
S. Jayakumar, *Diplomacy: A Singapore Experience*. Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2011, 316 pp. ISBN 978-981-426-694-9.

One of Singapore's grandees in politics, S. Jayakumar, with a distinguished number of governmental positions including deputy prime minister and senior minister, has authored a book about Singapore's experience in diplomacy based mainly, but not exclusively, on his tenure from 1994 to 2004 as minister for foreign affairs.

It is a valuable contribution to the many works on diplomacy, in particular because it is written by a person starting his professional life as an academic (before entering politics he was Dean of the Faculty of Law at the National University of Singapore) and then turned practitioner, participating in a large number of initiatives, activities and meetings.

The book tells a hugely relevant story about the problems small nations encounter trying to position themselves in an international environment and carve out a platform, not only defending their own interests, but also taking a strong role in regional or even global affairs. With two much larger nations – Malaysia and Indonesia – as neighbours, and having to manoeuvre taking into account the ties to the United States and the rising power of China, this has not always been easy.

It is wonderfully composed and written in smooth and easily accessible English. The book falls into three sections. The first one is called 'proactive and creative diplomacy', dealing with Singapore's diplomacy towards the international community and even the global community. Relations with the United Nations play a strong role for a country like Singapore and during S. Jayakumar's time as minister, Singapore was for the first time a member of the Security Council. Its role in creating international fora such as the Asia-Europe Meeting, Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation and Asia-Middle East Dialogue is explained, with many good points and insights, which were not always evident when an outside observer first pondered why these meetings were set up.

The second section is about safeguarding national interests, telling how Singapore had to behave adroitly to secure its national interests. Several times the term 'core interests' is used. Various cases now fading away, but at the time front page news, are analyzed, explaining why Singapore acted as it did, how it responded to pressure from outside nations (including the US in the caning case of Michael Fay), and how it managed to maintain its credibility in its own eyes and the eyes of the outside world.

The third section deals with managing bilateral relations with Malaysia, Indonesia and China. Here, Singapore, called a 'little red dot' on the map by a former Indonesian president, could not rely on power, but had to mobilize skills, intellect, diplomacy and a correct assessment of how far it could go and how far these three countries were prepared to go. For Singapore, these were not just trivial issues, but sometimes questions touching the very existence of the country, as for example in the case of the supply of water from Malaysia.

The real gift for a non-Singaporean is that Jayakumar, after each chapter, stops and offers a few pages of reflections. Here people interested in diplomacy and indeed professional diplomats still active or starting their career can learn some of the golden principles of the trade that never change. A couple of them serve as examples.

Jayakumar says about Singapore's role as initiator of the Asia-Europe meetings:

Sometimes, initiatives by Singapore are not well received by some officials, especially from our larger neighbours, who see themselves as the 'natural' leaders of the region or in ASEAN. We have to manage these sensitivities carefully while ensuring that we achieve our substantive objective. One way is for our larger neighbours or even a third, neutral country to reap the public accolades (p. 26).

This recalls the well-known quip of Tip O'Neil, who for many years was speaker of the House of Representatives in the US Congress: 'there are no limits to what you can achieve in politics if you are ready to let somebody else get the credit'. It underlines that for small countries it is more important to see things done than to get credit for initiating them. Results count and when you are small, you must apply ingenuity to achieve what you want.

The reader also gets some real nuggets of diplomacy that are universally applicable (p. 40). The first one is: 'Countries do not conduct foreign relations and diplomacy in isolation or in a vacuum. It is all about promoting and advancing national interests'. The second one is:

Fundamentally, Singapore's foreign policy is conducted off the bedrock of our continuing economic success. Larger, more powerful countries have time for us and our leaders not merely because we make sense but also because we have a long and consistent track record of good governance and effective economic management. The moment we become merely mediocre, we will be marginalised and ignored no matter how clever our ideas or how insightful our views (p. 40).

These are very wise words telling diplomats that the basis for all diplomacy starts at home, that diplomacy is a continuation or projecting of domestic policies, that any country, but especially small ones, are only heard abroad if they have managed to put their own house in order.

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Edward Steinfeldt, *Playing Our Game: Why China's Rise Doesn't Threaten the West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 265 pp., notes, index. ISBN 978-0-19-539065-0.

A host of new publications maintain that the days of Western economic superiority are over. In particular three indicators are cited to substantiate this claim: (1) in 2009 China overtook Germany to become the largest export nation in the world; (2) in 2010 the Chinese economy overtook that of Japan to become the second biggest economy in the world and according to the IMF the US will be surpassed in 2016; and (3) by mid-2011, China's foreign exchange reserves had ballooned to almost US\$3.2 trillion. A new book by Arvind Subramanian (*Eclipse: Living in the Shadow of China's Economic Dominance*, Petersen Institute for International Economics, 2011) argues that based on an index composed of size of GDP, trade, and foreign reserves, China may already have caught up with the US in terms of economic dominance. The argument has been strengthened by the rapid advance of Chinese business groups on the global-level playing field. The recent 2011 Global Fortune 500 list of the world's largest companies now has 61 Chinese companies on the list. This is 15 companies more than in 2010 and a clear indication that Chinese companies are on the march forward.

To Subramanian and other writers, China's new economic strength will reduce the economic power of the West and especially the US. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2011), Subramanian even draws a parallel to the Suez crisis in 1956 when the US forced the UK to withdraw from its occupation of the Suez Canal. The US made an approval of loans from the IMF to the crisis-ridden British economy