

## Talks in Singapore Strive for Togetherness

# Britain Tries to Keep a R

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SINGAPORE, — Britain's new Defense Secretary Lord Carrington has spent the last week in four national capitals testing the response to a replacement for the Anglo-Malaysian Defense Agreement (AMDA).

Lord Carrington's proposal includes both a quantitative and qualitative reduction of the British commitments in the area. However, the reduction is less drastic than that proposed by the previous Labor government.

Lord Carrington's travels have taken him to Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand.

"We believe that our presence in the area is right," Carrington stated in Singapore.

Similar to America's Nixon Doctrine, the British feel that a greater defense responsibility must now go to their Asian Allies. Thus, they are proposing an integrated command structure with equal military representation from each of the five countries involved.

The present series of talks is only a preliminary investigation of each country's diplomatic position. Later this year, the British Conservatives plan to present their total defense policy. A multi-national conference concerning AMDA should convene in London at about the same time.

However, many barbs are being smoothed out by this week's high level discussions.

The former AMDA treaty provided Malaysia with a British blank check to defend it against any external aggression. This 11-year-old bilateral defense agreement was open ended and could be terminated by either party with 6 months notice.

Both Australia and New Zealand adhered to the treaty but were not signatories. The status of Singapore has been in question ever since her separation from the Malaysian Federation in 1965.

It was AMDA that involved Britain in Malaysia's conflict with Indonesia 7 years ago.

Automatic involvement in future confrontations is to be avoided. The new treaty is envisioned as a multilateral agreement only to "consult" and cooperate," giving each nation a broader range of responses to a possible external attack.

The proportioning of military units will reflect this change. The British Labor government's 1967 White Paper proposed the total withdrawal of all British troops east of Suez by 1971.

However, the return of the entire 50,000 man garrison was rejected by Prime Minister Heath's Conservative Government. Present plans call for one battalion and several destroyers to remain based in Singapore.

The future of the British Far East Command, similar to the US Cincpac is not certain. It is likely that only a skeleton force will remain after next year. The new control center is to be made up of an integrated command.

Rather than being first among equals, Britain would now have only an equal voice in decision making.

Some progress has already been made. The air defense station at Butterworth already has an integrated command. Last month, the five powers held a joint tactical operation at Bersatu Padu Malaysia and since then, their naval forces have begun a coordinated effort.

Observers here do not expect a sophisticated NATO-style army to evolve. British military personnel have gone to great lengths to convince the other governments that Britain has the capability to rapidly re-enter the area militarily if the need arises.

The reasons for Britain's present diplomatic position are both economic and strategic. The balance of payments problems that led to the 1967



# Far East Defense Alliance

White Paper have been at least partially corrected.

However, the dock strike and the tumult in Ireland may change this optimistic picture. The continual presence of British troops east of Suez is largely due to the growing Soviet and Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean. Lord Carrington emphasized the British necessity to protect her trading interests and capital investments in the area.

Lord Carrington's proposals have met with varying degrees of approval. Both Australia and New Zealand have favored loose multilateral commitments to Malaysia and Singapore.

Although Malaysia is considered politically neutral, Kuala Lumpur provided a warm welcome

to the British Defense Minister's ideas. He would prefer another bilateral arrangement but will settle for the multilateral conception.

Singapore will now be more certain of her exact status. Economically Singapore will suffer from the British pullout, but the token English troops that will remain are seen as guarantee of future security.

American reaction was also favorable. Secretary of State Rogers at a recent SEATO meeting made it clear that he was pleased by the British decision to keep some troops in the area.

All sides seem to agree on the feasibility of the plan. It now remains up to the diplomats to work out the exact details.

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by Brickman

