

Loss of an Asian Friend

Attack by Singapore Leader Indicative of Drift to Peking

By SEYMOUR TOPPING

Special to The New York Times

HONG KONG, Sept. 1—Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, this week joined the array of Southeast Asian leaders, once good friends of the United States, who now are bitter critics.

Among the others are President Sukarno of Indonesia, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the Cambodian chief of State and General Ne Win, the ruler of

News Analysis

Burma. There is a remarkable similarity in the complaints lodged by

all these leaders as they drifted away from the United States. For example, all have charged that the Central Intelligence Agency conducted hostile operations against their governments during periods of ostensibly correct relations with the United States.

Prime Minister Lee cited the case of a C.I.A. agent who was apprehended in Singapore in 1960 while trying to buy information from a Singapore intelligence official. In Indonesia, President Sukarno recalls that the agency supported the abortive 1958 rebellion of the Revolutionary Council at Padang, Sumatra. Prince Sihanouk charges that C.I.A. has backed an underground group of the dissident Khmer Serei that has tried to overthrow his regime. General Ne Win and other Burmese still are resentful of the Central Intelligence Agency's support in the nineteen-fifties of Chinese Nationalist troops who were based for years in northern Burma.

Another common cause of irritation has been alleged slights by Americans.

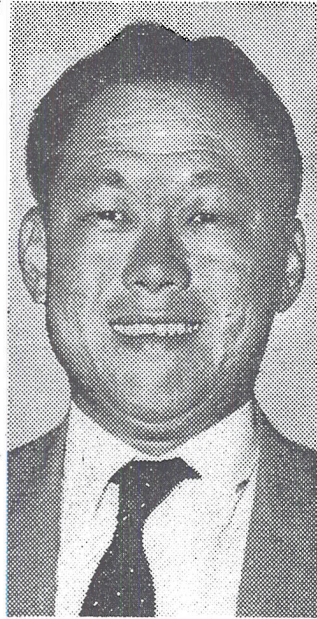
Rebuff Charged

Prime Minister Lee spoke publicly this week of one occasion when he was unable to get a leading American specialist to treat "somebody very dear to me." General Ne Win has told friends that on a private visit to the United States he was humiliated by customs officials and in treatment accorded him at a Washington hospital.

President Sukarno and Prince Sihanouk have repeatedly protested angrily about being ridiculed personally by American publications.

While bruised sensitivities may have affected the attitudes of the Southeast Asian leaders, observers look for a more basic motivation to explain their changed attitude toward the United States.

It is suggested that these leaders have given priority to political survival and a search for accommodation with Asian Communists. They have demonstrated the conviction that the United States and Britain will



Camera Press-Plx

Lee Kuan Yew

eventually be excluded from Southeast Asia and that their governments must find a place in the Asian order in which Communist China will assume a leading position.

These compulsions were manifest in the sudden and dramatic turn of Prime Minister Lee away from the United States.

Earlier Relations Cordial

Before the secession of Singapore from the British-protected federation of Malaysia on Aug. 9, Prime Minister Lee's relations with the United States had been cordial. During a trip through Asia this spring he was critical of what he described as the bloc struggle in Vietnam. The implied rebuke of the United States was not taken seriously by American officials, who viewed it as consonant with the Prime Minister's obvious aspiration to be well regarded by the nonaligned countries of Asia and Africa.

When Singapore unexpectedly was cut adrift from the Malaysian federation, Mr. Lee at first avoided taking a stand on relations with the United States while he assessed the international position of his tiny state.

He found himself under pressure from his influential business community to revive essential trade with Indonesia, Communist China and the Soviet Union. Asserting, "We must survive," he announced his intention to retain British bases in Singapore while frankly seeking a new understanding with Communist powers and with Indonesia, which was seeking to dismember Malaysia.

This week Prime Minister Lee spoke out strongly against the United States in a series of news conferences. He termed the Johnson Administration inadequate to deal with the crisis in Vietnam, warned that he would not tolerate American manning of bases in Singapore and said that the bases would never be used to blackmail Indonesia or to attack Communist China.

Charges 4 Years Late

He also chose this moment, more than four years after the fact, to report the alleged incident involving the C.I.A. agent and the apologetic letter written to him in confidence by Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

In attacking the United States, Prime Minister Lee moved closer to an accommodation with Peking and Jakarta without foregoing immediately the protection of the British bases. As if to refute charges that he was tainted by British neocolonialism, the Prime Minister, amid his protestations of the need for defense bases, let it be known that his British allies could be ordered off the island on 24 hours notice.

In practical terms, Prime Minister Lee's remarks meant that the United States can no longer count on Singapore, the hub of Commonwealth defenses in Southeast Asia, as an extension of its own defense system in the region.

Possibly the most aggrieved American officials were those who had looked hopefully to Mr. Lee, a 41-year-old Cambridge-educated lawyer, as an exemplary friend of the West. His dynamic social-reform program in Singapore and his earlier articulate denunciations of Communists had suggested that eventually he might attract a large pro-Western following in Southeast Asia.

That American vision has now landed in political limbo together with earlier hopes for the Southeast Asian leaders who once smiled at Washington and today scowl.