

FEATURE

A Short Memo on Singapore

By Roger Dong

Why should we be so interested in Singapore? Most of us know very little about Singapore - a tiny city state that plays a giant role in the modern world.

Do you know that Singapore is one of America's closest military, political and economic allies? Few people realize how important Singapore is to America and, especially to our military.

In Asia this small island nation (just 277 square miles) is the transportation and business hub for more than a quadrant of the world, including Australia. Compare this size to Beijing, which is 6,900 square miles? Singapore is considered by many people as the freest, most innovative, most competitive, and most business friendly country in the world. But it is not a democracy. Some would call it a benevolent dictatorship.

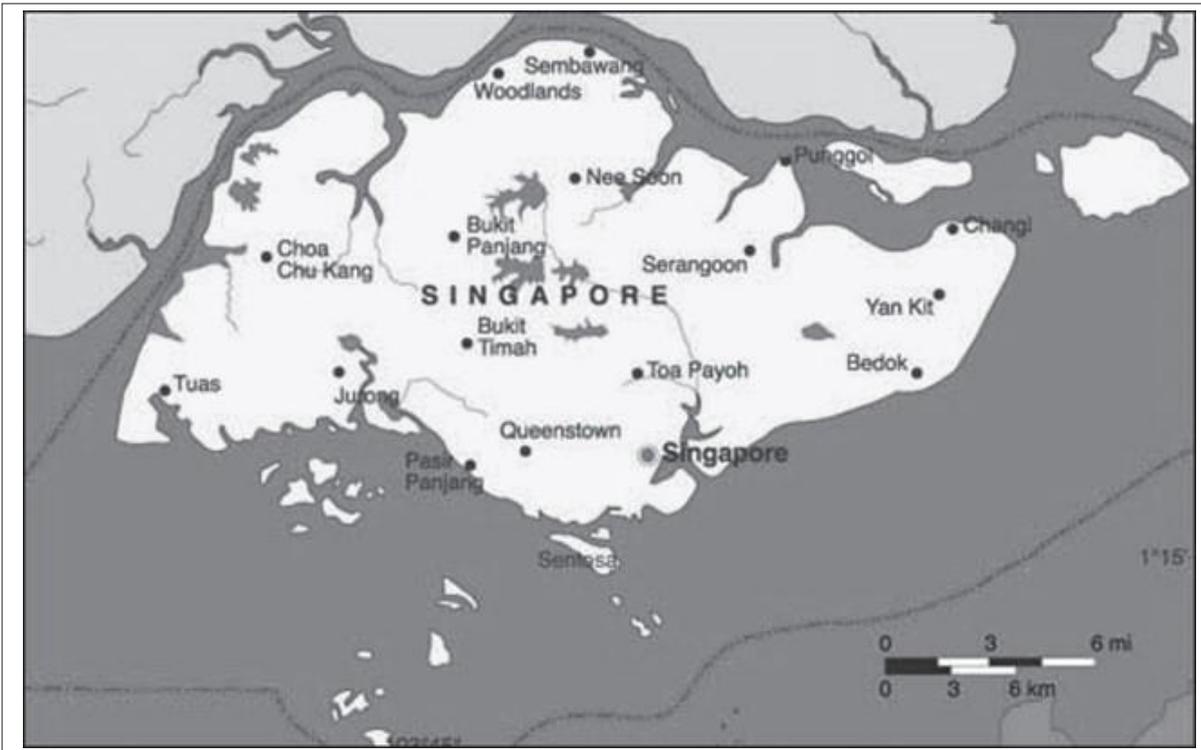
The nation's overall and military strategy is diplomacy and deterrence.

As a former diplomat (Defense Attaché) in Asia, I would like to share some background about the significance of our military relationship with the Singaporean. Nothing is classified in this memo, but you will not read a lot of this information in our history books or tour books.

First, a brief recent history about Singapore.

In 1965 (not 1865), Singapore's first Premier Lee Kuan-yew began developing Singapore from a barren swamp into one of the most advanced and technically competent countries in the world.

The island did not, and still does not have, any natural resources, and not enough fresh water to sustain even the small population even in



1965. Under the leadership of Premier Lee, the unprecedented development of a desolate swamp island into one of the most dynamic countries in the world is considered a miracle.

The first thing Lee did was negotiate (with their then arch enemy) and contracted for long term fresh water piped in from Malaysia, the country that just kicked Singapore and their citizens out its alliance with Malaysia due to growing racial unrest between the Malaysian Muslims and the Chinese Singaporeans.

One of the provisions of that contract was that if the Malaysian water were ever cut off, Singapore would be immediately at war with Malaysia. The joint water pipeline has never been disrupted, and today the two countries have a great relationship and thousands of Malaysians travel daily to work crossing the bridge into Singapore, and the two countries have a healthy and robust trade relationship. What a great international role model for the rest of the world!

Because Singapore is so small, there is not a square foot of space for their military to train. Lee Kuan-yew dedicated 10% of the island to well-groomed parks and greenery. Singapore's



armed forces are trained in Australia, France, Taiwan and the United States. Because of the very strong relationship with America, the Singaporean Air Force is one of the few foreign nations that trains alongside our three military services. Their Air Force pilots and aircraft fly in our strategic Red Flag training exercises in Arizona using dissimilar aircraft, their Army and armor units train alongside our Army at Fort Bliss

with their Navy trains with our Navy at San Diego.

Few American ports allow our nuclear carriers to visit or berth, but the Singas have built a special harbor facility capable of mooring and servicing our carriers and all the US Navy ships. US Air Force planes land almost daily at their military/ civilian Changi Airport. With all our military activities in Asia and the Middle East, Singapore's naval and air force facilities are critical to our military operations in times of peace and combat. Changi Navy Base is 1 mile from Changi Air Base which is 2.5 miles from Changi International Airport. Hey! This is a small island.

I learned from a former Singaporean Ambassador that I worked with in Taiwan and Hong Kong that during the President Bill Clinton administration, he and his wife dined monthly at the White House. That would mean that he dined at the White House more often than our Secretary of State.

Recently the current Singaporean Ambassador Ashok Kumar Manpuri visited San Francisco, and I met him and spoke with him in the Four Seasons Hotel. The Ambassador advised that today about 7,000 multinational firms do business in Singapore. General Motors has moved their Asia headquarters from Beijing to Singapore to manage all the Asian operations. Proctor and Gamble, Unilever, Diageo, Cotton On, LVMH and many other multinationals use Singapore as the hub of their Asian operations. Commercial office space in Singapore was, is, and will continue to be in high demand, and is a booming business.



*Ambassador Ashok
Kumar Manpuri*

Singapore is very friendly to business. Singapore is now the top oil rigging nation in Asia. It's airline, Singapore Airlines is now the



hub for many flights throughout Asia because you can fly directly from Singapore to anywhere in Asia. FedEx and UPS and 20 other logistics firms run their logistics operations in Singapore. It is generally recognized that Singaporean Airlines provides the best customer service of any airline in the world. OK, Royal Thai and Cathay Pacific claim they are the best, but that's just their own opinion.

Singapore trades and has strong diplomatic relationships with almost all nations. Their relationship with China is very strong, and like most nations, trade with China is one of their biggest connections. Lee Kuan-yew, as the Prime Minister and later the Senior Minister, was a brilliant leader and diplomat, who skillfully balanced the delicate triangle of US-China-Taiwan relations. Singapore has economic and political relationships with virtually every significant country in the world.

The Prime Minister instituted private home ownership, strictly limited public housing, and created a booming housing industry that has made every sixth Singaporean citizen worth at least a million dollars.

The Prime Minister created an education system, using traditional Chinese values, putting the teaching profession at the highest rung of society. Teachers were selected among the top 33% of all college graduates. Today, high school students in Singapore are ranked either #1 or #2

in the world each year they are evaluated. The students in South Korea are the biggest challengers to Singaporean educational excellence. In America, the status and respect for teachers is very low. We are paying very dearly for such a dumb and thoughtless national attitude. The future of our children and grandchildren have been sacrificed.

This memo is intended to inform our readers that we should all be aware of the strong and vital political, economic and military relationship our country has with the Republic of Singapore. The Singaporeans do many things right, and we should study and learn from their success and history.

Chinese scholars and officials study Singapore intensely, as they really want to know how a single party system has been so successful.

###

Roger S. Dong is a Contributing Reporter for Asianweek, Chair for Chinese American Heroes, Board Member of the Chinese American Forum and Historian of American Legion Cathay Post 384.