosperous Kuwait by its much larger neighbour Iraq struck a chord with Singapore. For Singapore it proved the value of a strong defence force. "Singapore does not want to suffer the fate of Kuwait", remarked Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng shortly after Iraq's invasion.<sup>184</sup> In 1989 some 27 per cent of Singapore's budget was allocated to defence.<sup>185</sup> "When we can take care of ourselves, we also contribute to regional stability", said First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Goh Chok Tong.<sup>186</sup> Second Minister for Defence Lee Hsien Loong said the Gulf crisis showed how unpredictable strategic developments can be. In Southeast Asia, "Despite the best efforts of ASEAN

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<sup>183</sup> *Straits Times*, 27 September 1990.

<sup>184</sup> *Straits Times*, 18 August 1990.

<sup>185</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review Asia 1990 Yearbook*, 9.

<sup>186</sup> *Straits Times*, 19 August 1990.

countries, untoward developments cannot completely be ruled out". The role of Singapore's Armed Forces is to "safeguard the prosperity which Singapore has achieved, and to guarantee a climate of stability and confidence in which economic growth can continue."<sup>187</sup>

A policy of "total defence" involving full use of civil as well as military resources provides the basis for Singapore's deterrent strategy. "If ever we are chased by a hound bigger than ourselves, which is conceivable, then we must, like the mousedeer, be prepared to turn around and give it a kick," said Lee Hsien Loong.<sup>188</sup> A standing army of some 55,000, the availability of 200,000 reserves at 6 hours notice, maintenance of a large force of tanks and armoured personnel carriers, and recent acquisitions of advanced F-16 fighter aircraft, E2C airborne early warning aircraft, and new missile corvettes<sup>189</sup>, give substance to Singapore's ability to do this.

Misgivings are expressed from time to time by Singapore's neighbours about its defence capabilities. "What if Singapore were governed by a Saddam Hussein", asked one Malaysian paper in August 1990, "then...Malaysia and Indonesia would be threatened."<sup>190</sup> Singapore is aware that its neighbours might find its development of a strong defence force unsettling. Lee Hsien Loong admitted that merely using the analogy of a "poisonous shrimp" to describe Singapore's defence posture "could be misread by others as Singapore being aggressive and

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187 Straits Times, 5 September 1990.

188 Straits Times, 15 September 1990.

189 Jane's Defence Weekly, 27 January 1990, 151-159.

190 Straits Times, 18 August 1990.

insensitive."<sup>191</sup> With proper explanation, however, Singapore feels there should be no misunderstanding of its defence approach. "The approach is no different from Indonesia's concept of regional resilience through national resilience", said Goh Chok Tong.<sup>192</sup> Singapore also takes other measures to allay concerns on the part of its neighbours. Singapore's new F-16 fighter aircraft were based in the United States for two years so that Singapore would not be the first to operate these aircraft in the region. As the Straits Times said:

The rationale...for keeping the F-16s in the United States was that Singapore wanted to avoid any misunderstanding with its neighbours. It did not want to be the first country in the region to introduce this generation of fighter jets.<sup>193</sup>

Possession of an effective defence force, and recognition of its capability by other nations, will continue to be seen by Singapore as a major component in a stable strategic environment. Strong defence, in Singapore's view, helps ensure the attraction of economic and not military competition for other states, as well as providing essential insurance in the event of a future breakdown in regional stability.

#### *Defence diplomacy*

Singapore is the only ASEAN nation to have bilateral military relations with all the other members of the grouping.<sup>194</sup> As Prime Minister Lee said in September 1989:

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191 Straits Times, 15 September 1990.

192 Sunday Times (Singapore), 19 August 1990.

193 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 25 July 1992.

194 Jane's Defence Weekly, 27 January 1990, 151.

I am a great believer in more interaction between armed forces, both between friends and potential adversaries, because nothing is lost....Not to know each other is to work in the dark, and fantasies can arise.<sup>195</sup>

In recent years Singapore has made a noticeable effort to build closer military ties with Indonesia and Malaysia. Frequent meetings between Lee Hsien Loong and Indonesia's General Benny Murdani (as Armed Forces Chief and then Defence Minister) were reportedly the basis for two "milestone" military agreements between Singapore and Indonesia in 1989.<sup>196</sup> The first was for joint funding of an air weapons practice range in north Sumatra; the second gave the Singapore Armed Forces "virtually unlimited access" to any part of Indonesia for Army training.<sup>197</sup> In December 1989 the first land exercise between the two nations was held.<sup>198</sup> In 1990 Indonesian aircraft operated from Singapore for the first time, during the Elang Indopura air exercise and in a naval exercise in the South China Sea. Singapore made available some of its latest technology for Indonesia's benefit - including early warning aircraft and a computer simulation centre.<sup>199</sup> In 1992 Singapore and Indonesia established a direct communications link between their navies and announced plans to conduct joint patrols to combat the growing menace of piracy.<sup>200</sup> In 1989 Singapore held its first ground force exercises with Malaysia. These were held in Singapore in May, and in Sarawak, East Malaysia, in October.<sup>201</sup> Given Singapore's concern about its susceptibility to assault, it is

195 Straits Times, 22 September, 1989.

196 Far Eastern Economic Review, 13 April 1989.

197 Straits Times, 24 March 1989.

198 Business Times (Singapore), 11 December 1989.

199 Straits Times, 13 September 1990 and 10 October 1990.

200 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 27 June 1992, 8.

201 Straits Times, 26 May 1989 and 6 October 1989.

particularly significant that Malaysian troops - as well as Indonesian aircraft - have been allowed to exercise in Singapore itself. As the Straits Times commented "It would have been thought impossible in 1986...that Malaysian troops would actually be exercising in Singapore."<sup>202</sup> Formal military links between Singapore and Malaysia, however, are not as stable as those between Singapore and Indonesia. In 1990 Malaysia cancelled bilateral exercises with Singapore (although joint exercises under the Five Power Defence Arrangements continued). Bilateral exercises between Malaysia and Singapore were not resumed until 1992.<sup>203</sup>

It is not formal exercises, however, but personal links between military leaders that Singapore believes contribute most to regional stability. In June 1992, the outgoing Chief of Singapore's Defence Force, Lieutenant-General Winston Choo, said:

There is now a greater sense of consensus among the military leaders on the nature of military relations among the ASEAN countries, a consensus that is governed by a network of bilateral military ties".<sup>204</sup>

There have been at least two recent meetings between the chiefs of staff from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore - the first in Bali in 1988 and the second in Bandung in August 1990. The Straits Times said of the first meeting that "it is expected to improve stability in the region as far as the three countries are concerned."<sup>205</sup> According to the Straits Times, 'defence sources' from Singapore said this informal

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<sup>202</sup> Straits Times, 26 May 1989.

<sup>203</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 25 April 1992.

<sup>204</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 13 June 1992.

<sup>205</sup> Straits Times 27 April 1989.

military relationship would supplement the already good links established by the political leadership of the three countries. The loose interlocking ties between the military top brass would not only provide a platform for possible trilateral defence co-operation but would help pre-empt any future misunderstandings at the defence level.<sup>206</sup>

Singapore's strategic vulnerability and its continual search for additional mechanisms that might enhance its security make it more willing than Indonesia or Malaysia to consider formal multilateral defence cooperation in ASEAN. At the Fourth ASEAN summit in January 1992, Singapore, together with Thailand and the Philippines, proposed that "military ties between the six ASEAN states needed to be increased in order to enhance Southeast Asian regional security." Singapore supported the Philippines' proposal for a formal consultative committee on defence. Opposition from Indonesia and Malaysia, however, meant the idea of multilateral ASEAN defence cooperation was not accepted by the summit.<sup>207</sup>

### **Implications for Australia**

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the above perceptions do not represent a comprehensive or prioritised list of all of the elements that individuals in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore see as important for regional stability. Nevertheless, the factors listed above are

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<sup>206</sup> *Straits Times*, 24 March 1989.

<sup>207</sup> Singh, Bilveer, "After the Summit: The Way Forward", 3.

regarded as significant by those who influence government policy and national opinion in the three countries. An awareness of these perceptions indicates whether Australia's approach to the promotion of a stable region could be adjusted to fit more closely with that of our near neighbours to the north. It also helps measure Australia's success in meeting the Government's aim of "participating actively in the gradual development of a regional security community based on a sense of shared security interests"<sup>208</sup>.

It was shown above that Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore each see military ties, close personal relationships between political leaders, and economic and business links as important for workable relations between nations and for building regional stability and security.

#### **Regional defence cooperation**

The three nations each see military links as a central to ASEAN unity and hence to regional stability as a whole. Military contacts are maintained, in one form or another, despite occasional political disputes and tension between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Malaysia and Indonesia upgraded military cooperation in early 1992 despite the dispute over Sipadan and Ligatan islands. Malaysia and Singapore restarted bilateral military exercises in April 1992 despite the Pedra Blanca dispute and various other bilateral irritations. Even when military exercises between Malaysia and Singapore were suspended from 1989 to 1992, the chiefs of

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208 Senator Gareth Evans, *Australia's Regional Security*, Canberra, 1989, 44.

their armed forces met each other in trilateral gatherings with their Indonesian counterpart.

Australia's approach is consistent with the perception in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore of the importance of military ties for regional stability. Australia regards military co-operation as central both to its policy of defence self-reliance and to its overall regional security approach. As The Defence of Australia 1987 stated, "Australia recognises its responsibility to contribute to regional security through bilateral defence relationships with all the countries in our region."<sup>209</sup> In Australia's Regional Security, Foreign Minister Evans said that "Australia's military capability ...provides the foundation for our capacity to contribute to a positive security environment through the exercise of... military diplomacy."<sup>210</sup>

Although The Defence of Australia 1987 said that "Australia's military cooperation with Southeast Asia is modest"<sup>211</sup>, over the last decade Australia has held more military exercises with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore than they have held between themselves. Between 1980 and 1990 Australia held 118 military exercises with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (including joint exercises with Malaysia and Singapore under the Five Power Defence Arrangements), compared with 88 bilateral exercises between the three Southeast Asian nations over the same period.<sup>212</sup> Apart from combined exercises, Australia's other defence cooperation with Southeast Asia includes "training courses, ship and aircraft

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209 Department of Defence, The Defence of Australia 1987, Canberra, 1987, 8.

210 Senator Evans, op. cit., 18.

211 Department of Defence, op. cit., 13.

212 Singh, Bilveer, "Confidence Building Security Measures in Southeast Asia", 36-46.

visits, regular high level visits and personnel exchanges."<sup>213</sup>  
 To enhance this nation's "ability to contribute constructively to the development of regional strategic stability", the Australian Government's 1989 strategic basis paper, Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s, said there was a need for additional cooperation, including:

substantive regional intelligence cooperation;...further development of regional maritime surveillance arrangements; (and)...more substantive Australian participation in combined exercises and training with regional countries.<sup>214</sup>

In September 1992, Australia's Minister for Defence, Senator Ray, said that security cooperation with regional countries was now an "increasingly prominent defence activity".<sup>215</sup>

Australia's approach also recognises the importance for regional stability of personal links between senior defence personnel. As the Government stated in October 1992:

The aim of cooperation [in this case with Indonesia] is to build personal and professional relationships to increase understanding between the defence establishments of both countries.<sup>216</sup>

There is a need to recognise, however, that the emphasis in Southeast Asia is on contact between senior military personnel. In Australia, civilian officials have an important role in advising the Government on defence policy. To ensure the value of defence links as an avenue for maintaining contact in times of political tension, countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore need to see civilian

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<sup>213</sup> Australian Government, The Government's response to the Coalition's defence policy, Canberra, October 1992, Appendix 1, 1.

<sup>214</sup> Australian Government, Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s, Canberra, 1992, 43-44.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., iv.

<sup>216</sup> Australian Government, The Government's response to the Coalition's defence policy, Appendix 1, 1.

officials as well as military officers from Australia as influential figures in the making of Government policy.

Australia also recognises the sensitivity of Indonesia and Malaysia about formal multilateral defence cooperation. In July 1992, Foreign Minister Senator Evans, commenting on the Liberal/National Party's proposed new defence policy of 'co-operative regional deterrence', said this title was:

unlikely to be appealing to anyone in the region: it implies there is a threat to be deterred, risks antagonising major countries, and generally seems more likely to add to tension than alleviate it. The ASEAN countries have repeatedly foresworn becoming involved in formal defence pacts, partly because of the perception that this would if anything tend to attract threats.<sup>217</sup>

Coalition defence spokesman, Alexander Downer, admitted that use of the word deterrence could raise the question of "them versus us...If the whole policy is going to suffer because of a name, I would change the name".<sup>218</sup> When the Coalition's policy was formally released under the new title of 'cooperative regional defence', it recognised the preference of nations like Indonesia and Malaysia for low profile defence cooperation:

In most if not all cases, the defence links which the Coalition proposes developing with the region will not be developed in a formal alliance relationship.<sup>219</sup>

The effectiveness of Australia's current regional defence ties can be seen from the events of 1990 and 1991, when there was high profile political tension with both Malaysia and

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<sup>217</sup> Senator Evans, "Australia's approach to Asia-Pacific regional security", address to Tomorrow's Pacific Conference, Canberra, 15 July 1992, 8.

<sup>218</sup> Age, 4 August 1992.

<sup>219</sup> Federal Liberal Party/National Party Coalition, A Strong Australia - Rebuilding Australia's Defence, Canberra 1992, 6.

Indonesia. In both cases the defence relationship was maintained despite difficulties at a political level. Previous defence links, in contrast, have not been so enduring. In 1986, for example, Indonesia suspended military cooperation with Australia following the publication in the Sydney Morning Herald of an article criticising President Suharto.<sup>220</sup>

### Personal political links

Foreign Minister Senator Evans said in Australia's Regional Security that:

In the political sphere, particularly at the head of government and ministerial level, personal relationships can make the atmosphere for practical business receptive or unreceptive.<sup>221</sup>

Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore each see personal political contact as one of the key factors in good relations with their neighbours. For Malaysia and Singapore, the capacity of heads of government to discuss problems with each other is an important means of controlling an often difficult bilateral relationship. Hence there is concern, particularly in Malaysia, about the effect on the overall relationship when a 'new generation' takes over with no common ties from pre-Malaysia days. In the case of Indonesia and Malaysia, what the Far Eastern Economic Review described as the contrasting "style and temperament" of President Suharto and Prime Minister Mahathir<sup>222</sup> has contributed to some uncertainty in

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<sup>220</sup> see an account of this incident in the Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 March 1990.

<sup>221</sup> Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 24.

<sup>222</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 August 1992.

the political relationship between the two countries. This seems to have made personal contact even more important in resolving bilateral difficulties. Mahathir's prompt apology to President Suharto over the East Timor documentary issue in September 1992 is a case in point. Apart from personal contact between national leaders, there has also been an emphasis on face to face contact at ministerial level in resolving bilateral security issues. Indonesia and Malaysia have had a longstanding Joint Border Commission to manage their border in Borneo. In 1991 the two countries set up a Joint Ministerial Commission to discuss the dispute over Sipadan and Ligatan islands off the east coast of Borneo, and to resolve the Acehnese refugees issue. This emphasis on direct contact does not mean, of course, that issues are always resolved. Moreover, it is also true that personal contact in itself can cause friction. This seems to have been the case with the second "Malindo" talks in Bogor in January 1990.

There is a perception in Southeast Asia that Australia does not place enough importance on personal contact between political leaders. In the opinion of Noordin Sopiee:

Networking is very important...This is one area where Australia fails to exploit the potential for networking with those who are sympathetically disposed towards you...nobody is doing this properly.<sup>223</sup>

In the case of Australia's most important neighbour in Southeast Asia, Indonesia, however, there were more than 40 separate ministerial visits between the two countries between

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223 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 May 1992.

1988 and 1992.<sup>224</sup> This indicates that personal political contact with Indonesia at a ministerial level has been given priority by Australia, although it is difficult to judge whether this has resulted in effective "networking". In addition, Australia and Indonesia agreed in 1992 to general meetings of relevant ministers every two years. The first Australia - Indonesia Ministerial Forum was held in Jakarta in November 1992. Senator Evans said that this meeting created "a real springboard for allowing the relationship to leap forward in a much more substantial way than anything we have achieved so far."<sup>225</sup> Senator Evans himself has been very active in developing strong personal relations in the region. Former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam said that Senator Evans was "the first Australian politician since me who had been able to establish a trusting and effective relationship with his Indonesian counterpart."<sup>226</sup>

As Gough Whitlam pointed out, however, even "The best foreign ministers and ambassadors need the backing of their respective heads of government."<sup>227</sup> As shown above, this is particularly important in Southeast Asia, where personal contact and rapport between national leaders is regarded as a major influence on regional stability. On this basis, it would seem that Australia neglected a key element in regional stability during the 1980s, particularly in the case of our relationship with Indonesia. Gough Whitlam said that when he was Prime Minister he stressed the importance of building a

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224 *Age*, 19 November 1992.

225 *Ibid.*

226 quoted in Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, "Facing the 21st century: trends in Australia's relations with Indonesia", *The Indonesian Quarterly*, vol. XX, no. 2, 2nd quarter 1992, 152.

227 *The Indonesian Quarterly*, vol. XX, no. 2, 2nd quarter 1992, 152.

close personal relationship with President Suharto.<sup>228</sup> Jusuf Wanandi believes that:

Bilateral relations [between Australia and Indonesia] were at their height in the early 1970s, in large part as a result of good personal relations...developed between Prime Minister Whitlam and President Suharto."<sup>229</sup>

By comparison, during nearly nine years in office from early 1983 to late 1991, Prime Minister Bob Hawke visited Indonesia only once - in his first year in power. As the Age reported, Indonesia was angered by conditions Hawke put on a second visit because of the Dili killings in November 1991.<sup>230</sup> Gough Whitlam believed that setting conditions for a visit to Jakarta would confirm impressions of Hawke both in Australia and overseas "as a media and poll-driven politician...(who) has always distanced himself from Indonesia."<sup>231</sup> Apart from not paying more than one visit to Indonesia, Hawke did not explore other ways of dealing directly with the Indonesian leadership. As an Indonesian academic pointed out:

Bob Hawke always took a tough stance on Indonesia, for example, in the David Jenkins affair and the Blenkinsop killing in Biak, Irian Jaya. [But] he never telephoned President Suharto to solve any problem in Australia's bilateral relationship with Indonesia, as he telephoned President Bush during the second Gulf War.<sup>232</sup>

The visit to Jakarta by Prime Minister Keating in April 1992 (discussed further in Chapter Three) helped to rectify the lack of personal political ties at the highest level between Australia and Indonesia. Together with other visits

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<sup>228</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, 10 December 1991.

<sup>229</sup> Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesian security relationship", 158.

<sup>230</sup> Age, 19 November 1992.

<sup>231</sup> quoted in Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, "Facing the 21st century: trends in Australia's relations with Indonesia", The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XX, no. 2, 2nd quarter 1992, 152.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

by Keating to Southeast Asia, this suggests the beginnings of a new approach that may be more in keeping with the importance Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore place on personal political contact as a factor in regional stability.

### **Economic development and co-operation**

Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore each see economic development and co-operation as an essential element in regional stability. For Malaysia and Singapore, this is more in terms of growth in commercial links between regional nations and the economic development of Southeast Asia as a whole. For Indonesia, given the perception that the Indonesian nation itself constitutes most of the region, it is also a matter of its own economic progress. Of the three nations, it is Singapore that has developed policies specifically aimed at improving regional stability through economic cooperation. A major reason for Singapore's promotion of the economic "growth triangle" with Indonesia and Malaysia was the desire to strengthen the cohesion and interdependence of the three nations.

Australia also recognises the role of economic development and cooperation in a stable strategic environment. In Australia's Regional Security, Foreign Minister Evans said:

Our economic assets and capabilities are of particular importance in the enhancement of national security, insofar as they create substantial and mutually beneficial links within the region...It is highly desirable from a national security viewpoint that we succeed in adding greater substance to our economic links with Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.<sup>233</sup>

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233 Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 25 & 30.

Prime Minister Keating indicated in November 1992 that Australia shares the perception that Indonesia's economic progress is of particular significance for the stability of the region as a whole.<sup>234</sup>

In theory, Australia, like Singapore, sees security considerations as specific justification for promoting economic ties with its neighbours. As Senator Evans stated:

Our security interests in developing a broad-ranging relationship with the region means that we must devote a level of effort and resources to our economic relationship with the region greater than its relative economic importance would justify...Within the region...we need to focus special attention on Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the nearer islands of the South Pacific."<sup>235</sup>

Economic links have increased in recent years with Australia's immediate neighbours. The ASEAN countries as a group now take more Australian exports than either the United States or the European community. Between 1988-89 and 1991-92, Australia's exports to ASEAN increased from \$3.9 billion to \$7.3 billion. Over the same period imports grew from \$2.8 billion to \$4 billion (or 9 per cent of total imports).<sup>236</sup> Singapore now ranks as Australia's fourth largest export market overall.<sup>237</sup> Indonesia has become Australia's ninth largest export market and the second largest in ASEAN.<sup>238</sup> Other examples of growing economic links with Indonesia include the Timor Gap Treaty and the Memorandum of Understanding on Economic Development Cooperation designed to

234 Paul Keating, Speech to 'Into Asia' Trade and Investment Convention, Perth, 17 November 1992, 2.

235 Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 41.

236 Ibid., 26, and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Annual Report 1991-92, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1992, 34.

237 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, op. cit., 35.

238 Paul Keating, op. cit., 2.

increase trade between the Northern Territory and Indonesia's eastern provinces.<sup>239</sup> As Senator Evans suggested, these increasing links do have security benefits for Australia. An Indonesian academic noted that:

Australian aid to the eastern part of Indonesia can be regarded as a positive factor to improve the standard of living in these backward areas and to prevent them from separatism ...[therefore] Australian aid to Indonesia is also related to its own security interests.<sup>240</sup>

With the possible exception of the Timor Gap Treaty, however, the growing economic ties between Australia and Southeast Asia do not appear to have been motivated in any major way by national security considerations. The real impetus has come firstly from changes in the global economic order (especially the establishment of the European community and the North American Free Trade Agreement, which restrict Australia's access to some of its traditional markets), and secondly from the broader issue of Australia's place in the world. As Prime Minister Keating said:

Southeast Asian markets will become increasingly important to Australia's prosperity...[In addition] it is a question of attitudes, to do with how we see ourselves as a nation and how we perceive our relations with the region.<sup>241</sup>

Although Senator Evans has said that "The Timor Gap resolution is a clear example of a non-military solution to a problem that historically has often led to conflict"<sup>242</sup>, even this seemed to result more from a deficiency in overall relations

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239 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, op. cit., 35.

240 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, op. cit., 152.

241 Paul Keating, op. cit., 3 & 6.

242 Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 31.

with Australia's most important Southeast Asian neighbour rather than any specific security concerns. Moreover, international economic initiatives by the Australian Government in recent years, such as APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) and the Cairns Group of agricultural exporters, have not demonstrated the type of focus on our immediate region that could have been expected if security considerations were a specific motivating factor. APEC serves the Asia-Pacific as a whole, while the Cairns Group is a global grouping. Both involve some or all of the ASEAN nations, but they are not focussed specifically on our immediate neighbours, or on promoting Australia's economic ties with Southeast Asia.

Despite the language in Australia's Regional Security, Australia does not therefore appear to give priority to economic agreements for reasons of national security and regional stability in the same way Singapore does. This reflects the different strategic circumstances of the two countries. Because of its geographic vulnerability, Singapore perceives a need to devise initiatives such as the economic growth triangle with Malaysia and Indonesia specifically to promote regional cohesion. Australia is not in the same position. As the 1986 Dobb Review said, "Australia is one of the most secure countries in the world".<sup>243</sup> Hence in practice Australia does not have the same motivation as Singapore on security grounds to devote an extra level of 'effort and resources' to economic relationships with its immediate neighbours.

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<sup>243</sup> Paul Dobb, Review of Australia's defence capabilities, Canberra, 1986, 1.

### **ASEAN and Australia's security**

As shown above, a commitment to ASEAN is a central element in the foreign policies of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Each sees ASEAN as a major contributor to the stability of their region. ASEAN provides a measure of political unity for resisting external pressure, allowing them to deal with major external powers on a more equal footing. The three nations also believe ASEAN acts as a strong constraint on bilateral disputes between members of the grouping. A commitment to ASEAN limits the extent to which nations are prepared to criticise or act against the interests of fellow members.

The three nations recognise that Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia has removed the original unifying force for ASEAN. But they see convincing reasons for continuing to support ASEAN, including uneasiness over the effect of a reduced United States security presence, uncertainty about the future policies of major Asian powers such as China, and the need for protection against emerging economic trade blocs in other parts of the globe. Each nation recognises that a move away from ASEAN would cause concern amongst other countries in the region. Indonesia, in particular, sees its commitment to ASEAN as a demonstration to the region that it will not revert to a Confrontation type approach. All three nations recognise that a commitment to ASEAN helps maintain an atmosphere of regional stability essential for external investment and trade.

Although not a member of the grouping, Australia also recognises the key role of ASEAN in a stable strategic environment. The Defence of Australia 1987 said that ASEAN's "success as a cohesive grouping has added substantially to the strategic stability of our region."<sup>244</sup> On this basis, the continued cohesion of ASEAN is central to a stable strategic outlook for Australia. It follows that even though it does not involve us directly, Australia should encourage the continued viability of ASEAN as a key element in its approach to regional security. In particular, Australia needs to avoid actions which harm ASEAN. A recent Australian initiative which had the potential to do this was the APEC proposal. In Australia's Regional Security, Senator Evans said:

The APEC initiative, together with the Cairns Group before it, are excellent examples of how Australia can employ economic instruments and its political and diplomatic resources to develop new connections with the region, thereby enhancing our national security.<sup>245</sup>

APEC was, however, in some ways a threat to ASEAN, because of ASEAN's own responsibility for promoting economic co-operation and because of fears that ASEAN's identity would be lost in the wider Asia-Pacific grouping. Despite its slow progress in promoting economic interaction between ASEAN members, there was concern that one of the justifications for continued ASEAN co-operation and unity might be overtaken. In August 1989 President Suharto stated "Increased economic co-operation in the Pacific...must not in any way reduce the importance of ASEAN."<sup>246</sup> In an article on the APEC proposal, Noordin Sopiee

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244 Department of Defence, op. cit., 14.

245 Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 30.

246 Jakarta Post, 4 November 1989.

said that "ASEAN is crucially important to us...we must guarantee against possible dilution of ASEAN."<sup>247</sup> The ASEAN members agreed in November 1989 that a condition of its participation in APEC would be that its "identity and cohesion should be preserved and its cooperative relations with its dialogue partners and with third countries should not be diluted"<sup>248</sup>

The Australian Government appears to have recognised the potential of APEC to harm ASEAN and hence to damage Australia's own security interests. In September 1989, Australia's Ambassador to Indonesia, Philip Flood, said in an address calling for greater regional economic co-operation that:

ASEAN is central to any scheme....As far as Australia is concerned, the continued political cohesion of the Association is of great importance for regional and international stability. Any new forum that resulted...in the weakening of ASEAN's links would be a backward step.<sup>249</sup>

As Senator Evans said, "we had to be acutely sensitive to the desire of ASEAN not to be subsumed and institutionally overwhelmed, in a wider regional process."<sup>250</sup> Hence the "principles of Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation" adopted at the inaugural APEC meeting in Canberra in November 1989 - chaired by Senator Evans - stated that "co-operation should complement and draw upon, rather than detract from, existing organisations...such as ASEAN."<sup>251</sup>

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247 Ibid.

248 Jakarta Post, 7 November 1989.

249 Jakarta Post, 28 September 1989.

250 Senator Evans & Bruce Grant, Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s, Melbourne, 1991, 124.

251 Ibid., 125.

### The China factor

From a Southeast Asian perspective, China has a pervasive influence on regional stability. The racial composition of Indonesia and Malaysia, together with their own experience of communist movements, has led to a fear of China's influence on domestic stability. Combined with China's demonstrated willingness to use military force, this leads to a continuing apprehension about China's future role in the region. Singapore, because of its largely ethnic Chinese makeup, is more ambivalent. Along with its neighbours, however, Singapore is concerned about China's assertive approach to international relations, especially its recent policies in the South China Sea, and the potential damage this might cause to regional welfare and prosperity.

China's ubiquitous place in regional strategic perceptions is significant for Australia's aim of "a community of shared strategic interests" with Southeast Asia. Australia needs to appreciate the concerns of Malaysia and other regional nations about China's military power. In Australia's Regional Security, Senator Evans said "In the case of China, its ability to project power into Australia's immediate region remains limited."<sup>252</sup> Countries such as Malaysia, however, are more wary about China's military capabilities. As Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s stated, "China's military capabilities are more than sufficient to handle any regional power."<sup>253</sup> It was shown above that Malaysia's perceived

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252 Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 13.

253 Australian Government, Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s, 18.

inability to counter China's military capabilities prompted it to explore quick fix options - such as ex-Soviet MIG-29 fighter aircraft - to provide air cover over the South China Sea. The concerns of countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia about China's military power are likely to increase as China's "four modernisations" progress. Hence Australia and regional nations will have a continuing interest in analysis of developments in China, especially its military programs and deployments. As Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s said, "It is important [with regard to China] that we keep in close contact with Southeast Asian countries in promoting a sense of regional strategic cohesion."<sup>254</sup>

#### **The national resilience of Indonesia**

The national resilience and stable international approach of Indonesia is regarded by all three countries - including Indonesia itself - as a most important factor in regional stability. For Indonesia, the challenge of maintaining national unity, and a belief in its leading role in the region combine to produce this perception. For Malaysia and Singapore, memories of Confrontation and their location on the doorstep of a nation of 185 million people ensure an appreciation of Indonesia's regional role. Each country realises that any reversion to the international approach of Sukarno during his later years in power would have severe consequences for the political and economic outlook of the Malay archipelago as a whole. All three nations welcome the

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254 Australian Government, Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s, 18.

opportunity that groupings like ASEAN present for Indonesia to demonstrate a continuing commitment to regional stability. Both Malaysia and Singapore would like to increase their links with Indonesia to reduce the long term potential for tension or conflict. Somewhat surprisingly (given racial, religious and other differences), Singapore has been the more successful in this area, using its military and commercial skills as inducement for Indonesian co-operation.

Australia's regional security approach is consistent with these perceptions. Australia shares the perception that the New Order regime under President Suharto has been a key factor in regional stability. In May 1991 Prime Minister Hawke said:

Since the establishment of the New Order in Indonesia under President Suharto, we have seen and greatly welcomed the passing of the threat posed by the Indonesia of the early 1960s, and the development of a stable, unified and rapidly developing neighbour able indeed to make a major contribution to the security of our region.<sup>255</sup>

In November 1992, Prime Minister Keating said:

I made a point of highlighting [when in Jakarta earlier in the year] the enormous strategic benefit Australia has obtained during the past 25 years through the success of the Suharto Government in consolidating political stability and economic development in the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>256</sup>

Australia's published security policies also indicate the priority given to Indonesia. As Senator Evans said in Australia's Regional Security, "In making judgements about where to deploy non-military policy instruments in support of our security concerns, geography dictates that Indonesia and

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<sup>255</sup> R.J. Hawke, "Australia's security in Asia", address to Asia-Australia Institute, Sydney, 24 May 1991, 4.

<sup>256</sup> Paul Keating, op. cit., 2.

PNG must be our first focus."<sup>257</sup> 'Non-military' ties between Australia and Indonesia have certainly increased in recent years. Important examples include not only the growing economic links mentioned above, but also the Australia-Indonesia Ministerial Forum and the Australia-Indonesia Institute, as well as a range of new agreements including an Extradition Treaty, a Fisheries Cooperation agreement and a Taxation agreement.<sup>258</sup> The fact that Prime Minister Keating visited Indonesia on his first overseas trip in April 1992 also indicates the priority Australia places on building ties with Jakarta. As in the case of commercial and economic links, however, there is little evidence to suggest that these 'non-military policy instruments' were specifically designed - as Senator Evans seems to imply - to "support our security concerns". Rather they result from a more general recognition of the national importance of adding substance to the relationship with Indonesia. On the other hand, the traditional military instruments in Australia's regional security approach have been structured with the strategic benefits of closer security ties with Indonesia in mind. As Prime Minister Keating said in Jakarta in April 1992:

We share with Indonesia a fundamental interest in the strategic stability of our region, and in limiting the potential for external powers to introduce tension or conflict. Recognising this shared strategic interest, we are keen to work with Indonesia as equal partners to strengthen bilateral defence relations. There is scope for building closer links between our armed forces and defence organisations."<sup>259</sup>

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257 Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 12.

258 Ibid., 37, and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Annual Report 1991-92, 34.

259 Paul Keating, Speech by the Prime Minister, Jakarta, 22 April 1992, 6.

Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s states that "It should be a major aim of Australian defence policy in the coming decade to give more substance to the defence relationship with Indonesia."<sup>260</sup> This approach is consistent with that of nations such as Singapore, which also perceives major strategic benefits from a closer security relationship with Indonesia.

Like Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia itself, Australia recognises the importance of the Presidential succession process in Indonesia for wider regional stability. As Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s stated, "Increasingly, Indonesian approaches to the external world, including to relations with Australia, will be shaped by the succession."<sup>261</sup>

#### **Indo-China and regional resilience**

Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore each see the economic growth and development of Indo-China, especially Vietnam, as important for future regional stability. Indonesia and Malaysia, in particular, have no wish to see a renewed wave of refugees from Indo-China, with the strain this would impose on their own national prosperity and cohesion. With doubts over future Chinese policy towards Southeast Asia, they also see a resilient Vietnam as an important buffer against China. Closer ties between ASEAN and Indo-China, in their view, will assist political and economic stability in Indo-China and the stability of Southeast Asia as a whole.

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<sup>260</sup> Australian Government, Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s, 10.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Australia's policies towards Indo-China are consistent with these perceptions. In Australia's Regional Security, Senator Evans said that "comprehensive engagement" with Southeast Asia included "working for the involvement of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar in the cooperative framework of regional affairs".<sup>262</sup> In October 1991 the Australian Government resumed direct bilateral aid to Vietnam. Economic agreements between Australia and Vietnam were signed and in April 1992, a four year \$100 million development program was announced. Economic agreements have also been signed with Laos. Australia has also played a leading role in devising a Cambodian peace settlement, and has made a major contribution to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (including some 500 military personnel).<sup>263</sup>

#### **Indonesia - Papua New Guinea - Australia relations**

Indonesia appreciates that tension or conflict with Papua New Guinea could cause instability in Irian Jaya and its other eastern provinces. Because it regards its own stability as central to the cohesion of the region as a whole, Indonesia therefore sees good relations with Papua New Guinea as an important factor in regional stability. The high priority given to the Papua New Guinea relationship by Indonesia since the early 1980s has benefitted Australia. The potential for serious disputes between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea - and hence the prospects for Australian involvement in such

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262 Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 44.

263 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Annual Report 1991-92, 32-33.

disputes - has declined. As The Defence of Australia 1987 said:

Papua New Guinea and Indonesia have demonstrated a co-operative approach to management of their common border. The Government welcomes the signing of the Treaty of Mutual Respect, Friendship and Co-operation between Papua New Guinea and Indonesia in 1986.<sup>264</sup>

Australia's defence and regional security policies also give high priority to bilateral co-operation with Papua New Guinea.<sup>265</sup> As Jusuf Wanandi has said, it is important for Indonesia and Australia to convey to each other an understanding of their respective policies towards Papua New Guinea:

PNG's development has profound strategic implications for Indonesia and Australia...It is important...that regular dialogues be held to assess developments in Papua New Guinea and the co-operation that each side has with Papua New Guinea in order to avoid mutual misunderstanding and suspicions.<sup>266</sup>

There is a continuing need for Australia's security planners to recognise the interlocking nature of the Indonesia - Papua New Guinea - Australia relationship. As The Defence of Australia 1987 says, "The relationship of Papua New Guinea with its neighbours will always be a matter of interest to Australia."<sup>267</sup> Wanandi believes events in Papua New Guinea retain the potential to cause tension between Australia and Indonesia:

Australia's assistance to maintain stability in Papua New Guinea will be generally accepted by Indonesia, except if the problem is one affecting the Indonesia - Papua New Guinea border, which by definition is a problem able to

<sup>264</sup> Department of Defence, op. cit., 19.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 19, and Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 12.

<sup>266</sup> Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", 157.

<sup>267</sup> Department of Defence, op. cit., 19.

be solved only by Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. While the provision of logistical assistance will be readily acceptable, I would speculate at the response to the dispatch of Australian troops to Papua New Guinea. There would undoubtedly be an Indonesian response. [Hence]...close consultations between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea and Indonesia and Australia will always be important.<sup>268</sup>

### **Defence self-reliance and regional stability**

Singapore believes that a strong defence force contributes to regional stability. In Singapore's view, this helps to ensure that regional countries concentrate on non-military means of achieving their international aims. It allows Singapore to deal confidently with its region, with an increasing focus on co-operation with its neighbours, knowing that it has a strong deterrent against external attack.

There is considerable similarity between Singapore's defence approach and that of Australia. As The Defence of Australia 1987 says, the Australian Government:

believes that an Australian defence force able to deal effectively with the most credible challenges to the nation's sovereignty is the best contribution we can make to the continued stability of our region.<sup>269</sup>

Both countries draw parallels between their approach to defence and Indonesia's concept of security. Just as Goh Chok Tong compared Singapore's 'total defence' policy with Indonesia's 'national and regional resilience', so too did Senator Evans in Australia's Regional Security. "There is an appreciation already that our defence concept of 'self-

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<sup>268</sup> Jusuf Wanandi, "Conclusion - Indonesia", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), Strange Neighbours, the Australia - Indonesia Relationship, Sydney, 1991, 241.

<sup>269</sup> Department of Defence, op. cit., 6.

reliance' is similar to that of the Indonesians' 'national resilience'", he said.<sup>270</sup>

Given Singapore's geographic vulnerability, it is apparent why the small island nation would see a strong defence force as important for a stable strategic environment. In contrast, Australia has a vastly more secure geographic position. Nevertheless, Australia has traditionally suffered from the same perceptions of insecurity as Singapore.<sup>271</sup> Both countries tended to see themselves as distinct from their neighbours in terms of race, religion, culture and politics. In this context, a growing realisation that Australia could be defended should it ever need to be, contributes - in the same way as it does for Singapore - to a more confident involvement with the region. As an Australian academic commented in 1989 about the Labor Government's policy of defence self-reliance:

Without doubt the recommendations for a reorientation of the structure of the Australian defence force contained in the Dibb Report and subsequently formalised in the Parliamentary White Paper of the Defence Minister, Mr Beazley, constitute the single most important development in Australian defence planning for many years...[these] changes...reflect a much greater degree of sophistication and maturity....[The] more self-assured attitude...about Australia's place in the region...[and] a gradual move to greater defence cooperation within the region generally...may well contribute to a reduction of traditional suspicions and uncertainties that Australia has felt about its region."<sup>272</sup>

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270 Senator Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 20.

271 for example, in 1979, the former head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Alan Renouf, stated "in terms of national defence capabilities, Australia is indefensible by her own unaided efforts." See A. Renouf, The Frightened Country, Melbourne, 1979, 13.

272 Andrew MacIntyre, "Australia - Indonesia Relations", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), op. cit. 151-153.

## Chapter 2

### Perceptions of the United States 1989-1992

A continued United States security interest and presence in the western Pacific is regarded by the Australian Government as a major factor in regional stability. As Prime Minister Hawke said in May 1991:

US engagement in the region is, and will remain, important to Australia's strategic and security interests, and important to the security interests of the region as a whole...A corner-stone of Australian strategic policy will therefore be to maintain and assist the US strategic presence in the region.<sup>1</sup>

Along with a capacity for self-defence and effective regional cooperation, strong alliance relationships - especially with the United States - are central to Australia's defence policy. The Government supports defence self-reliance "within a framework of alliances and agreements. The most significant of these is with the United States."<sup>2</sup> As the Minister for Defence, Kim Beazley, said when tabling The Defence of Australia 1987:

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<sup>1</sup> R.J. Hawke, op. cit., 7.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defence, op. cit., 1.

The availability of American intelligence, advanced technology, and logistic support makes a self-reliant defence capability for Australia achievable and affordable.<sup>3</sup>

An awareness of the shades of opinion in regional nations towards the United States is essential if Australia is to "establish a community of...strategic interests"<sup>4</sup> with Southeast Asia while maintaining its US military alliance. In general terms, it is correct to say that regional nations support a United States security presence in the western Pacific. But there is also opposition to the United States and its security policies in some sections of society in the region. Australia needs to recognise the limitations this places on the support that the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia and even Singapore can provide for the United States' security presence. It is also important not to mistake support from regional governments for a United States security umbrella for a deeper and more enduring cultural or ideological affinity. With the end of the Cold War, Australia's US alliance is likely to be seen by regional leaders as an important means of retaining a US strategic interest in this part of the world. This could be jeopardised, however, if Australia ignores sensitivities in the region about the United States and its security policies.

This chapter focusses in particular on reactions to Singapore's 1989 offer of military facilities to the United States and perceptions of the United States' role in the 1991 Gulf War. These two events exposed the range of opinions in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore towards the United States.

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<sup>3</sup> Hansard, 19 March 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government, Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s, 43.

### Indonesia's perceptions of the United States

A common view is that while Indonesia will not publicly support a United States military presence in the western Pacific, in private the Indonesians wish this presence to remain because of the restraining effect it has on the nations of the region and the security it provides against major external powers such as China, India and Japan.<sup>5</sup>

This appears to be something of a simplification. Contrary to this view, there are public expressions of support in Indonesia - including from government figures - for a continued United States military presence in the region. Foreign Minister Mochtar stated in 1986 that the existence of United States bases in the Philippines neutralised the possibility of a threat posed by the Soviet naval presence in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> An editorial in the Kompas newspaper at the time Singapore offered military facilities to the United States in 1989 stated that:

Developments...in the Peoples Republic of China are still giving reason for relations between ASEAN and the United States to be closer and stronger than that between ASEAN and any other big power...What is the basis for

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, J. Mohan Malik, The Gulf War: Australia's Role and Asian-Pacific Responses, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1992, 35: "Keeping close friendly relations with the United States has been a cornerstone of Indonesian foreign policy. Its declaratory policy notwithstanding, Jakarta has tacitly supported the presence of foreign forces in its immediate neighbourhood." See also P. Wood, J. Wheeler, ASEAN in the 1990s: New Challenges, New Directions, Hudson Institute, Indianapolis, 1990, 39: "Although Indonesia's nonaligned foreign policy and concern for ASEAN unity prevents any public support of the United States presence, there is no question that Indonesian military and defense leaders support the maintenance of U.S. naval and air deterrent capability in Southeast Asia." This is also a common view in Indonesia itself. At an Indonesia-US conference in Bali in August 1989, an Indonesian delegate stated that Indonesia was "silently taking advantage" of the presence of US bases in the Philippines (see Jakarta Post, 29 August 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Merdeka (Jakarta), 16 May 1986, quoted in J. Soedjati Djwandono, "Indonesia's Response to Soviet Initiatives", The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xvii, no 2, 1989, 145.

objections (to Singapore's offer) other than subjective sentiments in bilateral relations?<sup>7</sup>

Singapore's Straits Times reported in August 1989 that:

an official source close to the President's office [said] that both Mr Lee and President Suharto would like to have a balance of military power in the region 'especially after the uncertainty over the future of the American bases in the Philippines.'<sup>8</sup>

There are also those who seem to intend their publicly expressed opposition to the United States military presence to be taken literally. Noted Indonesian academic J. Soedjati Djiwandono said in 1988 that:

the...assumption that without the US bases the region of Southeast Asia would have been unstable would seem not only pretentious and presumptuous but it tends to underestimate or overlook the role of the regional states.<sup>9</sup>

In August 1989, the Jakarta Post stated that:

it would be most helpful from the outset to free ourselves of the entrenched notion that the US military presence in this region is by definition beneficial, and that its reduction would create a vacuum...it would be well for our Indonesian leaders to pay greater attention to the voices raised in our society...the impression must not be given that Indonesian public opinion, which is inclined to be critical of the existence of any superpower military presence...can simply be overlooked.<sup>10</sup>

As a further complication, where there are private indications of support for a United States military presence, these cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Sabam Siagian, then influential editor of the Jakarta Post, stated

7 quoted in Straits Times, 16 August 1989.

8 Straits Times, 23 August 1989.

9 J. Soedjati Djiwandono, "ASEAN and the US bases", The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xvi, no 2, 1988, 163.

10 Jakarta Post, 22 August 1989.

in a 1989 discussion on the United States bases in the Philippines, that:

There was, I am told, a so-called United States Information Service opinion-poll on what ASEAN countries thought about this issue. That was in 1986/87. And the findings were that the Indonesians publicly could not say that they are for the bases, but privately, they say, roughly "please, Americans, stay here." Now, again this is a cultural problem. You ask a Javanese, 'do you like me?' Yes, yes, yes. In Javanese there is no word for no. It is always yes.<sup>11</sup>

This suggests that Indonesian perceptions of the United States cannot be described in simple public versus private terms. Of more importance, as the following sections on Singapore's offer and the Gulf War show, are the contrasting attitudes towards the United States on the part of different elements of government and society in Indonesia.

#### **Reaction to Singapore's offer**

A selection of Indonesian reactions to Singapore's offer in August 1989 of military facilities to the United States reveals differing opinions on the value of a United States security presence in Southeast Asia. The Jakarta Post summarised Indonesian reactions to Singapore's offer:

Although Indonesia's official reaction...was cautious [for fear of upsetting ASEAN unity], statements made by a number of members of the House of Representatives and opinion leaders were indeed quite critical.

The paper warned the United States that:

Sub-packaging the cluster of military activities presently emanating from Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base, or the maintenance and repair jobs being done at those bases, and spreading them to other parts of Asia

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<sup>11</sup> Southeast Asia beyond Cambodia, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 1989, 11.

without due political considerations of the possible side effects could cause plenty of political flak, as the case of Singapore's offer has so convincingly demonstrated.<sup>12</sup>

The strongest opposition to Singapore's offer came from Ali Alatas and the Indonesian Foreign Ministry. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in August 1989 that "several high ranking Foreign Ministry officials have privately expressed strong reservations"<sup>13</sup> about Singapore's offer. Foreign Minister Alatas used firm language to express his displeasure:

Singapore says no we don't want a base. We did not immediately believe that, but we say okay, you know what our position is...we told them there is a line. You cross that line and we will speak out.

Alatas said the Indonesian Government would pay particular heed to two key points: that the offer would be strictly for servicing and repairs, and that it would only be an enhancement of existing facilities not amounting to a new base. Jakarta would firmly hold Singapore to its word that it had no intention of taking over any of the United States bases in the Philippines. Alatas cited the Bangkok Declaration of 1967 which led to the founding of ASEAN, the Kuala Lumpur Declaration of 1971 which advocated a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality and the ASEAN concord of 1976, which endorsed the Kuala Lumpur Declaration. Indonesia, said Alatas, would regard Singapore as having taken a step backwards from these three agreements if an American base was set up in Singapore.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jakarta Post, 9 October 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 24 August 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Straits Times, 23 September 1989.

Opposition to Singapore's offer was not confined to the Foreign Ministry. Public opinion generally was quite critical. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported that Indonesians found Singapore's offer "presumptuous", because Singapore did not defer to the position of Indonesia as "the largest and ultimately the most important country in ASEAN."<sup>15</sup> As the Indonesian Observer remarked, "We find it hard to swallow its [Singapore's] disproportionate cockiness."<sup>16</sup> Other commentators pointed out that the US bases in the Philippines "could not withstand the onslaught of the Japanese Imperial Forces in 1942..., nor could they prevent the fall of Saigon in 1975."<sup>17</sup> The Indonesian Democratic Party supported the line taken by Ali Alatas, saying this was consistent with Indonesia's principle of a "free and active foreign policy."<sup>18</sup> Former Indonesian Ambassador to the United States, Lt Gen Hasnan Habib, told the Third Indonesia-United States conference in Bali in 1989 that "We would not like to see an open ended presence of the US...At least there must be some limits to the US presence."<sup>19</sup> Indonesia's Antara news agency reported that "well informed sources" said that if the facilities grew to be more than merely a repair and maintenance site, "the undesirable thing may happen."<sup>20</sup> According to the Jakarta Post these sources were quoting President Suharto, who warned that "if the facilities...turn out to be much more than what has been disclosed, the Singaporean policy could arouse problems for Singapore and

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15 Far Eastern Economic Review, 31 August 1989.

16 Indonesian Observer, 19 August 1989.

17 Jakarta Post, 24 August 1989.

18 Straits Times, 10 September 1989.

19 Jakarta Post, 30 August 1989.

20 Antara, 10 August 1989/A.

influence Southeast Asian regional stability."<sup>21</sup> The Jakarta Post used Singapore's offer to call for the development of a "total" United States policy towards Southeast Asia, instead of one dominated by traditional security concerns:

Indonesia...expects the US to come up with a coherent plan regarding its presence in the entire east Asia/West Pacific region...Such a plan should formulate a more effective mix between the US military presence on a lower scale than the current one and an assortment of measures to enhance the economic capabilities of Southeast Asia and to facilitate a more rapid transfer of technology to the peoples of Southeast Asia.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to Ali Alatas and the Foreign Ministry, ABRI and the Defence Ministry were less concerned by Singapore's offer. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported that "military sources have let it be known that they would not necessarily object to the move."<sup>23</sup> ABRI's commander-in-chief General Try Sutrisno said that what was being offered was a "garage not a base", and that, after all, "Everybody can enter a garage."<sup>24</sup> Defence Minister General Benny Murdani pointed out that "Singapore cannot possibly replace Subic Bay from the point of view of both the physical size and the facilities available." He said it was better "if the entire matter is left to Singapore."<sup>25</sup> Some time later - in February 1992 - ABRI's Chief of the General Staff, Vice Admiral Soedibyo Rahardjo, recalled the 1989 United States - Singapore agreement in these words:

We understand the need for this kind of thing since the presence of American military forces, to be quite honest,

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<sup>21</sup> Jakarta Post, 10 August 1989.

<sup>22</sup> Jakarta Post, 30 August 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 24 August 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Sunday Times (Singapore), 13 August 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Straits Times, 19 September 1989.

is needed in this part of the world to maintain stability.<sup>26</sup>

Defence Minister Murdani's tacit approval of a United States military presence in Singapore, however, did not extend to support for the overall United States approach towards Southeast Asia. In August 1989 he said that "The United States is to a vast majority of Indonesians the symbol of welfare and hope". But at the same time he criticised the United States for "using double standards in its defence and foreign policy towards the region", saying that "The region's stability and security have mainly been based on mutual confidence among the regional states, ...rather than on...power politics and burden sharing."<sup>27</sup>

In November 1989, Ali Alatas said that issue of foreign military facilities in Singapore was closed after assurances that a permanent United States base would not be set up. He reiterated, however, Indonesia's preference for an alternative approach to regional stability. Each ASEAN member should ensure its respective internal strengths through economic progress, as well as social and political stability. The national resilience built up in this way would "contribute to the overall resilience of the region and deter external powers from interfering in the affairs of the ASEAN states."<sup>28</sup>

### **The Gulf War**

The reaction in Indonesia to United States led military operations against Iraq in early 1991 again revealed the

26 M. Richardson, "Indonesia-US get together", Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, April-May 1992, 3.

27 Jakarta Post, 1 September 1989.

28 Straits Times, 24 November 1989.

contrasting attitudes of the Foreign Ministry and the Armed Forces. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in February 1991 that "Within the Foreign Ministry there is growing unease about the conduct of the war, in particular the destruction of Iraq."<sup>29</sup> Ali Alatas reminded the United States, after some weeks of air attacks on Iraq, that the purpose of United Nations resolutions on the Gulf conflict was Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait and not the destruction of Iraq.<sup>30</sup> As with Singapore's offer, the attitude of Alatas and the Foreign Ministry appeared to reflect popular opinion. The vice-chairman of Indonesia's Parliamentary Commission No.1 (Foreign Affairs, Defence and Information), Mr Theo Sambuaga, explained that whilst Indonesians generally did not condone the invasion of Kuwait, once the attacks on Iraq began "there has been a tendency for people to have sympathy for the underdog." This was prompted in particular by the graphic portrayal on television of the damage suffered by Iraq. "Much of the news shows the damage done to Iraq by multinational forces", he said.<sup>31</sup> As an editorial in the Merdeka newspaper said, "the heart of every dignified human being is bound to be very wounded by the brutal and inhuman action" of the United States and their allies.<sup>32</sup> Professor Juwono Sudarsono of the University of Indonesia summed up popular sentiment in the following terms: "It's like a rich man beating a thief in the midst of poor people. They may blame the thief but the poor people mostly do not like the rich man".<sup>33</sup>

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29 Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 February 1991.

30 Far Eastern Economic Review, 7 March 1991.

31 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 9 February 1991.

32 quoted in J. Mohan Malik, op. cit. 36.

33 *Ibid.*, 36-37.

Despite considerable popular sentiment in support of Iraq, however, and despite the approach of Alatas and the Foreign Ministry, the leadership of the Indonesian Armed Forces took a different view. As the Far Eastern Economic Review reported, "The military faction in Parliament has stressed that it was Iraq which started the conflict."<sup>34</sup>

At a more fundamental level, the Gulf War also revealed the opposing pressures of religion and economics on Indonesia's attitude towards the United States. Although opinions about the Gulf War among Indonesia's Muslim community (some eighty per cent of the 190 million population), were - according to Professor Juwono Sudarsono - "quite divided"<sup>35</sup>, there is no doubt that much of the sympathy for Iraq was motivated by religion. The Straits Times reported that:

Some [in Indonesia] have hailed Mr Saddam as a symbol of bravery against the Western war machine, an Arab hero whose defiance has served to strengthen Muslim self-confidence in a world dominated by Western and non-Muslim interests.<sup>36</sup>

There was a perception that the United States was applying double standards in its policies towards the Middle East. Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew said Asian Muslims did not think the United States had been fair. "You enforce UN resolutions against Iraq, but when the same UN resolutions were passed about Israel occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip, nobody enforced them", he said to an American television network.<sup>37</sup> Theo Sambuaga confirmed this reflected the sentiments of many Indonesians. He said that while

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<sup>34</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 February 1991.

<sup>35</sup> M. Richardson, "Gulf War sharpens ASEAN differences", Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, April 1991, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 9 February 1991.

<sup>37</sup> Richardson, "Gulf War sharpens ASEAN differences", op. cit., 28.

Indonesia called on Iraq to withdraw, it also wanted other Middle East issues dealt with immediately after this was achieved - most notably the question of Israel's occupation of Arab territory and the Palestinian question.<sup>38</sup>

Indonesia's leaders, however, were aware of the threat to national stability should United States actions in the Gulf be used to stir up militant Islamic feeling. They took extensive precautions against this possibility. The Straits Times reported that:

The [Indonesian] Government's firm position against anyone taking advantage of the Gulf issue and using religion to raise temperatures appears well understood and accepted by the groups that have taken to the streets and by the leading Muslim organisations.<sup>39</sup>

Notwithstanding significant public sympathy for Iraq and the concerns of his foreign minister, President Suharto maintained a policy of condemning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and tacitly supporting the United Nations resolution sanctioning the use of force against Iraq.<sup>40</sup> Economic considerations were an important factor in this approach. Since it came to power in the 1960s the Suharto Government has been aware of the economic dangers of an anti-Western, anti-United States image. According to Goenawan Mohamad, editor of the leading Indonesian magazine Tempo:

After the fall of Sukarno, the new leadership decided to restore Indonesia's links with the established world order, though this was probably more a bow to necessity than anything else. Pressed by the need for urgent economic rehabilitation - and massive aid from Western donors - Indonesia understood the virtue of conformity.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 9 February 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 February 1991.

<sup>41</sup> Goenawan Mohamed, "Indonesia's self-perception", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), *op. cit.* 142.

In early 1991, Indonesia was already concerned about a decline in tourism (worth more than \$US1.2 billion in foreign exchange earnings in 1990) because of safety fears due to the Gulf War. As the Straits Times said:

With such concern being expressed [in Indonesia] about the effect of the war on tourism, what more impact and anxiety if the foreign banks, factories, and firms get hit by a mass of protesters chanting "Yankees go home" or "No yen for Gulf War effort" or "Infidels out."<sup>42</sup>

Apart from the loss of tourism earnings, Indonesia also had to consider its reliance on Western aid to supplement its national budget. As the Far Eastern Economic Review stated, "Indonesia's greater reliance on aid from Western donors has...made it shy of biting the hand that feeds it."<sup>43</sup> The Review reported in February 1991 that with a meeting of aid donors to be held in the near future, "The danger of an anti-US position is in the back of the minds of most economists, technocrats, and some of the military."<sup>44</sup>

Besides a concern for national stability and the need for foreign aid and investment, the Suharto regime's commitment to a stable international approach was also a factor in its attitude to the Gulf War. As the world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia was sensitive to any suggestion that religious motivation might cause it to become 'another Iraq'. Hence the attempt by Singapore's then deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong to draw a parallel between Singapore and Kuwait was not well received in Indonesia. As the Jakarta Post said:

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<sup>42</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 9 February 1991.

<sup>43</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 August 1992.

<sup>44</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 February 1991.

Where is it that he expects a Saddam Hussein to emerge from to threaten Singapore's independence and sovereignty? Does he expect such a power-hungry leader to emerge in...Jakarta?<sup>45</sup>

After the Gulf War, there was concern in Indonesia about the United States vision for a "New World Order". The clearest criticism again came from the Indonesian Foreign Ministry. In December 1992, Indonesia's ambassador to the United Nations said that Third World nations feared that if the UN continued to be dominated by "big powers", it would order 'unjust interventions':

If you look at the (United Nations Security) Council, in reality you will see that only one or two members are making the decisions.... Until there is a more democratic scheme of things in the United Nations, then it is difficult for us to accept a more far reaching military role.<sup>46</sup>

### **Prospects for Indonesia-United States relations**

According to Leszek Buszynski:

Regional attitudes towards the United States have changed dramatically during the last few years as the consequences of the US withdrawal from the Philippines have sunk in.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of Indonesia, the withdrawal of permanent United States bases in the Philippines in late 1992 made it easier for Alatas and the Foreign Ministry to publicly support the US regional security presence. In October 1992 at a seminar in Singapore, Alatas stated that:

Over the last four decades a more or less stable equilibrium prevailed among the four major powers,

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45 Jakarta Post, 9 August 1990.

46 Courier Mail (Brisbane), 9 December 1992.

47 Leszek Buszynski, "ASEAN security dilemmas", Survival, vol.34, no.4, Winter 1992-93, 104.

primarily underpinned by the US-Japan defense alliance which remains the pivotal relationship in the region.<sup>48</sup>

Alatas even suggested that ASEAN's long cherished ideal of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), which had previously assumed the absence of superpower military forces, could be made compatible with a United States security presence. As Alatas said, ZOPFAN "should remain of central validity and relevance" to regional security. However, in his view ZOPFAN:

is a flexible blueprint, open to further refinement and adjustments in light of the rapidly changing global and regional environment....ZOPFAN is by no means designed to exclude any or all of the major powers, but precisely to keep them constructively engaged in the region.

Addressing a particular concern of the United States, Alatas said that a 'Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone' should remain an essential component of ZOPFAN, but that "in the regime envisioned for the region, transit rights [for naval vessels carrying nuclear weapons] will remain unaffected."<sup>49</sup>

This endorsement by Alatas of the United States-Japan alliance and his willingness to allow United States naval vessels carrying nuclear weapons to transit Southeast Asian waters was, however, merely acceptance of the status quo. This does not necessarily indicate a fundamental change of attitude towards the United States. As the reaction of Alatas to Singapore's offer shows, any additional United States security presence which intrudes on Indonesia's free and independent foreign policy or which is not consistent with concepts such as ZOPFAN will continue to be opposed.

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<sup>48</sup> Ali Alatas, *op. cit.*, 10-11.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-19.

It should not be forgotten that the Foreign Ministry's attitude towards Singapore's offer and the Gulf War was representative of a considerable body of opinion in Indonesia. Prominent commentators, as editorials in the Jakarta Post or the writings of Soedjati Djwandano indicate, regard claims that regional stability is due to the United States military presence as an insult to Indonesia's achievements. In addition, the Gulf War showed that the Indonesian Muslim community identifies with the fate of its religious brethren in the Middle East. The televised destruction of parts of Iraq by US led forces did not help the United States' image amongst Indonesia's Muslims. In their eyes, this compounded the United States' faults as the main backer of Israel. The Gulf War showed that the progress of Middle East peace talks - and specifically the willingness of the United States to pressure Israel into a more conciliatory approach - will affect attitudes towards the United States in Indonesia.

Moreover, while it is likely that President Suharto and ABRI - for pragmatic reasons of economic (and therefore political) stability, the need to project a benign international image, and insurance against threats to regional security - will support a continued US strategic presence in Southeast Asia, this should not be misread as some kind of deeper cultural or ideological affinity for the United States. In Indonesia's view of regional security, any power which acts as a buffer against the major Asian powers, particularly China, is regarded as a stabilising factor in the region. This even applied to Indonesia's ideological opposite, the former Soviet Union. As Admiral Sunardi, adviser to Minister

for Defence Murdani, said in 1991, "I tend to think that [the Soviet military presence at] Cam Ranh Bay was meant to challenge the Chinese. So withdrawal of the Soviet Union is destabilising."<sup>50</sup>

The influence of nationalism and religion both on general public opinion and on sections of the Government, plus the fact that the Indonesian leadership has no desire to see a US security presence beyond what it sees as beneficial for its own interests, will continue to constrain the type of United States security presence Indonesia is prepared to support. Moreover, President Suharto's position as the new chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement increases the pressure on Indonesia to limit the support it provides for a United States security presence. Hence it was not possible, for example, for Indonesia to accept the permanent presence of United States ships or aircraft in Singapore. Even a rotational presence was only grudgingly accepted.

From the above reactions to Singapore's offer and the Gulf War, it is clear that United States security policies will not be automatically accepted in Indonesia. As Sabam Siagian warned, the United States cannot rely on simplistic notions of public opposition/private support. What needs to be appreciated are the differing attitudes towards the United States, both within the Government, especially between the Foreign Ministry and the Defence Ministry/ABRI, and between decision makers such as President Suharto and general opinion. While Foreign Minister Alatas was prepared to be quite critical of both the proposed United States-Singapore

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<sup>50</sup> International Herald Tribune, 14 June 1991.

agreement, and of United States led actions in the Gulf war, Defence Minister Murdani, ABRI Chief Try Sutrisno, and Sutrisno's ABRI colleagues adopted a calming approach in both cases, appearing to quietly support the United States position. General opinion appeared to be closer to that of Foreign Minister Alatas, while at least in the Gulf War President Suharto seemed to concur with the ABRI line.

Events in 1992 demonstrated that the United States is likely to experience continued difficulties in its security relations with Indonesia. The Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter reported in late 1992 that an agreement had been signed between the United States Navy and PT PAL, a state owned corporation, for the commercial repair and maintenance of American warships at Surabaya.<sup>51</sup> At the same time as this agreement was being finalised, however, the United States House of Representatives voted to freeze International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds for Indonesia over the issue of human rights in East Timor.<sup>52</sup> As mentioned above, General Murdani had already criticised the United States for its failure to coordinate its foreign and security policies towards the region. The Surabaya agreement and the withdrawal of IMET seemed to confirm a two-faced approach on the part of the United States. The deletion of IMET funds for Indonesia from the annual Foreign Aid bill became official in October 1992. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported that the United States Congress would consider lifting the freeze if the Indonesian Armed Forces agreed to spend IMET funds on

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51 M. Richardson, "Indonesia opens commercial door to US", Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, October-November 1992, 35.

52 Sydney Morning Herald, 29 June 1992.

human rights training for its soldiers and on legal redress for civilians prosecuted in the aftermath of the Dili killings in November 1991.<sup>53</sup>

Singling out Jakarta for 'punishment' over human rights caused resentment in Indonesia. As the Sydney Morning Herald said, "A rejection could bring out all the prickly nationalism that is never far below the surface in Jakarta."<sup>54</sup> As with the Gulf War, the United States was accused of double standards and its links with Israel were highlighted. A senior ABRI officer, Air Vice Marshall Teddy Rusdy, referring to Washington's \$US2.5 billion defence aid program with Israel, asked "Are you trying to tell me that Israel is much better in handling human rights than us?" More significantly, he also pointed out that the Indonesian Government had yet to approve access for United States naval vessels to ship repair facilities at Surabaya.<sup>55</sup> It was the United States, he said, which would have to consider whether it was ready to ignore ABRI in the context of its interests in Southeast Asia.<sup>56</sup>

Apart from hindering United States efforts to diversify its access to Southeast Asian facilities in the wake of the closure of its Philippines bases, the withdrawal of IMET will mean less influence with an important element in the Indonesian system. As shown above, ABRI did not oppose the United States position at the time of Singapore's offer and during the Gulf War. A major reason for ABRI's support for the United States has been the training that the United States has provided for Indonesian military officers for the last 40

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53 Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 October 1992.

54 Sydney Morning Herald, 29 June 1992.

55 Angkatan Bersenjata, 7 July 1992.

56 Ibid.

years. By 1992, more than 7,500 Indonesian military officers had been trained in the United States.<sup>57</sup> An American study concluded that the IMET program "has been primarily responsible for the orientation of the Indonesian officer corps developing in a pro-American/pro-Western direction".<sup>58</sup> Given that significant elements of Indonesian society and Government are less than fully supportive of the United States, withdrawal of IMET - if sustained over the longer term - will compound the difficulties the United States faces in gaining the support of Indonesia for its security initiatives in Southeast Asia.

#### Malaysia's perceptions of the United States

A distinction between public and private attitudes towards the United States is arguably more appropriate in Malaysia's case than Indonesia's. The Straits Times reported in April 1992 that Malaysia and the United States had been holding joint military exercises since the early 1970s, which were covered by a formal agreement signed in January 1984 by Prime Minister Mahathir and United States Secretary for Defense Caspar Weinberger. At Malaysia's request, however, the agreement was kept secret. According to the Straits Times, "One reason for the secrecy was that Malaysia had championed non-alignment and had argued strongly for the creation of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality in Southeast Asia."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, 29 June 1992.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 11 April 1992.

Even in Malaysia, however, important figures have been prepared on occasions to state publicly their support for a United States military presence in Southeast Asia. Prime Minister Mahathir said in 1989 that any reduction in the United States presence should be gradual and in response to specific steps by the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup> As Dr Noordin Sopiee, head of Malaysia's influential Institute for Strategic and International Studies remarked, "within the present context, ...we...want the Americans to stay militarily in the region at least until the Soviets leave."<sup>61</sup>

As in Indonesia, reactions to Singapore's offer of military facilities to the United States and to the United States role in the Gulf War revealed a divergence of opinion between Malaysia's leadership and the general population. There was also some evidence of a difference between Malaysia's Defence and Foreign Ministries, although this was less evident from public comments than in Indonesia's case.

#### **Reaction to Singapore's offer**

Opposition in Malaysia to Singapore's offer of military facilities to the United States in August 1989 was considerable and came from right across the political spectrum. According to Dr Noordin Sopiee:

The hot words that have come from Malaysians have come from the left and the right, from those in Government and outside, from political parties of all complexions...this is an important fact which should not pass the notice of all our friends<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> *Pacific Defence Reporter*, 1990 Annual Reference Edition, 25.

<sup>61</sup> *The Star*, 7 September 1989.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Vice-President of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said:

We see the offer as directed at us. You are telling us that you see in this area a sea of hostile Malays surrounding you and your warning is 'Hey, do not meddle with us, we have the Americans behind us'.<sup>63</sup>

Chairman of the youth wing of UMNO said that Singapore was not only violating the Kuala Lumpur declaration (which called for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality - ZOPFAN - in Southeast Asia), but was putting the solidarity of ASEAN in the "back seat."<sup>64</sup> The Chinese based Democratic Action Party said Malaysia should oppose Singapore's move publicly and with the help of other ASEAN nations try to persuade Singapore to drop the idea. "The people of ASEAN do not want to be drawn into any superpower conflict, which can only result in suffering, as happened in Indo-China", it said.<sup>65</sup> The opposition Parti Islam took a similar stand.<sup>66</sup> The President of the influential Aliran Social reform movement, Dr Chandra Muzaffar, warned that if Singapore allowed foreign powers to have military facilities there, it could have "implications" for the domestic politics of both Singapore and Malaysia.<sup>67</sup>

Religious factors also influenced Malaysia's reaction. Developments in the Middle East, especially the issue of a Palestinian homeland, are closely followed by Malaysia's Islamic community. Anti-American feeling results from the perception of the United States as the prime supporter of

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63 Datuk Abdullah Badawi, op. cit., 12.

64 Straits Times, 10 August 1989.

65 The Star, 10 August 1989.

66 Straits Times, 17 August 1989.

67 The Star, 10 August 1989.

Israel. In addition, for many in Malaysia, Singapore is the Israel of Southeast Asia. Just as Jewish migrants in Israel occupy what the surrounding Arab nations regard as their territory, so the Chinese in Singapore are seen as an immigrant race in the midst of a Malay archipelago. Singapore's offer to the United States brought these two elements together. In November 1989 an article in the monthly Malay publication, Dewan Masyarakat, stated:

The closeness of Israel-US-Singapore ties has long [been] known...Israel is arrogant because it has been 'spoilt' by the US...If the level of Singapore-US friendship reaches that of Israel-US friendship after the US base is shifted to Singapore, will this situation make Singapore arrogant like Israel?

After listing Israeli acts of aggression against its neighbours, the article said that "If Singapore emulates Israel's arrogance, we fear that one day it will also do the same to its neighbour and countries in the region."<sup>68</sup> Other Malaysian newspapers and journals, whilst not specifically mentioning Israel, maintained a similar line. With "a US military presence,...it is not unlikely that Singapore will one day become a proud and arrogant ally", said an article in Berita Minggu Malaysia.<sup>69</sup>

Malaysian reactions to Singapore's offer also focussed on the perceived threat to Islamic values and culture. The Muslim Students Association protested to the Singapore High Commission in Kuala Lumpur that the offer to host American facilities was "a threat to Islamic resurgence in the region."<sup>70</sup> A local professor of medicine said that the offer

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<sup>68</sup> Reprinted in Straits Times, 21 November 1989.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Straits Times, 17 August 1989.

<sup>70</sup> Straits Times, 16 August 1989.

reflected Singapore's intention to become another Israel, and that it would result in Johor Baru becoming an area where venereal disease would be rampant.<sup>71</sup> Malaysia's Information Minister and Secretary-General of the ruling UMNO Party warned that Johor could become the target of "Yankee" culture:

Already the region has been infiltrated with yellow and wild culture from the West. Now the influence of Yankee culture will seep in with the stationing of Yankee troops on the island Republic.<sup>72</sup>

An occasional voice of support for Singapore's offer was heard in Malaysia. A correspondent of the Star newspaper observed that:

The Chinese Navy often steams through Southeast Asian waters and [has] intentions of staking a claim to the disputed Spratly islands. It is only logical to have a force to counter all this...The Singapore Government should hence be commended on their decision to allow US military facilities on their soil.<sup>73</sup>

Similar examples of support for Singapore's offer, however, were hard to find.

It might be suggested that the widespread hostility in Malaysia to Singapore's offer was aimed at the island republic, and is not relevant to an assessment of Malaysian perceptions of the United States. As Wheeler and Wood have argued, however:

The United States needs to be aware that the presence of American facilities in Singapore, without comparable facilities in Malaysia as well, immediately places the United States in the middle of Singapore-Malaysia relations.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Straits Times, 21 September 1989.

<sup>72</sup> Straits Times, 7 September 1989.

<sup>73</sup> The Star (Kuala Lumpur), 25 August 1989.

<sup>74</sup> P. Wood, J. Wheeler, op. cit., 46.

While the use of facilities in Singapore was attractive to the United States as a partial alternative to its bases in the Philippines, the consequences of aligning itself with Singapore for its relations with Malaysia may not have been fully considered. As Datuk Abdullah Badawi said, "An anti-Singapore or Singapore-Malaysia issue bandwagon, is a very popular one...the Government is always under very severe strain when this happens."<sup>75</sup> According to Datuk Badawi:

rationally speaking, many people do not think that the US presence in Singapore significantly affects the security of Malaysia. Some would argue that it in fact enhances the security of Malaysia. While we may believe this to be so, it is politically unacceptable.<sup>76</sup>

There is some public evidence, although less than in Indonesia, for a division between Malaysia's Foreign and Defence Ministries over Singapore's offer. The Secretary-General of Malaysia's Foreign Ministry, Datuk Ahmad Kamil Jaafar, said that peace efforts in the region could be undermined if American facilities were set up in Singapore:

Any proliferation of bases is against what we [ASEAN] had set out to do...We have made our views known to Singapore. We do not wish the status quo of ZOPFAN to be disturbed.<sup>77</sup>

Malaysian Defence Minister Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen, on the other hand, adopted a less critical tone. While not obviously contradicting the Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, he merely stressed to the visiting United States Commander in Chief in the Pacific "the importance of ASEAN maintaining its present character and position with regard to military bases and the

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<sup>75</sup> Datuk Abdullah Badawi, op. cit., 30.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>77</sup> The Star, 9 August 1989.

presence of foreign bases in the region."<sup>78</sup> As he said in May 1990, "Malaysia can live with the bases that are already there."<sup>79</sup>

Defence Minister Tengku Rithauddeen's reaction, despite negative comments from the Foreign Minister and other members of the Government, was characteristic of the response of the Malaysian leadership. This was far less critical than general opinion. As Datuk Badawi said, it was necessary to distinguish vocal criticisms in Malaysia from the Malaysian Government's stand.<sup>80</sup> Despite the extensive opposition in Malaysia to Singapore's offer, Prime Minister Mahathir was able to state that "now is not the time to talk about evacuating the [US] bases [from the Philippines]. Not yet anyway."<sup>81</sup>

One reason for the adverse reaction from the Malaysian Foreign Ministry appeared to be inadequate prior consultation. Datuk Jaafar said that Malaysia's vociferous protests when Singapore first announced its offer were due to a lack of information from Singapore. "The first explanation given to us was not very clear," he said.<sup>82</sup> Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, admitted that some of Malaysia's excitement over the offer could have been avoided had he informed Prime Minister Mahathir of Singapore's plans during his visit to Kuala Lumpur in March 1989. According to Lee, however, he did not do so "because Dr Mahathir had just

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78 New Straits Times 11 August 1989.

79 Straits Times, 15 May 1990.

80 Straits Times, 29 August 1989.

81 The Washington Post, 13 August 1989.

82 Straits Times, 2 October 1989.

recovered from a coronary bypass operation and I did not want to trouble him."<sup>83</sup>

The extent of anti-Singapore feeling in Malaysia, together with the Malaysian Government's public commitment to ZOPFAN, constrained the Government's options with regard to the United States presence in Singapore. In this context Malaysia's public support for the United States-Singapore arrangement could be qualified at best. After talks with the Commander in Chief of the United States Pacific Command, Prime Minister Mahathir said he felt:

assured...that the US will not do anything that is sensitive to the region...Malaysia is not against the American military using facilities in Singapore for supplies and repairing of warships and planes but is opposed to the idea of a permanent base.<sup>84</sup>

As well as constraining the Malaysian Government's position on the issue of the United States presence, the vocal Malaysian reaction may have set limits on the agreement between the United States and Singapore itself. When the offer was first announced, Singapore said it was prepared to "host some facilities",<sup>85</sup> implying a permanent presence. This was later ruled out, with only a rotational presence of United States ships and aircraft being permitted. It may be that the general Malaysian reaction influenced the final agreement. As Dr Noordin Sopiee said, "by our actions we have set some parameters for any future US facilities in Singapore."<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, it would have suited Singapore to have been seen to be responding to Malaysia's concerns. Hence a

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83 Ibid.

84 New Straits Times, 16 August 1989.

85 Straits Times, 5 August 1989.

86 The Star, 7 September 1989.

rotational presence of ships and aircraft might have been intended in the first place.

A sequel to the debate over Singapore's offer occurred in January 1992, when US President George Bush announced the transfer of the United States Navy's logistic headquarters in the western Pacific from Subic Bay in the Philippines to the island republic. Once again, there was a clear contrast between general public opinion and the reaction of the national leadership. A prominent letter in the New Straits Times claimed that:

Singapore will now become the fulcrum of American military power in Southeast Asia. This not only perpetuates a foreign military presence in the region but also impedes the growth of a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality...which has been the ASEAN dream for the last 20 years. The transfer of the logistics command to Singapore is in fact a severe blow to the long struggle of Southeast Asia states for genuine political independence and national sovereignty.<sup>87</sup>

The Malaysian Youth Council said that following the demise of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, the decline in the arms race and the open policy adopted by China, there was no reason for any ASEAN country to maintain such a military relationship with the United States.<sup>88</sup>

By comparison, Prime Minister Mahathir said he believed the new arrangement did not exceed the provisions of the 1990 agreement. It was consistent, he said, with what Singapore had told Malaysia and other ASEAN countries. Moving staff and personnel from Subic Bay to Singapore, according to Dr Mahathir, was not tantamount to creating a United States base

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87 New Straits Times, 25 January 1992.

88 New Straits Times, 6 January 1992.

on the island.<sup>89</sup> Datuk Abdullah Badawi (now Malaysia's Foreign Minister) merely said he hoped the United States and Singapore would not exceed the agreement they had signed in 1990. "I am sure Singapore would not purposefully want to go against the understanding that we already have with them."<sup>90</sup>

### The Gulf War

The Gulf War showed even more clearly the role of Islam in Malaysia in shaping attitudes towards the United States. Protests by the Islamic community against American actions were larger and more organised than in Indonesia and had a greater influence on the Government's approach. Nevertheless, they did not determine the Government's policy. As in Indonesia, there was a divergence between general public opinion and the position of Malaysia's leaders, who - like their Indonesian counterparts - faced the contrasting pressures of religion and economics. In the end result, Prime Minister Mahathir and his senior colleagues, because of economic considerations as well as concerns about national stability, restricted their criticisms of the United States during the Gulf War.

Malaysia was a member of the United Nations Security Council when it approved the use of force to liberate Kuwait.

The Far Eastern Economic Review noted that:

the crucial UN vote on the use of force against Iraq coincided with UMNO's general assembly, when younger members of the party were voicing support for Saddam Hussein...Malaysia consistently supported UN resolutions against Iraq despite a strong pro-Iraqi mood in UMNO

<sup>89</sup> New Straits Times, 7 January 1992.

<sup>90</sup> New Sunday Times, 5 January 1992.

[United Malays National Organisation - the ruling political grouping in Malaysia].<sup>91</sup>

Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim admitted that Malaysia's support for UN resolutions against Iraq was "very unpopular amongst the Muslims".<sup>92</sup>

Muslim groups in Malaysia had two related concerns. Firstly, the extent of the United States led destruction of Iraq. At a mass rally organised by Parti Islam (PAS) in April 1991:

The Americans and their allies were given a bashing by all the speakers for their savage attacks against Iraq to further their own ends and to undermine Islam on behalf of Jewish-Zionist groups.<sup>93</sup>

The Straits Times reported in February 1991 that:

The position of the opposition parties, which to a large extent coincides with grassroots feelings among the politically dominant Muslim population, is that force should not be used at this juncture, least of all by the United States, which is the chief backer of Israel.<sup>94</sup>

The second concern of Islamic groups was the role of the United States in the Middle East generally. "We want Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, but we also want the US and its allies out of the Holy Land because they are there to change the Middle East", said Subky Laktif, information chief of PAS.<sup>95</sup>

The reaction of Muslim groups forced the Government to criticise the United Nations endorsed military action against Iraq. The Deputy Foreign Minister, Fadizil Che Wan, said that when the war began, American and allied forces, "bombed Iraq

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91 Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 August 1992.

92 quoted in J. Mohan Malik, op. cit., 42.

93 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 6 April 1991.

94 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 2 February 1991.

95 Richardson, "Gulf War sharpens ASEAN differences", op. cit., 27.

as if to destroy Baghdad and other cities in that country."<sup>96</sup> Prime Minister Mahathir said, "We agreed that Kuwait should be freed but never agreed that Iraq should be destroyed."<sup>97</sup> The Government also felt compelled to call for a resolution of the Palestinian issue. On 28 February 1991, Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan said it was necessary for UN Security Council members to work on a framework of political settlement to the Gulf crisis and the broader issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Palestinian question.<sup>98</sup>

While the Malaysian Government was prepared to criticise the United States in this way, voting against it in the United Nations was another matter. Economic factors were a key reason for this. As the Far Eastern Economic Review commented, for a country like Malaysia which sells twenty five per cent of its manufactured exports to the United States, "ultimately it does not pay to be too critical of Washington."<sup>99</sup>

Moreover, whilst the Malaysian leadership recognised the concerns of the Islamic community in its public statements, it was also anxious - in the same way as Indonesia's leaders - to ensure that Muslim protests did not lead to domestic instability. Malaysia's Minister of International Trade and Industry said that if Asian governments were "unable to explain to their people the rationale for what is happening in the Gulf", people would become emotional.<sup>100</sup> Prime Minister Mahathir made a point of countering the more extreme Muslim

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96 Ibid.

97 Sydney Morning Herald, 6 February 1991.

98 New Straits Times, 28 February 1991.

99 Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 August 1992.

100 Richardson, "Gulf War sharpens ASEAN differences", op. cit., 27.

arguments on the Gulf War. The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in February 1991 that he asked his UMNO party to convey to grassroots supporters that the Gulf War was not a jihad or holy war. He also criticised PAS for wanting to send 3,000 volunteers to help Iraq. "Luckily the plan did not materialise...otherwise they would not have returned, he said."<sup>101</sup>

A prominent Malaysian academic summed up the reaction of his country's government to the Gulf War in the following terms:

Given certain conditions, the US is not a 'paper' tiger, and US resolve is far from extinct. On the other hand, there is a level of dismay that its actions against Saddam were more to protect Israel and its own strategic interests, not so much an altruistic objective.<sup>102</sup>

In other words, the Malaysian Government gained some reassurance in a strategic sense from United States intervention on behalf of Kuwait, but was uncomfortable with the United States motives for doing so. As a letter to the New Straits Times stated, "Would the Great Protector have intervened so decisively and violently had Kuwait been an oil-less, non-strategic Ethiopia?"<sup>103</sup>

The aftermath of the Gulf War showed that Malaysia was uneasy with the prospect of a "New World Order" dominated by the United States. It was especially troubled by the implications this might have for the Islamic world. Following the Gulf War, the United Nations was described by some

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<sup>101</sup> Straits Times, 15 March 1991.

<sup>102</sup> Zakaria Ahmed, "The United States Military, Southeast Asian Views", Strategi, vol. 1, Kuala Lumpur, February 1992, 73.

<sup>103</sup> New Straits Times, 12 March 1992.

Malaysians as a "stooge of the United States." As one correspondent to the New Straits Times said:

How else can one explain the deafening silence of the so-called bastions of democracy and champions of free elections in the wake of the recent horrific events in Algeria?...the West, especially the United States and its puppets, have become paranoid of Islam and Muslims.<sup>104</sup>

Another letter, titled "US hoodwinks the world but perfidy is their style", said:

what makes me sick is the interventionist policies of the American Government, the self-acclaimed champion of the human cause, self-elected police of the world, and Nosey Parker of the world.<sup>105</sup>

As Prime Minister Mahathir said:

The world is ripe for 'A New World Order' but it is hoped that this New World Order will not be one that is imposed upon the world by the main beneficiary of the current revolution...We are already feeling heavy hands forcing us to do this and not that...is there only one form of democracy or only one high-priest to interpret it?...These people latch on to various causes such as human rights and the environment in order to reimpose colonial rule on us.<sup>106</sup>

Dr Chandra Muzaffar, head of the influential Muslim organisation Aliran, said a United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism had been overturned because of the dominance of the West in global politics. "The truth that was recognised in 1975", he said, "has been denounced as a falsehood in 1991 simply because of the power that the US and its allies command."<sup>107</sup>

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104 Ibid.

105 New Straits Times, 14 January 1992, 11.

106 Statement to Forty-Sixth Session of the United Nations General Assembly 24 September 1991, reproduced in Strategi, vol. no. 1, Kuala Lumpur, February 1992, 102-105.

107 New Straits Times, 19 February 1992.

### Prospects for Malaysia-United States relations

The failure of the United States-Philippines bases negotiations in 1991 removed one of the constraints on Malaysia's support for a United States military presence in Southeast Asia. As Minister for Defence Dato' Seri Najib pointed out in April 1992, there would now be no contradiction between the residual United States presence and Malaysia's high profile advocacy of a ZOPFAN for Southeast Asia:

Resulting from the US withdrawal from the Philippines, one thing which is clear is that the phenomenon of permanent bases is over...as of January 1993, there will no longer be any foreign bases in Southeast Asia...Therefore, the ASEAN concept of making Southeast Asia a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality could in fact be realised sooner than many have expected.<sup>108</sup>

Dato' Najib said Malaysia could even offer some practical assistance to help retain a United States presence in the region. "Like Singapore, Malaysia has offered to the US facilities for the repair and maintenance of warships on a commercial basis."<sup>109</sup> As he said:

Malaysia's move and those of other countries in the region is a tacit admission that the US is a benign power in the region and its presence will contribute significantly towards regional peace and prosperity. Although we may be critical of some US policies in certain areas, Malaysia welcomes her presence in the area.<sup>110</sup>

The Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter stated in early 1992 that "Malaysia...has given approval for US naval vessels to start using its strategically placed Lumut dockyard for ship repairs

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<sup>108</sup> Minister of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 11-12.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 7-9.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

in April."<sup>111</sup> Apart from access for United States naval vessels to Lumut, Dato' Najib also announced that bilateral defence exercises with the United States would be upgraded.<sup>112</sup>

Various public statements indicate some of the reasons Dato' Najib (and other Malaysian leaders) support the residual United States military presence in the western Pacific. In May 1992, Dato' Najib publicly urged the United States to remain committed to the region to prevent the development of a power vacuum. "It will be in our interest to see that there is no vacuum," he said.<sup>113</sup> As the New Straits Times stated in January 1992:

The future may not hold threats like Kuwait's conquest, but security and destabilisation threats may emerge in new forms. The possibility of tension developing among China, Vietnam, Philippines, Taiwan and Malaysia over claims to the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea...is real...ASEAN values the presence of the US military as a way of contributing towards a greater framework of co-operative peace.<sup>114</sup>

Malaysia sees special value in the United States presence as a potential buffer against China. Renewed assertiveness by China over the Spratly islands has given this a particular focus. There was a favourable reaction to the statement in March 1992 by senior United States defence official James Lilley that "We cannot just walk away from it [the Spratlys] as it will invite action (by others)."<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, comments by United States Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz in June 1992 that the chances of a peaceful outcome in the South China Sea were "much greater if they are the

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111 Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, April-May 1992, 31.

112 Minister of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 7-9.

113 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 2 May 1992.

114 New Straits Times 21 January 1992.

115 New Straits Times, 28 March 1992.

product of efforts within the region"<sup>116</sup> (implying that the United States would not intervene in any military dispute over the Spratlys) were not well received in Malaysia.

There is also a perception in Malaysia that the United States - Japan relationship is a key factor in the region's security. Trade friction between the United States and Japan has long been identified by the Malaysian Government as the "greatest threat" to Asia-Pacific security.<sup>117</sup> As the New Straits Times said:

Then there is the fear of Japan, a nascent military power, becoming a major Asia-Pacific military power. Having an American presence in the region will defuse its maritime trade routes and access to the oil in the Gulf.<sup>118</sup>

According to Dato' Najib, Malaysia does not want to see Japan playing a military role in the region. In his view, Japan could contribute to the region's security by playing a more significant role in the economic development of the countries in the area.<sup>119</sup>

As in Indonesia, however, even though the national leadership supports a United States presence, US access to Malaysia will remain heavily restricted. The Lumut agreement is significant, but it only permits the commercial repair of US warships at a privately owned (ie not Government dockyard). This is even less than the limited, rotational presence of US ships and aircraft allowed by Singapore. The reactions to Singapore's offer and the Gulf War revealed the pressures on the Malaysian Government to restrict its support in the

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<sup>116</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 9 July 1992.

<sup>117</sup> Business Times (Kuala Lumpur), 5 May 1990.

<sup>118</sup> New Straits Times, 21 January 1992.

<sup>119</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 2 May 1992.

security field for the United States. Not the least of these pressures is the influence of Islam. As Prime Minister Mahathir said in September 1991, "The plight of the Palestinian people touches the heart of every Malaysian. We would like the Palestinian people to be treated fairly and justly."<sup>120</sup> The perception of the United States as the main backer of Israel, as well as the fear of the Islamic community in Malaysia about the intrusion of American culture, will remain a restraining factor in Malaysia-United States relations. The United States-Singapore agreement adds a further complication, for this publicly aligns the United States with what many in Malaysia see as their difficult neighbour. Moreover, in Malaysian eyes it completes the remaining side of the United States-Israel-Singapore triangle.

Security ties between Malaysia and the United States are also constrained by a range of other irritants. A particular source of annoyance for the Malaysian leadership was United States opposition to Dr Mahathir's proposal for an East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC). As Prime Minister Mahathir said:

We are perplexed to find that this objective merely to have a voice in international affairs is being opposed openly and covertly by the very country which preaches free trade. It is even more surprising that there should be such opposition when NAFTA itself is being formed on the principle of the right of free association of independent countries. Can it be that what is right and proper for the rich and the powerful is not right or proper for the poor? One is tempted to suspect racist bias behind this stand.<sup>121</sup>

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi said:

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<sup>120</sup> Statement to Forty-Sixth Session of the United Nations General Assembly 24 September 1991, op. cit., 105.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 107.

"There should not be any form of interference by superpowers in our decision-making...The US has no right to make decisions for us...Basically East Asian country leaders must sit down and make a firm decision on the EAEC."<sup>122</sup>

Other sources of friction included Western criticism of Malaysia's logging practices and condemnation in the United States of Malaysia's policy of not accepting additional Indo-Chinese refugees. Malaysian Foreign Ministry officials thought United States criticism on the latter point to be especially hypocritical, since at the same time the United States was forcibly returning thousands of Haitian immigrants.<sup>123</sup> As with the withdrawal of IMET funds from Indonesia, the United States' suspension of its program of military education and training aid for Malaysia because of the Malaysian Government's treatment of Vietnamese boat people caused considerable resentment.<sup>124</sup>

United States officials have reportedly been confused by the different attitudes towards their country within the Malaysian Government.<sup>125</sup> This reveals a failure to appreciate that as in Indonesia, a desire on the part of the Malaysian leadership to retain a United States regional security presence does not equate to general support for the United States in Malaysia. It was not inconsistent - as United States officials seemed to believe - for the Malaysian Defence Ministry to agree to increased military cooperation with the United States at the same time as the United States was criticised by prominent Malaysians for its lack of support for

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122 New Straits Times, 6 January 1992.

123 Canberra Times, 1 August 1992.

124 Far Eastern Economic Review, 3 June 1993.

125 Far Eastern Economic Review, 12 March 1992.

Mahathir's EAEC proposal.<sup>126</sup> It is important to take notice not only of statements of support for the United States security presence, but the qualifications that accompany this support. Even Dato' Najib's support for the United States is strongly qualified. In his view, the United States:

must be prudent in her policy towards regional states. She must exercise discretion, equality and at the same time, to understand the plight and problems of developing states...if she uses the big stick approach, Washington's actions could be counter-productive, and result in her being alienated and receiving the antipathy of the region.<sup>127</sup>

It is qualifications such as this, even though they refer to the United States non-military policies towards Malaysia, that will continue to restrict Malaysia - United States security links.

#### **Singapore's perceptions of the United States**

In the case of Singapore there is little equivocation about the benefits of the United States regional security presence. Unlike Indonesia and Malaysia, there is no apparent distinction between public and private opinions towards the United States, between the Government's view and the general community attitude, or between different elements of the Government itself, such as the Foreign and Defence Ministries. There are, nevertheless, limits to the support Singapore can provide the United States. The attitudes of Singapore's neighbours are a major constraint in this respect.

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<sup>126</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 18 April 1992.  
<sup>127</sup> Minister of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 9-10.

Singapore believes the United States contributes to stability in the western Pacific through its alliance with Japan, by restraining internal ASEAN tension, and by ensuring the security of the major trade routes in the region.

There is a greater focus in Singapore than in Indonesia or Malaysia on the consequences of a rift between the United States and Japan. Because of its ethnic Chinese makeup, Singapore identifies strongly with China and hence with the traditional enmity between China and Japan. For Lee Kuan Yew, the key to the region's stability and security is the continued alliance between the United States and Japan. Without this:

That's a very dangerous world...there will be great unhappiness and the possibility of a reaction from China, from the Soviet Union, and pre-emptive kinds of problems.<sup>128</sup>

It was essential, according to Lee, for the United States to work out a "mutually beneficial formula " with the Japanese. "If that goes sour, the basis for growth and development in Asia is gone. A very different world will emerge." Asians, he said, would be astounded if there was no US military presence "because nobody has any contingency planning for that event."<sup>129</sup> Lee said that if the United States withdrew:

it will be even more difficult for the neighbours of Japan to accept the great Japanese military power. Japan does not have friends in the world, especially in the Far East.<sup>130</sup>

Lee Hsien Loong said the United States presence in the western Pacific:

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128 Straits Times, 20 May 1989.

129 Ibid.

130 International Herald Tribune, 28 May 1990.

has freed the non-communist countries of East and South-east Asia to concentrate on economic development...If the US leaves the region, or Japan gains the impression that it can no longer depend upon the US security umbrella, the situation will be completely destabilised... Japan may be forced to rearm, or worse to develop nuclear weapons. This will arouse grave concerns and trigger off reactions in many countries in the region, including China.<sup>131</sup>

In early 1992, Singapore Defence Minister Yeo Ning Hong warned that as Southeast Asia "looks towards the 21st century..., the likelihood of a United States that is less engaged in the region cannot be ruled out." He said that if there was a precipitous withdrawal of American forces, Japan "may feel compelled to rearm to safeguard its trade routes" beyond the current 1000 nautical mile limit. This in turn could lead to "a chain of destabilisation" in East Asia.<sup>132</sup>

Apart from its role in wider regional stability, Singapore believes a United States presence helps keep a lid on intra-ASEAN tension. Singapore's opinion on this aspect of the US regional security role is less clearly stated because of the risks of upsetting ASEAN unity. In May 1990, however, Lee Kuan Yew said if the US presence "is removed, all the latent conflicts in the region will surface."<sup>133</sup> As one example of the potential for latent conflict, he had earlier warned that ASEAN might lose the solidarity and cohesion it had gained from years of facing the common enemy of communist expansionism once the Cambodian conflict was resolved.<sup>134</sup> Lee Hsien Loong also warned of regional tension, which clearly

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131 Straits Times, 19 May 1989.

132 Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, April-May 1992, 31.

133 International Herald Tribune, 28 May 1990.

134 Straits Times, 18 September 1989.

included racial or religious conflict within ASEAN, if the United States withdrew:

The USSR may now be less of a threat to the region, but even in this new strategic environment the US deployments are still a force for stability. Any change will be unsettling for the region...regional rivalries...have their own root causes, be they historical animosities, racial and religious strife, or competition for influence and resources. These causes will not disappear.<sup>135</sup>

Chapter One showed that Singapore perceived a strong link between economic development and regional stability. For its economic prosperity it is essential that Singapore's trading partners have unhindered access to the sea lanes of Southeast Asia. Singapore's external trade is valued at 3.2 times its gross domestic product.<sup>136</sup> As the Straits Times said:

Ninety-five per cent of the country's trade, including most of its daily necessities, is carried out by sea....Closing the sea lanes would be tantamount to strangling Singapore. Further, continued access to them cannot be taken for granted. Piracy, navigational hazards, domestic instability and intra-regional conflicts can all threaten free access to them.<sup>137</sup>

Prominent Singapore political scientist and member of parliament, Professor Lau Teik Soon, believes that only the United States has the military capability to deter any threat to the Straits of Malacca and the other major sea routes in the region.<sup>138</sup>

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135 Jakarta Post, 17 July 1990.

136 Straits Times, 27 July 1990.

137 Straits Times, 8 May 1992.

138 Straits Times, 8 August 1989.

### The Singapore offer

In August 1989 Singapore offered the United States the use of military facilities on its territory. Announcing the offer, Minister of State for Finance and Foreign Affairs, BG George Yeo, said Singapore was prepared to "host" some facilities for United States ships and aircraft. Singapore, he said, would let the US "set up some military facilities here."<sup>139</sup> BG Yeo said Singapore wanted to ease the burden on the Philippines and make it easier for its fellow ASEAN member to continue to host United States bases.<sup>140</sup>

Already in 1987 Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was laying the groundwork for Singapore's offer:

What haunts me is the awful scenario where the United States feels she has had enough...she is protecting Japan, she is protecting the Pacific, she is protecting Europe, but she gets precious little in return.

Lee said that to help ease the United States' international security burden, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and ASEAN would have to "make a small contribution to maintain peace and stability in the region."<sup>141</sup> In January 1989 Lee said that if the Philippines decided the US bases must go, it would be in the interest of regional stability for the bases to remain "somewhere in the region."<sup>142</sup>

After Singapore's offer was announced, the Political Secretary to the Prime Minister, Ng Pock Too, said he was "somewhat perplexed by the outburst of reaction by some ASEAN

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<sup>139</sup> *Straits Times*, 5 August 1989.

<sup>140</sup> G. Rodan, "Singapore: continuity in change as the new guard's agenda becomes clearer", in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1990*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1990, 313.

<sup>141</sup> M. Richardson, "ASEAN tightens military bonds", *Pacific Defence Reporter*, May 1988, 15-16.

<sup>142</sup> *Straits Times*, 16 January 1989.

countries who seem to have misunderstood Singapore's intentions." All Singapore wanted to do, he said, was to maintain the regional status quo including the American presence, which had given all ASEAN countries the stability and security to grow and prosper in the last 20 years.<sup>143</sup> A Government MP, Mr Peh Chin Hua, said that criticism from "certain groups in some ASEAN countries" could cause confusion and encourage Vietnam and its superpower ally to exploit any differences and eye the region with aggression. "Why should we reject protection from the police, when we know that there are robbers around the corner waiting patiently for the opportunity to strike?", he asked.<sup>144</sup> Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng said that the United States, faced with trade and budget deficits, might withdraw its military presence in Southeast Asia if the region did not help it to stay. This would leave a vacuum which could be filled not only by the Soviets but by "other major powers waiting on the sidelines."<sup>145</sup>

Singapore rejected the argument that its offer to the United States was inconsistent with its support for ASEAN's goal of a ZOPFAN in Southeast Asia. The Chairman of the Government's Parliamentary Committee for Defence and Foreign Affairs said that Singapore and Malaysia had always hosted foreign military forces through, for example, the Five Power Defence Arrangements, and that Singapore's offer was "an extension of such foreign presence - all of which contribute to regional security and stability."<sup>146</sup> Prime Minister Lee

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143 Straits Times, 12 August 1989.

144 Straits Times, 21 August 1989.

145 Sunday Times (Singapore), 13 August 1989.

146 Straits Times, 15 August 1989.

warned that with superpower detente, conflicts between medium and big powers became a higher risk to small countries. The situation in the region would get more complicated as powers like India and Vietnam became able to project their military prowess across great distances.<sup>147</sup> The South China Sea was a particular concern. Lee warned about the risk of conflict if rich resources were discovered there:

I do not think gas and oil are good for zones of peace, freedom, and neutrality. So, until ZOPFAN is guaranteed, I think its wiser to make other arrangements.<sup>148</sup>

Apart from helping to maintain a United States military presence in Southeast Asia and thereby contributing to wider regional stability, Singapore would not have been unmindful of the more direct benefits from its offer for its own security. A formal and well-publicised military link to the United States would add to Singapore's security within the Malay archipelago. As a Malaysian commentator explained, "Any potential aggressor must take due recognition of the possibility of confronting not only the potent war machine of Singapore, but perhaps the United States as well."<sup>149</sup>

While Singapore reacted strongly to criticism of its offer<sup>150</sup>, it was nevertheless careful to balance support for the United States with the need to maintain good relations with its immediate neighbours. As stated earlier, Singapore appears to have downgraded its offer to the United States

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<sup>147</sup> Straits Times, 21 August 1989.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Straits Times, 27 August 1990.

<sup>150</sup> In October 1989, the Straits Times reported the formation of an action group of MPs in the ruling People's Action Party to counter criticism in Malaysia of Singapore's offer. "No self-respecting Singaporean should let such transgression of Singapore's national sovereignty go unchallenged", said the paper. The stance of the action group, said the paper, "...will deter any aggressor from messing around with Singapore." See Straits Times, 3 October 1989.

because of objections from Malaysia and Indonesia (or at least it sought to give this impression). Instead of the new facilities implied in BG Yeo's announcement, by October 1989 Prime Minister Lee was saying that "All we've offered are use of our facilities in former British bases".<sup>151</sup> According to a statement from Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

There will be more use of Singapore's maintenance and repair facilities by US naval vessels and short term visits on a rotational basis of US aircraft to Paya Lebar air base.<sup>152</sup>

This amounted to a "token burden showing" said Lee.<sup>153</sup> Singapore's need to maintain good relations with Malaysia and Indonesia was most publicly demonstrated by Lee's praise of Prime Minister Mahathir and President Suharto in August 1989. Mahathir, Lee said, was "a leader with a grasp of reality... Not everyone in Malaysia has his courage." And President Suharto, according to Lee, was the "most important factor for ASEAN stability."<sup>154</sup> Garry Rodan believes Lee's praise of his counterparts reflected "behind-the-scenes discussions which kept differences with Malaysia and Indonesia [over Singapore's offer] manageable".<sup>155</sup> It is clear that the attitudes of Singapore's neighbours will continue to restrain the island republic's security links with the United States. As Prime Minister Lee explained to reporters after meeting President Suharto in Jakarta in October 1989, "I can tell you there will be no American bases in Singapore."<sup>156</sup>

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151 Straits Times, 10 October 1989.

152 Straits Times, 19 October 1989.

153 Straits Times, 10 October 1989.

154 Straits Times, 21 August 1989.

155 Rodan, op. cit., 315.

156 Straits Times, 7 October 1989.

## The Gulf War

There was also little ambivalence within the Singapore Government about the Gulf War. Some obvious similarities between Kuwait and Singapore, and a desire to encourage a continued United States military presence in the western Pacific, meant strong support from Singapore for the United States in its role as defender of small strategically important states. Singapore strongly condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. "This blatant disregard of the UN charter and other fundamental principles of international law is a threat to the security of small states everywhere", said a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>157</sup> In contrast to Malaysia and Indonesia - who declined invitations to contribute to UN forces in the Gulf - Singapore sent a 35 member armed forces medical team to support the United States led coalition. In addition, United States transport aircraft and warships en route to the Gulf used Singapore for resupply.<sup>158</sup> Lee Hsien Loong said the world was fortunate that the Gulf crisis occurred before the planned cuts in United States military forces. According to Lee, the USO ability to deploy massive forces had safeguarded Saudi Arabi and the Gulf states.<sup>159</sup> As Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said in May 1991:

The recently-concluded Gulf War underlines the importance of having extra-regional friends interested in, and

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<sup>157</sup> Jakarta Post, 3 August 1990.

<sup>158</sup> J. Mohan Malik, *op. cit.*, 47-48.

<sup>159</sup> Straits Times, 5 September 1990.

prepared to commit forces to defend, the stability of the region.<sup>160</sup>

Even in Singapore, however, there were voices that opposed United States actions in the Gulf War. A public opinion poll showed that while non-Malay Singaporeans strongly supported the use of force against Iraq, nearly 60 per cent of Malay Singaporeans disapproved and an even larger proportion of this group said military action was premature.<sup>161</sup> In a Singapore TV forum local Muslims echoed the sentiments of their religious bretheren in Malaysia and Indonesia, saying that "the United States is seen as someone from outside coming in to interfere." Once again, the United States was perceived to be treating Iraq differently from the way it treated Israel. First Deputy Speaker of the Singapore Parliament, Abdullah Tarmugi said "the US appeared to be simply too forthcoming in trying to help Kuwait", whilst not pursuing United Nations Resolution 242, which required Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. In addition, the United States was seen as attacking Iraq too heavily. "Instead of first trying to free Kuwait,...they appear to be wanting to destroy Iraq also," said Abdullah<sup>162</sup>. According to the Acting President of Singapore's Islamic Religious Council:

Since Malay Singaporeans are Muslims and they see the Iraqis as their brothers and sisters in Islam, they feel that it is not justified for Iraqis to be given this kind of treatment.<sup>163</sup>

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160 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 4 May 1991.

161 Richardson, "Gulf War sharpens ASEAN differences", op. cit., 28.

162 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 9 February 1991.

163 Ibid.

Lee Kuan Yew thought that the reaction of Singapore's Muslim community should be taken note of. "I don't expect anything disastrous to happen in Singapore. But I think, nevertheless, it must cause a certain unease", he said.<sup>164</sup> The unease that Lee felt reflects Singapore's longstanding concern that unrest amongst the Islamic community in Malaysia or Indonesia could spill over into Singapore. In this respect, Lee clearly perceived domestic and regional risks for Singapore from the Israel - United States - Singapore connection. Lee said it was crucial that once the Gulf War was resolved, the United States must push for UN security resolutions on the Palestinian problem:

I'm not saying that if you solve Palestine and Gaza there won't be troubles in the Middle East...But at least the Israelis will not be blamed for it, and the Americans for backing the Israelis.

Lee might have added here, "and the Singaporeans for backing the Americans". United States leaders, according to Lee, "know what they have to do" after the war:

I do not know how strong the Jewish lobby [in the United States] will be after the Gulf War is over. If they are so strong that they can thwart a Palestinian settlement, they would have built in all the forces for another big eruption some time down the road. Is that what they want?<sup>165</sup>

Lee Kuan Yew's call for the United States to adopt a consistent and fair approach on the invasion of Kuwait and the Palestinian question was prominently reported in the Singapore press. This served the purpose of signalling both to Singapore's neighbours and to the local Muslim population

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

Singapore's desire not to be identified too closely with United States support for Israel.

#### **Prospects for Singapore-United States relations**

Even though - as its offer of military facilities to the United States and its approach during the Gulf War showed - Singapore will go to far greater lengths than its neighbours to assist the United States, this does not amount to unlimited support. Attitudes towards the United States in Malaysia and Indonesia will continue to limit Singapore's security assistance for the United States, both because of Singapore's need to maintain good government to government relations with its neighbours and because of a fear of provoking a general backlash in these nations that could spill over into Singapore itself.

The need to maintain workable relations with the Islamic community both at home and in neighbouring countries will remain a particular constraint on Singapore's security assistance to the United States. This will be the case for at least as long as the United States is seen by Muslim communities around the world as one of the main obstacles to a Palestinian homeland. The existence of a sizeable Malay/Muslim minority in Singapore, many of whom have relatives in Malaysia, means the Singapore Government must take special notice of discontent amongst the Islamic community in Malaysia. It should also be noted, however, that Malay/Muslim opposition will not stop Singapore providing some degree of practical security support for the United States.

Even in Singapore's case, the United States cannot merely assume long term support in the security field. Just as in Indonesia and Malaysia, Singapore's desire for a US security presence in Southeast Asia does not amount some kind of deeper affinity for the United States. As Wood and Wheeler have pointed out:

US - Singaporean relations do not reflect any emotional commitment, a common commitment to moral or political principles, nor even common security concerns.... Singapore's support for the US reflects its own interests, which are distinct from those of the United States. The US needs to be aware of this attitude because there are many possibilities of conflict in future US-Singaporean relations.<sup>166</sup>

There have been a number of significant bilateral strains in the United States - Singapore relationship in recent years, including Singapore's expulsion of a US diplomat in May 1988 for allegedly inciting political opposition to the PAP Government (the Hendrickson affair), and complaints in the United States Congress about restrictions on press freedom and human rights in Singapore.<sup>167</sup> These strains, plus deeper cultural differences, explain why the Singapore Government had to carefully prepare the way amongst its own population for a formal security arrangement with the United States.

What this means in practice is that the United States needs to be aware of the effect that its broader foreign policy - especially in areas such as human rights - could have on its security relationship with Singapore. The view in Indonesia and Malaysia that the United States must coordinate its overall approach to Southeast Asia to ensure support for

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<sup>166</sup> P.L. Wood, J.W. Wheeler, op. cit., 46.

<sup>167</sup> See BG Lee's comments on these issues, Straits Times 19 May 1989.

its regional security presence also applies in Singapore's case. In the near future, it is hard to see Singapore restricting or repudiating its security agreement with the United States. Nevertheless, irritants in bilateral US-Singapore relations, and the need to take account of anti-United States sentiments in neighbouring countries, will retain the potential to affect the security relationship between the two nations.

#### **Implications for Australia**

Three aspects of the above attitudes towards the United States need to be noted by Australia's security planners.

The first is the contrast between the views of national leaders and general opinion. As the above analysis of reactions to Singapore's offer and United States actions in the Gulf War shows, on matters of international security, national leaders in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore generally appear to support the United States, or at least not to actively oppose it. This results from their common need for trade, aid and investment from the United States and other Western countries, their commitment to regional stability, and their mutual concern to ensure the security of their region against external threats. These reasons were behind, for example, the tacit support of President Suharto and Prime Minister Mahathir for the United States role in the Gulf War,

and their ultimate acceptance of the rotational presence of US ships and aircraft in Singapore.

Singapore's offer and the Gulf War also showed, however, that general opinion in Indonesia and Malaysia is not supportive of the United States and its global and regional security role. In both nations, nationalism and strong religious beliefs produce a resentment of US dominance in security matters. The balance between these factors differ - in Indonesia pride in national achievements and a growing sense that Indonesia is the determining factor in regional affairs has more influence than a less united Islamic movement. In Malaysia, with Islam as the official state religion, Muslim communities are more organised and united, and more capable than their counterparts in Indonesia of pressuring the Government to take a harder line with the United States. The end effect, however, is similar in both countries - the national leadership's support for the United States is not shared by the general community. Hence the large protests by Islamic groups in Malaysia against the United States bombing of Iraq, and the strong resentment in Indonesia at the suggestion that the United States is the key factor in regional stability.

A particular factor that will affect the future attitude of Islamic groups in Indonesia and Malaysia towards the United States is the Palestinian question. The Gulf War revealed the prominence of the Palestinian issue for Muslims in both countries, as well as their belief that the United States applied double standards in its policies towards Iraq and Israel. As the Straits Times said:

The perception that the US has obstructed a settlement of the Palestinian problem because of its alliance with Israel is a source of considerable tension in US relations with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei."<sup>168</sup>

A further complication in this regard, particularly in Malaysia's eyes, is the identification of the United States with the strategic interests of Singapore, "the Israel of Southeast Asia".

The second aspect that should be recognised is that while national leaders generally support the security policies of the United States, this does not mean that the different arms of government have a united approach on this issue. The division between the Foreign Ministry on one side and the armed forces and Defence Ministry on the other is most publicly apparent in Indonesia, although it also appears to be the case in Malaysia. In both countries the Foreign Ministry reflects the nationalism and religious sympathies of the general community. More specific factors, such as the longstanding support of both countries for a ZOPFAN in Southeast Asia and the successful campaign by Indonesia's Foreign Ministry for the chairmanship of the non-aligned movement, are also important. The statement in October 1992 by Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas about the contribution of the United States to regional security is significant, but only because it showed that the US withdrawal from the Philippines allows the Indonesian Foreign Ministry to support both a ZOPFAN and the residual US regional security presence. It would not seem to represent a major change of attitude by Ali Alatas or his ministry. The strong words from Alatas on Singapore's offer and the Gulf War appear to be more

indicative of the Indonesian Foreign Ministry's fundamental view of the United States. In contrast, on the military/defence side in both Indonesia and Malaysia, the long history of bilateral training and other contact with the United States, plus the Cold War legacy of a joint commitment to containing the communist "menace", results in far more sympathy for United States security aims. Hence there was no criticism from the ABRI leadership in Indonesia of Singapore's offer or of United States led attacks on Iraq, and the Defence Ministry in Malaysia provided sufficient contrast to the Foreign Ministry's negative comments on the United States for US officials to be confused as to what the Malaysian Government's real attitude towards their country was. In this context, Australian security officials need to note that the people they have most contact with in Indonesia and Malaysia, ie those in defence and military circles, will have a more positive view of the United States than other sections of the Government or the general community.

It should also be noted that even in defence circles in Indonesia and Malaysia, support for the United States is qualified. In Indonesia, Minister for Defence Murdani criticised the United States for its failure to coordinate its defence and foreign policies towards Southeast Asia. The United States Congress then proved Murdani's point when, at the same time as the Pentagon was seeking access for its naval vessels to Surabaya, it withdrew military training aid from Indonesia. In Malaysia, Minister for Defence Dato' Najib warned the United States it could earn the antipathy of the region with the wrong approach. These reservations about the

United States on the part of defence and military circles in Indonesia and Malaysia need to be appreciated just as much as their statements of support for the US regional security presence.

The third aspect that needs to be appreciated is that all three nations - Singapore included - face significant political constraints on the practical assistance they can provide to help the United States retain a security presence in Southeast Asia. While the leaders of Malaysia and Indonesia wish this presence to remain, they can offer only limited military support themselves. Ultimately this is because the general community in their respective nations, for reasons of religion and nationalism described above, does not share their support for United States security policies. As Noordin Sopiee pointed out, there was opposition in Malaysia right across the political and community spectrum to the Singapore offer. Datuk Abdullah Badawi's remark that it would be politically unacceptable to suggest that the US presence in Singapore enhanced Malaysia's security is very revealing of the domestic pressures on the Malaysian leadership. Even a relatively minor agreement between Malaysia and the United States for low level joint exercises had to be kept secret until after the Cold War. Domestic sensitivities also meant that Lumut dockyard had to be privatised and distanced from the Government before minor repair and servicing work for US naval vessels could be permitted. The Lumut agreement appears to be about as far as the Malaysian Government will go in the security field with the United States. While an important

political step, its strategic value to the United States is small.

In Indonesia, Air Vice Marshall Rusdy's criticism of the withdrawal of IMET assistance by the United States revealed the underlying attitudes which make significant bilateral security cooperation difficult to achieve. While Indonesia, through PT Pal, has also signed a repair and servicing agreement with the US Navy covering the use of Surabaya, there have clearly been delays in implementing the agreement. Indonesia seems less willing than Malaysia to be seen cooperating with the United States in such a public way as the repair of US warships in Indonesian ports. This appears to be due to Indonesia's greater nationalism, its more strident advocacy of a "free and independent" foreign policy, and the greater confidence that it has in its own external security compared to Malaysia.

In Singapore's case, while it has agreed to the rotational presence of US naval vessels and a small number of fighter aircraft on its territory, this does not amount to major support in military terms for the United States. Compared with the former US bases in the Philippines, this is of token assistance only. Singapore is prevented from offering greater assistance by attitudes in Malaysia and Indonesia. In particular Singapore has to judge carefully the attitude of the Islamic community in neighbouring countries to its ties with the United States to avoid causing instability which might then spill over into Singapore itself. As Noordin Sophe said, the reaction in these nations to Singapore's 1989 offer set parameters on the island republic's security

cooperation with the United States. Even the transfer of a small logistics unit of the US Seventh Fleet from Subic Bay to Singapore, announced in January 1992, caused "anxiety" on the part of Singapore's Malay neighbours.<sup>169</sup>

### **Australia, the region and the United States**

Australia's Foreign Minister, Senator Evans, said that with the end of the Cold War:

governments [in the Asia-Pacific] have become if anything more conscious of the benefits of a US strategic presence in the region, in the time-honoured manner of appreciating someone's company only when he or she is about to leave. A benign US presence...is now seen to be in the interests of almost everyone.<sup>170</sup>

As the above analysis shows, this is a correct assessment of the attitude of the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore towards the United States. Australia's key policy aim of keeping the United States strategically engaged in our region is shared by national decision makers in these countries. As the New Straits Times commented in early 1992:

Accepting a US military presence is a farsighted decision by ASEAN leaders. It shows that their idea of security is not conservative or narrow. The concept itself is broader than military concerns.<sup>171</sup>

Senator Evans' summary of attitudes towards the United States, however, does not reveal the division between government and general opinion in nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia, or

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<sup>169</sup> Sree Kumar, "Singapore 1991, towards new horizons", Southeast Asian Affairs 1992, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1992, 296.

<sup>170</sup> Evans and Grant, op. cit., 99.

<sup>171</sup> New Straits Times, 21 January 1992.

the fact that government opinion itself is divided in these countries - especially between Defence and Foreign Ministries. Nor does it indicate the considerable constraints on the cooperation that Indonesia, Malaysia and even Singapore can offer to retain "a benign US presence" in Southeast Asia. These other aspects of regional attitudes and policies towards the United States also need to be recognised by Australia's security planners.

In addition, it cannot automatically be assumed that over the longer term the national leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore will continue to support the United States and its strategic presence in the region. In Australia's case, as Senator Evans has pointed out, there is a strong national commitment to the United States relationship:

Ultimately, it is because Australians and Americans believe in the same things - democracy, freedom and human rights - that our alliance relationship will endure, will adapt and will go on contributing to the building of a safer and fairer world.<sup>172</sup>

As the above study suggests, however, for Indonesia, Malaysia and even - as Wood and Wheeler point out - for Singapore, there is no similar foundation of shared ideals with the United States. This applies as much to national leaders as it does to the general community. To the extent that they espouse similar concepts to the United States, such as human rights, they see them in different terms. The leaders of these nations support the United States and its security policies essentially because of their need for economic and regional security. These are motives of self-interest, which

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<sup>172</sup> Evans and Grant, *op. cit.*, 308.

are not underwritten by common ideals. This is even more so with the end of the Cold War, because the one common ideal they did share with the United States - a commitment to anti-communism - has become increasingly less relevant. This is true even for nations in Southeast Asia, since the communist regimes which survive in their part of the world have abandoned the idea of exporting their ideology.

Far from sharing a common belief in 'democracy, freedom and human rights', these concepts are in fact causes of tension between the United States and Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Issues such as the Hendrickson affair in Singapore, objections in the United States Congress to Malaysian handling of Indo-Chinese refugees, and US criticism of Indonesia's human rights record, will occur from time to time. Given the propensity of the United States to harp on issues such as human rights and its failure more broadly to coordinate its defence and foreign policies towards Southeast Asia, this could well be an area of increasing friction. This could affect the extent to which a US security role in Southeast Asia is accepted in the three countries. The United States withdrawal of IMET from Indonesia and Malaysia is a case in point. As the chief of the US Pacific Command, Admiral Charles Larson, said, the loss of IMET in Indonesia and Malaysia is having "a serious adverse effect on our ability to establish links...with the future military leaders of these countries".<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 3 June 1993. It should be noted that the implications for Australia of the US withdrawal of IMET from Indonesia are mixed. The action of the United States does not assist Australia's aim of maintaining a US strategic presence in Southeast Asia. It also reduces the support for the United States amongst a key group in the Indonesian system. On the other hand, it improves general perceptions of Australia in Indonesia because this country did not (at least officially) contemplate taking similar action. In addition, it opens the prospect that the advanced training for ABRI personnel offered

Apart from specific bilateral issues, there is more general uneasiness in Malaysia and Indonesia about US dominance of the "New World Order"; there is the apparent alignment of the United States with Singapore which places it in the middle of the testy Malaysia/Singapore relationship; and there is the pressure of domestic constituencies, especially on the leadership of Indonesia and Malaysia, which already constrains security cooperation with the United States.

This suggests that despite current concerns about the effect of a reduced US strategic presence, the support of the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia and perhaps also Singapore over the longer term for the retention of this presence cannot be guaranteed. Much will depend on perceptions of external powers such as China and Japan. Chapter One noted that concern over China's ambitions might increase as that nation's "four modernisations" proceed. The uneasiness in the region about the prospect of Japan becoming a major Asia-Pacific military power has also been noted. If the future policies of China and Japan confirm such fears, regional leaders would retain a strong interest in supporting the United States and in assisting its regional security presence.

Another scenario which could increase interest in a US strategic presence is renewed tension within ASEAN or between ASEAN and Indo-China. Insurance against intra-ASEAN conflict was an unstated motive for Singapore's offer to the United States. The mechanisms and procedures for handling intra-ASEAN disputes, however, are well developed and practised, and

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under IMET could be replaced by Australia. As the Age reported, "Asked where they would go instead, Air Vice-Marshal Rusdy said: 'We have Australia...the possibility is already open.'" See The Age, 1 July 1992.

ASEAN as a group is committed to building links with Indo-China.

The start of this chapter noted that Australia needs to be aware of the complexity of attitudes towards the United States in Southeast Asia if it is to develop a sense of "strategic community" with its northern neighbours whilst maintaining its US alliance. As the above study shows, it is not enough to assume that a US strategic presence will automatically be accepted in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore - particularly over the longer term. The United States relationship is a difficult domestic issue for the leaders of Indonesia and Malaysia, and a difficult regional issue for Singapore. The leaders of all three countries support a US strategic presence in Southeast Asia, but they do so for reasons of self-interest, not because of a longer term commitment to shared ideals.

This clearly has implications for how Australia's US alliance will be seen by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. In May 1991, Prime Minister Hawke remarked that "Our neighbours have long recognised that our alliance with the US contributes to regional security...We hope to reinforce that perception."<sup>174</sup> At present, given concerns about a power vacuum and the future policies of China and Japan, it follows that Australia's military links with the United States have some added attraction to regional leaders as a means of retaining a US strategic interest and presence in this part of the world. To assist continued acceptance of Australia's links with the United States, Australia needs to avoid actions

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174 Ibid., 12.

which might cause regional leaders to criticise these links for domestic political reasons. In this context, some recent examples of Australian actions or proposals regarding the United States in the security field are considered below.

### **Australia and the Gulf War**

Chapter One noted that Prime Minister Hawke's personal links with United States President Bush during the 1990/91 Gulf War were criticised in Indonesia. The implication was that Hawke attached more importance to telephone calls from the American President than he did to ties with Indonesia and other countries in Australia's immediate region. J. Mohan Malik, in The Gulf War : Australia's Role and Asian-Pacific Responses, summed up Southeast Asian reactions to Australia's involvement in this way:

in the initial stages of the crisis, Canberra's prompt dispatch of warships following the US and British lead had the potential to undermine Australian attempts to project itself as an independent actor in the region.<sup>175</sup>

The Indonesian Foreign Ministry told Malik "there were...strong reactions towards the participation of Australia...by certain Asian countries".<sup>176</sup> According to Malik, Canberra's failure to consult with its Southeast Asian neighbours before agreeing to send forces to the Gulf wasted

an excellent opportunity to demonstrate to its neighbours Australia's commitment to developing 'habits of dialogue and cooperation' and a 'shared sense of strategic and security interests' in the region.<sup>177</sup>

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175 J. Mohan Malik, op. cit., 56.

176 Ibid., 37.

177 Ibid., 49.

The failure to consult its Southeast Asian neighbours before Australia agreed to commit forces to US led operations in the Gulf War, however, does not indicate a lack of commitment to security links with Southeast Asia. Rather, it suggests that the full range of attitudes towards the United States in Southeast Asia were not fully taken into account. Prime Minister Hawke's opinion in May 1991 was that:

Australia's view, and a view that I believe is widely shared within the region, is that a key to maintaining a stable security system in Asia, and providing the foundation of security as the region evolves, is the continued strategic engagement of the United States in the western Pacific.<sup>178</sup>

As stated above, this type of generalisation, whilst correct as a broad summary, masks the complexity of the issue for our Southeast Asian neighbours. Of particular importance in the case of the Gulf War, it ignores the importance of religion, and particularly events in the Middle East, in creating antipathy towards the United States amongst the general population in Indonesia and Malaysia. Had Australia's leaders appreciated the complexity of views towards the United States in Southeast Asia, and particularly the significance of the Middle East link, perhaps a higher priority would have been given, as Malik suggests, to prior explanation to regional nations of Australia's contribution to military operations in the Gulf.

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178 R.J. Hawke, *op. cit.* 7.

### Liberal/National Party defence policy

This chapter has noted the constraints on the level of security cooperation that Indonesia, Malaysia and even Singapore are prepared to engage in with the United States. Malaysia and Indonesia are prepared to offer minor access agreements at most. Even the US-Singapore agreement is arguably of relatively little military significance. It is therefore conceivable that in order to maintain key elements of a forward military presence in the western Pacific, the United States may look more to Australia. In releasing its alternative defence policy in October 1992, the Liberal/National Party Coalition seemed to anticipate this type of request from the United States. The Liberal/National Party's A Strong Australia document states:

The Coalition will...invite the United States to make greater use of Australian facilities at Darwin and Fremantle....We will invite the United States to evaluate Darwin as a potential site for the prepositioning of equipment. In addition, the Coalition will invite the United States to consider locating some aircraft at Darwin or elsewhere in the North on rotational secondments....a Coalition Government will be prepared to grant increased port access to compensate for the loss of the other facilities in the Asia-Pacific if the United States so requests.<sup>179</sup>

In the light of Singapore's experience with its offer of military facilities to the United States, clearly any Australian Government presented with such a proposal would need to consider carefully how our Southeast Asian neighbours would react. It may be that there would be less of an adverse reaction in Australia's case, given that this nation is

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<sup>179</sup> Federal Liberal Party/National Party Coalition, op. cit., 35.

already seen as a close ally of the United States, is not a signatory to the ZOPFAN ideal, and is not located in the middle of the Malay archipelago. Nevertheless, the reactions in Indonesia and Malaysia to Singapore's offer, as well as to the United States role in the Gulf War, suggest that groups in both countries - including the foreign ministries and the Islamic community - would oppose any large increase in the US military presence in Australia. As with the case of Malaysia's criticism of US led actions in the Gulf War, the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia may feel compelled because of domestic pressure to publicly criticise such a proposal. Singapore would be unlikely to object, unless it felt constrained to do so to avoid being seen as out of step with its Malay neighbours.

The leaders of Indonesia and Malaysia eventually agreed not to actively oppose Singapore's proposal provided no United States base was set up in the island republic. In this respect, the references in the Coalition proposal to United States use of "Australian facilities" and to "rotational secondments" of US aircraft (rather than a permanent presence or base) are well chosen. On the other hand, regional nations would query what was meant by the use of Darwin "as a site for the prepositioning of equipment". This may cause particular problems in Indonesia because of the proximity of a United States facility in Darwin to Indonesian territory, especially its proximity to East Timor. If this involved merely the type of logistics facility set up by the United States in Singapore, objections would be unlikely. If it was more than this, however, Australia would need to be wary of Indonesia's

reaction. Whatever the precise nature of such a proposal, Australia should heed one of the main lessons of the Singapore offer - the importance of prior consultation. Singapore did not do this, and the reaction in Malaysia and Indonesia, including in official circles, was all the more hostile as a result.

#### **Presentation of Australia's US alliance**

The perceptions of the United States described above have implications for how Australia should present its US alliance to the region. Once again, Australia needs to be conscious of the range of attitudes towards the United States in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The key requirement is that Australia should not be seen to place the interests of the United States ahead of its links with the region. The official defence white paper The Defence of Australia 1987 did not strike the right balance in this respect. The document stated that Australia's alliance arrangements, "particularly those with the United States...emphasise Australia's membership of the Western strategic community".<sup>180</sup> As stated above, Indonesia, Malaysia and even Singapore do not have a commitment to "Western" values. Indeed, perceived attempts to impose Western values on these countries in areas such as human rights are a significant source of friction. As the Australian reported in 1992:

some Indonesian military officials remain critical of the Government's 1987 White Paper on Defence because it emphasised Australia was part of the western community

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180 Department of Defence, op. cit., 1.

and therefore did not answer the strategic needs of the region.<sup>181</sup>

It was not the intention of The Defence of Australia 1987 - the central message of which was that Australia was not strategically dependent on the United States - to suggest that Australia should subvert the region's needs to those of United States or "the West". But the language used to describe Australia's alliance conveyed this impression.

Another example of the difficulties involved in presenting Australia's US alliance to the region was contained in the Liberal/National Party's A Strong Australia document. Despite calling for greater defence cooperation with Southeast Asia, the document also had a flavour of increased military dependence on the United States. As the leader of the Liberal/National Coalition, John Hewson, noted in the introduction, "A Strong Australia...promotes closer security cooperation under ANZUS with the United States."<sup>182</sup> In releasing the document, the Opposition defence spokesman, Alexander Downer, said "I have made it perfectly clear I would like to see a much greater presence by the US in Australia".<sup>183</sup> The type of increased United States military presence the Federal Opposition had in mind for Australia - and the potential for an adverse regional reaction - is described above. With regard to A Strong Australia itself, however, it is clear from the above study that nations such as

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<sup>181</sup> Australian, 6 August 1992. While Australia's ties with the United States and the West in general still attract some criticism in Indonesia, in the United States' view, Australia's ties with Southeast Asia assist broader US interests. As United States Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney said in May 1992, "Australia's role in promoting defense and security co-operation with Southeast Asian nations will continue to be a force for peace and stability in the years ahead". (United States Information Service, Address by Secretary of Defense Cheney at Australian Defence Association Symposium 2 May 1992)

<sup>182</sup> Federal Liberal Party/National Party Coalition, op. cit., Introduction.

<sup>183</sup> Age, 19 October 1992.

Indonesia and Malaysia would find it difficult to support its emphasis on further strengthening Australia's US alliance. Indonesia and Malaysia, and even Singapore, are uncomfortable - for cultural, political and religious reasons - with fervent expressions of support from Australia for the United States. As the Age commented:

they seek more evidence that Australia really can cut the umbilical cord with the great and powerful ally and carve out a niche in Asia...the call for an increased US presence tends to erode Australia's proclaimed self-reliance and has overtures of a return to the old idea of 'forward defence' in which Australia's military strategy depended on allies.<sup>184</sup>

Australia's alliance with the United States needs to be placed in its proper context for the benefit of regional audiences. It needs to be emphasised that the alliance, whilst important, is only one element in Australia's defence policy, and that it complements the high priority given to cooperation with regional nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

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184 Ibid.

### Chapter 3

## Perceptions of Australia

1989-1992

This chapter looks at the strategic perceptions from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore that are of most interest to Australia's security planners - perceptions of Australia itself. More space is devoted in the chapter to Indonesia's perceptions of Australia than those of Malaysia and Singapore. The perceptions of the latter two countries are important, but as Indonesia's ambassador to Australia, Sabam Siagian, stated, "To be part of the Asia-Pacific, the test case is whether Australia can establish a working relationship with this not unimportant neighbour, Indonesia."<sup>1</sup>

The chapter describes both general perceptions of Australia as well as more specific views of Australia's security policies. General perceptions provide a guide to the state of bilateral relations between Australia and the region. In addition, general perceptions can affect the level of security cooperation Australia has with its neighbours. As Foreign Minister Evans pointed out in Australia's Regional Security:

Australia continues to have something of an image problem in Southeast Asia....we are seen in a number of quarters as being of declining relative importance, tainted with racism, with an inefficient and lagging economy, and major industrial relations problems. That some of this image lacks substance is less important than the fact

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<sup>1</sup> New Straits Times, 26 June 1992.

that it is widely held. It impinges on many of our interests, not least our security interests.<sup>2</sup>

Specific perceptions of Australia's security policies are of obvious importance to the future development of these policies. For all three nations, perceptions of Australia's defence cooperation and overall regional security approach are considered. Perceptions of Australia's military posture, however, are only examined in the case of Indonesia. Since Malaysia and Singapore are not immediate neighbours of Australia, they have few comments to offer on this aspect of our security approach.

### Indonesia's view of Australia

#### General perceptions

The starting point for contemporary Indonesian perceptions of Australia is Australia's support for Indonesian attempts to gain independence following the Second World War. A small legacy of goodwill towards Australia remains amongst the generation of Indonesian leaders and opinion makers that experienced the independence struggle. During Prime Minister Keating's visit to Indonesia in April 1992, President Suharto praised Australia's role in helping Indonesia secure its independence, referring in particular to action by Australian trade unions which prevented Dutch vessels transporting military equipment to Indonesia.<sup>3</sup> In September 1991, Sabam

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<sup>2</sup> Evans, *Australia's Regional Security*, op. cit., 36.

<sup>3</sup> *The Age*, 22 April 1992.

Siagian said that he liked to remind people of the important role Australia played between 1946 and 1950:

when there were moments when Indonesians were seized with serious doubt whether the infant Republic of Indonesia will survive...Australia took the risk...to clearly support Indonesia's position instead of playing the role of an impartial mediator.<sup>4</sup>

Australia's attitude in the 1950s and 1960s to the incorporation of West Irian into Indonesia is not remembered in such a positive light. Jusuf Wanandi, chairman of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, noted that:

Prime Minister Menzies' views on Indonesia were very much influenced by those of the Western bloc, led by the US, that saw Indonesia moving into the embrace of the communist bloc.<sup>5</sup>

According to an Indonesian academic, Budiono Kusumohamidjojo, "Australia's policy in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict concerning 'Irian Barat' was...frustrating for the Indonesian Government."<sup>6</sup> As Sabam Siagian said:

there were moments...when we...had our genuine doubts whether Australia was indeed friendly towards us. Such a perception was formed because throughout the 1950s Australia experienced a policy switch and supported the status quo in...West New Guinea.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Australia's position on West Irian is recalled with more displeasure than this nation's role in Confrontation in the mid-1960s. The fact that Australian and Indonesian

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4 Sabam Siagian, Address to National Press Club, Canberra, 18 September 1991, 12.

5 Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XX, no. 2, second quarter 1992, 158.

6 Budiono Kusumohamidjojo, "The Indonesia - Australia relationship: problems between unfamiliar neighbours", Australian Outlook, vol.40, no.3, December 1986, 144.

7 Siagian, op. cit., 12.

troops clashed over the formation of Malaysia is remembered and commented on publicly in Indonesia. In 1992, Jusuf Wanandi reminded readers of The Indonesian Quarterly that "The 'konfrontasi' with Malaysia led to a direct confrontation between Indonesian and Australian troops in the jungles of Kalimantan".<sup>8</sup> But Confrontation did not involve Australian opposition to the incorporation of territory which Indonesia regarded as rightfully its own, as in the case of West Irian.

There remains considerable resentment in Indonesia, however, over Australia's perceived position on the East Timor issue. Australia is seen as having a two-faced approach on the question of Indonesia's annexation of the former Portuguese colony in 1975. According to David Jenkins, many Indonesians:

not only believed (no doubt correctly) that Gough Whitlam had all but given them the nod to take over the territory but felt that they were doing Australia a favour in the process, removing any possibility of a 'Cuba on the doorstep.'<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the East Timor question is behind the acerbic view many prominent Indonesians have of the Australian media. In Indonesia's opinion, the Australian media's attitude reflects a general ignorance about our surrounding region. As Wanandi has said:

The accusations made by the Australian mass media on human rights violations in East Timor, as well as the harsh comments on the role of the military and the questions of democracy in general, were negatively received in Indonesia. Australia...was seen as a racist country, arrogant and moralistic in imposing its values to other nations, and could never become part of Asia

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<sup>8</sup> Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", op. cit., 158.

<sup>9</sup> David Jenkins, "Indonesia: Government attitudes towards the domestic and foreign media", Australian Outlook, vol. 40, no. 3, December 1986, 157-158.

because of its predominant orientation towards England, USA and the West.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of East Timor, the role of Radio Australia has attracted specific criticism in Indonesia. As Ikrar Nusa Bhakti said in The Indonesian Quarterly in 1992:

The Australian media has conducted a vendetta against Indonesia since the death of five Australian journalists...in Balibo, East Timor....More importantly, Radio Australia provides news broadcasts in Indonesian which occasionally present coverage of political disturbances in various parts of Indonesia. This situation has been an enduring source of irritation to security planners in Jakarta and security apparatus [sic] in various parts of the country who do not want such incidents publicised.<sup>11</sup>

David Jenkins wrote in 1986 that "Ten years after the event the alleged shortcomings of the media still rankle with those Indonesian officers who served in Timor."<sup>12</sup> He added that there was also exasperation at a political level with the emphasis of the Australian media not only on East Timor but on the difficulties Indonesia faced in developing Irian Jaya. When questioned again on these subjects in the mid-1980s, Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja stated bluntly, "We refuse...to be seen as appendages of Irian Jaya and East Timor."<sup>13</sup> These perceptions of the Australian media supported the view of many Indonesians that Australia was a land of bossy, self-appointed regional experts. Before his visit to Australia in 1985, Mochtar said that Indonesians never had the chance to present their own point of view: "We felt that with

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10 Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", op. cit., 158-159.

11 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, "Facing the 21st century: trends in Australia's relations with Indonesia," The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XX, no. 2, second quarter 1992, 147.

12 Jenkins, op. cit., 157.

13 Ibid., 157.

Australia being so noisy about it, we would let you have your say."<sup>14</sup>

The publication in April 1986 of David Jenkins' article on the business interests of President Suharto's family confirmed for Indonesia the problems that the Australian media could cause. At a time when bilateral difficulties caused by the East Timor question appeared to be declining, the Jenkins affair caused a serious set-back in Australia-Indonesia relations. It is an important part of the background to current Indonesian perceptions of Australia. Writing shortly after the Jenkins affair, Budiono Kusumohamidjojo referred to the Indonesian reaction, including that of General Murdani, then ABRI commander:

General Murdani belongs to those who represent a harder stance against Australia, and the effect of the Jenkins article has strengthened their position.<sup>15</sup>

Indonesian respect for the Australian Government also suffered from this incident because of the damage done to Indonesia-Australia relations by a single newspaper article. According to Kusumohamidjojo:

For most Indonesians, a government which is not in a position to prevent individuals harming its national interests must be a rather weak and incompetent government.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, however, especially since 1989, there has been a marked improvement in the Australia-Indonesia relationship. David Jenkins felt able to comment in July 1991 that:

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<sup>14</sup> Kusumohamidjojo, *op. cit.*, 143.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

Australia-Indonesia relations seem to be on the up and up. We may irritate one another from time to time. But both sides seem to agree that the other is not unimportant.<sup>17</sup>

The turning point in the relationship was the visit to Australia in March 1989 by Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. According to one Indonesian commentator, this "showed Indonesia's goodwill to 'normalise' Australia-Indonesia relations after the ...completely unprovoked ... (1986) Sydney Morning Herald incident".<sup>18</sup> In July 1989, General Try Sutrisno made the first visit to Australia by the head of the Indonesian Armed Forces since 1972. As the Indonesian Observer said, "Indonesia's number one military man's stature - and his widely-talked about prospects beyond 1993 - has imbued the visit with added importance."<sup>19</sup>

The signing of the Timor Gap agreement in October 1989 helped improve Indonesia's perception of the benefits of good relations with Australia. Apart from settling the boundary between Australia and East Timor, it provided for joint oil and gas exploration in the Timor Sea. As Foreign Minister Alatas said, "this agreement has once again proven that Australia and Indonesia are really serious in improving their relations."<sup>20</sup> Indonesia's Director General of Oil and Gas, Suijitno Padmosukismo, said that exploitation of the oil and natural gas resources was in line with efforts to raise Indonesia's overall national resilience and was in accordance

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17 Sydney Morning Herald, 12 July 1991.

18 A. Hasnan Habib, "Australia - Indonesia Relations: the politico-defence dimension", in D. Ball & H. Wilson (eds), Strange Neighbours, the Australia - Indonesia Relationship, Sydney, 1991, 177.

19 Indonesian Observer, 12 July 1989.

20 Jakarta Post, 28 October 1989.

with the archipelagic concept.<sup>21</sup> In addition, former Foreign Minister Mochtar said that seen from the political aspect the Timor Gap agreement consolidated the defacto recognition which Australia had previously given on the integration of East Timor into Indonesian territory.<sup>22</sup>

After a steady improvement in relations between 1989 and 1992, it was the visit to Jakarta in April 1992 by Australia's new Prime Minister, Paul Keating, that for Indonesia signalled the start of a new era in bilateral ties. The visit was seen in Indonesia as evidence that with Keating's accession Australia was now serious about "enmeshment with Asia".

Angkatan Bersenjata, the official newspaper of the Indonesian Armed Forces, commented in an editorial titled "New freshness in RI-Australia relations" that:

Being young, PM Keating's political views differ from his predecessors who gave a priority to relations with fellow industrialised countries in the North. Keating wants to make Australia, which is located in Asia, a part of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>23</sup>

Keating's support for the aim of an Australian republic and his "anti-colonial" statements helped the perception of a new, more independent direction in Australian foreign policy.

Sabam Siagian commented that:

The foreign policy speech [in which Keating criticised Australia's 'nostalgic, Menzian links' to Great Britain] is...a proclamation of Australia's intention to...conduct an independent and active foreign policy...The desire of Australia to play a more genuine and independent role in the Asia-Pacific...is being welcomed in Indonesia and throughout the region.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Antara, 12 February 1990/B.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Angkatan Bersenjata, 25 April 1992.

<sup>24</sup> ABC Radio National, Indian Pacific, 11 April 1992.

The Jakarta daily, Suara Pembuaran said:

His statement that Australia would soon become a republic indicated that the time had come for this country to release itself from its dependence on the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, and come closer to Asia-Pacific countries instead. PM Keating even said that Australia should preferably be regarded as an Asian country.<sup>25</sup>

Keating's visit was of particular importance in the context of the East Timor issue. Coming soon after tension over events in East Timor again threatened Australia-Indonesia relations in November 1991, his visit produced a perception in Indonesia that at last there was an Australian leadership determined not to let the issue dominate the overall relationship. As Daniel Setyawan, editor of the Indonesian Quarterly, said:

Prime Minister Keating's three day visit is indeed strategically important. It is no secret that Indonesia-Australia bilateral relations always ebb and flow and recently reached a low point following the Dili incident of November 12 last year...Keating's visit reveals the strategic importance that Australia places on Indonesia in its foreign policy and makes clear Australian determination to have better relations with its Asian neighbours.<sup>26</sup>

Keating was compared favourably with his predecessor, Bob Hawke, who was seen as bowing to domestic political pressure when he delayed a planned visit to Indonesia at the end of 1991. Ikrar Nusa Bhakti noted that Hawke's attitude suggested to Indonesia that the former Prime Minister's statements about linking Australia more closely to Asia were merely rhetoric:

the then Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke intended to visit Indonesia last December. However, he delayed his visit because of the problem Indonesia had in Dili (Santa Cruz massacre)...Bob Hawke came to Indonesia in

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<sup>25</sup> Suara Pembuaran, 27 April 1992.

<sup>26</sup> The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xx, no. 2, second quarter, 1992, 128.

1983...and had never since visited Indonesia. In doing so he seemed to show that Indonesia was not important to Australia. Even though he always said that Australians should change their attitude towards Asia, he himself established a perception that the US was still Australia's important ally and protector.<sup>27</sup>

It was only with Keating's visit - and his espousal of republican ideals - that Indonesia began to accept that Australia was serious about the priority it gave to links with Asia. Keating was seen in Indonesia as a new breed of Prime Minister ready to support Senator Evans' push for comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia. According to Ikrar Nusa Bhaktri:

A combination between Paul Keating as Prime Minister and Senator Gareth Evans as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade...will enhance Australia's relations with Asia.<sup>28</sup>

Events later in 1992 reinforced the perception that Australia would not allow domestic pressure on East Timor to dictate the state of relations with Indonesia. When the United States House of Representatives voted in June 1992 to discontinue military aid to Indonesia because of the November 1991 East Timor killings, Australia did not take similar action. In contrast to the United States, Australia did not hold the Indonesian government responsible for the actions of its military units in East Timor. Hence Australia saw no need to suspend or cut back security co-operation with the Indonesian government. Angkatan Bersenjata quoted with approval that "Senator Gareth Evans, who has a deep understanding of this matter, has expressed regret over the US decision to discontinue the aid."<sup>29</sup> As the Sydney Morning

27 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, op. cit., 152-153.

28 Ibid., 152-153.

29 Angkatan Bersenjata, 7 July 1992.

Herald reported, Australia "might be secretly pleased...if we come out looking sweeter than the Americans."<sup>30</sup>

Compared to the mid-1980s, Indonesia's general perceptions of Australia had improved considerably by the end of 1992. It should be noted, however, that Indonesia's more positive view related to the Australian Government's approach. There was a belief in Indonesia that general community attitudes in Australia had been slower to change. As Jusuf Wanandi remarked:

Generally speaking, racial sentiments and the feeling of superiority of the white people are still widespread among (Australia's) people. Therefore, the feeling that its political and economic systems are superior is quite pronounced. The leaders have made efforts to change this, either through education, immigration policy, and appreciation of foreign cultures. However, this policy has not received bi-partisan support. Australia is still very much oriented toward Europe, England in particular, and the United States, although geographically, geographically and economically it is very much part of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from a belief that Australians still have a superior, racist attitude towards their Asian neighbours, there is also a perception in Indonesia that the Australian public sees it as a military threat. Again, Indonesia contrasts the public attitude with that of the Government and bureaucracy. Ikrar Nusa Bhakti referred to an appearance by the then vice-chief of the Australian Defence Force, Vice-Admiral Beaumont, before an Australian parliamentary committee, where Admiral Beaumont dismissed fears that Indonesia was a threat to Australia:

Actually, this is not his personal opinion but that of the Australian Department of Defence. This opinion is

<sup>30</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, 29 June 1992.

<sup>31</sup> Jusuf Wanandi, *op. cit.*, 160.

quite different from the opinion of the majority of Australians.<sup>32</sup>

Jusuf Wanandi had a similar perception. Australia, he said:

feels quite insecure towards Indonesia...Indonesia is seen as an aggressive and expansionist country. However, the Australian defence establishment recognises that Indonesia does not have any intention or capability to invade Australia...The Australian elite seems to be of the opinion that Indonesia poses a threat to Australia only if instability develops inside Indonesia which would allow its foreign policy to become aggressive as experienced during the Soekarno era.<sup>33</sup>

The deputy chairman of Indonesia's parliamentary commission on Foreign affairs, Defence and Information, Theo Sambuaga, said the Australian Government:

has to explain to its people that there's nothing to worry about. It should increase the flow of information to Australian society about the level of Indonesia's development in military capacity, that the level is still far from enough compared with Indonesia's geography and its needs for its own defence.<sup>34</sup>

While Australia's Minister for Defence, Senator Ray, believed "there's a misconception in Indonesia, that most Australians regard Indonesia as some sort of a threat"<sup>35</sup>, Prime Minister Keating seemed to accept the need to educate the wider Australian community about Indonesia. "Too many Australians", he said, "still have an image of Indonesia as a poor and backward country which is somehow threatening to Australia's interests."<sup>36</sup>

Hence Indonesia's general perceptions of Australia continue to be a mixture of positive and negative impressions.

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32 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, op. cit., 153.

33 Jusuf Wanandi, op. cit. 160.

34 Canberra Times, 28 April 1991.

35 Ibid.

36 Paul Keating, Address to 'Into Asia' Trade and Investment Convention, Perth, 17 November 1992, 2.

While the more positive view of the Australian Government in recent years is of considerable benefit for bilateral ties, the negative impressions Indonesia has of the general Australian community, especially the media, continue to act as a constraint on the overall relationship.

### Perceptions of Australia's security approach

#### *Australia's military posture*

In 1986 the Australian correspondent for *Kompas*, Savitri Scherer, argued that Paul Dibb's Review of Australia's defence capabilities (the forerunner of Australia's official defence white paper, The Defence of Australia 1987) could contribute significantly to better Australia-Indonesia relations. Scherer compared the approach in the Dibb Review with that of Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey in The Tyranny of Distance. Dibb, according to Scherer:

approaches Australia's distance from the rest of the world using an opposite frame of mind to that of Blainey. Through describing the lengthy distance of Australia from Great Britain, Blainey explained and justified the Australian consciousness of being culturally marginal. In Blainey's framework distance has helped cripple Australia's ability to realise fully its own cultural potential. Dibb, on the other hand, argues that the geographical distance between Australia and the US-British powers should not deter Australians from developing the capability to defend the region by using their own resources. Such a belief in Australia's own capability to defend its own region is a revolutionary perception for Australians....While the Blainey solution to conquering the tyranny of distance leads Australians to despair at their isolation, making them xenophobic towards their neighbours, Dibb's approach provides Australians with a basis for feeling secure in their environment. A tangible feeling of security would be an

important start towards decreasing the strain in the Australian-Indonesian relationship.<sup>37</sup>

Scherer's positive view of the Dobb Review suggested that the policy of defence self-reliance set out in The Defence of Australia 1987 would be readily accepted in Indonesia. By 1989, however, it was apparent that there was far from uniform acceptance in Indonesia of Australia's new defence approach. Indeed, support appeared to be confined to a narrow group of senior ABRI and Defence Ministry officials. As with Indonesia's perceptions of the United States, public material from the years 1989 to 1992 reveals a clear division between the attitude of ABRI and the Defence Ministry on the one hand and other parts of government and society, including the Foreign Ministry, on the other.

In May 1989, a former Indonesian Ambassador to the United States, Lt Gen Hasnan Habib, stated in an address at the Australian National University (ANU) that Australia's "hawkish military force in being is obviously out of place and may cause misgivings as to the real motivation and intention of Australia." The Dobb Review and The Defence of Australia 1987, Habib said, had only raised the possibility of limited military harassment, and to build up a military force capable of striking beyond Australia's area of direct military interest to meet that low level threat "is an over reaction...it gives the impression of an aggressive military doctrine."<sup>38</sup> Minister for Defence Murdani hastened to reassure Australia that these comments were merely Habib's

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37 Savitri Scherer, "The Tyranny of Cohabitation: Australian-Indonesian relations", Australian Outlook, vol. 40 no 3, December 1986, 150.

38 Canberra Times, 29 May 1989.

personal views.<sup>39</sup> When asked during his visit to Australia whether he agreed with Habib, ABRI chief General Try Sutrisno said "No, I don't and in any case General Habib is a retired not a serving officer."<sup>40</sup> ABRI spokesman General Nurhadi reiterated that Habib's comments did not reflect the thinking of the Indonesian Armed Forces. "ABRI never regards Australia as a threat", he said.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said that while General Habib had not been speaking on behalf of the Indonesian Government, his remarks showed that "people are looking, are interested in what comes out of the Australian defence debate, are taking notice of it, and are comparing your capability." Alatas said there was room for Australia to provide more information: "I think Australia has tried to explain but there is room for further discussion and seminars to air each others perceptions."<sup>42</sup>

Three years later differences between the Indonesian military and the Foreign Ministry over Australia's military posture were still apparent. In October 1992, the Australian Government announced plans to buy up to eighteen additional F-111 fighter bombers from the United States. Ambassador Siagian criticised the purchase. The planned acquisition, he said, could "raise possible scepticism of Australia's seriousness in security cooperation".<sup>43</sup> Two days after Siagian's criticism was prominently reported in the Australian media, General Sutrisno put forward a contrary view. He said the acquisition of extra F-111s was in the context of

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39 Jakarta Post, 21 July 1989.

40 Sydney Morning Herald, 12 July 1989.

41 Canberra Times, 30 May 1989.

42 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 July 1989.

43 Australian 16 October 1992.

Australia's internal defence strategy and did not pose a threat to its neighbours.<sup>44</sup> According to General Sutrisno, Australia needed many aircraft to defend its huge territory and the purchase should not be questioned.<sup>45</sup>

It is not only Indonesia's Foreign Ministry and its overseas representatives, however, that have questioned Australia's new military posture. Referring to Habib's 1989 criticism, Jusuf Wanandi said:

It's a wider view - not just Habib's...Many people here have no understanding of your strategy; they don't understand its objectives and it should be explained more.<sup>46</sup>

One group that has raised questions about Australia's policies is Indonesia's Parliamentary Commission 1 (Defence, Foreign Affairs and Information). In 1988 the Commission queried General Murdani about Australia's military approach. Murdani replied that Australia's defence program was not a threat to Indonesia.<sup>47</sup> "If I were Australian, I would have done the same thing", he said.<sup>48</sup> In September 1991 the Commission asked General Sutrisno to explain the deployment of additional ADF forces to the north of Australia. He replied:

As to your question why more troops are placed in the northern part of the country, it is just because Australia is the most southern country in this part of the hemisphere. Naturally, they have to be in that position.<sup>49</sup>

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44 Antara 19 October 1992.

45 Sydney Morning Herald, 19 October 1992.

46 Canberra Times, 30 May 1989.

47 Indonesia Times, 30 March 1988.

48 quoted in Kim Beazley, Hermann Black Forum Lecture, Sydney, 13 September 1989, 10.

49 Indonesia Times, 20 September 1991.

Earlier that year, the deputy chairman of the Commission, Theo Sambuaga, criticised Professor Des Ball from the ANU for suggesting that Australia's air force should increase its offensive planning given the improved military hardware of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.<sup>50</sup> "Comments such as this", said Sambuaga, "could create a psychological feeling in Indonesia that Australia still wants to maintain its European supremacy among its Asian neighbours."<sup>51</sup> Despite Murdani and Sutrisno's defence of Australia's military posture, the fact that Parliamentary Commission 1 has on a number of occasions raised or commented on this issue suggests that its members do not share their opinion.

Further criticism of Australia's military approach came from the Indonesian academic community. In July 1989, Dr Hilman Adil, senior analyst at the Indonesian Institute for Sciences, explained the evolution of Australia's policy of defence self-reliance in an article in the Jakarta Post. Dr Adil had no difficulty with the military strategy outlined in the Dibb Review and The Defence of Australia 1987:

one could easily agree with the argument that Australia needs to maintain an adequate defense system and must try to convince its neighbours that it fully intends to defend the continent against aggression.

But, he said, references by Australia's Minister for Defence, Kim Beazley, to an expanded fleet of naval warships and long range strike capabilities, including new submarines, as well as claims that Australia would have forces 'superior to

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<sup>50</sup> Sun Herald (Sydney), 7 April 1991, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Canberra Times, 28 April 1991.

anything in the region' "could be interpreted as provocative and offensive". In particular, said Dr Adil:

the naval build up could result in an arms race and precipitate the strategic uncertainties Australia always wanted to avoid...it would not be easy to perceive the naval build up as a solution to a future security problem...it should be made clear to [neighbouring] countries that Australia has no intention of attacking them.<sup>52</sup>

The divergence in opinion between different elements of government and society in Indonesia on the question of Australia's military posture can be explained by looking at the different forms of information available to them.

Immediately prior to the publication of the Dibb Review in 1986, Kim Beazley flew to Indonesia to explain the thinking behind the document to General Murdani:

I went to Jakarta specifically to talk to Indonesia's leaders about our defence planning. In particular, I spent several hours in discussion with General Murdani.

Kim Beazley felt he had got his message across. General Murdani, he said, "understands why we plan our defence the way we do."<sup>53</sup> It can be assumed that Beazley stressed to General Murdani the defensive thinking behind Australia's new military posture. As Beazley said in 1989:

Two types of capability in particular have been phased out or scaled down in the ADF, in large measure because we have concluded that their essentially offensive character makes them inappropriate for our force structure. The first of these is an aircraft carrier...The second...is amphibious trooplift - the ability to put troops ashore...we have not sought to expand our ability to seize and hold other nations' territory.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jakarta Post, 24 July 1987.

<sup>53</sup> Kim Beazley, Hermann Black Forum Lecture, op. cit., 9-10.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 13-15.

Other Indonesian military officials, such as General Sutrisno, had the chance to hear similar explanations from their Australian counterparts. There have been regular high level meetings between Australian and Indonesian defence officials since 1989. General Sutrisno's prompt public support in 1992 for the acquisition of additional F-111 aircraft by Australia reflects the understanding and personal links built up between the two countries in the defence field. As Time magazine said in a report on the F-111 purchase:

In part, Southeast Asia's increasing faith in Australian motives has grown from direct military cooperation. Officers from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Australia exchange visits regularly, as do defense ministers and force commanders.<sup>55</sup>

The type of understanding that senior Indonesian military figures gained of Australia's new defence posture was clearly not passed on to other elements of Indonesian government and society. The remarks by Alatas and Wanandi about the need for more information suggest they thought Australia had made little effort to explain its policy of defence self-reliance. Alatas, the Foreign Minister, Parliamentary Commission 1 and the Indonesian academic community seemed to have relied on public statements to gain an insight into Australia's defence thinking. The difficulty with this, however, was that statements on Australia's defence approach, for example by key figures such as Kim Beazley, could be misleading without a detailed understanding of the domestic political situation in Australia.

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<sup>55</sup> Time (Australia), 9 November 1992.

In criticising Australia's military posture, both Hilman Adil and Hasnan Habib referred to Kim Beazley's tabling statement in which he presented The Defence of Australia 1987 to the Australian Parliament. They quoted similar sections of the tabling statement, including *"Taken together these forces constitute by far the strongest long range strike capability in the region"*; Australia was embarking on *"the largest defence capital investment in (its) peacetime history"*; it would have submarines that would be *"among the largest, longest range and the most lethal conventional submarines operating anywhere in the world"*; it would have a capacity for long range strike operations *"throughout its area of direct military interest and well beyond"*, and it would be *"technically the most skilled military power in the area with some components of its forces probably superior to anything in the region in absolute terms"*.<sup>56</sup> It is not surprising that there were those in Indonesia that questioned Australia's defence thinking on the basis of Beazley's remarks. Australia would undoubtedly be concerned were we to be faced with a neighbour that made similar public statements about its defence capabilities.

An understanding of the domestic political context in which Beazley's speech was made, however, would have helped allay concerns in Indonesia. A major objective for Beazley in this statement was to convince the Australian electorate that the Labor Party was committed to a 'strong' defence policy. Beazley was keenly aware that one of the Labor Party's great electoral liabilities had been its vulnerability on defence

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<sup>56</sup> See Adil's article in Jakarta Post, 24 July 1987, and A. Hasnan Habib, op. cit., 167-168.

issues, with the conservative parties able to capitalise on connotations of pacifism and communist sympathies. Beazley demonstrated how important this issue was for him, and how concerned he was to change Australian domestic perceptions of Labor's attitude to defence, in his 1989 McKell lecture. This speech revealed his detailed knowledge of the history of Labor and Australian defence since Federation:

the passions aroused in the Labor movement by the conscription debate of 1916-17 left a profound impression on Labor and on the Australian public. It gave the conservatives a pretext to portray Labor as soft on Defence and disloyal to the Empire. They were still beating that drum half a century later.

In the 1960s, according to Beazley:

Labor was offering a humane and dignified resolution of the [Vietnam] War, careful management of our alliances, and the reconstruction of our defence forces so that they could defend our interests. And yet Labor was losing one election after another, specifically on the defence issue. Why was that so? There was one obvious answer; the communist stain.<sup>57</sup>

The 1986 Dobb Review, commissioned by the Government but not official Government policy, had been criticised by some on the political right and by defence interest groups such as the Returned Serviceman's League for advocating a military strategy that was "too defensive."<sup>58</sup> While retaining the vast majority of Dobb's recommendations and the same fundamentally defensive military strategy, Beazley therefore played up the tactical offensive capabilities that the

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<sup>57</sup> Kim Beazley, McKell Lecture, Sydney, 18 December 1989, 5,14.

<sup>58</sup> For a good analysis of criticisms of the Dobb Review, see Andrew Mack, 'Defence versus offence: the Dobb report and its critics', Australian Outlook, 1, 1987, 3-9. Mack states that "there have been...criticisms mounted against parts of the Dobb review by academic and military specialists whose expertise and/or professional experience command serious attention. Prominent among these criticisms has been the claim that the strategy of denial which Dobb advocates places insufficient stress on *offensive* operations for the...ADF - in particular for the RAAF. Dobb's strategic approach is seen as being simply too defensive."

Australian Defence Force would possess in presenting The Defence of Australia 1987 to the Australian Parliament.

Through his earlier visit to Jakarta, Beazley had ensured that General Murdani and his senior military colleagues would not misinterpret this language as a sign of an aggressive defence posture. But other groups in Indonesia, including Ali Alatas and the Foreign Ministry, without the benefit of a personal explanation from Australia's Minister for Defence, seem to have been unable to disentangle the defensive strategy at the heart of The Defence of Australia 1987 from the political emphasis in Beazley's statement on offensive military capabilities.

Beazley's presentation of The Defence of Australia 1987 contributed to Indonesian misunderstanding of Australia's defence posture in another, less direct way. Because of the emphasis on offensive and strike capabilities in Beazley's statements, a number of Australian critics claimed that the Government's policy represented a "new Australian militarism". Beazley countered these critics by pointing out the fundamentally defensive nature of the policy of defence self-reliance.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the prominent debate in Australia on this issue had an effect on Indonesian opinion. As Andrew MacIntyre has pointed out, the argument that Australia was acquiring excessive force projection capabilities and adopting an overly assertive defence posture, "has been put in forthright terms by a number of Indonesians and echoes similar claims in some circles within Australia itself."<sup>60</sup> Hasnan

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59 Kim Beazley, "Response", in G. Cheeseman, St John Kettle (eds), *The New Australian Militarism*, Sydney, 1990, 212.

60 Andrew MacIntyre, "Australia - Indonesia Relations", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), *op. cit.*, 157.

Habib, for example, drew on the "new militarism" writings in his May 1989 speech to the Australian National University. Habib quoted a paper by one of the main proponents of the new militarism theory, Richard Bolt, which included such statements as:

The racial fears associated with being a European nation near Asia still exist. Given that Australia was taken by force, it is not surprising that the tendency to 'defend ourselves by attacking others' is still with us.<sup>61</sup>

Indonesians seeking a better understanding of Australia's new defence approach would also have looked to their own academic journals. However, the few articles on Australia's defence policy in such influential journals as The Indonesian Quarterly would only have increased the concerns of the Foreign Ministry and others about Australia's military posture. For example, in a 1989 article in the Indonesian Quarterly, Michael O'Connor, executive director of the Australian Defence Association, stated that:

One of the basic assumptions of those Australian planners who favour an isolationist defence strategy is that this country should deploy a large proportion of her military power in the north, at or near Darwin. That was the policy back in 1938 and it was revived with the publication of the 1986 Dibb Review and the 1987 Defence White Paper.<sup>62</sup>

O'Connor went further in a 1992 article in the same journal. He claimed that "the belief that Indonesia would launch...an attack or would connive at an attack by some other power was implicit in [the Dibb Review]." O'Connor stated that the Dibb Review caused offence in Indonesia and indeed was of much

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61A. Hasnan Habib, op. cit., 166.

62 M. O'Connor, "Australia and its strategic position in the Asia-Pacific region", The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xvii, no. 3., third quarter 1989, 264.

greater significance than the attitude of the Australian media over East Timor in "poisoning Australia-Indonesia relations."<sup>63</sup>

From the public information available to them, therefore, it is clear why Ali Alatas and the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, as well as Parliamentary Commission 1, Hilman Adil, Hasnan Habib and others had concerns about Australia's new military posture. Without the benefit of personal explanations from Australian defence officials, these groups based their opinion on Beazley's public statements - which highlighted the ADF's offensive capabilities - and on assertions from Australia's academic community about an isolationist defence approach and a 'new Australian militarism'.

*Australia's regional security policy*

Australian Foreign Minister Senator Evans' 1989 statement on Australia's Regional Security was well received in Indonesia, especially by those who had not been given a proper explanation of The Defence of Australia 1987. Jusuf Wanandi had already said that defence policy needed to be presented in its "strategic and diplomatic framework", so that Australia's "objectives of greater regional stability and cooperation within Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific" could be understood.<sup>64</sup> While as Chapter One pointed out, The Defence of Australia 1987 stressed the importance of security

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<sup>63</sup> M. O'Connor, "Australia's defence relations with Indonesia," The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xx, no. 2, second quarter 1992, 187-188.

<sup>64</sup> Jusuf Wanandi, "Conclusion - Indonesia", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), *op. cit.* 242.

cooperation with the region, this appears to have been appreciated only by the narrow circle of senior military and defence officials who had regular contact with their Australian counterparts. For other elements in Indonesian government and society, it was Senator Evans' 1989 statement that revealed Australia's commitment to security cooperation with the region. As Ikrar Nusa Bhakti said:

In order to maintain its own security interests, the Australian government has formulated a so-called 'multidimensional approach towards Asia' [a reference to Senator Evans' 1989 statement] ...Instead of seeing Asia as a danger, Australia is now willing to become part of Asia's security system.<sup>65</sup>

As the Australian reported in August 1992, Indonesian officials "welcomed the shift in emphasis by the Government since 1989 towards a more regionally oriented defence stance."<sup>66</sup>

Subsequent initiatives by Senator Evans in the regional security field had more of a mixed reception in Indonesia. At the 1990 ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC), Senator Evans raised the concept of an Asian version of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). In an article published on the same day as he presented his idea to ASEAN foreign ministers, he said:

Why should there not be developed a similar institutional framework, a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia [CSCA], for addressing the apparently intractable security issues which exist in the region?

Senator Evans pointed out that Asia lacked a single East-West divide as in Europe and was "a diverse region with little of

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<sup>65</sup> Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, *op. cit.* 149.

<sup>66</sup> Australian, 6 August 1992.

the sense of common cultural identity and common diplomatic tradition of Europe". Nevertheless, as he said, "it is not unreasonable to expect that new Europe-style patterns of cooperation between old adversaries will find their echo in this part of the world".<sup>67</sup> The reaction of Senator Evans' Indonesian hosts was not enthusiastic. The Jakarta Post had already suggested that Australia pursued a different security agenda to the rest of the region:

Although Indonesia's position as a nonaligned power is currently somewhat understated,...this country's role as prime manager of regional security...is bound to create incongruities in terms of Australia's perceived role as a defender of Western strategic interests.<sup>68</sup>

Foreign Minister Ali Alatas welcomed more dialogue on how to promote security in the region but doubted that the Pacific was ready for a formal body.<sup>69</sup> "We have to be careful not to think that certain things that work in one region ought to be translated to another," he said.<sup>70</sup> In a later speech he set out detailed reasons for not supporting the CSCA concept:

It is obvious...that the European model cannot easily be transplanted to our part of the world....Unlike in the European situation, there has been no commonly perceived, single security threat in the Asia-Pacific region, but rather a multiplicity of security concerns which differ from country to country and from one subregion to another....In the Asia-Pacific region, there has never been a bipolar structure of two contending military blocs, such as the NATO and Warsaw Pacts, with more or less symmetrical force structures....Suggestions to move immediately towards region-wide security forums or structures within the Asia-Pacific ...appear to be still quite impracticable....Given their wide diversity of cultures, socio-political systems and levels of economic development, the nations of the region have yet to

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<sup>67</sup> see "What Asia needs is a Europe-Style CSCA", International Herald Tribune, 27 July 1990.

<sup>68</sup> Jakarta Post, 21 July 1989.

<sup>69</sup> New Straits Times, 8 October 1990.

<sup>70</sup> Canberra Times, 8 October 1990.

develop a distinct sense of community and of common destiny.<sup>71</sup>

Since 1990, however, the regional security approaches of Australia and Indonesia have moved closer together. The Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Richard Woolcott, said in June 1991 that Australia was merely trying to encourage "some wider regional security dialogue to respond to post-Cold war strategic and political trends." Woolcott said Australia appreciated the key role of ASEAN, which had been "a strong and effective force for stability" and could develop "into the centrepiece of any future security dialogue in Southeast Asia."<sup>72</sup> In a speech in July 1992, Senator Evans showed that Australia had stepped back from any suggestion of a formal security framework for the Asia-Pacific as a whole:

while there is a case for floating larger concepts from time to time, I believe that real progress on regional security will only be achieved by gradual, incremental measures in which the confidence of each country is won and consolidated step by step along the way...The region is moving towards more formalised co-operative arrangements, but the process is slow, cautious and evolutionary: it is not easy, and it cannot be rushed.<sup>73</sup>

The acknowledgement of ASEAN's role in regional security and the implication that Australia would work in an incremental way through forums such as the ASEAN PMC was more compatible with the approach of Ali Alatas and the Indonesian Foreign Ministry. For his part, by late 1992 Ali Alatas was more prepared to consider structured regional security discussions.

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71 Ali Alatas, "The Emerging Security Environment in East Asia and the Pacific - an ASEAN perspective", Address to the National University of Singapore Society, Singapore, 28 October 1992, 12-14.

72 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 June 1991.

73 Gareth Evans, "Australia's approach to Asia-Pacific regional security", Tomorrow's Pacific Conference, Canberra, 15 July 1992, 8-10.

While still not supporting a formal 'pan-Asian security framework', Alatas said that "we could cultivate the habit and devise the mechanisms for closer and more structured consultations on security issues in the region".<sup>74</sup> More remarkably, in proposing measures for "a new security equilibrium in the Asia-Pacific", Alatas suggested - in almost precisely the same words - a series of regional security initiatives already put forward by Senator Evans at the 1991 ASEAN PMC. These included: an incidents at sea agreement; greater transparency in military arrangements; making military exercises less provocative by the presence of observers from non-participating countries; the prevention of nuclear as well as chemical weapons proliferation and the discouragement of a mini-arms race among the countries of the region; and a cooperative approach to the security of sea lanes and sea lines of communication. The only initiative from Senator Evans proposals to the 1991 ASEAN PMC that Alatas did not include was on the subject of environmental security.<sup>75</sup>

In view of the differences between the Indonesian Foreign and Defence Ministries described earlier, it should not be assumed that the Indonesian Government as a whole would necessarily support the initiatives Alatas proposed. It could be expected, for example, that ABRI and the Defence Ministry might not support greater transparency in military funding and force development, or the attendance of foreign observers at Indonesian military exercises. Nevertheless, it remains the

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74 Alatas, op.cit., 14.

75 Ibid., 14-16, and for the list of initiatives Senator Evans proposed at the 1991 ASEAN PM see his address titled "Australia's regional security environment" to the Conference on Strategic Studies in a Changing World, Canberra, 31 July 1991, op. cit., 13-14.

case that by the latter half of 1992 a considerable similarity had developed in the approach to regional security of the foreign ministers of Australia and Indonesia.

*Australia's regional defence cooperation*

The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), which link Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand with Malaysia and Singapore, are one of the more important traditional "military instruments" in Australia's regional security approach. Given Australia's fundamental interest in promoting regional stability, and its more specific aim - as stated in Chapter One - of improving its defence relationship with Indonesia, it is important to be aware of the perception from Jakarta of FPDA.

On the question of FPDA, the opinion of Indonesia's military leadership again seems to be somewhat different from that of other elements of Indonesian society. The Australian Financial Review reported in May 1991 that:

Indonesia has had reservations about FPDA in the past but in recent years has appeared much more relaxed about the agreement. It is understood that senior Indonesian military officers have not objected to Brunei joining FPDA.<sup>76</sup>

In February 1992, Vice Admiral Soedibyo Rahardjo, Chief of the General Staff in Headquarters ABRI, said that Indonesia saw "no danger" from FPDA. He even pointed out that the military and technological knowledge that Malaysia and Singapore gained from FPDA could be transferred to Indonesia (and other ASEAN

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<sup>76</sup> Australian Financial Review, 3 May 1991.

countries) through bilateral security co-operation arrangements.<sup>77</sup>

On the other hand, ex-Foreign Minister Mochtar, whilst not formally speaking on behalf of the Indonesian Government, called in September 1990 for the abandonment of FPDA to allow a trilateral defence arrangement between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to be created:

We in Indonesia understand the FPDA to be an insurance against Indonesia's possible reversion to her old ways, exemplified by her confrontation campaign against Malaysia in the early 1960s.<sup>78</sup>

In an article in the Indonesian Quarterly in 1992, Ikrar Nusa Bhakti echoed Mochtar's sentiments:

Even though there was no formal statement in the FPDA, it was probable that one of the reasons of the establishment of FPDA was intended to face up to the Indonesian military "adventurism", because of their experience with Indonesian confrontation policy from 1963 until 1966.<sup>79</sup>

Ikrar Nusa Bhakti also believed that the priority Australia gives to cooperation with Malaysia and Singapore under FPDA is inconsistent with the strategic significance ascribed to Indonesia in Australian government statements. In his eyes, this compounds the negative impression Indonesia already has of Australia because of its security ties with "the West":

Australia, as part of the Western alliance, has retained its close relationship with the United States and European countries. Although it has acknowledged the importance of Indonesia, Australia developed more substantial links in Southeast Asia with Singapore and Malaysia rather than with Indonesia. For example, Australia...established the Five Power Defence Arrangements...in 1971, similar to the ANZUS Treaty.<sup>80</sup>

77 M. Richardson, "Indonesia-US get together", Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, April-May 1992, 31.

78 Straits Times, 27 September 1990.

79 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, op. cit., 146.

80 Ibid., 146.

While there still appears to be some ambivalence about FPDA in Indonesia, Jakarta's attitude towards bilateral defence ties with Australia has become increasingly positive in recent years. Defence co-operation with Australia had been suspended following the publication of stories in the Australian media about President Suharto's family in 1986. Indonesia's action "masked deep unhappiness among some military leaders about the patronising nature of...the Defence Co-operation Program."<sup>81</sup> Following the visit of armed forces chief General Sutrisno to Australia in 1989, the security relationship between the two countries recommenced<sup>82</sup>. By late 1992, it included high level consultations between defence officials, naval and air force visits and exercises, training in Australia for Indonesian personnel, and the attendance of Indonesian observers at the Kangaroo series of exercises in northern Australia. Unlike earlier cooperation, the new relationship was not based on "defence aid" from Australia. Instead, the cost of joint activities was met by each country on a reciprocal basis.<sup>83</sup> This helped make defence ties with Australia less of a political target in Indonesia. As mentioned earlier, despite renewed tension in November 1991 between Australia and Indonesia over East Timor, the defence relationship was not suspended. By July 1992, Air Vice Marshall Teddy Rusdy, a senior ABRI officer, was willing to declare that "much progress has been achieved by the Governments and Armed Forces of Indonesia and Australia".<sup>84</sup>

81 Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 March 1990.

82 Ibid.

83 Australian Government, The Government's response to the Coalition's defence policy, Canberra, October 1992, Appendix 1, 2.

84 Angkatan Bersenjata, 7 July 1992.

Indonesian military officials even told Australian Opposition defence spokesman Alexander Downer that "closer defence co-operation was a good way for Australia to participate more in the region and to see itself as less of an outsider."<sup>85</sup>

As with the improvement in the overall Australia - Indonesia relationship since 1989, the underlying reasons why Indonesia agreed to recommence defence ties are unclear. According to David Jenkins, "bilateral relations have improved because Jakarta has decided they should improve."<sup>86</sup> One motive for strengthening defence links, however, was the signing of the Timor Gap joint exploration treaty in October 1989. If Indonesia and Australia were to exploit the resources of the Timor Sea, a degree of security co-operation would be necessary. The Timor Gap treaty came into force in February 1991. It included arrangements for coordinating security and anti-terrorist measures in the Timor Gap. This was the first time such arrangements had been agreed between Australia and Indonesia.<sup>87</sup> Foreign Minister Ali Alatas had urged the Indonesian Parliament not to postpone or cancel the Timor Gap Treaty, since this "may prompt Australia to cancel the moratorium in the disputed area, and this would obviously create a long conflict between the two countries."<sup>88</sup>

Broader strategic concerns were also a reason for Indonesia to improve its defence relationship with Australia. According to Jusuf Wanandi:

Changes in the Asia-Pacific region as well as globally do affect relations between Indonesia and Australia. The direction of these changes are very uncertain

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<sup>85</sup> Australian, 6 August 1992, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, 7 April 1990.

<sup>87</sup> Canberra Times, 11 February 1991.

<sup>88</sup> Canberra Times, 29 November 1990.

today...Indonesia-Australia co-operation in the military field should also be seen in the context of strategic changes in the wider region. It is possible that multipolarity, which could result in new instabilities, will force small and medium countries to co-operate in security and defence. In the future, ASEAN might develop some kind of multilateral defence co-operation, and the group might also seek some defence co-operation with Australia.<sup>89</sup>

### Malaysia's view of Australia

#### General perceptions

The following statement by a former foreign editor of Kuala Lumpur's The Star newspaper indicates the most common perception of Australia in Malaysia:

ASEAN...sees Australia as a largely white nation seeking hegemony in the region, and has been miffed by Australia's persistent criticisms of alleged breaches of human rights by nations within its fold.<sup>90</sup>

The belief that Australia has a racist outlook is still widespread in Malaysia. In a 1989 article titled "Immigration, money and prejudice in Australia," the New Straits Times said:

if you are Asian, be prepared to face prejudice...Australia is still very much Anglo-Saxon...There is a genuine worry among white Australians that their country is admitting too many Asians.<sup>91</sup>

In April 1991 The Star said that the fundamental cause of Australia's problems with its neighbours was a "superiority complex which makes it impossible for Australians to accept

89 Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", op. cit., 156, 162.

90 Jakarta Post, 27 October 1989.

91 New Straits Times, 10 August 1989.

that there are countries in the region which are non-white and yet able to perform better economically."<sup>92</sup>

There is a perception in Malaysia that as well as being racist, Australia is also prejudiced against the Islamic religion. This leads to some extreme claims. In April 1991 the youth wing of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) claimed a connection between an alleged anti-federal campaign in the Malaysian state of Sabah and "the Zionist movement" in Australia.<sup>93</sup> In June of the same year, Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Addullah Fadzil Che Wan denied that the Government had any role in a Malaysian TV series depicting the racist approach of Australians. He noted, however, that:

unfortunately certain groups in Australia, possibly with Zionist links, are not happy with the good progress we have made. And based on what is called principles of freedom of the press they spread wild allegations against Malaysia.<sup>94</sup>

As in Indonesia, the Australian media has been a source of particular irritation in Malaysia. Until very recently, Malaysian authorities have not distinguished what they see as the biased attitude of the media and general community from the approach of the Australian Government. This has caused friction in government to government relations. Annoyance with Australian actions over a number of years led to the Malaysian Government's decision in October 1990 to limit "non-essential co-operation projects with Australia"<sup>95</sup>, as well as deferring official visits.<sup>96</sup> An article in the Malay language

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92 The Star, 24 April 1991.

93 The Star, 27 April 1991.

94 New Straits Times, 21 June 1991.

95 Canberra Times, 28 September 1991.

96 Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 March 1991.

newspaper Utusan Malaysia listed a number of incidents which it said were part of a deliberate Australian campaign against Malaysia: the reaction to the hanging of Australian drug couriers Brian Chambers and Kevin Barlow in 1986 (especially Prime Minister Hawke's use of the term "barbaric"); television programs such as Slow boat to Surabaya, said to have depicted Malaysia in a defamatory way; criticism by Australian parliamentarians in 1987 of the detention of more than 100 people under Malaysia's Internal Security Act; the possible imposition of anti-dumping duties on Malaysian car batteries; the bid by Adelaide for the 1998 Commonwealth games in competition with Kuala Lumpur; and Australia's lack of support for Prime Minister Mahathir's proposal for an East Asia Economic Grouping.<sup>97</sup> The final straw, however, was the screening of the Australian Broadcasting Commission(ABC)'s television drama Embassy, set in a fictional Asian country. Malaysian officials believed the drama made "fun of Malaysia."<sup>98</sup> They found it difficult to accept that a series produced by a government corporation could not be sanctioned by the government itself, especially when the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was listed as an adviser to the program<sup>99</sup>. Prime Minister Mahathir believed that Australia had made the Embassy series to tarnish Malaysia's image<sup>100</sup> and to dissuade investors from coming to Malaysia.<sup>101</sup> Mahathir said it was easy to say the Australian Government had nothing to do the Embassy program because it respected the freedom of

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97 Utusan Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), 25 April 1991.

98 Australian Financial Review, 24 April 1991.

99 The Bulletin, 30 April 1991.

100 The Star, 11 April 1991.

101 Business Times (Kuala Lumpur), 11 April 1991.

the media. As he pointed out, however, the Australian Government had taken the ABC to task over its coverage of the Gulf War earlier in the year.<sup>102</sup>

By mid-1991, after Senator Evans had acknowledged the insensitive actions of a "number of different groups in Australia - some in the media, some in Parliament, and some in pressure groups in the wider community,"<sup>103</sup> Mahathir agreed that the Australian Government should not necessarily be blamed for the failings of the media. According to Mahathir, "They fabricate stories...I think they have breached the limit of press freedom...I am talking about the Australian Press, not the Government."<sup>104</sup> Mahathir felt nevertheless that the Australian Government could not absolve itself completely of responsibility for the media. In July 1991 he said Malaysia understood the freedom of the press in Australia but this should not include the freedom to "make up stories and run down others." He believed the Australian Government should not defend the freedom of the press to "fabricate all kinds of lies."<sup>105</sup>

As the price for restoring normal relations, Mahathir believed he had extracted from the Australian Government "a guarantee to distance itself from what was done by several bodies in that country, and to take a disinterested attitude in various matters."<sup>106</sup> This understanding was put to the test in early 1992 with the release of the Australian film Turtle Beach, which depicted a massacre of Vietnamese refugees

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102 The Star, 6 July 1991.

103 Canberra Times, 28 September 1991.

104 New Straits Times, 2 August 1991.

105 New Straits Times, 28 July 1991.

106 Berita Harian (Kuala Lumpur), 28 July 1991.

by Malay villagers. Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Datuk Badawi, warned that the movies could provoke anger in his country. "We are unhappy about the manner in which we are projected to have done something which is not true," he said.<sup>107</sup> Senator Evans announced that the Australian Government would dissociate itself from the film. The scenes depicted were "simply not accurate historical representations."<sup>108</sup> Australia's Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshall Funnell, said this statement saved the Malaysia-Australia relationship: "I believe the ties between the two Governments have been preserved due to this action"<sup>109</sup>, he stated.

While Malaysia now appears to accept that the Australian Government cannot be blamed directly for what Malaysia sees as a racist and biased attitude on the part of the Australian media, this does not mean its perceptions of the Australian Government are necessarily positive. Former Prime Minister Hawke's description of the 1986 Barlow and Chambers hangings as "barbaric" remains a cause of particular resentment. Five years after Hawke made the remark, it still raised the ire of Malaysian leaders. In a general criticism of Australia in Fiji in July 1991, Mahathir said he had no respect for countries "who tell lies or say nasty things...The Australian Government did describe the Malaysians as barbarians once."<sup>110</sup> Malaysia's Minister for International Trade, Dato Seri Rafidah Aziz, told the Malaysia-Australia Business Council in April 1991, "They called us barbarians and I mean, come on, am I a

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107 New Straits Times, 26 February 1992.

108 Ibid.

109 New Straits Times, 29 February 1992.

110 New Straits Times, 6 July 1991.

barbarian...being called a barbarian simply because we hang drug traffickers?" As the Canberra Times remarked "the interpretation of the comments as [an Australian] description of Malaysians generally seems ensconced."<sup>111</sup> A further indication of dissatisfaction with the Australian Government was Australia's continued exclusion from Mahathir's proposed East Asia Economic Grouping (later renamed the East Asia Economic Caucus - EAEC). The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in March 1991 that:

Malaysia may have ...ambitions to wean its neighbours away from the Australia-originated Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC)...Kuala Lumpur has reportedly been unhappy with Australia's leadership both of APEC and of the so-called Cairns Group of agricultural exporting nations.<sup>112</sup>

While calls by new Prime Minister Paul Keating in early 1992 for a greater focus on ties with Asia were well received in Malaysia, they did not improve perceptions of Australia to the extent they did in Indonesia. This may have been merely because Keating did not include Kuala Lumpur in his early overseas visits. Whatever the reason, the view in Malaysia was that there were still considerable obstacles to Australia's goal of 'embracing Asia', chief among these being the attitude of the Australian media. As Minister of Defence Dato' Najib said in Darwin in April 1992:

If Australia wants to embrace Asia, then every segment of society here must be ready to move in that direction. It will be a sad thing if the media is out of step with the general development of this region. You have the right to free speech, but not the right to fabricate lies about another country.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Canberra Times, 28 September 1991.

<sup>112</sup> Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 March 1991.

<sup>113</sup> Financial Review, 14 April 1992.

This suggests that while the Australian Government may have successfully dissociated itself from media criticisms of Malaysia, negative perceptions of the Australian community in general - especially the media - will continue to be a factor in relations between the two countries.

### **Perceptions of Australia's security approach**

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, Malaysia does not have the same interest as Indonesia in Australia's military posture. Australia's planning for its own defence in accordance with The Defence of Australia 1987 has not been a subject of discussion in Malaysia. Similarly, Australia's Regional Security attracted little comment from Malaysian officials and academics. Of more interest to Malaysia were Senator Evans' calls for greater regional security dialogue and Australia's cooperation in the defence field with Southeast Asia - especially FPDA.

### *Australia's regional security policy*

When Senator Evans raised the concept of an Asian version of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe at the 1990 ASEAN PMC:

the regional reaction was uniformly negative...the Malaysians...have long held to ideas such as ZOPFAN...and they said why do we need to have a European concept imposed on us?<sup>114</sup>

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114 Andrew Mack, transcript from ABC Radio National, Indian Pacific, 17 August 1991.

As with Indonesia, however, the approaches of Malaysia and Australia have since moved closer together. As Senator Evans and his senior officials emphasised the need merely for greater dialogue on security issues rather than a formal 'CSCA', similar sentiments began to be expressed in Malaysia. In July 1991, Defence Minister Dato' Najib said that:

In view of the changing environment,...there is certainly a need to encourage a lot more dialogue, consultations and other confidence and security building measures - be they formal or informal amongst all regional states.<sup>115</sup>

In Darwin in April 1992, Dato' Najib quoted with approval the principles of common security devised by the Palme Commission:

I am of the opinion that these principles are equally valid in the non-nuclear context....The end of the Cold War has certainly provided us with a golden opportunity to find a new approach to regional security...We must be guided by the notion of co-operative security. 'One man's security should lead to another's assurance' should be our motto.<sup>116</sup>

Consistent with these principles, Dato' Najib proposed that:

Asia-Pacific countries, which naturally includes Australia, should begin a security dialogue, in which member-states will discuss regional security issues together, as well as to explore areas where co-operation amongst members could be enhanced...Malaysia is willing to host the first of this proposed Asia-Pacific security dialogue. Each member could send a delegation of various representatives of their security agencies, from both the military and civilian organisations.<sup>117</sup>

It was not a coincidence that in this speech to an Australian audience, Dato' Najib used the language of 'co-operative' and 'common' security. These principles had long been advocated

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<sup>115</sup> Minister of Defence, Malaysia, "Regional Alliances in a changing world order", Keynote address, IADS Seminar, 9 July 1991, 7.

<sup>116</sup> Minister of Defence, Malaysia, Keynote address, Chief of the General Staff Conference, Darwin, April 1992, 24-29.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 29-31.

by Senator Evans.<sup>118</sup> In addition, the Asia-Pacific security dialogue proposed by Dato' Najib was similar to the CSCA concept raised by Senator Evans in 1990. Dato' Najib, however, avoided the suggestion that a European institution might be replicated in Asia. It also became clear that his proposal was for a more unofficial forum, rather than a formal security body such as the CSCE. Nevertheless, as in the case of Indonesia, Najib's comments show that by mid-1992 Australia and Malaysia had a similar approach to the promotion of greater dialogue on regional security issues.

#### *Australia's regional defence cooperation*

While Malaysia supports greater regional security dialogue, this does not mean - as Chapter One pointed out - that it advocates formal ASEAN wide defence cooperation. The one example of multilateral defence cooperation that does have continuing support in Malaysia is FPDA. A Malaysian Government paper on the future direction of FPDA stated in March 1990 that:

despite the criticism levelled at it for the last 18 years the FPDA has remained intact and relevant to the changing circumstances of...Malaysia and Singapore...it has in terms of its deterrence value achieved the objective intended..., and has provided...the necessary breathing space for Malaysia and Singapore to develop their defence capabilities unburdened.<sup>119</sup>

In June 1991, Dato' Najib rejected a suggestion by former Indonesian foreign minister Mochtar that FPDA be replaced by a

<sup>118</sup> see, for example, Senator Evans address to the Williamsburg Conference XIX, in Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *The Monthly Record*, February 1991, 40.

<sup>119</sup> Ministry of Defence, Malaysia, *The Future Direction of the five Power Defence Arrangements*, Kuala Lumpur, March 1990, 4.

trilateral arrangement between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. "We have the Five Power Defence Arrangement. We don't have any intention of embarking on any new security arrangements", he said.<sup>120</sup> Dato' Najib also explained Australia's contribution to Malaysia's security - both through FPDA and bilateral defence cooperation. In the process he emphasised the importance of defence links for the broader Malaysia - Australia relationship:

In particular, Australia has been most consistent in its commitment towards FPDA and in the defence of Malaysia. Australia's links with Malaysia are of an historical nature, having sacrificed its soldiers for the defence of Malaysia during the Second World War, the Emergency 1948-60 and Confrontation, 1963-65. These are all evidences of Australia's firm commitment towards Malaysia's defence. Militarily speaking our relations have always been excellent. The only problem is perhaps the Australian mass media, which has been quite unkind to us. As a consolation, I understand they, too, have not been kind to Australian politicians as well.<sup>121</sup>

Malaysia sees FPDA as consistent with its commitment to ASEAN and with its emphasis on bilateral security links with its neighbours. As Dato' Najib said:

On our part, Malaysia will continue to strengthen the FPDA's resolve with our own bilateral co-operation with the other members of ASEAN...FPDA is, in fact, complementary to the overall security needs of ASEAN...In our view there is a direct correlation between the effort of achieving a high state of bilateral co-operation with individual members of ASEAN and the effort of maximising co-operation within the FPDA. Both efforts over the years have...paved the way to a web of interlocking security relationships - all working towards a common objective of creating a peaceful and stable regional environment.<sup>122</sup>

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120 Australian Financial Review, 17 June 1991.

121 Minister of Defence, Malaysia, Keynote address, Chief of the General Staff Conference, op. cit., 33-39.

122 Ibid., 33-39.

Malaysia also values the indirect connection provided by FPDA to the United States' global security network. According to the Ministry of Defence:

Both Britain and Australia are partners with the United States in other alliances. In the final analysis by being members of the FPDA, Malaysia and Singapore...are involved in a security nexus with focus on defence co-operation with the regional as well as extra-regional powers.<sup>123</sup>

The head of Strategic Studies at Malaysia's Armed Forces Defence College, Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, said that with FPDA:

Due to Australia's security link with the United States through ANZUS, the United States could provide some form of assistance to Australia which could then be channelled to the defence of Malaysia and Singapore...this security nexus...in a way has added further credibility [to] FPDA's deterrent value.<sup>124</sup>

In addition, FPDA "provides a framework for bilateral defence co-operation between Malaysia and Singapore."<sup>125</sup> As Abdul Razak remarked:

FPDA has been most important in keeping these two countries together in the military field. Without FPDA, Malaysia and Singapore do not have any security arrangement which provides for military co-operation.. All the major exercises involving these two states have been under the ambit of the Arrangement. Therefore the notion that FPDA is crucial in ensuring that Malaysia and Singapore are kept together, is not without any foundation.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, FPDA assists Malaysia's capacity to provide for its own defence. According to Dato' Najib:

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123 Ministry of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 5.

124 Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, "Five Power Defence Arrangement: two decades and beyond", *Strategi*, vol. 1, no. 1, Kuala Lumpur, February 1992, 59.

125 Ministry of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 5.

126 Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, op.cit., 57.

FPDA has assisted us...in the development of Malaysia's defence capability. The training provided by Australia, the UK and New Zealand...is immeasurable...The series of multilateral air, sea and land exercises have...provided the opportunities for interoperability of weapon systems amongst member states. In addition, it has also enabled better understanding among military personnel and improvement of military knowledge and skills.<sup>127</sup>

FPDA - and Australia's role in the arrangements - are not, however, so central to Malaysia's security that it believes FPDA should have an operational, as against merely a training, role. When Singapore proposed a "reserve command structure" for FPDA that would become operational in an emergency, Malaysia's then Defence Minister, Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen, stated that the region did not need a military pact to ensure its security, and that member nations of ASEAN and FPDA should be committed to act within the scope under which FPDA was set up.<sup>128</sup> While Malaysia particularly values elements of FPDA such as the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) for the training and exercising opportunities IADS provides, it also believes that "it is difficult to rationalise how IADS can be operational."<sup>129</sup>

There are a number of reasons for Malaysia's reluctance to see FPDA operationalised. Malaysia is concerned not to abandon its strong public commitment to a ZOPFAN in South East Asia. Turning FPDA into an operational military pact, involving the commitment of external powers to military operations in the direct defence of Malaysia and Singapore, would run counter to the aims of ZOPFAN. According to the Ministry of Defence, "ways and means should be explored such

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127 Minister of Defence, Malaysia, Keynote address, Chief of the General Staff Conference, op. cit., 33-39.

128 New Straits Times, 12 December 1989.

129 Ministry of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 5 & 11.

that its [FPDA's] utility can be enhanced and perpetuated... without jeopardising the concept of ZOPFAN."<sup>130</sup>

Operationalising FPDA would also compromise Malaysia's non-aligned stance. Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, commenting on the origins of FPDA, said that:

It was referred to as an arrangement only, and not a treaty. This was so primarily due to Kuala Lumpur's policy stance towards non-alignment, as a formal treaty with external powers would invariably compromise the country's position.<sup>131</sup>

But perhaps the major difficulty Malaysia has with the concept of an operational FPDA is its concern not to antagonise Indonesia on security issues and to encourage Indonesia to retain stabilising external policies. As Abdul Razak said, "FPDA has...been seen, especially amongst foreign observers [ie Indonesia] as contradicting Malaysia's neutral and non-aligned stance."<sup>132</sup> Malaysia is aware of the Indonesian perception that FPDA was designed to constrain it following Confrontation and is wary of any action that might provoke Indonesia into public opposition to FPDA. As Tengku Rithauddeen said in December 1989:

we may give our support [to the idea of an operational FPDA] if we find the concept feasible, but at this juncture, we do not want to do anything that might cause alarm or create tension among our neighbours in the region.<sup>133</sup>

Hence although Malaysia places a high value on FPDA and Australia's major part in these arrangements, there are limits on the role it is prepared to see Australia and other nations

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>131</sup> Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, op.cit., 49-50.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>133</sup> New Straits Times, 12 December 1989.

play in its own defence. Nevertheless, Malaysia's positive perception of Australia's contribution to its security balances the more negative general impressions it has of this country. This helps to ensure ties are maintained between the two nations despite occasional political tension. In turn, this assists Australia's regional security aim of comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia. This also assists more specific elements of Australia's broader regional security policies. Without a good security relationship, for example, prominent Malaysians such as Dato' Najib would have been less willing to echo Senator Evans' calls for greater regional security dialogue.

### **Singapore's view of Australia**

#### **General perceptions**

Since the change in Australia's leadership at the end of 1991, Singapore - like its neighbours - has perceived a new commitment by the Australian Government to engagement with Asia. As Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said in September 1992:

Australia must re-assess its place in the new world pattern. I applaud Prime Minister Keating's clear statement on this, and welcome Australia's desire to identify more with Asia.<sup>134</sup>

Like Indonesia and Malaysia, however, Singapore believes the attitude of the Australian community as a whole has yet to

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<sup>134</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 26 September 1992.

change in any significant way. As Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng said in April 1992:

I know that Australian leaders see their country's future as part of the region. I think they are correct. But I am not so sure that other sections of the Australian public share their commitment.<sup>135</sup>

According to the Straits Times:

Whatever noises the Labor government has been making about closer Asian ties will need time to permeate a society that has, for centuries, been culturally more in tune with Europe.<sup>136</sup>

In late 1992, when bids by Singapore International Airlines and Singapore Telecom for shares in Australian corporations were both passed over in favour of British companies, the Straits Times said this confirmed:

the suspicion that despite the Keating Government's avowed intention of snipping old imperial ties, the tangible links of heart and mind [to Britain] are still too entrenched to be cut by fiat.<sup>137</sup>

Singapore has a practical motive for questioning the Australian community's attitude towards Asia. The emigration of educated and highly skilled Singaporeans to countries such as Australia is of concern to the Government. An article in the Straits Times in April 1991 said there were an estimated 9,000 Singapore emigrants in Western Australia alone. It offered suggestions on "what Government can do to stem the flow."<sup>138</sup> Articles regularly appear in the Singapore press on the poor performance of the Australian economy and on alleged racist attitudes in Australia. These appear to be aimed at

135 Australian, 29 April 1992, 11.

136 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 27 June 1992.

137 quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1992.

138 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 6 April 1991.

those considering a move to Australia. A Straits Times report on Singaporeans who had already emigrated to Australia said that:

Many...brushed aside the instances of racial discrimination, claiming that it had been overplayed in Singapore newspapers - perhaps to discourage further emigration.<sup>139</sup>

Apart from negative perceptions of the Australian community, Singapore also perceives other differences with Australia. In the opinion of Wong Kan Seng:

Although there are economic, political and military links between Australia and Southeast Asia, it is also true that there are differences, for example different ideas about the role of the press or on the proper relationship between the individual and the community....We cannot deny these differences. I do not think it is necessary that Australia embraces the values of its neighbours. But, by the same token, Australians should not insist that its neighbours embrace its values, as some Australians seem to think should be the case."<sup>140</sup>

On the whole, however, differences between Australia and Singapore over the role of the media or Australia's advocacy of individual human rights have not in recent years caused the type of friction that they have with Indonesia or Malaysia. Unlike Indonesia, Singapore does not see itself in a position of leadership in the region which could be threatened by initiatives or criticism from Australia. In addition, Singapore's long term economic success gives it a sense of confidence and achievement, making it somewhat less sensitive than Malaysia to perceived Australian criticism. As Wong Kan Seng said, "Australia is already a significant actor in the

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139 Ibid., 6 April 1991.

140 Australian, 29 April 1992.

region....Singapore would welcome greater Australian involvement in Southeast Asia."<sup>141</sup>

The lack of political friction in recent years means that positive perceptions of Australia's contribution to Singapore's security have greater influence on the overall relationship than in the case of Indonesia or Malaysia.

### **Perceptions of Australia's security approach**

#### *Australia's regional security policy*

The same aspects of Australia's security approach that are of interest to Malaysia also attract comment in Singapore. Senator Evans' reference in 1990 to the possible development of an Asian version of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was criticised in Singapore. Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng said that:

The situation in Europe has facilitated the concept of the CSCE...The same kind of conditions have not been obtained in Asia. The countries are so culturally, ethnically, and politically diverse, that perceptions have to be harmonised...There has to be common ground before security issues can be discussed.<sup>142</sup>

However, while Singapore could not publicly support a CSCA in 1990, this appears to have had more to do with a desire not to disrupt ASEAN unity than any fundamental opposition to the concept. Supporting an Australian initiative for such a forum would have involved a sudden break with the approach to regional security ASEAN then accepted.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> New Straits Times, 8 October 1990.

Singapore has been willing to challenge ASEAN's orthodox security approach, as its 1989 offer of military facilities to the United States shows. But a further deviation by Singapore so soon after its offer to the United States could have seriously strained relations with its ASEAN partners.

Moreover, unlike the offer to the United States, there would have been little in the way of immediate security benefits in return for openly supporting the concept of a CSCA.

As noted in Chapter One, however, Singapore's strategic vulnerability makes it more interested than Indonesia and Malaysia in additional mechanisms that might enhance its security. Indeed, as its neighbours themselves became more supportive of formal regional security dialogue, Singapore felt able to become something of an advocate in this area. In January 1992, Singapore's Ambassador at Large, Professor Tommy Koh, proposed the creation of an Asia-Pacific security forum to foster stability similar to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.<sup>143</sup> Later in the year, he repeated this proposition, suggesting the establishment of a "regional security forum to map strategies."<sup>144</sup> The Singapore Government did not formally adopt Koh's suggestion. Nevertheless, Singapore was one of the prime movers at the Fourth ASEAN summit in January 1992 for "a fresh approach to regional security". Lobbying by Singapore played a major role in the acceptance by the summit that ASEAN should "intensify its external dialogues in political and security matters by using the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference."<sup>145</sup>

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143 New Straits Times, 3 January 1992.

144 Canberra Times, 22 July 1992.

145 S. Bilveer, "After the Summit: The Way Forward", ASEAN-ISIS Monitor (Kuala Lumpur), No.3, April 1992, 3.

Hence on the question of regional security dialogue, by the end of 1992, there was arguably an even greater convergence in the attitudes of Australia and Singapore than in the case of Indonesia or Malaysia. There had been calls for an Asia-Pacific wide security framework in Australia and Singapore, but these had been put to one side by the governments of both countries, whose official approach was to work through existing institutions - especially the ASEAN PMC - as the basis for broader security dialogue.

*Australia's regional defence cooperation*

Notwithstanding its conclusion of a rotational basing arrangement with the United States, Singapore has increasingly valued its defence relationship with Australia in recent years. According to the Australian Government, "As a stronger recognition of shared strategic interests has emerged in recent years, cooperative defence activities have broadened and diversified".<sup>146</sup>

Apart from a growing range of bilateral cooperation<sup>147</sup>, Singapore particularly values Australia's role in FPDA. In June 1991, Singapore's Foreign Minister, Wong Kan Seng, said that both FPDA and a US military presence needed to be sustained to ensure stability and peace in the region:

I think the Five Power Defence Arrangement has served us well...It's a very useful structure and Singapore would

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<sup>146</sup> Australian Government, *The Government's response to the Coalition's defence policy*, op. cit., 3.

<sup>147</sup> In March 1993, the Australia-Singapore defence relationship reached a new level. Agreements were signed for the relocation of Singapore's advanced air training facilities to Western Australia, and for cooperation between the two countries in defence science and technology. See *Financial Review*, 23 March 1993, and *Australian Defence Report*, 1 April 1993.

like to see the FPDA remaining for as long as possible.<sup>148</sup>

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said at a function for FPDA Ministers earlier in 1991 that "The recently concluded Gulf War underlines the importance of having extra-regional friends interested in, and prepared to commit forces to defend, the stability of a region." Goh said FPDA provided a stable and secure environment for Singapore and Malaysia to pursue economic development and become "dynamic Asian economies". Although the two countries were now better able to look after themselves, and there were other groupings such as ASEAN and APEC contributing to regional stability, FPDA was still relevant. "By keeping out threats to the security of Malaysia and Singapore, the FPDA also enhances ASEAN's stability", he said.<sup>149</sup> Defence Minister Dr Yeo Ning Hong said in September 1992 that in the face of uncertainties in the regional strategic environment such as disputed claims in the South China Sea and unclear prospects for a lasting peace in Cambodia, FPDA:

continues to be an effective ballast for stability in the region....And as the FPDA grows both in maturity and sophistication, with integrated operational procedures between the partners better exercised, it will become even more relevant and useful for regional peace and security.<sup>150</sup>

In the late 1980s, Singapore had some doubts about the commitment of Australia to FPDA. This can be inferred from statements in 1992 by the retiring chief of Singapore's defence force, Lt Gen Winston Choo. He said that the extra-

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148 Australian Financial Review, 17 June 1991.

149 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 4 May 1991.

150 Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 26 September 1992.

regional members (including Australia) now regarded the pact more seriously:

It is now seen to be an association that has greater military significance and is of mutual professional benefit, thereby resulting in greater commitment among the partners."<sup>151</sup>

Like Malaysia, Singapore believes Australia's contribution to the FPDA provides benefits in terms of deterrence, links with the US security system and a mechanism for Malaysia-Singapore cooperation. In November 1989, Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore's Minister for Defence (Services) spelled out the value of FPDA as a deterrent:

the very presence of forces belonging to an FPDA partner - for example Australian aircraft squadrons - must raise the possibility of a response from that partner...It is these imponderables that make the FPDA an important factor for stability in the region.<sup>152</sup>

Singapore believes FPDA assists its aim of encouraging a continued strategic interest by the United States in Southeast Asia. A political scientist from the University of Singapore, Obaid Ul Haq, stated that:

Singapore sees the FPDA as one of the important factors that help maintain stability in the Singapore-Malaysia area....(it) affords the additional advantage of encouraging the continuing US military engagement in the region.<sup>153</sup>

FPDA is also important for Singapore because of the forum it provides for cooperation with Malaysia. According to Obaid Ul Haq, FPDA has "considerable symbolic and psychological

<sup>151</sup> Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 13 June 1992.

<sup>152</sup> Straits Times, 30 November 1989.

<sup>153</sup> Obaid Ul Haq, 'Singapore's search for security: a selective analysis', in Chee, Stephen (ed), Leadership and Security in Southeast Asia - Institutional Aspects, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1991, 131.

significance as well as military importance...It provides a framework of military co-operation with Malaysia"<sup>154</sup> As Lee Hsien Loong said, "besides its security value..., it provides a non-sensitive format for SAF [Singapore Armed Forces] and MAF [Malaysian Armed Forces] officers to work together."<sup>155</sup>

In terms of specific military benefits, Singapore sees FPDA as an established avenue for Australia to provide logistic and other support in a crisis. Like Malaysia, Singapore especially values Australia's participation in the Integrated Air Defence System. Singapore underlined the value it attaches to IADS with the commitment of additional fighter aircraft and air defence missiles in 1989 and 1990 respectively.<sup>156</sup> In contrast to Malaysia, Singapore would like IADS and FPDA as a whole converted into an operational agreement structured to allow the external members to provide combat forces quickly. In November 1989, Lee Hsien Loong called for FPDA to be strengthened by the formation of a combined command staff, more joint training, and a greater emphasis on joint operations so that "the FPDA members can combine their military forces together to deal with any threat."<sup>157</sup> Unlike Malaysia, Singapore does not feel constrained from advocating an operational FPDA by its formal commitment to a ZOPFAN in Southeast Asia, its membership of the non-aligned movement, or Indonesia's sensitivities about the arrangements.

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154 Ibid., 124.

155 Straits Times, 30 November 1989.

156 Straits Times, 1 May 1990.

157 Straits Times, 30 November 1989.

### Implications for Australia

The perceptions described in this chapter have implications for Australia's broad regional security policies, its regional defence cooperation and its military posture.

#### Australia's regional security policy

##### *Comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia*

Positive perceptions of Australia are essential for the Government's key regional security aim of 'comprehensive engagement' with Southeast Asia. Negative perceptions on the part of political leaders or major sections of society would make it difficult for Australia, in Senator Evans' words, "to become a significant partner in the region, an accepted and natural participant in regional affairs".<sup>158</sup>

In this context, the positive view that Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have of Australian government policy under Prime Minister Keating assists comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia. The above study supports the judgement of the Australian that:

There is a perception throughout Southeast Asia that Keating represents generational change, that Hawke, despite his creditable role in the creation of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation grouping, was more obsessed with Africa than Asia, and that most of his significant diplomatic friendships were in Washington or the Middle East rather than Southeast Asia. Keating is seen as a new leader with a new direction. The countries of the

region like his nationalistic, pro-republican campaign - even the countries which are not themselves republics and which remain members of the British Commonwealth....The importance of the Keating rhetoric is that it gives political and symbolic weight to Australia's recent efforts to enmesh itself in the region.<sup>159</sup>

The positive reaction in the three countries to the ideas expressed by Australia's new Prime Minister demonstrates that the right 'rhetoric' is important in efforts to develop deeper links with Southeast Asia. Visits to the region can also have a considerable impact. Keating's visit to Indonesia was particularly significant, demonstrating to the Indonesian leadership that East Timor and other areas of past tension would not be allowed to stand in the way of good government to government relations.

While Keating's rhetoric about a more 'independent' Australia which is increasingly engaged with Asia was therefore well crafted for a region where symbolism of this type is important, it should not be thought that Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore see his statements or regional visits as evidence of a fundamental change in national attitudes. As the above study shows, all three countries believe the Australian public (especially the media) remains basically racist, with a far greater affinity for Europe and the United States than Southeast Asia. Such a perception is an obstacle to comprehensive engagement. This is most noticeable in Malaysia's case, where perceptions of racism on the part of the Australian media and government have contributed in recent years to a series of difficulties in political relations. In Indonesia, the attitude of the Australian Government is increasingly seen as separate from that of the general public.

159 Australian, 29 April 1992.

However, even though a further gradual improvement in relations with Indonesia appears likely, the perception that the Australian community remains racist and, in addition, sees Indonesia as a military threat, will continue to constrain the extent of cooperation that Indonesian authorities agree to. While Singapore also has negative perceptions of the Australian media and community in general, these have less effect on overall relations, perhaps ultimately because of Singapore's strategic vulnerability and its need for a sound security relationship with Australia.

The Australian media and its perceived tendency to lecture the region on human rights, democracy, the environment and other issues is seen as a particular obstacle to closer engagement with Asia. As Jat Sujatmiko, an official of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said:

The Australian media must better understand Asian behaviour and beliefs....Australian journalists who like to expose sensitive news issues or write about the negative behaviour of some of the Asian leaders will not help Australia's integration with Asia.<sup>160</sup>

In the eyes of Australia's regional neighbours, therefore, a pre-condition for comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia is the re-education of the Australian public and media. As Sujatmiko said in a paper entitled "Becoming a Republic: Will Australia be More Accepted in Asia?":

It is true that becoming a republic will help Australia to integrate with Asia but it is not the major condition....Australia's acceptance in Asia depends on how well the Government and the people of Australia understand Asian society and culture. These educational concerns have never been formally expressed by Asian leaders, but they will affect how soon Australia

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<sup>160</sup> *Australian*, 5 May 1993.

successfully becomes part of Asia, economically and socially.<sup>161</sup>

*Broader regional security initiatives*

This chapter has shown that by late 1992 Australia's approach towards the promotion of greater regional security dialogue had converged with that of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. On Australia's part there was a recognition that it was not in a good position to propose overarching security frameworks for the Asia-Pacific, particularly those modelled on Europe, that there was a need to pay deference to the role of ASEAN in regional security, and that the practical way ahead was to work in an incremental way through existing regional institutions, especially the ASEAN PMC.

The general perception in Southeast Asia of Australia as a predominately European nation with a superior attitude towards the region handicaps any proposals from Australia for the adoption of European concepts of security in the Asia-Pacific. This was the case with Senator Evans' suggestion at the 1992 ASEAN PMC for the eventual evolution of a "CSCE" in Asia. There is also resentment in ASEAN at any large scale security proposals that comes from outside the grouping. As the Far Eastern Economic Review stated in April 1991:

over the past year ASEAN has been bombarded with proposals aimed at luring the association into security-related forums....a mildly defiant mood was detectable when it came to the issue of regional security... Suggestions that ASEAN be drawn more into discussions on regional security are perceived as another external pressure.<sup>162</sup>

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161 Australian, 5 May 1993.

162 Far Eastern Economic Review, 1 August 1991.

Such external pressure has been particularly resented by Indonesia and Malaysia, who have been the strongest advocates within ASEAN of local concepts for regional security, such as regional resilience and a ZOPFAN for Southeast Asia. To be accepted by these countries, it is likely that proposals for region wide security frameworks would need to come from within ASEAN itself, or at least be sponsored by an ASEAN member. In this context, it should be noted that when Singapore's Tommy Koh proposed an Asia-Pacific version of the CSCE in 1991, he presented the proposal as one from Singapore, rather than supporting a previous idea from Australia.

From the point of view of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, another difficulty with Senator Evans' suggestion for the eventual emergence of a CSCA was that it implied a security structure not centred on ASEAN itself. Senator Evans had earlier raised doubts about the effectiveness of ASEAN in a regional security sense. In Australia's Regional Security, he said that ASEAN:

has provided a forum to dilute (but not eliminate) intra-regional territorial and security suspicions...There may...be a need to supplement ASEAN with a range of wider associations that involve diverse memberships and meet new needs, both economic and security.<sup>163</sup>

However, as Chapter One showed, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore each see the ASEAN grouping as one of the most important factors in regional stability. By late 1991, there was greater recognition in Australia of the need to acknowledge the contribution of ASEAN to regional security. As the Australian pointed out:

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163 Evans, Australia's Regional Security, op. cit., 8,9.

The failure of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to respond effectively to the crisis in what was Yugoslavia has forced some re-thinking about the effectiveness of grand, region-wide bodies which do not have a tradition of actually solving problems...on the other hand...there have historically been serious territorial disputes involving most of the ASEAN nations, but the dynamics of ASEAN solidarity has allowed virtually all of the purely intra-ASEAN disputes to be managed and defused.<sup>164</sup>

In a speech in Jakarta in June 1992, Australia's Ambassador to Indonesia, Phillip Flood, stated that:

The solid foundation of regional political stability created by ASEAN, which proved so enduring, is particularly relevant now in this post-Cold War period. The confidence building provided by the habits of ASEAN consultation and co-operation can operate at the centre of a new web of complementary political dialogues across the Pacific.<sup>165</sup>

Proposals by Senator Evans at the 1992 ASEAN PMC to advance regional security indicated both a sensitivity to ASEAN's security approach and an acceptance of the central role of ASEAN and the ASEAN PMC in regional security arrangements. Senator Evans did not suggest the creation of a formal regional institution or mechanism. Instead, he put forward three low key suggestions: discussions between strategic planners on approaches to external defence after the end of the Cold War; maritime information sharing and other measures to combat piracy; and regional discussions on the United Nations proposal for a register of military arms transfers.<sup>166</sup> The three issues Senator Evans chose were already of some significance to the region. With the reduction in the United States regional military presence, ASEAN members had to give

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164 Australian, 5 August 1992.

165 P. Flood, "Economic growth in ASEAN - a neighbours perspective", address to First international conference on trade and investment in ASEAN, Jakarta, 30 June 1992.

166 Australian, 5 August 1992.

greater attention to their own external defence; the increase in piracy in Southeast Asian waters was attracting considerable attention<sup>167</sup>; and earlier in the year Malaysia's Defence Minister had publicly supported the idea of regional discussions on the UN arms register.

The type of low profile proposals Senator Evans put forward at the 1992 ASEAN PMC were compatible with the perceptions of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore discussed above. They did not seek to impose 'external' security concepts on the region or challenge the role of ASEAN in broader regional security.<sup>168</sup> Such proposals were also consistent with Australia's aim of participating "actively in the gradual development of a regional security community based on a sense of shared security interests".<sup>169</sup>

#### *Australia's regional defence cooperation*

Australia's major means of participating in the development of a regional security community has been its longstanding defence cooperation with Southeast Asia. As indicated above, Australia's role in FPDA is a key element in this cooperation.

In 1989 the view was expressed that Australia:

will need...to assess the continuing relative importance of established forms of military cooperation in which we are involved in the region such as the Five Power Defence

<sup>167</sup> Daily Commercial News, 21 July 1992.

<sup>168</sup> Australia's approach on the question of regional security dialogue therefore fitted well with the creation of the 'ASEAN Regional Forum' in July 1993. This is not a formal security institution like the CSCE, but an informal gathering in the ASEAN style. It is centred on ASEAN, being an extension of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and PMC meetings. It includes not only the participants at those meetings, but also China, Russia, Vietnam, Laos and Papua New Guinea. It is not a vehicle for formal multilateral security cooperation, and is intended instead to promote informal security dialogue.

<sup>169</sup> Evans, Australia's Regional Security, 44.

Agreement [sic]...and the Integrated Air Defence System ....We will need to ask whether the weight we give to such arrangements will continue to convey the right messages about Australian security interests in the Southeast Asian region or whether these arrangements may eventually need to be de-emphasised."<sup>170</sup>

This statement clearly implied a downgrading of FPDA. Two years later, however, attitudes towards FPDA were far more positive. As Foreign Minister Evans said in August 1991:

our involvement in the FPDA is one that manifestly brings benefits to all participants...it is an involvement which might over time evolve to embrace other regional participants, or be capable of at least partial replication elsewhere.<sup>171</sup>

Neither of these statements, however, is entirely consistent with the perceptions described above. Malaysia and Singapore believe FPDA has considerable strategic importance - for its deterrence value, its indirect link to the US security network, the possibility of logistic and other support in a crisis, the forum it provides for Malaysia-Singapore military cooperation, and training and other benefits. Both countries would strongly oppose any suggestion that FPDA should be 'de-emphasised'. On the other hand, there would also be risks involved in expanding the FPDA to 'embrace other participants' or in 'replicating' it in some other part of the region. To what extent former Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar's desire for FPDA to be dismantled is shared by the Indonesian Government is unclear. Nevertheless, a strong reaction could be anticipated if a major expansion of FPDA was proposed. While senior Indonesian military figures are reportedly "comfortable" with FPDA, this refers to the Arrangements in

170 Tony Kevin, "Major Power Influences on the Southeast Asian region: an Australian view", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), op. cit., 29.

171 Senator Evans, "Australia's regional security environment", 10.

their current form. The misperception that FPDA was originally designed to constrain Indonesia following Confrontation means any significant enlargement of FPDA could not be supported by Jakarta. The addition of the small enclave of Brunei is one thing, the inclusion of other ASEAN countries - such as Thailand or Indonesia itself - quite another.

Similar considerations apply to the question of converting FPDA from what is largely a training forum into an operational structure. If Australia had Singapore's views alone in mind, it would make sense to agree to this. Malaysia, however, does not wish to raise the profile of FPDA by turning it into an operational grouping, at least partly because of uncertainty over Indonesia's reaction.

In this context, maintaining FPDA largely in its current form - without 'de-emphasising' it, but also without advocating any significant expansion or converting it into an operational agreement - would be the approach most compatible with the perceptions of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

In all three countries, there is a positive view of bilateral defence relations with Australia. In Malaysia and Singapore, bilateral defence ties are not remarked upon in public as much as FPDA. Nevertheless, they are clearly highly valued, with Malaysia's Defence Minister describing bilateral defence links as 'excellent' and Singapore moving towards a more extensive defence relationship with Australia. With Indonesia, there has also been substantial progress in this area since 1989. According to the chief of Australia's armed

forces, the ADF has been at the "leading edge" of redefining Australia's overall relationship with Indonesia.<sup>172</sup>

Regional defence cooperation, therefore, is clearly important for Australia's overall security aim of 'comprehensive engagement' with Southeast Asia. As Chapter One showed, the emphasis Australia places on regional defence cooperation in its overall security approach fits well with the importance for Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore of military links in overall regional stability. Apart from conducting more formal military exercises with these three nations in recent years than they have with themselves, the close personal links Australia has developed in the defence area sit comfortably with the role of informal military ties in maintaining workable relations within ASEAN. The survival of bilateral military links with Indonesia and Malaysia despite political tensions with both countries in 1990 and 1991 demonstrates the basic soundness of Australia's defence relations in Southeast Asia.

Despite the maintenance and improvement of Australia's regional defence links in recent years, however, it should not be thought that defence ties are immune from difficulties in broader relations. The negative impressions of Australia discussed earlier place limits on the bilateral defence cooperation regional nations will agree to. This is most apparent in the case of Indonesia, where the Australian community is not only regarded as having a racist attitude to Asia as a whole, but is believed to see Indonesia itself as a military threat. The Australian media is a further

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172 The Weekend Australian 17-18 April 1993.

complication. In Indonesia's eyes it has undue influence over Government policy, is preoccupied with East Timor and human rights generally, and hence could pose a threat to formal military cooperation between the two countries. While, therefore, the steady incremental improvement of Australia - Indonesia defence links is likely to continue, a major expansion of these ties appears unlikely without the resolution of some longstanding difficulties in broader relations. The visit to Indonesia in August 1992 by Australia's Opposition defence spokesman, Alexander Downer, illustrated this point. In developing its alternative defence policy, the Opposition had proposed extending regional defence cooperation into new areas, with particular emphasis on Indonesia:

The Coalition will make a major push to promote the development of joint equipment acquisition programs. The 1990s will present opportunities for a number of regional countries to participate in the design, manufacture and acquisition of common equipment types. Among these could be light armoured vehicles, transport aircraft and a number of naval programs".<sup>173</sup>

According to Downer:

There are enormous opportunities to develop ties between Australia's defence industries and those of Indonesia, as well as developing genuine joint exercises and training.<sup>174</sup>

Indonesia, however, believed considerable development of the overall relationship would be needed before the type of advanced defence cooperation that Downer was proposing could be feasible. As the Australian reported:

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173 Federal Liberal Party/National Party Coalition, A Strong Australia - Rebuilding Australia's Defence, Canberra 1992, 42.

174 Australian Financial Review, 3 August 1992.

in a sign that tensions still exist, the Indonesian officials said there was a need to build up more confidence in bilateral relations before the Opposition's policy of shared weapons procurement could be realised.<sup>175</sup>

In the case of Malaysia, the constraints that negative perceptions of Australia place on defence cooperation are less definite. This is partly because Australia's bilateral defence cooperation with Malaysia is deeper and of longer standing than that with Indonesia. It also reflects the importance for Malaysia of Australia's role in FPDA. In addition, there is no perception in Malaysia that Australia sees it as a military threat, and it is less likely that the Australian media would target military ties with Malaysia because of concerns over human rights. This suggests there could be greater scope for new forms of defence cooperation with Malaysia - along the lines proposed by Downer - although continued stability in political relations would be needed for this to occur.

As far as Singapore is concerned, its strategic need for military cooperation with Australia - which has increased with the end of the Cold War and the reduced United States military presence in Southeast Asia - would largely seem to override any constraints that broader political differences might otherwise impose on bilateral defence ties.

### Australia's military posture

A key aspect of the above perceptions is Indonesia's view of Australia's military posture. What needs to be noted in particular is the apparent division of opinion between ABRI and the Defence Ministry on the one hand, and the Foreign Ministry and the wider academic and political community on the other. As Andrew MacIntyre has said, "it remains the case that there is evidently some debate in Jakarta as to the meaning of the reforms introduced under Kim Beazley."<sup>176</sup>

Through a range of high level defence and military contacts, Australia has ensured that senior military and defence figures in Indonesia accept the policy of defence self-reliance set out in The Defence of Australia 1987. This understanding does not seem to have been passed on to Indonesia's Foreign Ministry, Parliamentary Commission 1 or the wider Indonesian academic community. These groups appear to have perceived Australia's military posture under its policy of defence self-reliance as - to use Hilman Adil's words - 'provocative and offensive'. Kim Beazley's emphasis for domestic political reasons on the capacity of Australian military forces to conduct offensive operations, together with accusations from Australian academics of 'a new Australian militarism', helped produce this perception.

While the key figures in Indonesia's military establishment accept Australia's defence approach, it is not in this nation's strategic interests for wider misunderstanding to persist. This adds to the general

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<sup>176</sup> Andrew MacIntyre, "Australia - Indonesia Relations", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), op. cit., 158.

perception that Australia sees Indonesia as a military threat. It also serves to confirm the view in Indonesia that Australians wish to maintain a form of 'European superiority' over their Asian neighbours. This complicates what has been a difficult relationship for both sides to manage.

The Liberal/National Party's presentation of its alternative defence policy in 1992 fitted well with the negative perceptions of Australia's military posture in Indonesia. Alexander Downer compared the Liberal/National Party's emphasis on cooperation with the region with the Government's defence policy, which he said was insular and assumed Asia to be a threat.<sup>177</sup> According to Downer, "The [1987] White Paper's strategy is wrong. It signals a wall around Australia where what we want to do economically and politically is the reverse".<sup>178</sup> Downer said that the Labor Government's "whole approach to Indonesia has only fostered a perception in Australia that Indonesia is a military threat to Australia."<sup>179</sup> While, however, some elements of Indonesian society and government would have agreed with Downer's assessment, the above study shows that his view of the Labor Government's defence policy as "a fortress Australia strategy"<sup>180</sup> would not have been shared by the senior Indonesian military officials he visited in August 1992. This may have contributed to the negative reception that his proposals for new areas of defence cooperation received in Indonesia.

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177 *Age*, 4 August 1992.

178 *The Weekend Australian*, 4 July 1992.

179 *Australian Financial Review*, 3 August 1992.

180 *Australian Financial Review*, 19 October 1992.

The current level of dissatisfaction in Indonesia with Australia's defence approach could not in itself lead to a serious dispute between the two nations. Even if Australia's defence posture is perceived by some as "hawkish" and the ADF's equipment program as beyond strict defensive needs, Australia is not seen as having any political motivation to threaten Indonesia. There have not been claims in Indonesia that Australia is ever likely to possess the type of aggressive political approach that would make a hawkish defence posture threatening. Moreover, whilst a variety of criticisms have been collected for this study, they have been spread over a number of years. Australia's defence approach is not a pressing issue in Indonesia. The strengthening of defence relations between 1989 and 1992 indicates this. At most it is of intermittent interest. Nevertheless, misunderstanding and concern persist in some quarters in Indonesia. For the sake of Australia's long term relationship with Indonesia, it is important that its military posture is understood outside the narrow Defence Ministry/ABRI circle. It is also important for Australia's security planners not be complacent on this subject, given the need for any two neighbours to avoid tension over military posture. In the case of Indonesia, a widespread belief that Australia possesses an unnecessarily offensive military posture could seriously exacerbate tension should a dispute arise between the two countries over some other issue.

In this context, three aspects of Australia's military posture which need to be understood more widely in Indonesia are discussed below.

### *Major equipment*

The concern expressed in Indonesia about Australia's defence posture relates mainly to major items of military equipment. This study has shown that a public emphasis in Australia on the offensive strike capacity of the ADF's submarine force and its F-111 and F/A-18 aircraft led to perceptions in Indonesia of an aggressive military posture. While personal explanations from Australian officials meant that ABRI and the Indonesian Defence Ministry understood the defensive nature of Australia's overall policy, other elements of government and society have been slower to accept this. Foreign Minister Alatas said Indonesians were "comparing your capability", presumably with that of their own nation. Hasnan Habib questioned why Australia needed the ability for long range strike operations to counter low level threats. Hilman Adil said development of the capabilities described in The Defence of Australia 1987 could be seen as provocative, referring in particular to Australia's "naval build up" and its plans for new submarines with a long range strike capacity.

The conclusion from the above is not that the ADF's capacity for offensive operations is necessarily inappropriate from a strategic or military point of view, but that a public emphasis on this capacity has the potential to damage Australia's relations with Indonesia. This means the ADF's strike capabilities are highlighted in Indonesia. In turn, this inevitably leads some in Indonesia to question

Australia's reasons for possessing these capabilities, and to ask whether the public emphasis on such capabilities is in itself meant to be a message to Indonesia. The reaction of Alatas and his political and academic colleagues shows that the way Australia's military equipment program fitted into the defensive policy enunciated in The Defence of Australia 1987 needed to be explained to more than just a narrow circle of senior ABRI and Defence Ministry officials. As MacIntyre has said:

What Australian defence planners see as necessary counter-strike capabilities may appear as more sinister long-range capabilities to other countries.... considerably more effort will be needed from Canberra to explain Australian defence policy more effectively and more widely in Indonesia to ensure that the security suspicions which were for so long the hallmark of Australian thinking about Indonesia, do not now come to characterise Indonesian thinking about Australia.<sup>181</sup>

Apart from a wider explanation of Australia's overall defence policy, an understanding of the domestic political scene in Australia would also have assisted acceptance of Australia's military posture in Indonesia. In particular, it would have made Kim Beazley's emphasis on the ADF's offensive capabilities more understandable to Indonesian observers.

The public criticism by Ambassador Siagian in October 1992 of Australia's plans to acquire additional F-111 fighter bombers underlines the legacy caused by the failure to explain the thinking behind The Defence of Australia 1987 more widely in Indonesia. Siagian's reaction shows again that Australia's defence equipment purchases will be queried in Indonesia, especially by those who were not acquainted with the rationale

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<sup>181</sup> Andrew MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, 158.

behind The Defence of Australia 1987. This is particularly so if, like the F-111s, the equipment could be used for offensive military operations.

One of the lessons Singapore learned from criticism of its offer of military facilities to the United States was the importance of prior consultation. Similarly, had Australia forewarned Indonesia of the F-111 purchase and the reasons for it, the criticism by Ambassador Siagian might have been avoided. In the case of the additional F-111s, however, the Government moved quickly to provide an explanation to a range of officials in Indonesia - not merely ABRI and the Defence Ministry - once the decision had been announced.<sup>182</sup>

Australia's diplomats, for example, conveyed an explanation of the purchase to their counterparts in the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, placing this in the context of the "basically defensive strategic posture" of Australia.<sup>183</sup> This showed an awareness that for the sake of good relations, Australia's military posture should be explained to more than just a narrow circle of senior Indonesian military officials. In addition, a willingness to quickly clarify such decisions is also in keeping with the way Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore resolve tensions between themselves. Malaysia's explanation and apology to Indonesia over the screening of a documentary on East Timor (see Chapter One) is a case in point. Prompt explanation of the F-111 purchase by Australian officials - together with the understanding built up since 1989 between senior Australian and Indonesian military and defence figures

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<sup>182</sup> Australian, 16 October 1992.

<sup>183</sup> The Weekend Australian 17-18 October 1992.

- clearly contributed to the public acceptance of the purchase by the head of Indonesia's armed forces, General Sutrisno.

The reaction in Indonesia to the Labor Government's emphasis on the ADF's offensive capabilities has clear implications for the Liberal/National Party's alternative defence policy. According to the Coalition:

Labor's reactive defence posture in the North is a policy for defeat....The Coalition Government will rectify this gap by augmenting our strike capability....(This) will present a deterrent against the initiation of hostilities, and provide Australia with a capability to defeat an enemy, not simply react to attacks on our soil.<sup>184</sup>

The Coalition said it would upgrade the capability of the F-111s - including an inflight refuelling capability - and consider equipping the new Collins class submarines with cruise missiles.<sup>185</sup>

It is not so much the fact that the Coalition plans to increase Australia's offensive strike capacity (the Sydney Morning Herald pointed out that the Liberal/National Party's policy in this area would only go 'slightly further' than that of the Government<sup>186</sup>), but the prominence of this aspect in the Coalition's overall policy that could cause difficulties in the region. As one report previewing the Liberal/National Party's policy said:

the Coalition is about to launch its new Fightback! Defence Policy, returning Australia to a past era of deterrence with the equipment and range to fight offensive wars in what they see as an increasingly uncertain Asia-Pacific region.<sup>187</sup>

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184 Federal Liberal Party/National Party Coalition, op. cit., 77.

185 Ibid., 77-79.

186 Sydney Morning Herald, 20 October 1992.

187 Transcript from SBS Television, "Dateline", 17 October 1992.

As the Australian remarked, "Perhaps the Opposition is a bit too keen on providing an independent strategic deterrent".<sup>188</sup>

The release of the Liberal/National Party's alternative defence policy occurred within a few days of the Labor Government's announcement of its plan to acquire additional F-111s. As a result, regional observers could have seen Australian political thinking on defence as dominated by a desire for an offensive military capability. Sabam Siagian in fact linked the Liberal/National Party's plan to consider a 'stand off strike capability' for the Collins submarines with the Government's acquisition of additional F-111s, saying that Australia should explain to its neighbours its "plan" to buy Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States.<sup>189</sup> Hence the Liberal/National Party's emphasis on deterrence and a capacity for strategic strike may have reinforced the perception of some sections of government and society in Indonesia that Australia possessed an aggressive defence posture. The Liberal/National Party's statements would also have provided further evidence for Indonesia that Australians see it as a military threat. As the Age suggested:

Following the Government's announcement last week of the proposed buy of an additional 18 F-111 long-range bombers, the Opposition's policy adds to the impression of continuing Australian insecurity.<sup>190</sup>

#### *Northern defence*

Another element of Australia's policy of defence self-reliance that requires careful explanation in Indonesia is the

<sup>188</sup> Australian, 20 October 1992.

<sup>189</sup> Antara 19 October 1992.

<sup>190</sup> Age, 19 October 1992.

increasing defence presence in the north of Australia. Construction of a chain of air bases across northern Australia, the basing of Australia's advanced F/A-18 fighter aircraft at Tindal in the Northern Territory, and an increased Army presence at Darwin, could without proper explanation cause uneasiness in Indonesia. As shown above, Indonesia's Parliamentary Commission 1 has already queried General Sutrisno about this. As Michael O'Connor stated in The Indonesian Quarterly:

In all the debates over Australian defence policy over the past decade, and in particular those aspects relating to northern basing, there has been little consideration of the external impact of that basing. Yet Indonesia and the principal shipping straits represent one of the most important strategic points in the world...By deploying forces to [the north of Australia], Australia actually alters the regional and global strategic balance. That is not an argument for not building the bases or making the deployments, It does, however, explain why our neighbours, and especially Indonesia, would be sensitive to the deployments and why Australia should be prepared to discuss its plans with its neighbours rather than act unilaterally on a matter that has regional and global security implications.<sup>191</sup>

Australian officials have recognised the need to provide an explanation of the increased military presence in northern Australia. In a speech to members of Indonesia's National Defence Institute, the head of the Australian Defence Department's International Policy Division said:

What I would like to emphasize is that this is not, and should not be seen as a threat to any other country. We are not developing a capacity for power projection into Southeast Asia. What we are doing is putting in place those Army, Navy and Air Force elements needed to defend what is logically the most vulnerable part of the country. A glance at a map of Australia shows you it is

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191 M. O'Connor, "Australia's defence relations with Indonesia," op. cit., 188-189.

far easier to threaten the north of Australia than it is to threaten the south.<sup>192</sup>

This type of explanation helped reduce any concern within the Indonesian armed forces over this issue. When Alexander Downer visited Indonesia in July 1992, he was told that "Indonesian forces did not feel threatened by the increased deployment of forces in the Northern Territory."<sup>193</sup>

Once again, however, it is also important to ensure that other elements of Indonesian government and society understand the reasons for Australia's northern deployments. Australia may not always be able to rely on figures like General Sutrisno to defend its policies before groups such as Parliamentary Commission 1. Australia needs also to consider the types of forces it bases in the north. For example, a decision to base the F-111 fleet in the north of Australia could on the basis of the above study provoke an adverse reaction in Indonesia. Similarly, as Chapter Two pointed out, proposals for the rotational basing of United States forces in northern Australia might not be seen in a favourable light in Indonesia.

#### *Military exercises*

Closely related to the question of northern defence is Australia's approach to military exercises in and around the north of the country. In the opinion of Michael O'Connor:

Indonesia does perceive that Australian policy appears to be fearful of Indonesian designs upon Australia. [This

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192 R.G. Brabin-Smith, address to Indonesian National Defence Institute, 29 October 1991, in Department of Defence, Australia, Defence Information Package, January 1992, A-5,6.

193 Australian, 6 August 1992.

is] reinforced by the current policy of military deployments to northern Australia and the broad scenarios used in the Kangaroo series of triennial defence exercises.<sup>194</sup>

In the case of Kangaroo 89, held in August and September 1989, the scale of the exercise appeared inconsistent with the emphasis in The Defence of Australia 1987 on low level threats. This was pointed out to Indonesian readers by Peter Hastings, an Australian journalist who commanded wide respect in Indonesia, in an article in the Jakarta Post in August 1989:

Had Kangaroo 89 been confined to small party exercises, one could understand it. The scale would have been appropriate. But why...is Australia spending...\$100 million on exercises in Australia's north-west against an imaginary enemy called Kamaria (for which read Indonesia) involving 26,000 servicemen of whom 2,000 are American, including airmen flying B-52s? What on earth for? What sort of message is an American B-52 meant to convey to Jakarta? Nuclear weapons?...Kangaroo 89 remains a bloody nonsense. And expensive nonsense.<sup>195</sup>

The Australian Government indicated its concern that Indonesia should not be offended by Kangaroo 89 by inviting ABRI chief, General Sutrisno, and his senior staff to observe the exercise. Again, however, the wider body of Indonesian Government officials and academics appear to have been left largely to determine their own opinions.

The need to explain major military exercises in the north of Australia to Indonesia seemed to be more clearly understood by the time the next exercise in the Kangaroo series was held in March 1992. Senior Indonesian officers including General Sutrisno were briefed in advance on the four week exercise.<sup>196</sup>

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194 M. O'Connor, "Australia's defence relations with Indonesia," op. cit., 190.

195 Jakarta Post, 11 August 1989.

196 Australian, 12 February 1992.

In addition, the commander of the Army's Operational Deployment Force, Brigadier Frank Hickling, addressed possible Indonesian concerns about the exercise in an interview he gave to the Kompas newspaper. "Kamaria is not Indonesia", he said. Kamaria was very different to Indonesia - for one thing, it was a white nation. A threat had to be invented for the exercise, because there was no threat to Australia. He also explained that Australia thought any enemy must come from the north because to attack from the south large distances would need to be transversed by sea.<sup>197</sup>

Together with the general improvement in the defence relationship, these measures appeared to allay any concern in Indonesia about the Kangaroo series of exercises. As the Australian commented in February 1992:

past difficulties with Indonesia over how the exercise has been characterised appear to have been resolved. The Kamarian enemy...has prompted persistent speculation that the Australian military designs its defence exercises with Indonesian military capabilities in mind. But the involvement of senior Indonesian officers in Kangaroo' 92 - after much closer senior contacts in recent years - is seen as an indication of the sophisticated understanding of mutual strategic interests that has developed between the Indonesian and Australian forces.<sup>198</sup>

The Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter went further in June 1992, saying that:

There was a time when the Kamaria exercises were capable of being interpreted as offensive to near northern neighbours. Today, the obviously genuine Australian interest in regional security, and the warm regional response to the initiative, has happily relegated that to the past.<sup>199</sup>

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197 Kompas, 20 April 1992.

198 Australian, 12 February 1992.

199 Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, June-July 1992, 11.

As with Australia's defence equipment program and the increase in northern basing, it will be important to ensure continued understanding in Indonesia of the ADF's exercises in and around northern Australia. The benefits of ensuring this understanding were demonstrated in early 1992, when the 'Lusitania Espresso' incident occurred at the same time as Kangaroo 92 was being conducted. Given the central role of East Timor in Australia-Indonesia relations, as well as the tension between the two nations over the events in Dili in November 1991, the fact that Australia was holding a major military exercise in its northern waters at the time of the protest ship's visit to East Timor had the potential to cause serious misunderstanding in Indonesia. That this did not occur reflects the understanding developed over recent years at a senior level between the armed forces of the two nations, and the efforts Australia has made to familiarise Indonesia with the thinking behind its exercises in northern Australia.

In a summary of Australia's military posture and relations with Indonesia, Michael O'Connor said that:

the development of northern basing and the scenarios which underpin the Kangaroo exercises tend to reinforce a perception of an Australia defending itself against an Indonesian invasion. At the same time, theoretical discussions about the use of Australian air power coupled with the RAAF's equipment and training policy reinforce perceptions in Indonesian as well as Australia that the RAAF is strongly committed to offensive operations against Indonesia....such adverse perceptions...should be overcome by a programme of consultations with Indonesia and a more sensitive programme of public discussion in Australia. The latter point is as important as the first; it is essential that the Australian community be encouraged to take a more sophisticated view of Australia's security relations with Indonesia and, in particular, to recognise the potential for collaboration

rather than the likelihood of conflict...there is a need to popularise the view in the wider Australian community that Indonesia is more likely to be a collaborator in security programmes than a potential enemy.<sup>200</sup>

O'Connor seems not to be aware that Australia's military posture has already been the subject of extensive "programmes of consultation" with Indonesia. Public support for Australia's defence posture from senior Indonesian military figures such as Benny Murdani and General Sutrisno demonstrates the success of this consultation process. This consultation, however, has occurred largely in the form of contact between senior Defence officials. While contributing in a major way to avoiding tension between Australia and Indonesia over military issues, it remains true - as O'Connor and MacIntyre have suggested - that there is a need to explain Australia's defence approach more widely in Indonesia. While not a serious issue at present, this would help avoid the possibility that criticism of Australia's defence posture could complicate relations with Indonesia in the future. Ambassador Siagian's reaction to Australia's decision to purchase additional F-111 fighter bombers demonstrates that there is still a lack of acceptance of Australia's defence approach outside senior ABRI/Defence Ministry circles. Australia moved quickly to explain the F-111 decision to the Indonesian Government as a whole, especially the Foreign Ministry. There will be a continuing need to provide such explanations if a wider acceptance in Indonesia of the defensive nature of Australia's overall defence policy is to develop.

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200 M. O'Connor, "Australia's defence relations with Indonesia", op.cit., 196.

It is also true, as O'Connor suggests, that the opinion in some quarters in Indonesia that Australia has an aggressive military posture is closely linked to the general perception that Australians see Indonesia as a military threat. As Jusuf Wanandi and Ikrar Nusa Bhaktri have pointed out, this perception will only disappear when the more relaxed view of Indonesia's military ambitions in Australian Government circles is extended to the community as a whole.

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## Conclusion

As approaches to security in Southeast Asia evolve, Australia needs to be aware of the strategic perceptions of regional nations if it is to participate in a security community 'based on a sense of shared security interests'. The perceptions of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore are of special significance, given the strategic importance of this triangle of Southeast Asian nations for Australia.

This study has not sought to examine the fundamental basis for Australia's current security policies, merely to look at how the strategic perceptions of our neighbours might influence these policies. It has shown that Australia's approach to the promotion of regional cohesion is largely consistent with the factors that Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore see as important for regional stability. Australia's emphasis on bilateral military cooperation and personal contact between military leaders fits well with the approach of these countries, as does the priority Australia gives to economic development and cooperation. Australia recognises the contribution of ASEAN to regional stability, the need for the Indo-China states to move into the mainstream of regional economic and political affairs, and the major influence that China and Indonesia itself have on the stability and security of Southeast Asia. On the other hand, there has been insufficient awareness in Australia of the role of personal contact between national leaders in maintaining and enhancing regional stability. Prime Minister Hawke's failure to develop personal links with President Suharto of

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Indonesia meant Australia lost an opportunity to capitalise on the success of its other regional security policies.

Australia also needs to appreciate the importance for Indonesia of good relations with Papua New Guinea for regional stability, and hence the need to maintain dialogue with Indonesia on PNG issues.

The study also revealed the complexity of attitudes in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore towards Australia's military ally, the United States. The chapter showed that Australia should not assume automatic support from these three nations for United States' actions or policies, including in the security field. For reasons of economic and regional stability, the national leaders of these countries support a continued United States security presence in Southeast Asia. Even in Singapore's case, however, this support is not underwritten by the type of cultural and ideological affinity that exists between the United States and Australia. Events in the Middle East strongly influence the attitude of the Islamic community in Southeast Asia towards the United States. Together with nationalism and various bilateral difficulties, this constrains the level and type of security cooperation with the United States that Indonesia and Malaysia are willing to agree to. This in turn sets parameters for Singapore's security links with the United States. In this context, Australia's should consult or at least inform regional nations before cooperating with the United States in major international security actions such as the Gulf War. Australia should also explain that its US alliance complements its security cooperation with regional nations, and take

regional attitudes into account in considering any proposals for an additional United States security presence on its territory. In assessing regional perceptions, Australia should note that senior officials in defence and military circles in Indonesia and Malaysia have a more positive attitude towards the United States than other elements of government and society.

As far as perceptions of Australia itself are concerned, the study has shown that Prime Minister Keating's nationalist rhetoric and regional visits have contributed to a more positive perception of the Australian Government, but that negative images of the wider Australian community - especially the media - persist. These negative perceptions remain an obstacle to Australia's key regional security aim of comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia. By late 1992, Australia's approach on the question of broader regional security initiatives had converged with that of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. There was a positive view of Australia's bilateral defence cooperation in all three countries, although in the case of Indonesia and perhaps also in Malaysia, negative general perceptions of Australia will constrain the pace at which this cooperation can be developed. The varying perceptions of the Five Power Defence Arrangements in the three nations suggest that the arrangements should be maintained largely in their current form, with neither a downgrading nor a significant expansion.

The study showed that some Australian and Indonesian commentators saw Australia's policy of defence self-reliance as the basis for a more confident, outward looking Australia,

and as part of Australia's contribution to future regional stability. However, the fact that important elements of government and society in Indonesia did not see Australia's new military posture in this light means a wider explanation and better presentation of Australia's defence approach is needed. The belief outside Indonesian Defence Ministry/ABRI circles that Australia's defence approach is overly aggressive also reinforces the perception that Australians see Indonesia as a military threat. Whilst Australia's military posture is not a pressing issue in Jakarta, such a perception complicates the relationship between the two countries, and hinders Australia's aim of closer engagement with the region. Australia should ensure that its major defence equipment purchases, as well as its military presence and exercises in and around northern Australia, are understood by a wider audience in Indonesia.

Based on the strategic perceptions of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, therefore, to improve its prospects of being seen as a natural participant in a regional security community, Australia needs to strengthen personal links with regional heads of government, recognise the widely differing views in Indonesia and Malaysia about its United States ally, encourage a better perception in all three countries of the general Australian community, and promote a wider understanding in Indonesia of Australia's policy of defence self-reliance.

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