Small-State Diplomacy: ASEAN and Strategic Balance: summary

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Singapore became independent in 1965 without security or a hinterland and placed its survival inside a regional framework when its foreign minister Rajaratnam signed the Bangkok Declaration that founded ASEAN in 1967. Its diplomacy follows a doctrine of small-state realism that combines deterrence, defence arrangements with outside powers, a commitment to international law and coalitions of small states such as the Forum of Small States and the Global Governance Group. Trade agreements, from the bilateral deals of 2001 to 2004 through the CPTPP and RCEP to the first digital economy agreements, together with tax treaties covering around 100 jurisdictions, turned economic diplomacy into a source of market access for the city's firms. Singapore describes its policy as one of consistency on principles, a stance that allowed it to balance between the United States and China while imposing its own sanctions on Russia in March 2022. For the financial centre, this diplomacy provides predictability, market access, regulatory and tax cooperation and the reputation of a trustworthy host, which distinguishes Singapore from Geneva's formal neutrality and from Hong Kong's lack of an independent foreign policy.

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