4 Michael Leifer, the balance of power and international relations theory

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The work of the late Professor Michael Leifer has been identified with a range of concepts, particularly those that he applied to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), including diplomatic community[1] or internal collective security organization.[2] However, he is now arguably most often associated with the concept of the balance of power. The reason for this is two-fold. First, Leifer himself routinely used the concept throughout his illustrious career. Second, to the extent that Leifer's work has met with open criticism, such criticism has overwhelmingly focused on his invocation of the balance of power, particularly in terms of the concept's analytical power and related policy implications. Of particular importance in this regard have been two review essays respectively authored by Yuen Foong Khong and Sorpong Peou.[3] Khong's criticisms relate to Leifer's influential 1996 Adelphi Paper on the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).[4] In his review Khong argues that the analytical utility of the balance of power was far more limited than that of the concept of balance of threat to account for Southeast Asia's post-Cold War response to China. After all, he suggested, ASEAN was not in the business of engaging in a countervailing balance of power against the most powerful regional state, the United States, but instead was seeking protection against China. Khong also questioned the implicit policy advice that he understood Leifer to be giving. In particular he pointed to Leifer's argument that the prerequisite for a successful ARF might well be 'the prior existence of a stable balance of power'.[5] Khong believed that this prescription was fraught with danger if it was translated into policy practice. Significantly, he disagreed with Leifer not only on the need for a balance of power as a prerequisite for the ARF's functioning, but also in relation to the importance of the ARF in the absence of such a balance. As Khong formulated it, 'Thus in contrast to Leifer, I view the ARF not as "a valuable adjunct to the workings of the balance of power" but as a mechanism for defusing the conflictual by-products of power balancing practices.'[6]

More recently, Sorpong Peou has reinforced Leifer's association with the balance of power and realism by comparing and contrasting Leifer's work with that of the constructivist scholarship undertaken by Professor Amitav Acharya. However, in an interesting twist Peou contends that 'Leifer's thinking conforms

to balance-of-threat logic' rather than to the conventional balance-of-power logic,[7] which he takes to be an inconsistency in Leifer's approach. While Khong and Peou agree that Leifer was a realist, they thus disagree about the logic that Leifer suggested was underpinning balance of power formation. Given this rather interesting disagreement, which is reinforced by Peou's additional comment that Leifer actually came close to being a constructivist, this chapter will look again at the way in which the balance of power has been used both in Leifer's empirical analyses and in his more explicit theoretical interventions. The aim of this dual approach, which involves examining many of Leifer's early as well as later works, is to provide a more rounded account in relation to the significance that the balance of power has played in Leifer's overall work. In particular, the chapter has the following three objectives: (1) to examine Leifer's basic understanding of the balance of power and how he applied the concept in relation to Southeast and East Asia; (2) to ascertain his preferred theoretical home in line with the significance he attached to the balance of power; and (3) to investigate the role of the balance of power as a factor in the foreign policies of individual regional states. These three objectives will be pursued sequentially in three sections dealing with the topics in turn.

Leifer and the balance of power

Although Professor Leifer consistently invoked the concept of the balance of power, he only rarely expressly differentiated its possible definitions.[8] Indeed, it was arguably only in the mid-1990s that he explicitly did so. Then, Leifer essentially distinguished between two key meanings of the balance of power.[9] First, he took the balance of power to denote a situation, or, more appropriately put, a description of a relationship between two or more states defined in terms of their respective capabilities. Second, he understood the balance of power in terms of a policy directed at preventing the establishment of undue dominance by one or more states that would be able to dictate the terms of regional order. Leifer saw these two meanings as being linked, and both are clearly integrated in his work. The former is evident not least in his analysis of political, economic and military developments at the global and regional level. In this context, Leifer distinguished between a global, regional and sub-regional or even local balance of power. He saw developments at the global and regional level as impacting on those at the sub-regional level, testified to not least by his use of the term 'balance of extra-regional influences',[10] and argued that these changes were factored into the foreign and security policies of individual states.

As regards the meaning attributed to individual components of the concept of balance of power, Leifer remained somewhat ambiguous. For instance, all that he would generally say on 'balance' was that he did not necessarily take this concept to imply a situation of equipoise or equal power, as is also illustrated by his frequent usage of the term 'balance or distribution of power'.[11] There is also some ambiguity in his writing on 'power'. Defining the concept, Leifer did

suggest that power denoted capabilities.[12] However, when discussing either power or changes in the balance of power, he drew attention to a range of factors including quantitative and qualitative changes in military strength, present and future potential economic achievements, as well as developments in political-security relations, such as shifting political alignments and allegiances underpinned by fluid patterns of amity and enmity, particularly evolving ties with and among the major powers. In his own analyses of developments affecting the balance of power, then, Leifer took into account both material and non-material factors and examined power in the context of actors' interaction as well as the structures impinging on these interactions.

Leifer was not a dispassionate analyst of power transitions. Changes in the balance of power were central to his analysis and mattered to him, especially if they heralded potentially negative consequences for regional order. However, in reaching his own conclusions about changes in the balance of power as a situation, he relied not merely on relevant empirical developments, but also on the assessments of the leadership and other individuals within a region and their evolving perceptions on these matters. Not surprisingly, Leifer reached differentiated and different conclusions for seemingly similar circumstances about whether changes in the balance of power had occurred. Take for example his analysis of East Asia's regional balance of power after the enunciation of the Nixon Doctrine and US withdrawal from Vietnam, and his account of changes in the balance of power at the end of the Cold War.

The regional balance of power in East Asia: the early 1970s

It goes without saying that Leifer examined the international politics of East Asia in the context of the global balance of power that pitted the United States and the Soviet Union against one another. In the Cold War period, East Asian regional security against the expansion of communism rested above all on the network of bilateral alliances that the United States crafted and maintained with countries in the region in the form of a hub and spokes system. To many analysts, developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s seemed to bring about a change in the regional balance of power given the impending withdrawal from east of Suez by the British government, the enunciation of the Nixon Doctrine, and the coming relinquishment of Washington's position in Vietnam. Leifer took a more differentiated line, however. He agreed that Washington *believed* that 'proxies of the Soviet Union were attempting to revise the balance and distribution of power in East Asia to their global advantage.'[13] Yet he was cautious in the assessment that the impact of the developments at hand amounted to a change in the actual regional balance of power. Despite the Nixon Doctrine, he argued, Washington continued to be militarily involved in Asia (including in the form of secret wars waged in Laos and Cambodia). Moreover, China had entered into a strategic alignment with the United States. Not even when Communist forces won victories in Cambodia, South Vietnam and Laos did Leifer see a major change in

the regional balance of power as having taken place. In his view, there was no monolithic Communist bloc given the tensions between China and Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge and Hanoi.[14] Yet he readily conceded that attempts to change the regional balance of power were still under way even in the 1980s, particularly as regards Indochina. As he spelled out the issue, 'the only change in the Indochina problem during the two phases of the Cold War was which particular major adversary required containing, not the stake involved – namely, the prospect of an adverse regional dominance with global consequences.'[15] Importantly, if in his view the balance of power ultimately did not undergo dramatic revision in the Cold War era, Leifer suggested that the same was not true for the post-Cold War period.

Changes in the regional balance of power after the Cold War

Examining the regional balance of power in the 1990s, Leifer argued in no uncertain terms that the end of Cold War had brought about 'the disturbing emergence of a new distribution of power to the apparent advantage of China'.[16] Indeed, for Leifer China was 'a rising and potentially dominant regional power'.[17] As he saw it, the change in the regional balance of power had a number of causes. One was that 'China is improving its military capabilities in an environment devoid of the constraints imposed by a Cold War balance of power'.[18] Another was the partial strategic withdrawal from Philippine bases by the United States. Still another was to him the effect in East Asia of the end of the Cold War, particularly the removal of direct threats to China formerly posed above all by the Soviet Union. Also relevant was the ending of the tacit China–ASEAN alliance over confronting Vietnam in Cambodia.

The revision of 'the balance or distribution of power… to the decided strategic advantage of China' mattered to Leifer because Beijing had 'long cast a political shadow over the region'.[19] Leifer was concerned above all about Beijing's 'steely assertiveness' in the prosecution of irredentist claims in the South China Sea. In his view, it was only the limitations in the sustained projection of military power that still constrained China's freedom 'to engage in a full-bloodied assertiveness'.[20] If these claims were realized, he noted, 'China would effectively encompass the maritime heart of South-east Asia, with disturbing implications for ASEAN.'[21]

Clearly, Leifer's analysis of the post-Cold War change in the regional balance of power is not attributable to a simple assessment of changes in material capabilities. This is underlined by his summary of the factors underlying regional strategic change in East Asia in the early 1990s.[22] According to Leifer, the United States had lost the will to uphold the regional balance of power, Russia no longer counted militarily, and Japan was viewed as a sleeping giant best left alone. The key factor, however, was the re-emergence of China as a major regional power. This assessment was based not least on the concerns about China communicated to him by decision-makers in Southeast Asia and perhaps

elsewhere. Leifer was, of course, not alone in making this argument and emphasizing the attendant threat particularly as regards developments in the South China Sea.[23] However, as Emmers noted, the 'balance of power perspective … exaggerates the potential danger resulting from emerging hegemons'.[24] It is noteworthy in this respect that Leifer never re-visited his position on China, notwithstanding writings on American unipolarity, studies on the massive socio-economic challenges afflicting China and the difficulties associated with military modernization, as well as research on China's grand strategy and its foreign policy outlook.[25] This diverse body of literature suggested that China would for the foreseeable future remain a country beset with enormous challenges relating to development and reform. Also, it suggested that Beijing's foreign policy and presence within Southeast Asia could be more benign than Leifer believed. It is not clear what Leifer would now make either of current analyses of China as a status quo power or of recent sea changes in China–Southeast Asia relations,[26] illustrated for example by China's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2003.

It would appear that Leifer's assessment of the (potential) consequences of the posited change in the balance of power were accompanied by particular words of warning because ASEAN continued to embrace the same model of security in the post-Cold War period as it had done in the Cold War. That model of security addressed conflict avoidance and conflict management.[27] However, the model did not address the 'problem of power', and it failed to make practical provision for addressing 'the role of force in conflict and in its resolution'.[28] As Leifer pointed out time and again, there was no commitment within ASEAN ranks to common defence. Only at the level of individual states had ASEAN countries opted for balance-of-power arrangements, with four of the five original members at one stage relying on external countervailing power (as illustrated by the 1951 Mutual Security Pact between Manila and Washington, the 1954 Manila Pact, the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement and the revised Malaysian Defence Agreement from 1963, to which both Malaysia and Singapore were party). However, ASEAN itself did not come to share the need to develop countervailing power within the grouping. To Indonesia as ASEAN's *primus inter pares*, for instance, this was inimical given Jakarta's declared support for non-alignment and its repudiation of balance-of-power practices. In any case, as Leifer made clear throughout, ASEAN members have also tended to see their regional partners as potential adversaries. It was not least in view of bilateral tensions and divisions in strategic perspective that ASEAN had not reached agreement, 'specifically, over whether or not it should manage the regional balance or distribution of power on an exclusive basis'.[29] To be sure, Leifer did regard ASEAN as a security organization.[30] But, carefully qualifying his argument, he only ever described ASEAN as an intramural collective security organization in the limited sense of member states sharing a sense of indivisibility of their security as in a traditional collective security vehicle. What was also shared was the perception of the significance of internal threats to the survival of ruling governments. For

Leifer, however, this meant that 'ASEAN was not organized to deal with problems of power in an ungoverned world'.[31] Consequently, as Leifer added, ASEAN's operational security doctrine 'has depended on a supporting pattern of power in which the United States has played the critical balancing role'.[32]

Leifer's analysis of the balance or distribution of power treated as relevant a number of factors beyond the development and amassing of material capabilities. At the same time, his analysis of change to the existing distribution of power clearly reflected apprehensions concerning the political-security and military implications of China's rapid and successful economic modernization and renewal, which today might no longer be shared in full even within Southeast Asia. Leifer's cautionary words about the implications of a change in the balance of power are also tied to his analysis of ASEAN. To place these in perspective three questions will be addressed in the next section. First, given what he had to say on the balance of power, what is Michael Leifer's home within IR theory? Second, to what extent is his position on the balance of power a normative one? Third, what kind of practices does he associate with the balance of power?

Leifer, the balance of power and the English School

The context for the development of Michael Leifer's theoretical thoughts was in many ways provided by the London School of Economics. Leifer wrote his doctoral thesis with Elie Kedourie in the late 1950s on Zionism and Palestine in British opinion and policy and from the late 1960s onwards worked for more than three decades in the School's Department of International Relations. This is not the place to attempt tracing in detail in the form of a history of ideas how influential individual scholars such as Kedourie or Leifer's colleagues, including Hedley Bull, were for the development of his thought. It suffices to note that he seems to have shared with Kedourie an interest in whether after independence the new states would be able to rise above a romantic nationalism to focus on economic development for the benefit of their citizens. Equally, it is obvious from his work that he was able, and probably felt obliged, to engage with key figures of the English School. Indeed, for a while he himself taught Structure of International Society, the IR Department's introductory course to International Relations. From today's perspective, it is, of course, interesting that Professor Leifer was not explicit about his own theoretical approach, at least in the sense that he chose not to assume a specific label in his published work. But the very idea that he should have done so might not have appeared so obvious to him. After all, his theoretical interests were wide-ranging, and he was at least as much a political theorist as someone committed to International Relations. In many ways, he would also appear to have seen himself doing foreign policy analysis rather than adding to international theory (as discussed in the next section). Second, blunt theory-driven analysis, which would require 'theoretically coming out' and formulating hypotheses, so some of his former colleagues suggest, was for Leifer an exercise in 'intellectual masturbation', from which he preferred to

abstain. Nevertheless, Leifer was sufficiently interested to take note of such efforts from whatever perspective. More often than not, however, he seems to have viewed with a measure of bemusement and suspicion, if not at times a sense of frustration, attempts to apply to the study of the international politics of Southeast Asia works building on what to him were trendy theoretical approaches. Such attempts all too often resulted only in what – to him – amounted at best to skewed analyses and inappropriate or flawed conclusions. Maybe it was in testament to his feelings about these matters that he considered it apposite, if not necessary, to intervene on at least three occasions in discussions on IR theory and Southeast Asia. For example, he took issue with the idea of applying functionalism to the study of ASEAN.[33] After the end of the Cold War, he sounded a cautionary note in response to the case outlined in writings on 'common security'.[34] And in the mid-1990s, he described as 'the height of intellectual naivety' the argument of those whom he saw as suggesting that the dialogical encounters at governmental level as part of the processes of the ASEAN Regional Forum justified notions of a new paradigm of international relations.[35]

A standard feature of these intermittent interventions in IR theory debates was the emphasis Leifer placed on the basic point that Southeast Asia's international relations were neither unique nor dissociable from the context of great power relations and realpolitik considerations of its resident states. Leifer considered it fully appropriate to draw on insights into international politics that emphasized the role of the major powers, the question of power and the significance of the balance of power. In other words, to make sense of the international, Leifer drew on ideas and concepts that we associate with the English School and perhaps most readily so with the pluralist perspective within this approach. However, if the international relations of Southeast Asia could in Leifer's opinion not be understood without reference to the great powers and the balance of power, the foreign policies of individual countries of the region could similarly in his view not be understood without reference to their history, their experiences with and reaction to colonialism, their geopolitical predicaments, and their domestic politics and civil–military relations. Notably, to understand the foreign policy of individual states Leifer also took an interest in the biographies of key political players, their thoughts, ambitions and idiosyncrasies. For Leifer's purposes, then, insights about international society in themselves were insufficient if the objective was to understand the international relations of Southeast Asia. Still, when it came to identifying the most important institution within international society, Leifer focused unswervingly on the balance of power.

The balance of power as the key institution of international society

Leifer would seem to have accepted the point of view that institutions other than the balance of power also serve to maintain international and regional order.

However, there is little doubt that for him the balance of power was the most important institution, more important than for instance international law or diplomacy. As he put it in the context of his analysis of Singapore's foreign policy, '[t]o the extent that International Law, with all of its shortcomings, is viewed as a supporting pillar of the independence of the Republic [of Singapore], then it serves as an instrument of the balance of power in its traditional function of upholding the independence of all states.'[36] From his perspective, therefore, international law was an auxiliary or dependent institution that was inadequate to uphold the independence of states. Not surprisingly, Leifer had little time for the advocates (as opposed to the analysts) of the so-called 'ASEAN way'.[37]

Leifer was similarly sceptical about the role of diplomacy in international society. Discussing the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Leifer invoked the aphorism of 'bricks without straw' to highlight the uncertain effects of the dialogical–diplomatic encounters taking place. Nevertheless, for Leifer the ARF originally served two purposes. One was to promote co-operative security in the sense that the objective was to improve the climate in which relations among states in the Asia Pacific could develop. The other was to facilitate a stable balance of power. To the extent that the ARF built on diplomacy, however, Leifer did not see it as being able to ensure the maintenance of regional order. As Leifer argued: 'The ARF … can be seen as an imperfect diplomatic instrument for achieving regional security goals in that it seeks to address the problem of power which arises from the anarchical nature of international society without provision for either collective defense or conventional collective security.'[38]

This is not to say that Leifer did not recognize the importance of the balance of power factor in the context of the establishment of the ARF. But he did maintain that 'the prerequisite for a successful ARF may well be the prior existence of a stable balance of power'.[39] One could infer from his work that Leifer believed that the balance of power was ultimately left for the United States to uphold because only Washington would be able to deter a country such as China from disturbing regional order in Southeast and East Asia. However, as noted, Leifer seems to have thought that Washington's regional role could not necessarily be taken for granted. In such circumstances, diplomacy, unlike the balance of power, was insufficient to provide a stable order and maintain the independence of states.

A normative commitment to the balance of power

Bearing in mind the totality of his writings, few ideas probably mattered more to Leifer than the preservation of a system of independent states as well as freedom from malign forms of hegemony. This was for Leifer a normative position. Indeed, Leifer's normative commitment to international society is detectable throughout his work, including his post-Cold War writings. He was convinced that China had ambitions to become the region's primary or hegemonic power, and he intimated that in this capacity it might not behave like a good regional

citizen but opt for military domination, with adverse consequences for the security and independence of regional states. In illustrating his argument, Leifer cited 'informed sources' who saw the decision to seize Mischief Reef as having been made at the highest levels of China's Communist Party.[40] Indeed, he regarded China's later concession in relation to the South China Sea as having been 'one of form only'.[41] Given his normative perspective, Leifer's verdict on the ARF was blunt. As he formulated it, '[a]ny expectation that the ARF itself might fulfil the role of balance of power by non-military means were dashed by China's rigid and adamant adherence to its irredentist agenda in the South China Sea.'[42] He even considered it to be a 'category mistake' to ask whether the ARF was capable of solving problems and conflicts such as those dividing China and ASEAN countries.[43]

For Leifer, the rise of China as a seemingly dissatisfied country probably evoked disturbing historical memories. He recognized that a balance of power factor permeated the establishment of the ARF, but regarded this diplomatic meeting place as inadequate to deal with China if the latter were to pursue its assumed military designs. Problems associated with a particular balance or distribution of power, which might give rise to the use of force, could not, he said, be altered through diplomacy alone. This, no doubt, was for Leifer a lesson that history had unambiguously taught. Given his normative commitment to the balance of power, it is not surprising that he disagreed fairly vehemently, especially in the mid-1990s, with the attempts by some scholars to discredit the concept as policy. He rejected point-blank, for instance, the argument that the balance of power was 'a mechanical contrivance of European provenance which is not suitable for regional circumstances'.[44] As he saw it, 'ASEAN's practice has contained an evident dimension of balance of power from the outset.'[45] This was a reference to the formation of ASEAN in *post-konfrontasi* Southeast Asia, as seen in particular from the perspective of Indonesia's closest neighbours. Leifer moreover rejected the view that 'indulgence in the balance of power would be a self-affliction best confined to the dust-bin of history along with colonialism because it would provoke confrontation and not facilitate reconciliation'.[46] There was no inevitability about this for Leifer, and he may have thought that overall the track record of the balance of power in hindering undue dominance and upholding the independence of states was fairly respectable. Although he was thus normatively committed to the balance of power as an institution to safeguard international society and the independence of states, it would be stretching the point if one said that he was, therefore, a sponsor of adversarial balance of power practices whenever a country exhibits hegemonic potential. His distinction between Hobbesian and Grotian forms of the balance of power testifies to this.

The balance of power: Hobbesian and (neo-) Grotian arrangements

Although the point has not always been noted, Leifer distinguished between a conventional or adversarial balance of power tradition associated with realism

and an 'associative' or 'Grotian' balance of power tradition.[47] In other words, although it is the case that Leifer generally linked the balance of power with a countervailing political–military strategy to prevent undue dominance by any one state, he did not limit his understanding of balance of power practices to the formation of military alliances, collective security mechanism or unilateral defense force modernization. This is illustrated by his explicit mention of the Concert Arrangement in the early nineteenth century as one relevant example of a multilateral institution that would serve to engage and restrain a past and/or potential hegemon. Even though he was sceptical about its prospects in this regard, the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum was to him another attempt to promote a balance of power practice, in this case to prevent Chinese hegemony.

Consequently, it seems reasonable to argue that Leifer actually regarded it to be an empirical question whether Grotian-style or Hobbesian-style institutions meant to uphold the balance of power were most appropriate in dealing with hegemonic ambitions. Leifer clearly thought that where 'associative' balance of power arrangements could not necessarily be expected to prevent the rise of a hegemonic power, other countervailing balance of power arrangements might be required. In view of this, to assert or imply that Leifer a priori advocated countervailing balance of power practices in the event of changes in the balance of power seems unpersuasive. It was only in view of the absence of an alliance or collective security organization *in the context* of China's 'steely assertiveness' that he hinted at the importance of a sustained and viable American military presence, the alliance between the United States and Japan, and other bilateral security and defence arrangements between sub-regional states and Washington. Having discussed Leifer's intellectual and normative position according to which the balance of power is crucial for the independence of states, the chapter now moves on to explore how he employed the concept of balance of power in his capacity as an analyst of the foreign policies of individual Southeast Asian states.

The balance of power factor in foreign policy

Michael Leifer was an expert foreign policy analyst. This was well recognized in public even by senior government representatives from within Southeast Asia.[48] As a foreign policy analyst, it was one of Leifer's main achievements to demonstrate the significance of the balance of power factor (understood as a political motive) in the making of foreign policy in Southeast Asia, notwithstanding the widespread rhetorical attachment of many regional governments to ideas of neutrality and non-alignment and attendant political discourses. For Leifer, such official rhetoric was, of course, politically astute and understandable given Southeast Asia's colonial history, its relations with the great powers, and the many unresolved bilateral conflicts and fears about likely sub-regional or regional predators. But he refused to be taken in by attendant discourses. Indeed, as he saw it, the rhetoric clouded the actual key motivations

underpinning foreign policy, and he firmly believed that in view of the challenges to survival and the independence of regional countries, balance of power considerations were a major motive informing the formulation of their foreign policy. Although he touched on the significance of balance of power considerations in the foreign policy of all Southeast Asian states, Leifer's main published foreign policy titles in this regard focused on three countries: Cambodia, Indonesia and Singapore. However, the remainder of this section will only briefly map out some of the arguments Leifer offered when highlighting the balance of power factor in relation to Cambodia and Singapore.

Cambodia

In his 1967 study of Cambodian foreign policy Leifer examines in great detail Prince Norodom Sihanouk's pursuit of 'neutrality' as a security strategy following independence. The main objective, as Leifer put it, was that 'Prince Sihanouk sought to use the opposing powers to establish a political equilibrium that would safeguard Cambodia's territorial and national integrity.'[49] Achieving a political balance among the Communist and the Western 'blocs' was considered necessary by Sihanouk due to perceived predatory ambitions on the part of Cambodia's two neighbours: Thailand and Vietnam (then conceived both as an independent South Vietnam and a possible reunified Vietnam at some point in the future). Sihanouk's strategy was to develop good relations with both the United States and China primarily with a view to making these powers keep their respective allies in check. A further rationale for pursuing this strategy of building good relations with Washington and Beijing was that Sihanouk was also keen to demonstrate that both the Western and the Communist camps threatened Cambodia so as to ensure that domestic divisions based on ideological attachments, which might conceivably be exploited by its neighbours and their backers (as happened in Laos), could be stunted before they would prove inimical to national consensus. As Leifer argued, Sihanouk was successful in pursuing this strategy in so far as he achieved at least for a while a position of 'carefully balanced non-alignment'.[50] In the event, however, maintaining the balance between West and East over time proved difficult, not least due to what Leifer argued amounted on Cambodia's part to hypersensitivity to shifts in the balance of power in Southeast Asia, as expressed above all in developments in Laos and South Vietnam in the early 1960s.[51]

As a consequence of these perceived shifts, so Leifer suggests, Sihanouk allowed diplomatic relations with the United States to rupture while he developed increasingly close ties with Beijing. The reason for the former was above all Sihanouk's conviction that 'the drift of events could not be controlled by the United States'.[52] Notwithstanding the events in South Vietnam, Sihanouk was more concerned about Hanoi than he was about Saigon, irrespective of the latter's much more threatening public rhetoric vis-à-vis Phnom Penh, as he believed that it was above all the Communist regime that embodied the territorial

expansionism of Cambodia's neighbour. Relations with China thus assumed critical importance. As Leifer formulated it, 'Sihanouk viewed China as the only power capable of restraining the traditional expansion of the Vietnamese.'[53] Moving closer to China entailed balance of power considerations that were never explicitly articulated in formal policy, but preoccupied Sihanouk and shaped Cambodian foreign policy at the time. Moreover, adjusting Cambodia's policy of 'neutrality' in this way also constituted a further challenge. As Leifer carefully summarized the thinking underpinning Sihanouk's stance vis-à-vis China, '[i]f Cambodia was to survive, it had to demonstrate that it was more useful to the interests of China to seek the preservation of Cambodia than to promote its disintegration.'[54] At the same time, it also had to avoid Cambodia becoming a Chinese satellite state as a consequence of its balance of power strategy towards Vietnam.

Singapore

The balance of power factor is in many ways also at the heart of Leifer's analysis of Singapore's foreign policy.[55] This work is particularly interesting in the way it combines a perceptive analysis of Singapore's vulnerability with an incisive account of the multiplicity of avenues and methods its leaders have chosen to ensure the country's survival, security and prosperity. As regards its vulnerability, Leifer pointed to Singapore's geographical locus, historical ties of suspicion and enmity with its immediate neighbours, as well as its dependence on resources and social capital. As he also appreciated, Singapore's vulnerability has over time been further accentuated by actual and potential strategic changes. Recently, internal developments in neighbouring countries, such as the weakening of state capacity, have added to Singapore's continued apprehensions.

Leifer showed that Singapore's way of dealing with its vulnerability and the challenge and prospect of constant change that is potentially threatening its security and independence at both the sub-regional and wider regional level has involved finding and employing a variety of ways of compensating for and reshaping to advantage a regional distribution of power. As he put it: 'It naturally includes defence cooperation but does not exclude liberal internationalism in economic policy or engaging in multilateral forms of cooperative security arrangements which lack a military dimension.'[56] All-round development of the US–Singapore relationship has been a key platform of implementing Singapore's balance of power policy. Notwithstanding the deepening security partnership with Washington, Leifer's argument was that for Singapore the balance of power as a policy has not been about forging military alliances along the lines of nineteenth century European practice. Instead, the promotion of multilateral institutions has been a key aspect of Singapore's balance of power policy. Its sponsorship of the ARF is a key example in this regard, and similar arguments can be advanced for the roles of ASEAN and ASEM (Asia–Europe Meeting). According to Leifer, Singapore's 'ideal objective has been to encourage a

regional pattern of multilateral power engagement capable of neutralizing potentially hostile forces, especially those geographically most proximate to the Republic, through the medium of institutional co-operation'.[57] In sum, then, this section has served to demonstrate how Leifer saw the foreign policies of Southeast Asian leaders as being both intimately tied to perceived changes in the wider regional balance of power and underpinned by balance of power considerations even though the latter have for the most part not been made very explicit.

Conclusion

In the light of existing interpretations of his underlying theoretical framework, it has been the objective of this chapter to review the status of the balance of power in the writings of the late Professor Michael Leifer. Leifer distinguished two basic meanings of the balance of power: (1) as a situation, and (2) as a policy. The chapter also examined how Leifer analysed changes in the regional balance of power and the balance of power factor in the foreign and security policies of Southeast Asian states. It has demonstrated that Leifer's commitment to the balance of power – as a foundation of regional order – was in many ways a normative one. It has also argued that it would be inappropriate to view Leifer as an advocate of blunt adversarial measures to oppose undue dominance in international society. In principle, he appreciated the value of both associative and countervailing forms of the balance of power, even though he seemed to lean more towards the latter. Pointing this out might well have appealed to Professor Leifer because it would have put the spotlight not so much on any one theoretical approach, but instead on only one of the basic conceptual building blocks for what he was really most concerned with: a refined analysis of the politics and international relations of Southeast Asia.

Notes

1 Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 1989).
2 Michael Leifer, *ASEAN's Search for Regional Order* (Singapore : G. Brash for Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, 1987).
3 See Khong Yuen Foong, 'Making Bricks without Straw in Asia-Pacific', *The Pacific Review* 10 (2) 1997: 289–300 and Sorpong Peou, 'Realism and Constructivism in Southeast Asian Security Studies Today', *The Pacific Review* 15 (1) 2002: 119–38.
4 See Michael Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum: Extending ASEAN's Model of Regional Security* (Adelphi Paper No. 302, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996).
5 Khong, 'Making Bricks', p. 295, quoted from Leifer, *ASEAN Regional Forum*, p.57.
6 Khong, 'Making Bricks', p. 296.
7 Peou, 'Realism and Constructivism', p. 128.
8 For such differentiation see Ernst B. Haas, 'The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept, or Propaganda', *World Politics* 5 (4) 1953: 442–77.