

MEET THE PRESS

Produced by Lawrence E. Spivak

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1967

GUEST:

PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

Republic of Singapore

MODERATOR:

Edwin Newman

PANEL:

Seymour Topping - The New York Times

Crosby Noyes - Washington Evening Star

National Archives of Singapore

Rowland Evans - Chicago Sun - Times

Pauline Frederiok - NBC News

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MR. NEWMAN: Our guest today on MEET THE PRESS is the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, who arrived this week for an official visit to President Johnson. We will have the first questions now from Pauline Frederick of NBC News.

MISS FREDERICK: Mr. Prime Minister, you said in Washington that Americans are powerful, all the world is too painfully aware, but their power should be controlled. The United States should be restrained.

Do you feel American power is controlled or use with restraint in Vietnam?

Mr. LEE: As of now?

MISS FREDERICK: Yes.

Mr. LEE: I don't want to engage in your domestic dispute and I am not a General or an Admiral, but --

MISS FREDERICK: But you are a nation.

Mr. LEE: Yes. I would like to see a great deal more caution, more selective exercise of your enormous range of weapons that you have got and more brains and feet, preferably Vietnamese brains and feet, rather than more power and gadgetry.

MISS FREDERICK: Well, to be more specific, North Vietnam is less than one-fourth the size of Texas. It is now being bombed at the level that the bombing was carried on in World War II and has been bombed for almost three years. Do you believe that this bombing is controlled or restrained use of power?

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MR. LEE: That is like asking me whether I have stopped beating my wife. I never beat my wife.

MISS FREDERICK: Let me ask you this: 47 heads of delegations in the United Nations, many of them foreign Ministers, said in this General

Assembly American bombing of North Vietnam should be ended unconditionally.

Do you agree with them?

MR. LEE: Well, that depends on who the 47 heads are. Are they from Africa, from Asia, from Western Europe?

MISS FREDERICK: They were from all over the world.

MR. LEE: From Eastern Europe?

MISS FREDERICK: They were from all over the world.

MR. LEE: As I understand, there are about 122 members, so that is 47.

Well, I wasn't there, but my colleague, Mr. Rajaratnam, the foreign Minister, is attending the United Nations and I think he is going to say something on Vietnam on the bombing and all the other problems about Vietnam, and I think bombing is one of the minor problems about that now.

If I may answer you this way, he said it is a bothersome question.

MISS FREDERICK: But do you feel the bombing should be stopped? Would this help to get Hanoi to the conference table?

MR. LEE: I think the bombing could be reduced and even stopped without any decisive change in the course of the war, but I think it does not follow that because you stop bombing you will have the North Vietnamese Government to the conference table. Why should they go to the conference table, to help President Johnson win the elections? Do they love him?

You know Mr. Khrushchev said that he helped President Kennedy win by not seeing Mr. Nixon.

MISS FREDERICK: In other words, are you saying that, if the North Vietnamese should come to the conference table and there would be a settlement, that President Johnson would win the next election? And by the same token would he lose if there is not a peace settlement?

MR. LEE: I don't think it is as simple as that. I mean, you are putting words -- you are putting a form of words in such a tight and, I think, imprecise way really, because the world is not so simple; it is not black and white. If you were to stop bombing and if Hanoi were to meet with your President, it doesn't

mean that there will be a settlement before the timetable for your presidential elections, and things can become very complicated, really, if it weren't, so I really don't want to go into all the intricacies because it can take so many twists and turns as Panmunjom did, so all I would like to say as an outsider is, were we all in the name of humanity and for the sake of human civilization, to take great care that there is no miscalculation on the reactions not only of the North Vietnamese, but of the Russians and of the Chinese, because there must be a point at which they must react.

MR. EVANS: You said in a recent speech "The wrong kind of conclusion to the mess in Vietnam can absolutely unscramble the whole lot of us in Southeast Asia."

What did you mean by "unscramble the whole lot of us"?

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MR. LEE: Well, one of the problems in Southeast Asia is that it consists of relatively new and fragile independent nations that have just become independent since the Second World War. And the great problem is the will to resist, and it melts very easily because people particularly -- the world over they want to be on the winning side but in Southeast Asia, because they are small countries, because big armies have come, Europeans came, the Japanese came --

you know, you bend with the wind like the bamboo, as the Chinese saying goes, and if it looks as if the East Wind is blowing stronger than the West Wind, then people start bending that way even before the wind comes.

MR. EVANS: What you are saying, sir if I understand, is that the American position of force and resistance to this East Wind is essential to give your country and these other newly independent countries a bulwark behind which you can develop your independence, is that what you mean?

MR. LEE: No, may I say what I mean myself in my own form of words? I think Americans have -- I think it is a friendly habit of trying to help a person think for himself but I would rather do my own composition if I may.

You have adopted this position in Vietnam, in 1954. You never asked the rest of Southeast Asia, and we were not consulted. You decided again in 1956 that Diem should not have free elections because -- or, he didn't want free elections and you supported him because elections couldn't be free, and I have read all the semantics about what is free and unfree.

You decided in 1961 when things got a little bit difficult for Diem, to put in American advisers. And by 1963 -- and the end of '63 you had 25,000

American advisers, in the Kennedy Administration. You had your last chance when Diem got knocked down by a bus, or perhaps it was a tank, and you could have got out and said to the generals "well, we will help you -- guns, food, uniforms, pay for the troops" -- but you have decided rightly or wrongly to go in, and now this is 1967, and it is no use asking me now for my opinion on what you should have done before. All I can say is, we have got to live with today, not with what might have been day before yesterday, and as of today, the Field Marshal of Thailand says -- Kittikachorn, and he is saying it to his own people, that they are going to fight in Vietnam, not in Thailand.

But I take that to mean that if that is gone, he is going to anticipate history and you know the Thais have this great sense of the future and are good anticipators of history. They make the kind of adjustments in their postures arising out of what they think is a failure in Vietnam. I don't think the Tunku in West Malaysia has very many years in spite of all his armed forces and then they have got me by the throat.

MR. TOPPING: If I may again do what my predecessors here have done, recall a speech you have made some years ago, you said: "The Vietnamese experience shows that however massive the military cover, however enormous the economic assistance, if the leaders of the people in whose name

and in whose behalf military cover and economic aid are being given do not set out to secure their own salvation, the end result is perdition both for the helper and the help."

Speaking as an Asian, do you think the South Vietnamese are helping themselves enough or are we here in the United States headed for perdition with our allies?

MR. LEE: Well, you are asking me a very difficult question. I am not making any direct contribution in Vietnam and I think if I were a North Vietnamese I'd resent the Prime Minister of Singapore passing judgment on the effort of the South Vietnamese, but I think they wouldn't mind my saying that the world will be a much better place if it is not Mr. Rusk explaining what this is all about, but either President or their Vice President or, better still, a new figure in a prime Minister -- you know? Forward looking.

MR. TOPPING: For South Vietnam?

MR. LEE: Forward looking, independent, determined, and most important, sincere and honest.

MR. TOPPING: If I might shift a little here, one of the questions in our minds here has been about the future of China and the relationship to Southeast Asia.

Some people are saying that China is now so divided politically that there is no great danger for Southeast Asia in the future.

Speaking as a Chinese who understands China, can you make an estimate or a guess as to the future of China? Do you think in the near future it will become again a unified country, a strongly unified country that might represent some kind of a danger to Southeast Asia?

MR. LEE: First of all, I can't speak as a Chinese because I am a Singaporean. I am of Chinese ethnic stock and this is crucial. You ask me to speak as a Chinese.

MR. TOPPING: As an ethnic Chinese.

MR. LEE: You know the Chinese People's Republic in Peking will be, I think quite rightfully indignant and so will the other aspirant in Taipei, but speaking as a Singaporean with some of the built-in memory programming of the

Chinese people, I would say if you believe that the Chinese people will just splinter up into so many warlord communist committees, each governing a province or even part of a province, then you will make one of the gravest mistakes about Asia. I think I -- I have travelled around the world often and, you know, people don't know that I come from Singapore and they treat me as a Chinese, or as a Chinaman in the old days as they used to call them and they used to say "Ah, Chiang Kai-shek," you know, in the middle forties and thirties. And of course, Mao Tse-tung.

I would say they are determined, as a people, to unify and build a modern, powerful, wealthy Chinese nation and I say good luck to them. And I think the moment they get prosperous, good luck to me, because I will be much safer.

I don't believe, however, you know the simple theory that they are just going to send their armies across and eat up Southeast Asia. It is too simple, and it is too simple for you, for the Americans, and for us, because then it is naked aggression; the whole of Southeast Asia will gel together and meet an incoming invader. But you have got this "Make it yourself" kind of revolution. Wars of national liberation, you know. Here is the text. "We have an instructor. He will teach you how to organize and will slip you a few guns and more if necessary and, if it gets more difficult, well, surface-to-air missiles and so on."

I think this is the problem that each of the individual governments in that region must use the time that you are buying in South Vietnam for the rest of the world, particularly Southeast Asia. I am not saying you are doing this, you know, just for Southeast Asia. You are doing this for yourselves but it so happens that I think I believe it might get a bit difficult for me if there is a sudden evacuation. And I am determined to use this time to its fullest advantage and I hope my neighbours will do likewise.

MR. NOYES: Mr. Prime Minister, what is the effect in Asia of demonstrations such as we had yesterday in Washington?

MR. LEE: Well, you know, I get a lot of demonstrations in Singapore when my students are quite a rambunctious and spirited lot. And I think they ought to be. Otherwise I think there is very little future for Singapore. It is a young community and the young must be idealistic, the young must believe that the world should be more just and there should be more moral rectitude in the behaviour of their leaders and they protest often in more than just a peaceful manner because the Communists slip into my demonstrations and, you know, windows got broken so often and cars got overturned but at the end of the day I think decisions have got to be made by adults, not teenagers, but it has got to be

made in such a way that when the teenagers become adults and they look back on these decisions they will be proud of the generation that went before them.

MR. NOYAS: Well, let me ask you this, Prime Minister: How confident are you that the United States will continue to supply this underpinning which you consider to be necessary for the non-Communist states in Asia over, say, the next decade or so?

MR. LEE: I don't know and I don't think -- first of all I am not an American, so how can I know? this is one of the reasons I have come here, to try to get a sample of the thinking, the feeling. I have no doubt your President has got resolution and determination and restraint and somebody will probably work out a winning line, but I have also no doubt that your Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence have got it, but what, I think, in your kind of open, democratic society you must demonstrate, and which I have really come here to try and understand better, to watch the proceedings in your presidential elections next year is whether you, as a people, have got that resolution, that stamina, that perseverance and, most important of all, infinite patience and capacity to hold back your desire to settle this quickly and get it over with, because this is a very different kind of war. The other side is not in uniform. You are.

MR. NOYES: Do you believe that SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, in its present framework provides an adequate to Southeast Asian security?

MR. LEE: Well, you know, when it happened in, I think, 1954-55, Mr. Nehru and quite a few other leaders, like President Sukarno, were very vehement in their denunciation and even Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia was critical and so was I and I think, looking back now, it really didn't meet the situation because it was so very different from what you did for Europe.

You know in SEATO, when an attack takes place on a member country, it is just an attack against a member and the others will take no -- this is a breach of peace and a danger to the area, but in NATO when an attack takes place an attack on one is an attack on all and they all respond, and you know what has happened. I mean, who has responded in South Vietnam? The Pakistanis have not; the French have not; the British have not, and probably for very good reasons. And until you convince Asia that you consider Asia as important to you, as Americans, as Europe was to America, you are going to find a lot of Asians like me rather critical and really doubting because ninety per cent of you have come from Europe; you understand Europe better than you understand Asia. Some of you understand Asia very well because you make specialized studies of

the subject, but as a people and, finally, it is the mothers and fathers watching this television screen and seeing what is happening to their sons and all their sweethearts also watching this, that will decide. And if you want people to take a stand, you have got to demonstrate that as a people you have got what it takes; that Asia does matter to you and does matter to the Free World, as you call it.

MISS FREDERICK: Mr. Prime Minister, in answer to one of my questions I believe you said, and I think I am quoting you correctly, "In the name of humanity, great care should be taken that there be no reaction by the Russians and the Chinese. They must react."

Would you tell us under that conditions you feel the Russians and the Chinese might react to what is going on in Vietnam and whether there is any possibility of it now as you see the picture?

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MR. LEE: I think really you should put that question to Mr. Krushchev and Mr. Brezhnev and Mr. Kosygin and probably Mr. Mao-Tse-tung and Marshall Lin Piao or Chou En-lai.

I really can't answer this, but I am quite certain at some point they will decide that their own national interests are at stake and they must respond.

MR. NEWMAN: We have a little more than three minutes left.

MR. EVANS: Mr. Prime Minister, you said it clear that you are concerned about the resolution, particularly beyond the '68 election and into the future of the U.S. in Vietnam and in all of Asia, that our interest is stable and long-term,.

Would it not help resolve that difficulty as you see it if your country put a token, a small, token force -- you only have two million in your population, I understand, but if you put a small token force into the field to assist in the work that is being done over there against what we call aggression from the North? Wouldn't that help the United States to resolve this issue?

MR. LEE: I don't see it as my duty as the Prime Minister, an elected Prime Minister of Singapore and not a client state of the United States -- I am not in receipt of your aid nor am I here to seek aid. I am doing all right, I hope to do more trade with you. And I don't think it is the duty of the elected representative, leader, of Singapore to go in and involve his country in a situation which can end disastrously for his whole people. And as I have said, if there is no resolution shown -- and God knows what can happen between now and November, 1968 --

you tell me what happens to all your allies who have gone in with you in South Vietnam.

MR. TOPPLING: Well, in connection with what you have just said, I remember once you said -- in fact I believe you said it to me when we were talking about your neutrality -- you said "I am not neutral where the survival of my people is concerned."

If your survival does depend upon how well the United States and the South Vietnamese are able to do in Vietnam, in the sense of containing Asian Communists, don't you think you should help more directly?

MR. LEE: I think my survival is not threatened yet. I have got the -- my British friends and my Commonwealth friends in the area, up until the middle '70's and that is a very long time in the history of Southeast Asia. But of course it could change fundamentally by decisions you can make in South Vietnam between now and '68 and '69, and as the situation changes we shall be watching it most intensely and avidly and we shall make contingency plans. We have to.

MR. NEWMAN: We have about one minute left.

MR. NOYES: Mr. Prime Minister, if as you said the SEATO Treaty were strengthened to be more like NATO, with the same guarantees that NATO provides, would your country adhere to such a treaty?

MR. LEE: I think eventually what we must try and create in South and Southeast Asia is a community that is economically and socially conscious of what is to be gained by gearing into each other, yeasting up the economy, and once that happens I think the security aspect, the mutual security interests should lead us to a NATO-type situation, perhaps, with a minimum of underpinning from outside. And if we can have a multilateral underpinning, you know -- America, Russia, and most important China too, saying "Yes, there shall be no aggression in South and Southeast Asia, and boundaries shall not be changed by force," I think we have got a much more peaceful world.

MR. NEWMAN: I must interrupt you there. Our time is up. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for being with us today on MEET THE PRESS.