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Fighting Piracy: Another first for SAF

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The appointment of a Singaporean naval officer to lead CTF-151, a multinational anti-piracy mission, highlights Singapore's steadfast commitment to global security. The navy's professionalism will be further enhanced by valuable operational lessons and experiences.

A SINGAPOREAN naval officer, Rear Admiral Bernard Miranda, has for the first time been appointed to lead a multinational anti-piracy mission, underscoring Singapore's commitment to global security. Established on 8 January 2009, Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) is a multinational flotilla mandated to deter, disrupt and suppress piracy and maintain maritime law and order. It covers a vast area of responsibility that includes the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea. In conjunction with other ships from the European Union Naval Force (CTF 465) and Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (CTF 508), these task forces represent an international effort to ensure safe passage for international shipping through waters flanked by lawless regions.

Three Key Objectives

Consisting of more than 30 ships and aircraft from 17 nations, CTF-151 has three key objectives. First, deter piracy through a show of force. Second, guide and assist ships travelling along the Internationally Recognised Transit Corridor by responding to distress calls and encouraging ships not to surrender immediately. Finally, aid nations like Somalia and Yemen establish indigenous anti-piracy capabilities. The latter, however, remains a long term goal given current realities. Even though Somalia's Prime Minister Omar Sharmarke promised to eradicate piracy by 2011, the fact remains that his government only controls a few districts of the capital Mogadishu while the pirates roam freely in areas beyond government control.

The report card for CTF-151 as it approaches its first anniversary is positive but the threat of piracy remains a clear and present danger. The presence of patrols conducted by the international naval armada has slowed but not eradicated piracy. Furthermore, since ships are no longer easy prey, the pirates have had to work harder, resulting in increasing number of attacks – 214 vessels in 2009, up from 111 in 2008; the latter of which represented a 200 percent increase from 2007. The United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme also notes that pirate attacks are now further

into the Indian Ocean.

In October last year, the Singaporean-flagged container ship *Kota Wajar* was seized with 21 crew north of the Seychelles, some 800 nautical miles off the Somali coast. Both ship and crew were released in December only after a \$4 million ransom was paid. Most recently, the Singapore-flagged chemical tanker *MV Pramoni* was hijacked with a crew of 24 on New Year's Day in the Gulf of Aden en route to Kandla, India.

Singapore and the CTF-151

The command of CTF-151 has experienced many firsts since inaugural commander Rear-Admiral (RADM) Terence McKnight of the US Navy (USN) took the helm. McKnight's successor RADM Michelle Howard was the first African-American woman to command a US Navy ship and is the first female graduate of the US Naval Academy to attain flag rank. Following Howard was RADM Caner Bener of Turkey which heralded the Turkish navy's first command of a combined task force. Relieving Bener was incumbent commander RADM Scott Sanders, the first reserve Admiral from the USN to command a combined task force at sea. As a civilian, Sanders is the Vice President of Wyle Laboratories.

Adding to the list is RADM Bernard Donald Miranda of the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) who will be Singapore's first coalition commander at sea and the second Singaporean officer to command a multinational force. In 2002, Major-General Eric Tan Huck Gim from the Singapore Army led 3,300 troops from 26 countries as UN Force Commander in East Timor. Having served with distinction in the SAF for 32 years, he retired from the SAF in 2005 and with his experience was later appointed Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Security Sector and Rule of Law in Timor Leste.

RADM Miranda's tour will be challenging in three ways. First is the complex maritime picture arising from the number of ships spread across the vast area of responsibility. Second, CTF-151 is almost as large as the entire RSN. Finally, there is the unique challenges – such as culture and doctrine – associated with multinational operations. This is where command and operational experiences during a challenging career with the RSN becomes invaluable. With key appointments such as Commanding Officer (CO) of RSS PERSISTENCE, CO of 191 Squadron, and Commander of the RSN's 3rd Flotilla, RADM Miranda is undoubtedly endowed with the firmness and responsibility demanded of coalition command. His wealth of operational experiences is also undeniable, having served in the North Arabian Gulf as lead operations planner, Mission Commander, and Deputy Commander Task Force Ashore. For his devotion to duty and country, RADM Miranda has been decorated with the Public Administration Medal (Bronze) (Military) and the Overseas Service Medal (Bar Enhanced).

This epoch-making event also presents the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) with the opportunity to reward commanders and further strengthen the practice of meritocracy. It is current practice to allow officers serving in an international capacity to adorn higher ranks on a 'temporary' basis to match their appointments before reverting to their 'original' ranks at the conclusion of their tour of duties. There are, however, two reasons to eradicate this practice. First, this is to prevent coalition partners and untrained observers from concluding that exemplary performances result in 'demotions'.

Second, if an SAF officer is successful in leading a multinational command, has he/she not displayed the competence and respect demanded of both rank and appointment? Surely with the distinction that a successful multinational command brings to both the SAF and Singapore, the very least the defence establishment could do is to recognise and honour the individual with that which has been rightfully earned.

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