

The Rise Of Singapore-India Defense Relations In The Postcold War Era : Strategic And Security Implications

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Introduction

Since the early 1990s, Singapore-India relations have progressed rapidly in most fields. In the economic realm, Singapore companies have invested massively in the Indian telecommunications industry. Bilateral trade rose 40% from 2004 to 2005 and increased further following the conclusion of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement between the two states in 2005.¹ In 2006, bilateral trade jumped 20% to S\$20 billion.² Defense relations, which have also been enhanced, are epitomized by the signing of a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in October 2003. Among other agreements, the DCA gave the Republic of Singapore Armed Forces (RSAP) access to Indian training facilities.³ Although the progress in Singapore-India economic relations has been analyzed in a many studies, analyses of security and defense cooperation have been undertaken primarily in the broader context of India's relations with ASEAN.⁴ In the current study, we analyze Singapore-India defense relations in the post-Cold War era.

The study begins by examining the defense policies of Singapore and India, especially the transformation from mutual suspicion towards cooperation with the onset of the post-Cold War era. Various areas of defense and security cooperation will be highlighted. The implications of the rise in defense cooperation between the two countries and the way in which it impacts regional security will be also discussed. Although defense relations between both states have improved rapidly since 1993, new avenues of cooperation are also being assessed, including research and development [R&D] and humanitarian operations. Pitfalls along the path to closer cooperation are evidenced by China's apprehension over India's increasing influence in Southeast Asia. In addition, potential conflicts between India and Pakistan could place Singapore in an awkward position if the strategic partnership of Singapore and India continues to strengthen.

¹ "Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Foreign Policy - Countries/Regions - South Asia - India," http://www.mfa.gov.sg/internet/foreignpolicy/sa_india.htm (accessed on 27 September 2006)

² Ravi Vellor, "Singapore and India strike air force training deal". The Straits Times, 10 October 2007.

³ Boey, David. "Sky's the Limit with S'pore -India Defense Pa(rl)," The Straits Times, 17 October 2003

⁴ Huxley, Tim *Defending the Lion City*, (Australia, Allen & Unwin: 2000), 220 and Devare, Sudhir *India and Southeast Asia: Towards Security Convergence* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Studies: 2006)

Changes in Singapore-India Security Outlooks in the Post-Cold War Era

Located in what was traditionally a conflict-prone region and surrounded by large neighbors such as Malaysia and Indonesia, Singapore's defense policy has focused on "the maintenance of a sub-regional balance of power in maritime Southeast Asia."⁵ This was accomplished through the build up of a deterrent defense capability by the Singapore Armed Forces (RSAF) and by engaging extra-regional powers in economic and security cooperation. The focus of the policy was on enhancing Singapore's interdependence with the great powers, thereby giving them an important stake in the Republic's security and survival.

Singapore's defense policy has been shaped by the immutable factors that condition its security outlook and worldview.⁶ This policy has been continuously and consistently repeated by its political elites. For example, in a speech in Parliament in March 2006, the Defense Minister, Teo Chee Hean argued:⁷

the fundamentals of Singapore's defense policy are determined by our geography and environment. We are a small island with no strategic depth. We have no hinterland to absorb an attack, and there is no natural buffer between the external environment and our populated areas and economic infrastructure. We are also a maritime nation, critically dependent on the security of sea lines of communications and the freedom of navigation. Our geography - both in the contours and size of our island and in our location in a sometimes turbulent region - is immutable:

As a result, the twin pillars of defense and diplomacy underpin Singapore's defense policy. According to Teo Chee Hean:⁸

We have invested considerable resources into building up a defense force that can deter aggression. And should deterrence fail, the Singapore Armed Forces must be able to defeat the aggressor swiftly and decisively. At the same time, we have also been enhancing our security by pursuing active defense diplomacy. The objectives of our defense diplomacy are to develop positive and mutually beneficial relationships with friendly countries and armed forces, to contribute to a stable and cooperative regional environment and international order.

⁵ Huxley, 55

⁶ See Bilveer Singh, *The Vulnerability of Small States Revisited: A Study of Singapore's Post-Cold War Foreign Policy*, (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1999), pp.274-302.

⁷ See "Speech by Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean at Committee of Supply Debate 2006", at http://www.nexus.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2006/mar/06mar06_nr.html

⁸ Ibid.

India's defense policy, meanwhile, had traditionally focused on preparing for a war with Pakistan and China and managing internal security threats such as terrorism and insurgencies, mainly from Pakistan-based Islamist organizations.⁹ Since the 1980s, however, India's buildup of naval and air power in the Andaman and Nicobar island bases indicated India's interest in securing Sea Lines of Communications [SLOCs] in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. This interest is likely to grow with India's trade with Southeast and East Asia, especially following the implementation of its "Look East" policy in 1992.

Between the late 1970s and 1990s, Singapore-India relations were characterized by mutual suspicion. Singapore opposed India's recognition of the Vietnamese-installed Heng Samrin regime in Cambodia, viewing the 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia as an attempt to increase communist influence in Southeast Asia. India's support for Vietnam and the Soviet Union was regarded as a threat to ASEAN's security. India, on the other hand, perceived its support for Vietnam as an important counter to an apparent US-China-Pakistan alliance against India.¹⁰ Differences between both Singapore and India did not immediately dissipate after Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia in 1990. Following the withdrawal of US forces from the Philippines in 1991, Singapore feared that the American disengagement from Southeast Asia could lead to "competition between India, China and Japan to fill the (political) vacuum" in the region.¹¹ In contrast, India was concerned with potential American domination of Southeast Asia, leading India to oppose Singapore's decision to provide facilities to American forces.¹²

Security rapprochement between Singapore and India, despite their earlier differences, can be attributed to two factors. First, China has made considerable effort since the early 1990s to enhance its economic and political influence in Southeast Asia, establishing diplomatic relations with Indonesia and Singapore, while cultivating Myanmar's military regime. From India's perspective, China's actions could potentially isolate India diplomatically and strategically.¹³ By engaging Singapore and other Southeast Asian states through dialogue and defense exercises, India could reduce suspicions regarding its naval buildup, check Chinese influence in the region and complement its development of economic ties with Southeast Asia through its "Look East" policy, first proclaimed in Singapore during Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's official visit in 1992. From Singapore's perspective, developing security ties with New Delhi would give India a

⁹ Ministry of De(ense: Annual Report 2002-2003 (India: Government of India, 2003), 2.

¹⁰ This perception was strengthened by US president Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1971 and China's support for Pakistan by providing military equipment.

¹¹ Sridharan, Kripa "The Evolution and Growth of India - Singapore Relations," in *Singapore - India Relations: A Primer* ed:(Yong Mun Cheong and Rao, V.V. Bhanaji (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1995), 32.

¹² Sridharan, 32.

¹³ This is especially true with regards to China's cultivation of Burma. Already, China has built 4 electronic listening posts on Burmese territory to monitor Indian naval movements and signals along the Bay of

stake in regional stability and provide a counterbalance to Chinese influence. A mutual interest in maintaining a power balance in Southeast Asia provides both states with an incentive to cooperate in security and defense-related issues. Thus, Singapore championed India's inclusion in the ARF in 1996, the same year that India also became ASEAN's Dialogue Partner.

At the same time, India became more pro-active in staking its interest in Southeast Asia, for example by intensifying its military ties with countries in the region. In April 2004, a new maritime doctrine, dubbed 'India's Monroe Doctrine', was unveiled. According to this doctrine, India's maritime areas extended from "the arc from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca". The document, released by the India's Navy Chief, identified four functions of the navy in supporting India's foreign and defense policies. First, the military function emphasized the development of the capability to project force and the building of trust and inter-operability with foreign navies. Second, the navy's diplomatic function was to enhance India's relations with its neighbors and with countries of strategic importance in the Indian Ocean Region, including Southeast Asian states such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar and Singapore. Third, the navy's constabulary function was to cooperate with the coast Guard to maintain stability in the Indian Ocean Region with the aim of reducing disruption to maritime trade and energy supplies between the Middle East and East Asia. Finally, the document emphasized the navy's humanitarian role, which included search and rescue missions and assistance during calamities such as floods.

In the same vein, at the Fifth Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in 2006, India's External Affairs Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, listed the goals of New Delhi's defense policy in the following terms "*to safeguard India's territorial integrity and sovereignty, promote durable peace in the immediate neighborhood, including the Indian Ocean Region, and to promote economic and social development*". Through a strong economy, India hoped to become a key strategic player in Asia. In this connection, India has two major security interests. First, India sought to enhance its existing political, economic and security ties with other great powers and states in the Middle East and Central, South, Southeast and Northeast Asia. This would permit India to increase its diplomatic influence and reduce tensions with China and Pakistan, thereby allowing scarce resources to be deployed to develop India's economic and technological capacity. Second, India sought to increase its strategic influence over key maritime and energy routes through the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Straits of Malacca. By having a key voice in the

Bengal and the Andaman Sea. China's upgrading of the Burmese port at Hanggyi potentially provides Chinese naval forces a base to project power to the Bay of Bengal. See Sengupta U Prasun K. "An Impending Clash of Civilizations in Asia," *Asian Defense Yearbook 2000-2001* (Malaysia: Syed Hassan Publications Sdn. Bhd. 2000), 37 and "India: Country and Armed Forces Profiles," *Asian Defense Yearbook 2000-2001* (Malaysia: Syed Hassan Publications Sdn. Bhd. 2000), 51.

energy supply chain, India's influence on world politics would rise in commensurate terms, especially as energy security becomes of foremost importance in world politics. In this connection, India's influence would be used to prevent disruption to energy and raw material supplies needed to drive its economic power house, to counter attempts by potential rivals to project power against India by gaining footholds in India's immediate neighborhood, and to give India leverage over global economic development, which would in turn enhance New Delhi's political, diplomatic and strategic clout. It is against this backdrop that India's closer defense relations with ASEAN countries, particularly, Singapore should be understood.

Defense Relations with ASEAN

Unlike the United States or Australia, India has not had comprehensive defense ties with ASEAN countries. This was mainly due to India's generally 'inward' defense posture and intense preoccupation with China and Pakistan. It was only in the post-Cold War era, especially following the attack on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, that closer defense ties with Southeast Asian countries started to strengthen. Historically, there have been longstanding defense ties with Vietnam, partly due to convergences during the Cold War. These intensified in the post-Cold War era in the context of India's 'Look East' policy. In addition to exchanges of defense officials, Vietnamese military officers have received training at Indian Defence Colleges for a long time. India has also helped to refurbish Vietnam's Soviet-era air force and navy. Since March 2000, a high-level security dialogue has been conducted, for example to discuss piracy on the high seas. Vietnam has also allowed Indian officers to train in its jungle warfare school since 2000. In July 2007, a new level of security cooperation was reached when the visiting Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung signed a joint declaration that "welcomed the steady development of bilateral defense and security ties" and "pledged themselves to strengthen cooperation in defense supplies, joint projects, training cooperation and intelligence exchanges."¹⁴

Since Malaysia purchased Russian-built MiG-29 aircraft in the late 1980s, Malaysian-Indian defense relations have intensified. In 1992, the Malaysia-India Defence Committee (MIDCOM) was established. It met in February 1993, May 1997 and January 2001. India has played a key role in training Malaysian pilots and has provided logistical support for the maintenance and operation of the MiG-29s and Sukhoi fighters ever since. Rudimentary defense ties also exist with other ASEAN countries. Indonesian officers have been training in India since the 1950s. Naval cooperation has intensified markedly with Indonesian and Indian navies holding joint exercises to enhance interoperability. In September 2006, the two navies conducted their first joint patrol to check piracy in the Andaman Sea. During Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Indonesia in June 2007, each country affirmed the need to strengthen bilateral security cooperation,

¹⁴ See C.Raja Mohan, "East Asian Security: India's Rising Profile", RSIS Commentaries, (Singapore: S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2007), 30 July 2007.

envisaging India's arms exports to Indonesia as well as joint production of weapons, for example. India has also held bilateral naval exercises with Thailand since 1995. Since 2003, there have been intermittent discussions between the India and Thailand on counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing. It is against this backdrop that Singapore-India defense cooperation should be understood and appreciated.

The Rise in Singapore-India Defense and Security Cooperation

Defense relations between Singapore and India, such as visits by defense officials and training at each others defense academies, have been established for a long time. However, intense bilateral defense cooperation has developed only after 1993. The evolution of the relationship consists of two phases. The first phase from 1993 to 2003 was characterized by two main dimensions. First, security cooperation mainly involved exchanges between the Republic of Singapore Navy [RSN] and the Indian Navy [IN]. This included the Lion King series of naval exercises, which started in 1993. Since 1999, the exercise has been renamed Exercise SIMBEX (Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise).¹⁵ Over the years, however, the exercise has increased in duration and complexity. The 1998 exercises lasted twelve days and involved RSN anti-submarine Patrol Vessels for the first time.¹⁶ Due to these exercises, the RSN was able to expand its access to Indian naval facilities, from Port Blair in the Andaman Islands in 1993 to India's Southern Naval Command headquarters at Cochin, the only foreign country to do so.¹⁷ Singapore was also able to use India's missile range at Chandipur, Orissa, for testing its missiles.¹⁸ Naval cooperation was further boosted during the American invasion of Iraq. From April to September 2002, Singapore granted Indian patrol craft access to Sembawang port for escorting 24 American merchant ships through the Straits of Malacca.¹⁹

Second, the first phase of defense cooperation also comprised high-profile visits by Indian and Singaporean leaders. RSN Chief Richard Lim was the first foreign military leader to visit India after New Delhi's 1998 nuclear tests.²⁰ Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes and Indian Chief of Army Staff Nirmal Chander Vij also visited Singapore in 2002 and 2003, respectively. Though limited in scope, the interactions between Singapore and India during this first phase of defense relations were instrumental in building confidence and enhancing trust between the two states, which had been harmed during the Cold War. The interactions laid the foundation for the development of closer defense ties that characterized the second phase.

¹⁵ Huxley, 220. Since 1999, "Exercise Lion King" was renamed "Exercise Simbex". See "S'pore, Indian Navies Conduct Bilateral Exercise," http://www.mindef.gov.sg/i_mindef/publications/cybemioneer/news/2005/feb/24feb05news.html (accessed on 27 September 2006)

¹⁶ Huxley, 220.

¹⁷ Naidu, G.V.C. "Whither the Look East Policy: India and Southeast Asia" Strategic Analysis Vol. 28 No.2 April-June 2004, 339.

¹⁸ Naidu, 339.

¹⁹ See Boey.

²⁰ "Singapore Navy Chief to Visit India Next Week," The Times of India, 22 August 1998.

signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) which provided for the exchange of intelligence and the establishment of a Defense Policy Dialogue (DPD) between the defense ministries. The DPD provided a forum to oversee and drive the bilateral defense relationship forward. This phase of bilateral relations was also characterized by two The second phase of Singapore-India defense relations was inaugurated in October 2003 when the defense ministers of the two countries, Teo Chee Hean and George Fernandes, aspects. First, there appeared to be a strengthening of existing naval ties. In contrast to previous years during which exercises were held in Indian waters, SIMBEX 2005 saw RSN and IN forces training in the South China Sea for the first time.²¹ In addition, the inclusion in this exercise of a maritime interdiction component was unprecedented. Together with the signing of Standard Operating Procedures in SIMBEX 2006 "to be used as a guide for all future exercises between the two navies,"²² the new trends appeared to indicate the growing interest of both states in maritime security collaboration in Southeast Asian waters. During SIMBEX 07, held from 23 to 28 March 2007 in the South China Sea, the RSN deployed two missile corvettes, a missile gunboat, an anti-submarine patrol vessel and a submarine. The IN was supported by two destroyers and a corvette.²³

Second, defense relations between Singapore and India since 2003 have broadened in scope to include regular dialogue and exercises involving their Armies and Air Forces.[for details, see Appendix 1] On 22 March 2004, the inaugural Singapore-India DPD between the two Defense Secretaries provided "a regular forum ... to discuss defense cooperation and regional defense and security issues."²⁴ This was followed by the signing of the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in June 2005, in which each state pledged to curb funding for terrorist organizations.²⁵ During the fourth DPD in October 2007, Singapore and India signed a long-term, joint training and exercises agreement for the two air forces.²⁶ Called the Bilateral Agreement for the Conduct of Joint Military Training and Exercises in India between the Singaporean and Indian Air Forces, the arrangement will allow the RSAF keep some of its military equipment in India on a permanent basis.²⁷

²¹ "What's Hot? Analysis of Recent Happenings," <http://www.indiadefence.c0lrJnavyex.htm> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

²² "Indian and Singapore Navies Conclude Bilateral Exercise," <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/newsandevents/nr/2006/mar/11mar06nr.html> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

²³ "Singapore and Indian Navies Conduct Bilateral Exercise", at <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/newsandevents/nr12007/mar/23mar07nr.html>

²⁴ "Inaugural India - Singapore Defense Policy Dialogue," <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/newsandevents/nr/2004/mar/22mar04nr.html>(accessed on 27 September 2006)

²⁵ Devare, 63 and 68.

²⁶ Ravi Vellor, "Singapore and India strike air force training deal", *The Straits Times*, 10 October 2007.

²⁷ Rajat Pandit, "India to train Singapore armed forces", *Times of India*, 9 October 2007.

The five-year agreement provided for RSAF's equipment to be kept in India on a permanent basis. According to Indian officials, it was approved by the Indian Cabinet Committee on Security, chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. This was because "Singapore simply does not have the space for its armed forces to engage in large-scale exercises. Though its armed forces have been coming here for exercises under a 2003 defense cooperation pact, this will be the first time such a detailed longterm agreement will be signed."²⁸ By the agreement, the RSAF will be permitted to train at the Indian Air Force base at Kalaikunda, West Bengal "at notified times".²⁹ For the RSAF, the Kalaikunda Air Force Base is ideal as it has a ground firing and aerial combat range, facilities for Electronic Warfare training and is also where the IAF operates its 'Lakshya' aerial combat training UAV.³⁰ The basing agreement was important because in addition to signifying the growing convergence of security perspectives it compensated somewhat for the failure of the Indonesian Parliament to ratify a similar agreement that was signed in July 2007. In the Indonesian case, the Parliamentarians rejected the agreement signed by the two governments on grounds that Singapore benefitted disproportionately and that Indonesia's sovereignty and territorial integrity was being trampled by the Defense Cooperation Agreement.³¹

Moving beyond naval engagement, the SINDEX series of exercises between the Singapore and Indian Air Forces were held for the first time at Gwalior Air Force Station, western India in 2004³² and at Kalaikunda Air Force Station in eastern India in 2006.³³ The Singapore Army also started training with its Indian counterparts in 2005, after Singapore Chief of Army, Desmond Kwek, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indian High Commissioner to Singapore, Alok Prasad. The 'Pouncing Tiger' series of armor exercises were held in India's Babina Field Firing Range while the 'Agni Warrior' artillery exercises were conducted at Devlali Firing Range.³⁴ From 15 October to

²⁸ Rajat Pandit, "India to train Singapore armed forces", *Times of India*, 9 October 2007.

²⁹ Josy Joseph, "Singapore leases IAF base for 5 years", *Daily News and Analysis*, 10 October 2007.

³⁰ Manu Pubby, "Deal inked, Singapore to use Bengal airbase for F-16 training", *The Indian Express*, 10 October 2007.

³¹ In July 2007, both Singapore and Indonesia signed two agreements, the Defence Cooperation Agreement and the Extradition Agreement, in what was described as a 'package deal'. However, following the signing of the two agreements by ministers from both sides, Indonesian Parliamentarians objected to the DCA on grounds that the SAF was given excessive rights to undertake military training and live firing. See 'Defense Cooperation Not Ratified Before Bravo Area Completion' *Tempo Interactive*, 30 August 2007; "Pemerintah Indonesia Tidak Meminta Renegosiasi" (Indonesian Government Did not Ask for Renegotiation), *Suara Pembaruan*, 12 August 2007.

³² "Singapore and India Hold Inaugural Bilateral Air Exercise," http://www.mindef.gov.sg/limindef/news_and_events/m/2004/oct/26oct04_nr.html (accessed on 27 September 2006)

³³ "Republic of Singapore Air Force and Indian Air Force Conduct Second Bilateral Air Exercise," <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/limindef/newsandevents/nr/2006/jan/03jan06nr.html> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

³⁴ "Singapore and India Sign Memorandum of Understanding for Army Exercise in India," http://www.mindef.gov.sg/limindef/news_and_events/nr/2005/jan/17jan05_nr.html (accessed on 27 September 2006)

6 November 2007, the fourth joint artillery exercise was held to "understand each other's doctrine and tactics as well as enhance mutual understanding and inter-operability".³⁵ The exercise was observed by Singapore's Defence Minister, Teo Chee Hean, who was on his third visit to India following his earlier visits in October 2003 and 2005. This expansion of defence changes between the two countries not only suggested the possibility of the RSAF gaining access to Indian training grounds on a longer and more permanent basis, but could also lead to closer security cooperation in the long term.

Defense relations between Singapore and India also have developed in multilateral settings. The most important of these has been the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which allowed ASEAN members and major extra-regional powers to discuss common security challenges and engage in confidence-building measures to reduce suspicion and tensions between the great powers. While Singapore supported India's entry into the ARF in 1996 and allowed New Delhi to break out of its South Asian diplomatic confines, India skillfully used its membership in the ARF to "project itself on the wider Asia Pacific scene."³⁶ India's hosting of ARF seminars on maritime security and peacekeeping,³⁷ together with its accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation [TAC] in 2003, reassured ASEAN of its benign intentions and facilitated further defense cooperation between India and the Southeast Asian states. In view of the increasing convergence of views on terrorism, in 2003 the ASEAN-India Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism was signed.

Besides the ARF, Singapore and India have participated in other multilateral initiatives. Furthermore, Singapore has participated in the MILAN series of naval exercises off the Andaman and Nicobar Islands that have been held biennially since 1995. The members of ASEAN that participated in MILAN 2006, from 9-14 January, were Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Myanmar.³⁸ The annual Western Pacific Naval Seminar [WPNS] established common communications procedures among Asia Pacific navies in 2001 and facilitated the sharing of information on piracy.³⁹ In 2006, Singapore became the Information Sharing Center for the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia [ReCAAP].⁴⁰ Such regional

³⁵ See "Minister for Defence Visits Bilateral Artillery Exercise in India", at <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/newsandevents/nr/2007/oct/17oct07nr.htmJ.pri...>

³⁶ Devare, 76.

³⁷ "ASEAN Regional Forum - List of Track I Activities," <https://www.aseanregionalforum.org/Default.aspx?tabid=123> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

³⁸ MILAN 2006 was particularly significant as it was the first time in more than forty years that a naval ship from Myanmar, in this case, the 'Anawratha', had travelled beyond the country's territorial waters. See <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2006/01/12/narinjara-news-burmeset-junta-sends-na-vv-shi...>

³⁹ "Speech by Minister of State for Defence and Information and the Arts Mr David T.E. Lim at the Opening Ceremony of the 1st Western Pacific Mine Countermeasure Exercise and the 1st Western Pacific Diving Exercise Held on Tuesday, 12 June 2001 at 1525 hrs at Tuas Naval Base," <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/limindef/newsandevents/nr/2001/jun/12jun01nr/12jun01speech.html> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

⁴⁰ "Cooperating for Peace and Security" - Speech by Minister for Defence at the 8th IDSS Asia-Pacific Programme,"

efforts to improve maritime security would in turn complement existing defense ties between India and Singapore. In September 2007, Singapore participated in Exercise Malabar, a naval war game in the Bay of Bengal, alongside Indian, American, Australian and Japanese naval vessels.⁴¹

Impact of the Rising Singapore-India Defense Cooperation

The rise of India as an economic and military giant will have serious consequences for regional security. As India's military posture in general and its naval posture in particular become more assertive, it will concomitantly increase its strategic influence in South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. First, India's military posture will enhance its diplomatic, political and strategic clout with countries in the region in addition to the great powers, especially the US and China. This will be accomplished by the participation of India's units in joint exercises, such as naval patrols, by India's participation in humanitarian missions, by the upgrading of foreign ports and by the modernization of India's military. As a result, India's strategic profile vis-a-vis China will be enhanced which will in turn provide incentives for other countries to improve their ties with India.

Second, India's strengthened military has increased New Delhi's strategic influence in the Indian Ocean Region, Bay of Bengal and the Arabia Sea in a number of ways. The modernized Indian Navy now has the ability to project power into contiguous maritime regions. Second, India has given foreign states, including strategic competitors such as the US and China, a vital stake in political stability in these regions by engaging an increasing number of foreign powers in land, air and naval exercises. This has complicated attempts by one or more foreign states to dominate the maritime regions surrounding India and has allowed India to increase its strategic influence. Third, India's upgrading of port facilities, as in Iran and Myanmar, has enhanced India's influence in these states relative to that of its key strategic competitor, China. Given China's concerted attempts to increase its influence over maritime trade and energy supply routes from the Middle East to East Asia through its 'strings of pearls' strategy, India's improved relations with Teheran and Yangon would allow New Delhi to build a zone of influence along the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, thereby competing with China in these regions.

Under these circumstances, the rising Singapore-India defense relationship is acquiring a strategic importance far beyond bilateral military exercises. India's increasingly assertive naval posture provides Singapore with invaluable opportunities to increase its options in a number of ways. For example, it contributes to a shift in the balance of power in

<http://www.mindef.gov.sg/limindef/newsandevents/nr/2006/aug107aug06nr.html> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

⁴¹ Ravi Vellor, "Singapore and India strike air force training deal", *The Straits Times*, 10 October 2007.

Southeast Asia, especially by anchoring India more strongly in the region. This has impacted the regional balance of power. India's rising naval presence in Southeast Asia, including in the South China Sea region, has counterbalanced China's rising political, diplomatic and strategic clout in the region. At the same time, India's military assertiveness coupled with American engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq has increased the influence of both China and India in Southeast Asia. Despite Southeast Asia being described as an 'American lake' since the 1950s, the rise of China and India has clearly signaled that Asian powers are likely to dominate Southeast Asia strategically in the coming years with Sino-Indian rivalries increasingly determining security in the region. The shift in the regional balance of power will increase the space available to Singapore for diplomatic maneuvering in the coming years.

The rising power of India in the region will also increase the interest of China and India in improving their ties with Singapore. Singapore occupies a strategic location along the key maritime nodal points linking South, Southeast and Northeast Asia. Consequently, Singapore has emerged as the gateway for India to increase its military presence in Southeast and Northeast Asia just as Singapore plays a useful role in promoting China's presence in South and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Singapore is also likely to benefit because it has a more highly developed infrastructure than Vietnam or Myanmar, which are the two other strategically important states that could serve as gateways for the projection of force by China and India. Both India and China have overwhelming reasons to enhance their diplomatic ties with Singapore to facilitate access of their military forces to the region. At the same time, competition between China and India to enhance their influence in Southeast Asia is increasing. Consequently, China and India each has an incentive to enhance its ties with Singapore, and to prevent Singapore from falling into the 'sphere of influence' of the other. Singapore has shown greater willingness than other maritime state in Southeast Asia (such as Indonesia and Malaysia) to embark on security arrangements with extraregional powers. This has enhanced Singapore's strategic importance to both China and India.

The rapidly improving defense relations between Singapore and India have provided the catalyst for the expansion of India's security relations with other countries in Southeast Asia. Security initiatives were largely missing in the early phase of India's 'Look East' policy but once the Singapore-Indian bilateral defense relationship was aggressively launched, India also succeeded in vastly improving its defense diplomacy with other ASEAN states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and even Myanmar. For instance, in the past, New Delhi was cautious in 'flying its military flag' in the region. However, in 2005, the Indian Aircraft Carrier *INS Viraat* for the first time visited Southeast Asian ports in Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.⁴² Similarly, from April to May 2007, India conducted bilateral naval exercises with Indonesia, Malaysia,

⁴² C.Raja Mohan, "East Asian Security: India's Rising Profile", RSIS Commentaries, (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2007), 30 July 2007.

Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam. Following the enhancement of Singapore-Indian defense relations, New Delhi has increasingly proclaimed the need for strategic partnerships with Asian powers such as China, Japan, and member-states of ASEAN.⁴³ Despite its small size, Singapore has succeeded in setting the pace for India's engagement with Southeast Asia and has contributed greatly to the success of India's 'Look East' policy in diplomacy is supported by multilateral military ties.

Improvements in the relationship between Singapore and India are likely to have repercussions beyond the two countries. There are important ramifications for the operational readiness of Singapore's air force. The strengthening of the military ties between Singapore and India has increased Singapore's strategic importance to India and has opened avenues to engage India at a bilateral and multilateral level to improve RSAF's operational capabilities. At a bilateral level, Singapore is likely to negotiate for longer term deployments of its military assets in India, as was recently concluded following the visit of Singapore's Ministry of Defense Permanent Secretary in October 2007. RSAF's military assets, especially the air force, armored vehicles and artillery, are likely to be deployed in Indian military bases over the long term. In return, Singapore is likely to upgrade existing Indian military facilities that are used by RSAF. Such an arrangement will facilitate more frequent and largescale exercises between the militaries of the two countries and will provide landscarce Singapore with invaluable training grounds in India. A military relationship could evolve between India and Singapore that is similar to relationships between Singapore and its American and Australian counterparts.

India stands to gain much from closer defense ties with Singapore. For example, there is a simple trade of 'dollars for space'. Singapore pays hard currency for the use of Indian military training grounds, which is an additional source for revenue for the Indian Government. Singapore has also agreed to upgrade the facilities that it uses in India, which are also used by the Indian military. India also benefits by being exposed to state-of-the-art weapon systems that Singapore possess, especially its navy and air force. Even though the RSAF is much smaller than the Indian air force, the RSAF operates on an extremely high technological level. The joint air force exercises t expose Indian pilots to RSAF's F 16 C/D fighters, which are also used by Pakistan, are extremely valuable to India. Due to these considerations, an Indian defense official defended the recent long-term leasing of its military bases to Singapore on the following grounds: ⁴⁴

Apart from paying for the access to our training facilities, Singapore will also consider investments to upgrade them. We, in return, will get access to their state-of the art weaponry.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See Rajat Pandit, "India to train Singapore armed forces"

At a multilateral level, Singapore is likely to enhance its participation in existing air and naval exercises, such as the recently completed 'Exercise Malabar' series that involved the United States. Given its existing security relations with the US and India, Singapore's participation in such exercises is unlikely to provoke unwarranted concern among other great powers or its Southeast Asian neighbors. Instead, such participation can prove beneficial on a number of counts. Because the 'Malabar' series of exercises have come to include multidimensional threat scenarios, expeditionary warfare as well as air and maritime interdiction, Singapore's participation will enhance RSAF and RSN's capacity to handle both conventional and asymmetric threats in naval and air warfare. This will also allow the SAF to evaluate equipment that it could purchase in the future.

The rise of defense-related cooperation offers benefits that might not be strictly termed as military. Cooperation in defense R&D could improve, for example. Although India's indigenous defense industry has developed an array of weapons systems, "nearly all major programs implemented in the 1980s are experiencing time and cost over-runs," leading to calls for "greater private sector and possibly foreign participation."⁴⁵ Since May 2001, India's defense industry allowed up to 26% foreign investment.⁴⁶ While tanks and aircraft from Russia and the U.S. are likely to predominate, Singapore has strengths in the development of simulators,⁴⁷ surveillance equipment for urban warfare,⁴⁸ and unmanned vehicle technology.⁴⁹ By engaging in defense R&D collaboration with India, Singapore could secure a niche in the Indian defense market, and utilize India's strengths in information technology to develop better command, control and communications systems. Similarly, Singapore and India could collaborate in humanitarian operations. Both states dispatched rescue teams to Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami. While ASEAN has since held exercises to coordinate relief efforts for future emergencies, India's proximity to Southeast Asia makes it a potential partner of ASEAN in disaster preparation and response,⁵⁰ allowing it to further enhance its relations and influence in Southeast Asia.

⁴⁵ "Indian Defense Industry: Domestic Production and Imports - the Future Balance," <http://www.cia.gov/nic/pubs/researchsupportedbynic/conferencepaperlbristow.htm> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

⁴⁶ "Speech by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee at the Executive Defense Industry Round Table Lunch organized by US-India Business Council- June 27, 2005," <http://meaindia.nic.in/htcsg/spcdefmin.htm> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

⁴⁷ "DSTA: DSTA in the News - Year 2000," <http://www.dsta.gov.sg/home/DisplayPage/ContentPage9.asp?id=958> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

⁴⁸ "New Urban Warriors," http://www.mindef.gov.sg/limindef/publications/cybemioneer/3g_saf/2005/features/apr05.cs.html (accessed on 27 September 2006)

⁴⁹ Boey, David "Eye, Robot," *The Straits Times* 12 December 2005 H5

⁵⁰ "ASEAN Mounts Major Regional Disaster Emergency Response Simulation Exercise in Cambodia," <http://www.aseansec.org/18796.htm> (accessed on 27 September 2006)

The Singapore-India Defense Axis: A Note of Caution

Singapore-India defense ties are emerging as one of the fastest growing bilateral defense network in the region. However, closer defense relations could be constrained by two factors. First, the 2003 Defense Cooperation Agreement was signed after the then Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to China, when India and China pledged to resolve bilateral differences peacefully.⁵¹ This suggests that the Singapore-India defense relationship has taken place in the context of improved Sino-Indian relations. A breakdown in those relations could cause China to regard closer defense relations between India and any Southeast Asian state, including Singapore, with suspicion, given China's dependency on oil shipments through the Malacca Straits. Beijing already has "said that while it supports efforts by the three coastal states (of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore), individually or jointly, to safeguard the straits and counter possible terrorist threats to shipping, any outside military intervention with no regard to the interests and sovereignty of the littoral countries would cause great concern in Beijing."⁵² Given its economic interests in China, Singapore is likely to promote closer defense cooperation with India through multilateral organizations instead, to allay concerns by the PRC.

Second, increased tension between Pakistan and India could derail India's attempts to improve defense relations with Singapore. While both South Asian states have focused on suppressing Islamist militancy since the attack of September 11 2001, the Musharraf regime has been unable to decisively defeat militant networks in Pakistan. In the event of further terror attacks on India by Pakistan-based militant groups, increased tensions between the two South Asia powers could lead to conflict.

This would in turn obstruct closer Singapore-India relations. Therefore, while bilateral security relations between Singapore and India currently are cordial and have the potential to improve, they could also regress due to developments beyond the region.

Conclusion

Singapore-India defense cooperation has improved considerably since the end of the Cold War due to India's desire to avoid diplomatic and strategic isolation in Southeast Asia and due to Singapore's desire to maintain a power balance in the region by engaging the various great powers. The first phase of cooperation from 1993 to 2003 emphasized naval exercises and high profile visits by senior defense leaders from each state. Beginning in 2003, the increased confidence in the relationship led to a more vigorous second phase of engagement, which institutionalized defense policy dialogue and expanded military exercises to include air and army training. The scope for future collaboration between the two states remains great, especially in the fields of defense R&D and humanitarian operations.

⁵¹ Devare, 38.

⁵² Richardson, Michael "Singapore's web of Defenses," *The Straits Times* 3 March, 2005.

Nevertheless, Singapore's concern over arousing China's suspicions regarding Indian domination of Southeast Asia, together with the possibility of conflict between India and Pakistan could hinder further cooperation. The prospects for Singapore's defense relations with India in the future, therefore, not only requires consistent efforts by both states but also is likely to be influenced by regional dynamics beyond their individual control.

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Appendix 1

Naval Exercises: LION KING/SIMBEX

Year	Type of Exercise	Location	Vessels Involved
Feb 1993	ASW	Port Blair	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine
Feb 1994	ASW	Indian Ocean	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine
Jan 1995	ASW	Port Blair	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Mar 1996	ASW	Visakhapatnam	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Feb 1997	ASW	Cochin	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Mar 1998	ASW	Kochi	2 missile corvettes, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Mar 1999	ASW	Cochin	2 missile corvettes, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Feb 2000	ASW	Port Blair	2 missile corvettes, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 2 frigates, helicopters
Mar 2001	ASW	Cochin	1 missile corvette, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 missile frigate, 1 patrol vessel, 1 MPA
Mar 2002	ASW	Kochi	1 missile corvette, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 missile frigate, 1 patrol vessel, aircraft, helicopters
Mar 2003	ASW	Kochi	2 missile corvettes, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 missile frigate, 2 patrol vessels, strike aircraft, 1 MP A
Mar 2004	ASW	Kochi	2 missile corvettes, 1 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 submarine tender, 2 missile frigates, 1 patrol vessel, strike aircraft, MPA
Feb 2005	ASW, Maritime Interdiction	South China Sea	3 missile corvettes, 1 ASW Patrol Vessel, 1 submarine, 1 destroyer, 1 patrol vessel, strike aircraft
Feb 2006	ASW, Maritime Interdiction, VBSS	Visakhapatnam	4 missile corvettes, 1 ASW Patrol Vessel, 1 submarine, strike aircraft
Mar 2007	ASW, Air and Surface Interdiction	South China Sea	3 missile corvettes, 1 missile gunboat, 1 ASW Patrol Vessel, 1 submarine, 2 destroyers, strike aircraft, 1 MP A

Air Exercises: SINDEK

Year	Location	Aircraft involved
Oct 2004	Gwalior Air Force Station	6 F 16C/D fighters, 2 KC-135 tankers, SU- 30S, MIG-27, MIG-29, Mirage 2000 aircraft
2005	NA	
Jan 2006	Kalaikunda Air Force Station	8 F16C/D fighters, 1 KC-135 tanker,
Nov 2006	Kalaikunda Air Force Station	F-16CID fighters, MIG-27, Bison Fighter jets
Dec 2006	Paya Lebar Air Base	F-16CID, F-5 SIT, 25 Mirage and Jaguar Fighter
Nov-Dec 2007	Kalaikunda Air Force Station	F-5 fighters, MIG-27 ground attack fighters.

Armour Exercises: Pouching Tiger

Year	Location
Feb 2005	Babina Field Firing Range
Feb 2006	Babina Field Firing Range
Feb 2007	Babina Field Firing

Range Artillery Exercises: Agni Warrior

Year	Location	Weapons Involved
Feb 2005	Devlali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns
Feb 2006	Devlali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns
Oct 2006	Devlali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns
October 2007	Devlali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns