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SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND  
SECOND MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT THE GRADUATION  
CEREMONY AT PASIR LABA CAMP ON TUESDAY  
27 MARCH 1984 AT 6.30 PM

## SAFEGUARD YOUR FUTURE WITH DEFENCE

Throughout the Western world today, a generation born in peace and unable to visualise any situation other than peace has grown up. This generation went to extreme lengths to distance itself from the military by the casualness of its dress, the length of its hair, and its relaxed life style. Thus, we have the hippie movement, the flower people, and the anti-war pacifists. In Singapore too, a generation has grown up without direct experience of any dangers threatening them from outside.

In the long run, such casual and carefree attitudes are likely to undermine the self-confidence of the military. And it will strengthen the opposition to the necessary large military budgets compelled by the increasing cost of weapons.

One may feel gratified that, after a thousand years of conflict within Europe, a society has at last developed which feels itself sufficiently secure to turn its back on the traditional military virtues. But such confidence may prove short-lived. We live in an unpredictable world. Nothing has occurred since 1945 to indicate that war, or the threat of it, could not still be an effective instrument of state policy.

On the contrary, the reverse is true. One in four nations is at war. Against peoples who were not prepared to defend themselves, war or the threat of it might be very effective indeed.

Defence cannot just be the responsibility of the government or the armed forces. It is the responsibility of the whole nation. A population cannot will the end objective of deterrence which is peace, without willing the means which is vigilance and national preparedness.

Self-preservation is a natural instinct for an individual, a society or a nation. To survive, one can bend with the wind, or fortify oneself against the wind. Between the two, the latter is more dignified.

Let me illustrate. After the fall of France in 1940, Britain was written off by Hitler who felt that Britain was bound to recognise 'her militarily hopeless situation'. That was a misjudgement of the British will to survive with dignity. Churchill and the British people emphatically rejected any compromise and showed great determination to pursue the war. Had the British people accepted 'their militarily hopeless situation', the outcome of World War Two would have been drastically changed. Nazi Germany would have ruled supreme. Britain had survived the German onslaught in 1940 because her highly effective RAF was nourished by the will of the people to resist. Both were necessary; both existed. More recently, the Falklands were snatched from the jaws of the Argentinians by the British. Again, this was a demonstration of military prowess and political will working effectively together.

Yugoslavia remains today an independent, non-aligned state. It was able to reject the Brezhnev doctrine of "limited sovereignty" among members of the socialist commonwealth because it reaffirmed its readiness to fight

for its independence, if necessary. After all, its people had claimed victory against the mighty Nazis in World War Two. In late Mar 1941, the pro-Nazis government of neutral Yugoslavia was ousted by a coup and replaced by a leadership sympathetic to the Allies. Germany quickly launched a blitzkrieg attack which forced Yugoslavia to render its unconditional surrender on 17 Apr 1941. But the Yugoslavs did not capitulate. The "surrender" opened 4 years of bitter partisan warfare by thousands of soldiers who fled to the mountain, leading to the eventual victory by Tito which restored Yugoslavia as an independent state. By the close of World War Two, the Russian Army occupied most of East Europe. Except in Yugoslavia and Finland, governments totally subservient to the Soviet Union were established. Yugoslavs would resist a Soviet or Warsaw Pact invasion. The degree of Yugoslav resistance that might be encountered by a Soviet invading force must surely have influenced Kremlin's attitude towards Yugoslavia, even after the death of Tito. For, elsewhere, Soviet tanks have not shown the same degree of restraint. They invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968 and held manoeuvres in Poland and other Warsaw Pact countries at the slightest sign of deviation from Kremlin policy.

Switzerland has been a neutral country for more than 150 years. But Switzerland has to spend billions of dollars every year to safeguard its neutrality. Because its neutrality must be credible, Swiss defensive strategy is based essentially on the concept of deterrence through demonstrated readiness. The entire national militia can be mobilised and ready for battle in mobile operational units and carefully prepared defensive positions within forty eight hours. All the approaches into Switzerland are prepared for demolition, and demolitions are prepositioned to destroy vital industrial plants and to block all major defiles within the country. Thus any potential aggressor is on notice that the conquest of Switzerland will be extremely costly, and that the potential prizes and wealth of the country will be destroyed before they can be seized.

National will is thus an essential political pre-condition of any convincing military posture of deterrence. Singaporeans must be psychologically prepared to defend our homeland. Thus even if a hostile ship from a big power comes steaming in with a huge banner across its bow saying, "Singapore here we come", we must still try and be prepared to blow it up. At least, we must extract a high price from our aggressors. Any potential aggressor would ceaselessly seek to weaken our will to fight. For he must surely have learnt from Sun Tzu that:

" Those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle. They capture his cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations."

What I regret is that there are Singaporeans who are wittingly or unwittingly undermining our psychological will to stand up by expounding defeatist attitude.

Whilst the will to remain free is important, Singaporeans should not be misled into thinking that guts and determination of the people alone can save the day. Poor Poland had little but guts and determination and could not save herself against both Germany and Russia during World War Two. Determined Khmer nationalists and Afghan guerillas are also faced with uphill tasks against their well-armed aggressors. Our way of life will only be guaranteed by our will to safeguard it coupled with the ability to do so. There are no two ways about it. If we value our lives we take defence seriously. If we do not take defence seriously, we are forsaking our future.

You can demonstrate your will to defend yourself by the seriousness in which you learn and shoulder the task of defence.

May I end by congratulating you on your graduation today.

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