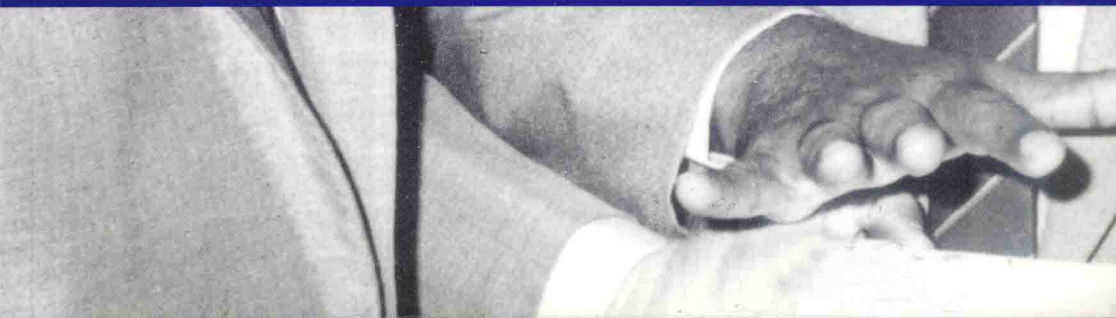




Singapore, ASEAN and the Cambodian Conflict 1978–1991

Ang Cheng Guan



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Ang Cheng Guan
Singapore, August 2013

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It is not possible to study the Cold War in Southeast Asia without considering the developments in Indochina. Indochina was the persistent centre of regional conflict, which involved the external powers, namely the US, the Soviet Union and China, from the beginning of the Cold War in the region, round about 1949 till 1991.¹ During those years, there were three Indochina or (some would prefer to call them) Vietnam Wars—the first which started as a colonial war against the French² which morphed into the Second Indochina or Vietnam War against the Americans, and finally the Third Indochina War, the subject of this book, from 1978–1991. As Odd Arne Westad described, the Third Indochina War

created shock-waves within the international system of states. Not only was this the first time that countries led by Communist parties had been at war with each other, but these wars also happened in the immediate aftermath of the Second Indochina War during which the Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cambodian Communists had been allies fighting the US. For many, the world seemed to have turned upside down. The certainties of the past—especially the question of who was allied to whom—seems to evaporate alongside the hopes for stability and peace in Indochina...³

It is perhaps understandable that the Southeast Asia dimension does not feature in most accounts of the First Indochina War as in the immediate aftermath of World War II, Southeast Asian states were in one way or another preoccupied with their own colonial struggles and challenges in nation-building.⁴ Malaysia and Singapore, for examples, did not achieve independence till 1963 and 1965 respectively. It is harder to justify the neglect of the Southeast Asian perspective(s) in the historiography of the Second Indochina War as the Southeast Asian states were the “dominoes” used to justify American involvement in Vietnam, particularly in the early phase of the war.⁵

Turning to the Third Indochina War, given that the war occurred just over thirty years ago and the conflict only ended about twenty years ago, not many historians have focused on this topic. The literature on the Third Indochina War has been dominated by journalists and political scientists, particularly international relations specialists with an interest in Asia and/or Indochina writing during the duration of the conflict. Their construction and analysis of the events and developments are largely based on open sources and media reports. Many of the contemporary accounts and analysis on the various aspects and stages of the Third Indochina War can be found in journals such as the *Asian Survey* and *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. These two journals possibly have the largest concentration of articles on the issue. Incidentally, the inaugural issue of *Contemporary Southeast Asia* was published in May 1979, not long after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia (December 1978) and the Sino-Vietnamese War (February 1979), and the *raison d'être* for the journal was (and still is) to “publish articles of economic, political, and social development in Southeast Asia, that is, on matters of current and topical concern in the individual countries and the region as a whole”. Until the mid-1980s, each issue of the journal had a useful “Documentation” section which carried many of the official statements made by different quarters pertaining to the Third Indochina War. The best contemporary account is Nayan Chanda’s *Brother Enemy: The War After the War* published in 1986.⁶ Writings on the war dwindled in the early 1990s.

It is perhaps still too soon for historians to write on the Third Indochina War as most of the Western archival documents for this period have yet to be declassified. If one takes the US as the yardstick, the Office of Historian, US Department of State, has only recently completed the *Foreign Relations of the US* (FRUS) series on Vietnam up till the Nixon/Ford administration.⁷ The files of the Carter Administration remains closed. That said, a recent book edited by Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–1979* published in 2006 is an attempt by a group of historians to look afresh at some of the key issues of the Third Indochina War, specifically the Vietnamese-Cambodian and Sino-Vietnamese conflict based on “new documentation from all sides”.⁸ In his Introduction, Westad noted that the Chinese and Vietnamese historical literature on the war was still “very weak” and that research on the war “is still hampered by a lack of primary sources”.⁹

Unlike the Westad and Quinn-Judge edited volume, the intention of this study is not to re-visit the origins of the Third Indochina War but to reconstruct the process that led to its end in 1991. The Cambodian conflict, as Bilahari Kausikan (Permanent Secretary, Singapore Ministry of Foreign

Affairs) noted, was essentially a “Sino-Soviet conflict in which ASEAN was but a secondary player”. Nevertheless, there is a case for studying the role of ASEAN as Cambodia was “the greatest diplomatic success of ASEAN’s first quarter century”. Cambodia “made ASEAN’s name internationally, winning international respect for ASEAN to the extent that it overshadowed the actual stagnation in progressing ASEAN’s professed goals as set out in the Bangkok Declaration”.¹⁰ It took 12 years of diplomatic manoeuvrings and shifting power relations before a settlement was finally reached in 1991, not long after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Indeed, 2011 marks the 20th anniversary of the Paris Peace Conference/Agreements on Cambodia.

In 2009–2010, the author was given access to the archival records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore to write an official account of Singapore’s role in the resolution of the Cambodia problem. It was initially meant to be a classified historical record for internal use but the author was pleasantly surprised to be given permission to publish it with minimal redaction. This study is thus the first reconstruction (since the end of the conflict) of the shifting power relations and diplomatic manoeuvrings based on original research in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Singapore as well as interviews with key Singapore foreign officers who were involved in the Cambodia problem. This study is also ground breaking as archival records of all the other players remain closed. Western records (specifically US and British) have yet to be fully declassified while it is very unlikely that archival records of the Southeast Asia countries will be made accessible to the public.

Although Singapore is a small country, it has often been described as a country that punches above its weight. Lee Kuan Yew has often been described as one of the most astute and influential strategic thinkers in Asia. The Singapore’s Foreign Service is also very highly regarded internationally. In his memoir, one of Singapore’s pioneer civil servants, S.R. Nathan (who subsequently rose to become Singapore’s second elected President), recalled that he was posted back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in late 1978 with the specific task of “improving the quality of work being done” in the ministry within two years, which was deemed not up to scratch, failing which Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew would “disband MFA and make it a part of the Prime Minister’s Department”. When he rejoined MFA, the Ministry was “already heavily immersed in diplomatic efforts in ASEAN to address the Cambodian problem”. Singapore was one of the most active of the ASEAN countries searching for a resolution to the Cambodia problem during those twelve years. In the effort to raise the quality of the diplomatic service, a new group of officers were posted to the Ministry between 1979 and 1981 to complement/supplement the 1970 (or thereabouts) batch of officers.¹¹ The

Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs came of age during this period for it was in those years that the pioneering group of foreign service officers “gained a certain competence in defending Singapore’s national interests in international forum”. The Cambodian experience “forged a group of politically savvy and operationally hardened multilateralists”.¹²

This study provides a detailed account of the policies and decision making principally (though not exclusively) of Singapore and ASEAN as well as the diplomatic manoeuvrings of the other major parties and powers involved in the conflict as revealed by the Singapore MFA records and other open sources, contemporary to the period under study as well those which have become available post-1991. It hopes to achieve two objectives:

- (i) Describe Singapore’s role and illustrate how Singapore’s management of the Cambodian issue was shaped by the fundamentals of Singapore’s foreign policy. What were the basic tenets of Singapore foreign policy? We can go back to the first Foreign Policy speech by S Rajaratnam delivered at the first session of the first parliament on 16 December 1965 where he laid out the basic principles and rationale for Singapore’s foreign policy—nonalignment, pragmatism, recognising the physical constraints of Singapore, support for multipolarity and a sense of realism. This was repeated by President S.R. Nathan in the augural S. Rajaratnam Lecture marking the launch of the MFA Academy on 10 March 2008.¹³ The basic premise of Singapore’s foreign policy has not changed despite the passing of time. And,
- (ii) Provide a glimpse of intra-ASEAN relations, as well as ASEAN’s foreign relations in the context of the Cambodia problem, albeit from one insider’s—Singapore’s—perspective. Although ASEAN was formed in August 1967, ASEAN officials only got to know each other well after 1975 through the meetings and interactions leading to the inaugural ASEAN summit in 1976. Most of these officials were subsequently involved in coordinating and executing intra-ASEAN policies in the effort to find a resolution to the Cambodian problem.¹⁴ This case-history will also illustrate the practice of two precepts of Singapore’s foreign policy as described by Second Permanent Secretary, MFA, Bilahari Kausikan:

We can, we must and we do cooperate with our neighbours. This is an imperative.... We must (however) cooperate without illusions. Problems will inevitably occur from time to time and there will be ups and downs in relationships. We must accept this and manage them. We should regard events with a certain psychological equilibrium, not becoming euphoric or complacent when things are good, and not panicking when or become despondent when things are bad. We need patience, stamina, steady nerves

and a long term view, taking things one step at a time and standing firm on fundamentals... We are inescapably and forever part of Southeast Asia. But we must also never be limited or be trapped by Southeast Asia.... We must always reach beyond our immediate region and maintain a lifeline to the world at large.¹⁵

Hopefully, this publication will encourage more diplomatic historians to weigh in with other country perspectives of what happened between 1978 and 1991.

The Cambodian problem was a very significant issue in the history of the international politics of Southeast Asia with important implications for the survival of Singapore as well as the growth and development of the Singapore Foreign Service. Former Foreign Minister S. Dhanabalan described the Cambodian issue as “the key issue for the Ministry” and “the centrepiece of ASEAN diplomacy” during the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁶ Former Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee described the Cambodian problem as “a life-and-death struggle, the outcome of which will have profound effect on the Republic”.¹⁷

Why is the Kampuchean issue so important to Singapore? The answer was clearly explained by Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, S.R. Nathan. According to Nathan, “The Kampuchean issue was central to Singapore’s policy. The principle involved was that no foreign military intervention should be allowed to overthrow a legally constituted regime. If this principle was violated, it would create a dangerous precedent. Foreign forces could go into Thailand and depose the current Thai government and put up a regime under the Communist Party of Thailand. Singapore had to work on the worst possible outcome. With this in mind, Singapore could not compromise”.¹⁸

In the inaugural S. Rajaratnam Lecture in 2008, President S.R. Nathan said, “Together with other ASEAN delegations, for a decade, Singapore diplomats helped lead the challenge to the position of Vietnam and its allies both in regional as well as international fora.” He further recalled that many of Singapore’s career ambassadors such as Tommy Koh, Kishore Mahbubani, and Tony Siddique and senior MFA officials cut their teeth and learnt their trade during this period. In the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and in the UN General Assembly, Singapore’s stand, and that of its ASEAN colleagues, enabled ASEAN to move the matter to the Paris Conference on Cambodia and helped the restoration of Cambodia’s independence.¹⁹

In the words of the late-Professor Michael Leifer,

the Cambodian conflict... was a defining period for ASEAN. It was the critical episode over and during which the Association attained and demonstrated the quality of a diplomatic community able to conduct itself up to a point, as unitary international actor. Equally significant was the way

in which Singapore assumed an increasingly active diplomatic role within the Association in upholding a corporate solidarity in challenging Vietnam's military occupation of Cambodia and the legitimacy of the government carried into Phnom Penh in the saddlebags of its army.²⁰

It is perhaps useful to begin by putting the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in the context of the international politics of Southeast Asia after the Paris Peace Agreement of 27 January 1973 which marked the end of America's military involvement in the Vietnam War. As Hari Singh put it, "the prospects of living with a united and powerful Vietnam came to bear upon the minds of the decision makers in the ASEAN states"²¹ which explains why after the signing of the Paris Accord, an informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting issued a statement welcoming the Agreement and called for mutual understanding and improving relations among regional states. The Statement also included the offer of rehabilitation and reconstruction aid to Indochina as well as an expression of the desirability to expand the membership of ASEAN to cover all the countries in Southeast Asia at some appropriate time.²² Amongst the non-communist Southeast Asian countries, there was a movement towards improving relations with Hanoi as well as Beijing. Malaysia established diplomatic relations with North Vietnam on 30 March 1973, Singapore on 1 August 1973. Indonesia which had diplomatic relations with North Vietnam since 1964 sent its ambassador back to Hanoi in early 1973. Both the Philippines and Thailand also made efforts to establish formal relations with Hanoi which eventually materialised only in 1976 after the end of the Vietnam War and the reunification of North and South Vietnam.²³ In April 1973, Thailand even extended an invitation to the North Vietnamese conveyed through the Indonesian Embassy in Hanoi to send an observer to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting to be held in Pattaya that month. Hanoi rejected the invitation because of "Thai involvement in the Vietnam War, and Thai government's willingness to permit the existence of US military bases in Thailand".²⁴ ASEAN again extended the invitation in 1974. Hanoi, however, continued to perceive ASEAN as a grouping which was heavily influenced by Western/liberal governments, particularly the US "steadfastly refused to acknowledge ASEAN as a corporate entity, indicating a willingness only to deal on a strictly bilateral basis with non-Communist regional states".²⁵

Parallel to the above was the movement towards normalising relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Malaysia was the earliest country to do so in June 1974, almost a year before the Vietnam War ended. The Philippines normalised relations with the PRC in June 1975 followed by Thailand a month later. Only Indonesia and Singapore did not follow suit. Since 1973, there were apparently two views in Indonesia regarding re-establishing diplomatic relations

with the PRC (which had been suspended since 1967) of which the opposing view prevailed.²⁶ Indonesia would eventually establish diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1990. Singapore had officially stated that it would be the last ASEAN country to establish diplomatic relations with China although that did not prevent its Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Rajaratnam as well as Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew from visiting Beijing in March 1975 and May 1976 respectively. Singapore established diplomatic relations with the PRC soon after Indonesia.

The fall of Saigon in April 1975 was a watershed in the international politics of Southeast Asia. Lim Joo-Jock noted that “the suddenness of the end of the war was followed by an initially confused reaction by the other countries in the region. The ‘shock waves’ quite naturally were felt with most alarm in Thailand, the country closest to the epicentre of political and military turmoil. It brought the least response from the country furthest away, Indonesia”.²⁷ The Indonesians were not surprised by the fall of Saigon but more by the speed and completeness of the defeat. Lee Kuan Yew told President Gerald Ford when they met on 8 May 1975 that his immediate reaction to the fall of Saigon was “one of astonishment and alarm at the rapidity with which the situation fell apart... The Thais,” he told Ford, “were accusing the US of having no morals, the Malaysians were frightened, Marcos was reacting to the mass media but the good thing was that the Indonesians were ‘digging their toes in’.” The ASEAN countries were all doing a reassessment of the implication of the fall.²⁸

In Lee’s analysis, Hanoi, with a million-man well-trained and equipped army, might see this military success as a moment of destiny and might want a master-servant situation with Cambodia and Laos and also exert pressure on the Thais. While Bangkok was not in immediate danger, Lee believed that there was the urgent need for the Americans to “calm the Thais down”. Laos was “a goner”. As for Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge would never have succeeded had Sihanouk not swung Cambodia to them. Lee opined that Sihanouk should have returned to Phnom Penh or stayed in Paris. Cambodia would be the arena of a struggle between Beijing and Hanoi. Beijing will do its best to see that Hanoi did not control Cambodia. Moscow would support Hanoi. Referring to Vietnam, Lee said, “This is an Asian Yugoslavia. It’s Albania in reverse. The Soviet Union is backing the Titoists who are independently minded people”. With hindsight, Lee was indeed prescient.²⁹

Turning to Cambodia, until March 1970, Singapore and Cambodia enjoyed very good relations. For Singapore, its Phnom Penh mission was the “only listening post in Indochina.” There was the personal friendship between Sihanouk and Prime Minister Lee which was founded on a similarity of views regarding the foreign policies of small states. Cambodia, then under Prince

Sihanouk, was also the very first country to recognise Singapore's independence.³⁰ Lee and his family visited Cambodia in December 1967. According to Lee, Singapore's relations with Sihanouk and (then) prime minister Son Sann "could not be better... we are probably his most trusted and closest friend."³¹

This changed after the coup of 18 March 1970 which ousted Sihanouk. Soon after the coup, the new government under General Lon Nol approached the various ambassadors accredited to Cambodia to request their governments for recognition. Some governments refused and instead extended recognition to Sihanouk's government-in-exile based in Beijing. Singapore's position was that the Lon Nol government, elected in August 1969, was in effect the same government and hence the question of recognition did not arise. Furthermore, the change of Head of State was a purely internal affair. As such, Singapore accepted the *de facto* position of the Lon Nol government.

Singapore deliberately assumed a very low profile in Phnom Penh post-March 1970 but Singapore-Cambodia relations remained good. Relations with Lon Nol were "correct and cordial". But when Singapore's ambassador to Cambodia Chan Keng Howe returned to Singapore on completion of his term, he was not immediately replaced, and for the duration of the Lon Nol administration, Singapore was represented by the junior *Chargé d'Affaires* of the Embassy. Singapore also refused to be caught up in the international politics brought about by the internal developments in Cambodia.³² On at least two occasions, Prime Minister Lee responded ambiguously to Lon Nol's appeal for assistance to rid the Khmer territory of Vietnamese communists. In his reply to Lon Nol on 19 May 1973, Lee stated that "the Republic of Singapore have always held that it is for the Khmer people alone to decide the government which will represent them, and that international conferences cannot arbitrarily decide such issues."³³ In his 23 October 1973 reply to Lon Nol, he wrote,

My government has been consistent in its policy that the Khmer people should be left to solve their problems themselves. That is why we have been loath to support or condone any act from any quarter, which, in our view, constitutes interference in the internal affairs of another country, particularly when such interference would encourage and prolong the fighting in your country. Conversely, we have always supported any move that would reduce or end the fighting in the Khmer Republic or create conditions for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.³⁴

Indeed, Singapore was the only ASEAN country which did not militarily assist the anti-communist forces in the Indochina War. As a MFA document put it, "we do not want to be placed in a position of total or partial commitment to the present government in Phnom Penh or of outright hostility to it." Within the MFA, there were serious doubts on the longevity of the Lon Nol regime.³⁵

In October 1973, Singapore was one of the seven Asian and Pacific nations which sent a note to Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) Kurt Waldheim that the UN ought to leave the question of who should govern Cambodia to its people. At the 1973 UN General Assembly session, supporters of Sihanouk's Royal Government of the Khmer National Union (GRUNK) led by China tabled a resolution to admit the GRUNK into the UN. Singapore (along with the rest of the ASEAN countries) voted against the move to expel the representative of the Lon Nol government from the UN, explaining privately that the vote against was not because of political support for Lon Nol but because it would set a dangerous precedent for anyone claiming to be a government or government-in-exile to be seated in the UN. Secondly, it would amount to interference by the UN in the internal affairs of Cambodia.

Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge on 17 April 1975. S.R. Nathan recalled that Singapore and the other ASEAN countries immediately recognised the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime following the fall of the Lon Nol government largely due to the persuasion of the Thai Foreign Ministry, and despite knowing the suffering of the country and the potential threat to Thailand. Nathan remembered that Thailand sought a decision by 0700 hours Bangkok time of the following morning after the fall of Phnom Penh for a joint ASEAN announcement. Singapore also issued a unilateral government statement to the effect. Singapore's stand was that its position with regards to the Cambodian problem remained unchanged. It would recognise "the government in the capital which claims popular mass support." As such, Singapore would recognise the new Cambodian government in Phnom Penh—GRUNK.³⁶

However, it was not until April 1976 that the new Cambodian government for the first time initiated the establishment of diplomatic relations with Singapore. On 21 April 1976, Thioun Prasith, the Cambodian leader to the Law of the Sea Conference informed Singapore's Permanent Representative to the UN, Tommy Koh, of the desire of Cambodian government to establish diplomatic relations with Singapore, at the ambassadorial level, from 3 May 1976. Relations were eventually established on 6 May, but Singapore still did not send an ambassador to Phnom Penh. Whereas Singapore-Cambodia relations were previously based on the close relationship between Sihanouk and Lee, the rationale for the new Singapore-Democratic Kampuchea³⁷ relations was "to encourage Kampuchea's continued independence from Vietnamese influence." On the part of the new Khmer leadership, it was hoped that the development of good political and economic relations with her non-communist Southeast Asian neighbours would enhance Kampuchea's ability to maintain its independence.³⁸ Following his meeting with Deputy Prime Minister in charge

of Foreign Affairs, Ieng Sary, during the latter's official visit to Singapore from 21–24 March 1977, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew directed trade officials to meet with Ieng Sary to discuss trade matters.³⁹ From his conversation with Ieng Sary on 22 March 1977, Rajaratnam gathered that Phnom Penh did not trust Vietnam or the Soviet Union. The Khmer leadership depended on China and it was on the prompting of Beijing that Ieng Sary visited Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore. The Khmers took pains to emphasise that Indochina was not a bloc but comprised three separate states.⁴⁰ Singapore was keen to set up direct communication links with Democratic Kampuchea but Ieng Sary told Rajaratnam on 12 October 1977 that communication facilities in Phnom Penh were not ready to handle direct links with Singapore and suggested that communications be carried out via Beijing where facilities between Phnom Penh had already been established. A Singapore trade and economic delegation visited DK from 10–16 May 1978 and both sides discussed direct trade, telecommunication and shipping ties between the two countries, which were expected to materialise in the near future.⁴¹

Despite the discussions, it was very difficult for Singapore to conduct business with the Khmer Rouge as they did not believe in having any currency.⁴² Lee described the Kampuchean leadership as “insane and perhaps could not be helped” and that it was “impossible to deal with them”. According to Lee, the Khmer Rouge wanted to buy diesel pumps for irrigation purposes in exchange for fish. But it was immensely difficult to determine the relative values. There were transportation problems and no currency. Lee noted after his discussion with Ieng Sary that the Khmer Rouge was operating on the basis of Khieu Samphan's thesis wherein he had argued for a rural, self-sufficient economy.⁴³

The DK government was also very secretive. Rajaratnam noted that nobody knew what was actually going on in the country. The DK government in May extended an invitation to Rajaratnam to pay an official visit to the country in 1978 which Singapore accepted in principle.⁴⁴ But in November, there were reports of a Vietnamese build-up in preparation for an all-out attack on Kampuchea. Ministry officials, deliberating the appropriate time for the Minister to visit Kampuchea, adopted a wait-and-see attitude. They closely monitored the developments and a decision was postponed a number of times. On 16 December, it was decided to wait till the first week of January 1979. But before a decision could be taken, the Vietnamese launched their invasion of Kampuchea on 25 December.

As we noted above, at the insistence of Thailand, the ASEAN countries collectively and promptly recognised the new Phnom Penh government—Royal Government of the Khmer National Union (GRUNK) on 18 April 1975.⁴⁵

There was however no immediate response from Phnom Penh. Individually, Malaysia was the first ASEAN country to recognise both the new government in Kampuchea in April and the provisional government in South Vietnam in July 1975.⁴⁶ Thailand, given the baggage of the Vietnam War, not surprisingly, had the most difficulty reaching an accommodation with Vietnam, but as noted above did eventually re-establish diplomatic relations with the formally re-unified Vietnam—now called the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) since 2 July 1976—in August 1976, a month after the Philippines. Lee Kuan Yew recalled that Singapore-Vietnam relations did not begin well. According to Lee,

the Vietnamese cunningly exploited the fears and desires of the countries of ASEAN that wanted to befriend them. They talked tough over their radio and newspapers. I found their leaders insufferable. They were filled with their own importance, and prided themselves as the Prussians of Southeast Asia.... They were confident they could bear any other power in the world, even China, if it interfered with Vietnam. For us, the puny states of Southeast Asia, they had nothing but contempt.⁴⁷

As K.K. Nair noted, “much of the initiative towards accommodation with the emerging realities of the power structure in the region was effectively in the hands of individual member states rather than in ASEAN as a regional grouping. Each state reached its particular decisions on the question of normalising relations with China and Hanoi based upon its particular circumstances and appraisals of its national interests”.⁴⁸ The Joint Communiqué issued at the end of the 8th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 13–15 May 1975 made no mention of the recent developments in Indochina which would indicate that the ASEAN governments had yet to reach a consensus on their next move. S. Rajaratnam’s opening speech at the meeting is perhaps worth citing: “We should not,” he said,

give the impression, as far as ASEAN is concerned, that we are hostile (to the Indochinese states) until they prove to us that they are hostile to a non-communist Southeast Asia. Equally, ASEAN should not give the impression that it is disconcerted by the emergence of communist or communist-influenced regimes...nor should we give the impression that we are prepared at any cost to adjust ourselves to win the favour of the Indochinese states. We should not be the only ones wooing the new regimes in Indochina; they should be wooing us too. They must feel that we are as important to their well-being as we think they could be to our well-being.⁴⁹

The Joint Communiqué of the inaugural ASEAN Heads of Government held in Bali on 23–24 February 1976 had a paragraph affirming the determination of the respective ASEAN governments “to continue to work for the promotion of peace, stability and progress in Southeast Asia...” Without