

Singapore's Co-operation with the US, Japan and Australia in the War Against Global Terrorism

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Introduction

This paper will assess Singapore's cooperation with the US, Japan and Australia in the global war on terrorism. It begins with a short description of the context of Southeast Asia, particularly the Malay Archipelago, in the global war on terrorism, the place of Singapore in this conflict, and the interests of the three extra-regional powers in its outcome. It will then explain the nature and extent of Singapore's cooperation with these three powers. The paper ends with suggestions of counter-terrorism strategies in the war on terrorism in the Malay Archipelago.

The Threat of Terrorism to Singapore

The terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 is a pivotal event. It appeared to validate the predictions of the 'new' terrorism analysts led by Bruce Hoffman and others, that a new, much more deadly form of global, apocalyptic religious terrorism has appeared since the 1990s, and that this form of terrorism is characterised by acts intended to cause massive casualties running into thousands or tens of thousands.¹

The 'new' terrorism has not escaped Southeast Asia. Within this region, the Malay Archipelago has the world's largest Muslim population. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim state. In the context of the struggle between radical Islam, and the West and its allies, the region assumes great, long-term strategic significance. In addition, arguably the world's most strategic waterway and chokepoint, the narrow Straits of Malacca, is located within this cauldron. More than half the world's trade and oil passes through this strategic straits. By comparison, oil flows through the straits are three times more than through the Suez, and fifteen times greater than the Panama Canal. The straits however, has serious problems with maritime security given that Indonesian waters have for years experienced the highest incidences of piracy in the world. Coupled with the general lack of security throughout the entire maritime trading chain compared with aviation security, and the growing reliance on seaborne trade that is one of the hallmarks of the just-in-time interlinked, globalised trading and manufacturing economy, one can begin to understand why there are grave fears over the security of these sea-lanes in particular, and more generally, of the stability of the Malay Archipelago. One scenario touted is an LPG tanker being hijacked by terrorists, steered into Singapore and detonated in a maritime version of 9-11, which would have serious consequences as it will disrupt operations at the world's second busiest port and a super-hub crucial to the smooth operation of today's globalised trading and manufacturing system.²

Following the 9-11 attacks, therefore, Southeast Asia, especially the Malay archipelago, has come into focus as the so-called 'second front' in the war against

international terrorism. Subsequent events, however, brought home the fact that the international war against terrorism, indeed, the very events of 11 September 2001, had great resonance within the region. The existence of an Al Qaeda-affiliated network in the region was dramatically highlighted by the arrest in Singapore since January 2002 of 39 members of the extremist Jemaah Islamiah (JI) regional terrorist network. The group planned to attack American military personnel and naval vessels in Singapore, as well as a range of local targets. 21 tonnes of ammonium nitrate were to be used for several massive truck bombs to carry out the attacks. Had the planned attacks succeeded, they would collectively have constituted the largest terrorist attack since 11 September 2001. They would also have caused many American and local casualties as well as made an immense political, psychological and economic impact on Singapore that would reverberate throughout the region and internationally.

The abortive bomb plots demonstrated that Singapore is a prime target of radical Islamists because of its close identification with the USA on political, security and economic issues, the presence of a US naval logistics facility that has supported US naval and military operations in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, and the fact that Singapore is home to many US multinationals operating in the region.

The JI terrorist threat is clearly a serious one. As revealed in the Singapore Government's White Paper entitled "The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism" issued in January 2003, the JI, or *Al Jama'ah Al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic Group) is an extensive regional terrorist network with well-trained operatives in Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Australia. Members of the group have been implicated in various subsequent terrorist attacks in the region, for instance, the bomb attack at the popular Kuta Beach in Bali, Indonesia in October 2002 killed 202 people, including many Australians.³ This was followed by the Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta in August 2003 that killed 12 people, the attack on the Australian High Commission in Jakarta in October 2004 that killed 11 people and the second Bali bombing in October 2005 that killed 26 people.⁴

There is today a growing consensus among terrorism experts that the threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia has gone beyond the JI, given the spread of radical teachings. Worldwide, the concern is that the threat from the 'new' terrorism has gone beyond Al Qaeda, with many recent terrorist attacks, such as in Madrid, Casablanca, Istanbul, Jakarta and Bali, being carried out by local affiliates of Al Qaeda acting independently. Indeed, post-Al Qaeda organizations, such as the Al Zarqawi group in Iraq, are already appearing, groups that could potentially be more effective than Al Qaeda, particularly in the use of weapons of mass destruction.⁵ In other words, there is now a general, ideological, globalised, and long-term threat from the new terrorism that will outlive Al Qaeda. Thus, despite Singapore's vigorous internal security measures to both seal its borders and to prevent terrorists in its midst from launching attacks, as well as its confidence that the local Al Qaeda-JI logistical cells have been neutralized, it continues to face a grave danger from regional networks and from global terrorist organizations, which could plan an attack on Singapore and carry it out provided so long as they could penetrate its border controls. Singapore therefore has every incentive to take the terrorist threat very seriously, and to build cooperative links with interested parties, such as the USA, Australia and Japan, in the war against terrorism.

Indeed, Singapore's recognition of the threat of global terrorism predated the events of 11 September 2001. Singapore's security perceptions are clearly expressed in Singapore's Defence White Paper published in 2000, entitled *Defending Singapore in the 21st Century*. Significantly, whilst it reiterated the importance of traditional realist tools of military deterrence and diplomacy, it also acknowledged the emergence of non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, cyber-warfare and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It envisaged that the Singapore Armed Forces would have to develop a broader range of capabilities and work with others to meet some of the new security challenges that have arisen in the globalised era.⁶

More generally, Singapore's foreign policy objective has always been to win friends internationally through diplomacy. As Lee Kuan Yew once stated in 1964, "external affairs are a matter of life and death ... half the problem of international survival is to win friends who understand and sympathize with us." Despite its evidently close relations with the US, Singapore has also always emphasized a balance of power strategy in welcoming all great powers in the region. These great powers can collectively guarantee Singapore's sovereignty provided that Singapore is useful to all of them and that they balance one another.⁷ In addition, Singapore has also emphasized ASEAN multilateralism and regionalism, and has strongly supported the UN and the international system. It has also worked to foster regional and international political and economic cooperation through institutions and forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and APEC.

Countering Threats to Maritime Transportation

The threat to maritime transport has been especially recognized, with the Singapore government moving swiftly to implement various security measures. It has moved swiftly to implement the requirements of the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code, and the amendments to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention, which came into effect on 1 July 2004. Under the code, adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in December 2002, governments, ships and ports are required to have enhanced security measures to ensure better control and monitoring of the movement of people and cargo, and to promulgate the appropriate security levels according to the prevailing threat assessments. The amendments include the installation of automatic identification systems on ships, a ship-to-shore alert system to signal emergencies, and other security measures.⁸ Singapore went a step further with a series of measures to coincide with the implementation of the ISPS code, such as requiring all ships of 500 tonnes and above to comply with the Pre-Arrival Notification of Security (PANS) procedures 24 hours in advance. PANS includes information on whether the vessel is in possession of a valid International Ship Security Certificate (ISSC), the current security level of the ship, the last 10 ports of call and whether any additional security measures were taken during any ship-to-port or ship-to-ship interface. Ships which arrived from non-ISPS compliant ports would also be subject to an IMO checklist on additional security measures.⁹ Singapore also moved quickly to implement a satellite-based ship tracking system as well as ship-to-shore alert systems.¹⁰ In August 2004, Singapore announced that it would go beyond the ISPS requirements to track even small vessels, by requiring them to eventually install a transponder to enable the authorities to track and identify the estimated 3,000 small vessels that use Singapore waters.¹¹ Singapore also joined in a several US-led initiatives to improve maritime security, such as the Container Security Initiative

(CSI) and the International Port Security Program (IPSP). Navy patrol craft escort high-risk merchant vessels, such as oil and gas containers and cruise ships, through the Singapore Straits. Restrictions have also been placed barring all unauthorized sea traffic from waters around sensitive areas such as petrochemical installations, as well as the movement of ships and boats at night.¹²

Singapore-US Security Cooperation

Singapore has always taken a balance of power approach, welcoming all major powers, including the US, to play a role in the region. In this context, however, Singapore has also emerged as a principal security ally of the USA in South-East Asia, particularly following the departure of the USA from its bases at Subic Bay in the Philippines. Singapore has been particularly anxious to encourage a continued US presence in the region in view of continuing regional uncertainties. Following an agreement in 1990, the USA was permitted access to naval facilities in the former British base at Sembawang in Singapore, as well as the use of Paya Lebar airbase for short-term rotations by the US Air Force. A logistics facility of about 200 US navy personnel under Commander, Logistics Group, Western Pacific (COMLOG WESTPAC) was then established in Singapore in 1992 by the US Navy to plan the resupply and maintenance of US naval vessels belonging to the Seventh Fleet deployed in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Singapore became a transit point for US troops, ships and aircraft during the subsequent Gulf Wars. In 2000, Singapore opened a new naval base at Changi with facilities that could accommodate US aircraft carriers.¹³ The Pentagon has valued Singapore's cooperation for years. Its East Asian Strategy Report (1998), observed that "Singapore has been Southeast Asia's leading advocate of a continued United States military presence. Singapore actively searches for ways to keep the United States engaged in the region."¹⁴

Following the events of 9-11, the Singapore government came out strongly to support the US in its declaration of war against international terrorism. As Kishore Mahbuhani, Singapore's Ambassador to the UN stated on 1 October 2001: "Americans are not alone in this fight against terrorism. Singapore stands with the United States and the international community in this struggle. This is a fight between people who stand for civilised society, and those out to destroy it." He further added that "the opportunity before us today is to channel the global outrage following the events of 11 September into a strong global commitment and action to eradicate the scourge of terrorism ... divisions among us will hand victory to the terrorists."¹⁵ A number of Singaporean leaders also publicly affirmed Singapore's backing for the US effort to hunt down the terrorists responsible for the September 11 atrocities in New York and Washington.¹⁶ On 23 September 2001, at a 9-11 memorial at Singapore's National Stadium attended by some 15,000 people, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong affirmed that Singapore would stand with the US in the fight against terrorism, "even though it has to manage both regional and domestic sensitivities in doing so."¹⁷

This security cooperation has since accelerated following the discovery of the Al Qaeda-linked JI terrorist network in Singapore and the region. Singapore has also supported all US-led counter-terrorism initiatives. Singapore joined the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) designed to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and related materials by interdicting the illegal trafficking of such materials. This includes intercepting and searching suspect vessels on the high seas.¹⁸

Singapore also became the first Asian port to join the US Customs-led Container Security Initiative (CSI) when it signed an agreement to do so in 2002 and launched a program in March 2003 to screen US-bound containers and inspect suspicious cargo.¹⁹ In 2004, Singapore joined the US Coast Guard-led International Port Security Program (IPSP), which will allow the US Coast Guard to inspect Singapore's port facilities and verify their implementation of the ISPS code.²⁰ Singapore also welcomed the US Pacific Command's Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI), which was floated in March 2004 as a plan to deal with transnational maritime threats in the Asia-Pacific, although the plan was met with reservations from Malaysia and Indonesia.²¹ In 2003, both countries also agreed to establish a Regional Emerging Diseases Intervention (REDI) Centre based in Singapore to counter the threat of serious diseases and bio-terrorism.²²

Singapore, Japan and the US have increasingly been drawn into multilateral security cooperation through the aegis of the Cobra Gold series of military exercises. Cobra Gold began as joint forces military exercises between Thailand and the USA that began in 1981. It is the most visible demonstration of the continued US military commitment in the region, particularly after its departure from Subic Bay in 1992. Indeed, the exercises are the largest conducted by the US Pacific Command in South-East Asia with any ally. In the aftermath of 9-11 and evidence of radical terrorist activities in the region, Cobra Gold has taken on a counter-terrorism and peace enforcement focus. In 2005, 6,400 personnel from Thailand, USA, Singapore and Japan were involved, with observers from 16 countries, including Australia.²³ Singapore and Japan's involvement in what has been traditionally a US-Thai bilateral arrangement is significant because it signals their growing involvement in a multilateral approach to security and terrorism challenges. What is especially significant is evidence of a much more active Japanese strategic and regional role since 9-11.

Singapore has also been part of the coalition of the willing in the US intervention in Iraq, and has provided personnel and equipment for operations there, for instance, a police team to train Iraqi police, the deployment of a landing ship for coastal patrol and the provision of military transport aircraft. At one stage, up to 200 personnel were involved.²⁴

Singapore's strong support for the US war on global terrorism has been rewarded with much closer strategic, security and economic relations. Singapore is the 12th largest trading partner of the USA, with two-way trade worth over US\$30 billion. In May 2003, the USA and Singapore signed a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). Under the agreement, Singapore guaranteed zero tariffs on all US goods and cannot increase its duties on any US product. Singapore was the sixth country to have a free trade agreement with the US, after Chile, Canada, Mexico, Israel and Jordan. It is also the first Asian state to enjoy this privilege. For Singapore, the agreement guaranteed privileged access to the vast USA market in an era of global and regional economic uncertainty.²⁵

In October 2003, Singapore and the USA agreed to begin negotiations for a comprehensive Framework Agreement for the Promotion of a Strategic Cooperation Partnership in Defence and Security, that would expand the scope of current bilateral security cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation of

weapons of mass destruction, joint military exercises and training, policy dialogues and defence technology.²⁶ The scope and depth of bilateral cooperation has made Singapore a defence ally in all but name.

Regionally, Singapore has been at the forefront of many initiatives, often US-led, to improve counter-terrorism capabilities. After 9-11, it has strongly urged the rest of ASEAN, particularly its neighboring countries, to take the threat of terrorism seriously, and to adopt strong counter-terrorism measures. This was not initially welcomed by neighboring states with large Muslim populations and strong anti-US sentiments. Indeed, Singapore's strong support for the US line has given rise to popular perceptions that Singapore has become an American stalking horse.

Malaysia and Indonesia have been strong supporters in the war on terrorism. In Indonesia's case, initial reservations and skepticisms were overcome following the series of JI terrorist attacks on its soil. Nonetheless, there remain deep domestic sensitivities as a result of popular anti-US sentiments. They were therefore upset with suggestions that the US might station special forces in the vicinity of the Straits of Malacca to carry out counter-terrorism operations, due to sovereignty issues as well as domestic political sensitivities.²⁷ But this prospect resulted in a declaration in July 2004 that the three littoral states would cooperate more closely in carrying out coordinated year-round patrols, linked by communications hotlines, to ensure the security of the sea-lanes.²⁸ Malaysia has been very much aware of the terrorist threat, and has moved proactively to work more closely with Singapore on other exploring other measures to improve maritime security.²⁹ Despite lingering mutual suspicions, the three littoral states have in effect been forced to cooperate closely due to the threat of US intervention and a heightened US role in the Straits of Malacca should they fail to do so.

Japan's Role in Counter-Terrorism

In a symposium in Japan in 2004 organized by the National Institute of Defence Studies, the think-tank of the Japan Self Defence Force, this writer made the argument that Japan is not in a position to opt out of the global war on terrorism, and that it needed to play an active role regionally and globally. In Southeast Asia, it has a huge stake in the security of the Straits of Malacca, given that it is its oil and economic lifeline. 99% of its oil and 70% of its food is imported, most of which must traverse the Straits of Malacca. Any prolonged disruption or instability would imperil Japanese economic interests. Strategically and economically, instability as a result of increased radical challenges to the governments of the region would also be inimical to Japan's interests. Japan thus has every stake in ensuring the stability of the often volatile Malay archipelago. Globally, Al Qaeda has already publicly threatened Japan on account of its identification with the US on security and political issues, its hosting of US bases, and in particular its dispatch of troops to Iraq. The threat from the new transnational terrorism is also so broad and generalized today that Japan must play an active role, together with the rest of the international community, in dealing with this increasing menace to global security.

Japan itself came to these conclusions. As Mizukoshi Hideaki, Japan's Director of International Counter-Terrorism Cooperation noted in 2003, "it is vital that Japan (also) be part of the global fight against international terrorism ... on the one hand,

Japan can contribute in the effort to destroy the headquarters and training camps of Al Qaeda, as we did by providing logistical support to the American and coalition forces in Afghanistan, and we can also help build global and regional networks designed to combat terrorism by denying terrorist groups safe haven and the means to pursue their goals.”³⁰

In this respect, Japan has today strongly supported capacity building for counter-terrorism in Southeast Asia as a practical approach, given its constitutional and historical constraints on the deployment of military forces or a more overt military-strategic in the region. This capacity building approach has taken the form of the provision of training and equipment in the areas of immigration control, aviation security, customs cooperation, export control, law enforcement cooperation and measures against terrorism financing.³¹ Indeed, following the abduction of Japanese crew of a tugboat in the Straits of Malacca in March 2005, Japan offered to provide Indonesia with high-speed patrol boats for anti-piracy missions in the Straits.³²

Japan also proposed in 2005 multinational patrols in both territorial and international waters as a counter-piracy measure. This was met with scepticism by a number of Southeast Asian states; both Indonesia and Malaysia, concerned about violations of their sovereignty and any limitations on controlling their EEZs, were unwilling to allow Japanese forces to patrol their waters. However, Singapore has been receptive to this idea.

Regional anti-piracy and counter-terrorism cooperation on the part of Japan has been effected not by the Self Defence Force but through the Japanese Coast Guard, which has provided training, equipment, and funding to all the coastal states of the region. It has also conducted joint counter-terrorism training exercises with six Southeast Asian states, including Singapore. It has funded the installation and maintenance of navigational aides and buoy-tenders, and provided technical assistance to upgrade marine safety data management systems and hydrographic surveys. These efforts have also had the effect of heightening regional awareness of the piracy and terrorism problem, provoking coastal responses that have been emerging.³³

Singapore and Japan are strong and key supporters of US-led initiatives on counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation, such as the Container Security Initiative and the Proliferation Security Initiative. Singapore took part in the PSI exercise in Japan in 2004, and in 2005, Japan was also among the 12 nations taking part in the PSI exercise in Singapore, sending a 430-strong contingent from its Self Defence Force as well as coast guard.³⁴

Singapore-Japan political and economic relations are close, culminating in the signing of a free trade agreement, the Japan-Singapore Economic Partnership Agreement, in November 2002. Singapore has also strongly supported the US-Japan security treaty for its positive contribution to regional security.³⁵

Japan dispatched transport planes and patrol ships to Singapore for the possible evacuation of Japanese citizens in Indonesia during the Indonesian political and economic crisis in 1998. In May 2000, Japan’s Self Defence Agency Chief Tsutomu Kawara concluded a visit to Singapore with the advance approval to use Singapore’s military bases for any regional emergencies. This included the evacuation its citizens

abroad and any assistance to UN peacekeeping operations in the region. In recent years, Japanese coast guard and Self Defence Force ships have made frequent port calls to Singapore. Both the coast guard and Singapore have conducted joint anti-piracy exercises, which included counter-terrorism commando exercises, and patrols. These developments indicate not only a broader increase in bilateral security ties, but also demonstrate Singapore's desire for a greater Japanese security role in the region. On Singapore's part, Japan's increased role would increase regional counter-terrorism capacities. It is also in line with Singapore's broader balance of power approach in welcoming the presence and role of extra-regional powers in the region. On Japan's part, it has been increasing eager to become more active in regional security matters, especially given the evident rise of China, and the clear and present dangers to Japanese interests arising from the emergence of the new global terrorism. Access to Singapore bases would give Japan a greater ability to protect its vital sea-lanes of communications in the environs of the Straits of Malacca.³⁶

The broadening scope of Singapore-Japan relations, hitherto restricted to economic and political cooperation, to now include security and strategic cooperation, is best encapsulated in the following summary of bilateral relations on the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs website:

“In 2004, Japan was Singapore's fourth largest trade partner and third largest investor. Singapore and Japan also share many common interests in regional issues such as the security situation in the Asia-Pacific, maintaining the freedom and safety of navigation in the international sea-lanes of Southeast Asia, and promoting regional dialogue mechanisms for the Asia-Pacific region. Both countries are also working together under the Japan-Singapore Partnership Programme for the 21st Century (JSPP21) to provide technical assistance to developing countries. Bilateral cooperation has also been expanded to include cooperation to combat SARS and joint anti-piracy exercises between the coast guards of the two countries. The close bilateral relations are characterised by frequent contacts between the leaders of both countries and exchanges at the officials' level.”³⁷

Singapore-Australia security cooperation

Singapore's relations with Australia can be described as exceptionally close, despite periodic hiccups in bilateral ties.³⁸ Singapore has often been described by Australia as its best friend in Asia. On its part, Singapore has always sought to help Australia play a role in the region, insisting, for instance, that it should participate in the inaugural East Asia Summit in 2005 in Malaysia even when it was supposedly an Asia-only gathering and excluded both Europe and the US.³⁹

Australia has also allowed Singapore to maintain basing and training facilities in Australia, including use of airbases for training, and land facilities for army exercises. In August 2005, both countries also renewed an agreement that allowed Singapore to train at Shoalwater Bay in Queensland until 2009. Australia believed that the provision of access to Singapore to training areas in Australia benefited both countries, as it provided valuable assistance for the training and development of the Singapore Armed Forces, improved interoperability with the Australian Defence

Force and contributed to the broader security and stability of a region of immense strategic importance to Australia.⁴⁰

Both countries also hold a biennial Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Conference to discuss trade, defence and security. Under the Singapore-Australia Trilateral Cooperation Program set up in 1996, both countries also collaborate on development assistance projects. In July 2003, Singapore and Australia also signed a free trade agreement.

Australia has placed enormous strategic importance on the Malay Archipelago, due not just to its geographical propinquity but also the fact that Australia is a prime terrorist target on account of its close alliance relationship with the US and its active participation in the global war on terrorism. The terrorist threat to Australia has emanated principally from the north, as demonstrated by Australia's inclusion in the JI's sphere of operations and the Australian targets and casualties in both the Bali attacks as well as the bombing of the Australian High Commission in Jakarta in 2004. Australia thus furnished Indonesia with forensic and other police assistance in investigating the various JI terrorist bombings. It also helped establish the Center for Law Enforcement Cooperation in Jakarta, which is partially staffed by Australian police officers. In addition, Australia and ASEAN issued a Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism in 2004, in which both sides pledged to exchange intelligence, strengthen capacity building, stem document and identity fraud, and choke off terrorism financing, among other measures.⁴¹

Both Singapore and Australia have cooperated closely on trans-national security issues, such as terrorism, trans-national crime, avian flu, disaster relief and preventing WMD proliferation. In particular, both have placed great importance on counter-terrorism cooperation, as both are prime Al Qaeda targets.⁴² Both have exchanged intelligence and information, cooperated on trans-national crime issues, and exchanged visits and personnel. Indeed, the security cooperation between the two countries has been described by the Attorney-General's office in Australia as "excellent."⁴³ On his visit to Singapore in May 2005, the Australian Attorney-General observed that:

"Singapore is one of Australia's closest counter-terrorism partners regionally ... but scope always exists for enhanced intelligence and operational cooperation including police-to-police cooperation, contingency planning and consequence management."⁴⁴

In June 2005, both countries came to a formal agreement on matters relating to trans-national crime. This was the first memorandum of understanding that the Singapore Police Force has entered with another country. The agreement formalised and expanded on the existing bilateral cooperation that was operationalized through an Australian Federal Police representative stationed in Singapore since 1980. The MoU provided for the exchange of information, joint operations and cooperative assistance on all criminal and trans-national crime issues. The agreement is aimed at improving cooperation in dealing with terrorism, illegal firearms trafficking, piracy, money laundering, identity fraud, cyber crime and trans-national economic crime.⁴⁵

Both countries have also improved counter-terrorism cooperation through the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) which groups Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia. Indeed, defence ministers of the five countries, meeting in 2004, not only reaffirmed the importance and relevance of the defence alliance, they also signalled that it would now focus on countering terrorism. This seemed appropriate, given the heightened interest in maritime security in South-East Asia. In 2005, therefore, like Cobra Gold, the FPDA military exercises focused on maritime security, particularly on countering terrorist threats.⁴⁶

Conclusion: An Evolving Singapore-US-Japan-Australia Security Network in Southeast Asia?

Major external powers with an interest in the stability and security of the Straits of Malacca, namely Japan, Australia and the USA, have felt the need to coordinate their efforts, strategy and approach, given the initial reluctance of littoral states in the region in coordinating their counter-terrorism strategies. There has now emerged a U.S.-Japan-Australia trilateral security nexus that has at its core a common interest in securing the vital Straits of Malacca and containing the threat of radical terrorism in the surrounding Malay Archipelago. The evolving U.S.-Japan-Australia strategic dialogue has resulted in cooperation in the war on terrorism and on their response to the December 2004 tsunami disaster. Recent developments in the region have pushed the three countries closer together on security issues than ever.⁴⁷ In January 2006, the three countries met in Canberra, with the backdrop of continuing concerns over maritime security and the challenges posed by terrorism in the region. Another salient concern, however, has also been the emergence of China, an issue that concerns especially the US and Japan. On the part of the US, China's rise is a challenge to its dominance in the region. On the part of Japan, increasingly poor relations with China as a result of strategic competition and historical animosities have been a driving force behind Japan's more proactive regional approach. On its part, Australia is keen to encourage Japan to commit more resources to fighting terrorism, believing it has at its disposal expertise and resources that could be used in the struggle against militant extremists in South-East Asia.⁴⁸

This trilateral security nexus is thus set to grow. Within the region, however, Singapore has managed to deepen its ties with all three members of this emerging nexus on account of its congruence of security interests with them, particularly on terrorism and maritime security issues. Interestingly, Singapore has the closest security ties with Australia, the USA and Japan, compared to its neighbours. Uniquely, it has signed free trade agreements with all three as well, indicating the depth of bilateral cooperation with all three extra-regional powers that have interests and stakes in the region. Not surprisingly, the four work closely together on a range of regional security initiatives. Indeed, as a senior US State Department official indicated, "we are working with Singapore, Japan and Australia to broaden PSI participation in Asia."⁴⁹

The way that this four-nation security nexus is evolving indicates some form of division of labor. For instance, the states that are more acceptable to the region, such as Japan and Australia, have begun to take a greater role compared to the US. Japan has begun to provide the necessary training, funding and other capacity-building assistance (eg funding of surveillance equipment and patrol craft) with the littoral

states to improve their indigenous capability in counter-piracy and counter-terrorism. Australia's assistance to Indonesia in counter-terrorism has been substantial and invaluable. Indeed, it appears that Japan and Australia have been able to gain greater acceptance for counter-piracy and counter-terrorism roles in a way that would have been difficult for the US, given domestic sensitivities as a result of strong anti-US sentiments among Muslims in the region.

Singapore has played an important role in facilitating the entry and roles of all three extra-regional powers. It is a critical regional ally for all three in their engagement with the region. On Singapore's part, this represents a striking success in foreign policy as security, political and economic allies enhances its own ability to better manage the new terrorist threats that have emerged since 9-11.

¹ See for instance, Bruce Hoffman, "The New Terrorism", in Andrew Tan and Kumar Ramakrishna (eds), *Anatomy, Trends and Counter-Strategies* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2002).

² *Washington Post*, 2 June 2004.

³ *Straits Times Interactive*, <straitstimes.asia1.com>, 15 October 2002.

⁴ "Carnage in Wake of Jakarta Blast," *CBS News*,

<<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/08/06/attack/main566857.shtml>>, 5 August 2003, "Massive Blast at Jakarta Embassy", *BBC News*, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3639922.stm>>, 9 September 2004, and "Bali Bomb Attacks Claim 26 Lives," *BBC News*, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4300274.stm>>, 2 October 2005.

⁵ See, for instance, Rohan Gunaratna, *Abu Musab Al Zaqawi: A New Generation Terrorist Leader*, Commentary, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, 5 July 2004.

⁶ *Defending Singapore in the 21st Century* (Singapore: Ministry of Defence, 2000), p.5.

⁷ Andrew T H Tan, *Security Perspectives of the Malay Archipelago: Security Linkages in the Second Front in the War on Terrorism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2004), p.174.

⁸ "IMO Adopts Comprehensive Maritime Security Measures," Conference of Contracting Governments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974: 9 - 13 December 2002 in <http://www.imo.org/Newsroom/mainframe.asp?topic_id=583&doc_id=2689>. See also "Keeping the Seas Safe," *Straits Times*, 22 January 2003.

⁹ "Singapore Issues 24-hour Security Rule for Ships," *Business Times*, 25 June 2004.

¹⁰ "Satellite-based Ship Tracking System Soon," *Channel News Asia*, 22 January 2003.

¹¹ "Small Ships to be Tagged for Security," *Straits Times*, 5 August 2004.

¹² *Straits Times Interactive*, <straitstimes.asia1.com>, 5 November 2002, and "Singapore Steps up Port Security, Restricts Vessel Movements by Night," *Channel News Asia*, 20 March 2003.

¹³ Andrew Tan, *A Dictionary of Politics and Economics of Southeast Asia* (London: Europa / Taylor and Francis, 2004), pp.260-261.

¹⁴ Cited in L. Edgar Prina, 'Singapore: An Important in US Navy Forward Presence,' Navy League of the United States,' <http://www.navyleague.org/seapower/singapore.htm>, accessed 17 January 2006.

¹⁵ Statement by Ambassador Kishore Mahubani on 1 October 2001 to the UN General Assembly, at <http://www.un.org.terrorism/statements/SingaporeE.htm>

¹⁶ "Terrorism: Singapore will do its part," *Straits Times Interactive*, <straitstimes.asia1.com>, 20 September 2001.

¹⁷ *Straits Times Interactive*, <straitstimes.asia1.com>, 24 September 2001.

¹⁸ "Singapore Participates in US-led Security Exercise in Arabian Sea," *Channel News Asia*, 11 January 2004 and *Proliferation Security Initiative*, <<http://www.state.gov/tnp/c10390.htm>>.

¹⁹ "Singapore Begins Screening US-Bound Containers," *Straits Times*, 17 March 2003.

²⁰ "Singapore First to Take Part in US Port Security Plan," *Business Times*, 1 June 2004.

²¹ "US Plan to Secure Key Shipping Lane Upsets SE Asia," *CNSNews.com*, <<http://www.cnsnews.com/ForeignBureaus/Archive/200404/FOR20040406a.html>>, 6 April 2004.

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