

**Inter-Parliamentary Forum on Security Sector Governance (IPF-SSG)
in Southeast Asia**

**Explanatory Background Note
on the Role of Parliament in Defence Procurement in Singapore
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The study of defence procurement in Singapore suffers from a lack of clear information and therefore much of the information contained in this study is derived from open sources.

Defence procurement

Procurement in the Singapore Armed Forces is governed by the Singapore Armed Forces Act, which is the Act of Parliament that establishes the SAF and dictates its management. The SAF Act determines the composition of the Armed Forces Council, presided by the Minister for Defence and comprising the Permanent Secretary (Defence) as well as representatives from the SAF.

The key agency for defence procurement is the Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA), a statutory board that is set up by the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF). It is responsible for implementing defence technology plans, managing defence research and development, acquiring defence material and developing defence infrastructure for MINDEF. As the executive agent of MINDEF, DSTA's roles and functions are to:

- Acquire weapon systems for the SAF;
- Advise MINDEF on all defence science and technology matters;
- Manage defence research and development;
- Develop military infrastructure;
- Provide engineering and related services in defence areas; and,
- Promote and facilitate the development of defence science and technology in Singapore.

Procurement practices within MINDEF and DSTA follow organisational 'best practices', which are based on 'best practices' gleaned from a wide variety of sources. DSTA works with a number of international partners to develop pricing and costing models that are designed to ensure maximum efficiency in defence procurement programmes. In addition, DSTA accounts are subject to regular inspection by the Auditor-General's office in the Ministry of Finance. Where financial irregularities are found, these are then

referred to the Corrupt Practices Investigation Board and, where necessary, the international partners are prosecuted in the through the courts.

Procurement decisions are essentially an internal cycle – there is little or no public debate on specific procurement programmes. While there is parliamentary oversight in terms of budgeting (to be discussed later), this does not extend to the specifics of procurement programmes. There is also a distinct absence of civil society involvement in the procurement cycle.

Role of parliament

As with the Whitehall model, defence expenditures are controlled by the parliament. The Minister of Defence is required to submit an annual budget to the parliamentary debate in government spending for approval. Budgetary oversight is provided by the Auditor-General's office in the Ministry of Finance (MOF).

In 1987, the ruling People's Action Party agreed to the establishment of a Parliamentary Committee to review military spending and provide a forum for public debate on defence issues. Prior to that, the government had closely monitored the press and discouraged the publication of articles critical of the government's defence policies on the pretext that national security was the prerogative of the small number of government officials responsible for policy-making and budget decisions. The Committee's primary function is to review the decisions on defence issues and to advise the government about the public opinion concerning military spending. However, the committee lacks the power to change the government's defence policy or to amend the defence budget.

In any case, there is little capacity – especially in terms of expertise – for the Parliamentary Committee on Defence to deal with specifics within the defence procurement process. While there may be parliamentary debate over the amount of the defence budget, there have been no instances of specific queries over individual procurement programmes. The debate has tended to focus on the impact of defence expenditures, rather than the rationale or utility of specific procurements. This is unlikely to change for the near to medium-term future.

Characterising Defence Procurement in Singapore

The absence of civil society and governmental oversight into defence procurement notwithstanding, defence procurement in Singapore has been remarkably rational, at least in terms of equating specific procurement programmes with the mission statement of the SAF. Put simply, there has been a striking correlation between the stated mission objectives of the SAF and the procurement programmes it has put in place, even if the numbers within specific programmes may raise questions.