

## 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

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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

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

<sup>27</sup> Jakarta Post, 1 September 1989.

<sup>28</sup> 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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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> New Straits Times, 16 August 1989.

<sup>85</sup> Straits Times, 5 August 1989.

<sup>86</sup> 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

89 New Straits Times, 7 January 1992.

90 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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116 Far Eastern Economic Review, 9 July 1992.

117 Business Times (Kuala Lumpur), 5 May 1990.

118 New Straits Times, 21 January 1992.

119 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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166 P.L. Wood, J.W. Wheeler, op. cit., 46.

167 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

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

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 Sopiee 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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179 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.