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## TOTAL DEFENCE: COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE

### JOB HISTORY

When I left the University of Singapore, 20 years ago, my immediate interest was to work for a Ph D, and perhaps sequester myself later with scholarly dons.

I actually took up a Research Fellowship. But two weeks later PSC dealt an interfering blow. It refused to release me from my bursary bond. I was summarily plonked into the Administrative Service. That was my first big experience that plans may not always work out. Exogenous factors play a big part.

After a while in the Administrative Service, I was released to a shipping line. I thought I had found my niche in life. But again, good old exogenous factor interfered and I was sucked back into public service.

### X FACTOR

I recounted my job history not to extol the virtues of job-hopping. It is to emphasize the influence of the X factor, the unknown extraneous factor we never allow for in our lives.

I see this often as an MP. Crying young mothers have sought my assistance to get a hawker's stall or to appeal to HDB to give them more time to settle their rental arrears. Their husbands have left them, or been detained for drug consumption. Others, looking forward to a happy life, had suddenly become desperate widows, without skills but many children. They too had their plans upset by unexpected events.

If the X factor can affect a person's life so gravely, it too can interfere with the fortunes of entire nations, for better or for worse. The oil crisis of 1973, for example, made billionaires of the Arabs and paupers of many oil-importing countries.

Living in Singapore, we sometimes forget that violence, chaos and misery are daily occurrences in the world. Perhaps, those events took place or are taking place so far away. Perhaps, we have become desensitised because we see gunfire, tears and deaths, so frequently on our TV screen. Perhaps, the present peace and quiet and our growing prosperity, have lulled us into forgetting the interfering hand of the X factor.

#### ITALIANS IN THE 15TH CENTURY

The Italians in the Middle Ages experienced a similar period of peace and quiet. In the 15th Century, the period of Machiavelli, the States of Venice, Naples, Milan and Florence, were prosperous and eminent political entities enjoying a standard of living way above their neighbours' in Europe. They were proud of their wealth and the life style which their inventions and advances in scholarship had given them. They forgot about security and were easily overthrown by a French Army under Charles VIII in 1494. Italy became an open house where foreign armies marched in and out at will. Italians could do no more than look on as the alien

armies fought each other and plundered the country, leaving the land in ruins.

Modern day historians traced Middle Ages' Italy's downfall to various causes. A principal one was that the Italians, in the midst of their economic and intellectual superiority, neglected military virtues. "Stability has increased so much," reported a statesman of that time "that, if nothing unexpected happens, we shall in future hear more about battles against birds and dogs than about battles between armies."

Whereas the Italian states had previously invested much material, manpower and effort in maintaining a line of frontier fortresses capable of holding out against superior forces, this capability soon declined. The armaments and defence systems of the Italian states became far inferior to those of their neighbours. It was too late when they saw the glint of King Charles' artillery in the Mediterranean sun.

History is full of vivid examples of how state boundary shifted like drifting desert sand. Today, we are seeing the shattering of Lebanon. Tomorrow, other hapless, helpless states may be pounded, shunted aside. But there are other states which have learnt the lessons of history well. Sweden is one of them.

#### TOTAL DEFENCE IN SWEDEN

Sweden has chosen a policy of non-alignment in peace time aimed at neutrality in the event of war. This policy is supported by a total defence based on wartime mobilisation of all the resources of Swedish society. The Swedish Total Defence consists of:

- The Armed Forces
- Civil Defence
- Economic Defence
- Psychological Defence
- Emergency Planning of the Society

The main task of Sweden's Total Defence is to discourage threats and attacks on the country, while protecting, feeding and clothing the population. The purpose of Swedish Total Defence is to make it too risky and too expensive for others to mount a military undertaking against her.

#### TOTAL DEFENCE IN SINGAPORE

We share Sweden's defence policy. Our defence message this year is Total Defence - total because we have a small regular Armed Forces and hence must be able to mobilize all human and material resources in times of emergency. We intend to translate this defence concept into workable programmes in the following manner.

First, we will launch a mass communication programme on Total Defence in April. Next, we will make defence a life-long commitment for every able-bodied man. Simultaneously, we will work out a system to mobilise essential material or civil resources, the way we have done for human resources.

#### SWISS EXAMPLE

Let me elaborate on defence as a life-long commitment by using the Swiss example. Every able-bodied Swiss serves four phases of defence obligation:

- (a) From 20 to 32 years, he serves in an Elite unit as part of the Manoeuvre Divisions. (This is similar to our two or two-and-a-half years National Service plus the first cycle of 13 years Reservist Service).
- (b) From 33 to 42, he is posted to a Border unit, responsible for border defence.

- (c) From 43 to 50 years of age, he serves in a Territorial unit, responsible for territorial defence.
- (d) After 50 years old, he is channelled to civil defence.

Up to now, our reserve service has been designed to cater only for military defence. A typical SAF reservist can expect to complete his in-camp training cycle at between 30 to 35 years of age, well within the maximum national service age limit of 50 for officers and 40 for Other Ranks provided for under the Enlistment Act.

As defence is a life-long commitment, we intend to channel the reservists, after they have served with the SAF, to Civil Defence units, as they are still fit. They will serve Civil Defence until their maximum National Service age limit.

#### CIVIL RESOURCES

Human resources is only one side of the coin. The other side is civil resources.

The concept of mobilising civil resources like cranes, bulldozers, ships, aircraft, to support national emergencies or defence efforts is not new. Countries such as Britain, Germany, Australia and even Hong Kong have plans to mobilise civil resources in times of emergency. Britain demonstrated the contribution of civil resources in the resolution of the Falklands conflict. In that conflict, she was able to mobilise commercial shipping at short notice to support the war effort.

National Service has helped us build a credible Armed Forces without tying down large numbers of our valuable manpower resources. In the same way, we should tap available civil resources for use in an emergency.

## SECURITY FOUNDATION

Security is the foundation on which peace and prosperity is built. Without it no nation can plan and build its future. Defence is commitment to the future.

Machiavelli put it this way in the 15th Century, "The foundation of states is a good military organisation." He had observed the decisive role of military power in Roman history and politics and had drawn the conclusion that the existence and greatness of a state were assured only if military power received its appropriate place in the political order. He even admonished the rulers to keep in mind that the preservation of their power depended on military strength: "A Prince should therefore have no other aim or thought, nor take up any other thing for his study, but war and its organisation and discipline." He was of course referring to 15th Century Italy when states were rivalling each other for political supremacy.

The admonishment of Machiavelli is not lost on countries like Sweden, Switzerland and New Zealand, all small countries in terms of population. Sweden is sparsely populated with 8.3 million people. Switzerland has a population of 6.5 million, and New Zealand, 3.2 million.

## NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand is far from anywhere. She has no perceived threats. Any major threat to her is likely to come only in the context of a wide and perhaps generalized breakdown in international order. Her defence objective, as spelt out in her recent Defence Review (1983) is "to develop the capabilities of the Armed Services so that they constitute an effective deterrent against direct challenges to New Zealand or its vital national interests ... "

When asked where were the threats or whether New Zealand was not too small to defend herself, her Defence Ministry replied,

" A Government must start with the obvious fact that the future is unknowable. It will not be inclined to accept at face value the claims of those who say that they know otherwise and that there is no cause to take precautions because there will be no problem. If on the other hand we accept the more careful proposition that the ability to project military power in our times renders no part of the world secure, we must be ready to oppose any challenge that might arise. Put in its most simple terms, if there is no obvious evidence of a threat to New Zealand's national security the aim must be to prevent one from arising. This Government also rejects the notion that small countries cannot protect their interests in the modern world and that there is no point in trying. Such an approach would rule out participation by a small country in attempts to resolve international problems and would suggest that there is no cause to co-operate with other like-minded countries in the pursuit of common aims. "

(Para 3.5, Defence Review, 1983)

#### TIME TRAVEL

The future is indeed unknowable. Travelling in a time capsule into the future is not the same as taking a plane on a scheduled flight. There are no control towers to guide you. Even if the route is planned, sudden storms may veer the capsule from its planned journey. But if the travellers are well-prepared, mentally, psychologically and physically, like the astronauts, they stand a better chance of survival in the unknowable future. #####