SINGAPORE’S FOREIGN POLICY: BEYOND REALISM

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Singapore’s foreign policy seeks to maximise order, and not power. Hence, it proposes that the English School theory, with its focus explaining why a high degree of substantive order exists in an anarchical context is therefore a more appropriate tool to analyse Singapore’s foreign policy. To substantiate this point, this thesis examines Singapore’s foreign policy towards Malaysia, Indonesia, China, and India to show how this city–state has managed to conduct its relations with them within the framework of an international society. Japan is excluded because this thesis focuses on states that have the greatest potential to affect Singapore by virtue of three main considerations – geographical distance, future impact on regional geopolitical developments, and ethnicity. Due to their geographical proximity, Malaysia and Indonesia are arguably the states most important to Singapore. China and India, as the rising powers, constitute unknown variables since the nature and effects of their rise are still not clear, and Singapore’s foreign policy needs to be sensitive towards developments there. At the same time, Singapore is a predominantly ethnic Chinese state with a sizeable Malay minority that constitutes the majority in the region as well as a significant Indian minority, a demographic reality that has influenced its foreign policy as well. Japan is an important actor. However, compared with these four states, Japan has comparatively less impact on Singapore in these areas, and so it is not included. Literature on Singapore’s foreign policy is almost entirely based on Realism. Consequently, the resultant focus is on the conflictual, adversarial, and anarchical aspects, and associational aspects are overlooked. According to Realist theory, Singapore would be dominated by these larger states. This thesis draws attention to the fact that inter–state relations are not moderated solely by material considerations such as geographical and population sizes as depicted by Realism. Associational aspects are present as rules, values and norms also matter, which allows small states such as Singapore to interact with these larger states, both bilaterally and multilaterally, on the basis of formal equality. This shows that Singapore is able to influence the terrain in which its foreign policy is being conducted, which is apparent in its pursuit of a stable balance of power that involves all legitimate actors. As a result, a high level of order characterises its foreign policy, and this congruence justifies the use of the English School theory in this context.
Thesis Declaration

Name: Ming Hwa Ting  
Program: Doctor of Philosophy

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due references have been made in the text.

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Signature:        Date: 5 November 2010
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To other International Relations theorists who are tempted to speak before reading and to judge before knowing, it is worth revisiting Montesquieu’s plea Morgenthau made in the preface to the second edition of *Politics Among Nations*: “I beg one favour of my readers, which I fear will not be granted me; that is, they will not judge by a few [hours’] reading of the labour of [the past three years]; that they will approve or condemn the [thesis] entire and not a few particular phrases.”

Lastly, I would also like to endorse the thanks and gratitudes writers customarily extend to their families. My parents deserve my deepest thanks and gratitudes for encouraging my scholarly pursuits that have yet to translate into tangible benefits for them, or will in the near future. Finally, I would also like to single out a special lady in my life – Cassandra, for special mention. Being of the conservative persuasion, I call her my wife rather than partner, a term that is in vogue in more progressive circles, though devoid of meaning and significance to both of us.
# List of Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APT</td>
<td>ASEAN plus Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASW</td>
<td>Anti-Submarine Marine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIMP–EAGA</td>
<td>Brunei Darussalam–Indonesia–Malaysia–Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIMSTEC</td>
<td>Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CECA</td>
<td>Closer Economic Cooperation Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Chief Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCA</td>
<td>Defence Cooperation Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAS</td>
<td>East Asia Summit</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEZ</td>
<td>Exclusive Economic Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIC</td>
<td>East India Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>ET</td>
<td>Extradition Treaty</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSO</td>
<td>Foreign Service Officers</td>
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<tr>
<td>HINDRAF</td>
<td>Hindu Rights Action Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICJ</td>
<td>International Court of Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>Indian Navy</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCP</td>
<td>Malayan Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAM</td>
<td>Non-Aligned Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEFOS</td>
<td>New Emerging Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>OLDEFO</td>
<td>Old Emerging Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAP</td>
<td>People’s Action Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>Partai Islam SeMalaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRM</td>
<td>Parti Rakyat Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Ports of Singapore Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSN</td>
<td>Republic of Singapore Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARS</td>
<td>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEATO</td>
<td>Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIIA</td>
<td>Singapore Institute of International Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMBEX</td>
<td>Singapore–India Maritime Bilateral Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP</td>
<td>Suzhou Industrial Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAC</td>
<td>Treaty of Amity and Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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