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Transcript of an interview with  
Mr. Edward Heath, Leader of the  
British Conservative Party,  
recorded in the studios of  
Television Singapore, on 7.1.'70

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Mr. Wee Kim Wee: The Right Honourable Edward Heath, Leader  
of the British Conservative Party.

Mr. Heath, before we proceed with this  
interview I would like to congratulate you,  
and I am sure many Singaporeans will want me  
to congratulate you, on winning the 640-  
mile ocean classic from Sydney to Hobart  
in your 34-foot sloop, the Morning Cloud.

Mr. Edward Heath: Thank you very much indeed. We were  
naturally very pleased to do it and we had  
quite a good British success in all the  
different classes in the racing.

Wee: While you were in Sydney, Mr. Heath, I see  
that Mr. Gorton was the official starter  
of the race, and I take it that you have  
had a discussion with Mr. Gorton on  
questions of mutual interest.

Heath: Well, on this occasion I saw him after the  
race because he very kindly invited me for  
lunch with himself and his family in  
Canberra. But that was purely a social  
occasion. But of course I discussed the  
whole question of defence in this part of  
the world with him in the past on many  
occasions.

Wee: Did you find any shift in his stand on the subject of joint Commonwealth force or is the Australian Government still resolutely firm on the commitment to station troops in Singapore and Malaysia?

Heath: Well, you know, the Australian Government announced the decision to keep forces here after 1971, and as I understand it, that remains the Australian policy.

Wee: Mr. Heath, you have on several occasions stated your party's policy on the Labour Government's plan of the British pull-out east of Suez by the end of 1971. Do you mind spelling out once again your plan, for the benefit of Singaporeans, why your party feels a significant British presence here in this region is essential?

Heath: Not at all. Of course, I will be delighted to. This is one sphere, of course, in which the Conservative Party does differ completely from the Labour Government's proposals. They have decided that they would withdraw all British forces by the end of 1971. The last date for General Election in Britain is the 7th of May, 1971. So that is nine months almost before the date of withdrawal. So when we become the government, there will still be forces in Singapore-Malaysia as well as in the Persian Gulf. There won't therefore be any question of British forces having been withdrawn and British forces coming back. It will be a question that British forces are still here, and we as a Conservative Government will halt the withdrawal.

Well, now let me explain our thinking about this.

You see, it seems to us that great prosperity has I was here in 1961 which is nine years ago. developed in this area. / I was here for a fortnight

and I saw a great deal of the island during that time. I was back here in 1966 in January, that was four years ago. And on each occasion I've been through since, when I have been going to other places, I have seen the development going on apace. This morning I had the opportunity of flying all over the island in a helicopter. And I am immensely impressed with the real remarkable achievements which have been brought about in the island. And of course, I feel that we were able to make a contribution to these developments, and since independence you have been able to build on them in a very remarkable way.

Now, the basis for all of these is confidence in the future and peace and stability in the whole area. Malaysia is interested in this, Singapore is, Indonesia is, the Philippines are. And so we ought to be able and prepared to make a contribution towards peace and stability here. Our friends want us to. If of course, our friends didn't want us in the area and want us to get out, that will be quite different. But the Malaysian Government wants us to stay, the Singapore Government wants us to stay. The Indonesian Government has an equal interest in stability. They have now got on top of some of their economic problems. They want to see the same sort of progress and development and prosperity. So that is a very important reason.

The other reason is that we in Britain are a great trading nation. We live by our trade. We got no other means of getting our livelihood. And a great deal of our trade is with this area. We have a greater investment here, our firms are here. And so peace and progress and stability are in our own interests as well. And the fortunate thing is that your interests and our interests coincide. And that is the reason why I think that we should maintain a presence here in order to make our contribution towards the stability of the area.

Wee: Yes. On economic development and stability I would like to, if I may, at the end of this interview come back to you on it. In the meantime, if I may, I'll proceed on defence.

Heath: Yes. Perhaps I could have one other thing about your defence. I was in Canberra 15 months ago and I made a speech there stating out what our proposals were in rather more detail. Obviously I discussed them first of all with the Malaysian and Singapore Governments and with the New Zealand and Australian Governments. And the proposal I put forward was that there should be a five-power Commonwealth force here in Singapore-Malaysia. That would be the Singapore contribution, Malaysian Government's contribution, New Zealand, Australian and ourselves. And we would be able to use part of the bases here which are now the property of the Singapore Government. So this would mean that it wouldn't any longer be the predominantly British force which has been in the past, but this would be a co-operative element, co-operative operation between the five countries concerned.

Of course, this leads to the next point: people say, how can you afford to do this? We can afford to make a contribution to the five-power Commonwealth force, and it is, after all, for each of us - your government, our government - a very modest insurance premium that, to have stability and prosperity continuing here.

Wee: I see you have deliberately used the words 'five-power joint Commonwealth defence force' rather than an arrangement. Is that correct?

Heath: Yes, that is right.

Wee: Would you clarify, Mr. Heath, your idea of a balanced British contribution to this joint force to be based in Singapore?

Heath: What we propose here is that when we come into power, which will be before the withdrawal of the forces, as I have said, we would discuss with the other four Commonwealth Governments involved what contribution we would make in order to produce a balanced viable force. Of course, this morning I have been having discussions again about the development of the Singapore defence forces. We know roughly what are the contributions the other countries would make. But this can only finally be settled when we become the government. And then we have the advice of our own Chiefs-of-Staff and we can work it out with the other four governments.

Wee: Yes. But in the type of British defence in Singapore that you have in mind, when you talk of the defence force, is it logical to expect your reliance on land-based aircraft, for instance, to protect your naval and ground forces here in the event of a setting up of this joint defence force? Presumably, I mean, you must have your ground and naval forces, in which case you must have a protective air cover. Would it be logical to expect you to rely on land-based aircraft? If so, then such aircraft would have to operate from land bases in Singapore. Would it be proper to ask you whether you have discussed this with Mr. Lee Kuan Yew about the leasing of some of the base installations here?

Heath: Well, as you know, there will be a small Singapore air element, and there are also of course the air bases in Malaysia. So it isn't limited entirely to Singapore. And in fact, I think this, from the air force point of view, they could operate from land-bases. We shall, in any case at the time that I am talking about in 1971, still have part of our own carrier force in existence, so that quite wide possibilities are open to us.

Wee: If, as you say, some of the land-based aircraft could operate from Malaysia, does that go also for your ground forces? Is it likely that ground forces of this Commonwealth defence force could also be stationed in parts of Malaysia?

Heath: I think there is, of course, that possibility as exactly the same way as part of the Commonwealth brigade has been able to be stationed in Malaysia

under the defence agreement. But these are details which can be worked out between the governments at the time as we come into power.

Wee: You have explained the reasons, Sir, that have influenced your party to adopt the policy of having a British presence, Mr. Heath, protection of British interest and you also, I understand, saw Singapore and Malaysia as the gateway to Australia and New Zealand whose security you are primarily interested. Would that be correct?

Heath: Well, I wouldn't say "primarily", no. In the proposals we put forward we are interested in the stability of this particular area here of Singapore-Malaysia. Australia can of course make a major contribution to her own defence. But I am sure that Australia and New Zealand also see their own interests represented here in Southeast Asia. Isn't it the right way to look at it, that all of our interests coincide here and therefore the sensible way is for us to work together? I don't think we got to argue about primarily here or primarily there. The plain fact is that we all have a common interest, that we all have the same sort of system, we all have a great desire to see trade improve, we want to see more investment, industrial development and so on, and we are all in the same family of the Commonwealth. I think it is quite natural that we should work together to help all our own interests.

Wee: Yes. You have described also Mr. Denis Healey's plan of general capability as shortsighted and inadequate in one of the reports I have read. Could you explain why you thought this was so?

Heath: Well, I think there are two reasons. First of all, probably the more important reason, is that if a force of this kind is to be effective then people want to see that it's here on the spot. The dangers against which we want to guard, in particular those of subversion from the outside who might try to overthrow the stability and prosperity of this area, these dangers can best be combatted if those concerned see the effective forces here in which we are all joining; if they see that it is many thousands of miles away, then they doubt as to whether, when the trouble comes, that forces will be brought into action. That really, I think, is the most important reason. Of course, the other reason is that if you have to bring a force in from the outside, well, it has got to have time to be brought here; unless it's going to have only the lightest of weapons you've either got to store the range of equipment here, which Mr. Healey is not proposing to do, or you've got to bring it here by sea which is a long time. And again, as far as the people, the personnel themselves are concerned, then they got to be acclimatised to the climate which is quite different from anything we have at home or in Europe and that again takes time. I just realised it myself, having gone to Sydney as you said to race in my boat, to realise how quickly I had to acclimatise. Well, it took me some time. So these are all basic reasons why in fact it is more effective to have the force here.



Wee: Speaking of external aggression, on this joint Commonwealth force, Mr. Heath, do you envisage that it will be set up purely for external aggression or is it likely to be made available for internal use as well, in the event of trouble in the country?

Heath: The main purpose of the force must be to prevent the stability being interfered with from outside. Of course, as far as Malaysia and Singapore are concerned, their internal defence is their own responsibility and they are organising their police forces and so on to deal with it.

Wee: It has been suggested in some quarters here that at best your party would only be able to achieve a partial reversal of the present British Government's plan because by next May sizeable British forces would have left the region. But you say that you are quite satisfied that by next May, by the time the elections come along, there would be enough forces to be adapted for this particular force.

Heath: What I am saying is that we the British would altogether have enough forces to be able to make up a component here. You see, again it comes back to the fact that both the governments here want this to happen. And I emphasise if they didn't want us here, then the situation will be quite different. They want it to happen and we want to make our contribution. We therefore can do it.

Wee: In an interview with Mr. David Fairhall, if I may bring back this interview last February you had with him, you said that the only threat to stability which would really require massive military effort would be a full-scale invasion from Communist China and you doubted at that time that this was likely. But if it did happen, the United States and other countries would have at once become involved. Do you still hold this view today?

Heath: I think broadly yes. I think what I said then was right. If you are talking about a direct attack which is what we were discussing, then I would have thought that was the only possible threat and I don't think now any more than I did then that this is immediately likely.

Wee: What I am trying to get at, Mr. Heath, is: do you think that the United States and other countries would at once become involved in such an eventuality, taking into consideration what is happening in Vietnam today and the temper of the American people back home - do you still think that after Vietnam American ground forces could still be committed in Southeast Asia?

Heath: Well, this is obviously a matter for the American people and the American President themselves. What I was dealing with was a likelihood or at least a possibility, which is a question put to me, as to

whether China as a great power should suddenly decide herself to launch a major attack on Asia, then I think on all past history it is to be very difficult for the Americans to remain unaffected by it. But I see no likelihood of this at this moment. It is therefore a hypothetical question which we were discussing.

Wee: I mean, I am putting this up because the US policy in Vietnam, I think, is one of the areas of interest that you are looking into on this trip.

Heath: I am not going to Vietnam on this occasion, no. I was there last in 1966.

Wee: But I mean, in this tour, just before you left London, I think you did mention that you were sort of trying to get the views of the leaders on this U.S. policy in Vietnam. Would that be correct?

Heath: Well, I am naturally interested in the reactions of the other countries outside Vietnam and outside the United States as to what is happening there. Of course, I find that all the leaders in Southeast Asia want to see a peaceful settlement. And on the other hand, they don't want to see the Americans withdraw and leave a country in a state of chaos. And so they recognise that it has to be a gradual process in which the President is now making progress.

Wee: After you saw President Nixon last year, you made a statement to the effect that your Party's plans fit in well with U.S. policy. You were convinced then, that not only Britain, that if only Britain had made some continuing effort in Southeast Asia, she will be able to influence American policy in the area, does this hold true today?

Heath: Yes, that holds absolutely true. I am not suggesting for a moment that the Americans should take part in this operation in the 5-power force, because, I think, these are obligations which can be assumed by the Commonwealth countries. America still has other obligations in Asia, quite apart from Vietnam. But what I think the Americans do feel is that the Commonwealth countries are here, working together in Asia, then this is a good thing, and it also means they feel that stability is being maintained in a very important area.

Wee: Do you foresee the day when the United States will only be prepared to defend Asia across the Pacific Ocean and the China Sea, as has been suggested time and again?

Heath: Well, again this is a matter of American policy for which I am not responsible. If you are saying "Is America going to withdraw inside a 'fortress' America?" I don't really see that possibility. No, neither do I foresee that America is going to withdraw from Europe.

Wee: But the suggestion has been, that probably American forces will be prepared to defend Asia across the Pacific in line with Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, right down the China Sea -

Heath: - based on the island chain?

Wee: That's right.

Heath: Well, as I understand, that has always been part of American strategy since 1945.

Wee: Are your plans on defence in Southeast Asia as it is today likely to be drastically adjusted in the event of a vast American disengagement in Vietnam or the pullout?

Heath: No, I don't think (so) that would affect our position, as you would see it from the basis of the argument which I have been putting to you and the philosophy which lies behind it. What I have described to you will still remain true that stability in this area is all important because progress and prosperity depend on it.

Wee: Irrespective of what the Americans do in Vietnam?

Heath: Yes, this is our policy and we adhere to it because we think it's in the interest of the area.

Wee: Do you believe in the Domino theory, if I may ask?

Heath: Well, I believe that other countries around can be affected. I think, there is no doubt about that at all, and the Americans realise this full well and that is one of the very important factors in the way in which they are carrying out their policy.

Wee: If the Americans have had enough in Vietnam and pull out now or in the future, can you really pin your faith on SEATO holding the line along the borders of Thailand, in the event of external aggression?

Heath: Well, we are now moving into a wholly hypothetical sphere. I don't - I have been in the British Foreign Office for 3 years and I know we have discussed foreign affairs purely on the basis of purely hypothetical situations. I don't think - as far as I can see, the Americans are

moving on a gradual progress towards a settlement in Vietnam. It may not be a written legal settlement but it will become a de facto settlement and I don't think there is really any point in arguing about hypothetical positions which may never come about.

Wee: Now, can I switch to Indonesia? You were in Jakarta for a few hours?

Heath: Yes.

Wee: When you talked to Adnan Malik in London sometime last year?

Heath: Yes, he was there in October.

Wee: You said that he had accepted the idea of a Commonwealth force in Singapore/Malaysia and that he had recognised that such a force could ensure stability and that he also welcomed it. In Jakarta did you find the same acceptance from President Suharto?

Heath: I found President Suharto very understanding with the whole of our policy. As far as Indonesia is concerned, their interest is also stability, just as much as it is ours and yours.

Wee: I know you wouldn't like to discuss the talks because they are confidential but have the Indonesians offered any new idea or posture vis-a-vis the question of defence in this region?

Heath: No, I didn't discuss that with them and I didn't ask them too. My purpose was to explain our own Conservative policy.

Wee: In your talks were they concerned about the communist penetration from the North, as they have always been concerned?

Heath: Well, I didn't discuss this specifically with them either. I was discussing with them much more the whole question of economic and industrial development of their country.

Wec: You said a little while ago that you have had a discussion about the defence build-up in Singapore. I suppose you are also aware of the rapid build-up of the defence forces in Singapore for the past 2½ years. Would you care to comment on this build-up and how this will fit in with your plan of a joint Commonwealth defence force?

Heath: I have been very much impressed with what I have seen on this visit, with the progress which has been made in building up the Singapore defence forces. Obviously these things take time. You can't create them overnight and above all you can't create officers and non-commissioned officers with experience. Experience can only be gained by time but apart from that I think, very good progress is being made. And obviously when we are working out the Commonwealth defence force, what Singapore is able to do, and what Malaysia is able to do, will to a considerable extent, affect what the Australians and New Zealanders and ourselves contribute, and as you all know, the emphasis here in Singapore is on the land force together with the naval and air force element and this is one of the things which we recognise.

Wec: You said you flew over Jurong this morning; if we could change the subject now to the economic field -

Heath: - Yes, I flew over the whole of Singapore this morning.

Wec: Before you left London on this trip, I think you said that you were trying to study local feeling, that British industry was not doing enough in participating in this

new industrial development in Singapore. Are you proposing to do anything about it?

Heath: Well, what I have found on this visit is that more investment from British industry would be welcomed and they would like to see more firms coming out, establishing themselves. Perhaps I could also say, having talked to British businessmen here as well as in Kuala Lumpur, that perhaps sometimes the public doesn't always realise how much is going on from the existing firms. It is quite natural if the firm comes out which hasn't been here before, then that's commented upon - they say such such a firm has arrived, it's British or American or it's Japanese, whatever it may be. A firm which is here already and decides to use some of its profits to invest still further here, doesn't get noticed in the same way and I think that ought also to be understood. After all, you get a lot of British firms or British industries already here and they are reinvesting the profits which I mentioned, trade and production, so that they can expand still further.

Wee: Is it true that this is because of the balance of payments position that some of the British industries in Britain have been discouraged from coming out here?

Heath: This is quite true, yes. I know there are some who would like to expand here, and some who would like to come here to start new factories are not able to do at the moment because of the restrictions on the export of capital for this purpose.

Wee: Do you see this being remedied in the not too distant future?



Heath: We take a rather different view about overseas investment from the present British Government. This is another difference between us. I fully recognise that while we had these problems of the balance of payments which the present Labour Government had, it is more difficult to invest overseas, and of course, I put forward, as the leader of the Conservative Party, an economic policy which I believe will make Britain strong economically and enable us to resume investment overseas.

Woo: It has been suggested that this discouraging of the British industries is good on the short-term but in the long-term British industries may miss out on the good dividends. Would you agree on this?

Heath: Well, not a matter of missing out on dividends, a matter of missing out on very great opportunities for trade as well as for actual investment and building up plant and factory and so on. Of course, perhaps one other thing I would like to add, that there has been some misunderstanding at home as well as out here, it is really this: that because the Labour Government has announced that it's going to withdraw, the total withdrawal of British forces here, some people at home have taken this to mean that we got no further interest in the whole of this area. And some people out here have said to me, well we are going, that's the end of it, why should we have British equipment, why should we buy British goods and so on and so this is an attitude which we got to change and of course when we put our policy into effect, we are showing that we are remaining in the area. Then, I think people will recognise that this means trade and investment as well.

Wee: What, then, do you see the role of the British investor, the British trader in Southeast Asia in general and in Singapore in particular, say in the next 3 or 5 years?

Heath: Well, I think this area got the most enormous opportunities and Singapore is really at the centre of it and the great opportunities in Malaysia and the great opportunities in Indonesia. What I want to see is the British trader seizing these opportunities. I do not ask for any special treatment and I say this: at home, we British are not asking for special treatment. All we are asking is we should be considered on our merits and we got to be prepared to compete with anybody else no matter where they come from. Because we have been here for a very long time, 150 years, there is no justification for saying we can sit back and expect to go automatically, not for one moment. We got to fight every inch of the way. That's what I want to see.

Wee: Now if I may just switch on one question on the British entry into the European Common Market; I think which is a subject that is closest to your heart.

Heath: It's close. I wouldn't say "closest".

Wee: When you left London, I think you said that you would like to sort of survey the impact on British entry into the Common Market especially in Singapore, Malaysia, Hongkong. Would you like to say what impact this could have on Singapore/Malaysia and how it is going to affect these two countries if at all by British entry?

Heath: Yes, I think your qualification is really, if at all - When I was doing the negotiations in 1961 to 1963, then we found that very few problems would really arise as far

as Malaysia and Singapore were concerned. After all, from Malaysia there are exports of raw materials which we want, which Europe wants. Most of them, there are no duties in Europe, in the Common Market and that will not produce very many problems. Hongkong is a rather different situation and that's why I am going on to Hongkong for a few days in order to discuss with them there what the problems would be.

Wec: Mr. Heath, as time is running out, one last question. Would you like to tell us your Party's chances in the forthcoming General Elections and also what, once the Conservative returned to power, it will have in store for the Commonwealth and for Southeast Asia?

Heath: That is a very pretty big question.

Well, I think every observer would agree that the chances of the Conservative Party in the next general election, when it comes, are good, very good. And if you look at the by-elections which we just had, then you will see again we had great successes. Over the period of this Parliament we have gained 12 seats from the Labour Government which is a record in British political history, certainly modern times. And as far as local government is concerned, we have captured almost the whole of the Labour Government in Britain today. And so I think on all of these criteria our chances are very good indeed. I am one of these people who believe what matters is what people do in the polling booths and not so much at this stage what they say to public opinion polls, when they haven't got to make a decision. If there is a by-election, they get a vote and they make up their minds and that's what is important.

And now you ask what do we hold when we come in as a government and this is really asking for complete description of our policies, isn't it? But I can really in some way summarise like this: that I am not saying to the British people we will come in as a government and do everything for you. What I am saying is we will give you the opportunity to achieve things for yourself. Now, this is really I think the true key to the British character. It is the basis on which Britain's prosperity, success and greatness was built up in the past and I am absolutely certain it is the basis on which we must work in the future.

Wee: Thank you very much Mr. Heath.

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