SINGAPORE
LECTURE

PEACE AND EAST-WEST RELATIONS

Giscard d'Estaing

Singapore Lecture 1982

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Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
1983

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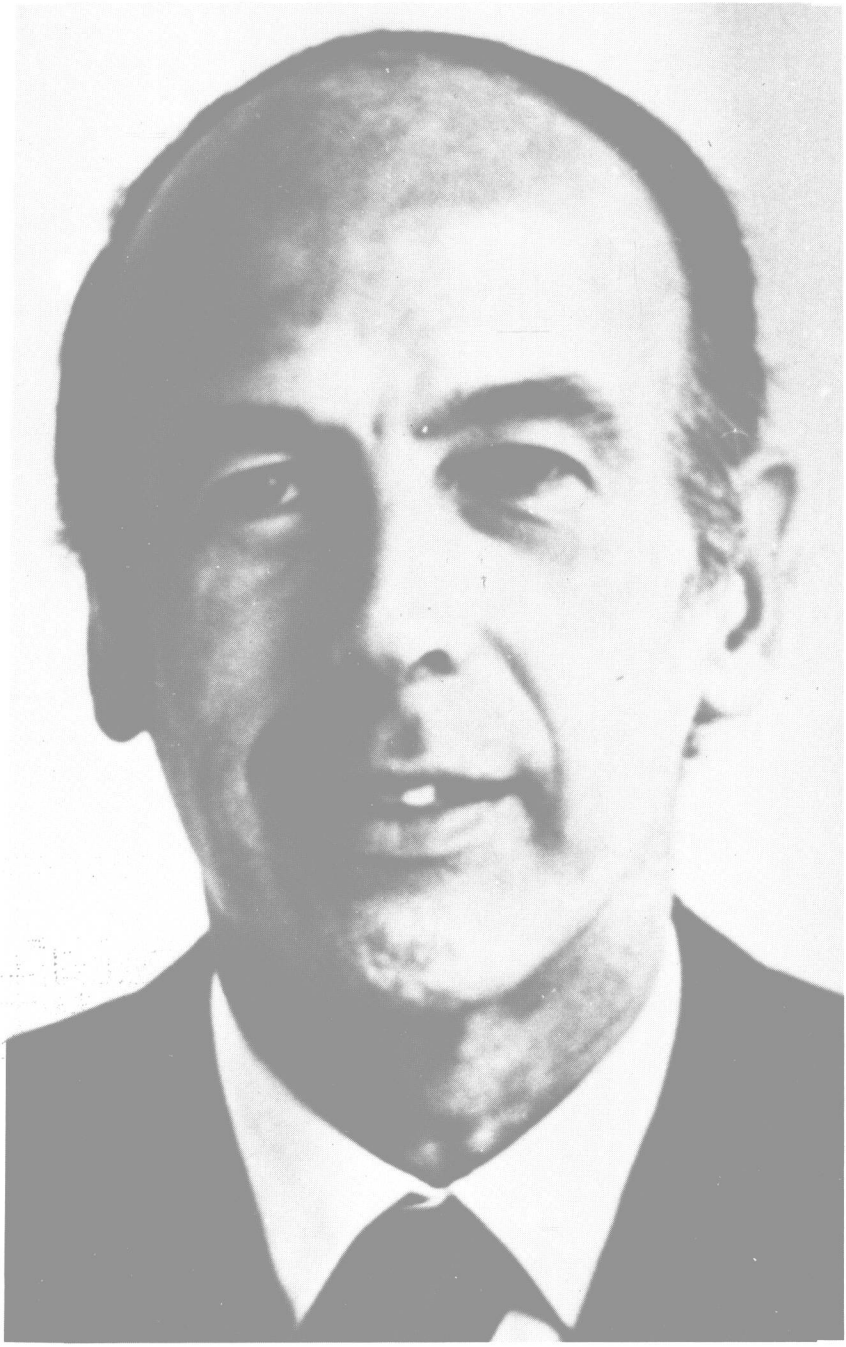

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I Opening Address

S. Rajaratnam

Mr President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My responsibility as chairman is to bear firmly in mind that I am not the designated lecturer tonight, a common enough fantasy among some chairmen who go beserk when presented with a captive audience.

My function in fact is twofold. First to introduce the speaker and second hopefully to say something memorable about his chosen topic. Frankly, the first, that is to introduce the speaker, is somewhat superfluous since our speaker tonight is, as the cliché has it, a man who needs no introduction. In most cases, this particular cliché means and is a polite way of apologizing to the audience for inflicting on them a speaker notably obscure. That is why the cliché is often followed by a detailed and not necessarily accurate biography of the lecturer in question. But in the case of President Giscard d'Estaing no introduction is necessary because even those of us who know a little of the politics of France know a great deal about the contributions made by President Giscard in the shaping of modern France.

The only explanation I need therefore offer is why he and not someone else has been invited to deliver the third Singapore Lecture. I understand it has something to do with the balancing of various viewpoints. As you know, the first two lecturers were, I think more by accident than by design, delivered by Americans. First by Professor Milton Friedman and next by Dr Henry Kissinger.

Tonight, we shall have the privilege of listening to a European giving a Frenchman's thoughts on the ultimate of all human problems — the problem of war and peace or as President Giscard has entitled his lecture, "Peace and East-West Relations". I hope our American friends will forgive me for saying that a European and in particular a Gallic statesman has a better feel for the problems of war and peace, if only because Europeans have for centuries played the game of war and peace with the single-mindedness and even

some would say devotion that are well beyond the capacity and comprehension of our American friends, in particular the non-Latin section of the New World.

Wars have been endemic in Europe and certainly it has been the battleground for two world wars during the first half of the twentieth century. Now for the first time in Europe's history its quarrelsome and violent nations have let some 40 years pass by without a war. This is something unique and new in European history, though it is too early to say whether this would be a temporary or a permanent arrangement. It would appear, however, that the luxury of war is something that only underdeveloped, emerging, impoverished or oil-rich nations of the Third World can afford these days. With one or two exceptions, all the international wars of the post-War period have been fought between and among anti-imperialist liberated and underdeveloped nations of the Third World.

We have one such war going on, not far from our doorsteps. Vietnam is one of the poorest nations on earth. So much so that its Foreign Minister told *Newsweek* only a few weeks ago that when all was said and done, there was one Vietnamese achievement worthy of attention. His country, he said, may be desperately poor but it had succeeded in redistributing poverty fairly and efficiently, which is not an unfair definition of Vietnamese socialism. Yet a country which has difficulty finding two "dongs" to rub together is nevertheless able, not only to sustain an army larger than that of the United States but also to run an old-fashioned but expensive colonial war without going bankrupt. And I therefore strongly suspect that we are witness to an as yet unexplained economic miracle of the third kind in Vietnam today.

The war now going on between Iran and Iraq proves a contrary thesis that too much wealth, too, can drive nations into inexplicable and ruinous wars. So you don't have to be poor or rich to fight wars these days. I do not know how President Giscard intends to elaborate his theme of peace to East-West relations. All I am aware of is that given modern technology, the alternative to peace is a war I believe which will really end all wars. This is because for the first time in mankind's history, a few nations already possess the military know-how and the technological capacity to obliterate within a few hours all human life. Hitherto, wars have fortunately ended with the living outnumbering the dead; no longer so.

Today, both victor and vanquished would have achieved the permanent peace of total oblivion. We also know that before the end of this century, many more nations will make or buy nuclear weapons. Sooner or later, there will emerge one psychopathic or world-weary leader, who will try to achieve immortality by launching the world's first nuclear war. All we need is one such madman to start the stampede towards what is called the "Big Bang" — the end of war, the end of history, the end of everything.

We all agree that given modern technology, war between nations solve nothing and yet paradoxically, most people, most politicians, most governments act on the basis that only by preparing for war can they enjoy safety and the peace of mind that goes with it. The fact we can happily entertain these two incompatible beliefs in our minds, tells us a great deal about the inexplicable mysteries and workings of the human mind.

So I am hopeful that tonight President Giscard, who has dealt with these problems far longer than many of us, will cast some light on why mankind in the twentieth century persists in preparations for war when we all know that no one wins a modern war. So may I invite President Giscard to come and address us.

II Peace and East-West Relations

Giscard d'Estaing

Mr Deputy Prime Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak this evening as a guest of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. It is well known that a large part of the world's destiny is dependent on what will be undertaken and decided by the men of this region. Nothing seems more useful to me than to increase our knowledge about each other, and to exchange ideas.

I have already had such an opportunity in meetings here and in Paris with your very remarkable Prime Minister. I have noted that he is able both to be ahead of his time, foreseeing the changes which would affect life in his State, and at the same time to remain in close contact with everyday realities. That is an excellent method, for it ensures both the historical value and the political survival of statesmen.

The subject of Peace and East-West Relations does not at first glance seem to concern Singapore directly. And yet the life of your region depends, economically, monetarily, and even politically, on the status of East-West relations, of which you feel the consequences. For these relations are part of a double balance between East and West, and between North and South, which is the key to understanding international relations as a whole.

The present situation seems to me most important; for two years East-West relations have been in a state that I would describe as "blocked tension". The accession to power of President Reagan, two years ago, with his desire, legitimate in my opinion, to strengthen the means of defence of the United States, and his recall of SALT II, which had been negotiated by the previous administration, has brought a new attitude, a new approach, in Soviet-U.S. relations. And, until recently, the organization of the power of the Soviet Union, marked by the long predominance, and lately the age, of Leonid Brezhnev, have not permitted the opening of a range of

initiatives on the part of one side or the other. And this was a very curious situation of "blocked tension", without direct meeting, without real initiatives, and proposals were made more for domestic public opinion than the international community itself.

The recent change of leadership of the Soviet Union will inevitably create a new situation, introducing the possibility of more flexible initiatives, or at least more varied ones.

A new code of relations will be defined by both parties, even if it borrows extensively from previous positions. I am convinced that 1983 will see the mark of this new code. The following reflections will attempt to elaborate a definition of this code, of this necessary "concept" of East-West relations, which was modified during the past few years, as a result of Soviet initiatives, the last one being the invasion of Afghanistan and the lack of foresight of American reactions. This concept is nevertheless vital for the peace of the world.

Between the first two World Wars, peace lasted barely more than twenty years. More than thirty-five years have passed since the end of the Second World War.

Certainly, the period from 1945 to 1982 has not been free of conflicts or tensions. Even at the present moment, we can observe a good half a dozen armed conflicts, from Cambodia to Afghanistan, from Iraq to Iran, and in parts of Central Latin America. It is also clear that between Moscow and Washington, between East and West, there is continuing ideological, diplomatic, and political confrontation, which shows no sign of ending. So it is a very peculiar situation in which in fact there is not what we would call a war but in which there are at the same time many armed conflicts unsolved, and sometimes very lasting, and also a basic confrontation between two groups of powers.

But it is inaccurate to say, as some do, that the Third World War has begun: we know what a war between the United States and the Soviet Union would represent. It would mean a full destruction of the European continent, the European part of the Soviet Union and certainly the major cities of the United States. In the following remarks, the word "peace" will be used in its true sense, that is: absence of armed conflicts.

This point of definition settled, it seems evident to me that the concept which applies to East-West relations and peace is that of balance. In other words, *it is the East-West balance which has*

preserved peace until now, and which should be able to maintain it in the future.

This statement, which seems evident, becomes a little less obvious when one investigates the nature of the balance, for one sees it is unstable, vulnerable, and always threatened.

So it is not sufficient to recognize the existence of this balance and to admit its necessity. We must ask ourselves about its exact nature, which is far from obvious. And we must not underestimate the problems it raises, that is, its difficulty.

Necessity, complexity, and difficulty of achieving the balance — these are the three points which I propose to examine with you.

A. The Necessity of a Balance

To convince ourselves of this, we need only rapidly review the last thirty-five years. History confirms what intuition suggests. The whole period has, in fact, been dominated by the quest for balance.

I would distinguish three major periods.

(1) From 1945 to 1951, the West, and more particularly, Western Europe, is afraid. It is thought that Stalin will attempt to extend his empire to the shores of the Atlantic. As a result of the conditions of the Nazi defeat, he already dominates Eastern Europe. In February 1948, the coup of Prague brings Czechoslovakia definitely under the control of Moscow. Not long after, Berlin is blockaded. At the same time, the Communists come to power in China. Finally, the Korean War leads one to think that the world balance of power is in the process of shifting.

In fact, that will not be the case. The balance of peace is maintained. Western Europe recovers confidence and power, thanks to its own dynamism, and also to the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Pact. The blockade of Berlin is lifted. In the Far East, Washington extends its protection to Japan and Taiwan. When South Korea is invaded, after some dramatic moments, American action re-establishes the status quo. So, after quite dramatic moves on both sides, the balance appears to have been restored.

(2) A second period unfolds from 1953 to 1963. After the death of Stalin and the subsequent battle for succession, the Soviet Union is weakened. Foster Dulles, a great master of American diplomacy,

seems to believe in the possibility of a rollback which would liberate what he called "the captive nations" of Eastern Europe, and he allows in Taiwan the hope for reconquest of continental China. So during this period, the balance seems to have changed as the weight seems to be on the American side.

But, despite apparent military superiority, at least at first, despite the vigour of the diplomatic action, despite the spectacular brinkmanship, the results are modest. When Hungary rebels, Washington does not dare to intervene. The launching of the Sputnik raises questions about American superiority. The reaction of Krushchev in the Berlin crisis, and then in the Cuban missile crisis, fails, first in reality, then in world opinion. It would seem that all ends in a draw. All this demonstrates that there is in fact a form of balance of power, and that it would be dangerous to modify it suddenly.

(3) Now opens the third chapter, "*détente*". Because it is a French word, and also because of the dimension given to it by General de Gaulle, one would be tempted to attribute it to a French initiative. In fact, it originated between the United States and the Soviet Union, right after the Cuban missile crisis, with the hot line, the Limited Test Ban Treaty and the sale of American wheat to the Soviet Union.

At this point, the balance is not only established but apparently accepted. There is even an effort to attempt to codify it, along military lines (with the SALT agreements) or political lines (with the CESC, CSSE, and Helsinki). Perhaps because the alert in 1962 was particularly acute, the following period of calm is particularly long. It lasts from about 1962 to the 1980s.

Thus, facts show that threatening the balance increases the danger of war, while recognizing its necessity enhances the chances of peace. On both sides, since peace is preferable to war, the balance must be respected, nolens volens.

(4) Now one must observe that we have, for the last few years, been living in a fourth period, which is not well understood and which was obscured by the change of the American presidency and the recent change of the Soviet leadership. *Since the end of the seventies, something has gone wrong with détente. That means that something has gone wrong with the balance.*

And that leads us to ask questions about the nature of that balance, and to discover its complexity.

B. The Complexity of the Balance

One is naturally tempted, at first glance, to say that the East-West balance can be defined in military terms, in terms of concrete means and objectives. In other words, balance could be defined as an effective strategic parity between East and West, measured in global terms.

Such a definition contains, obviously, a great deal of truth. But further analysis will show that it is insufficient.

(1) In the first place, the balance is indubitably military, that is, particularly in today's terms, nuclear. But it is also political.

Here are a few examples to illustrate this assessment.

By installing missiles in Cuba, Krushchev did not in fact violate any rule of international law. But the United States managed to convince the Latin Americans, its Western allies and international public opinion, that the law was on its side. The weight of political pressure was added to that of military pressure. And, actually, the dismantling of the missiles was achieved through political pressure and not through direct military pressure.

On the other hand, it is true that the Soviet position in Cuba was militarily risky. But, at the same time, the United States itself was in a vulnerable position in Berlin, for instance, or in Turkey. To this political situation was at least one of the reasons that deterred it from resorting to a purely military solution.

What is true in times of crisis is also true in more ordinary times. The fact that after the Marshall Plan Europe gets back on her feet and that the risks of Communist take-over disappeared played as important a part in the re-establishment of the balance as the purely military reinforcement of the West. The fact that Mao takes power in China and breaks with Moscow, that Castro prevails in Cuba and converts the country to Communism, are decisive in the evaluation of the balance. These are not military phenomena.

The political aspect of the balance is undoubtedly less visible than the military aspect. But it must not, however, be neglected. In particular, the skilful exploitation by the Soviet Union of awkwardly

concluded situations of decolonization in Africa (Angola, Zaire, the Horn of Africa) compromised the implicit balance in that important part of the world, while the previous American administration failed to react appropriately, or even to perceive the danger. *In East-West relations the rule should be the same as is in a game of chess — a move must be countered by another move, a point for a point, a pawn for a pawn.*

(2) A second observation: The military balance itself is expressed in figures — number of launchers, etc. — but figures alone do not suffice to describe it. It must be real. It must be expressed in the will of the countries concerned. In short bare figures are inadequate. It must be perceived and accepted as a reality.

It is very obvious how public opinion could be misled in judging the balance. One particularly characteristic example is the "missile gap" at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. During the period 1958–59 there was a widespread feeling in the United States that the Soviet Union deployed or was about to deploy a large number of inter-continental ballistic missiles, and would therefore achieve strategic superiority. The Kennedy Administration came to power with that conviction, but discovered quite quickly that the so-called "missile gap" had never existed. Meanwhile, however, the decisions had been made to reinforce the American nuclear arsenal considerably.

More recently, we have seen two successive American administrations make radically different appraisals of SALT II: for the former one, it was a fair agreement creating the appropriate balance of power; for the present one, it was not and should be revised.

Precise figures often give false impressions. Numerical precision alone does not eliminate ambiguity.

(3) The fundamental balance is of course between East and West. There are the nuclear weapons, there also the major political stakes. But what happens in the rest of the world should not be considered negligible.

Doubtless, not one country in the Third World has sufficient weight to tip the balance alone, with the possible exception of China. But phenomena which occur there could reach a critical level by a simple effect of accumulation. Thus from the alleged stabilizing

effect of the Cubans in Angola, one passes on to the emotion produced by the invasion of Afghanistan because, in the meantime, there have been Ethiopia, South Yemen, and Cambodia.

But Afghanistan is not only a case of accumulation. Its geographic position makes it a capital strategic stake. In addition, the type of action plays a role. The direct intervention of the Red Army, its massive and brutal character, the resistance of the vast mass of the population gave the event a particular dimension.

One could further refine the analysis. What is essential is to underline that it would be erroneous to identify the balance with a simple equation of megatons or nuclear warheads.

These remarks help us to better understand the principal barriers to the preservation of the balance.

C. The Difficulties of the Balance

It seems to me that there are two sorts of problems in maintaining the balance: internal and external. The former stem from errors concerning the nature of the balance; the latter from the play of forces independent of the balance.

(1) The internal difficulties: they consist in an erroneous interpretation either of the basic elements of the balance, or of the intentions attributed to one of the camps by the other. The first proceeds generally from an overestimation of the military forces and the second leads to a futile search for strategic superiority.

At the stage which the nuclear arsenals have reached, it would be necessary to combine an inordinate effort on one side with total negligence on the other in order to arrive at a significant degree of superiority. *Strategic parity cannot be expressed by a geometrical line, with no width, above which or below which it would cease to exist. It extends within a fairly large band whose outer limits cannot even be precisely defined, but vary appreciably according to the political context.* It is clear, for example, that when the United States and China came closer together in the 1970s, this considerably modified the strategic equation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In the same way, this global balance can consist of partial balances necessary for the security of a region, or the stability of an alliance. This is presently the case in Europe, which is not content,