

MEMORANDUM

CLASSIFIED BY ~~Henry A. Kissinger~~
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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore
Ambassador Monteiro
Dr. Henry Kissinger
John Holdridge, NSC Staff
Kathleen Ryan, NSC Staff

DATE AND TIME: Wednesday, April 11, 1973
9:50 - 10:20 a.m.

PLACE: Dr. Kissinger's Office

Dr. Kissinger: That was a very fine toast you gave last night.

P. M. Lee: It was ephemeral. I hope that South Vietnam can stick and anything we can do to help them, we can try and do our best.

Dr. Kissinger: What can you do?

P. M. Lee: Well, our urban problems are not dissimilar. We can help them in three things--organization, housing, and welfare.

Dr. Kissinger: You can pay a visit and talk to Thieu.

P. M. Lee: I can try. It would be easier if he came to me.

Dr. Kissinger: I will try to arrange it.

P. M. Lee: Now let's be frank, or why else should I be here.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree. Thieu is surrounded by second-raters. He is the only one with vision. The problem is to get into his morbidly suspicious head that I am not against him. He thinks I have a deal with the Communists to get rid of him. He believes that I want to unify all of Indochina under Hanoi as a counter weight to the USSR and China. China is not our threat but the USSR is. When China has its second strike capability in 5-10 years..

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P. M. Lee: 10 years.

Dr. Kissinger: I want Indochina to remain in four different states. Those are your interests, are they not?

P. M. Lee: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Thieu is wrong and should hear it from you, not me. You have to get together. You prefer that he comes to you?

P. M. Lee: Yes, it looks more casual. I am known to the Communists as a partisan. He could take a trip to Jakarta and stop in Singapore.

Dr. Kissinger: Would Jakarta have him?

P. M. Lee: Perhaps not, but he could make a swing through Singapore and Bangkok.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. I'll see if this can be arranged.

P. M. Lee: We could help him with urban problems, housing. If he scales down his military, we can help with the conversion of military bases.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you have technicians to help him?

P. M. Lee: We have some, not enough, but we can help build models.

Dr. Kissinger: We will do much to help his technological needs. Psychology is the real problem: we need to keep his confidence. If he goes on the offensive militarily and politically, he can win. He holds more cards than the enemy, but he has an inferiority complex. The Viet Cong need the support of the North Vietnamese Army, which is based 400 miles away. But we have to pick the time and the provocation. It has to be something great. If we do something prematurely we have to pay the domestic price.

Is that wrong?

P. M. Lee: That is your domestic scene. There has to be a real buildup emotionally and psychologically here before you can give a real wallop. But you can't afford to lose any more prisoners.

Dr. Kissinger: We can do almost anything without losing prisoners.

P. M. Lee: How?

Dr. Kissinger: By mining the ports.

P. M. Lee: There are still surface-to-surface missiles. I would like to take you two steps further. I am not a simplistic man, but the debunking of the domino theory is too simply put. If Thieu goes in the next two or three years and instability follows, the Thais are going to switch.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree.

P. M. Lee: The Thais will keep out of it. Look what they did with the Japanese in World War II--their government supported Japan, but there was an underground that supported you.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree.

P. M. Lee: Why is Thanat Khoman out and allowed to say these things? Thanom Kittikachoun and Praphat are committed to you. Don't let them lose confidence. They were very pleased that you followed Agnew on your visit, it boosted their confidence. They can do a lot for you if they think you will stand by them. On the other hand, they need not have to give away major considerations to reach an accommodation. Just look at their history, and you can understand their temptation to make a deal with the bigger fellow. The North Vietnamese, they know, are tough and near.

Dr. Kissinger: What about their Chinese minority?

P. M. Lee: Their Chinese minority are bourgeois, and their system allows for assimilation. Phote Sarasin is, I believe, half Chinese. Thanat Khoman is Thai by nationality but ethnically Chinese. The Chinese don't pose a problem to them. Their real problem is in Malaysia.

Dr. Kissinger: I have the impression that the Chinese want four states in Indochina and us in Asia until they can push us out. But they want to do the job, and ~~not~~ have others do it for them.

P. M. Lee: They don't want the North Vietnamese or the Russians.

Dr. Kissinger: That's right.

P. M. Lee: The Russians never let anything go. Russia still holds the four Kurile islands. Japan has had much trouble over this for the past 27 years. After Thailand, then Malaysia. If the Thais switch, so will the Malays. The trouble is ethnic, with 40% non-Malays. In Malaya there is a renaissance movement, which is just as tough as the Viet Minh: the MCP (Malayan Communist Party). During World War II they were

willing to fight and die, and were not afraid of Japanese torture. One thousand five hundred of them at the border, and they are hard core.

Dr. Kissinger: Along the Thai border?

P. M. Lee: Yes. The Thais and Malays are waiting to see what happens. The terrorists are building up a logistical base, putting C-rations in metal drums and burying them. These will last for 10 years. The Malaysian government finds one, but there are four more not found. I don't want to sound alarmist, but you need to do some thinking before the crisis arrives. If you have some prior thinking, one can appreciate the situation more clearly.

Dr. Kissinger: In a crisis, will Indochina collapse?

P. M. Lee: No, but the Thais will switch if you do not give them confidence.

Dr. Kissinger: How do we give them confidence?

P. M. Lee: By making it known that you are not going to abandon them.

Dr. Kissinger: How do we go about this?

P. M. Lee: By a token presence there.

Dr. Kissinger: We will not remove our airbases. There is no chance in this Administration.

P. M. Lee: If that is so and they have that confidence...

Dr. Kissinger: We are now keeping airplanes there, but we are getting advice from our people there that our presence is generating anti-US feeling.

P. M. Lee: If you have them in large towns, yes, but not in the small towns. The Thais are a very pragmatic people. They like the good life and don't mind enjoying your PXs, the income generated from your bases, and the large spending. Be cautious in putting your people in highly built up areas...the bars and women are bad.

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Dr. Kissinger: But the bars and women always/them wherever they go.

P. M. Lee: It's not important if its kept out of sight.

Dr. Kissinger: We will keep most of our force in Thailand. I think that our successor will want to keep them on if all goes well.

P. M. Lee: I hope so. The critical thing is to avoid panic. Even if we don't panic, Hanoi and not China, may want to get you out of Southeast Asia. They may send supplies to the Malayan Communist party.

Dr. Kissinger: To the Malayan Communist Party operating in Thailand?

P. M. Lee: In Malaysia itself.

Dr. Kissinger: How does causing trouble in Malaysia get us out of Southeast Asia?

P. M. Lee: By making their movement respectable. If things get really bad, the Malays will call on the Indonesians for help, and this will cause a polarization between the Malays and the non-Malays with the respectable people among the non-Malays then opting for Communism. They would have no alternative.

Dr. Kissinger: What is the solution?

P. M. Lee: The solution is maintaining political and economic stability and providing security. We can help.

Dr. Kissinger: How? Do you have military forces?

P. M. Lee: I am not exactly defenseless. I can give them some help.

Dr. Kissinger: do you mean that your forces and the Malay forces would join together in putting down the terrorists among the non-Malays?

P. M. Lee: That's right. This is what we had in mind in joining Malaysia in the first place, but their conservatives got the upper hand and kicked us out.

Right now there is a real crisis between the Malays and the non-Malays. They are trying to control the education of the non-Malays, and three-quarters of the non-Malays have failed the Malay language examination. This is a very serious matter for them, because without a pass you can't go from primary school into middle school or from middle school into college. All of this builds resentment.

Dr. Kissinger: Will they make any concessions?

P. M. Lee: Not now.

Dr. Kissinger: With them could you suppress an insurrection?

P. M. Lee: No doubt about it.

Dr. Kissinger: I am sympathetic. If there is anything you can do to help stabilize the situation in the area, we will try to help you.

I would like to set up a channel to you with this place. I will designate some intelligence man who will have a direct channel to you, and then if you have something specific in mind, will you feel free to get in touch with me through him?

P. M. Lee: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: And can I ask things of you?

P. M. Lee: Yes, and we can bounce some ideas around.

Dr. Kissinger: I will designate some intelligence person. We don't do this sort of thing with very many others.

P. M. Lee: This is really a crucial period, it can never be the same again. The Vietnamese have to carry it on their own.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree. The longer we can keep it together, the better. All of this is essential. Therefore, I need people like you to help me. Speaking frankly, this is because I cannot always be perfectly informed.

P. M. Lee: If you think we are of value.

Dr. Kissinger: Very much.

P. M. Lee: I have one last passing thought: don't let the Indonesians think they can deal.

Dr. Kissinger: I haven't found that their precision of thought is outstanding.

P. M. Lee: They never have any concrete ideas.

Dr. Kissinger: They have never studied even moving two divisions

P. M. Lee: That is the whole trouble; they will have to live off the land.

Dr. Kissinger: And how can they carry out such an enterprise?

P. M. Lee: We have thought how to do it, with transports. First, they would move to Sumatra, and then make a quick jump across the Straits of Malacca. It would be easy if friendly forces hold the landing area.

Dr. Kissinger: What do you think would happen if the Indonesians helped out?

P. M. Lee: Disaster, because you would present the non-Malays who don't want to be Communists with no option but to support them. Indonesia is 70% Javanese and they are different from the Malaysians. The Indonesian knows that he is a Javanese.

Dr. Kissinger: The Indonesians don't care much for guerrilla warfare

P. M. Lee: No, but they have a thirst for extensive military power. It will be a useful experience for them to be on the supervisory team in Vietnam.

I don't want you to think that I believe all is dark.

Dr. Kissinger: No, I don't think you are neurotic. Your position requires realism. I know what you are saying. We want no major change and we want everything to go as slow as possible. We are willing to cooperate. Certainly before any drastic move in Indochina, you will be contacted. Of great importance is Thailand. I will attach great importance to our new communications link. Although I am very busy, once I identify a problem I can move fast.

P. M. Lee: The crucial thing is not to have any crisis spring unexpectedly. It should be envisaged.

Dr. Kissinger: If one has to improvise a response he is in bad shape.

P. M. Lee: You have to get a contact man.

Dr. Kissinger: I will tell your Ambassador by early next week who he is to be.

P. M. Lee: I must be absolutely quiet, no leakage or else it would be counter-

Dr. Kissinger: There is never a leak here. My staff may be incompetent, but they are loyal. Even our Ambassador will not know.