

Singapore-US Relations 2004-2024: From the Perspective of International Relations Theories

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the period from 2004 to 2024, Singapore's foreign policy towards the United States has been characterized by pragmatism and adaptability. As a small but economically significant state, Singapore has effectively leveraged its strategic location in Southeast Asia to build strong ties with the U.S., securing economic and security cooperation while navigating the challenges posed by the rise of China and the rebalancing of global power structures. The study also delves into Singapore's participation in key regional and global institutions, such as ASEAN and the United Nations, where it balances its support for U.S. interests with an emphasis on regional stability and multilateralism. Singapore has maintained an unwavering commitment to free trade, demonstrating a liberal economic outlook that aligns with American values, especially in the context of their close partnership in areas like defense, trade, technology, and investment. Constructivist theory also provides valuable insight into the shaping of their bilateral relationship, as both countries share an identity as global middle powers advocating for rules-based international order, human rights, and sustainable development. As global power dynamics continue to evolve, Singapore remains an important player in U.S. foreign policy strategies, positioning itself as a bridge between East and West in an increasingly multipolar world.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 Dec. 2024
Accepted 08 Jan. 2025
Published 04 Feb. 2025

KEYWORDS

Singapore, United States, international relations theories, small states, major powers, competition.

Introduction

In the increasingly complex landscape of international relations, understanding how nations interact and establish political relationships is a crucial field of study. The interactions between smaller nations, such as Singapore, and major powers, such as the United States, provide deep insights into the dynamics, strategies, and foreign policy approaches within a multifaceted international system. Singapore, a nation with a modest landmass and population, occupies a significant strategic position in Southeast Asia. It has crafted a shrewd and flexible foreign policy to protect its national interests and ensure stable development. Meanwhile, the United States, wielding strong global influence, has fostered cooperative relations with Singapore not only in the realm of trade but also regarding security and diplomacy (Brookings Institution, 2016).

To better comprehend this relationship, this research applies international relations theories to analyze Singapore's foreign policy strategies, shedding light on the role of a small state within an international system dominated by major powers. Specifically, theories such as realism, liberalism, and other approaches are used to interpret the motivations, objectives, and interactions of the two nations. These theoretical perspectives demonstrate that, despite differing standings in the international hierarchy, the relationship between the United States and Singapore transcends a mere balancing of power and influence and can be examined from various angles and conceptual viewpoints (Goh, E, 2005).

This research examines Singapore-US relations from the standpoint of international relations theories to explore how Singapore manages and adjusts its foreign policies amidst global volatility. By employing theories such as realism, structural theory, and liberalism, the study aims to deepen understanding of the interactions between a small nation and a superpower in today's multipolar world.

Research Methodology

The study employs international relations theories such as realism, liberalism, and structural theory to analyze the political and strategic dynamics influencing the two nations. By examining policy documents,

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diplomatic statements, and international reports, the research clarifies how Singapore, as a small state, navigates interactions with a major power like the United States within the international system.

Literature Review

The foreign relations between Singapore and the United States have long been marked by strategic importance, economic collaboration, and geopolitical balancing. Examining this bilateral relationship through the lens of International Relations (IR) theories provides a nuanced understanding of how both nations, despite significant differences in size and power, maintain a mutually beneficial connection. This literature review explores key perspectives rooted in the dominant IR paradigms: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, covering the period from 2004 to 2024 (Keohane, 1984).

In realist theory, international relations are largely driven by the pursuit of national interest, power dynamics, and the balancing behavior of states. Singapore's strategy vis-à-vis the US, particularly from 2004 to 2024, has been one of pragmatic hedging, a term popularized in discussions of small-state foreign policy. According to Cai (2013), Singapore has employed a flexible approach to security and diplomacy, carefully balancing its security interests between its relationship with the US and China. Given Singapore's limited size and its dependence on international trade and security, its hedging strategy allows the country to avoid being overly aligned with either the US or China, preserving its autonomy (Cai, 2013). The theory of "balancing" and "bandwagoning" (Walt, 1985; Schweller, 1994) applies directly to the dynamics between these two powers in Southeast Asia, where Singapore adeptly adjusts its policy to avoid aligning too rigidly with any one global power, enabling it to mitigate the effects of regional rivalries and potential conflicts. Realist theories in the Singapore-US context demonstrate the strategic calculations that smaller states like Singapore make to secure their interests while avoiding overdependence on any one nation.

Moreover, a realist view suggests that security and military cooperation between Singapore and the US significantly enhanced during this period, with the extension of agreements like the 2005 US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and later, greater US military access to Singaporean ports and airbases. This security partnership fulfills Singapore's need for security in the face of regional uncertainties (Tan, 2016).

From a liberal viewpoint, the relations between Singapore and the US can be largely understood through the lens of economic interdependence and institutional cooperation. Liberalism emphasizes the role of international institutions, trade agreements, and cooperation as mechanisms to promote peace and mitigate the anarchic nature of the international system. The US-Singapore FTA (2005), as noted by Chrystol and Craigwell (2008), exemplifies how liberal theorists view trade and economic agreements as vital to maintaining stable relations between nations. The growth of economic exchanges over the past two decades, coupled with shared democratic values, has fostered cooperation and encouraged Singapore's participation in broader global governance structures that align with US foreign policy objectives, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

The liberal paradigm also underscores the diplomatic initiatives and regional security cooperation between the two nations. Over the last decade, both states have increased their engagements through the Singapore-US Comprehensive Economic Partnership and enhanced bilateral dialogue on regional security issues, particularly in Southeast Asia (Wang, 2015). The free flow of trade and open markets between Singapore and the US supports the liberal theory of interdependence, where economic linkages act as a stabilizing factor in otherwise precarious political contexts.

Furthermore, Singapore's embrace of international governance models such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and various United Nations frameworks further aligns with the tenets of liberalism, illustrating that cooperation based on rules and norms creates mutual benefits (Mofid, 2020).

Constructivism, with its emphasis on social constructions of identity, norms, and shared ideas, provides additional insights into the Singapore-US relationship. Constructivists argue that international relations are shaped not just by material interests but by ideas, values, and the identities of states. Singapore's foreign policy has been shaped by its national identity as a small, open, and technologically advanced state that seeks stability, security, and opportunities for economic growth (Finnemore, 1998).

According to Tan (2016), Singapore's perception of the US as an indispensable power has been crucial in this context. The idea of "America as a security partner" has grown more salient post-9/11, where Singapore views its relationship with the US as a pillar of security amidst regional uncertainty. The idea of the US as a "guardian" in Southeast Asia and a promoter of global stability aligns well with the constructivist argument that shared beliefs and cultural norms—such as the rule of law and open markets—have influenced the state-to-state relationship (Roy, 2005). Singapore's elite view of the US has been framed in terms of shared

democratic values and international engagement, with efforts to assert this through bilateral summits and collaborations in areas such as cybersecurity and counterterrorism.

As Lee Hsien Loong noted in his speeches, the presence of the US in Southeast Asia, and its partnership with Singapore, has strengthened Singapore's sovereignty and placed the nation within the broader global community, reinforcing both Singapore's alignment with Western liberal norms and its desire to navigate relations with its regional neighbors effectively (Lee, 2008).

The past decade (2016–2024) has been marked by heightened geopolitical tension, particularly due to the rise of China and evolving US foreign policy under various administrations. This period has highlighted the relevance of all three IR theories in understanding Singapore's foreign policy choices. Realist considerations become evident in how Singapore has consistently had to balance its relationships between the US and China, responding to fluctuations in American policy toward Asia. The rise of a more assertive China, particularly in the South China Sea, has further complicated Singapore's balancing act between these two major powers.

Simultaneously, the liberal approach continues to shape much of Singapore's external economic dealings, as it seeks to diversify trade partnerships and maintain strong international links to ensure access to markets and technologies. The signing of newer agreements like the TPP and its eventual reinstatement under the Biden administration emphasizes these trends (Bremmer, 2016).

Singapore's relationship with the United States between 2004 and 2024 offers valuable insights into how small states navigate global politics. Through Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, the dynamics of power, economic interdependence, and shared ideas frame a nuanced picture of diplomatic and security relations. While security and pragmatism dominate through the realist lens, economic cooperation remains key under liberal theory, and shared norms and identities continue to bind these two states. Together, these theories help to unravel the complex relationship between a small yet strategically significant nation and one of the world's preeminent powers.

Study Objectives

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Analyze Singapore's Foreign Policy:** To examine the strategies and approaches that Singapore employs in its foreign policy towards the United States, particularly from 2004 to 2024.
2. **Apply International Relations Theories:** To interpret the motivations, objectives, and interactions between Singapore and the United States through the lenses of realism, liberalism, and constructivism.
3. **Evaluate Bilateral Dynamics:** To explore how Singapore navigates its relations with a global superpower while addressing regional challenges, such as the rise of China and shifts in the global power structure.
4. **Assess the Role of Multilateralism:** To investigate Singapore's involvement in regional and global institutions, focusing on how these relationships shape its bilateral ties with the U.S.
5. **Contribute to Small State Studies:** To provide deeper insights into the role of small states in an international system dominated by major powers.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How has Singapore's foreign policy towards the United States evolved during the 2004–2024 period?
2. What insights do realism, liberalism, and constructivism provide into the motivations behind Singapore's bilateral relationship with the United States?
3. In what ways does Singapore balance its foreign policy between supporting U.S. interests and maintaining regional stability in the face of China's rise?

Results and Discussion

Various Interpretations of "Small States" in International Studies

A "small state" is a term used to describe a nation with a smaller territory, population, or economic strength compared to others worldwide. The definition of a small state may vary depending on the context and criteria applied.

Criteria for Identifying "Small States"

To date, there is no universally accepted standard for defining a "small state" in international studies. Some common criteria used include:

- Population: Nations with small populations are considered "small states." The population threshold varies depending on the context, but typically refers to nations with fewer than ten million people (World Bank online, *Small States Overview*).
- Territorial Size: Nations with small land areas are also considered "small states." The size threshold can vary, with common benchmarks including less than 10,000 km² or 100,000 km² (World Bank online, *Small States Overview*).
- Economy: Nations with a small economy, low GDP, and limited scale of economic activity can be classified as "small states." This often refers to countries with GDP below a certain threshold, such as under USD 10 billion (World Bank online, *Small States Overview*).
- Political Influence: Countries that lack significant roles in the global political power structure, have little international influence, and possess limited military capabilities may also be considered "small states." In addition to these criteria, the context and specific research objectives can also shape how "small states" are defined and understood.

Based on the criteria above, the author considers a "small state" to be a nation with a small territory, low population, limited economic scale, and little or no international or regional political influence.

Various Interpretations of "Major Powers" in Contemporary International Studies

The concept of "major powers" has many interpretations. For instance, Wikipedia defines a "major power" as a sovereign state possessing strength and influence within a geographic region or globally. A prevalent understanding describes "major powers" as nations with vast territories, large populations, and exceptional resources compared to other countries. These nations hold superior capacity, strength, and influence in politics, military, diplomacy, economy, and culture, enabling them to shape the policies and actions of other nations and control the operation of the global order and international trends (*The small country-big country relationship in the world nowadays, lyluanchinhtri*).

Criteria for Identifying a "Major Power"

To date, no single criterion exists to define a "major power," and evaluations often depend on varying factors. Commonly used criteria include:

Population: Nations with large populations are typically regarded as major powers due to their significant influence on global economic, political, and cultural developments (Chrystol Thomas & Roland Craigwell, 2008). Examples include China, India, and the United States.

- Economy: Nations with large economies and high GDP are often considered major powers. Their ability to generate and distribute resources, as well as their influence in global economic matters, is notable. Examples include the United States, China, Japan, and EU nations (Chrystol Thomas & Roland Craigwell, 2008).
- Military: Nations with strong military capabilities and modern warfare capacities are often considered major powers. Such military strength reflects their ability to influence international issues. Examples include the United States, Russia, China, and NATO member states (Chrystol Thomas & Roland Craigwell, 2008).
- Political Influence: Nations with substantial political impact and active participation in international relations and organizations are considered major powers (Kamran Mofid, 2020).

Based on the above definitions, the author considers major powers to be nations with large populations and economies, advanced scientific capabilities, robust military forces, and the ability to influence international and regional politics. However, whether a nation or a regional cooperation organization qualifies as a major power depends on the context and evaluation criteria.

The Concept of "Small State-Major Power Relations"

This concept refers to the relationships between nations with differing scales, power, and resources. "Small state-major power relations" extend beyond size disparity, also involving elements such as friendship, mutual interests, power balance, and the strategic visions of the countries involved.

Benefits and Risks in "Small State-Major Power Relations"

Small states, as members of the international community, cannot avoid engaging in relations with other nations, particularly major powers. This is because:

Conflict and Cooperation: Conflict and cooperation are two primary trends in international relations. Small states tend to choose cooperation over conflict with major powers, as conflicts could lead to complete losses, whereas cooperation often yields more benefits than costs (Paul, Wi, & Fortmann, 2004).

- **Security and Defense:** Small states can seek assistance or protection from major powers to ensure their security and defense.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Small states can take advantage of the potential markets of major powers to export goods and services. Economic cooperation also facilitates foreign investment and technology exchange, contributing to economic growth and development (Chrystal Thomas & Roland Craigwell, 2008).
- **Political and Diplomatic Support:** Small states can gain support from major powers on international issues related to their national interests, such as territorial disputes, trade agreements, or human rights issues (Kamran Mofid, 2020).
- **Development Cooperation:** Small states can benefit from the knowledge sharing, technical assistance, and expertise of major powers in areas like education, health, technology, energy, and infrastructure development.
- **International Relations:** Cooperation with major powers not only helps small states strengthen bilateral relations but also facilitates their participation in or creation of multilateral forums to balance the influence of those major powers.

Challenges and Risks: Despite these benefits, the relationship between a small state and a major power poses significant risks and challenges.

- **Impositions:** Major powers often impose conditions that small states may find undesirable or difficult to accept. Additionally, major powers tend to aim for dependence from small states, sometimes expecting them to follow their lead in regional and international matters where they hold key interests (Walt, 1985).
- **Interference in Internal Affairs:** Relations with major powers might also expose small states to risks of intervention in their domestic affairs. For example, during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998, the United States exploited Indonesia's struggles to support opposition forces, ultimately forcing President Suharto to resign in 1998.
- **Subordination Risks:** Major powers may attempt to subvert the autonomy of small states, leveraging asymmetries in power dynamics to prioritize their own geopolitical or economic agendas.

Small State-Major Power Relations Under International Relations Theories

Realist Perspective

From the realist perspective, the relations between "small states" and "major powers" reflect the realities of power dynamics and the imbalances that characterize the international system. Key characteristics include:

- **Power and Influence:** Major powers hold superior control over resources, military, economic strength, and political authority. They can significantly influence or even dictate the actions and decisions of smaller states.
- **Inequality:** The relationship is inherently unequal, often manifested as economic dominance, political leverage, or the use of military power to safeguard the interests of the major power.
- **National Interests:** Both small states and major powers strive to protect their national interests. Small states, however, must often navigate constraints imposed by major powers to assert their sovereignty and pursue their objectives.
- **Balancing Acts:** To mitigate asymmetries, small states may seek alliances, negotiations, or mutual agreements that allow them to optimize shared benefits while minimizing coercive pressures from major powers (Paul, Wi, & Fortmann, 2004).

Liberal Perspective

The liberal approach to small state-major power relations highlights the value of mutual respect, fairness, and collective progress:

- **Respect for Sovereignty:** Nations have the right to self-determination and autonomy in their internal policies without unwarranted interference.
- **Equality in Law:** All states are considered equal under international law, fostering transparent and fair negotiations and agreements.
- **Economic Interdependence:** Emphasis on reducing trade barriers and encouraging open trade, fostering equitable economic partnerships.

- Collaboration and Alliances: Advocates cooperative frameworks in areas like economic, security, and environmental development, aligning small state strategies with broader international goals.

Theories on Policies of Small States in Relations with Major Powers

Relations between small states and major powers bring many benefits to small states. However, these relationships also pose significant risks. The question arises: how can small states leverage the advantages of relations with major powers while safeguarding their national interests? Drawing from the realities of small-state policies in relations with major powers, researchers in the field of "Small State-Major Power Relations" have established three primary theories: the Balancing Power Theory, the Bandwagoning Theory, and the Hedging Theory.

Balancing Power Theory

The Balancing Power Theory describes a strategy wherein small states seek to counterbalance or oppose major powers through policies aimed at strengthening internal capabilities and building international alliances to offset threats posed by powerful nations (Paul, Wi, & Fortmann, 2004).

- Core Principle in Realism:

Balancing power is a core concept within the realist school of international relations. It serves as an essential theoretical basis for shaping the foreign policies of nations, including small states. The term "balancing power" helps explain the establishment of new global orders.

- Interpretive Variability:

The concept remains contested, with varying interpretations. Some view balancing power as an inevitable cycle akin to a natural law, while others disagree. Some see it as a strategic guideline for policymakers, while others critique it as a mechanism disguising inequality in benefits between major and small powers. While some argue that balancing power fosters peace, in many cases, it has drawn states into conflicts aimed at preserving specific world orders, often at great cost (Lục Minh Tuấn, 2014).

- Complexity of Goals:

The objectives of balancing power vary depending on historical context and theoretical approach. As a principle, balancing power represents a state of the international system where no nation is overwhelmingly dominant.

- Strategies for Balance:

Balance can be achieved by countering a dominant nation or bloc with an equally powerful competitor or coalition. Maintaining this state often benefits major powers while disadvantaging dependent small states, as seen in historical imbalances (Lục Minh Tuấn, 2014).

- Practical Applications:

For example, during the 19th century, Thailand employed balancing power strategies against both Britain and France, successfully avoiding colonization. Today, ASEAN employs balancing power strategies by fostering close relations with the United States, the European Union, Japan, and India to counter China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. This strategy also involves the establishment of multilateral frameworks like ARF and ASEAN+3 to ensure regional stability and mitigate unilateral dominance (Paul, Wi, & Fortmann, 2004).

Bandwagoning Theory

The Bandwagoning Theory represents another approach used by small states in relations with major powers. In this strategy, small states align with major powers, accepting a subordinate position to secure security, economic benefits, and relatively stable relations (Roy, 2005).

- Definition and Opposite of Balancing:

According to scholar Stephen Walt, bandwagoning is the opposite of balancing. Small, weaker nations align with powerful states that threaten them, thereby avoiding aggression from their chosen ally (Walt, 1985).

- Leverage through Alignment:

Small states often rely on the major power's influence as leverage to advance their national interests (Schweller, 1994). For instance, during World War II, Thailand allied with Japan to avoid occupation. In return, Japan used Thai territory for military operations in Indochina. However, once Japan was defeated, Thailand shifted its alignment to the United States to benefit from post-war American dominance.

Hedging theory

Hedging, or the strategy of dual hedging, is a policy that not only many small countries have adopted in their relationships with large countries but also both the US and China use it. This strategy allows these

countries to simultaneously benefit from the relationship while avoiding potential risks posed by such alliances.

To date, there have been many different definitions of the concept of Hedging. Evelyn Goh defines Hedging as a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for) surprises in situations where states cannot decide between alternative choices such as Balancing, Bandwagoning, or Neutrality. When implementing a Hedging policy, nations attempt to "nurture a position in the middle that forestalls or avoids clearly choosing one side to the detriment of the other" (Wang Dong, 2015).

Building on the analysis of satisfactory and unsatisfactory aspects of earlier researchers' understandings of Hedging, Chinese scholar Wang Dong developed the following definition: "Dual hedging in international relations is defined as a wise insurance strategy that states undertake when confronted with uncertainty. This strategy aims to reduce or minimize risk, maintain or expand freedom of action, diversify strategic options, and shape the preferred goals of nations or those they choose" (Wang Dong, 2015). In the writer's view, this definition accurately reflects the current realities of small nations' relationships with larger ones, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. The dual hedging strategy is indeed a wise form of insurance that small countries adopt when engaging with a rapidly rising power like China. China's rise creates numerous opportunities, especially economic growth, for all nations, including small ones. However, China's rise also introduces risks, even threats to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring small countries. The dual hedging policy helps these small nations mitigate the risks posed by such a rising power while granting them the freedom to act and diversify activities to maximize the benefits they can derive from China's growth.

However, the strategic choice of dual hedging only occurs when three conditions are met: (i) there is no direct threat compelling a nation to ally with a large power for protection, (ii) there are no significant ideological divides between the countries, and (iii) there is no major external power rivalry that forces small nations to make a choice (Cai Dexian, 2013).

Dual hedging is also a strategy in which a country simultaneously pursues different, sometimes contradictory, policies with another country to avoid having to choose a strategy. This strategy consists of three elements: soft balancing or indirect balancing, complex engagement at political, economic, and strategic levels, and the enmeshment of great powers into regional cooperative institutions to ensure regional stability.

The policy of dual hedging in international relations involves a range of strategic tools such as engagement, commitment, pursuit, restraint, or balancing (Wang Dong, 2015). This strategy can be applied in various forms such as economic, diplomatic, or military, allowing countries to minimize long-term threats and maximize long-term opportunities.

The International Outlook of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

Given its territorial and demographic specificities, and its position within the not-so-friendly Malay world, Singapore's leaders, from Lee Kuan Yew and Go Chok Tong to Lee Hsien Loong, have a deep understanding of the world and the region in which Singapore exists, as well as the inherent strengths and weaknesses of their nation, which allows them to devise foreign policies aimed at achieving the goal of "ensuring the independence, survival, and development of Singapore" (Cai Dexian, 2013).

According to former Singapore President Nathan S.R., "These are the core national interests of Singapore that we have sought to advance" (Wang Dong, 2015).

Regarding the global and regional situation, the interview "Maintaining a Singaporean Identity in a Global Economy," conducted with Lee Hsien Loong on May 5, 2001, when he was Deputy Prime Minister and Singapore's Minister of Finance, discussed the challenges globalization poses to Singapore, particularly in maintaining cultural identity and social cohesion. Prime Minister Lee has always emphasized the significance of globalization and the interconnectedness of countries in the 21st century. He acknowledges that Singapore's prosperity and stability are tied to global development and stresses the importance of maintaining an open, connected, and dynamic global economy (Commanding Heights: Lee Hsien Loong, on PBS).

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also acknowledged the shifting geopolitical context globally, particularly the rise of new powers in Asia. Like many other ASEAN leaders, he holds a balanced and pragmatic view on China's rise. According to him, China's rise presents opportunities for the economic development of Southeast Asian countries, including Singapore. Therefore, he highlighted the importance of maintaining strong economic ties with China and tapping into its growing investment and consumer markets. However, he also pointed out that China's rise presents challenges to regional economic and security development.

- **On the Rules-Based International Order**

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong emphasized the importance of maintaining a rules-based international order, one that upholds international norms and standards. He called on China to contribute responsibly and actively to global issues, thus contributing to the stability and prosperity of the region.

- **On Regional Stability**
Lee Hsien Loong stressed the need to maintain peace and stability within the region, particularly amidst China's rise. He urged countries in the region to engage in constructive dialogue to manage differences and avoid conflicts.
- **On Multilateralism and Regional Cooperation**
Prime Minister Lee praised the crucial role of regional cooperation and multilateral frameworks, such as ASEAN, in addressing the complexities arising from China's rise. He encouraged countries in the region to work closely together and find common ground to tackle shared issues.
- **On Ensuring a Level Playing Field**
He also stressed the importance of ensuring a fair and level playing field in economic and trade relations with China. He advocated for a competitive environment and protection of intellectual property rights, emphasizing that countries must adapt and maintain competitiveness within an evolving global economic landscape.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's Views on America's Role in Southeast Asian Security and Development

Overall, Lee Hsien Loong sees the United States as a key partner in ensuring security and fostering development in Southeast Asia. He reaffirmed this positive view of the US's role in Asia in his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue on May 29, 2015. "The US remains a dominant Pacific power. Its Pacific Command and the Seventh Fleet are central to peace and stability in the region" (See Seng Tan, 2016). Lee values the US role in Southeast Asia as Singapore is concerned about China's rise and its potential to disrupt regional stability. For Singapore, regional political stability is crucial to its own security and development. Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew openly stated that Singapore would progress "only if there is international order, peace and stability in the region, and growth rather than war and conflict" (Lee Kuan Yew, 2008). Stability in Southeast Asia is not only vital but also opens up valuable opportunities for Singapore to attract trade and foreign investment. This benefits Singapore in consolidating its economic position while providing a solid foundation for sustainable future development. In particular, given Singapore's small size and strategic limitations, leveraging regional stability becomes crucial for maintaining competitiveness and growth in the global economy. Increased trade and investment will not only spur economic growth but also create job opportunities and improve the quality of life for Singapore's people.

Not only does Prime Minister Lee value the US's role in Southeast Asian security and stability, but he also highly values the US's role in ASEAN's economic development in general and Singapore's economic growth in particular (See Seng Tan, 2016). According to Lee, "The Americans have significant interests in the region. Their investments are substantial. In terms of impact, their Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is much stronger than China's, even though China now invests more overseas. Generally, the US is not as large a trading partner as China, but in fact, much of the trade with China ultimately flows through to the US, [via] intermediate goods. So, economic connections are very important" (Báo nghiên cứu quốc tế online, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong: Both 'big and small' countries must play by the rules).

Given the importance of the US to Southeast Asia's security and development, Prime Minister Lee expressed concern over the instability in US policies toward Southeast Asia. In his statements, he not only emphasized America's interests in Southeast Asia but also criticized the US, comparing its approach to engagement in the region to that of China. In an interview with *Time* magazine on September 4, 2016, Prime Minister Lee openly criticized the US: "Your position has declined with many countries around the world, your competitors as well as your friends will say, 'You talk about strategic rebalancing, you talk about developing your relationships. You can move your aircraft carriers around, but what do they help with?'" According to Lee, the US "needs to deepen its economic relations and broader connections. You don't do what the Chinese do – the Chinese go everywhere with lollipops in their pockets. They have aid, they have friendly deals. They build Prime Minister's offices, President's offices, the National Assembly, or Foreign Ministries. For them, trade is an extension of their foreign policy. You don't do those concrete things. The big thing you do is set up TPP, which Obama did. That shows you are serious, that you are willing to deepen relations... Now you say you can't implement TPP. After you got Vietnam to join, after you got Japan to join (with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe having to make difficult concessions on agriculture, rice, and milk), now you say, 'I'm leaving, I don't believe in this deal.' How can people trust you now?" (Ian Bremmer, 2016).

With such an international outlook, especially his recognition of the US's role in Southeast Asia's security and development, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has directed the formulation of Singapore's foreign policy in general, and specifically its policy towards the US.

Conclusion

The relationship between Singapore and the United States can be better understood through the lens of international relations theories. From a realist perspective, this relationship exemplifies the dynamics between a small nation and a great power, where Singapore maintains flexibility and diplomacy in its foreign policy to safeguard national interests while still relying on the U.S. as an important strategic partner. From a liberal viewpoint, the relationship also highlights strong cooperation in the realms of economics and trade, with mutual benefit through partnership agreements and shared security arrangements. The structural theory underscores the influence of global and regional factors in shaping relations between the two countries, especially amid strategic shifts in Southeast Asia. Singapore demonstrates the ability to leverage strategic advantages and international cooperation to promote security and development, while the U.S. seeks to maintain its influence in the region. The bilateral relationship between Singapore and the U.S., when viewed through international relations theories, serves as a model of coordination between countries of varying scales within a rapidly changing international system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis of Singapore-US relations from 2004 to 2024, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, academics, and stakeholders to strengthen and deepen the bilateral relationship:

- **Enhance Economic Cooperation:** Expand collaborative initiatives in emerging fields such as digital trade, green technology, and sustainable development to ensure continued economic alignment and mutual growth.
- **Foster Security and Defense Collaboration:** Build on existing frameworks to strengthen maritime security and counter-terrorism efforts while addressing new challenges such as cyber threats and technological warfare.
- **Deepen Multilateral Engagement:** Encourage greater coordination within multilateral platforms like ASEAN and the United Nations to address global challenges, including climate change, pandemic preparedness, and geopolitical instability.
- **Promote People-to-People Connections:** Increase exchange programs in education, research, and cultural initiatives to bolster mutual understanding and strengthen soft power dynamics.
- **Support Small States in the Global System:** Position Singapore as a model for how small states can effectively navigate relations with major powers, offering leadership and expertise to other nations in similar circumstances.
- **Diversify Bilateral Priorities:** Focus on broadening areas of cooperation, such as space technology, artificial intelligence, and global health initiatives, to future-proof the partnership.
- **Maintain Strategic Balancing:** Continue leveraging Singapore's neutral stance and strategic location to mediate U.S.-China competition and promote regional stability in Southeast Asia.
- **Invest in Institutional Resilience:** Develop joint mechanisms to withstand shifts in global power dynamics, ensuring the sustainability of the U.S.-Singapore partnership under evolving geopolitical conditions.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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