

Singapore and the Cold War (1965-1991) Part 1/3

Learning Outcome:

Evaluate Singapore's responses to the development of the Cold War in Southeast Asia

Some questions to consider:

How did Cold War politics affect Singapore's foreign policy?

How well did Singapore respond to the Cold War developments and challenges?

How did ASEAN shape Singapore's foreign policy during the Cold War? / How did Singapore shape ASEAN's policies during the Cold War?

Singapore's responses to Cold War developments in Southeast Asia

Relations with the USA, the USSR and China (Part 1)

In 1984, Deputy Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong said in a speech "(Singapore's foreign policy) depends on the competing interests of several big powers in a region, rather than on linking the nation's fortunes to one overbearing partner. The big powers can keep one another in check and will prevent any one of them from dominating the entire region, and so allow small states to survive in the interstices between them. It is not a foolproof method, as the equilibrium is a dynamic and possibly unstable one, and may be upset if one power changes course and withdraws. Nor can a small state manipulate the big powers with impunity. The most it can hope to do is to influence their policies in their favour."

- **The USA**

Singapore's relationship with the USA has been judged the most important among the major powers. The USA has long been regarded as a benign presence in the Asia-Pacific region as not only are its interests most in accord with those of Singapore but it is also the state most capable of protecting them because of its global reach. The relationship has been subject to recurrent differences, especially over political values since the end of the Cold War, but those differences have not seriously disturbed bilateral ties, which have come to be valued in Washington because of their strategic utility bearing on American interests in the Gulf as well as in Southeast Asia. Those ties are valued all the more in Singapore but have been continuously joined with a concern that America's regional security role could be progressively diminished because of a national preoccupation with domestic priorities.

- Early tensions with the USA (pre-independence)

1. US underlying role in indirectly contributing to the political situation that birthed Konfrontasi
 - During Konfrontasi and the limited tenure of President Kennedy and into that of President Johnson, Singapore had reason to lack confidence in the regional policy of the USA.
 - Washington had played a decisive role in persuading the Netherlands to relinquish control of the western half of the island of New Guinea to Indonesia. The government in the Hague had refused to transfer that peripheral part of its East Indies to Indonesia on international acknowledgement of its independence in December 1949.
 - The unresolved dispute had not only soured the post-colonial relationship but had also become a source of nationalist ferment, which the late President Sukarno had exploited to his personal political advantage.
 - In early 1964, US Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, was sent by President Johnson on a diplomatic mission to Southeast Asia in an attempt to resolve the problem of Konfrontasi which seemed to be serving the interests of Indonesia's Communist Party and its external patrons.
 - The tenor of the mission gave the impression of an act of appeasement on America's behalf at the expense of Malaysia of which Singapore was then a constituent part. In the event, President Sukarno's obduracy worked to Malaysia's advantage, while his continuing acts of coercive diplomacy against the Federation alienated President Johnson, then about to deepend America's fateful involvement in Vietnam.

- The need for non-alignment

- When Singapore separated from Malaysia in August 1965, the Second Indochina War was well underway.
- Not long after 9 August, US forces and the Vietnamese Communists confronted each other in two major military campaigns.
- Singapore, in response to this, started establishing an increasingly non-aligned position on the global stage.
- Lee Kuan Yew went out of his way to repudiate any military association with the USA. Moreover, he deemed it politic to reveal publicly an act of political indiscretion by America's Central Intelligence Agency in Singapore in 1960 during its period of self-government.

- At that time, Lee Kuan Yew was concerned to demonstrate a declaratory non-alignment in order to ensure full international recognition of a new-found independence, bearing in mind the extent to which Indonesia had been able to represent Malaysia, and by association Singapore, as a neo-colonialist enterprise among fellow post-colonial states.

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- Ang Cheng Guan points out that non-alignment allowed Singapore the “freedom of manoeuvrability on specific international issues based on its national interests”. Not aligning itself with major powers also gave Singapore greater flexibility to achieve economic and social stability during the Cold War.
- Singapore’s position on non-alignment was clearly articulated in Foreign Minister S Rajaratnam’s address to the UN General Assembly (21 Sept 1965):
Singapore has chosen the path of non-alignment. It simply means that we do not wish to be drawn into alliances dedicated to imposing our own way of life on other countries. Friendship between two countries should not be conditional on the acceptance of common ideologies, common friends and common foes.
- And in a speech to Singapore’s parliament on 16 December 1965, S Rajaratnam expressed the necessity of non-alignment:
...because to be aligned to any big country would eventually have meant the loss of our freedom of action even in domestic fields, because foreign policies are in fact an extension of domestic politics into the international field.
- There were several reasons why Singapore’s adopted a policy non-alignment upon independence in 1965-66:

a) Balancing the perceptions of a Singapore-US alignment

- When Singapore became independent in August 1965, many countries thought that Singapore was aligning to the United States and Britain.
- The PAP was outwardly anti-communists and had evidently been fighting against leftist and pro-communist elements in Singapore.
- Moreover, Singapore government was keen to retain Britain and US military presence in the region to maintain regional stability.

- Adopting a non-alignment position would help Singapore to deflect criticisms from anti-imperialist Afro-Asian countries, particularly Indonesia, Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

b) Fear of provoking Indonesia

- Singapore wanted to avoid unnecessary provocation of Indonesia while Konfrontasi was ongoing. Bearing in mind that Indonesia under Sukarno was staunchly anti-West at that point in time. Sukarno's ultra-nationalistic stance was aptly summed up by the following words, "Amerika...go to hell with your aid."
- Given that Sukarno considered Singapore and Malaysia as "client states" of the British, Lee Kuan Yew had to ensure that Singapore was not conspicuously pro-West by openly siding with the anti-Communist camp.

c) Preventing external interference from the Communist powers

- The People's Action Party government was still fighting a political battle with the leftist Barisan Sosialis.
- Adopting a policy non-alignment would not give external powers like China and the USSR the pretext to intercede on the behalf of the leftist forces and to allow the PAP government to deal with them it as an internal problem.
- The leftist forces could also ride on anti-US propaganda to carry out subversive activities with the support from external Communist powers and threaten the newly independent Singapore.

d) Gaining international support from the Afro-Asian countries

- The newly independent Singapore, ejected from Malaysia, placed considerable importance on securing overwhelming international recognition at a time when the General Assembly of the UN was being increasingly dominated by newly decolonised Afro-Asian countries that were part of the Non-Aligned Movement and had emerged from anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles.

- Singapore sought international support from these Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries to speed up its entry into the United Nations.
 - Almost a month after Singapore's independence, most of the Afro-Asian nations had recognised Singapore. Since NAM countries made up significant numbers in the UN, Singapore had to win their support by publicly distancing itself from the US, which was perceived to be an imperialist power by Afro-Asian states.
 - To prove that Singapore was committed to Non-Alignment, Lee Kuan Yew initially adopted a somewhat strident anti-American stance, gave public assurances that the US would be denied access to Singapore's bases and temporarily soured relations between US and Singapore officials (which was ironic because Singapore openly invited the US to use its naval and aircraft bases several years later).
 - Singapore was smoothly admitted into the UN on 21 September 1965 because of the overwhelming support from the NAM Afro-Asian countries.
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- In the wake of rising Cold War threats in the region, in November 1971, Singapore supported ASEAN's initiative to declare the ASEAN region to be a 'Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality' in which ASEAN members would commit to maintaining neutrality and be free from outside interferences.
 - However, Lee Kuan Yew believed that the ZOPFAN concept made the presence of the US even more necessary since there was no guarantee that external powers would abide by the principles to restrain themselves in Southeast Asia.
 - Hence, Singapore was not fully committed to the wordings of ZOPFAN as it was keen to engage the US to protect Singapore's self-interest.
 - The Five Power Defence Arrangements which came into force in November 1971, involving British, Australian and New Zealand as well as Malaysian participation were welcomed despite the end of an explicit alliance commitment.
 - The defence links with Commonwealth partners, however diminished in utility, had the advantage of tying Singapore and Malaysia into a structure of defence cooperation, which could be used to contain and mitigate bilateral relations.

- A closer security association with the USA was contemplated as serving a complementary purpose, but more important in the first two decades of independence than any formal defence link was the continuing regional role of the most powerful state in the world at that time.
- US regional presence would ensure that local powers would not be able to control Singapore's security environment.

- **Singapore's anti-communist and pro-Western position**

- During the Cold War and its Vietnam phase, a vigorous anti-communism, which was reflected in Singapore's domestic policy, endeared the Republic politically to Washington where Lee Kuan Yew came to be received regularly in the White House and before the Congress.
- The American connection did not have direct military expression, however.
- Despite the rhetoric, Singapore was leaning more towards the US than to the Communist bloc. This was most evident once Singapore gained entry into the UN.
- Lee Kuan Yew and Rajaratnam understood the strategic importance of US in maintaining regional peace and stability.
- Regional instability could undermine socioeconomic development that was necessary to banish the threat of communist subversion in Singapore.

- **Singapore's support for the USA's involvement and attempts to balance perceptions of Singapore-USA alignment during the Second Indochina War**

- Britain's withdrawals from the region added to the sense of vulnerability as Singapore had only just emerged from hostilities with Malaysia and Indonesia.
- Singapore felt the need to not only persuade the US to commit to the war in Vietnam for as long as possible.
- A phased and gradual American withdrawal, as opposed to a sudden one, would prevent the immediate and total collapse of South Vietnam.
- This would in turn buy time for the rest of Southeast Asia. Conversely a sudden withdrawal of the US Army from South Vietnam would precipitate a communist victory and provide fresh encouragement to local communist insurgencies in the region, including in Singapore and Malaysia.
- Thus, Lee famously remarked that "if American power were withdrawn, there could only be a communist Chinese solution to Asia's problems."
- In addition, Singapore could also engage the US help diplomatically, economically and strategically to overcome its own vulnerability as the smallest state in the region.

- After 1967, Lee openly supported US military intervention in Vietnam, describing it as a great American contribution aimed at providing valuable breathing space to the non-communist Southeast Asian countries.
 - As Lee told US Vice-President Hubert Humphrey in October 1967: “You are going to have to take sides. No one wants to be on the losing side. With you, we have a fighting chance. For me, it’s survival.”
 - He was thus highly supportive of the US retaining its military presence in the Philippines. Through its military bases, the Philippines offered the Americans an ability to better intervene to support the defence of Singapore should the occasion arise.
 - Apart from public exhortation, Singapore was also willing to be identified with America’s military enterprise in providing rest and recreational facilities for its servicemen from Vietnam during the late 1960s. It also permitted South Vietnamese officers to Singapore for training in the Johore Jungle Warfare School in August 1965
 - To prevent the Americans from leaving entirely from the region, Lee tried to get the Nixon administration’s assurance that the US Navy could utilise Singapore’s naval repair and maintenance facilities by threatening to offer the facilities to Soviet ships.
 - US forces began to utilise former British naval and air bases in Singapore for the maintenance and repair of US military vessels deployed in Vietnam from the late 1960s, while revenues from the ship and aircraft repair facilities, as well as the supply of petroleum, oil and lubricants to the US military, contributed greatly to Singapore’s economic development.
 - For instance, the US navy used the Sembawang’s ship-repair facilities from April to June 1968 and provided \$4 to \$5 million of business.
 - (However, to demonstrate its stance on neutrality, the Singapore government qualified that the ship and aircraft repair facilities would also be open to USSR or Chinese vessels based on similar commercial terms.)
- **Singapore’s continual support for the USA’s presence in the region**
- After the success of revolutionary communism in Indochina during 1975, Singapore sustained its open support for an American presence offshore in the Philippines, especially as, from the late 1960s, the Soviet Union had begun to demonstrate a menacing naval mobility from its Far Eastern port of Vladivostok into the Indian Ocean.
 - Indeed, it was from the late 1960s that the USA had indicated a declining regional resolve through a statement by President Nixon on the island of Guam in July 1969 that placed the prime responsibility for their conventional defence on regional states.

- It was with direct reference to the Soviet Union, made acute after Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, that Singapore engaged in recurrent exhortation in support of an American regional buffer role. **(Such concern did not preclude a commercial relationship with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European partners, including the provision of repair facilities for merchant vessels some of which serviced the Soviet Pacific fleet.** A willingness to deal to economic advantage with declared adversaries tended to devalue the more alarmist pronouncements of Singapore's Foreign Ministry, especially during its subsequent diplomatic confrontation with Vietnam.)
- At the end of the Cold War, when Washington announced that it would withdraw from long-held military bases in the Philippines after failing to reach an agreement with the government in Manila on their continued tenure, Singapore expressed its view for the need of US presence in the region –
- Speaking in Tokyo in May 1991, Lee Kuan Yew made clear his view that the peace and security both in Europe and Asia depended still on a balance of power and that 'A US military presence in both regions is very necessary'.
- Six months prior to that speech, in Nov 1990, just before relinquishing the office of Prime Minister and also while visiting Tokyo, he had signed a memorandum of understanding with America's Vice-President Dan Quayle that offered and enhanced use of facilities in Singapore to America's military aircraft and naval vessels as a contribution to sustaining its forward military position in Southeast Asia – this intended to demonstrate that the US was still welcome in the region.
- In 1991, Singapore went even further in providing facilities for the USA with the transfer from the Philippines to the island-state of an American naval logistics centre; this time, without arousing regional opposition.
- At the end of 1998, Singapore entered into an agreement with the US whereby its capital ships would be able to berth at the new Changi naval base on its completion after 2000, instead of having to anchor off-shore.
- Singapore's role within ASEAN in promoting the formation of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 1993 also intended to sustain America's regional interest and engagement in changing and uncertain strategic circumstances at the end of the Cold War. Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng was explicit in saying 'I see multilateral security dialogues as another means of helping the US stay engaged in this dynamic and economically important region. It creates a new rationale for a US presence in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific.'

- **Development of economic ties**

- Naval repair and recreation mentioned above
- In the wake of America's revision of its foreign policy to stress engagement with China and also the advent of economic adversity in East Asia, personal relationships visibly improved
- For example, at the meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) heads of government in Vancouver in October 1997, President Clinton conspicuously chose Prime Minister Goh as a golfing partner in a visible display of improved tone in the relationship underpinned by active defence cooperation
- September 1998, Prime Minister Goh called on President Clinton at the White House for discussions, in part, on the Asian economic crisis.

- **US and Singapore and the Third Indochina War**

- There were differences between Singapore – on ASEAN's behalf – and the USA over the diplomatic management of the Cambodian conflict; for example, during an international conference at the United Nations in 1981, because of the USAs interest in conciliating China as its strategic partner against the Soviet Union.
- Nonetheless, to Singapore's satisfaction, the USA became heavily involved in challenging the military *fait accompli* in Cambodia through economic sanctions against Vietnam and military assistance for the so-called Khmer resistance.
- Indeed, in 1987, ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh, revealed the success that he had enjoyed, while Singapore's head of mission in Washington in lobbying successfully for the USA to provide overt aid to the non-communist Cambodian resistance through the good offices of Stephen Solarz, then chair of the House Foreign Affairs sub-committee on Asia and the Pacific.
- America's mixed involvement in the Cambodian conflict certainly served Singapore's interests in balance of power terms.

● **The USSR**

- Singapore's changing stance on diplomatic relations with the USSR in the late 1960s (eg. Establishment of diplomatic relations (1968))
 - The Soviet Union had been a factor in Singapore's calculations even before independence when, in September 1962, Lee Kuan Yew had briefly visited Moscow to solicit its government's support for the Malaysia project, albeit without success.
 - After independence, Singapore entertained an initial concern about Moscow's likely response to its application for membership of the UN. That

membership was achieved without open objection, Singapore then set out to cultivate trade relations expressed in a formal agreement in March 1966.

- Diplomatic relations were established in June 1968, with the Soviet Union tolerant of Singapore's international alignments in the wake of its own loss of position in Indonesia.
- In the late 1960s, Soviet naval vessels had been to sail through the Singapore Strait *en route* to the Indian Ocean. The sighting of one such vessel during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference held in Singapore in January 1971 caused a diplomatic flurry
- So did the appearance of a Soviet destroyer in Singapore's roads in the following July.
- Lee Kuan Yew registered an uncharacteristic ambivalence over the use of Singapore's facilities by Soviet naval vessels, appearing to indicate approval in March 1971 but unequivocally opposing it by the end of 1972.
- Trade ties were sustained, however, but never amounted to much because of the limited offerings of the defective Soviet economy.

- Identification of the USSR as the prime external threat to regional order and cooling of relations in the 1970s and 1980s

- The development of trade ties had been encouraged with the end of Confrontation and extended by 1972 to the provision of ship repair facilities for Soviet merchant vessels.
- The virtually concurrent announcement of the Nixon Doctrine and Brezhnev's proposal for a collective security system in Asia provoked alarm in Singapore as an indication of a seeming strategic retreat.
- In the mid-1970s, Lee Kuan Yew made an abortive call for measures to counter its growing influence, including a proposal for a joint American, European and Australian naval force with Japanese participation.
- The relationship deteriorated markedly from the late 1970s, after Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, which was represented as part of a grand Soviet design for Indochina, and then Moscow's military deployment to former American naval and air bases in Cam Ranh Bay and Danang.
- In August 1980, a planned visit to Moscow by Lee Kuan Yew, where he had not been for nearly a decade, was cancelled a short notice on spurious grounds following on the Republic's boycott of the Olympic Games in the Soviet capital over the issue of Afghanistan.

- The depiction of the Soviet Union as a political demon in Singapore's media and government statements makes curious reading with the benefit of hindsight.
 - Even accounting for the nuclear military capability of the Soviet Union and its patronage of Vietnam, the representation of its regional threat seemed exaggerated at the time.
 - Such exaggeration has been explained partly in terms of the predominant ethnic-Chinese domestic constituency in Singapore.
 - The nature of Sino-Soviet rivalry and the Soviet attempt to depict Singapore as a vehicle for China's interests is said to have disposed the Republic to diplomatic confrontation.
 - However valid that explanation, an additional consideration was probably the persisting interest in attracting America's perpetual involvement in regional security through dramatizing the malign intent of its principal global rival.
 - These dramatic events revived anxiety on Singapore's part over the regional role of the USA because of the disappearance of the Soviet threat.
 - That said, it was Singapore which pressed successfully for Russia's participation in the founding foreign ministers' meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum in July 1993.
- **Singapore's perceptions of the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty (1978) and Soviet naval base at Cam Ranh Bay (1979)**
- To hedge against the uncertainties of British and US withdrawal and to make contingency plans for a potential North Vietnamese victory, Lee sought to improve its ties with the communist bloc countries, including the Soviet Union.
 - Rajaratnam remarked in 1976 that maintaining good relations with the USSR would compel the Soviets to respect Singapore's national interests and its "non-communist way of life."
 - It was also hoped that better relations with the Communist Bloc would act as a restraint on Vietnam's aggression towards other countries in the Southeast Asian region.
 - In June 1968, Singapore and the USSR established diplomatic relations and the Soviets were permitted to establish an embassy in Singapore in January 1969.

- This was followed by most of the east European communist governments as well as Outer Mongolia. Even North Korea had a consulate-general in Singapore.
- Lee however distanced itself from the People's Republic of China because he thought China exercised undue influence on the 'potentially subversive [leftist] force' in Singapore.
- Cognisant of the deepening Sino-Soviet split, the Singapore government sought better ties with the Soviet Union so as to strategically counter China's influence while keeping the US interested in the region.
- The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, was signed on November 3, 1978.
- Singapore, like many other Southeast Asian nations, was concerned about the increasing Soviet influence in the region. The treaty signaled a strengthening of ties between the USSR and Vietnam, potentially altering the balance of power in Southeast Asia.
- The signing of the treaty occurred against the backdrop of the ongoing conflicts in Southeast Asia, particularly the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. The treaty raised concerns about the potential for increased tensions and instability in the region.
- Singapore was known for its pragmatic approach to foreign policy, and it maintained economic relations with both the Soviet Union and Vietnam. The treaty had implications for trade and economic cooperation in the region, and Singapore may have assessed how it could navigate these changes to its advantage.

- Development of economic ties

- In 1989 Singapore maintained both economic and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. From the mid-1960s until the mid-1970s, Singapore's leaders promoted trade relations with Moscow in the belief that a Soviet role in Southeast Asia would ensure the permanent interest of the United States in the region. The Soviet Union was viewed as a major power and as a counterweight to China, and, therefore, as a significant factor in maintaining the regional power balance.
- This view changed when the Soviets established a military presence at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, following the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in November 1978, and actively supported the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia a month later. At that

time, according to Singapore, Moscow became a threat to regional stability.

- Soviet diplomacy toward the region changed, however, in the mid-1980s under the leadership of new general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. Beginning with a milestone foreign policy address in Vladivostok in July 1986, he initiated extended ties with the ASEAN states and committed the Soviet Union to playing a more constructive role in resolving the Cambodian issue.
- His interest in improving ties with the region and his new emphasis on Soviet economic development acted to modify regional perceptions. Singapore, as well as many of its ASEAN partners, became increasingly receptive to upgrading their bilateral relations with Moscow.
- Trade, banking, and shipping were the three critical areas of Singapore's economic ties with Moscow. Singapore's exports were mainly in the form of repairs to Soviet vessels in Singapore shipyards. Other exports included rubber, coconut oil, and fuel oil. In return, the Soviets exported fish and fish products, cast iron, light machinery, and crude oil.
- Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Soviets encouraged Singaporean firms to invest in joint ventures in the Soviet Union. Singapore's shipyards were reported in 1988 to be interested in reconstructing and developing the port of Nakhodka, the second largest port in the Soviet Far East after Vladivostok.

- **China**

- Background of Singapore-China connection
 - China has always loomed large in the calculations of Singapore's government because of the island's demographic profile and attendant suspicions among close neighbours.
 - Singapore's Chinese (three-quarters of the population) had sustained a separate strong cultural identity during the colonial period as well as links with their ancestral land through remittances to extended families and through charitable donations by successful businessmen, notably to education institutions.
 - Within Singapore, community supported Chinese schools based on a traditional curriculum served to infuse and sustain an extended and, at times, contested national identity.
 - Issues which both united and divided China and Chinese were exported to the colonial diaspora where community organisations mobilised financial support for the prevailing cause, especially opposition to Japan's invasion and occupation during the 1930s.

- A branch of the Bank of China was set up on the island in 1936 to serve that end.
 - Communist insurrection in the jungles of Malaya from mid-1948 was not replicated in urban Singapore but clandestine communist organisation existed within its trade unions with ancillary support from Chinese high school students
 - The victory of the Chinese Communist Party over the Kuomintang gave great encouragement to the local communist movement, which viewed Singapore and Malaya as a single battleground and which drew political support from among the Chinese community, especially from those educated in the Chinese medium.
 - It was that constituency that the English-educated leaders of the People's Action Party had sought to attract in their electoral bid for power within colonial Singapore.
 - That constituency had become of increasing political significance with constitutional change and an expansion of the suffrage
 - It was an electorate dominated by the Chinese-educated that carried the PAP to office in May 1959 but then an internal struggle for power ensued as a party faction aligned with the communist movement sought to exploit its strength on the ground.
 - The latent internal split came out into the open with the positive response of Singapore's government to the proposal in May 1961 by Malaya's Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, for a new and wider federation to include the self-governing island as well as British possessions in northern Borneo
 - this intended to permit British decolonisation from Singapore in a way that the local communist movement would be effectively crushed
 - In the event, the communist movement was crushed through the use of powers of arrest and the ability of the leadership of the PAP to rally popular support in their contention with the Malaysian government, which culminated in an unanticipated separation in August 1965.
- **Singapore's views of China's role in Southeast Asia**
- After independence, PAP sustained its concerns about the perils of links between China and Singapore which were seen as a source of continuing political challenge as well as complicating relations with neighbouring states.
 - China posted a dual problem for Singapore from the outset. It had shown itself to be a source of threat as a revolutionary power because of its support for communist insurgency. Indeed, Singapore became an object of vituperation during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, China's perceived

potential to menace the region was alarming in the light of its scale and population, and a willingness to resort to force to prosecute national and ideological interests.

- **Singapore's need to address external perceptions of Singapore as "third China"**

- The label of a third China, after the mainland and Taiwan, was one that a Singapore vulnerable within its confined location could not afford to carry.
- Although Singapore's first Chief Minister, David Marshall, had been invited to visit China in 1956, the People's Republic initially ignored the international status of the island-state on independence.
- Singapore had to cope regionally with the recurrent charge that ethnic affinity would make the island, at the very least, an agent of influence for China.
- A politically embarrassing episode occurred in Feb 1980 when spectators at a badminton match in Singapore between Indonesian and Chinese teams demonstrated an effusive partisan support for the latter.
- Singapore had never been in a position to manage and cope with the promble of China on its own.
- Singapore has sought, nonetheless, to engage constructively with China where practical.
- Indeed, Lee Kuan Yew has recalled giving unsolicited advice to the late Richard Nixon in April 1967 that 'There was much to be gained from engaging with China'.
- An independent Singapore engaged with China very tentatively, however, and only in economic activity where practical and profitable, for example, in tolerating the opening of Chinese emporia which sold cheap products which helped to keep down the cost of living.
- Moreover, its government had not been inhibited in prosecuting the local branch of the Bank of China in the late 1960s for its failure to observe banking regulations.
- In other respects, Singapore kept its political distance from a perceived locus of subversion and also encouraged, as far as it was possible, a different kind of engagement; namely, that of the USA whose countervailing power was judged to be critical for the security of the vulnerable island-state
- May 1976, Lee Kuan Yew met with comatose Mao Zedong
- Lee made a point of only speaking in English in all official occasions in a conspicuous attempt to refute the charge that Singapore was a third China.

- **Improving relations in the second half of the Cold War**

- Bilateral engagement with China by Singapore was only undertaken with a change in the pattern of major power alignments which marked the onset of the second phase of the Cold War, and with the change of the regime within China itself after the death of Mao in September 1976.
- Lee Kuan Yew recognised the opportunities attendant on Deng Xiaoping's radical revision of China's political economy as well as the potential challenge likely to be posed should China realise its full economic potential.
- In so far as Singapore might serve as a model of a kind for China's economic development, then the prospect of a flourishing and stable regional environment was deemed to be far more likely.
- The prospect of a growing economic interdependence on China's part encouraged expectations that it would conduct itself as a good regional citizen because of an interest in a stable regional environment

- **Singapore's changing stance on diplomatic recognition of China**

- Despite voting for Beijing's government to represent China in the UN, Singapore did not follow Malaysia's lead when it established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic in May 1974.
- Singapore was not moved by the same domestic political imperative as Malaysia and was also highly sensitive to Indonesia's negative disposition.
- It was made a matter of policy not to establish diplomatic relations with the government in Beijing until after the government in Jakarta had done so.
- In addition, at least during the 1970s, there was less than complete confidence within the government of Singapore that the Chinese population of the island would not fall prey to an emotive identification with representatives of the new China, given the experience of political fall-out from the Cultural Revolution.
- After some preliminary ping-pong diplomacy and contacts through chambers of commerce, Singapore began its direct encounter with China through an act of political reconnaissance conducted in March 1975 by Foreign Minister Rajaratnam whose ethnic-Tami identity was deemed an asset in the circumstances. Rajaratnam had the advantage of having been given a private dinner in New York in September 1974 by China's Vice-Foreign Minister, Qiao Guanhua, who issued the initial invitation. He subsequently became foreign minister by the time of the visit.

- That visit took place against a background of a notable improvement in Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations so that Singapore was hardly being politically adventurous in sending its foreign minister to Beijing.
- By then, China's media had long softened their recurrent diatribes against 'the Lee Kuan Yew clique', which had not harmed the Republic's relations with its close neighbours who were advised in advance of Rajaratnam's visit.
- In Beijing, Rajaratnam was received by the Prime Minister, Zhou Enlai, who expressed the view that he understood Singapore's foreign policy of delaying diplomatic relations until after Indonesia had re-established them and that his government was prepared to wait until then.
- The visit provided the opportunity to develop trade relations further.
- The extent to which China truly understood Singapore's position, as expressed in official statements, was qualified by unofficial comments that Singapore was a 'kinsman' country, which was not well received by the government of the island-state – it was the kind of identity that the Singapore government had gone to great pains to repudiate from the very outset
- Moreover, Rajartanam made the point of informing China's Foreign Minister, Qiao Guanhua, that Singapore would be sending soldiers to Taiwan for training because of limitations of space on the island and, without voicing objections, 'Mr Qiao immediately indicated that he had taken note of what I said.'
- May 1976, Lee Kuan Yew met with comatose Mao Zedong - Lee made a point of only speaking in English in all official occasions in a conspicuous attempt to refute the charge that Singapore was a third China. He also returned a gift of a Chinese book on the 1962 Sino-Indian War because of the significant Indian community in Singapore.
- Lee's visit took place following dramatic political changes in Southeast Asia with the success of revolutionary communism in Indochina.
- This was not to China's liking because of a concern that Vietnam might establish a dominant position in that peninsula to the advantage of the Soviet Union, then its principal adversary.
- China had ben an ideological missionary state in the first phase of the Cold War. With rapprochement with the USA, expressed in the Shanghai Communique (Feb 1972), its regional interests had found a different focus, registered in rising differences with Vietnam which as perceived as an agent of hostile Soviet influence.
- Lee Kuan Yew was testing the political water in such circumstances without making any change of substance in his government policy.

- Any concerns in Jakarta about the prospect of Singapore getting too close to Beijing were almost certainly allayed by the inspired revelation in Sept 1976 that Singapore's servicemen, including pilots, had been receiving regular military training in Taiwan.
- Lee Kuan Yew also pointed out while in Beijing, that China's support for communist insurgency within Southeast Asia was a fundamental obstacle to better relations with regional states.
- Deng visited Singapore in Nov 1978, driven in important part by a concern to counter the regional influence of the USSR expressed through the perceived agency of Vietnam with which it had recently concluded a Treaty of Friendship with evident security implications
- In the 1970s, Singapore found common tactical cause with China over the regional balance of power. Singapore had come to share corresponding concerns about the projection of Soviet influence, which came to a head with Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in the month following Deng's visit.
- Its government had already made a point of showing resolve towards Hanoi in October 1977 in refusing its demand for the return of Vietnamese hijackers of a Vietnamese aircraft, who had been dealt with in Singapore's courts.
- It was not moved by Vietnam's cancellation of a visit by a trade delegation as a mark of displeasure.
- Over Cambodia, Singapore adopted a strident public position, which brought it closer to China in political priorities and alignment and also incurred Vietnam's strong displeasure for representing it as the main threat to SEA. – Vietnam thus depicted Singapore as out to please Beijing and faithfully following its policies as a stooge.
- Nov 1980, Lee Kuan Yew's second visit to China, his hosts had become upset at seeing critical references in a prior draft speech to the issue of party-to-party support for communist insurgencies, while seeking good government-to-government relations.
- On his return, Lee announced that China's government wanted to disengage from any involvement in such insurgencies but this was contradicted by 'Voice of the Malayan Revolution, a radio station broadcasting from Yunnan, which criticised Singapore.
- In the following August, when Premier Zhao Ziyang visited Singapore, LKY told him that China would have to make up its mind about political priorities in SEA.
- September 1985, Lee Kuan Yew's third visit.
- The government in Beijing withdrew its objection to Singapore continuing to use Taiwan for military training as a condition for the establishment of diplomatic relations which occurred in October 1990, after ties had been

resumed with Jakarta in the previous August and after Lee Kuan Yew's fifth and final visit as Prime Minister

- In addition to economic opportunity, Singapore's government had been motivated by considerations of the balance of power in its dealings with China. Although China's potential for regional hegemony was well understood against a background of its Communist Party's interference in the domestic politics of SEA states, the considered judgement before the end of the CW was that the prime external threat to regional order was posed by the Soviet Union aided in its expansionist goals by Vietnam.
- To cope with that prospect, Singapore saw utility in political cooperation with China, especially if it could be located within the context of ASEAN's regional interests following the invasion of Cambodia.
- That informal alliance practice worked to Singapore's advantage in that Vietnam ultimately found itself without any alternative but to withdraw its troops from Cambodia as part of an imperative accommodation with China.

- **Singapore's attempts to differentiate itself from China**

- On independence, Singapore needed to differentiate itself from China, which was not difficult in one sense because its government had made a reputation for crushing its internal communist opponents. I
- The way in which communist influence had been eliminated from the trade unions movement was a very important factor in foreign economic policy as the Republic sought to attract inward investment in support for its industrialisation policy
- The economic predicament of Singapore on independence posed a dilemma as far as relations with China were concerned, however. Entrepot trade with China was a tangible asset for the Republic which it could not afford to discard.
- Indeed, a tussle with the federal government over closing the Singapore branch of the Bank of China, during the closing stages of the island's incorporation within Malaysia, had been indicative of economic priorities. That branch had been saved from closure by separation which may well have been a factor in China's measure of political tolerance towards Singapore's independence, despite the anti-communist record of its government
- After 1949, the Bank of China in Singapore became the point of unofficial diplomatic contact with Beijing until a trade office was opened in 1981.
- At issue in the development of relations with China was the need to separate Singapore's economics from politics.
- In that respect, Singapore's flag did not follow trade.

- Its government went out of its way to register a distinct political identity, while permitting commercial and trading links on a private basis. In the meantime, economic ties were developed with Taiwan as well as defence cooperation in an attempt to overcome the limitations in military training facilities posed by the scale and population of Singapore island. Singapore never recognised the government in Taipei, however, nor enter into formal consular relations. Singapore adhered to a one-China policy from the outset but without giving it operational diplomatic expression.
- Attempts to differentiate continued even with improving economic ties in 1978. Speaking in the presence of Deng Xiaoping, at a dinner in his honour in mid-November 1978, Lee Kuan Yew pointed out that Singaporeans were in the mist of ensuring a separate and durable future in Southeast Asia which had to be shared equally with Malays, Indians and other nationals. He explained further that 'They understand enough of geopolitics to know that their future directly depends on Singapore's future in Southeast Asia and not on China's future among the front rank of industrial nations.'
- This pointed differentiation has punctuated the development of relations between Singapore and China on a consistent basis

- Development of economic ties

- During Rajaratnam's 1975 visit where he was received by PM Zhou Enlai, Singapore took the opportunity to develop trade relations
- On China's part, an interest was expressed in purchasing machinery and oil rigs as well as in sending tankers and cargo vessels to Singapore for repair.
- Trade links were strengthened, notably after Deng Xiaoping had inaugurated his policy of economic modernisation during 1978.
- Indeed, China acknowledged Singapore as a model of economic development and political economy, at least for its cities, and to that end looked to it as a source of modern technology and for guidance in developing service sectors, such as tourism.
- Deng's 1978 visit suggested that 'Singapore's officials knew that he (Deng) had seen China's economic future in Singapore' and that 'Singapore was Deng's preferred model because it showed that rapid economic growth was not inconsistent with tight central government control'
- From that juncture, Singapore engaged with China with growing enthusiasm because of the opportunity to pursue major economic advantage as well as to benefit in terms of general security from China's incentive to do the same as it opened up to the international economy.

- The issue of support for communist insurgencies did not stem the process of international collaboration between Singapore and China.
- Singapore's Finance Minister, Hon Sui Sen, signed a trade agreement with Deng Xiaoping in December 1979 which paved the way for an acceleration in trade and economic cooperation.
- Singapore's government-linked trading company, Intraco, played an important coordinating and supervisory role in shifting the balance of economic activity from traditional entrepot flows to the export of manufactured and processed goods as well as investment.
- In June 1980, another agreement was concluded which provided for the establishment of trade offices in respective capitals. These were opened during 1981 and did not arouse any indications of concern by regional partners, even when Singapore's office began to function as if it were a fully fledged diplomatic representation.
- One striking indication of Singapore's deepening involvement in China's economic modernisation was the appointment in May 1985 of former Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Goh Keng Swee, as an adviser on the development of special economic zones and tourism.
- Singapore's growing stake in the economic development of China was expressed more than just symbolically in an agreement in 1993 to participate in building an entire satellite township and industrial park in Suzhou in the vicinity of Shanghai, which has attracted considerable capital outlay from Singapore, albeit with mixed returns.
- That said, Singapore's government has not been inhibited in speaking out against China when its interests seem likely to be jeopardised.
- For example, Lee Kuan yew has voiced open frustration at the failings of China's central authorities to give adequate attention to the Singapore Industrial Park in Suzhou, near Shanghai, which, under an agreement in January 1994, had been intended to cater for a township of 600 000, inhabitants. In June 1999, he announced that Singapore would finish only one sector of the project and leave the rest to China because the Suzhou authorities had set up a rival industrial park nearby based on Singapore's ideas and had also solicited the interest of the same investors.