



NEWS RELEASE

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Fact Sheet: A Restructured SAF to Better Meet New Security Threats

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Background

Amidst a changing geopolitical environment, Singapore faces new security challenges and threats. Restructuring efforts at the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) are underway to ensure that the SAF remains relevant, responsive and effective for Singapore's national defence. The SAF has stepped up efforts and will continue to work with whole-of-government agencies to strengthen capabilities and tackle emerging threats in the counter-terrorism, cyber and maritime domains.

Enhanced Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Capabilities

The terrorism threat to Singapore remains high. Singapore has been a terrorist target in the past, most recently in 2016 by regional militants linked to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Beyond our shores, global and regional terrorist groups continue to plot and conduct terrorist attacks, including in Southeast Asia. There is the threat of foreign terrorist fighters from conflict zones in the Middle East coming to the region, and introducing new attack methods and capabilities. The threat from home-grown, self-radicalised lone actors also cannot be ruled out.

Today, SAF task forces are on standby 24/7, to support our homefront and law enforcement agencies in dealing with terrorism-related incidents. Accurate and timely intelligence is important in dealing effectively with terrorism threats. The SAF will restructure its Military Intelligence Organisation (MIO) to provide dedicated intelligence support for counter-terrorism early warning and incident response. It will focus on the following areas:

Building Capabilities. Working with defence technology partners, the restructured MIO will acquire systems and capabilities that can uncover, investigate and monitor threat concerns. MIO will also strengthen its counter-terrorism research and analysis expertise.

Strengthening Partnerships. As part of the national counter-terrorism efforts, the restructured MIO will work closely with other national agencies. As terrorism is a complex international security challenge that crosses national boundaries, MIO will also cooperate with its foreign military intelligence partners, both on a bilateral and multilateral basis. MIO will continue to participate actively in regional counter-terrorism initiatives to enhance intelligence sharing and collaboration, such as the “ASEAN Our Eyes” initiative^[1].

Stronger Cyber Defence Capabilities

Similar to threats in the air, land, and sea, advanced cyber threat actors can pose threats to Singapore's national security. The Defence Cyber Organisation (DCO) was set up in 2017 as the cyber command under the authority of a Deputy Secretary to lead and drive cybersecurity across the Defence Sector. In September 2019, DCO attained an initial level of operating capability to secure our Defence Information Infrastructure and defend against threats in the cyber domain. The Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) and the SAF will develop stronger cyber defence capabilities to defend against foreign actors who can pose cyber threats to Singapore's national security. It is timely to bring the cyber command under the SAF after achieving key milestones in:

Enhancing Operations. DCO established the Defence Cyber Security Centre (DCSC) in 2018. Through the DCSC, MINDEF/SAF is able to conduct 24/7 cybersecurity monitoring and incident response for the defence sector, as well as coordinate integrated defence sector operations. Operational readiness was also validated through internal cyber defence exercises.

Building the Cyber Workforce. MINDEF/SAF has also been building its cyber workforce. The Cyber NSF scheme was launched in 2018, allowing MINDEF/SAF to tap on individuals with the requisite skills and aptitude. New career specialisations were also introduced to attract and develop both military and non-uniformed cybersecurity professionals, under the SAF C4 Experts (C4X) vocation and Defence Cyber Expert (DCX) job specialisation respectively.

Developing Capabilities. To support cyber defence operations, MINDEF/SAF has developed threat-hunting and cyber threat intelligence capabilities. These capabilities enable MINDEF/SAF to identify and respond to cyber threats more rapidly.

To guide the restructuring efforts, a committee led by the Chief of Defence Force (CDF) and Permanent Secretary (Defence Development) has been formed to oversee the building of an integrated cyber command and force to defend our digital borders, especially against foreign cyber actors, both state and non-state who seek to undermine our stability and/or pose a threat to national security. For command integrity and accountability, after the restructuring, CDF will continue to be in charge of mission outcomes, and the Chief C4I (Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence) will be the pinnacle position that holds accountability and reports directly to the CDF. The SAF cyber command will have to provide threat assessments and early warning in cyber-attacks, and also respond accordingly.

New Maritime Defence Capabilities

Singapore is an island nation, with seaborne trade the lifeblood of its economy. This is because Singapore sits at the convergence of key global shipping routes. Today, about 70% of the world's maritime trade transits through the Singapore Strait. As part of the whole-of-government maritime security efforts, the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN)'s Maritime Security Task Force (MSTF) will be increasing its capacity to tackle maritime threats that have grown in scale and complexity. These threats include the recent spike in sea robbery incidents in the Singapore Strait and intrusions into Singapore Territorial Waters. New purpose-built ships will be acquired and delivered in the next few years. In the interim, four patrol vessels will be refurbished. These ships will be dedicated, and deployed for greater persistence to protect our territorial waters.

Together with the MSTF's Littoral Mission Vessels, these new assets will enhance the MSTF's capabilities to protect Singapore's waters against intrusion and other maritime threats. The MSTF will continue to work closely with national agencies, such as the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, Singapore Customs and Singapore Police Force, through the Singapore Maritime Crisis Centre, to safeguard Singapore's waters.

Internationally, the RSN is constantly strengthening its cooperation and collaboration with foreign counterparts, such as with Malaysia and Indonesia, given the transnational nature of maritime threats. One such initiative is the Malacca Straits Patrol, which has worked well to reduce piracy in the Malacca Strait through coordinated patrols by the navies of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Discussions are ongoing for such efforts to be extended to other areas in our surrounding waters. At the same time, the RSN's Information Fusion Centre is also linked to 97 operation centres from 41 countries. It hosts International Liaison Officers from various navies and coast guards to enable better information-sharing with our neighbours, facilitating operations to deter possible perpetrators and respond to sea robberies.

^[1]The ASEAN "Our Eyes" is an initiative by the ten ASEAN countries to exchange strategic information on counter terrorism. The ASEAN Defence Ministers signed a joint statement launching the initiative in February 2018.

More Resources:

- Speech by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen, at the Ministry of Defence Committee of Supply Debate 2020 (Document No: MINDEF_20200302001_4)
- Fact Sheet on A Greener SAF to Contribute to Environmental Sustainability (Document No: MINDEF_20200302001_6)