



# SPEECH

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## **Speech by Senior Minister of State for Defence and Acting Minister for Social and Family Development Mr Chan Chun Sing, at the Overseas Service Medal Presentation Ceremony**

13 Dec 2012

Chief of Defence Force,  
Chief of Navy,  
Families and friends,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good afternoon to all of you. To all the men and women of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Task Group, a very warm welcome home! You have done Singapore proud and flown our flag high through your many contributions to the international counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden.

While the Gulf of Aden is some 4,000 nautical miles away from Singapore, it is a major waterway that connects Asia and Europe. It accounts for a significant proportion of global trade. Much of the shipping that transits our Singapore port passes through the Gulf. Hence, when piracy in the Gulf of Aden threatens the freedom of navigation and the safety of international shipping, it impacts Singapore's security and economic well-being directly. It is therefore in our interest to contribute to the international counter-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden.

Since 2009, the SAF has sent four Task Groups to the Gulf of Aden under the ambit of the multinational Combined Task Force 151, or CTF 151, to enhance the security of ships transiting the Gulf. The first three task groups each comprised an RSN Landing Ship Tank and two Super Puma helicopters. In addition, an RSAF Fokker-50 Maritime Patrol Aircraft was deployed in 2011 to assist in surveillance operations along the Gulf of Aden. We have also sent Command Teams to lead CTF 151 twice, in 2010 and 2011. Today, I am proud to welcome home our first deployment of a frigate and naval helicopter to the Gulf of Aden.

It is heartening that the international counter-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden has made a difference to its security. Since the multinational naval operations to combat piracy commenced in early 2009, the number of successful pirate attacks has declined. The latest

report from the International Maritime Bureau indicates that the number of pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden has since dropped to one-third of its previous high of 214. Merchant vessels now adopt more effective anti-piracy measures to deter potential attackers. The improved security situation in the Gulf of Aden underscores the effectiveness of international collaboration to collectively safeguard shipping in key sea lanes.

Our contribution in support of the counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden has been useful and well-received by the international community. In this regard, Singapore has accepted a third invitation by the Combined Maritime Forces Headquarters to command CTF 151 for three months from March to June next year. While the international naval presence in the Gulf of Aden has made a positive impact in improving the piracy situation there, we will continue to work with the international community in deciding when the military presence will be less required.

Today, we recognise the contributions of our servicemen and women from the Navy, Army and Air Force who were deployed to the latest SAF Task Group to the Gulf of Aden from September to December this year. While in theatre, RSS Intrepid spent a total of 90 days on active duty, conducting deterrence and surveillance operations in a challenging environment. RSS Intrepid responded to three calls for assistance and launched more than 110 helicopter sorties to provide air surveillance and to warn off suspicious boats. Personnel from the Navy, Air Force and Army worked together seamlessly, around the clock, to ensure the success of each and every operation.

I want to make special mention of the fact that this deployment has proven the successful integration of our Frigate-Naval Helicopter operational capabilities. This was done within a very short span of time, by personnel who were operating in a new, high-tempo and demanding environment. The unique stresses of this mission must have been felt by each and every one of you, but you were steadfast and determined, and you gave your very best.

This successful deployment bears testament to the high standards of professionalism in the SAF. You have proven yourselves to be competent, effective and operationally ready. This is a view that is shared by others who observed you in-theatre. Once again, you have done Singapore, the SAF, your families, and every one of us proud.

What truly moves me is your dedication and commitment to the mission. Many of our servicemen made personal sacrifices in order to be part of this mission. For example, ME2 Chua Kai Jong was deployed just two weeks after the birth of his first child, Bryan. Now that he is at home, I am quite certain that his wife, Claire, will appreciate the extra pair of hands around the house. We have two Operationally-Ready National Servicemen who took a break from their civilian lives to serve the nation. Four NSF's also volunteered to extend their national service so that they could participate in this mission. Your deep personal commitment to duty reflects a strong ethos of service to the SAF and Singapore.

On this note, I would like to thank the families and friends, who gave support, well-wishes and encouragement from back home. Your support had gone a long way to helping our servicemen and women accomplish their mission with peace of mind. Many of you posted notes on the "Sea of Support" website, letting our servicemen and women know that they were constantly in our thoughts. I felt that this post by Ms Andrea Lau summed up our sentiments well. She wrote: "You may be far from home, but you are never far from our hearts. Every ordinary day in Singapore is a reminder of your extraordinary work."

Let me once again congratulate all of you for successfully carrying out your mission. On behalf of the SAF and MINDEF, I would like to thank each and every one of you for serving our country and keeping Singapore safe and secure.

Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore