

**TRANSCRIPT OF A SPEECH MADE BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR.**  
**LEE KUAN YEW, AT A SEMINAR ON “INTERNATIONAL**  
**RELATIONS”, HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**  
**ON 9TH OCTOBER, 1966.**

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

There are two things which we must always keep clearly in mind whenever we talk about the foreign policy of a particular country.

First, you must remember that the foreign policy which it pursues at any one time is designed primarily for the long-term national interests of a group of people organised into a nation. And second, the policy is designed for the specific and special interests of the type of regime or the type of political leadership that is for the time being in charge of the destiny of that country.

If you confuse one for the other, then you will make grave misjudgements as to what are likely to be the power situations in various parts of the world from time to time.

This particular aspect is very pertinent to us.

There are certain aspects of policy which any Indonesian Government must pursue regardless of its particular ideological or political flavour. You can change governments but there are certain basic compulsions of a people grouped together as to the things they want to do. But when you change governments, there are certain objectives which a previous regime pursued which are abandoned as unprofitable.

This is true wherever you go. You can choose any example you like. Ghana, Nigeria: you can have a coup; you can knock out a regime; but certain basic compulsions remain.

Whether you are Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in charge of 50 million Nigerians of different ethnic and religious groupings or whether you are General Ironsi or Lieutenant-Colonel Gowon, you are faced with a particular problem.

And, if that nation remains in that particular form, then there are certain inevitable compulsions it must urge its government towards.

But, of course, the ideological and the political flavour can be immediately thrown away. That is just happening in Ghana. The Brigadier who represents

the present Ghanaian regime talks, acts and pursues policies which would have dismayed his predecessor.

What is the peculiar situation about us? And, in the last 15 months, I have had to re-scan all the various steps we took, not by way of post-mortem to find out where we went wrong for that is neither here nor there, but to discover what are the relevant factors that will determine our future in this part of the world.

First, why did we attempt Malaysia? Was it an impossible thing to have brought together into one national context, people of diverse racial, linguistic and cultural and religious origins? I do not think it was. I do not think -- and I never did think -- that race or ethnic affinity was a fundamental basis of any national unity. And perhaps, it is because I am the product of my generation.

I used to go to a club in London when I was a student because it provided good meals at a very low price and it was open to all students of Chinese origin from whichever part of the world they came. It was run from a Boxer Indemnity Fund: the British, out of the conscience of their past misdeeds, ran this little club. And I used to sit in this club and, after a while, you became adept at distinguishing them. They were all Chinese because that was fundamental. It was open to all Chinese. But you could tell from which part of the world they

came even before they spoke -- whether it was the West Indies, the Caribbean, from Mauritius, from South Africa, or from Malaya, Hong Kong or from China proper.

And, those of us who used to come from Singapore and from Malaya discovered, over the years, that there was more in common between us -- Chinese, Malays, Indians who came from Malaya and Singapore -- than between Chinese who came from all these other parts of the world.

This is crucial to the reason why my colleagues and I did what we did. If I believed all Chinese are brothers all over the world and that they are more brothers than they are with the Indians and the Malays, then we would never have attempted Malaysia.

But I want to qualify this with a very strong proviso: that if you insist on treating a person as a political liability on the basis of race, then eventually he must coalesce in self-defence.

In other words, the proposition that I have stated is not a universal truth meant for all time. You can create situations which you can reverse those processes.

I was enamoured of the information I once gleaned reading through the list of civil servants -- very senior civil servants -- who have now to opt whether or not they want to be Singapore citizens. For, if you are not a Singapore citizen and you are in very high position with access to secret papers, you can see them to your own government and we, the Singapore Government, cannot prosecute you for treason because you are not a subject! This never arose before because we were in a state of transition so it did not really matter. We thought we were going to be in Malaysia so we could resolve it. And now we have got a situation where the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs travels on a Malaysian Passport because he is a Malaysian. He was born in Penang. And he can take all the files in the Foreign Ministry and go to Kuala Lumpur and say, "Here you are; make photostat copies. I will come back with more next week!" And we have tried to rationalise this.

## National Archives of Singapore

Then I discovered that a whole series of Chinese names were, in fact, people who had come to Singapore from other parts of the world, not even from Malaya. We have Chinese from Australia, from New Zealand, from South Africa. Obviously, in all these other places, they did not feel so happy. This place offered them a more congenial climate. They are accepted as part of the society; they fitted in. I never realised that I had them here.

If you begin to have this happen all around you, then a mutation in men's minds will take place. I leave that as a rider.

We are now presented with a segment of the Malaysian whole -- not an equal segment nor, in texture, of the same kind because the proportions are different.

But I believe, having gone through it with considerable care, that it is possible to nurture and inculcate the multi-racial tolerant outlook provided there are no extraneous forces which are let loose which will influence our internal situation and cause a reaction against these policies.

Why do I advocate these policies? Because I believe that is the policy that will lead to the maximum amount of happiness for the maximum number of people not only in Singapore but for a large number of others who live near us.

Leaving that aside, there are two other factors which we should always bear in mind when we talk about the foreign policy of Singapore.

There is something peculiar which we share with certain island-bases which have emerged as a result of European decolonization over the last 120 years. These are Malta, Cyprus, Gibraltar and a few others.

There was a reason why all of them were chosen as strategic points. It was not just geography; it was also a juxtaposition of power-interests in a particular region. So Malta was crucial in the 19th century and even as recently as the Second World War. But unfortunately for the Maltese, in the political texture of Cold War politics in Europe and the possibilities of the lines of conflict in another hot war in Europe, Malta no longer counts as a strategic point. In contrast, Cyprus still counts as a staging-post, and parts of Cyprus are held by the British in sovereignty for their base purposes.

So far as I can see into the foreseeable future, both the geographic and the socio-political factors make this part of the world a crucial point.

The other factor is the effect of human migration over the face of this world over the centuries.

It has been said -- particularly by the Australians who have made a great study of this -- that it is really a remarkable thing that it should have been Anglo-

Saxons from the other end of the world who went around and captured all the desirable parts of the South Pacific, and not the over-populated peoples from the Asian sub-continent -- either India or China -- who discovered these areas.

Because proximity of space and pressures of population cause people to migrate.

And this is perhaps, the most remarkable thing: that 400 years ago, the world was a very different place. There was no such thing as the United States of America peopled by Europeans of largely Anglo-Saxon stock and English-speaking; there was no such thing as Canada: you had buffaloes, Red Indians; there was no such thing as Australia: you had the Aborigines; there was no such thing as New Zealanders or South America -- in the shape that we understand it.

National Archives of Singapore



And, in 400 years, led largely by English-speaking Anglo-Saxons, the Caucasian peoples -- which means people ethnically from that particular part of the Eurasian steppes -- moved westwards, and occupied and populated whole continents. All this in the space of less than 500 years -- a remarkable thing. Man is supposed to have existed for a million years. The history of recorded civilization goes back some six or seven thousand years. And yet, in this very brief space of time, one particular group suddenly fanned out.

Why? How?

Are we safe in assuming that it was because of their technological skills, their break-through into the scientific store of knowledge and technical expertise which made it possible for them to do this and that they will always set the pattern of things? We must ask ourselves this. This is crucial.

## National Archives of Singapore

Will somebody else, some other ethnic group or combination of ethnic groups reverse this process? Because if that is going to happen, then obviously our foreign policies and our attitudes must be different. Mine may not be different because I have certain political and ideological basic points which cannot change: they are part of my thinking. But that does not mean that a whole population is saddled with my convictions.

And my answer to those questions is: I really do not know.

The future is not pre-destined. You have not got it all written out in a book where you can turn to and say, "What will happen in the 2000?". It depends upon what we do; what so many other people in other parts of the world do.

But I am quite convinced on one point: Man has migrated from the beginning of time and will migrate till the end of time. Geography also sometimes changes. Islands have emerged where there were no islands before, and towns like Telok Anson are slowly being washed away so that one day, there will be no town where there was one. By and large, short of the sun burning itself out, the world will be as we understand it. But the human beings, I am afraid, will not be.

National Archives of Singapore

For when we talk of the Anglo-Saxon, the Caucasian and so on, we failed to see what happens with the passage of time; that, in fact, the Englishman is very different from the Vikings to whom he fondly refers from time to time because Vikings are supposed to be desirable ethnic prototypes! And he is a very different person because I saw the Vikings in Scandinavia. And, in fact, I

discovered that they were not such large, stalwart men of great stature with blue eyes and blond hair. In fact, it is quite likely that because of diet problems and so on, they were fairly stocky and stoutly-built creatures.

The American, similarly, is quite different from the Australian.

But out of this, I give you three conclusions. First, nothing is pre-destined.

Nobody decided that the Second World War would be won by the Allies and definitely lost by the Germans, the Italians and the Japanese. And if you read these war memoirs, you know how close it often came to it ending the other side. And, if you talk to some of those who took part in the Pacific War, particularly on the other side when they are in their cups, you will know how close they thought they were to victory, too! This is the first point.

## National Archives of Singapore

The second is: whilst your geographic and natural resources and other factors are by and large unchanging, your human factor is capable of change and it does change -- with very important and significant consequences.

You can ask the anthropologists and they will say, "Well, it is social and cultural," and there will be some others who have the nagging doubt that perhaps

the whole thing is genetic, due to hereditary factors. But whatever it is, the human factor is the one factor that really makes a change in the sum total result. Because this factor commands the scientific and technical expertise -- your capacity for scientific and technical skills -- which makes it possible for you to do things to nature which otherwise you cannot.

That means for us the very real danger that in the same way as we see salvation through innovation -- with new skills, new techniques, new methods of seeking a livelihood -- in this type of situation, so others will consider us a threat. For, our very resourcefulness poses a challenge to the type of society which they believe should be there for all time. They have not figured this out: whether it is possible to re-create or bring back a past, idyllic society. Vaguely, minds go back to lost empires which were supposed to have typified and glorified the ability, the cultural creativeness of a group of people: the Majapahit and Sri

Vijaya empires.

National Archives of Singapore

Every group of people has this urge. And one of the problems that the African ethos faces is the inability to point to any relic in stone and monument which they can safely say, "We once upon a time built that or some ancestors built that" -- as you can in Asia. There is, in Asia, Angkor Wat, Borobudur.

There are none here or in Malaya. That does not trouble us, but it does trouble other people!

But, if you really go into it, then you find that, in fact, these were creations of completely different cultures. I am told on very high authority -- I have not gone into the history of it -- that it was really the Hindu culture and civilization that made these things possible.

The foreign policy of Singapore must ensure, regardless of the nature of the government it has from time to time, that this migrant community that brought in life, vitality, enterprise from many parts of the world should always find an oasis here whatever happens in the surrounding environment.

When you talk about foreign policy, and unless you are a big power, an inter-continental power like Russia, United States, China, you are really talking about your neighbours. Your neighbours are not your best friends, wherever you are.

Whether you are the USA with Mexico or with Canada. The Canadians are not the greatest admirers of the Americans. The Thais do not find the Cambodians the congenial and happy people we find them. But the Thais and the Vietnamese are great friends. But the Vietnamese and the Cambodians are not great friends. And the Burmese have not forgotten that not so very long ago, they were in occupation of large parts of Thailand, including some places very near Bangkok. The Thais have not forgotten that only about a century ago, they were in control of large parts of north Burma.

So, when you talk of foreign policy, whether you go to the United Nations or to Commonwealth conferences, at the end of the day, after all the huff and chaff is done, the chap produces a paper and says, "You know, that chap, that scoundrel, has been sending his troops and harassing my villagers. Will you support me in putting in this phrase into the communique?" We all do it -- so much so that I make a point now of not doing it just to be different!

And I would say this: that a foreign policy for Singapore must be one as to encourage first, the major powers in this world to find it -- if not in their interests to help us -- at least in their interests not to have us go worse. This is important. If you do not like me as I am, then just think of what a nasty business it could be if I am not what I am! This is the first point.

The second point is: we must always offer to the rest of the world a continuing interest in the type of society we project.

If we can identify ourselves with the mass of new nations that have emerged with their ideals and their ideas of what a new modern forward-looking nation of the 20th century should be, then the risk we run of being used as a pawn and destroyed is that much diminished. But, in the last resort, it is power which decides what happens and, therefore, it behoves us to ensure that we always have overwhelming power on our side. That is something which the Thais have learnt and that is why they were one of the few nations in Asia that managed to stall off European occupation for so long.

People want to be themselves. They do not necessarily start off as democrats or freedom-loving people on behalf of the Free World. The Thais want to be Thais. They want to be wealthy; they want to be prosperous -- as everybody else wants to be. And those who endanger the separate survival of Thailand they consider their enemies.

Similarly with us. We want to be ourselves. Those who want to thwart us and prevent us from being ourselves must necessarily be not our friends. And, therefore, we seek the maximum number of friends with the maximum capacity to uphold what our friends and ourselves have decided to uphold. That is the beginning and the end of any foreign policy for a situation like Singapore's.

We have no aspirations, no ambitions to exercise and influence -- in the sense of exercise of authority -- beyond persuasive moral authority on others. But it must be our constant endeavour to ensure first, the political climate in which the force which can be lent to us can be exercised.

Let me explain this.

If we did not have force on our side when we were under confrontation, then the end result would not have been a solution in which Asians found an Asian solution to Asian problems. It would have been the case of one Asian finding a solution for the other Asians' problems! But, there was a severe limitation in the way in which that force was deployed and exercised. It was unable to be used effectively without grave political consequences.



So you could have incursions into your territory: airdrops by paratroopers over Labis; saboteurs going into the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in Orchard Road and blowing it up; but nobody could go to Jakarta to plant a little cracker. You see? It was a very uneven and unequal exercise of power.

If the political climate had been different, and the governments at any one time in the countries in the world accepted the fact that this was an aggressor nation, then you could have served the other chap with 24 hours' notice to dismantle all their aggressive installations or they would be destroyed. And all the bases around us could have been destroyed in a matter of hour. Then, you and I could have gone to sleep very peacefully; there would have been no need for a Vigilante Corps, no need for all the sentries at all the power stations because the spring-boards from whence all this irritations came could have been wiped off in 24 hours. The political climate was such that all this was not possible without very grave international complications.

National Archives of Singapore

So, any foreign policy must achieve these two objectives. One is the right political climate. The other: power. For, you can have the best of political climates, but if the power to sustain your position is not there, then you must lose.

Out of that, you can sit back and calculate and re-calculate all the permutations and combinations that can arise in South and Southeast Asia by the turn of this century when you and I perhaps may not be here. But that does not mean that our people will not be here: they will be here. And it is our job to ensure that the widest range of options must be left open to them.

Life is a continuing process. There is no pre-destination. And, there are certain desirable objectives and targets which we seek to achieve. But if we are thwarted -- and we can be thwarted -- in the creation of a multi-racial society by others assiduously pursuing a contrary policy in order to prevent ours from ever coming to fruition, then other alternatives are inevitable -- which brings into train horrendous thoughts of the future.

And, on that note, I leave you.

---