



SPEECH

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Speech by Mr Ong Ye Kung, Second Minister for Defence at the Inauguration Parade of the Island Defence Training Institute, on 31 Jul 17, 1600hrs, Clementi Camp

31 Jul 2017

Colleagues

Friends

Ladies and gentlemen

I am happy to be here today to inaugurate the Island Defence Training Institute (IDTI). Ten years ago, the Infantry Training Institute was formed to anchor the training system for National Servicemen. At that time, our pre-occupation was mostly on traditional threats. And hence, we prepared our soldiers to be engaged in conventional warfare, mainly jungle warfare.

Global Terrorism - A Different Kind of War

Since then, security threats have evolved. One imminent threat is global terrorism. It is a fast rising one, increasing in prevalence, with the number of incidents tripling from 5,000 cases in 2011 to almost 17,000 in 2014.

More importantly, the nature of the threat is vastly different from the traditional threats. First, there is no fixed enemy. The enemy is no longer distinguished by uniforms or by colours.

Instead of being camouflaged in the jungle, it is now camouflaged amongst the civilian population. It also means that security forces have to be on alert all the time, while terrorists only need to succeed once. Though traditional enemies are intent on winning and surviving battles, terrorists on the other hand are willing to sacrifice their lives in order to inflict harm, for the promise of martyrdom.

Second big difference is the scale of attacks has shrunk and their sophistication reduced, which ironically, make the attacks more dangerous. In the 1970s and 1980s, terrorist attacks tended to be sophisticated, large-scale activities such as the Munich Olympics Massacre in 1972. But today, we see a high frequency of attacks, much smaller scale, using trucks and knives to cause harm to innocent lives. Such attacks are easier to execute, harder to foil.

Third difference, the war has gone urban. In Mosul, U.S. backed Iraqi forces faced immense difficulty in fighting Islamic State militants in a densely populated city, where militants had built up complex defences. Security forces that are more adept to fighting in jungles, are caught by surprise by the resilience of the militant forces, who employ highly effective urban tactics and accurate sniper fire. As a result, in the 9 months of conflict beginning in October 2016, over 1,000 anti-ISIS forces were killed, and over 6,000 wounded.

The Manchester concert is another example. The assailants, well aware of the security forces' conduct of stringent checks on crowds entering the venue, strategically chose to strike at the conclusion of the event when security was not as tight. In the field, it is a contest of war fighting skills and supremacy of weapons. In urban battle, this can easily become a cat-and-mouse game.

Fourth difference, the war is also fought in cyber space, which defies the traditional phases of conflict. Terrorist organisations are skilled in spreading propaganda and extremist ideologies online - no less adept than commercial marketing companies. They have created an almost "franchiser-franchisee" relationship in how they operate, instigating self-radicalised individuals and groups around the world to promote their cause. Hence, extremism infiltrates societies and converts our own. In Singapore, this includes a 22-year old female infant-care assistant who was detained under the Internal Security Act, having planned to join the Islamic State; and two AETOS security officers who were similarly detained in June.

ISIS has also used social media and online platforms to disseminate best practices in conducting attacks and techniques to maximise casualties. In November 2016, the Islamic State published an issue of their Rumiya magazine, entitled 'Just Terror Tactics'. The magazine provided details such as vehicle structural specifications, optimal speeds, recommended targets in order to achieve high casualty counts in vehicle attacks.

Terrorism is spreading, it is indiscriminate, it is at our doorstep, it is here to stay. The threats to us and our way of life are very real.

We Are Confronted With Terror Threats

What's the situation in our region? In short, terrorism is already in Southeast Asia.

Since January last year, a total of eight ISIS-linked incidents have occurred within our region - they include suicide bombings, drive-by shootings, and stabbings. Multiple explosive devices went off in a bus terminal in Jakarta in May, killing three police officers, wounding 10 people.

We also see a worrying escalation into drawn-out conflicts, notably the ongoing fight between the Philippine security forces and ISIS-affiliated groups such as the Maute rebels, which has claimed more than 250 lives in Marawi in the last 2 months. ISIS plans to create a wilayat, or a satellite state of its so-called caliphate, within the Philippines. With the Philippines as a foothold, ISIS can establish training camps that will attract radicals from other countries within Southeast Asia. These armed and trained radicals will ultimately be threats to their home countries, upon their return. The proximity of Marawi to Singapore is of particular concern - the distance is just a little bit longer than Singapore to Bali.

The recently released Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report cited that the terrorism threat to Singapore is at its highest in recent years. Reports have shown that ISIS had plotted to carry out two attacks against Singapore in the last year, one of which included the plan to launch a rocket attack on Marina Bay. Confronted with the clear and present danger of terror threats, we have been telling Singaporeans 'It is not a matter of if, but when.'

Standing Ready

And today, I want to assure Singaporeans - we have done what we can to get ourselves prepared. This is a joint effort across Government agencies, which include the SAF, MHA, CSA, MPA and ICA.

First level of defence is surveillance. Our security agencies are keeping watch 24/7, and they have done a good job in deterring any attempts to strike at our nation and our way of life. We established the Island Defence Task Force in 2010, the IDTF. The IDTF played a crucial role in coordinating joint patrols with the Singapore Police Force in our heartlands. The successful conduct of this exercise showcased the IDTF's capabilities, and our multi-agency efforts, to coordinate large-scale Homeland Security operations.

Security forces are constantly on a look out for potential terror suspects. That's why we can detect and detain potential extremists before they can cause any significant harm. We are closely working with foreign forces, in sharing information, and conducting joint exercises. But we need the help of family members and friends too - to report any unusual and suspected behavior. We launched SGSecure, so that all Singaporeans can be our eyes and ears on the ground - looking out for the suspicious, responding proactively should an attack happen.

Second, is to build up our capabilities, for fighting terrorists, for urban warfare, which will increasingly be the theatre for extremists. SAFTI city will introduce key urban features such as multiple road networks, high rise buildings as well as MRT stations. These features will provide realistic training for our Homeland Security and Urban Operations by simulating the dense urban environment of Singapore's commercial and residential areas. We need to adapt synergistically, leverage each other's strengths, share our limited resources, work in unison. Inter-operability and cross-collaboration between the SAF, MHA and other security partners will have to be continuously refined, strengthened and exercised to meet this evolving threat.

Third, is to ensure these are not one off efforts but an on-going one to strengthen capability, we need to develop a centre of excellence. Just like Infantry Training Institute, the centre of excellence needs to train and equip all our servicemen with the skills and technology to deal with several counter-terrorist and homeland defence scenarios. In collaboration with IDTF, IDTI will also serve to constantly update training pedagogy and doctrine, to ensure that our soldiers employ the latest counter-terrorism techniques, equipment and knowhow.

There will be four sub-units under IDTI - the Homeland Security Training Centre (HSTC), the Island Defence Training Centre (IDTC), Security and Policing Vocational School (SPVS) as well as the Security and Policing Leadership School (SPLS). The two centres will be responsible for training and developing SAF units for critical missions, including the protection of our military and civilian key installations, conduct of joint deterrence patrols and other Peace Time Contingency Operations. The two schools will focus on military security and policing duties. IDTI will focus on leadership and vocational training at the individual-level, as well as at the unit-level.

IDTI will train both active NSFs, as well as NSmen. Since last year, our full-time National Servicemen from the active units have started to undergo training to conduct homeland security operations. At its peak, IDTI will train up to 18,000 active and NSmen in homeland security operations, and a further 15,000 personnel for other island defence roles every year.

IDTI will also develop the competency of units in utilising and integrating the latest technologies to enhance their capabilities and effectiveness in Homeland Security operations. It will also foster new inter-agency partnerships, strengthen existing ones, and regularly exercise avenues of collaboration. Through joint exercises such as Exercise NORTH STAR, the SAF will be able to continuously enhance and refine the way it works with MHA and other security partners.

Conclusion

IDTI can only be as successful as the readiness and dedication of the personnel that undergoes its training.

IDTI will be commanded by Senior Lieutenant Colonel (SLTC) Vincent Soh Chee Yong. Vincent has had extensive experience in island defence, homeland security operations, and inter-agency collaboration projects and exercises. I am confident, and we are confident, that Vincent will lay the foundation for IDTI to deliver excellent and relevant training for our Army units.

Beyond the commander we need dedicated personnel. One of IDTI's trainees is LTA(NS) Satria Bin Sadon. An OC from 716 SIR, Satria's wife had unfortunately suffered a miscarriage in June 2015, the same month he was scheduled to return for his first In Camp

Training (ICT). Notwithstanding, Satria made the tough choice to turn up for training. As it was the unit's first ICT, Satria felt that it was important for the OC to be present.

Satria said, "I wanted to make the point that though we may have never seen each other before, we will be spending the next 10 years training and we must know that we can depend on each other". His wife Diyanah was fully supportive of his decision, and her understanding gave him great motivation. We are honoured to have dedicated leaders like Satria amongst us, and grateful to have the strong support of loved ones like Mdm Diyanah. Satria and Diyanah and their kid are with us today. Please stand up, and take a bow. And I'm sure there are many other soldiers, many other dedicated personnel like Satria, with very supportive family members like Diyanah.

The Island Defence Task Force, with its committed NSmen and NSF's as its backbone, personifies the will of a nation to defend itself. Generations of NSF's and NSmen who remain committed to serve Singapore even when the going gets tough, are a testament that our NS institution remains strong. They are the reason why the SAF is credible and well-regarded. On this note, I wish to extend our appreciation to family members present, for your unwavering support to our soldiers.

I urge each soldier to do your best, and in so doing, we will prevail against those who seek to undermine our peace and stability. Thank you.

News Release:

- Enhancing Homeland Security for Singapore (MINDEF_20170731001.pdf)

Fact Sheet:

- Fact Sheet: Island Defence Training Institute (MINDEF_20170731001_1.pdf)