

## 1. SINGAPORE'S FIGHT AGAINST TERROR

This year marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 11 Sep 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. PM Lee Hsien Loong, Minister for Home Affairs and Law K Shanmugam, and SM Teo Chee Hean commented on<sup>1</sup> the **legacy of 9/11**, its **implications for Singapore's racial and religious harmony**, and the security threats to Singapore. Here are their key points:



Image: Wikimedia Commons

### The fight against terrorism is far from over

- After 9/11, threats appeared quickly in Singapore. In Dec 2001, Singaporean members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a terrorist group with links to Al Qaeda, were detained by the Internal Security Department (ISD) for their involvement in a plan to attack Yishun MRT and foreign embassies.
- Today, **extremist terrorism has evolved and is amplified by digital media**. Technology has enabled greater numbers of self-radicalised lone-wolf attackers. Terror groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have continued operating online despite losing physical territory.
- **Singapore's approach to dealing with terrorism is based on key fundamentals**, such as policies to ensure that Singaporeans feel that they have a stake in the country, effective intelligence, and zero-tolerance to radicalism.

***“The price of security is eternal vigilance. The price of harmony is an unflagging effort to uphold and realise ever more fully our nation's founding ideal to become one people, regardless of race, language, or religion.”***

— PM Lee in his commentary on 11 Sep

### The danger of terrorism to trust and social cohesion

- In the face of jihadist terrorism after 9/11, we could have been divided by race and religion, and our society could have been torn apart by an attack.
- However, **Singaporeans drew on the trust built up over many years**, pulled together, and responded **strongly and cohesively**. Muslim leaders guided the community on the true teachings of Islam, while non-Muslim leaders spoke up in support of religious tolerance.
- Nevertheless, **9/11 showed how powerful the forces that pull us apart are**. Our racial harmony is still a work in progress, and any adjustments to the formula that has brought us racial harmony must be done carefully.

### Security threats to Singapore still remain

- While the Taliban takeover of Kabul in Aug 2021 did not lead to an immediate increase in security threats, this is a **mid- to long-term strategic issue** that Singapore needs to be prepared for.
- Security agencies in Singapore and abroad fear that Afghanistan will once again become a safe haven for terrorism.
- Singapore will **continue to be vigilant**, monitor developments, and calibrate our security posture accordingly.

[Sources: TODAY and CNA, 10 Sep; PMO, ST and CNA, 11 Aug]

<sup>1</sup> PM Lee wrote a commentary on the legacy of 9/11 that was published on CNA on 11 Sep, SM Teo had an interview with ST about terrorism on 10 Sep, and Minister Shanmugam spoke to reporters on the security risks after Afghanistan on 10 Sep.

## 2. ADVANCING SG-CHINA BILATERAL RELATIONS

From 13 to 14 Sep, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi made an official visit to Singapore as part of his six-day trip to four countries in the region.



During his visit, he called on DPM Heng Swee Keat, Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, and PM Lee. In conjunction with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations this year, the leaders:

- **Reaffirmed** the excellent relationship between Singapore and China
- **Acknowledged** the progress made in deepening cooperation, amidst the disruptions caused by COVID-19
- **Exchanged** views on regional and international developments, including:

### China's increasing engagement with ASEAN

- China's commitment to multilateral cooperation is evident through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which Singapore and China have ratified.
- The 24th ASEAN-China Summit will be held at the end of 2021.

### Ways to enhance Singapore-China cooperation

- Sustain high-level exchanges, such as the upcoming 17<sup>th</sup> Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC).
- Advance cooperation on Singapore's Government-to-Government projects with China in Suzhou, Tianjin, and Chongqing.
- Explore new areas of cooperation, such as in the digital economy.

### Singapore's position amidst US-China Relations

- Dr Balakrishnan highlighted that Singapore hopes that China and the US will have a constructive relationship despite inevitable competition.
- He expressed optimism that relations between Southeast Asia, China, and the US "will be conducted on the basis of mutual respect, on the equality of countries, and to look for win-win outcomes in all circumstances".

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*Nobody wants to be forced to choose sides. For us, we hope that both the US and China will find a modus vivendi in the conduct of their relations, open channels of communication, manage tensions and frictions as and when they arise, and find a way to move forward despite their differences.”*

– Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, 13 Sep 2021

## Singapore-China Defence Policy Dialogue

On 14 Sep, officials from MINDEF and China's Central Military Commission discussed areas of defence cooperation and areas of mutual interest during the Singapore-China Defence Policy Dialogue, held via a video conference. Both sides:



- **Reaffirmed warm and friendly defence relations** and progress in the bilateral relationship, especially through mutual support during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Expressed commitment to strengthening defence cooperation**, including through more regular and larger-scale bilateral exercises, and establishing a bilateral hotline.
- **Exchanged views on global and regional security developments**, including strengthening cooperation under the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus framework, and broadening ASEAN-China defence cooperation.

[Sources: MFA, 13 Sep; ST, CNA, 13 Sep; MINDEF, 14 Sep]

### 3. AUKUS: TRILATERAL SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

On 15 Sep, Australia, UK, and the US, announced a historic security partnership in the Asia-Pacific: AUKUS. Here are some things to note:

- This is one of the countries’ biggest defence partnerships, and covers artificial intelligence (AI), cyber capabilities and undersea technologies.
- It will enable Australia to build and deploy nuclear-powered submarines for the first time, using technology provided by the US.
- In a joint statement, the countries called it a “historic opportunity for the three nations, with like-minded allies and partners, to protect shared values and promote security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.”
- Australia’s ambassador to ASEAN stated that AUKUS “is not a defence alliance or pact” and “does not change Australia’s commitment to ASEAN nor [its] ongoing support for ASEAN-led regional architecture”. He emphasised that Australia will continue to support the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and ensure its compliance to NPT obligations.



#### Reactions to AUKUS

- ⇒ **Singapore:** PM Lee noted the long-standing bilateral and multilateral relations that Singapore shared with Australia, the UK and the US. He said that he hopes AUKUS would contribute constructively to the peace and stability of the region and complement the regional architecture.
- ⇒ **China:** A Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman said AUKUS “undermined regional peace and stability, intensified an arms race in the region, and undermined international nuclear non-proliferation efforts”. He asked countries to “abandon the outdated Cold War zero-sum mentality and narrow geopolitical concepts, respect the will of the people in the region, and do more things that are conducive to regional peace and stability.”
- ⇒ **France:** France recalled its ambassadors to the US and Australia, as AUKUS effectively nullified a 2016 commitment Australia had made to buy conventional vessels from France.
- ⇒ **Indonesia:** The Foreign Ministry said it was deeply concerned over the continuing arms race and power projection in the region” and called on Australia to uphold its commitment to regional peace and stability.
- ⇒ **Malaysia:** PM Ismail Sabri Yaakob expressed concern that AUKUS might “catalyse a nuclear arms race” in the Indo-Pacific, and provoke aggression in the region, especially in the South China Sea.” He added that Malaysia “holds the principle of maintaining ASEAN as a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality.”

[Sources: White House, 15 Sep; CNA, MFA and BBC, 16 Sep; ST, 17 Sep; SCMP, 18 Sep; SCMP, 20 Sep]

### 4. FOREIGN INTERFERENCE (COUNTERMEASURES) BILL

At Parliament on 13 Sep, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) introduced the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Bill for its First Reading. The debate on the bill will be held on 4 Oct.

- The Bill will strengthen the ability to **prevent, detect and disrupt foreign interference** in our domestic politics through hostile information campaigns (HICs) and local proxies.
  - It will ensure that Singaporeans continue to make our own choices on governing Singapore and our lives.
- Foreign interference poses a serious **threat to our political sovereignty** and national security.
  - During a HIC, hostile actors can mislead Singaporeans on political issues, stir up dissent and disharmony by playing up race and religion, or undermine confidence and trust in public institutions.

**WHAT ARE HICs?**

HICs involve the use of sophisticated online tools and tactics in a coordinated manner to advance one country’s interest, such as influencing domestic political discourse, inciting social discord, and undermining political sovereignty. Examples include:

- Creating and using inauthentic accounts to mislead users about their identity and credibility.
- Using bots on social media platforms or advertisements to artificially boost the reach of certain messages and engineer an artificial sense of strong public support for a certain position or sentiment.
- Inciting other users into “trolling”, harassing, or intimidating a particular target.
- Creating accounts or pages and cultivating a public following by posting on benign topics, before pushing out political messages at critical periods.

Image: MHA

- **Singapore is not immune to these threats.** For example, in late-2018 and 2019, when facing bilateral issues with another country, there was a spike in comments critical of Singapore on social media.
  - In Parliament in Feb 2019, then-SMS for Law Edwin Tong said Singapore will consider legislation to counter deliberate online falsehoods and state-sponsored campaigns that threaten national security.
  - In May 2019, Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) was enacted. Since Oct 2019, more than 70 POFMA orders have been issued.

[Sources: TODAY, 12 Feb 2019; MHA, ST, TODAY, 13 Sep]

## 5. EXERCISE FORGING SABRE 2021

From 14 to 25 Sep 2021, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) conducted its 8<sup>th</sup> Exercise Forging Sabre 2021 (XFS21) at Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho, US. XFS is a biennial sense and strike exercise that integrates land and air assets and operations, allowing the SAF to conduct realistic and large-scale training to maintain high levels of readiness for Singapore’s defence.

XFS21 is the SAF’s first integrated exercise since the COVID-19 pandemic, and involved around 600 personnel from the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) and 200 from the Singapore Army. Servicemen and women were fully vaccinated, and adhered to strict safe management measures (SMMs).



This year, we deployed new capabilities that enable the SAF to remain agile and guard against threats in an evolving battlefield, including:

- The **Army’s Headquarters Sense and Strike (HQ SS)**, which integrates the Next-Generation Army’s tactical intelligence and fire capability, allowing land and air forces to work better together.
- **Command and Control Information System (CCIS)** within the command post (CP), which makes use of data analytics, AI, and algorithms that match weapons to targets. It:
  - Provides real-time overview of SAF’s assets and the battlefield
  - Recommends optimal warfighting solutions
  - Offers mission parameters, such as timeliness.
- This allows the SAF to make better and quicker decisions especially amidst **unexpected and imminent threats**, and deploy a full range of assets and weapons from air and land forces against various targets.



Scan the QR Code to watch some of the highlights from XFS21



### First all-women F-15SG Fighter Crew

XFS21 also saw the participation of the first female duo in the RSAF to fly the F-15SG together: CPT Julie Lim as the pilot, and LTA Hannah Teo as the Weapon Systems Officer (Fighter) (WSO), who is in charge of navigating, monitoring threats, and managing on-board weapon systems.



[Sources: Pioneer, MINDEF, ST and CNA, 23 Sep]

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