



# SPEECH

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## **Response to Parliament on the Sending of Troops to Iraq by Minister for Defence, RADM (NS) Teo Chee Hean**

10 Nov 2003

Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission I will take the two questions by Ms Irene Ng and Mr Steve Chia together.

Singapore has contributed a C-130 transport aircraft and a landing ship tank or LST to the multi-national effort to help rebuild Iraq. Our C-130 detachment, comprising 31 SAF servicemen, will be on a 2-month mission carrying out airlift, transportation and supply missions. Our aircraft will assist coalition forces in carrying supplies and personnel, and also carry humanitarian material and conduct medical evacuation operations. The LST, RSS Endurance, with a crew of 160, is on a 2-month mission undertaking logistical tasks. She will provide replenishment and supplies for other naval vessels operating in the northern Arabian Gulf, and conduct patrols to show maritime presence. RSS Endurance will also provide a platform for helicopter missions and maritime boarding missions by teams from other contributing countries when they inspect ships in the operating area. On her way to Iraq, RSS Endurance also transported humanitarian aid material provided by the Singapore Civil Defence Force to the Iraqi Fire Department.

Sir, the international community recognises that the reconstruction of Iraq is an important endeavour. Besides Singapore, some 35 other countries are deploying forces to make a contribution to the multi-national reconstruction effort. The importance of establishing conditions of stability and security in Iraq was also reflected in the unanimous vote for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1511 on 16 October 2003 which urged states to contribute assistance, including military forces. Resolution 1511 highlighted the importance of international support to help the Iraqi people govern themselves, freely determine their own political future, and control their own natural resources. Resolution 1511 also urged countries to support the Iraq reconstruction effort and meet the needs of the Iraqi people by providing resources necessary for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Iraq's economic infrastructure.

As a responsible member of the international community, Singapore has made contributions to the multi-national effort to assist in the reconstruction of Iraq. The C-130 and the LST follow on an earlier contribution of a Singapore Police Force contingent of 32 personnel to help train Iraqi police in the protection of critical installations. The people of Singapore have also responded to the need of the Iraqi people for international assistance by contributing to the Singapore Red Cross Society's appeal for funds for the reconstruction of Iraq. The appeal has now raised a total of \$1.4 million, including a contribution of US\$250,000 by the Singapore Government.

It is important that Singapore does our part within our means to help the international community see through the reconstruction of Iraq. This will help the Iraqi people to rebuild their lives, facilitate Iraq's reintegration into the global community, and provide the foundation for a better future for the Iraqi people. It is in our interest that this effort succeeds. Without a stable Iraq, there can be no stability in the Gulf region. Security and stability in the Gulf region has significant implications for issues that are critical to Singapore, such as the supply of oil and the spread of terrorism. We may be geographically distant from Iraq, but how the situation turns out there has a direct bearing on some of our most vital interests.

The Government recognises that the situation in Iraq is still in transition and not yet stabilised, and there will be risks to our SAF servicemen as they carry out their mission to aid in Iraq's reconstruction. But the SAF cannot shy away from missions in support of our national interests and our responsibilities as a member of the international community just because the mission carries some risks.

We should also remember that this is not the first time that the SAF has been deployed in a multi-national support mission where our servicemen have faced danger. In UNMISSET in Timor Leste, our combat peacekeepers and helicopter detachment were deployed in operational missions. During the one and a half years that the SAF was deployed in UNMISSET, our servicemen were involved in a number of dangerous situations dealing with civil unrest and the militia. In 1998, an SAF officer who served as a military adviser in the UN Support Mission to Afghanistan, which was a peace-making mission, was caught in more than one life-threatening situation during the battle for Mazar-e-Sharif. Such missions, including the current one to Iraq, carry an element of risk. But they also allow the SAF to gain useful operational experience.

MINDEF and the SAF mitigate the risks in such missions by making sure that our servicemen are well trained and well equipped to carry out their mission, and to deal with contingencies that may arise. For the deployment to Iraq, our aircraft and ship are equipped with appropriate defensive systems. For instance, our C-130 is equipped with anti-missile defensive systems for self-protection. These systems are comparable to those of aircraft and ships from other countries which are carrying out similar missions there.

Sir, as a responsible member of the international community, Singapore has to make our

contribution to multi-national missions, particularly where they safeguard our national interests. There are always risks involved in such missions, as in this deployment to Iraq. MINDEF and the SAF will ensure that our servicemen have the training and equipment necessary for them to carry out their missions, and to defend and protect themselves.

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