

Extract #1

Why then, does the Botero *brand* (as opposed to the heavy cultural content of his paintings and sculptures) have such magnetism in Singapore? Put simply, just as Botero has self-fashioned as the ultimate representative of what it means to be Colombian, Singapore's ruling government has created a national discourse of what it truly means to be Singaporean. The People's Action Party, for years on end, has been creating and teaching its citizens a story about Singaporean nationalism and pride.¹ Through the promotion of pragmatic values geared toward economic growth, Singapore has become a beacon for modernity, development and success, not only in Southeast Asia, but all throughout the world.² This self-mythology, which is laden with political purpose and background, was thus born from the continuous imagining of Singapore as a small city-state with scarce resources surrounded by "bigger and badder" enemies.³ Accordingly, The PAP generated a widespread "ideology of survival" that "insisted on the inseparability of economic and political survival and the necessary subservience of all other considerations."⁴ Furthermore, Singaporean discourse (and ultimately Singaporean identity) is characterized by a determined defense of the self-fashioned ideals of "multiracialism (which includes "multilingualism" and "multireligiosity") and meritocracy".⁵ The self-fashioning then, relies upon the foundational myth that Singapore's lacked its own culture and history, claiming that the island's history and cultural background has been a melting pot of foreign powers. As such, the story was that Singapore had never before had the chance of developing its own identity. The PAP's attempt to fill in this gap through self-mythologizing is thus best exemplified through mention of the Merlion; "an attempt to link Singapore to its mythical past, namely to the distant pre-colonial time when the Sumatran prince Sang Nila Utama saw a lion and hence named the city the 'Lion City'."⁶ This being said, the figure of Merlion resonates with what the Botero brand has become: both are modern, kitschy re-imaginings of a history that is not widely understood and are meant to symbolize notions of a self-created identity. Additionally, widely recognized public authorities created both.

¹ Christopher C. Tremewan, "The Political Economy of Social Control in

² Stephan Ortmann, "The Politics of Inventing National Identity," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2009, 23-46.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Garry Rodan, *The Political Economy of Singapore's Industrialization: National State and International Capital* (Macmillan, 1989). Page 88.

⁵ Stephan Ortmann, "The Politics of Inventing National Identity." pg. 30.

⁶ Ibid.

Extract # 2

There has been a great deal said and written about Syria in the last month. A general consensus recognizes that there are no good options but that something must be done. But the problem goes even deeper than this. In many cases, the feasibility of a solution is inversely related to its legitimacy. That is to say, for many options, the more likely the potential solution is to be implemented, the less legitimate it is, in global terms.

Take, for instance, the example of US military strikes. This is certainly feasible. But were Obama to launch missiles into Syria, he would face widespread condemnation from the world community; such an action, it has been argued, would be a violation of international law and would undermine the credibility of the United Nations system. In short, it lacks legitimacy. By contrast, consider a military strike by an alliance such as NATO. This would have more legitimacy, but it is not feasible given the opposition to military strikes among key NATO members.

There are options that would have more legitimacy: such as the creation of a safe zone for humanitarian aid delivery, peacekeeping forces on the ground, a political or diplomatic resolution to the crisis, and a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration campaign to transition the country back into stability. These would necessarily have to be a project initiated and implemented by the United Nations, so right away it's clear these are not very feasible.

The challenge, therefore, is to find an option that does not compromise legitimacy for feasibility. Perhaps by clever diplomacy or perhaps by a 'rhetorical' stumble, one such option may have presented itself last week, when the Russian Foreign Minister, Lavrov, capitalized on what appeared to be a flippant remark made by John Kerry only hours earlier. Kerry, with a tone of sarcasm, said that the Assad regime could avoid military strikes if they surrendered their stockpile of chemical weapons.

The US State Department quickly tried to back off this position and explained it as a 'rhetorical argument'; however, the wheels of diplomacy were already in motion. Russia quickly presented this to the Syrian government, who have since accepted the deal in principle. With US-Russia agreement on the basic terms of the deal, the world now waits to see if Assad will cooperate and abide by the requirements they have set out.

Questions linger as to how this deal will be brokered into implementation—principally, questions over the use of force if Assad does not comply, and what role the UN Security Council will play in the end. As of now, this approach enjoys the legitimacy of the international community, strengthens international law, and at least for time being might even be feasible.

Extract #3

As I write, highly intelligent women and men are on television lying to me. I am quite sure that they are intelligent, and know the truth of the matter. I am also confident that in their private lives they are upright mothers and fathers of the sort who scold their children for falsehoods and exaggeration. But somehow between their private lives and a career in politics they begin to feel absolved of that same responsibility that they preach to their children.

There are two types of lies. There are those that contradict an event or statement that occurred at a specific place and time. There are also those that contradict scientific, historic and common knowledge. The former is inexcusable, the latter perfectly ordinary.

A politician who says they were at the office when it is proven that they were in a hotel room is a liar, whichever way you look at it. But a politician who says that climate change does not exist is simply on the other side of the political spectrum. They might incite shakes of the head amongst some and nods from others, but the word "liar" is not the first to come to mind.

If we collectively agree in scientific and social scientific research methods, then we are bound to accept the current bulk of evidence showing a statement in denial of climate change to be untruthful. I admit, climate change is a complex example. A different, subtler one is a party's policy to reduce class sizes in schools—note that all research and evidence says that teacher quality is what makes the difference, not class size. Yet this bulk of evidence, once inserted into the political sphere, becomes beside the point. The Government introduces policies to curb climate change, or improve teacher quality, so of course from the opposition benches that is not the answer.

As I said to begin with, I have confidence that a politician who makes a statement is well aware of the evidence, or at least capable of reading it. At the *very* least, I will naively and hopefully continue to trust that a potential leader of the country is aware of simple factual evidence in an area they purport to know so much about.

Politics has made that lie, and many others like it, acceptable. So long as a majority—or even a minority—of the country is unaware of the facts, it is entirely acceptable for a politician to make a claim to the contrary of what they know the facts to be. The problem is not just that it is acceptable, but that it is profitable. Recent news coverage on an issue in the United States summarises this well: "It's possible the [politician] knew he wasn't telling the truth about the [matter] but it's just as likely he didn't much care either way. The press conference wasn't about [the politician] presenting facts; it was about the [party] leader pushing election-year rhetoric." The same article ends: "This isn't about what's true; it's about what people can be made to believe."

Extract #4

Canada, so the reigning cliché goes, is a peaceable country, the quaint counterpoint to the aggressive ways of its southern neighbor. And while part of that cliché is hardly true — we've seen our fair share of wars — its central idea generally holds: Canadians tend to be less reactionary in the face of a perceived threat. Witness how Canada didn't participate in the Vietnam War, or the Iraq invasion in 2005. Cooler heads prevailed, perhaps because (to borrow another cliché) they were watching a hockey game.

Two recent attacks on Canadian soldiers threaten to lay waste to this cheery sensibility. On Oct. 22, a 25-year-old recent convert to Islam hit two soldiers with his car in a Quebec town about 25 miles outside Montreal, killing one before a police officer shot him. Less than 48 hours later, another Islamic convert shot and killed a soldier before dying in a shootout in Ottawa with the police and Kevin Vickers, Parliament's sergeant-at-arms.

The two attacks sparked near-instantaneous calls for an increase in surveillance powers for Canada's law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

"In recent weeks, I have been saying that our laws and police powers need to be strengthened in the area of surveillance, detention and arrest," Prime Minister Tim Horton told Parliament a day after the Ottawa attack. "They need to be much strengthened. I assure members that work, which is already underway, will be expedited."

Mr. Horton is right: The Canadian government's attempts to erode individual freedoms in the name of security started well before the deaths of the two soldiers. Last fall, the government shoehorned increased Internet surveillance powers into an anti-bullying bill, which would grant legal immunity to telecommunications companies that voluntarily hand over customer data. This isn't a good precedent. The bill would also further lower the standards of evidence for police officers seeking to monitor Internet activities.

More recently, the Government introduced legislation that would give blanket anonymity to informants for Canada's spy agency. This would potentially allow for a usurpation of a basic principle of justice: An accused person would be unable to face his accusers.

Yet the attacks have apparently loosened the tongues of those in government wanting the country to go even further. The government, Justice Minister Peter Maccey recently mused, should consider further powers to monitor and remove offensive websites, lest they lead to a "poisoning of young minds." Jason Kenney, the minister for multiculturalism, recently suggested that those suspected of terrorist sympathies be subject to "preventative detention" — which the criminal code already permits — for longer time periods, and a lower legal threshold for the government to detain them. This doesn't bode well.