

## Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony for Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore August 2, 2016

*President Obama.* Good morning, everybody.

*Audience members.* Good morning!

*President Obama.* Today we welcome our friends from Singapore. We have a little—

*Audience members.* Woo!

*The President.* —we have some Singapore weather. [*Laughter*] So you can appreciate that. Singapore is one nation, with four official languages. So let me just say good morning. *Selamat datang, Vanakkam.* And *ni hao.* On behalf of Michelle and myself, on behalf of the American people, I am honored to welcome Prime Minister Lee and Mrs. Lee to the United States.

This marks the first official state visit by a Singaporean Prime Minister in over 30 years. It celebrates the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two nations. And it is a reflection of my friendship and partnership with Prime Minister Lee over the past 8 years. It's an opportunity for me to repay the hospitality that the Prime Minister and the people of Singapore showed me when I visited Singapore during my first year in office. We were there for the APEC summit, with its tradition of dressing in shirts that are somewhat colorful—[*laughter*]—a tradition that we will reserve only for those summits and we are not duplicating today. [*Laughter*]

A half a century ago, when Singapore was an island of rural villages and crowded tenements, few would have imagined a day like today. But Singaporeans pride themselves on being the “little red dot”—the little red dot on many maps, but with a very big impact on the world. In less than a generation, under the vision and stewardship of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Singaporeans transformed their nation from Third World to First. They did this with almost no natural resources, except one: the people of Singapore and their commitment to education and to progress and to innovation.

Our Singaporean friends say that “a long road reveals the strength of your horse; a long time reveals the heart of your friends.” I first saw the heart of the people of Singapore as a young boy, during my years living in Southeast Asia. We see it now in the proud Singaporean Americans who enrich our Nation and who join us today, including a lot of “uncles” and “aunties.” [*Laughter*] We see it in all the Singaporean officers who attend [American] military academies, more than the rest of Asia combined.

We see our friendship in the collaborations between our innovators and entrepreneurs, from Silicon Valley to Singapore's Block 71. In fact, I understand that the Prime Minister himself recently wrote a program to solve sudoku puzzles—which Michelle will want. [*Laughter*] Then the Foreign Minister stepped in and translated that program into JavaScript. So I've got to start asking John Kerry to do that. [*Laughter*]

Today our friendship and shared interests bring us together in common pursuit of a common vision: a peaceful and prosperous Asia-Pacific and a more secure world. As the United States has rebalanced our foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific, Singapore—and Prime Minister Lee, in particular—have been solid-rock partners. Singapore is an anchor of our presence in the region. We stand together for a regional order where every nation, large and small, plays and trades by the same rules. And we stand together to meet the threats of the 21st century, from terrorism to the spread of disease to climate change.

In this work, we draw strength from our people, two societies built on multiculturalism and on merit. In the United States, we call ourselves a “melting pot” of different races, religions, and creeds. In Singapore, it is *rojak*—different parts united in a harmonious whole. We're bound by the belief that no matter who

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\* White House correction.

you are, if you work hard and play by the rules, you can make it. What Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew once said of his country could be said of us: Both are populations of triers, “prepared to try anything to improve themselves. [We] have only the future to go in quest of.”

Prime Minister Lee, Mrs. Lee: With our eyes focused on the future and united in our quest for the progress and security of our two peoples, we welcome you to the United States of America.

*Prime Minister Lee.* Thank you.

President Barack Obama and Mrs. Michelle Obama; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen; and Americans and Singaporeans who are here today: Thank you very much for this very kind invitation. I know it’s a busy year. I watched you on television last week, and Michelle too. And it’s an honor for Singapore to be received with such a warm welcome, especially as we celebrate 50 years of our diplomatic relations.

The first official visit by a Singapore Prime Minister to the United States was in 1967. President Lyndon Johnson received Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, our founding Prime Minister.

Singapore was then newly independent. We were struggling to build a modern economy with no means to defend ourselves in a turbulent Southeast Asia. But Mr. Lee did not come to seek military or economic aid. At the time, America was divided over the Vietnam War. He came to take the measure of America’s moods and intentions. He explained to his American friends why Asia mattered to America, and why the United States’ active engagement was important to millions of people living in Southeast Asia. America’s presence helped to contain the spread of communism and gave noncommunist Southeast Asian countries the crucial security, time, and space to consolidate and to prosper.

Almost 50 years later, the world has completely changed. The cold war is long over, and the threat of communism has disappeared. Asia is at peace, though tensions are not entirely absent. Southeast Asia has prospered, with countries cooperating peacefully as members of ASEAN.

America’s endurance, policies, and actions have contributed greatly to this current peace and prosperity. Keeping your markets open to trade, deepening your partnership with ASEAN, and cooperating with countries in the region to enhance regional security, you have helped create the basis for a peaceful, rules-based regional and international order.

President Obama, the U.S. rebalance to Asia is an important affirmation of a longstanding policy of the United States and has been warmly welcomed by all ASEAN countries. Your efforts to build a constructive relationship with China will set the strategic backdrop for the whole region and beyond. You have personally pushed for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, growing a small FTA that Singapore started, together with Chile, Brunei, and New Zealand, into what will be a major trading group linking both sides of the Pacific.

I know that America has many preoccupations both at home and abroad. Some Americans are anxious and frustrated with economic uncertainty and the uneven results of globalization, trade, and foreign engagement. But the U.S. has many interests, investments, and friends in the region. These strengthen the United States.

Singapore fervently hopes that the U.S. will stay engaged and maintain its indispensable role in the Asia-Pacific. In particular, we hope—and I’m sure the President shares this hope—that Congress will ratify the TPP soon. Not only will the TPP benefit American workers and businesses, it will send a clear signal, and a vital signal, that America will continue to lead in the Asia-Pacific and enhance the partnerships that link our destinies together.

Singapore’s own ties with the United States have remained steadfast through nine U.S. Presidents—five Republican and four Democratic—and three Singapore Prime Ministers. We will maintain these bipartisan links with whichever party wins the elections in November. We will continue to build and to deepen our economic and security relationships. We are partners in tackling the scourge of ISIS and other forms of violent extremism. Our armed

forces take part in exercises together and interact regularly.

On this visit, President Obama and I will discuss expanding our already extensive cooperation to new areas, including cybersecurity and smart cities. But our ties reach beyond the government offices and corporate boardrooms to the hearts and minds of our people.

Thousands of Singapore students and people study and work in America, and thousands of U.S. companies operate out of Singapore. The largest American curriculum school outside the U.S. in the world is in Singapore and is a Singapore-American school.

*Audience members.* Woo!

*Prime Minister Lee.* And there are some alumni here, obviously. [Laughter]

In my many visits to America, I meet Singaporeans living in many different States, contributing in their own ways to their host country and their respective communities. And I al-

so meet Americans who have been to Singapore and tell me about their Singaporean friends and their favorite hawked food. And I think many of them have met *rojak* too.

So I'm very grateful for this opportunity to renew our partnership on this 50th anniversary milestone. And I look forward to having many more occasions and reasons to celebrate this special relationship together.

Thank you, President Obama.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:26 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, where Prime Minister Lee was accorded a formal welcome with full military honors. In his remarks, he referred to Ho Ching, wife of Prime Minister Lee; and Minister of Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan of Singapore. Prime Minister Lee referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization, also known as ISIS.

## The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore August 2, 2016

*President Obama.* Hello, everyone. Please have a seat. Once again, I'm honored to welcome my good friend, Prime Minister Lee and his delegation back to the White House. I have been fortunate to work with the Prime Minister throughout my Presidency, and I always value his insight, his counsel, and his outstanding partnership.

Let me say that our thoughts today are also with former President Nathan, and we join the people of Singapore in praying for his full and speedy recovery.

As President, I've rebalanced American foreign policy so that we're playing a larger and long-term role in the Asia-Pacific, a region that is critical to our security and our prosperity. And as I said this morning, Singapore has played a vital role in that rebalance. With Singapore's support, the United States is engaging more deeply than ever across the region, including through ASEAN and the East Asia Summit. Given its strategic location, Singapore

is an anchor for the U.S. presence in the region, which is the foundation of stability and peace. And, Mr. Prime Minister, I want to thank you for the invaluable contributions that Singapore has made to a central pillar of our foreign policy.

Today we agreed to continue building on this progress. The U.S. and Singapore are united in our commitment to advancing regional security and stability. Our defense relationship remains one of the closest in Southeast Asia, with hundreds of American ships and aircraft rotating through Singapore each year. As I told the Prime Minister, we welcome Singapore's interest in purchasing the F-35 aircraft, and we'll also explore the possibility of Singaporean troops training on Guam.

At the same time, we'll continue working to strengthen regional institutions like ASEAN, in line with the principles we agreed to at Sunnysands earlier this year. And we reaffirmed our shared commitment to building a regional or-