

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW THE PRIME MINISTER
ACCORDED TO MR. CROCKER SNOW OF THE BOSTON GLOBE,
AT THE ISTANA, ON 16 MARCH 1976

CROCKER SNOW: The main reason I am out here and that I am interviewing you and a lot of others is to ask what you feel -- it's almost one year since the collapse of Vietnam and what do you think the effect on East Asia, particularly, the status and self-confidence of the developing countries?

PRIME MINISTER: It varies from country to country. The realities of what has happened are making themselves felt. Particularly, the border problems between Thailand and Laos and to a lesser extent between Thailand and Cambodia which nobody believes is trouble between Laotians and Thais per se.

It is also generally accepted that Vietnam has been reunified very swiftly and they have pinned their rehabilitation aid more on Soviet Union than on China.

Therefore, it will be interesting to see whether the extremely able way in which they got war-time aid from both the Soviet Union and China whilst fighting the Americans in South Vietnam could continue -- this policy, this strategy to continue in a situation where the United States is no longer the common enemy of the Communist blocs, not bloc but blocs. I myself believe that the Vietnamese

leaders have considerable experience. They know the limit in which they can go in any given situation to get maximum aid from the Soviet Union and probably if not help from China, at least no problems with China. These will be the constraints.

SNOW: How do you analyse the big-power line-up in East Asia today as a result of the war?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, the official view from Hanoi newspaper editorial and radio broadcasts is that the United States is behind the non-Communist countries of Southeast Asia, particularly those in ASEAN. I don't know if this is really believed in. But whatever the position, that is the public line. The agreement between Hanoi and Moscow about the post-war aid -- rehabilitation and so on of the Vietnamese economy -- presupposes that any spaces left vacant by the Americans, could be filled up, the sooner the better, by groups more sympathetic to Hanoi and by the logic of present situation, for the time being, more sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

SNOW: Do you feel that from a Singapore perspective that the tensions between the big powers are heightened or lessened as a result of the Vietnam War?

PRIME MINISTER: By 'big powers' you mean America, Soviet Union and China?

SNOW: Yes.

PRIME MINISTER: Do you include Japan?

SNOW: No. I am talking politically at the moment.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, between the Soviet Union and China, definitely it hasn't lessened. Between the Soviet Union and the United States, it is muted, but I don't think it has relaxed. Between China and the United States, it's not been a happy relationship but for reasons which are fairly well-known -- it's not American policy per se which worries China so much as American policies towards the Soviet Union.

SNOW: But you think these trends have been exacerbated or lessened by the result of Vietnam?

PRIME MINISTER: Exacerbated.

SNOW: What do you see is the significance of President Ford's Pacific Doctrine as compared to Nixon's Guam Doctrine from Asia, for nations like your own?

PRIME MINISTER: None for the time being. We will have to wait till after the elections. Then we shall know. An elected President will be able, after November, to decide which of the policy options he wants to adopt. As of now, the position is status quo. All options left open.

SNOW: What do you think the Vietnam experience has done to American commitment, its traditional idealism and its role and participation in world affairs generally?

PRIME MINISTER: Nothing short of disastrous. Your friends are dismayed, and your enemies are jubilant.

SNOW: And this is a trend you see continuing for the foreseeable future?

PRIME MINISTER: No, no. Nothing continues in a straight curve either upwards or downwards. There must be a reversal of the mood. You can't just give ground more and more all over the world whether it is Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, or Angola, and Southern Africa.

SNOW: Do you regard President Ford's statement two days ago that he would not support continued white rule in Rhodesia as giving ground in this sense?

PRIME MINISTER: No, no. That is a very sound statement. What else could anybody say? Nobody can support South Africa as long as it pursues its Apartheid policies. That having been said, of course, there is another thing -- how the solution is to be found.

SNOW: If the end of the war in Vietnam marked the end of an era in this part of the world, what do you see the new era has been?

PRIME MINISTER: We will see it better after the American Presidential Elections. It is one of the important components and this triangular balance of forces.

SNOW: What do you think it is likely to be? I mean, it is quite easy to argue that there is not really much more than just rhetoric differences between the different major candidates?

PRIME MINISTER: I would hate to believe this. All the rhetoric that's being coined and polished day by day that there is not a dime's worth difference in all the wordsmith's forging new phrases.

SNOW: Well, keeping us on business ...

PRIME MINISTER: I think even if there were no basic differences as of now, there are fundamental differences of character and approach. How a President reacts to a situation, reacts to a crisis or a challenge, depends as much upon his character as upon the hard-headed calculation of national self-interest in an inter-dependent world.

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