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Why Lee Blew Whistle on U.S.

BY PETER LISAGOR

Our Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON -- Behind the Singapore prime minister's bitter outburst against the United States is the story of an emotionally distressed man who blames Washington for failure to help his desperately sick wife.

Lee Kuan Yew blew the whistle on a 1960 Central Intelligence Agency plot to penetrate Singapore's intelligence service in an interview published Monday, angrily accusing the United States of a crude bribery attempt to silence him.

Lee's attack upon the United States, which he accused of

a lack of "depth and judgment or wisdom that comes out of an accumulation of knowledge of human beings and human situations over a long period of time," was triggered by an intensely personal grievance, according to informants here.

A FEW weeks ago, Lee asked U.S. authorities to help him get an American medical specialist for his wife, suffer-

ing from a serious but unspecified ailment. The American doctor was recommended by Lee's own physician.

The State Department contacted the American doctor, who was retired and who, as it happened, was about to de-

part for Europe. His reaction was a negative one, and he told U.S. authorities that many other doctors were available and able to handle Mrs. Lee's particular condition. He recommended several.

The State Department relayed these names to Lee, whose response was bitter. He privately accused the depart-

ment of lacking compassion and of being indifferent to his wife's plight. Only the originally recommended doctor would do.

Because Lee is regarded as a promising Asian leader with some privately held sympathy for U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, department officials made another attempt to persuade the retired doctor, who was then in Geneva, to take the case. It was hard sell in the extreme, but the doctor finally agreed.

But when Lee was informed, he had become so emotionally distraught that he flatly re-

jected the offer. He told U.S. officials that it was too late and that he would rely upon his own doctor, a British citizen.

A SHORT while later, Lee chose to exhume an old CIA blunder in a long disjointed

interview with five foreign correspondents. During the rambling discussion, he charged that Washington did not understand the Chinese, and added:

"And they don't understand the Vietnamese. That is why Viet Nam is in such a mess."

Ironically, Lee had indicated his support of the American effort in Viet Nam but because of pressures on him from Indonesia and Red China, he has confined expressions of support to private conversations.

Since Singapore's break with Malaysia, the 41-year-old Lee has been under some emotional stress, according to informants here. He has felt more vulnerable and has tried to show himself to be as vocally anti-American in public as Sukarno. A U.S. official described Lee's reaction this way: "We're the best Afro-Asian fall guy in the business, and Lee was doing what he thought necessary."

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BUT WASHINGTON continued to look upon Lee as a dynamic leader who would be co-operative with the British, as he confirmed in his interview, and would not carry his occasional blasts at the United States too far.

Then the illness of his wife intervened, and he turned to the United States for the one specialist he was told could help her.

Some sources here say Lee felt Washington was treating him somewhat cavalierly in saying that the doctor was retired, unwilling and unable to take the case, and that there were other doctors equally capable of treating her.

When the United States inquired more fully into Mrs. Lee's condition, they found it to be more sophisticated than they imagined and realized that perhaps Lee's own doctor had good cause to recommend the American specialist. It was then that they moved to persuade the doctor to see Mrs. Lee.

EMBARRASSMENT over the CIA goof was compounded here by the belated disclosure that Sec. of State Rusk, shortly after taking office in 1961,

wrote Lee that the United States regretted any "improper action" by an American in Singapore.

Neither the CIA nor many in the State Department knew the letter had been sent. It was at a time when President Kennedy was trying to rein in the free-wheeling actions of the CIA, a periodic exercise by most Presidents. Mr. Kennedy, like his predecessor, Gen. Eisenhower, reaffirmed that the ambassador in each country was in charge of all operations in that country, including the CIA.

It is freely admitted here that Lee has the goods on the attempt to subvert a Singapore special branch officer, including bona fide tapes of the conversations. But there is considerable bafflement over the prime minister's charge that a bribe of \$3,000,000 was offered him to hush up the case. No evidence of the bribe offer is available here.

CURIOSLY, last May, Lee told about the CIA case to a group of American businessmen touring Asia under the auspices of Time-Life Inc. So little was thought of it at that time, the disclosure went unreported. As one source notes: "It's part of the CIA's mandate to do what they tried to do in Singapore. They just got caught there."

What the State Department can now do to placate the emotionally upset Lee, whose wife continues desperately ill, is causing a king-sized headache.

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