

PRESS RELEASE

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS IN LONDON MADE BY THE
PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, ON SATURDAY, 1ST JULY
1967.

After nearly two weeks in London meeting members of the British Cabinet, shadow Ministers on the Opposition, and backbench Labour and Conservative M.P.'s on the Defence and Commonwealth Parliamentary Party Committees, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's Prime Minister, was asked if he thought his visit was a success. He is leaving London tomorrow for Singapore.

What I wanted to do was to present, not the short term problems about the cut down on the bases, but the longer term future -- the defence and security of my part of Southeast Asia.

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"No one will know whether this visit is a success or a failure until Mr. Harold Wilson announces his policies in Parliament in mid-July. But I am encouraged by my discussions with him and his colleagues, most of whom know the Far East and Singapore well, and quite a number of whom have kept in touch with us in Singapore over the last two decades.

"With the new Labour and some Conservative backbenchers elected in the recent general election last year, the problem is different. They have never been to the Far East. Being economists, accountants and University lecturers, a number of whom are on the Public Accounts Committee in Parliament, their intellectual answer to Britain's economic problems and balance of payments deficits is to immediately cut out the £200 million to £300 million per annum spent on East of Suez.

"There have been much speculation, mostly inaccurate, made about my meeting with backbenchers.

"I explained to the backbenchers that:

"First, nobody can say what Southeast Asia is going to be like in 1975.

"Second, long before 1975, there would be a decisive change in the situation in South Vietnam. Depending on how the war in South Vietnam is resolved, the rest of South and Southeast Asia will fall into place and can be seen in proper perspective. The reductions in the forces are uncomfortable and even

painful particularly to about half the civilian employees in the British Armed Forces, but they do not affect our defence and security.

"Third, that we in Singapore, too, would like, in the long run, a situation where our defence can be secured with the maximum co-operation of Asian powers backed by our friends in the Commonwealth by their providing us with the sophisticated weapons, primarily naval and air. For we in Singapore must be prepared to fight and die for our own freedom, and we are confident that given time to build up and train our young men in this task, even sophisticated weaponry like ground to air missiles will not be beyond our capacity.

"I do not think I convinced all the back bench critics. But quite a number of them see the unwisdom of having a time-table for getting off the mainland of Asia. It is far better to have these things assessed quietly in qualitative terms, and not in quantitative time-tables.

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"All have seen what has happened in Aden. This was in large measure due to the naming of a date by which the British forces would be off. The result was that an uglier situation arose, even before the named date, because everyone started activities on the basis that British Forces would be absent after 1968.

Now the Royal Air Force and an aircraft carrier have to stay on.

"It was an exhausting business explaining to an endless series of M.P's, young and able, impatient to get on with the Labour Party's social programmes by cutting out East of Suez. They were not so well-informed on Southeast Asia and perhaps some of them may now doubt if the exercise of rapid reductions is in fact so easy and uncomplicated. If defence forces are precipitately withdrawn it could have severe repercussions on Britain's own economy, for the Far East holds about £750 million of sterling assets in Britain as against £450 million held by the Middle East. These assets could not have been accumulated without extensive and mutually beneficial economic relations.

"I have every confidence that Mr. Wilson and his colleagues know what is best for Britain and reasonable to her Commonwealth partners. We have no right to ask Britain to spend vast sums of money to ensure our defence in perpetuity.

But in a long association over 150 years, British administration and enterprise, combined with the drive, industry and skills of Chinese, Indian and Indonesian migrants, has created a thriving metropolis of two million people. It is the only one in the equatorial belt of the world where standards of life, and the civic and social amenities approximate that of Western Europe. This long association emboldens me to believe that the British would wish to have their responsibilities

reduced in such a way as to give us the best chance to continue as a viable community, and to build on what we have inherited."

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