

Chapter 3

Perceptions of Australia

1989-1992

This chapter looks at the strategic perceptions from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore that are of most interest to Australia's security planners - perceptions of Australia itself. More space is devoted in the chapter to Indonesia's perceptions of Australia than those of Malaysia and Singapore. The perceptions of the latter two countries are important, but as Indonesia's ambassador to Australia, Sabam Siagian, stated, "To be part of the Asia-Pacific, the test case is whether Australia can establish a working relationship with this not unimportant neighbour, Indonesia."¹

The chapter describes both general perceptions of Australia as well as more specific views of Australia's security policies. General perceptions provide a guide to the state of bilateral relations between Australia and the region. In addition, general perceptions can affect the level of security cooperation Australia has with its neighbours. As Foreign Minister Evans pointed out in Australia's Regional Security:

Australia continues to have something of an image problem in Southeast Asia....we are seen in a number of quarters as being of declining relative importance, tainted with racism, with an inefficient and lagging economy, and major industrial relations problems. That some of this image lacks substance is less important than the fact

¹ New Straits Times, 26 June 1992.

that it is widely held. It impinges on many of our interests, not least our security interests.²

Specific perceptions of Australia's security policies are of obvious importance to the future development of these policies. For all three nations, perceptions of Australia's defence cooperation and overall regional security approach are considered. Perceptions of Australia's military posture, however, are only examined in the case of Indonesia. Since Malaysia and Singapore are not immediate neighbours of Australia, they have few comments to offer on this aspect of our security approach.

Indonesia's view of Australia

General perceptions

The starting point for contemporary Indonesian perceptions of Australia is Australia's support for Indonesian attempts to gain independence following the Second World War. A small legacy of goodwill towards Australia remains amongst the generation of Indonesian leaders and opinion makers that experienced the independence struggle. During Prime Minister Keating's visit to Indonesia in April 1992, President Suharto praised Australia's role in helping Indonesia secure its independence, referring in particular to action by Australian trade unions which prevented Dutch vessels transporting military equipment to Indonesia.³ In September 1991, Sabam

² Evans, *Australia's Regional Security*, op. cit., 36.

³ *The Age*, 22 April 1992.

Siagian said that he liked to remind people of the important role Australia played between 1946 and 1950:

when there were moments when Indonesians were seized with serious doubt whether the infant Republic of Indonesia will survive...Australia took the risk...to clearly support Indonesia's position instead of playing the role of an impartial mediator.⁴

Australia's attitude in the 1950s and 1960s to the incorporation of West Irian into Indonesia is not remembered in such a positive light. Jusuf Wanandi, chairman of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, noted that:

Prime Minister Menzies' views on Indonesia were very much influenced by those of the Western bloc, led by the US, that saw Indonesia moving into the embrace of the communist bloc.⁵

According to an Indonesian academic, Budiono Kusumohamidjojo, "Australia's policy in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict concerning 'Irian Barat' was...frustrating for the Indonesian Government."⁶ As Sabam Siagian said:

there were moments...when we...had our genuine doubts whether Australia was indeed friendly towards us. Such a perception was formed because throughout the 1950s Australia experienced a policy switch and supported the status quo in...West New Guinea.⁷

Indeed, Australia's position on West Irian is recalled with more displeasure than this nation's role in Confrontation in the mid-1960s. The fact that Australian and Indonesian

4 Sabam Siagian, Address to National Press Club, Canberra, 18 September 1991, 12.

5 Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XX, no. 2, second quarter 1992, 158.

6 Budiono Kusumohamidjojo, "The Indonesia - Australia relationship: problems between unfamiliar neighbours", Australian Outlook, vol.40, no.3, December 1986, 144.

7 Siagian, op. cit., 12.

troops clashed over the formation of Malaysia is remembered and commented on publicly in Indonesia. In 1992, Jusuf Wanandi reminded readers of The Indonesian Quarterly that "The 'konfrontasi' with Malaysia led to a direct confrontation between Indonesian and Australian troops in the jungles of Kalimantan".⁸ But Confrontation did not involve Australian opposition to the incorporation of territory which Indonesia regarded as rightfully its own, as in the case of West Irian.

There remains considerable resentment in Indonesia, however, over Australia's perceived position on the East Timor issue. Australia is seen as having a two-faced approach on the question of Indonesia's annexation of the former Portuguese colony in 1975. According to David Jenkins, many Indonesians:

not only believed (no doubt correctly) that Gough Whitlam had all but given them the nod to take over the territory but felt that they were doing Australia a favour in the process, removing any possibility of a 'Cuba on the doorstep.'⁹

In addition, the East Timor question is behind the acerbic view many prominent Indonesians have of the Australian media. In Indonesia's opinion, the Australian media's attitude reflects a general ignorance about our surrounding region. As Wanandi has said:

The accusations made by the Australian mass media on human rights violations in East Timor, as well as the harsh comments on the role of the military and the questions of democracy in general, were negatively received in Indonesia. Australia...was seen as a racist country, arrogant and moralistic in imposing its values to other nations, and could never become part of Asia

⁸ Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", op. cit., 158.

⁹ David Jenkins, "Indonesia: Government attitudes towards the domestic and foreign media", Australian Outlook, vol. 40, no. 3, December 1986, 157-158.

because of its predominant orientation towards England, USA and the West.¹⁰

In the context of East Timor, the role of Radio Australia has attracted specific criticism in Indonesia. As Ikrar Nusa Bhakti said in The Indonesian Quarterly in 1992:

The Australian media has conducted a vendetta against Indonesia since the death of five Australian journalists...in Balibo, East Timor....More importantly, Radio Australia provides news broadcasts in Indonesian which occasionally present coverage of political disturbances in various parts of Indonesia. This situation has been an enduring source of irritation to security planners in Jakarta and security apparatus [sic] in various parts of the country who do not want such incidents publicised.¹¹

David Jenkins wrote in 1986 that "Ten years after the event the alleged shortcomings of the media still rankle with those Indonesian officers who served in Timor."¹² He added that there was also exasperation at a political level with the emphasis of the Australian media not only on East Timor but on the difficulties Indonesia faced in developing Irian Jaya. When questioned again on these subjects in the mid-1980s, Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja stated bluntly, "We refuse...to be seen as appendages of Irian Jaya and East Timor."¹³ These perceptions of the Australian media supported the view of many Indonesians that Australia was a land of bossy, self-appointed regional experts. Before his visit to Australia in 1985, Mochtar said that Indonesians never had the chance to present their own point of view: "We felt that with

10 Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", op. cit., 158-159.

11 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, "Facing the 21st century: trends in Australia's relations with Indonesia," The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XX, no. 2, second quarter 1992, 147.

12 Jenkins, op. cit., 157.

13 *Ibid.*, 157.

Australia being so noisy about it, we would let you have your say."¹⁴

The publication in April 1986 of David Jenkins' article on the business interests of President Suharto's family confirmed for Indonesia the problems that the Australian media could cause. At a time when bilateral difficulties caused by the East Timor question appeared to be declining, the Jenkins affair caused a serious set-back in Australia-Indonesia relations. It is an important part of the background to current Indonesian perceptions of Australia. Writing shortly after the Jenkins affair, Budiono Kusumohamidjojo referred to the Indonesian reaction, including that of General Murdani, then ABRI commander:

General Murdani belongs to those who represent a harder stance against Australia, and the effect of the Jenkins article has strengthened their position.¹⁵

Indonesian respect for the Australian Government also suffered from this incident because of the damage done to Indonesia-Australia relations by a single newspaper article. According to Kusumohamidjojo:

For most Indonesians, a government which is not in a position to prevent individuals harming its national interests must be a rather weak and incompetent government.¹⁶

In recent years, however, especially since 1989, there has been a marked improvement in the Australia-Indonesia relationship. David Jenkins felt able to comment in July 1991 that:

¹⁴ Kusumohamidjojo, *op. cit.*, 143.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

Australia-Indonesia relations seem to be on the up and up. We may irritate one another from time to time. But both sides seem to agree that the other is not unimportant.¹⁷

The turning point in the relationship was the visit to Australia in March 1989 by Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. According to one Indonesian commentator, this "showed Indonesia's goodwill to 'normalise' Australia-Indonesia relations after the ...completely unprovoked ... (1986) Sydney Morning Herald incident".¹⁸ In July 1989, General Try Sutrisno made the first visit to Australia by the head of the Indonesian Armed Forces since 1972. As the Indonesian Observer said, "Indonesia's number one military man's stature - and his widely-talked about prospects beyond 1993 - has imbued the visit with added importance."¹⁹

The signing of the Timor Gap agreement in October 1989 helped improve Indonesia's perception of the benefits of good relations with Australia. Apart from settling the boundary between Australia and East Timor, it provided for joint oil and gas exploration in the Timor Sea. As Foreign Minister Alatas said, "this agreement has once again proven that Australia and Indonesia are really serious in improving their relations."²⁰ Indonesia's Director General of Oil and Gas, Suijitno Padmosukismo, said that exploitation of the oil and natural gas resources was in line with efforts to raise Indonesia's overall national resilience and was in accordance

¹⁷ Sydney Morning Herald, 12 July 1991.

¹⁸ A. Hasnan Habib, "Australia - Indonesia Relations: the politico-defence dimension", in D. Ball & H. Wilson (eds), Strange Neighbours, the Australia - Indonesia Relationship, Sydney, 1991, 177.

¹⁹ Indonesian Observer, 12 July 1989.

²⁰ Jakarta Post, 28 October 1989.

with the archipelagic concept.²¹ In addition, former Foreign Minister Mochtar said that seen from the political aspect the Timor Gap agreement consolidated the defacto recognition which Australia had previously given on the integration of East Timor into Indonesian territory.²²

After a steady improvement in relations between 1989 and 1992, it was the visit to Jakarta in April 1992 by Australia's new Prime Minister, Paul Keating, that for Indonesia signalled the start of a new era in bilateral ties. The visit was seen in Indonesia as evidence that with Keating's accession Australia was now serious about "enmeshment with Asia".

Angkatan Bersenjata, the official newspaper of the Indonesian Armed Forces, commented in an editorial titled "New freshness in RI-Australia relations" that:

Being young, PM Keating's political views differ from his predecessors who gave a priority to relations with fellow industrialised countries in the North. Keating wants to make Australia, which is located in Asia, a part of the Asia-Pacific region.²³

Keating's support for the aim of an Australian republic and his "anti-colonial" statements helped the perception of a new, more independent direction in Australian foreign policy.

Sabam Siagian commented that:

The foreign policy speech [in which Keating criticised Australia's 'nostalgic, Menzian links' to Great Britain] is...a proclamation of Australia's intention to...conduct an independent and active foreign policy...The desire of Australia to play a more genuine and independent role in the Asia-Pacific...is being welcomed in Indonesia and throughout the region.²⁴

²¹ Antara, 12 February 1990/B.

²² Ibid.

²³ Angkatan Bersenjata, 25 April 1992.

²⁴ ABC Radio National, Indian Pacific, 11 April 1992.

The Jakarta daily, Suara Pembuaran said:

His statement that Australia would soon become a republic indicated that the time had come for this country to release itself from its dependence on the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, and come closer to Asia-Pacific countries instead. PM Keating even said that Australia should preferably be regarded as an Asian country.²⁵

Keating's visit was of particular importance in the context of the East Timor issue. Coming soon after tension over events in East Timor again threatened Australia-Indonesia relations in November 1991, his visit produced a perception in Indonesia that at last there was an Australian leadership determined not to let the issue dominate the overall relationship. As Daniel Setyawan, editor of the Indonesian Quarterly, said:

Prime Minister Keating's three day visit is indeed strategically important. It is no secret that Indonesia-Australia bilateral relations always ebb and flow and recently reached a low point following the Dili incident of November 12 last year...Keating's visit reveals the strategic importance that Australia places on Indonesia in its foreign policy and makes clear Australian determination to have better relations with its Asian neighbours.²⁶

Keating was compared favourably with his predecessor, Bob Hawke, who was seen as bowing to domestic political pressure when he delayed a planned visit to Indonesia at the end of 1991. Ikrar Nusa Bhakti noted that Hawke's attitude suggested to Indonesia that the former Prime Minister's statements about linking Australia more closely to Asia were merely rhetoric:

the then Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke intended to visit Indonesia last December. However, he delayed his visit because of the problem Indonesia had in Dili (Santa Cruz massacre)...Bob Hawke came to Indonesia in

²⁵ Suara Pembuaran, 27 April 1992.

²⁶ The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xx, no. 2, second quarter, 1992, 128.

1983...and had never since visited Indonesia. In doing so he seemed to show that Indonesia was not important to Australia. Even though he always said that Australians should change their attitude towards Asia, he himself established a perception that the US was still Australia's important ally and protector.²⁷

It was only with Keating's visit - and his espousal of republican ideals - that Indonesia began to accept that Australia was serious about the priority it gave to links with Asia. Keating was seen in Indonesia as a new breed of Prime Minister ready to support Senator Evans' push for comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia. According to Ikrar Nusa Bhaktri:

A combination between Paul Keating as Prime Minister and Senator Gareth Evans as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade...will enhance Australia's relations with Asia.²⁸

Events later in 1992 reinforced the perception that Australia would not allow domestic pressure on East Timor to dictate the state of relations with Indonesia. When the United States House of Representatives voted in June 1992 to discontinue military aid to Indonesia because of the November 1991 East Timor killings, Australia did not take similar action. In contrast to the United States, Australia did not hold the Indonesian government responsible for the actions of its military units in East Timor. Hence Australia saw no need to suspend or cut back security co-operation with the Indonesian government. Angkatan Bersenjata quoted with approval that "Senator Gareth Evans, who has a deep understanding of this matter, has expressed regret over the US decision to discontinue the aid."²⁹ As the Sydney Morning

27 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, op. cit., 152-153.

28 Ibid., 152-153.

29 Angkatan Bersenjata, 7 July 1992.

Herald reported, Australia "might be secretly pleased...if we come out looking sweeter than the Americans."³⁰

Compared to the mid-1980s, Indonesia's general perceptions of Australia had improved considerably by the end of 1992. It should be noted, however, that Indonesia's more positive view related to the Australian Government's approach. There was a belief in Indonesia that general community attitudes in Australia had been slower to change. As Jusuf Wanandi remarked:

Generally speaking, racial sentiments and the feeling of superiority of the white people are still widespread among (Australia's) people. Therefore, the feeling that its political and economic systems are superior is quite pronounced. The leaders have made efforts to change this, either through education, immigration policy, and appreciation of foreign cultures. However, this policy has not received bi-partisan support. Australia is still very much oriented toward Europe, England in particular, and the United States, although geographically, geographically and economically it is very much part of the Asia-Pacific region.³¹

Apart from a belief that Australians still have a superior, racist attitude towards their Asian neighbours, there is also a perception in Indonesia that the Australian public sees it as a military threat. Again, Indonesia contrasts the public attitude with that of the Government and bureaucracy. Ikrar Nusa Bhakti referred to an appearance by the then vice-chief of the Australian Defence Force, Vice-Admiral Beaumont, before an Australian parliamentary committee, where Admiral Beaumont dismissed fears that Indonesia was a threat to Australia:

Actually, this is not his personal opinion but that of the Australian Department of Defence. This opinion is

³⁰ Sydney Morning Herald, 29 June 1992.

³¹ Jusuf Wanandi, *op. cit.*, 160.

quite different from the opinion of the majority of Australians.³²

Jusuf Wanandi had a similar perception. Australia, he said:

feels quite insecure towards Indonesia...Indonesia is seen as an aggressive and expansionist country. However, the Australian defence establishment recognises that Indonesia does not have any intention or capability to invade Australia...The Australian elite seems to be of the opinion that Indonesia poses a threat to Australia only if instability develops inside Indonesia which would allow its foreign policy to become aggressive as experienced during the Soekarno era.³³

The deputy chairman of Indonesia's parliamentary commission on Foreign affairs, Defence and Information, Theo Sambuaga, said the Australian Government:

has to explain to its people that there's nothing to worry about. It should increase the flow of information to Australian society about the level of Indonesia's development in military capacity, that the level is still far from enough compared with Indonesia's geography and its needs for its own defence.³⁴

While Australia's Minister for Defence, Senator Ray, believed "there's a misconception in Indonesia, that most Australians regard Indonesia as some sort of a threat"³⁵, Prime Minister Keating seemed to accept the need to educate the wider Australian community about Indonesia. "Too many Australians", he said, "still have an image of Indonesia as a poor and backward country which is somehow threatening to Australia's interests."³⁶

Hence Indonesia's general perceptions of Australia continue to be a mixture of positive and negative impressions.

32 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, op. cit., 153.

33 Jusuf Wanandi, op. cit. 160.

34 Canberra Times, 28 April 1991.

35 Ibid.

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

While the more positive view of the Australian Government in recent years is of considerable benefit for bilateral ties, the negative impressions Indonesia has of the general Australian community, especially the media, continue to act as a constraint on the overall relationship.

Perceptions of Australia's security approach

Australia's military posture

In 1986 the Australian correspondent for *Kompas*, Savitri Scherer, argued that Paul Dibb's Review of Australia's defence capabilities (the forerunner of Australia's official defence white paper, The Defence of Australia 1987) could contribute significantly to better Australia-Indonesia relations. Scherer compared the approach in the Dibb Review with that of Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey in The Tyranny of Distance. Dibb, according to Scherer:

approaches Australia's distance from the rest of the world using an opposite frame of mind to that of Blainey. Through describing the lengthy distance of Australia from Great Britain, Blainey explained and justified the Australian consciousness of being culturally marginal. In Blainey's framework distance has helped cripple Australia's ability to realise fully its own cultural potential. Dibb, on the other hand, argues that the geographical distance between Australia and the US-British powers should not deter Australians from developing the capability to defend the region by using their own resources. Such a belief in Australia's own capability to defend its own region is a revolutionary perception for Australians....While the Blainey solution to conquering the tyranny of distance leads Australians to despair at their isolation, making them xenophobic towards their neighbours, Dibb's approach provides Australians with a basis for feeling secure in their environment. A tangible feeling of security would be an

important start towards decreasing the strain in the Australian-Indonesian relationship.³⁷

Scherer's positive view of the Dobb Review suggested that the policy of defence self-reliance set out in The Defence of Australia 1987 would be readily accepted in Indonesia. By 1989, however, it was apparent that there was far from uniform acceptance in Indonesia of Australia's new defence approach. Indeed, support appeared to be confined to a narrow group of senior ABRI and Defence Ministry officials. As with Indonesia's perceptions of the United States, public material from the years 1989 to 1992 reveals a clear division between the attitude of ABRI and the Defence Ministry on the one hand and other parts of government and society, including the Foreign Ministry, on the other.

In May 1989, a former Indonesian Ambassador to the United States, Lt Gen Hasnan Habib, stated in an address at the Australian National University (ANU) that Australia's "hawkish military force in being is obviously out of place and may cause misgivings as to the real motivation and intention of Australia." The Dobb Review and The Defence of Australia 1987, Habib said, had only raised the possibility of limited military harassment, and to build up a military force capable of striking beyond Australia's area of direct military interest to meet that low level threat "is an over reaction...it gives the impression of an aggressive military doctrine."³⁸ Minister for Defence Murdani hastened to reassure Australia that these comments were merely Habib's

37 Savitri Scherer, "The Tyranny of Cohabitation: Australian-Indonesian relations", Australian Outlook, vol. 40 no 3, December 1986, 150.

38 Canberra Times, 29 May 1989.

personal views.³⁹ When asked during his visit to Australia whether he agreed with Habib, ABRI chief General Try Sutrisno said "No, I don't and in any case General Habib is a retired not a serving officer."⁴⁰ ABRI spokesman General Nurhadi reiterated that Habib's comments did not reflect the thinking of the Indonesian Armed Forces. "ABRI never regards Australia as a threat", he said.⁴¹ In contrast, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said that while General Habib had not been speaking on behalf of the Indonesian Government, his remarks showed that "people are looking, are interested in what comes out of the Australian defence debate, are taking notice of it, and are comparing your capability." Alatas said there was room for Australia to provide more information: "I think Australia has tried to explain but there is room for further discussion and seminars to air each others perceptions."⁴²

Three years later differences between the Indonesian military and the Foreign Ministry over Australia's military posture were still apparent. In October 1992, the Australian Government announced plans to buy up to eighteen additional F-111 fighter bombers from the United States. Ambassador Siagian criticised the purchase. The planned acquisition, he said, could "raise possible scepticism of Australia's seriousness in security cooperation".⁴³ Two days after Siagian's criticism was prominently reported in the Australian media, General Sutrisno put forward a contrary view. He said the acquisition of extra F-111s was in the context of

39 Jakarta Post, 21 July 1989.

40 Sydney Morning Herald, 12 July 1989.

41 Canberra Times, 30 May 1989.

42 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 July 1989.

43 Australian 16 October 1992.

Australia's internal defence strategy and did not pose a threat to its neighbours.⁴⁴ According to General Sutrisno, Australia needed many aircraft to defend its huge territory and the purchase should not be questioned.⁴⁵

It is not only Indonesia's Foreign Ministry and its overseas representatives, however, that have questioned Australia's new military posture. Referring to Habib's 1989 criticism, Jusuf Wanandi said:

It's a wider view - not just Habib's...Many people here have no understanding of your strategy; they don't understand its objectives and it should be explained more.⁴⁶

One group that has raised questions about Australia's policies is Indonesia's Parliamentary Commission 1 (Defence, Foreign Affairs and Information). In 1988 the Commission queried General Murdani about Australia's military approach. Murdani replied that Australia's defence program was not a threat to Indonesia.⁴⁷ "If I were Australian, I would have done the same thing", he said.⁴⁸ In September 1991 the Commission asked General Sutrisno to explain the deployment of additional ADF forces to the north of Australia. He replied:

As to your question why more troops are placed in the northern part of the country, it is just because Australia is the most southern country in this part of the hemisphere. Naturally, they have to be in that position.⁴⁹

44 Antara 19 October 1992.

45 Sydney Morning Herald, 19 October 1992.

46 Canberra Times, 30 May 1989.

47 Indonesia Times, 30 March 1988.

48 quoted in Kim Beazley, Hermann Black Forum Lecture, Sydney, 13 September 1989, 10.

49 Indonesia Times, 20 September 1991.

Earlier that year, the deputy chairman of the Commission, Theo Sambuaga, criticised Professor Des Ball from the ANU for suggesting that Australia's air force should increase its offensive planning given the improved military hardware of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.⁵⁰ "Comments such as this", said Sambuaga, "could create a psychological feeling in Indonesia that Australia still wants to maintain its European supremacy among its Asian neighbours."⁵¹ Despite Murdani and Sutrisno's defence of Australia's military posture, the fact that Parliamentary Commission 1 has on a number of occasions raised or commented on this issue suggests that its members do not share their opinion.

Further criticism of Australia's military approach came from the Indonesian academic community. In July 1989, Dr Hilman Adil, senior analyst at the Indonesian Institute for Sciences, explained the evolution of Australia's policy of defence self-reliance in an article in the Jakarta Post. Dr Adil had no difficulty with the military strategy outlined in the Dibb Review and The Defence of Australia 1987:

one could easily agree with the argument that Australia needs to maintain an adequate defense system and must try to convince its neighbours that it fully intends to defend the continent against aggression.

But, he said, references by Australia's Minister for Defence, Kim Beazley, to an expanded fleet of naval warships and long range strike capabilities, including new submarines, as well as claims that Australia would have forces 'superior to

50 Sun Herald (Sydney), 7 April 1991, 29.

51 Canberra Times, 28 April 1991.

anything in the region' "could be interpreted as provocative and offensive". In particular, said Dr Adil:

the naval build up could result in an arms race and precipitate the strategic uncertainties Australia always wanted to avoid...it would not be easy to perceive the naval build up as a solution to a future security problem...it should be made clear to [neighbouring] countries that Australia has no intention of attacking them.⁵²

The divergence in opinion between different elements of government and society in Indonesia on the question of Australia's military posture can be explained by looking at the different forms of information available to them.

Immediately prior to the publication of the Dibb Review in 1986, Kim Beazley flew to Indonesia to explain the thinking behind the document to General Murdani:

I went to Jakarta specifically to talk to Indonesia's leaders about our defence planning. In particular, I spent several hours in discussion with General Murdani.

Kim Beazley felt he had got his message across. General Murdani, he said, "understands why we plan our defence the way we do."⁵³ It can be assumed that Beazley stressed to General Murdani the defensive thinking behind Australia's new military posture. As Beazley said in 1989:

Two types of capability in particular have been phased out or scaled down in the ADF, in large measure because we have concluded that their essentially offensive character makes them inappropriate for our force structure. The first of these is an aircraft carrier...The second...is amphibious trooplift - the ability to put troops ashore...we have not sought to expand our ability to seize and hold other nations' territory.⁵⁴

52 Jakarta Post, 24 July 1987.

53 Kim Beazley, Hermann Black Forum Lecture, op. cit., 9-10.

54 Ibid., 13-15.

Other Indonesian military officials, such as General Sutrisno, had the chance to hear similar explanations from their Australian counterparts. There have been regular high level meetings between Australian and Indonesian defence officials since 1989. General Sutrisno's prompt public support in 1992 for the acquisition of additional F-111 aircraft by Australia reflects the understanding and personal links built up between the two countries in the defence field. As Time magazine said in a report on the F-111 purchase:

In part, Southeast Asia's increasing faith in Australian motives has grown from direct military cooperation. Officers from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Australia exchange visits regularly, as do defense ministers and force commanders.⁵⁵

The type of understanding that senior Indonesian military figures gained of Australia's new defence posture was clearly not passed on to other elements of Indonesian government and society. The remarks by Alatas and Wanandi about the need for more information suggest they thought Australia had made little effort to explain its policy of defence self-reliance. Alatas, the Foreign Minister, Parliamentary Commission 1 and the Indonesian academic community seemed to have relied on public statements to gain an insight into Australia's defence thinking. The difficulty with this, however, was that statements on Australia's defence approach, for example by key figures such as Kim Beazley, could be misleading without a detailed understanding of the domestic political situation in Australia.

⁵⁵ Time (Australia), 9 November 1992.

In criticising Australia's military posture, both Hilman Adil and Hasnan Habib referred to Kim Beazley's tabling statement in which he presented The Defence of Australia 1987 to the Australian Parliament. They quoted similar sections of the tabling statement, including *"Taken together these forces constitute by far the strongest long range strike capability in the region"*; Australia was embarking on *"the largest defence capital investment in (its) peacetime history"*; it would have submarines that would be *"among the largest, longest range and the most lethal conventional submarines operating anywhere in the world"*; it would have a capacity for long range strike operations *"throughout its area of direct military interest and well beyond"*, and it would be *"technically the most skilled military power in the area with some components of its forces probably superior to anything in the region in absolute terms"*.⁵⁶ It is not surprising that there were those in Indonesia that questioned Australia's defence thinking on the basis of Beazley's remarks. Australia would undoubtedly be concerned were we to be faced with a neighbour that made similar public statements about its defence capabilities.

An understanding of the domestic political context in which Beazley's speech was made, however, would have helped allay concerns in Indonesia. A major objective for Beazley in this statement was to convince the Australian electorate that the Labor Party was committed to a 'strong' defence policy. Beazley was keenly aware that one of the Labor Party's great electoral liabilities had been its vulnerability on defence

⁵⁶ See Adil's article in Jakarta Post, 24 July 1987, and A. Hasnan Habib, op. cit., 167-168.

issues, with the conservative parties able to capitalise on connotations of pacifism and communist sympathies. Beazley demonstrated how important this issue was for him, and how concerned he was to change Australian domestic perceptions of Labor's attitude to defence, in his 1989 McKell lecture. This speech revealed his detailed knowledge of the history of Labor and Australian defence since Federation:

the passions aroused in the Labor movement by the conscription debate of 1916-17 left a profound impression on Labor and on the Australian public. It gave the conservatives a pretext to portray Labor as soft on Defence and disloyal to the Empire. They were still beating that drum half a century later.

In the 1960s, according to Beazley:

Labor was offering a humane and dignified resolution of the [Vietnam] War, careful management of our alliances, and the reconstruction of our defence forces so that they could defend our interests. And yet Labor was losing one election after another, specifically on the defence issue. Why was that so? There was one obvious answer; the communist stain.⁵⁷

The 1986 Dobb Review, commissioned by the Government but not official Government policy, had been criticised by some on the political right and by defence interest groups such as the Returned Serviceman's League for advocating a military strategy that was "too defensive."⁵⁸ While retaining the vast majority of Dobb's recommendations and the same fundamentally defensive military strategy, Beazley therefore played up the tactical offensive capabilities that the

⁵⁷ Kim Beazley, McKell Lecture, Sydney, 18 December 1989, 5,14.

⁵⁸ For a good analysis of criticisms of the Dobb Review, see Andrew Mack, 'Defence versus offence: the Dobb report and its critics', Australian Outlook, 1, 1987, 3-9. Mack states that "there have been...criticisms mounted against parts of the Dobb review by academic and military specialists whose expertise and/or professional experience command serious attention. Prominent among these criticisms has been the claim that the strategy of denial which Dobb advocates places insufficient stress on *offensive* operations for the...ADF - in particular for the RAAF. Dobb's strategic approach is seen as being simply too defensive."

Australian Defence Force would possess in presenting The Defence of Australia 1987 to the Australian Parliament.

Through his earlier visit to Jakarta, Beazley had ensured that General Murdani and his senior military colleagues would not misinterpret this language as a sign of an aggressive defence posture. But other groups in Indonesia, including Ali Alatas and the Foreign Ministry, without the benefit of a personal explanation from Australia's Minister for Defence, seem to have been unable to disentangle the defensive strategy at the heart of The Defence of Australia 1987 from the political emphasis in Beazley's statement on offensive military capabilities.

Beazley's presentation of The Defence of Australia 1987 contributed to Indonesian misunderstanding of Australia's defence posture in another, less direct way. Because of the emphasis on offensive and strike capabilities in Beazley's statements, a number of Australian critics claimed that the Government's policy represented a "new Australian militarism". Beazley countered these critics by pointing out the fundamentally defensive nature of the policy of defence self-reliance.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the prominent debate in Australia on this issue had an effect on Indonesian opinion. As Andrew MacIntyre has pointed out, the argument that Australia was acquiring excessive force projection capabilities and adopting an overly assertive defence posture, "has been put in forthright terms by a number of Indonesians and echoes similar claims in some circles within Australia itself."⁶⁰ Hasnan

59 Kim Beazley, "Response", in G. Cheeseman, St John Kettle (eds), *The New Australian Militarism*, Sydney, 1990, 212.

60 Andrew MacIntyre, "Australia - Indonesia Relations", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), *op. cit.*, 157.

Habib, for example, drew on the "new militarism" writings in his May 1989 speech to the Australian National University. Habib quoted a paper by one of the main proponents of the new militarism theory, Richard Bolt, which included such statements as:

The racial fears associated with being a European nation near Asia still exist. Given that Australia was taken by force, it is not surprising that the tendency to 'defend ourselves by attacking others' is still with us.⁶¹

Indonesians seeking a better understanding of Australia's new defence approach would also have looked to their own academic journals. However, the few articles on Australia's defence policy in such influential journals as The Indonesian Quarterly would only have increased the concerns of the Foreign Ministry and others about Australia's military posture. For example, in a 1989 article in the Indonesian Quarterly, Michael O'Connor, executive director of the Australian Defence Association, stated that:

One of the basic assumptions of those Australian planners who favour an isolationist defence strategy is that this country should deploy a large proportion of her military power in the north, at or near Darwin. That was the policy back in 1938 and it was revived with the publication of the 1986 Dibb Review and the 1987 Defence White Paper.⁶²

O'Connor went further in a 1992 article in the same journal. He claimed that "the belief that Indonesia would launch...an attack or would connive at an attack by some other power was implicit in [the Dibb Review]." O'Connor stated that the Dibb Review caused offence in Indonesia and indeed was of much

61A. Hasnan Habib, op. cit., 166.

62 M. O'Connor, "Australia and its strategic position in the Asia-Pacific region", The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xvii, no. 3., third quarter 1989, 264.

greater significance than the attitude of the Australian media over East Timor in "poisoning Australia-Indonesia relations."⁶³

From the public information available to them, therefore, it is clear why Ali Alatas and the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, as well as Parliamentary Commission 1, Hilman Adil, Hasnan Habib and others had concerns about Australia's new military posture. Without the benefit of personal explanations from Australian defence officials, these groups based their opinion on Beazley's public statements - which highlighted the ADF's offensive capabilities - and on assertions from Australia's academic community about an isolationist defence approach and a 'new Australian militarism'.

Australia's regional security policy

Australian Foreign Minister Senator Evans' 1989 statement on Australia's Regional Security was well received in Indonesia, especially by those who had not been given a proper explanation of The Defence of Australia 1987. Jusuf Wanandi had already said that defence policy needed to be presented in its "strategic and diplomatic framework", so that Australia's "objectives of greater regional stability and cooperation within Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific" could be understood.⁶⁴ While as Chapter One pointed out, The Defence of Australia 1987 stressed the importance of security

⁶³ M. O'Connor, "Australia's defence relations with Indonesia," The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. xx, no. 2, second quarter 1992, 187-188.

⁶⁴ Jusuf Wanandi, "Conclusion - Indonesia", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), *op. cit.* 242.

cooperation with the region, this appears to have been appreciated only by the narrow circle of senior military and defence officials who had regular contact with their Australian counterparts. For other elements in Indonesian government and society, it was Senator Evans' 1989 statement that revealed Australia's commitment to security cooperation with the region. As Ikrar Nusa Bhakti said:

In order to maintain its own security interests, the Australian government has formulated a so-called 'multidimensional approach towards Asia' [a reference to Senator Evans' 1989 statement] ...Instead of seeing Asia as a danger, Australia is now willing to become part of Asia's security system.⁶⁵

As the Australian reported in August 1992, Indonesian officials "welcomed the shift in emphasis by the Government since 1989 towards a more regionally oriented defence stance."⁶⁶

Subsequent initiatives by Senator Evans in the regional security field had more of a mixed reception in Indonesia. At the 1990 ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC), Senator Evans raised the concept of an Asian version of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). In an article published on the same day as he presented his idea to ASEAN foreign ministers, he said:

Why should there not be developed a similar institutional framework, a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia [CSCA], for addressing the apparently intractable security issues which exist in the region?

Senator Evans pointed out that Asia lacked a single East-West divide as in Europe and was "a diverse region with little of

⁶⁵ Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, *op. cit.* 149.

⁶⁶ Australian, 6 August 1992.

the sense of common cultural identity and common diplomatic tradition of Europe". Nevertheless, as he said, "it is not unreasonable to expect that new Europe-style patterns of cooperation between old adversaries will find their echo in this part of the world".⁶⁷ The reaction of Senator Evans' Indonesian hosts was not enthusiastic. The Jakarta Post had already suggested that Australia pursued a different security agenda to the rest of the region:

Although Indonesia's position as a nonaligned power is currently somewhat understated,...this country's role as prime manager of regional security...is bound to create incongruities in terms of Australia's perceived role as a defender of Western strategic interests.⁶⁸

Foreign Minister Ali Alatas welcomed more dialogue on how to promote security in the region but doubted that the Pacific was ready for a formal body.⁶⁹ "We have to be careful not to think that certain things that work in one region ought to be translated to another," he said.⁷⁰ In a later speech he set out detailed reasons for not supporting the CSCA concept:

It is obvious...that the European model cannot easily be transplanted to our part of the world....Unlike in the European situation, there has been no commonly perceived, single security threat in the Asia-Pacific region, but rather a multiplicity of security concerns which differ from country to country and from one subregion to another....In the Asia-Pacific region, there has never been a bipolar structure of two contending military blocs, such as the NATO and Warsaw Pacts, with more or less symmetrical force structures....Suggestions to move immediately towards region-wide security forums or structures within the Asia-Pacific ...appear to be still quite impracticable....Given their wide diversity of cultures, socio-political systems and levels of economic development, the nations of the region have yet to

⁶⁷ see "What Asia needs is a Europe-Style CSCA", International Herald Tribune, 27 July 1990.

⁶⁸ Jakarta Post, 21 July 1989.

⁶⁹ New Straits Times, 8 October 1990.

⁷⁰ Canberra Times, 8 October 1990.

develop a distinct sense of community and of common destiny.⁷¹

Since 1990, however, the regional security approaches of Australia and Indonesia have moved closer together. The Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Richard Woolcott, said in June 1991 that Australia was merely trying to encourage "some wider regional security dialogue to respond to post-Cold war strategic and political trends." Woolcott said Australia appreciated the key role of ASEAN, which had been "a strong and effective force for stability" and could develop "into the centrepiece of any future security dialogue in Southeast Asia."⁷² In a speech in July 1992, Senator Evans showed that Australia had stepped back from any suggestion of a formal security framework for the Asia-Pacific as a whole:

while there is a case for floating larger concepts from time to time, I believe that real progress on regional security will only be achieved by gradual, incremental measures in which the confidence of each country is won and consolidated step by step along the way...The region is moving towards more formalised co-operative arrangements, but the process is slow, cautious and evolutionary: it is not easy, and it cannot be rushed.⁷³

The acknowledgement of ASEAN's role in regional security and the implication that Australia would work in an incremental way through forums such as the ASEAN PMC was more compatible with the approach of Ali Alatas and the Indonesian Foreign Ministry. For his part, by late 1992 Ali Alatas was more prepared to consider structured regional security discussions.

71 Ali Alatas, "The Emerging Security Environment in East Asia and the Pacific - an ASEAN perspective", Address to the National University of Singapore Society, Singapore, 28 October 1992, 12-14.

72 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 June 1991.

73 Gareth Evans, "Australia's approach to Asia-Pacific regional security", Tomorrow's Pacific Conference, Canberra, 15 July 1992, 8-10.

While still not supporting a formal 'pan-Asian security framework', Alatas said that "we could cultivate the habit and devise the mechanisms for closer and more structured consultations on security issues in the region".⁷⁴ More remarkably, in proposing measures for "a new security equilibrium in the Asia-Pacific", Alatas suggested - in almost precisely the same words - a series of regional security initiatives already put forward by Senator Evans at the 1991 ASEAN PMC. These included: an incidents at sea agreement; greater transparency in military arrangements; making military exercises less provocative by the presence of observers from non-participating countries; the prevention of nuclear as well as chemical weapons proliferation and the discouragement of a mini-arms race among the countries of the region; and a cooperative approach to the security of sea lanes and sea lines of communication. The only initiative from Senator Evans proposals to the 1991 ASEAN PMC that Alatas did not include was on the subject of environmental security.⁷⁵

In view of the differences between the Indonesian Foreign and Defence Ministries described earlier, it should not be assumed that the Indonesian Government as a whole would necessarily support the initiatives Alatas proposed. It could be expected, for example, that ABRI and the Defence Ministry might not support greater transparency in military funding and force development, or the attendance of foreign observers at Indonesian military exercises. Nevertheless, it remains the

74 Alatas, op.cit., 14.

75 Ibid., 14-16, and for the list of initiatives Senator Evans proposed at the 1991 ASEAN PM see his address titled "Australia's regional security environment" to the Conference on Strategic Studies in a Changing World, Canberra, 31 July 1991, op. cit., 13-14.

case that by the latter half of 1992 a considerable similarity had developed in the approach to regional security of the foreign ministers of Australia and Indonesia.

Australia's regional defence cooperation

The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), which link Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand with Malaysia and Singapore, are one of the more important traditional "military instruments" in Australia's regional security approach. Given Australia's fundamental interest in promoting regional stability, and its more specific aim - as stated in Chapter One - of improving its defence relationship with Indonesia, it is important to be aware of the perception from Jakarta of FPDA.

On the question of FPDA, the opinion of Indonesia's military leadership again seems to be somewhat different from that of other elements of Indonesian society. The Australian Financial Review reported in May 1991 that:

Indonesia has had reservations about FPDA in the past but in recent years has appeared much more relaxed about the agreement. It is understood that senior Indonesian military officers have not objected to Brunei joining FPDA.⁷⁶

In February 1992, Vice Admiral Soedibyo Rahardjo, Chief of the General Staff in Headquarters ABRI, said that Indonesia saw "no danger" from FPDA. He even pointed out that the military and technological knowledge that Malaysia and Singapore gained from FPDA could be transferred to Indonesia (and other ASEAN

⁷⁶ Australian Financial Review, 3 May 1991.

countries) through bilateral security co-operation arrangements.⁷⁷

On the other hand, ex-Foreign Minister Mochtar, whilst not formally speaking on behalf of the Indonesian Government, called in September 1990 for the abandonment of FPDA to allow a trilateral defence arrangement between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to be created:

We in Indonesia understand the FPDA to be an insurance against Indonesia's possible reversion to her old ways, exemplified by her confrontation campaign against Malaysia in the early 1960s.⁷⁸

In an article in the Indonesian Quarterly in 1992, Ikrar Nusa Bhakti echoed Mochtar's sentiments:

Even though there was no formal statement in the FPDA, it was probable that one of the reasons of the establishment of FPDA was intended to face up to the Indonesian military "adventurism", because of their experience with Indonesian confrontation policy from 1963 until 1966.⁷⁹

Ikrar Nusa Bhakti also believed that the priority Australia gives to cooperation with Malaysia and Singapore under FPDA is inconsistent with the strategic significance ascribed to Indonesia in Australian government statements. In his eyes, this compounds the negative impression Indonesia already has of Australia because of its security ties with "the West":

Australia, as part of the Western alliance, has retained its close relationship with the United States and European countries. Although it has acknowledged the importance of Indonesia, Australia developed more substantial links in Southeast Asia with Singapore and Malaysia rather than with Indonesia. For example, Australia...established the Five Power Defence Arrangements...in 1971, similar to the ANZUS Treaty.⁸⁰

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

78 Straits Times, 27 September 1990.

79 Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, op. cit., 146.

80 Ibid., 146.

While there still appears to be some ambivalence about FPDA in Indonesia, Jakarta's attitude towards bilateral defence ties with Australia has become increasingly positive in recent years. Defence co-operation with Australia had been suspended following the publication of stories in the Australian media about President Suharto's family in 1986. Indonesia's action "masked deep unhappiness among some military leaders about the patronising nature of...the Defence Co-operation Program."⁸¹ Following the visit of armed forces chief General Sutrisno to Australia in 1989, the security relationship between the two countries recommenced⁸². By late 1992, it included high level consultations between defence officials, naval and air force visits and exercises, training in Australia for Indonesian personnel, and the attendance of Indonesian observers at the Kangaroo series of exercises in northern Australia. Unlike earlier cooperation, the new relationship was not based on "defence aid" from Australia. Instead, the cost of joint activities was met by each country on a reciprocal basis.⁸³ This helped make defence ties with Australia less of a political target in Indonesia. As mentioned earlier, despite renewed tension in November 1991 between Australia and Indonesia over East Timor, the defence relationship was not suspended. By July 1992, Air Vice Marshall Teddy Rusdy, a senior ABRI officer, was willing to declare that "much progress has been achieved by the Governments and Armed Forces of Indonesia and Australia".⁸⁴

81 Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 March 1990.

82 Ibid.

83 Australian Government, The Government's response to the Coalition's defence policy, Canberra, October 1992, Appendix 1, 2.

84 Angkatan Bersenjata, 7 July 1992.

Indonesian military officials even told Australian Opposition defence spokesman Alexander Downer that "closer defence co-operation was a good way for Australia to participate more in the region and to see itself as less of an outsider."⁸⁵

As with the improvement in the overall Australia - Indonesia relationship since 1989, the underlying reasons why Indonesia agreed to recommence defence ties are unclear. According to David Jenkins, "bilateral relations have improved because Jakarta has decided they should improve."⁸⁶ One motive for strengthening defence links, however, was the signing of the Timor Gap joint exploration treaty in October 1989. If Indonesia and Australia were to exploit the resources of the Timor Sea, a degree of security co-operation would be necessary. The Timor Gap treaty came into force in February 1991. It included arrangements for coordinating security and anti-terrorist measures in the Timor Gap. This was the first time such arrangements had been agreed between Australia and Indonesia.⁸⁷ Foreign Minister Ali Alatas had urged the Indonesian Parliament not to postpone or cancel the Timor Gap Treaty, since this "may prompt Australia to cancel the moratorium in the disputed area, and this would obviously create a long conflict between the two countries."⁸⁸

Broader strategic concerns were also a reason for Indonesia to improve its defence relationship with Australia. According to Jusuf Wanandi:

Changes in the Asia-Pacific region as well as globally do affect relations between Indonesia and Australia. The direction of these changes are very uncertain

⁸⁵ Australian, 6 August 1992, 1.

⁸⁶ Sydney Morning Herald, 7 April 1990.

⁸⁷ Canberra Times, 11 February 1991.

⁸⁸ Canberra Times, 29 November 1990.

today...Indonesia-Australia co-operation in the military field should also be seen in the context of strategic changes in the wider region. It is possible that multipolarity, which could result in new instabilities, will force small and medium countries to co-operate in security and defence. In the future, ASEAN might develop some kind of multilateral defence co-operation, and the group might also seek some defence co-operation with Australia.⁸⁹

Malaysia's view of Australia

General perceptions

The following statement by a former foreign editor of Kuala Lumpur's The Star newspaper indicates the most common perception of Australia in Malaysia:

ASEAN...sees Australia as a largely white nation seeking hegemony in the region, and has been miffed by Australia's persistent criticisms of alleged breaches of human rights by nations within its fold.⁹⁰

The belief that Australia has a racist outlook is still widespread in Malaysia. In a 1989 article titled "Immigration, money and prejudice in Australia," the New Straits Times said:

if you are Asian, be prepared to face prejudice...Australia is still very much Anglo-Saxon...There is a genuine worry among white Australians that their country is admitting too many Asians.⁹¹

In April 1991 The Star said that the fundamental cause of Australia's problems with its neighbours was a "superiority complex which makes it impossible for Australians to accept

89 Jusuf Wanandi, "Australia-Indonesia security relationship", op. cit., 156, 162.

90 Jakarta Post, 27 October 1989.

91 New Straits Times, 10 August 1989.

that there are countries in the region which are non-white and yet able to perform better economically."⁹²

There is a perception in Malaysia that as well as being racist, Australia is also prejudiced against the Islamic religion. This leads to some extreme claims. In April 1991 the youth wing of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) claimed a connection between an alleged anti-federal campaign in the Malaysian state of Sabah and "the Zionist movement" in Australia.⁹³ In June of the same year, Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Addullah Fadzil Che Wan denied that the Government had any role in a Malaysian TV series depicting the racist approach of Australians. He noted, however, that:

unfortunately certain groups in Australia, possibly with Zionist links, are not happy with the good progress we have made. And based on what is called principles of freedom of the press they spread wild allegations against Malaysia.⁹⁴

As in Indonesia, the Australian media has been a source of particular irritation in Malaysia. Until very recently, Malaysian authorities have not distinguished what they see as the biased attitude of the media and general community from the approach of the Australian Government. This has caused friction in government to government relations. Annoyance with Australian actions over a number of years led to the Malaysian Government's decision in October 1990 to limit "non-essential co-operation projects with Australia"⁹⁵, as well as deferring official visits.⁹⁶ An article in the Malay language

92 The Star, 24 April 1991.

93 The Star, 27 April 1991.

94 New Straits Times, 21 June 1991.

95 Canberra Times, 28 September 1991.

96 Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 March 1991.

newspaper Utusan Malaysia listed a number of incidents which it said were part of a deliberate Australian campaign against Malaysia: the reaction to the hanging of Australian drug couriers Brian Chambers and Kevin Barlow in 1986 (especially Prime Minister Hawke's use of the term "barbaric"); television programs such as Slow boat to Surabaya, said to have depicted Malaysia in a defamatory way; criticism by Australian parliamentarians in 1987 of the detention of more than 100 people under Malaysia's Internal Security Act; the possible imposition of anti-dumping duties on Malaysian car batteries; the bid by Adelaide for the 1998 Commonwealth games in competition with Kuala Lumpur; and Australia's lack of support for Prime Minister Mahathir's proposal for an East Asia Economic Grouping.⁹⁷ The final straw, however, was the screening of the Australian Broadcasting Commission(ABC)'s television drama Embassy, set in a fictional Asian country. Malaysian officials believed the drama made "fun of Malaysia."⁹⁸ They found it difficult to accept that a series produced by a government corporation could not be sanctioned by the government itself, especially when the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was listed as an adviser to the program⁹⁹. Prime Minister Mahathir believed that Australia had made the Embassy series to tarnish Malaysia's image¹⁰⁰ and to dissuade investors from coming to Malaysia.¹⁰¹ Mahathir said it was easy to say the Australian Government had nothing to do the Embassy program because it respected the freedom of

97 Utusan Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), 25 April 1991.

98 Australian Financial Review, 24 April 1991.

99 The Bulletin, 30 April 1991.

100 The Star, 11 April 1991.

101 Business Times (Kuala Lumpur), 11 April 1991.

the media. As he pointed out, however, the Australian Government had taken the ABC to task over its coverage of the Gulf War earlier in the year.¹⁰²

By mid-1991, after Senator Evans had acknowledged the insensitive actions of a "number of different groups in Australia - some in the media, some in Parliament, and some in pressure groups in the wider community,"¹⁰³ Mahathir agreed that the Australian Government should not necessarily be blamed for the failings of the media. According to Mahathir, "They fabricate stories...I think they have breached the limit of press freedom...I am talking about the Australian Press, not the Government."¹⁰⁴ Mahathir felt nevertheless that the Australian Government could not absolve itself completely of responsibility for the media. In July 1991 he said Malaysia understood the freedom of the press in Australia but this should not include the freedom to "make up stories and run down others." He believed the Australian Government should not defend the freedom of the press to "fabricate all kinds of lies."¹⁰⁵

As the price for restoring normal relations, Mahathir believed he had extracted from the Australian Government "a guarantee to distance itself from what was done by several bodies in that country, and to take a disinterested attitude in various matters."¹⁰⁶ This understanding was put to the test in early 1992 with the release of the Australian film Turtle Beach, which depicted a massacre of Vietnamese refugees

102 The Star, 6 July 1991.

103 Canberra Times, 28 September 1991.

104 New Straits Times, 2 August 1991.

105 New Straits Times, 28 July 1991.

106 Berita Harian (Kuala Lumpur), 28 July 1991.

by Malay villagers. Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Datuk Badawi, warned that the movies could provoke anger in his country. "We are unhappy about the manner in which we are projected to have done something which is not true," he said.¹⁰⁷ Senator Evans announced that the Australian Government would dissociate itself from the film. The scenes depicted were "simply not accurate historical representations."¹⁰⁸ Australia's Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshall Funnell, said this statement saved the Malaysia-Australia relationship: "I believe the ties between the two Governments have been preserved due to this action"¹⁰⁹, he stated.

While Malaysia now appears to accept that the Australian Government cannot be blamed directly for what Malaysia sees as a racist and biased attitude on the part of the Australian media, this does not mean its perceptions of the Australian Government are necessarily positive. Former Prime Minister Hawke's description of the 1986 Barlow and Chambers hangings as "barbaric" remains a cause of particular resentment. Five years after Hawke made the remark, it still raised the ire of Malaysian leaders. In a general criticism of Australia in Fiji in July 1991, Mahathir said he had no respect for countries "who tell lies or say nasty things...The Australian Government did describe the Malaysians as barbarians once."¹¹⁰ Malaysia's Minister for International Trade, Dato Seri Rafidah Aziz, told the Malaysia-Australia Business Council in April 1991, "They called us barbarians and I mean, come on, am I a

107 New Straits Times, 26 February 1992.

108 Ibid.

109 New Straits Times, 29 February 1992.

110 New Straits Times, 6 July 1991.

barbarian...being called a barbarian simply because we hang drug traffickers?" As the Canberra Times remarked "the interpretation of the comments as [an Australian] description of Malaysians generally seems ensconced."¹¹¹ A further indication of dissatisfaction with the Australian Government was Australia's continued exclusion from Mahathir's proposed East Asia Economic Grouping (later renamed the East Asia Economic Caucus - EAEC). The Far Eastern Economic Review reported in March 1991 that:

Malaysia may have ...ambitions to wean its neighbours away from the Australia-originated Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC)...Kuala Lumpur has reportedly been unhappy with Australia's leadership both of APEC and of the so-called Cairns Group of agricultural exporting nations.¹¹²

While calls by new Prime Minister Paul Keating in early 1992 for a greater focus on ties with Asia were well received in Malaysia, they did not improve perceptions of Australia to the extent they did in Indonesia. This may have been merely because Keating did not include Kuala Lumpur in his early overseas visits. Whatever the reason, the view in Malaysia was that there were still considerable obstacles to Australia's goal of 'embracing Asia', chief among these being the attitude of the Australian media. As Minister of Defence Dato' Najib said in Darwin in April 1992:

If Australia wants to embrace Asia, then every segment of society here must be ready to move in that direction. It will be a sad thing if the media is out of step with the general development of this region. You have the right to free speech, but not the right to fabricate lies about another country.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Canberra Times, 28 September 1991.

¹¹² Far Eastern Economic Review, 28 March 1991.

¹¹³ Financial Review, 14 April 1992.

This suggests that while the Australian Government may have successfully dissociated itself from media criticisms of Malaysia, negative perceptions of the Australian community in general - especially the media - will continue to be a factor in relations between the two countries.

Perceptions of Australia's security approach

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, Malaysia does not have the same interest as Indonesia in Australia's military posture. Australia's planning for its own defence in accordance with The Defence of Australia 1987 has not been a subject of discussion in Malaysia. Similarly, Australia's Regional Security attracted little comment from Malaysian officials and academics. Of more interest to Malaysia were Senator Evans' calls for greater regional security dialogue and Australia's cooperation in the defence field with Southeast Asia - especially FPDA.

Australia's regional security policy

When Senator Evans raised the concept of an Asian version of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe at the 1990 ASEAN PMC:

the regional reaction was uniformly negative...the Malaysians...have long held to ideas such as ZOPFAN...and they said why do we need to have a European concept imposed on us?¹¹⁴

114 Andrew Mack, transcript from ABC Radio National, Indian Pacific, 17 August 1991.

As with Indonesia, however, the approaches of Malaysia and Australia have since moved closer together. As Senator Evans and his senior officials emphasised the need merely for greater dialogue on security issues rather than a formal 'CSCA', similar sentiments began to be expressed in Malaysia. In July 1991, Defence Minister Dato' Najib said that:

In view of the changing environment,...there is certainly a need to encourage a lot more dialogue, consultations and other confidence and security building measures - be they formal or informal amongst all regional states.¹¹⁵

In Darwin in April 1992, Dato' Najib quoted with approval the principles of common security devised by the Palme Commission:

I am of the opinion that these principles are equally valid in the non-nuclear context....The end of the Cold War has certainly provided us with a golden opportunity to find a new approach to regional security...We must be guided by the notion of co-operative security. 'One man's security should lead to another's assurance' should be our motto.¹¹⁶

Consistent with these principles, Dato' Najib proposed that:

Asia-Pacific countries, which naturally includes Australia, should begin a security dialogue, in which member-states will discuss regional security issues together, as well as to explore areas where co-operation amongst members could be enhanced...Malaysia is willing to host the first of this proposed Asia-Pacific security dialogue. Each member could send a delegation of various representatives of their security agencies, from both the military and civilian organisations.¹¹⁷

It was not a coincidence that in this speech to an Australian audience, Dato' Najib used the language of 'co-operative' and 'common' security. These principles had long been advocated

¹¹⁵ Minister of Defence, Malaysia, "Regional Alliances in a changing world order", Keynote address, IADS Seminar, 9 July 1991, 7.

¹¹⁶ Minister of Defence, Malaysia, Keynote address, Chief of the General Staff Conference, Darwin, April 1992, 24-29.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 29-31.

by Senator Evans.¹¹⁸ In addition, the Asia-Pacific security dialogue proposed by Dato' Najib was similar to the CSCA concept raised by Senator Evans in 1990. Dato' Najib, however, avoided the suggestion that a European institution might be replicated in Asia. It also became clear that his proposal was for a more unofficial forum, rather than a formal security body such as the CSCE. Nevertheless, as in the case of Indonesia, Najib's comments show that by mid-1992 Australia and Malaysia had a similar approach to the promotion of greater dialogue on regional security issues.

Australia's regional defence cooperation

While Malaysia supports greater regional security dialogue, this does not mean - as Chapter One pointed out - that it advocates formal ASEAN wide defence cooperation. The one example of multilateral defence cooperation that does have continuing support in Malaysia is FPDA. A Malaysian Government paper on the future direction of FPDA stated in March 1990 that:

despite the criticism levelled at it for the last 18 years the FPDA has remained intact and relevant to the changing circumstances of...Malaysia and Singapore...it has in terms of its deterrence value achieved the objective intended..., and has provided...the necessary breathing space for Malaysia and Singapore to develop their defence capabilities unburdened.¹¹⁹

In June 1991, Dato' Najib rejected a suggestion by former Indonesian foreign minister Mochtar that FPDA be replaced by a

¹¹⁸ see, for example, Senator Evans address to the Williamsburg Conference XIX, in Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *The Monthly Record*, February 1991, 40.

¹¹⁹ Ministry of Defence, Malaysia, *The Future Direction of the five Power Defence Arrangements*, Kuala Lumpur, March 1990, 4.

trilateral arrangement between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. "We have the Five Power Defence Arrangement. We don't have any intention of embarking on any new security arrangements", he said.¹²⁰ Dato' Najib also explained Australia's contribution to Malaysia's security - both through FPDA and bilateral defence cooperation. In the process he emphasised the importance of defence links for the broader Malaysia - Australia relationship:

In particular, Australia has been most consistent in its commitment towards FPDA and in the defence of Malaysia. Australia's links with Malaysia are of an historical nature, having sacrificed its soldiers for the defence of Malaysia during the Second World War, the Emergency 1948-60 and Confrontation, 1963-65. These are all evidences of Australia's firm commitment towards Malaysia's defence. Militarily speaking our relations have always been excellent. The only problem is perhaps the Australian mass media, which has been quite unkind to us. As a consolation, I understand they, too, have not been kind to Australian politicians as well.¹²¹

Malaysia sees FPDA as consistent with its commitment to ASEAN and with its emphasis on bilateral security links with its neighbours. As Dato' Najib said:

On our part, Malaysia will continue to strengthen the FPDA's resolve with our own bilateral co-operation with the other members of ASEAN...FPDA is, in fact, complementary to the overall security needs of ASEAN...In our view there is a direct correlation between the effort of achieving a high state of bilateral co-operation with individual members of ASEAN and the effort of maximising co-operation within the FPDA. Both efforts over the years have...paved the way to a web of interlocking security relationships - all working towards a common objective of creating a peaceful and stable regional environment.¹²²

120 Australian Financial Review, 17 June 1991.

121 Minister of Defence, Malaysia, Keynote address, Chief of the General Staff Conference, op. cit., 33-39.

122 Ibid., 33-39.

Malaysia also values the indirect connection provided by FPDA to the United States' global security network. According to the Ministry of Defence:

Both Britain and Australia are partners with the United States in other alliances. In the final analysis by being members of the FPDA, Malaysia and Singapore...are involved in a security nexus with focus on defence co-operation with the regional as well as extra-regional powers.¹²³

The head of Strategic Studies at Malaysia's Armed Forces Defence College, Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, said that with FPDA:

Due to Australia's security link with the United States through ANZUS, the United States could provide some form of assistance to Australia which could then be channelled to the defence of Malaysia and Singapore...this security nexus...in a way has added further credibility [to] FPDA's deterrent value.¹²⁴

In addition, FPDA "provides a framework for bilateral defence co-operation between Malaysia and Singapore."¹²⁵ As Abdul Razak remarked:

FPDA has been most important in keeping these two countries together in the military field. Without FPDA, Malaysia and Singapore do not have any security arrangement which provides for military co-operation.. All the major exercises involving these two states have been under the ambit of the Arrangement. Therefore the notion that FPDA is crucial in ensuring that Malaysia and Singapore are kept together, is not without any foundation.¹²⁶

Finally, FPDA assists Malaysia's capacity to provide for its own defence. According to Dato' Najib:

123 Ministry of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 5.

124 Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, "Five Power Defence Arrangement: two decades and beyond", *Strategi*, vol. 1, no. 1, Kuala Lumpur, February 1992, 59.

125 Ministry of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 5.

126 Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, op.cit., 57.

FPDA has assisted us...in the development of Malaysia's defence capability. The training provided by Australia, the UK and New Zealand...is immeasurable...The series of multilateral air, sea and land exercises have...provided the opportunities for interoperability of weapon systems amongst member states. In addition, it has also enabled better understanding among military personnel and improvement of military knowledge and skills.¹²⁷

FPDA - and Australia's role in the arrangements - are not, however, so central to Malaysia's security that it believes FPDA should have an operational, as against merely a training, role. When Singapore proposed a "reserve command structure" for FPDA that would become operational in an emergency, Malaysia's then Defence Minister, Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen, stated that the region did not need a military pact to ensure its security, and that member nations of ASEAN and FPDA should be committed to act within the scope under which FPDA was set up.¹²⁸ While Malaysia particularly values elements of FPDA such as the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) for the training and exercising opportunities IADS provides, it also believes that "it is difficult to rationalise how IADS can be operational."¹²⁹

There are a number of reasons for Malaysia's reluctance to see FPDA operationalised. Malaysia is concerned not to abandon its strong public commitment to a ZOPFAN in South East Asia. Turning FPDA into an operational military pact, involving the commitment of external powers to military operations in the direct defence of Malaysia and Singapore, would run counter to the aims of ZOPFAN. According to the Ministry of Defence, "ways and means should be explored such

127 Minister of Defence, Malaysia, Keynote address, Chief of the General Staff Conference, op. cit., 33-39.

128 New Straits Times, 12 December 1989.

129 Ministry of Defence, Malaysia, op. cit., 5 & 11.

that its [FPDA's] utility can be enhanced and perpetuated... without jeopardising the concept of ZOPFAN."¹³⁰

Operationalising FPDA would also compromise Malaysia's non-aligned stance. Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, commenting on the origins of FPDA, said that:

It was referred to as an arrangement only, and not a treaty. This was so primarily due to Kuala Lumpur's policy stance towards non-alignment, as a formal treaty with external powers would invariably compromise the country's position.¹³¹

But perhaps the major difficulty Malaysia has with the concept of an operational FPDA is its concern not to antagonise Indonesia on security issues and to encourage Indonesia to retain stabilising external policies. As Abdul Razak said, "FPDA has...been seen, especially amongst foreign observers [ie Indonesia] as contradicting Malaysia's neutral and non-aligned stance."¹³² Malaysia is aware of the Indonesian perception that FPDA was designed to constrain it following Confrontation and is wary of any action that might provoke Indonesia into public opposition to FPDA. As Tengku Rithauddeen said in December 1989:

we may give our support [to the idea of an operational FPDA] if we find the concept feasible, but at this juncture, we do not want to do anything that might cause alarm or create tension among our neighbours in the region.¹³³

Hence although Malaysia places a high value on FPDA and Australia's major part in these arrangements, there are limits on the role it is prepared to see Australia and other nations

¹³⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹³¹ Abdul Razak Abdullah Baginda, op.cit., 49-50.

¹³² Ibid., 50.

¹³³ New Straits Times, 12 December 1989.

play in its own defence. Nevertheless, Malaysia's positive perception of Australia's contribution to its security balances the more negative general impressions it has of this country. This helps to ensure ties are maintained between the two nations despite occasional political tension. In turn, this assists Australia's regional security aim of comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia. This also assists more specific elements of Australia's broader regional security policies. Without a good security relationship, for example, prominent Malaysians such as Dato' Najib would have been less willing to echo Senator Evans' calls for greater regional security dialogue.

Singapore's view of Australia

General perceptions

Since the change in Australia's leadership at the end of 1991, Singapore - like its neighbours - has perceived a new commitment by the Australian Government to engagement with Asia. As Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said in September 1992:

Australia must re-assess its place in the new world pattern. I applaud Prime Minister Keating's clear statement on this, and welcome Australia's desire to identify more with Asia.¹³⁴

Like Indonesia and Malaysia, however, Singapore believes the attitude of the Australian community as a whole has yet to

¹³⁴ Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 26 September 1992.

change in any significant way. As Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng said in April 1992:

I know that Australian leaders see their country's future as part of the region. I think they are correct. But I am not so sure that other sections of the Australian public share their commitment.¹³⁵

According to the Straits Times:

Whatever noises the Labor government has been making about closer Asian ties will need time to permeate a society that has, for centuries, been culturally more in tune with Europe.¹³⁶

In late 1992, when bids by Singapore International Airlines and Singapore Telecom for shares in Australian corporations were both passed over in favour of British companies, the Straits Times said this confirmed:

the suspicion that despite the Keating Government's avowed intention of snipping old imperial ties, the tangible links of heart and mind [to Britain] are still too entrenched to be cut by fiat.¹³⁷

Singapore has a practical motive for questioning the Australian community's attitude towards Asia. The emigration of educated and highly skilled Singaporeans to countries such as Australia is of concern to the Government. An article in the Straits Times in April 1991 said there were an estimated 9,000 Singapore emigrants in Western Australia alone. It offered suggestions on "what Government can do to stem the flow."¹³⁸ Articles regularly appear in the Singapore press on the poor performance of the Australian economy and on alleged racist attitudes in Australia. These appear to be aimed at

135 Australian, 29 April 1992, 11.

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

137 quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December 1992.

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

those considering a move to Australia. A Straits Times report on Singaporeans who had already emigrated to Australia said that:

Many...brushed aside the instances of racial discrimination, claiming that it had been overplayed in Singapore newspapers - perhaps to discourage further emigration.¹³⁹

Apart from negative perceptions of the Australian community, Singapore also perceives other differences with Australia. In the opinion of Wong Kan Seng:

Although there are economic, political and military links between Australia and Southeast Asia, it is also true that there are differences, for example different ideas about the role of the press or on the proper relationship between the individual and the community....We cannot deny these differences. I do not think it is necessary that Australia embraces the values of its neighbours. But, by the same token, Australians should not insist that its neighbours embrace its values, as some Australians seem to think should be the case."¹⁴⁰

On the whole, however, differences between Australia and Singapore over the role of the media or Australia's advocacy of individual human rights have not in recent years caused the type of friction that they have with Indonesia or Malaysia. Unlike Indonesia, Singapore does not see itself in a position of leadership in the region which could be threatened by initiatives or criticism from Australia. In addition, Singapore's long term economic success gives it a sense of confidence and achievement, making it somewhat less sensitive than Malaysia to perceived Australian criticism. As Wong Kan Seng said, "Australia is already a significant actor in the

139 Ibid., 6 April 1991.

140 Australian, 29 April 1992.

region....Singapore would welcome greater Australian involvement in Southeast Asia."¹⁴¹

The lack of political friction in recent years means that positive perceptions of Australia's contribution to Singapore's security have greater influence on the overall relationship than in the case of Indonesia or Malaysia.

Perceptions of Australia's security approach

Australia's regional security policy

The same aspects of Australia's security approach that are of interest to Malaysia also attract comment in Singapore. Senator Evans' reference in 1990 to the possible development of an Asian version of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was criticised in Singapore. Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng said that:

The situation in Europe has facilitated the concept of the CSCE...The same kind of conditions have not been obtained in Asia. The countries are so culturally, ethnically, and politically diverse, that perceptions have to be harmonised...There has to be common ground before security issues can be discussed.¹⁴²

However, while Singapore could not publicly support a CSCA in 1990, this appears to have had more to do with a desire not to disrupt ASEAN unity than any fundamental opposition to the concept. Supporting an Australian initiative for such a forum would have involved a sudden break with the approach to regional security ASEAN then accepted.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² *New Straits Times*, 8 October 1990.

Singapore has been willing to challenge ASEAN's orthodox security approach, as its 1989 offer of military facilities to the United States shows. But a further deviation by Singapore so soon after its offer to the United States could have seriously strained relations with its ASEAN partners.

Moreover, unlike the offer to the United States, there would have been little in the way of immediate security benefits in return for openly supporting the concept of a CSCA.

As noted in Chapter One, however, Singapore's strategic vulnerability makes it more interested than Indonesia and Malaysia in additional mechanisms that might enhance its security. Indeed, as its neighbours themselves became more supportive of formal regional security dialogue, Singapore felt able to become something of an advocate in this area. In January 1992, Singapore's Ambassador at Large, Professor Tommy Koh, proposed the creation of an Asia-Pacific security forum to foster stability similar to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.¹⁴³ Later in the year, he repeated this proposition, suggesting the establishment of a "regional security forum to map strategies."¹⁴⁴ The Singapore Government did not formally adopt Koh's suggestion. Nevertheless, Singapore was one of the prime movers at the Fourth ASEAN summit in January 1992 for "a fresh approach to regional security". Lobbying by Singapore played a major role in the acceptance by the summit that ASEAN should "intensify its external dialogues in political and security matters by using the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference."¹⁴⁵

143 New Straits Times, 3 January 1992.

144 Canberra Times, 22 July 1992.

145 S. Bilveer, "After the Summit: The Way Forward", ASEAN-ISIS Monitor (Kuala Lumpur), No.3, April 1992, 3.

Hence on the question of regional security dialogue, by the end of 1992, there was arguably an even greater convergence in the attitudes of Australia and Singapore than in the case of Indonesia or Malaysia. There had been calls for an Asia-Pacific wide security framework in Australia and Singapore, but these had been put to one side by the governments of both countries, whose official approach was to work through existing institutions - especially the ASEAN PMC - as the basis for broader security dialogue.

Australia's regional defence cooperation

Notwithstanding its conclusion of a rotational basing arrangement with the United States, Singapore has increasingly valued its defence relationship with Australia in recent years. According to the Australian Government, "As a stronger recognition of shared strategic interests has emerged in recent years, cooperative defence activities have broadened and diversified".¹⁴⁶

Apart from a growing range of bilateral cooperation¹⁴⁷, Singapore particularly values Australia's role in FPDA. In June 1991, Singapore's Foreign Minister, Wong Kan Seng, said that both FPDA and a US military presence needed to be sustained to ensure stability and peace in the region:

I think the Five Power Defence Arrangement has served us well...It's a very useful structure and Singapore would

¹⁴⁶ Australian Government, *The Government's response to the Coalition's defence policy*, op. cit., 3.

¹⁴⁷ In March 1993, the Australia-Singapore defence relationship reached a new level. Agreements were signed for the relocation of Singapore's advanced air training facilities to Western Australia, and for cooperation between the two countries in defence science and technology. See *Financial Review*, 23 March 1993, and *Australian Defence Report*, 1 April 1993.

like to see the FPDA remaining for as long as possible.¹⁴⁸

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said at a function for FPDA Ministers earlier in 1991 that "The recently concluded Gulf War underlines the importance of having extra-regional friends interested in, and prepared to commit forces to defend, the stability of a region." Goh said FPDA provided a stable and secure environment for Singapore and Malaysia to pursue economic development and become "dynamic Asian economies". Although the two countries were now better able to look after themselves, and there were other groupings such as ASEAN and APEC contributing to regional stability, FPDA was still relevant. "By keeping out threats to the security of Malaysia and Singapore, the FPDA also enhances ASEAN's stability", he said.¹⁴⁹ Defence Minister Dr Yeo Ning Hong said in September 1992 that in the face of uncertainties in the regional strategic environment such as disputed claims in the South China Sea and unclear prospects for a lasting peace in Cambodia, FPDA:

continues to be an effective ballast for stability in the region....And as the FPDA grows both in maturity and sophistication, with integrated operational procedures between the partners better exercised, it will become even more relevant and useful for regional peace and security.¹⁵⁰

In the late 1980s, Singapore had some doubts about the commitment of Australia to FPDA. This can be inferred from statements in 1992 by the retiring chief of Singapore's defence force, Lt Gen Winston Choo. He said that the extra-

148 Australian Financial Review, 17 June 1991.

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

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

regional members (including Australia) now regarded the pact more seriously:

It is now seen to be an association that has greater military significance and is of mutual professional benefit, thereby resulting in greater commitment among the partners."¹⁵¹

Like Malaysia, Singapore believes Australia's contribution to the FPDA provides benefits in terms of deterrence, links with the US security system and a mechanism for Malaysia-Singapore cooperation. In November 1989, Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore's Minister for Defence (Services) spelled out the value of FPDA as a deterrent:

the very presence of forces belonging to an FPDA partner - for example Australian aircraft squadrons - must raise the possibility of a response from that partner...It is these imponderables that make the FPDA an important factor for stability in the region.¹⁵²

Singapore believes FPDA assists its aim of encouraging a continued strategic interest by the United States in Southeast Asia. A political scientist from the University of Singapore, Obaid Ul Haq, stated that:

Singapore sees the FPDA as one of the important factors that help maintain stability in the Singapore-Malaysia area....(it) affords the additional advantage of encouraging the continuing US military engagement in the region.¹⁵³

FPDA is also important for Singapore because of the forum it provides for cooperation with Malaysia. According to Obaid Ul Haq, FPDA has "considerable symbolic and psychological

¹⁵¹ Straits Times (weekly overseas edition), 13 June 1992.

¹⁵² Straits Times, 30 November 1989.

¹⁵³ Obaid Ul Haq, 'Singapore's search for security: a selective analysis', in Chee, Stephen (ed), Leadership and Security in Southeast Asia - Institutional Aspects, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1991, 131.

significance as well as military importance...It provides a framework of military co-operation with Malaysia"¹⁵⁴ As Lee Hsien Loong said, "besides its security value..., it provides a non-sensitive format for SAF [Singapore Armed Forces] and MAF [Malaysian Armed Forces] officers to work together."¹⁵⁵

In terms of specific military benefits, Singapore sees FPDA as an established avenue for Australia to provide logistic and other support in a crisis. Like Malaysia, Singapore especially values Australia's participation in the Integrated Air Defence System. Singapore underlined the value it attaches to IADS with the commitment of additional fighter aircraft and air defence missiles in 1989 and 1990 respectively.¹⁵⁶ In contrast to Malaysia, Singapore would like IADS and FPDA as a whole converted into an operational agreement structured to allow the external members to provide combat forces quickly. In November 1989, Lee Hsien Loong called for FPDA to be strengthened by the formation of a combined command staff, more joint training, and a greater emphasis on joint operations so that "the FPDA members can combine their military forces together to deal with any threat."¹⁵⁷ Unlike Malaysia, Singapore does not feel constrained from advocating an operational FPDA by its formal commitment to a ZOPFAN in Southeast Asia, its membership of the non-aligned movement, or Indonesia's sensitivities about the arrangements.

154 Ibid., 124.

155 Straits Times, 30 November 1989.

156 Straits Times, 1 May 1990.

157 Straits Times, 30 November 1989.

Implications for Australia

The perceptions described in this chapter have implications for Australia's broad regional security policies, its regional defence cooperation and its military posture.

Australia's regional security policy

Comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia

Positive perceptions of Australia are essential for the Government's key regional security aim of 'comprehensive engagement' with Southeast Asia. Negative perceptions on the part of political leaders or major sections of society would make it difficult for Australia, in Senator Evans' words, "to become a significant partner in the region, an accepted and natural participant in regional affairs".¹⁵⁸

In this context, the positive view that Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have of Australian government policy under Prime Minister Keating assists comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia. The above study supports the judgement of the Australian that:

There is a perception throughout Southeast Asia that Keating represents generational change, that Hawke, despite his creditable role in the creation of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation grouping, was more obsessed with Africa than Asia, and that most of his significant diplomatic friendships were in Washington or the Middle East rather than Southeast Asia. Keating is seen as a new leader with a new direction. The countries of the

region like his nationalistic, pro-republican campaign - even the countries which are not themselves republics and which remain members of the British Commonwealth....The importance of the Keating rhetoric is that it gives political and symbolic weight to Australia's recent efforts to enmesh itself in the region.¹⁵⁹

The positive reaction in the three countries to the ideas expressed by Australia's new Prime Minister demonstrates that the right 'rhetoric' is important in efforts to develop deeper links with Southeast Asia. Visits to the region can also have a considerable impact. Keating's visit to Indonesia was particularly significant, demonstrating to the Indonesian leadership that East Timor and other areas of past tension would not be allowed to stand in the way of good government to government relations.

While Keating's rhetoric about a more 'independent' Australia which is increasingly engaged with Asia was therefore well crafted for a region where symbolism of this type is important, it should not be thought that Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore see his statements or regional visits as evidence of a fundamental change in national attitudes. As the above study shows, all three countries believe the Australian public (especially the media) remains basically racist, with a far greater affinity for Europe and the United States than Southeast Asia. Such a perception is an obstacle to comprehensive engagement. This is most noticeable in Malaysia's case, where perceptions of racism on the part of the Australian media and government have contributed in recent years to a series of difficulties in political relations. In Indonesia, the attitude of the Australian Government is increasingly seen as separate from that of the general public.

159 Australian, 29 April 1992.

However, even though a further gradual improvement in relations with Indonesia appears likely, the perception that the Australian community remains racist and, in addition, sees Indonesia as a military threat, will continue to constrain the extent of cooperation that Indonesian authorities agree to. While Singapore also has negative perceptions of the Australian media and community in general, these have less effect on overall relations, perhaps ultimately because of Singapore's strategic vulnerability and its need for a sound security relationship with Australia.

The Australian media and its perceived tendency to lecture the region on human rights, democracy, the environment and other issues is seen as a particular obstacle to closer engagement with Asia. As Jat Sujatmiko, an official of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said:

The Australian media must better understand Asian behaviour and beliefs....Australian journalists who like to expose sensitive news issues or write about the negative behaviour of some of the Asian leaders will not help Australia's integration with Asia.¹⁶⁰

In the eyes of Australia's regional neighbours, therefore, a pre-condition for comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asia is the re-education of the Australian public and media. As Sujatmiko said in a paper entitled "Becoming a Republic: Will Australia be More Accepted in Asia?":

It is true that becoming a republic will help Australia to integrate with Asia but it is not the major condition....Australia's acceptance in Asia depends on how well the Government and the people of Australia understand Asian society and culture. These educational concerns have never been formally expressed by Asian leaders, but they will affect how soon Australia

¹⁶⁰ *Australian*, 5 May 1993.

successfully becomes part of Asia, economically and socially.¹⁶¹

Broader regional security initiatives

This chapter has shown that by late 1992 Australia's approach towards the promotion of greater regional security dialogue had converged with that of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. On Australia's part there was a recognition that it was not in a good position to propose overarching security frameworks for the Asia-Pacific, particularly those modelled on Europe, that there was a need to pay deference to the role of ASEAN in regional security, and that the practical way ahead was to work in an incremental way through existing regional institutions, especially the ASEAN PMC.

The general perception in Southeast Asia of Australia as a predominately European nation with a superior attitude towards the region handicaps any proposals from Australia for the adoption of European concepts of security in the Asia-Pacific. This was the case with Senator Evans' suggestion at the 1992 ASEAN PMC for the eventual evolution of a "CSCE" in Asia. There is also resentment in ASEAN at any large scale security proposals that comes from outside the grouping. As the Far Eastern Economic Review stated in April 1991:

over the past year ASEAN has been bombarded with proposals aimed at luring the association into security-related forums....a mildly defiant mood was detectable when it came to the issue of regional security... Suggestions that ASEAN be drawn more into discussions on regional security are perceived as another external pressure.¹⁶²

161 Australian, 5 May 1993.

162 Far Eastern Economic Review, 1 August 1991.

Such external pressure has been particularly resented by Indonesia and Malaysia, who have been the strongest advocates within ASEAN of local concepts for regional security, such as regional resilience and a ZOPFAN for Southeast Asia. To be accepted by these countries, it is likely that proposals for region wide security frameworks would need to come from within ASEAN itself, or at least be sponsored by an ASEAN member. In this context, it should be noted that when Singapore's Tommy Koh proposed an Asia-Pacific version of the CSCE in 1991, he presented the proposal as one from Singapore, rather than supporting a previous idea from Australia.

From the point of view of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, another difficulty with Senator Evans' suggestion for the eventual emergence of a CSCA was that it implied a security structure not centred on ASEAN itself. Senator Evans had earlier raised doubts about the effectiveness of ASEAN in a regional security sense. In Australia's Regional Security, he said that ASEAN:

has provided a forum to dilute (but not eliminate) intra-regional territorial and security suspicions...There may...be a need to supplement ASEAN with a range of wider associations that involve diverse memberships and meet new needs, both economic and security.¹⁶³

However, as Chapter One showed, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore each see the ASEAN grouping as one of the most important factors in regional stability. By late 1991, there was greater recognition in Australia of the need to acknowledge the contribution of ASEAN to regional security. As the Australian pointed out:

163 Evans, Australia's Regional Security, op. cit., 8,9.

The failure of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to respond effectively to the crisis in what was Yugoslavia has forced some re-thinking about the effectiveness of grand, region-wide bodies which do not have a tradition of actually solving problems...on the other hand...there have historically been serious territorial disputes involving most of the ASEAN nations, but the dynamics of ASEAN solidarity has allowed virtually all of the purely intra-ASEAN disputes to be managed and defused.¹⁶⁴

In a speech in Jakarta in June 1992, Australia's Ambassador to Indonesia, Phillip Flood, stated that:

The solid foundation of regional political stability created by ASEAN, which proved so enduring, is particularly relevant now in this post-Cold War period. The confidence building provided by the habits of ASEAN consultation and co-operation can operate at the centre of a new web of complementary political dialogues across the Pacific.¹⁶⁵

Proposals by Senator Evans at the 1992 ASEAN PMC to advance regional security indicated both a sensitivity to ASEAN's security approach and an acceptance of the central role of ASEAN and the ASEAN PMC in regional security arrangements. Senator Evans did not suggest the creation of a formal regional institution or mechanism. Instead, he put forward three low key suggestions: discussions between strategic planners on approaches to external defence after the end of the Cold War; maritime information sharing and other measures to combat piracy; and regional discussions on the United Nations proposal for a register of military arms transfers.¹⁶⁶ The three issues Senator Evans chose were already of some significance to the region. With the reduction in the United States regional military presence, ASEAN members had to give

164 Australian, 5 August 1992.

165 P. Flood, "Economic growth in ASEAN - a neighbours perspective", address to First international conference on trade and investment in ASEAN, Jakarta, 30 June 1992.

166 Australian, 5 August 1992.

greater attention to their own external defence; the increase in piracy in Southeast Asian waters was attracting considerable attention¹⁶⁷; and earlier in the year Malaysia's Defence Minister had publicly supported the idea of regional discussions on the UN arms register.

The type of low profile proposals Senator Evans put forward at the 1992 ASEAN PMC were compatible with the perceptions of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore discussed above. They did not seek to impose 'external' security concepts on the region or challenge the role of ASEAN in broader regional security.¹⁶⁸ Such proposals were also consistent with Australia's aim of participating "actively in the gradual development of a regional security community based on a sense of shared security interests".¹⁶⁹

Australia's regional defence cooperation

Australia's major means of participating in the development of a regional security community has been its longstanding defence cooperation with Southeast Asia. As indicated above, Australia's role in FPDA is a key element in this cooperation.

In 1989 the view was expressed that Australia:

will need...to assess the continuing relative importance of established forms of military cooperation in which we are involved in the region such as the Five Power Defence

¹⁶⁷ *Daily Commercial News*, 21 July 1992.

¹⁶⁸ Australia's approach on the question of regional security dialogue therefore fitted well with the creation of the 'ASEAN Regional Forum' in July 1993. This is not a formal security institution like the CSCE, but an informal gathering in the ASEAN style. It is centred on ASEAN, being an extension of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and PMC meetings. It includes not only the participants at those meetings, but also China, Russia, Vietnam, Laos and Papua New Guinea. It is not a vehicle for formal multilateral security cooperation, and is intended instead to promote informal security dialogue.

¹⁶⁹ Evans, *Australia's Regional Security*, 44.

Agreement [sic]...and the Integrated Air Defence SystemWe will need to ask whether the weight we give to such arrangements will continue to convey the right messages about Australian security interests in the Southeast Asian region or whether these arrangements may eventually need to be de-emphasised."¹⁷⁰

This statement clearly implied a downgrading of FPDA. Two years later, however, attitudes towards FPDA were far more positive. As Foreign Minister Evans said in August 1991:

our involvement in the FPDA is one that manifestly brings benefits to all participants...it is an involvement which might over time evolve to embrace other regional participants, or be capable of at least partial replication elsewhere.¹⁷¹

Neither of these statements, however, is entirely consistent with the perceptions described above. Malaysia and Singapore believe FPDA has considerable strategic importance - for its deterrence value, its indirect link to the US security network, the possibility of logistic and other support in a crisis, the forum it provides for Malaysia-Singapore military cooperation, and training and other benefits. Both countries would strongly oppose any suggestion that FPDA should be 'de-emphasised'. On the other hand, there would also be risks involved in expanding the FPDA to 'embrace other participants' or in 'replicating' it in some other part of the region. To what extent former Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar's desire for FPDA to be dismantled is shared by the Indonesian Government is unclear. Nevertheless, a strong reaction could be anticipated if a major expansion of FPDA was proposed. While senior Indonesian military figures are reportedly "comfortable" with FPDA, this refers to the Arrangements in

170 Tony Kevin, "Major Power Influences on the Southeast Asian region: an Australian view", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), op. cit., 29.

171 Senator Evans, "Australia's regional security environment", 10.

their current form. The misperception that FPDA was originally designed to constrain Indonesia following Confrontation means any significant enlargement of FPDA could not be supported by Jakarta. The addition of the small enclave of Brunei is one thing, the inclusion of other ASEAN countries - such as Thailand or Indonesia itself - quite another.

Similar considerations apply to the question of converting FPDA from what is largely a training forum into an operational structure. If Australia had Singapore's views alone in mind, it would make sense to agree to this. Malaysia, however, does not wish to raise the profile of FPDA by turning it into an operational grouping, at least partly because of uncertainty over Indonesia's reaction.

In this context, maintaining FPDA largely in its current form - without 'de-emphasising' it, but also without advocating any significant expansion or converting it into an operational agreement - would be the approach most compatible with the perceptions of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

In all three countries, there is a positive view of bilateral defence relations with Australia. In Malaysia and Singapore, bilateral defence ties are not remarked upon in public as much as FPDA. Nevertheless, they are clearly highly valued, with Malaysia's Defence Minister describing bilateral defence links as 'excellent' and Singapore moving towards a more extensive defence relationship with Australia. With Indonesia, there has also been substantial progress in this area since 1989. According to the chief of Australia's armed

forces, the ADF has been at the "leading edge" of redefining Australia's overall relationship with Indonesia.¹⁷²

Regional defence cooperation, therefore, is clearly important for Australia's overall security aim of 'comprehensive engagement' with Southeast Asia. As Chapter One showed, the emphasis Australia places on regional defence cooperation in its overall security approach fits well with the importance for Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore of military links in overall regional stability. Apart from conducting more formal military exercises with these three nations in recent years than they have with themselves, the close personal links Australia has developed in the defence area sit comfortably with the role of informal military ties in maintaining workable relations within ASEAN. The survival of bilateral military links with Indonesia and Malaysia despite political tensions with both countries in 1990 and 1991 demonstrates the basic soundness of Australia's defence relations in Southeast Asia.

Despite the maintenance and improvement of Australia's regional defence links in recent years, however, it should not be thought that defence ties are immune from difficulties in broader relations. The negative impressions of Australia discussed earlier place limits on the bilateral defence cooperation regional nations will agree to. This is most apparent in the case of Indonesia, where the Australian community is not only regarded as having a racist attitude to Asia as a whole, but is believed to see Indonesia itself as a military threat. The Australian media is a further

172 The Weekend Australian 17-18 April 1993.

complication. In Indonesia's eyes it has undue influence over Government policy, is preoccupied with East Timor and human rights generally, and hence could pose a threat to formal military cooperation between the two countries. While, therefore, the steady incremental improvement of Australia - Indonesia defence links is likely to continue, a major expansion of these ties appears unlikely without the resolution of some longstanding difficulties in broader relations. The visit to Indonesia in August 1992 by Australia's Opposition defence spokesman, Alexander Downer, illustrated this point. In developing its alternative defence policy, the Opposition had proposed extending regional defence cooperation into new areas, with particular emphasis on Indonesia:

The Coalition will make a major push to promote the development of joint equipment acquisition programs. The 1990s will present opportunities for a number of regional countries to participate in the design, manufacture and acquisition of common equipment types. Among these could be light armoured vehicles, transport aircraft and a number of naval programs".¹⁷³

According to Downer:

There are enormous opportunities to develop ties between Australia's defence industries and those of Indonesia, as well as developing genuine joint exercises and training.¹⁷⁴

Indonesia, however, believed considerable development of the overall relationship would be needed before the type of advanced defence cooperation that Downer was proposing could be feasible. As the Australian reported:

173 Federal Liberal Party/National Party Coalition, A Strong Australia - Rebuilding Australia's Defence, Canberra 1992, 42.

174 Australian Financial Review, 3 August 1992.

in a sign that tensions still exist, the Indonesian officials said there was a need to build up more confidence in bilateral relations before the Opposition's policy of shared weapons procurement could be realised.¹⁷⁵

In the case of Malaysia, the constraints that negative perceptions of Australia place on defence cooperation are less definite. This is partly because Australia's bilateral defence cooperation with Malaysia is deeper and of longer standing than that with Indonesia. It also reflects the importance for Malaysia of Australia's role in FPDA. In addition, there is no perception in Malaysia that Australia sees it as a military threat, and it is less likely that the Australian media would target military ties with Malaysia because of concerns over human rights. This suggests there could be greater scope for new forms of defence cooperation with Malaysia - along the lines proposed by Downer - although continued stability in political relations would be needed for this to occur.

As far as Singapore is concerned, its strategic need for military cooperation with Australia - which has increased with the end of the Cold War and the reduced United States military presence in Southeast Asia - would largely seem to override any constraints that broader political differences might otherwise impose on bilateral defence ties.

Australia's military posture

A key aspect of the above perceptions is Indonesia's view of Australia's military posture. What needs to be noted in particular is the apparent division of opinion between ABRI and the Defence Ministry on the one hand, and the Foreign Ministry and the wider academic and political community on the other. As Andrew MacIntyre has said, "it remains the case that there is evidently some debate in Jakarta as to the meaning of the reforms introduced under Kim Beazley."¹⁷⁶

Through a range of high level defence and military contacts, Australia has ensured that senior military and defence figures in Indonesia accept the policy of defence self-reliance set out in The Defence of Australia 1987. This understanding does not seem to have been passed on to Indonesia's Foreign Ministry, Parliamentary Commission 1 or the wider Indonesian academic community. These groups appear to have perceived Australia's military posture under its policy of defence self-reliance as - to use Hilman Adil's words - 'provocative and offensive'. Kim Beazley's emphasis for domestic political reasons on the capacity of Australian military forces to conduct offensive operations, together with accusations from Australian academics of 'a new Australian militarism', helped produce this perception.

While the key figures in Indonesia's military establishment accept Australia's defence approach, it is not in this nation's strategic interests for wider misunderstanding to persist. This adds to the general

¹⁷⁶ Andrew MacIntyre, "Australia - Indonesia Relations", in Desmond Ball & Helen Wilson (eds), op. cit., 158.

perception that Australia sees Indonesia as a military threat. It also serves to confirm the view in Indonesia that Australians wish to maintain a form of 'European superiority' over their Asian neighbours. This complicates what has been a difficult relationship for both sides to manage.

The Liberal/National Party's presentation of its alternative defence policy in 1992 fitted well with the negative perceptions of Australia's military posture in Indonesia. Alexander Downer compared the Liberal/National Party's emphasis on cooperation with the region with the Government's defence policy, which he said was insular and assumed Asia to be a threat.¹⁷⁷ According to Downer, "The [1987] White Paper's strategy is wrong. It signals a wall around Australia where what we want to do economically and politically is the reverse".¹⁷⁸ Downer said that the Labor Government's "whole approach to Indonesia has only fostered a perception in Australia that Indonesia is a military threat to Australia."¹⁷⁹ While, however, some elements of Indonesian society and government would have agreed with Downer's assessment, the above study shows that his view of the Labor Government's defence policy as "a fortress Australia strategy"¹⁸⁰ would not have been shared by the senior Indonesian military officials he visited in August 1992. This may have contributed to the negative reception that his proposals for new areas of defence cooperation received in Indonesia.

177 *Age*, 4 August 1992.

178 *The Weekend Australian*, 4 July 1992.

179 *Australian Financial Review*, 3 August 1992.

180 *Australian Financial Review*, 19 October 1992.

The current level of dissatisfaction in Indonesia with Australia's defence approach could not in itself lead to a serious dispute between the two nations. Even if Australia's defence posture is perceived by some as "hawkish" and the ADF's equipment program as beyond strict defensive needs, Australia is not seen as having any political motivation to threaten Indonesia. There have not been claims in Indonesia that Australia is ever likely to possess the type of aggressive political approach that would make a hawkish defence posture threatening. Moreover, whilst a variety of criticisms have been collected for this study, they have been spread over a number of years. Australia's defence approach is not a pressing issue in Indonesia. The strengthening of defence relations between 1989 and 1992 indicates this. At most it is of intermittent interest. Nevertheless, misunderstanding and concern persist in some quarters in Indonesia. For the sake of Australia's long term relationship with Indonesia, it is important that its military posture is understood outside the narrow Defence Ministry/ABRI circle. It is also important for Australia's security planners not be complacent on this subject, given the need for any two neighbours to avoid tension over military posture. In the case of Indonesia, a widespread belief that Australia possesses an unnecessarily offensive military posture could seriously exacerbate tension should a dispute arise between the two countries over some other issue.

In this context, three aspects of Australia's military posture which need to be understood more widely in Indonesia are discussed below.

Major equipment

The concern expressed in Indonesia about Australia's defence posture relates mainly to major items of military equipment. This study has shown that a public emphasis in Australia on the offensive strike capacity of the ADF's submarine force and its F-111 and F/A-18 aircraft led to perceptions in Indonesia of an aggressive military posture. While personal explanations from Australian officials meant that ABRI and the Indonesian Defence Ministry understood the defensive nature of Australia's overall policy, other elements of government and society have been slower to accept this. Foreign Minister Alatas said Indonesians were "comparing your capability", presumably with that of their own nation. Hasnan Habib questioned why Australia needed the ability for long range strike operations to counter low level threats. Hilman Adil said development of the capabilities described in The Defence of Australia 1987 could be seen as provocative, referring in particular to Australia's "naval build up" and its plans for new submarines with a long range strike capacity.

The conclusion from the above is not that the ADF's capacity for offensive operations is necessarily inappropriate from a strategic or military point of view, but that a public emphasis on this capacity has the potential to damage Australia's relations with Indonesia. This means the ADF's strike capabilities are highlighted in Indonesia. In turn, this inevitably leads some in Indonesia to question

Australia's reasons for possessing these capabilities, and to ask whether the public emphasis on such capabilities is in itself meant to be a message to Indonesia. The reaction of Alatas and his political and academic colleagues shows that the way Australia's military equipment program fitted into the defensive policy enunciated in The Defence of Australia 1987 needed to be explained to more than just a narrow circle of senior ABRI and Defence Ministry officials. As MacIntyre has said:

What Australian defence planners see as necessary counter-strike capabilities may appear as more sinister long-range capabilities to other countries.... considerably more effort will be needed from Canberra to explain Australian defence policy more effectively and more widely in Indonesia to ensure that the security suspicions which were for so long the hallmark of Australian thinking about Indonesia, do not now come to characterise Indonesian thinking about Australia.¹⁸¹

Apart from a wider explanation of Australia's overall defence policy, an understanding of the domestic political scene in Australia would also have assisted acceptance of Australia's military posture in Indonesia. In particular, it would have made Kim Beazley's emphasis on the ADF's offensive capabilities more understandable to Indonesian observers.

The public criticism by Ambassador Siagian in October 1992 of Australia's plans to acquire additional F-111 fighter bombers underlines the legacy caused by the failure to explain the thinking behind The Defence of Australia 1987 more widely in Indonesia. Siagian's reaction shows again that Australia's defence equipment purchases will be queried in Indonesia, especially by those who were not acquainted with the rationale

¹⁸¹ Andrew MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, 158.

behind The Defence of Australia 1987. This is particularly so if, like the F-111s, the equipment could be used for offensive military operations.

One of the lessons Singapore learned from criticism of its offer of military facilities to the United States was the importance of prior consultation. Similarly, had Australia forewarned Indonesia of the F-111 purchase and the reasons for it, the criticism by Ambassador Siagian might have been avoided. In the case of the additional F-111s, however, the Government moved quickly to provide an explanation to a range of officials in Indonesia - not merely ABRI and the Defence Ministry - once the decision had been announced.¹⁸²

Australia's diplomats, for example, conveyed an explanation of the purchase to their counterparts in the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, placing this in the context of the "basically defensive strategic posture" of Australia.¹⁸³ This showed an awareness that for the sake of good relations, Australia's military posture should be explained to more than just a narrow circle of senior Indonesian military officials. In addition, a willingness to quickly clarify such decisions is also in keeping with the way Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore resolve tensions between themselves. Malaysia's explanation and apology to Indonesia over the screening of a documentary on East Timor (see Chapter One) is a case in point. Prompt explanation of the F-111 purchase by Australian officials - together with the understanding built up since 1989 between senior Australian and Indonesian military and defence figures

¹⁸² Australian, 16 October 1992.

¹⁸³ The Weekend Australian 17-18 October 1992.

- clearly contributed to the public acceptance of the purchase by the head of Indonesia's armed forces, General Sutrisno.

The reaction in Indonesia to the Labor Government's emphasis on the ADF's offensive capabilities has clear implications for the Liberal/National Party's alternative defence policy. According to the Coalition:

Labor's reactive defence posture in the North is a policy for defeat....The Coalition Government will rectify this gap by augmenting our strike capability....(This) will present a deterrent against the initiation of hostilities, and provide Australia with a capability to defeat an enemy, not simply react to attacks on our soil.¹⁸⁴

The Coalition said it would upgrade the capability of the F-111s - including an inflight refuelling capability - and consider equipping the new Collins class submarines with cruise missiles.¹⁸⁵

It is not so much the fact that the Coalition plans to increase Australia's offensive strike capacity (the Sydney Morning Herald pointed out that the Liberal/National Party's policy in this area would only go 'slightly further' than that of the Government¹⁸⁶), but the prominence of this aspect in the Coalition's overall policy that could cause difficulties in the region. As one report previewing the Liberal/National Party's policy said:

the Coalition is about to launch its new Fightback! Defence Policy, returning Australia to a past era of deterrence with the equipment and range to fight offensive wars in what they see as an increasingly uncertain Asia-Pacific region.¹⁸⁷

184 Federal Liberal Party/National Party Coalition, op. cit., 77.

185 Ibid., 77-79.

186 Sydney Morning Herald, 20 October 1992.

187 Transcript from SBS Television, "Dateline", 17 October 1992.

As the Australian remarked, "Perhaps the Opposition is a bit too keen on providing an independent strategic deterrent".¹⁸⁸

The release of the Liberal/National Party's alternative defence policy occurred within a few days of the Labor Government's announcement of its plan to acquire additional F-111s. As a result, regional observers could have seen Australian political thinking on defence as dominated by a desire for an offensive military capability. Sabam Siagian in fact linked the Liberal/National Party's plan to consider a 'stand off strike capability' for the Collins submarines with the Government's acquisition of additional F-111s, saying that Australia should explain to its neighbours its "plan" to buy Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States.¹⁸⁹ Hence the Liberal/National Party's emphasis on deterrence and a capacity for strategic strike may have reinforced the perception of some sections of government and society in Indonesia that Australia possessed an aggressive defence posture. The Liberal/National Party's statements would also have provided further evidence for Indonesia that Australians see it as a military threat. As the Age suggested:

Following the Government's announcement last week of the proposed buy of an additional 18 F-111 long-range bombers, the Opposition's policy adds to the impression of continuing Australian insecurity.¹⁹⁰

Northern defence

Another element of Australia's policy of defence self-reliance that requires careful explanation in Indonesia is the

¹⁸⁸ Australian, 20 October 1992.

¹⁸⁹ Antara 19 October 1992.

¹⁹⁰ Age, 19 October 1992.

increasing defence presence in the north of Australia. Construction of a chain of air bases across northern Australia, the basing of Australia's advanced F/A-18 fighter aircraft at Tindal in the Northern Territory, and an increased Army presence at Darwin, could without proper explanation cause uneasiness in Indonesia. As shown above, Indonesia's Parliamentary Commission 1 has already queried General Sutrisno about this. As Michael O'Connor stated in The Indonesian Quarterly:

In all the debates over Australian defence policy over the past decade, and in particular those aspects relating to northern basing, there has been little consideration of the external impact of that basing. Yet Indonesia and the principal shipping straits represent one of the most important strategic points in the world...By deploying forces to [the north of Australia], Australia actually alters the regional and global strategic balance. That is not an argument for not building the bases or making the deployments, It does, however, explain why our neighbours, and especially Indonesia, would be sensitive to the deployments and why Australia should be prepared to discuss its plans with its neighbours rather than act unilaterally on a matter that has regional and global security implications.¹⁹¹

Australian officials have recognised the need to provide an explanation of the increased military presence in northern Australia. In a speech to members of Indonesia's National Defence Institute, the head of the Australian Defence Department's International Policy Division said:

What I would like to emphasize is that this is not, and should not be seen as a threat to any other country. We are not developing a capacity for power projection into Southeast Asia. What we are doing is putting in place those Army, Navy and Air Force elements needed to defend what is logically the most vulnerable part of the country. A glance at a map of Australia shows you it is

191 M. O'Connor, "Australia's defence relations with Indonesia," op. cit., 188-189.

far easier to threaten the north of Australia than it is to threaten the south.¹⁹²

This type of explanation helped reduce any concern within the Indonesian armed forces over this issue. When Alexander Downer visited Indonesia in July 1992, he was told that "Indonesian forces did not feel threatened by the increased deployment of forces in the Northern Territory."¹⁹³

Once again, however, it is also important to ensure that other elements of Indonesian government and society understand the reasons for Australia's northern deployments. Australia may not always be able to rely on figures like General Sutrisno to defend its policies before groups such as Parliamentary Commission 1. Australia needs also to consider the types of forces it bases in the north. For example, a decision to base the F-111 fleet in the north of Australia could on the basis of the above study provoke an adverse reaction in Indonesia. Similarly, as Chapter Two pointed out, proposals for the rotational basing of United States forces in northern Australia might not be seen in a favourable light in Indonesia.

Military exercises

Closely related to the question of northern defence is Australia's approach to military exercises in and around the north of the country. In the opinion of Michael O'Connor:

Indonesia does perceive that Australian policy appears to be fearful of Indonesian designs upon Australia. [This

192 R.G. Brabin-Smith, address to Indonesian National Defence Institute, 29 October 1991, in Department of Defence, Australia, Defence Information Package, January 1992, A-5,6.

193 Australian, 6 August 1992.

is] reinforced by the current policy of military deployments to northern Australia and the broad scenarios used in the Kangaroo series of triennial defence exercises.¹⁹⁴

In the case of Kangaroo 89, held in August and September 1989, the scale of the exercise appeared inconsistent with the emphasis in The Defence of Australia 1987 on low level threats. This was pointed out to Indonesian readers by Peter Hastings, an Australian journalist who commanded wide respect in Indonesia, in an article in the Jakarta Post in August 1989:

Had Kangaroo 89 been confined to small party exercises, one could understand it. The scale would have been appropriate. But why...is Australia spending...\$100 million on exercises in Australia's north-west against an imaginary enemy called Kamaria (for which read Indonesia) involving 26,000 servicemen of whom 2,000 are American, including airmen flying B-52s? What on earth for? What sort of message is an American B-52 meant to convey to Jakarta? Nuclear weapons?...Kangaroo 89 remains a bloody nonsense. And expensive nonsense.¹⁹⁵

The Australian Government indicated its concern that Indonesia should not be offended by Kangaroo 89 by inviting ABRI chief, General Sutrisno, and his senior staff to observe the exercise. Again, however, the wider body of Indonesian Government officials and academics appear to have been left largely to determine their own opinions.

The need to explain major military exercises in the north of Australia to Indonesia seemed to be more clearly understood by the time the next exercise in the Kangaroo series was held in March 1992. Senior Indonesian officers including General Sutrisno were briefed in advance on the four week exercise.¹⁹⁶

194 M. O'Connor, "Australia's defence relations with Indonesia," op. cit., 190.

195 Jakarta Post, 11 August 1989.

196 Australian, 12 February 1992.

In addition, the commander of the Army's Operational Deployment Force, Brigadier Frank Hickling, addressed possible Indonesian concerns about the exercise in an interview he gave to the Kompas newspaper. "Kamaria is not Indonesia", he said. Kamaria was very different to Indonesia - for one thing, it was a white nation. A threat had to be invented for the exercise, because there was no threat to Australia. He also explained that Australia thought any enemy must come from the north because to attack from the south large distances would need to be transversed by sea.¹⁹⁷

Together with the general improvement in the defence relationship, these measures appeared to allay any concern in Indonesia about the Kangaroo series of exercises. As the Australian commented in February 1992:

past difficulties with Indonesia over how the exercise has been characterised appear to have been resolved. The Kamarian enemy...has prompted persistent speculation that the Australian military designs its defence exercises with Indonesian military capabilities in mind. But the involvement of senior Indonesian officers in Kangaroo' 92 - after much closer senior contacts in recent years - is seen as an indication of the sophisticated understanding of mutual strategic interests that has developed between the Indonesian and Australian forces.¹⁹⁸

The Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter went further in June 1992, saying that:

There was a time when the Kamaria exercises were capable of being interpreted as offensive to near northern neighbours. Today, the obviously genuine Australian interest in regional security, and the warm regional response to the initiative, has happily relegated that to the past.¹⁹⁹

197 Kompas, 20 April 1992.

198 Australian, 12 February 1992.

199 Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, June-July 1992, 11.

As with Australia's defence equipment program and the increase in northern basing, it will be important to ensure continued understanding in Indonesia of the ADF's exercises in and around northern Australia. The benefits of ensuring this understanding were demonstrated in early 1992, when the 'Lusitania Espresso' incident occurred at the same time as Kangaroo 92 was being conducted. Given the central role of East Timor in Australia-Indonesia relations, as well as the tension between the two nations over the events in Dili in November 1991, the fact that Australia was holding a major military exercise in its northern waters at the time of the protest ship's visit to East Timor had the potential to cause serious misunderstanding in Indonesia. That this did not occur reflects the understanding developed over recent years at a senior level between the armed forces of the two nations, and the efforts Australia has made to familiarise Indonesia with the thinking behind its exercises in northern Australia.

In a summary of Australia's military posture and relations with Indonesia, Michael O'Connor said that:

the development of northern basing and the scenarios which underpin the Kangaroo exercises tend to reinforce a perception of an Australia defending itself against an Indonesian invasion. At the same time, theoretical discussions about the use of Australian air power coupled with the RAAF's equipment and training policy reinforce perceptions in Indonesian as well as Australia that the RAAF is strongly committed to offensive operations against Indonesia....such adverse perceptions...should be overcome by a programme of consultations with Indonesia and a more sensitive programme of public discussion in Australia. The latter point is as important as the first; it is essential that the Australian community be encouraged to take a more sophisticated view of Australia's security relations with Indonesia and, in particular, to recognise the potential for collaboration

rather than the likelihood of conflict...there is a need to popularise the view in the wider Australian community that Indonesia is more likely to be a collaborator in security programmes than a potential enemy.²⁰⁰

O'Connor seems not to be aware that Australia's military posture has already been the subject of extensive "programmes of consultation" with Indonesia. Public support for Australia's defence posture from senior Indonesian military figures such as Benny Murdani and General Sutrisno demonstrates the success of this consultation process. This consultation, however, has occurred largely in the form of contact between senior Defence officials. While contributing in a major way to avoiding tension between Australia and Indonesia over military issues, it remains true - as O'Connor and MacIntyre have suggested - that there is a need to explain Australia's defence approach more widely in Indonesia. While not a serious issue at present, this would help avoid the possibility that criticism of Australia's defence posture could complicate relations with Indonesia in the future. Ambassador Siagian's reaction to Australia's decision to purchase additional F-111 fighter bombers demonstrates that there is still a lack of acceptance of Australia's defence approach outside senior ABRI/Defence Ministry circles. Australia moved quickly to explain the F-111 decision to the Indonesian Government as a whole, especially the Foreign Ministry. There will be a continuing need to provide such explanations if a wider acceptance in Indonesia of the defensive nature of Australia's overall defence policy is to develop.

200 M. O'Connor, "Australia's defence relations with Indonesia", op.cit., 196.

It is also true, as O'Connor suggests, that the opinion in some quarters in Indonesia that Australia has an aggressive military posture is closely linked to the general perception that Australians see Indonesia as a military threat. As Jusuf Wanandi and Ikrar Nusa Bhaktri have pointed out, this perception will only disappear when the more relaxed view of Indonesia's military ambitions in Australian Government circles is extended to the community as a whole.
