

14 AUG 1992

SPEECH BY MR MATTHIAS YAO CHIH, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(DEFENCE), AT THE NATIONAL DAY OBSERVANCE CEREMONY
AT GAS ON WED, 12 AUG 92 AT 8.30 AM 92 - YCM - 1

On National Day two years ago, we heard bad news from the Persian Gulf.

Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 Aug 1990, and captured its capital within 12 hours.

The lesson for Singaporeans was clear.

To preserve our sovereignty, we must have a defence force that is strong and ready.

otherwise, we will be as vulnerable as Kuwait was.

The events that followed in the Gulf War are well known.

One day after the invasion, the British and the Americans sent warships into the Gulf.

Four days later, US troops landed in Saudi Arabia to prepare against a possible Iraqi attack.

Then came "Desert Storm".

The United Nations and the major powers worked together to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait.

The action was swift, sharp and decisive.

Triumph was loudly and euphorically proclaimed.

The assumption was that this would be the new way to deal with aggression.

Those who violate international law and order will be punished quickly by the UN with the help of the major powers.

If Singaporeans thought that this was the second lesson we could learn from the Gulf War - that the future is secure because we can expect our friends to free us if we are invaded - then I suggest we should think very carefully again.

International events do not support this belief.

Look at Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Hardly a day goes by without a headline about shelling and starvation in Sarajevo, Bosnia's capital.

Fighting started when Yugoslavia broke up last year.

The Serbians wanted to dominate by force the territories where there were Serbs, in the newly independent countries Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia.

Initial response by the major powers was cautious. No one wanted to take the lead to tackle the problem. They hoped that the fighting would soon exhaust itself.

It was not to be.

Meanwhile, the atrocities mounted, and the refugees started to move out in larger numbers.

The US, the European Community and the UN Security Council tried to impose sanctions on Serbia and send in peace-keeping forces.

But the sanctions have made little impact, and the peace-keeping forces are themselves under fire.

Food supplies cannot get through to Sarajevo because the airport and roads are not safe.

The slaughter continues.

Later today, the UN Security Council will vote on a resolution to allow the use of force to get food and medical supplies through to the people in Sarajevo.

I hope that this will bring some relief to those who are trapped there.

But the UN Security Council is talking about using force to get the supplies through only.

There is no discussion on military action to stop the fighting.

Some say that it is because such military action will be too costly. Others say that the Western powers do not want to be bogged down by another war like Vietnam or Beirut.

Whatever the reason, the lesson for this National Day should be clear. If we are ever invaded, do not expect anyone to drive out the invaders for us.

The events in Sarajevo may sound so far away, and the names so strange, that we may not pay much attention to the news from there.

But remember this: to the rest of the world, Singapore may sound even further away than Sarajevo, and Bukit Timah even more unfamiliar than Bosnia-Herzegovina.

If a war should come, the rest of the world may not pay much attention to us either.

To preserve our country, our prosperity and our way of life, we must rely on our own effort.

By our own effort, we must make sure that we can overcome whatever difficulty we may face.

Of course, it will be good if our friends can help us.

We will do all that we can to make friends and cement our friendships.

But there may exist domestic and international factors that could prevent them from intervening.

There is no guarantee that when we are in trouble, there will be an "Equatorial Storm" to blow away our aggressors just like "Desert Storm" did to Kuwait's.

The crisis in Bosnia teaches us that we have to build a capability that can ensure our survival.

We import almost everything we eat.

We must therefore have a navy that will keep our sea lanes open so that we can continue to get our food.

We must have an airforce that will keep us safe from air bombardment.

We must have an army that will guard our land and protect our vital installations.

We must have a workforce that keeps learning and improving so that the economy can overcome any attempt to subvert it.

We must build a community that wants to do everything it can to make Singapore succeed.

Our protection is our Total Defence.

We must be well prepared.

Our deterrence must be strong and committed to give us some certainty in this uncertain world.

And so that we can celebrate many more peaceful National Days to come.

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