



Total Defence in Action – Singapore's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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1. Introduction

Cognisant of the need for a small city-state to develop credible deterrent capabilities to protect its national sovereignty, Singapore adopted Total Defence as its whole-of-country defence strategy in 1984. Total Defence is based on the principle of collective defence, in which all of Singapore’s military and non-military assets, as well as its armed forces and citizens, are committed to defending the nation. However, as then Brigadier-General (BG) Lee Hsien Loong, Minister of State (Defence and Trade and Industry) noted in 1985, “Total Defence not only caters for the defence needs of the country in war. It is central to nation-building, our philosophy of government and preserving our way of life.”¹ In essence, apart from being a defence doctrine, Total Defence also serves as a tool for nation-building by involving and mobilising the entire population in Singapore’s defence efforts.

Whilst Total Defence has retained its place as Singapore’s national defence framework for the past thirty-eight years, the international and domestic security environments have undergone tremendous changes since the early decades of Singapore’s independence. It is therefore timely to assess the salience of Total Defence to Singapore’s national security posture since its inception.

This research report will focus specifically on examining Singapore’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It seeks to highlight how the Total Defence concept facilitated a whole-of-country response against a national security threat, rallied the country in a time of crisis, and strengthened resilience and adaptive capacities across different segments of the populace. The wide-ranging and multi-sectoral effects brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic underscores Singapore’s need for a coordinated, cross-domain national security response. Total Defence thus remains a relevant and critical national defence strategy.

2. The Genesis and Evolution of Total Defence in Singapore²

Adapted from the comprehensive defence strategies of countries such as Switzerland and Sweden, Total Defence was first introduced in 1984 as Singapore’s “all-out defence plan.”³ The adoption of Total Defence was deemed necessary because wars had taken on a ‘total’ nature, involving not only military forces but also the civilian population. It was therefore critical for Singapore to move away from the notion that the duty of defending the country was “merely the specialised and

¹ “Three more ministries help in total defence,” *Business Times*, December 10, 1985, <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/biztimes19851210-1.2.11.6>.

² For a more comprehensive discussion on the evolution of Total Defence in Singapore, see Sandy Wang, *Mobilising a Nation: The inception and evolution of Total Defence in Singapore, 1983-2020* (Singapore: National Security Studies Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2021).

³ “An All-out Defence Plan,” *The Straits Times*, May 1, 1984, <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19840501-1.2.38>.

exclusive concern of the Ministry of Defence.”⁴ While it was vital for Singapore to develop a strong military deterrence, its security was equally contingent on the willingness and commitment of every individual to contribute towards its defence. Former President C V Devan Nair emphasised the importance of citizen participation in the country’s defence in his speech at the Officer Cadets School Commissioning Parade in 1983,

Modern conflicts are not old-fashioned duels between gentlemen, with others watching from the side-lines. No distinctions are made these days between combatants and non-combatants. We witness total conflicts which involve everybody in the country concerned. National security is therefore also total, and a nation’s defences need to be seen, especially by other countries, to be firmly entrenched in the minds, hearts, and spirits of all its citizens.”⁵

President Nair’s views were echoed by then First Permanent Secretary for Defence, Mr Lim Siong Guan. Explaining the rationale for Total Defence in an interview with *The Reservist* in 1984, Mr Lim reiterated that the conduct of war “involves not just the armed forces, but entire nations,”⁶ and since Singapore is a small nation-state with limited resources, “every Singaporean and every organisation in Singapore is needed to ensure that the defence of our country is adequate.”⁷ Additionally, there was also a recognition that threats to Singapore can emerge from beyond the military realm. Mr Lim pointed out that “any weakness in our society or our economy may be exploited by an aggressor to further its cause.”⁸ Hence, from the outset, Singapore’s Total Defence concept comprised five distinct but interrelated pillars – Psychological Defence, Social Defence, Economic Defence, Civil Defence, and Military Defence.⁹ Digital Defence was added in 2019 to reflect the expansion of Singapore’s national security domains to include cyberspace.¹⁰ Viewed as a whole, Total Defence is an articulation of Singapore’s whole-of-country approach towards countering military and non-military threats.

Military Defence and Civil Defence were at the forefront of Total Defence campaigns in the first decade of the concept’s inception, which centred on rallying the nation behind the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and on mobilising civilian resources for military use. The official launch of Total Defence in 1984 was accompanied by an extensive publicity blitz, with newspapers carrying a slogan which recognised the role of the individual but highlighted the leading role of the military in

⁴ Ministry of Culture, Speech by President C V Devan Nair at the Officer Cadets School Commissioning Parade at Pasir Laba Camp on Friday, 23 December 1983 at 5:30 PM, National Archives of Singapore, <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/cvdm19831223s.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “An All-out Defence Plan,” *The Straits Times*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See “The Pillars of Total Defence”, Ministry of Defence, 2022, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/totaldefence/about.html.

¹⁰ Hariz Baharudin, “Digital Defence to be sixth Total Defence pillar, signalling importance of cyber security,” *The Straits Times*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/digital-defence-to-be-sixth-total-defence-pillar-signalling-the-importance-of-cyber>.

Singapore's defence: "Total Defence. It begins with the SAF, but there's a part for everyone."¹¹ In an oral interview conducted in 2006, Mr Lim recounted how the Total Defence media campaign helped to boost the image of the armed forces,

But what it did was, it showed the military now as something honourable, something people should look up to, something every time you see a soldier on the street you must say, you know, good that we have soldiers around the place in order to give us peace and stability.¹²

An Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence (ACCORD) was created in tandem with the introduction of Total Defence. Consisting of representatives from government and non-government sectors, as well as grassroots organisations, the Council was to work with the Ministry of Defence to "improve support and recognition for full-time national servicemen and reservists by their families, employers and peers."¹³ All these measures helped to elevate the role of the SAF, its servicemen, and reserve forces in the national defence structure. At the same time, plans were made to train the public in "the basic skills of civil defence"¹⁴ and to secure civil resources for military use in times of crisis. At a Tri-service Graduation Ceremony in March 1985, then Minister for Communications and Information, Dr Yeo Ning Hong, spoke about how "employers and companies can contribute to the Total Defence effort by providing civil resources that are needed to support the military in an emergency."¹⁵ Such a move would "enhance [Singapore's] overall defence capability" whilst being cost-effective since the SAF would not be "spending vast sums of taxpayers' money on equipment that will remain largely unused in peacetime."¹⁶ The Requisition of Resources Act was eventually passed in October 1985¹⁷, which "enable[d] the government in an emergency to take over equipment which it needs for Total Defence purposes"¹⁸ and to compensate owners of requisitioned resources.

¹¹ Loong Swee Yin, "Big Media Drive for Total Defence," *Singapore Monitor - 2nd Edition*, April 2, 1984, <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/singmonitor19840402-2.2.5.3>.

¹² Mr Lim Siong Guan, oral history interview by Mr Lim Siam Kim, August 31, 2006, The Civil Service – A Retrospection, Accession Number 003060/14, Reel 6, National Archives of Singapore.

¹³ "ACCORD to seek support for total defence concept," *Business Times*, January 6, 1984, <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/biztimes19840106-1.2.12.6>.

¹⁴ Ministry of Culture, Addendum to Presidential Address at the Opening of the First Session of the Sixth Parliament on Monday, 25 February 1985, Ministry of Defence, National Archives of Singapore, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/19850225_0008.pdf.

¹⁵ Ministry of Culture, Speech by Dr Yeo Ning Hong, Minister for Communications and Information, Second Minister for Defence and Second Minister for National Development, at the Tri-Service Graduation Ceremony at Pasir Laba Camp on Saturday, 9 March 1985 at 7.30 PM, National Archives of Singapore, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/19850309_0001.pdf.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Singapore Statutes Online, Requisition of Resources Act 1985, October 5, 1985, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/RRA1985?WholeDoc=1>.

¹⁸ Ministry of Culture, Speech by Brig-Gen Lee Hsien Loong, Minister of State (Defence and Trade & Industry), at the Civil Resource Mobilisation Discussion at the Public Affairs Conference Room on 19 April 1985, National Archives of Singapore, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/19850419_0001.pdf.

The initial emphasis on Military Defence and Civil Defence coincided with an early Total Defence narrative which focused on the need for Singapore to develop deterrent capabilities against foreign incursions. News articles seeking to convey the *raison d'être* for Total defence cited unpreparedness as a key reason for the Japanese invasion during the Second World War,¹⁹ and highlighted how the religious, communal, and political riots of the 1950s and 1960s could become “an invitation to an outside power to step in.”²⁰ To avoid the experiences of “Afghanistan, Lebanon, Cambodia and Grenada” who had become “victims of their own military weakness”,²¹ it was critical for Singapore to develop a “defence policy... [that would] make it too risky and too expensive for others to mount a military undertaking against it.”²² Total Defence was therefore presented as pivotal to Singapore’s ability to counter conventional threats, specifically external military interference and aggression.

The tenor of the Total Defence narrative began to shift from the late 1990s as Singapore contended with the emergence of new national security threats. Singapore experienced the spill-over effects of a regional economic downturn during the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis, plunging into a deep recession in 1998.²³ Dr Tony Tan, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, drew attention to the highly volatile and swiftly deteriorating circumstances leading to the economic turmoil.²⁴ He noted that Singapore was able to respond decisively to the crisis because of its “economic resilience based on strong fundamentals,”²⁵ which “underscores the importance of Economic Defence”, as well as “the importance of Total Defence to ensure our nation’s continued survival, security, and success”²⁶ in periods of uncertainty. The early 2000s brought about further new developments in Singapore’s security landscape. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the Internal Security Department (ISD) launched a series of operations against the Islamic terrorist group, Jemaah Islamiyah, arresting its operatives and dismantling its network in Singapore between 2001 to 2002.²⁷

¹⁹ “Driving home message of Total Defence,” *Business Times*, April 3, 1984,

<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/biztimes19840403-1.2.11.11>.

²⁰ “We must be ready,” *Singapore Monitor*, January 22, 1984,

<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/singmonitor19840122-1.2.4.19>.

²¹ “Defence involves everyone,” *Singapore Monitor*, January 23, 1984,

<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/singmonitor19840123-1.2.21.1>.

²² “Total defence vital to future peace and prosperity,” *Business Times*, February 25, 1984,

<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/biztimes19840225-1.2.11.4>.

²³ Valerie Chew, “Asian financial crisis (1997–1998),” in *Singapore Infopedia*, July 30, 2016,

https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1530_2009-06-09.html?s=asian%20financial%20crisis.

²⁴ Ministry of Defence, Speech by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, at the Opening of the H.E.R.O.E.S in Total Defence Exhibition, February 13, 1998, National Archives of Singapore,

https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/MINDEF_19980213002.pdf.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “20th Anniversary of ISD’s Operations Against Jemaah Islamiyah in Singapore,” Ministry of Home Affairs, December 4, 2021, <https://www.mha.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/20th-anniversary-of-isd-operations-against-ji-in-singapore.pdf>.

In 2003, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak hit Singapore, infecting 238 people and causing 33 deaths.²⁸ Reflecting on Singapore's responses to the terrorist threats and the SARS outbreak at the launch of the 2004 Total Defence campaign, Dr Tan, who had assumed the role of Coordinating Minister for Security and Defence, commented that

Singaporeans saw first-hand how Total Defence served as a relevant framework for an integrated response to both conventional and non-conventional threat scenarios...Total Defence was not just a useful strategy to deal with security threats, but also a philosophy that could be applied effectively to handle other national crises...Total Defence brings together the resources of all relevant government agencies and private sector organisations, and involves all Singaporeans in a total effort to deal with national crises.²⁹

Thus, by the early 2000s, Total Defence had evolved to become more than a deterrent strategy against external threats to Singapore's sovereignty. It was construed as Singapore's whole-of-country approach in forging a consolidated national response in times of crisis and in managing all forms of security threats, whether conventional or non-conventional. This re-contextualisation of the Total Defence concept could also be observed through changes to its campaign themes from the late 1990s, with a greater emphasis on non-conventional threats, as well as personal commitment to Singapore's defence.³⁰

3. The COVID-19 Pandemic in Singapore

The report will now examine how Total Defence was applied in Singapore's response to the most recent non-conventional threat to have confronted the nation, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Originating as a cluster of severe pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China, the COVID-19 disease, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, reached Singapore when the first case was confirmed on 23 January 2020.³¹ A ministers-led Multi-Ministry Task Force (MTF) had been established a day prior to this to oversee Singapore's response to this outbreak.³² On 7 February 2020, following the emergence of a few local cases without links to previous cases or travel history to China, the Disease Outbreak

²⁸ "SARS in Singapore: Timeline," *The Straits Times*, March 15, 2013, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/sars-in-singapore-timeline>.

²⁹ Ministry of Defence, Speech by Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Security and Defence, Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam at the Launch of the Total Defence Campaign 2004 at Suntec City Entertainment Centre Atrium, National Archives of Singapore, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/MINDEF_20040214002.pdf.

³⁰ Dominic Teo, "See how Total Defence Day has evolved through the years," *The Straits Times*, February 16, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/see-how-total-defence-day-has-evolved-through-the-years>.

³¹ Timothy Goh and Toh Ting Wei, "Singapore confirms first case of Wuhan virus; second case likely," *The Straits Times*, January 23, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/singapore-confirms-first-case-of-wuhan-virus>.

³² Jalelah Abu Baker, "Singapore forms Wuhan virus ministerial task force, imported case 'inevitable': Gan Kim Yong," *Channel News Asia*, January 22, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/wuhan-virus-singapore-ministerial-task-force-inevitable-786226>.

Response System Condition (DORSCON) level – a colour-coded framework that reflects a current disease situation in Singapore – was raised from Yellow to Orange, indicating that the disease was severe and spreads easily but still contained.³³ The MTF, supported by the Homefront Crisis Executive Group (HCEG) and the Crisis Management Groups (CMGs) assumed responsibility for coordinating a whole-of-government and eventually whole-of-country response to the COVID-19 outbreak³⁴, which was officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020.³⁵

The COVID-19 outbreak was unparalleled in terms of its speed of transmission. In addition to enforcing testing, quarantine, and contact-tracing measures, safe distancing regulations and restrictions on social gatherings were introduced on 13 March 2020 and tightened on 24 March 2020³⁶ to reduce the spread of infections. A surge in imported and locally transmitted COVID-19 cases and the detection of major clusters in migrant worker dormitories prompted the imposition of the strictest set of movement restriction measures during the “Circuit-Breaker” (CB) to slow down transmissions. The CB was initially to be implemented from 7 April to 4 May 2020 but was extended to 1 June 2020.³⁷ Businesses remain shuttered except for those providing essential services, companies transited to work-from-home arrangements, students shifted to full-time home-based learning as schools closed, and Singaporeans were permitted to leave their homes only to attend to healthcare-related and essential personal errands. The CB mitigating measures, albeit temporary, fundamentally altered the daily routines of Singaporeans and brought about serious social disruptions. A survey conducted by researchers from the Earth Observatory of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, and ETH Zurich between 7 May and 16 July 2020 found that the “social consequences of the lockdown period were widely felt and had real and potentially lasting impacts on the well-being of all segments of society regardless of income, race, gender, age, etc.”³⁸

³³ “MOH Pandemic Readiness and Response Plan for Influenza and other Acute Respiratory Diseases,” Ministry of Health, revised April 2014, <https://www.moh.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/diseases-updates/interim-pandemic-plan-public-ver- april-2014.pdf>.

³⁴ James Low, “COVID-19 Crisis Management: An Early Look,” *Ethos*, June 3, 2022, <https://www.csc.gov.sg/articles/covid-19-crisis-management-an-early-look>.

³⁵ “WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020,” World Health Organisation, March 11, 2020, <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>.

³⁶ Michael Yong, “Timeline: How the COVID-19 outbreak has evolved in Singapore so far,” *Channel News Asia*, April 18, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/singapore-covid-19-outbreak-evolved-coronavirus-deaths-timeline-764126>.

³⁷ Matthew Mohan, “COVID-19 circuit breaker extended until Jun 1 as Singapore aims to bring down community cases ‘decisively’: PM Lee,” *Channel News Asia*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/covid-19-circuit-breaker-extended-june-pm-lee-speech-apr-21-765811>.

³⁸ Patrick Daly et. al, “The Social and Economic Impacts of COVID-19 Mitigation Measures on Citizens and Permanent Residents During the Circuit Breaker Period in Singapore,” *NTS Insight*, August, 2021,

Besides exerting a toll on the mental and social well-being of Singaporeans, the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic was palpable. International travel came to a standstill as countries around the world closed their borders and imposed lockdowns to curb the global transmission of the virus. The aviation industry bore the brunt of these developments. The Singapore Airlines group axed approximately 4,300 positions across its airlines.³⁹ Operations were suspended at Changi Airport Terminal 2 on 1 May 2020 for 18 months to allow the Changi Airport Group to save on running costs while speeding up upgrading works.⁴⁰ Companies across various sectors faced serious supply delays as the pandemic upended global supply chain operations. The livelihoods of many were affected. A report published by the Ministry of Trade and Industry on 24 November 2021 described the number of job losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as “unprecedented, more than in any other crisis.”⁴¹ The pandemic further weakened consumer demand and added to the woes of many brick-and-mortar businesses, which led to a stream of retail store closures in Singapore, including Robinsons.⁴² To cope with the burgeoning economic crisis, the Singapore government rolled out four fiscal packages in 2020 to support businesses and workers: the Unity Budget, the Resilience Budget, the Solidarity Budget, and the Fortitude Budget.⁴³ The Resilience Budget introduced in March 2020 was “a landmark package in Singapore’s history.”⁴⁴ At \$48 billion, it was “the largest of any stimulus package announced by the government” with “up to \$17 billion drawn from past reserves.”⁴⁵

Singapore commenced its COVID-19 National Vaccination Programme in December 2020, with a senior staff nurse at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases receiving the first Pfizer-BioNTech

<https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/NTS-IN21-02-Impact-of-Mitigation-Measure-August-2021.pdf>.

³⁹ Toh Ting Wei, “2,400 SIA staff affected by job cuts amid Covid-19 fallout,” *The Straits Times*, September 10, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/sia-announces-job-cuts-for-pilots-cabin-crew-as-business-battered-by-covid-19>.

⁴⁰ Ahmad Zaki Abdullah, “Changi Airport Terminal 2 to suspend operations for 18 months amid COVID-19 pandemic,” *Channel News Asia*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/changi-airport-terminal-2-to-close-for-18-months-amid-covid-19-762211>.

⁴¹ Sue-Ann Tan, “Covid-19 drove unprecedented drop of 196,400 in S’pore employment; services hardest-hit: MTI report,” *The Straits Times*, November 24, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/jobs/covid-19-drove-unprecedented-drop-of-196400-in-singapore-employment-services-hardest>.

⁴² “Robinsons to close last 2 stores in Singapore due to weak demand,” *Channel News Asia*, October 30, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/robinsons-close-last-stores-singapore-heeren-raffles-weak-demand-1306026>.

⁴³ “Singapore Budget 2020: COVID-19 Relief Measures for Singaporeans and Businesses,” EDB Singapore, June 23, 2020, <https://www.edb.gov.sg/en/business-insights/insights/singapore-budget-2020--covid-19-relief-measures-for-singaporeans.html>.

⁴⁴ Wong Shu Yun, “Unprecedented Budgets To Help Singaporeans Survive And Thrive,” *Challenge*, July 6, 2022, <https://www.psd.gov.sg/challenge/covid-19/stories/stronger-together/unprecedented-budgets-to-help-singaporeans-survive-and-thrive>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

COVID-19 vaccine.⁴⁶ Vaccination invitations were subsequently extended to seniors aged 70 and above from 22 February 2021,⁴⁷ and progressively to other segments of the population over the course of the year. Despite the vaccine rollout, Singapore had to grapple with subsequent infection waves driven by new variants of the coronavirus. The vaccination programme was updated to include the administration of booster shots to ensure the population remained sufficiently protected against the COVID-19 disease.⁴⁸ As of 18 October 2022, Singapore had registered a total of 2,029,195 Covid-19 cases, and 1,651 deaths.⁴⁹

Given the magnitude of its impact, the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as one of Singapore's largest national contingencies. Notably, the Total Defence strategy can be discerned from the responses of the Singapore government and Singaporeans to the pandemic's multi-sectoral effects, especially during the initial phase of the outbreak.

3.1 Military Defence

Conventionally, the Ministry of Defence and the SAF support military defence by building a strong and formidable defence force to deter aggressors and protect the peace and security of Singapore. During the fight against COVID-19, the Ministry of Defence and the SAF remained steadfast in protecting the nation against an "invisible enemy" through an expanded role to support the implementation of inter-agency management plans to cope with exigencies that arose over the course of the pandemic. Shortly after Singapore registered its first imported case on 23 January 2020, the SAF convened a Health Surveillance Task Force (HSTF) on 26 January 2020 to assist the Ministry of Health (MOH) in call centre operations for visitors from affected countries and travel industry staff.⁵⁰ HSTF personnel were also deployed to support screening measures at Changi Airport as Singapore's Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) stepped up health monitoring procedures for inbound travellers. When more people took to wearing surgical masks as protection against the spread of COVID-19, the SAF's Combat Service Support Task Force was stood up to conduct mass packing of

⁴⁶ Aradhana Aravindan, "Singapore begins rollout of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine with healthcare workers," *Reuters*, December 30, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/singapore-begins-rollout-pfizers-covid-19-vaccine-with-healthcare-workers-2020-12-30/>.

⁴⁷ Hariz Baharudin, "Seniors across Singapore to start getting vaccinated against Covid-19 from Feb 22: PM Lee," *The Straits Times*, February 12, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/seniors-across-singapore-to-start-getting-vaccinated-from-feb-22-pm-lee>.

⁴⁸ Clara Chong, "Boosters needed for extension of full vaccination status as Covid-19 variants emerge," *The Straits Times*, December 14, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/exception-to-enter-vaccination-differentiated-places-for-recovered-covid-19-patients>.

⁴⁹ "11,934 new Covid-19 cases in Singapore, more than double Monday's figure," *The Straits Times*, October 18, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/11934-new-covid-cases-in-singapore-more-than-double-monday-s-figure>.

⁵⁰ The Singapore Armed Forces, "Timeline of the SAF's journey through the COVID-19 Pandemic," in *Fighting the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership Reflections from the SAF* (Singapore: SAFTI Military Institute, 2022), 20-27.

masks and to aid in a nation-wide mask distribution exercise⁵¹. As COVID-19 caseloads continued to climb, the HSTF was roped in to help ICA with its Stay-Home Notice (SHN) enforcement efforts and MOH with contact tracing.⁵² SAF also contributed towards managing the COVID-19 situation at migrant worker dormitories through Joint Task Force (Assurance), which was formed to assist with the Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) containment efforts at the dormitories.⁵³ Officers from SAF, MOM, and the Home Team were jointly dispatched as Forward Assurance and Support Teams (FAST) to all 43 purpose-built dormitories (PBDs) in Singapore to ensure the daily needs of workers were met and hygiene standards in the facilities were properly maintained. The SAF led operations in about half of the PBDs.⁵⁴ When MOH implemented the Home Recovery Programme as the default mode of care for the majority of the population,⁵⁵ SAF personnel served as the first line of contact for COVID-19 positive patients in their capacities as home recovery buddies.⁵⁶

Though the SAF was also mobilised to assist with containment measures during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, the COVID-19 pandemic marked the first time that SAF infrastructures were utilised as part of Singapore's contingency response. Six SAF camps were repurposed into temporary community recovery facilities for migrant workers as part of a broader strategy to augment healthcare capacity.⁵⁷

The SAF, as a highly organised entity with clear chains of command, coupled with its ability to rapidly harness manpower resources for large-scale operations in a short time, assumed a critical assistive role in Singapore's overall pandemic management efforts. This underscores how the military's role continues to be relevant in non-conventional threat scenarios and reflects the increasing involvement of modern militaries in Operations Other Than Wars (OOTWS), particularly in facilitating and supporting a coordinated national response to crises or disasters during peacetime.

⁵¹ Ibid. See also Aqil Haziq Mahmud, "Wuhan coronavirus: 1,500 SAF personnel packing 5.2m masks in 24-hour operation," *Channel News Asia*, January 31, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/wuhan-virus-masks-saf-safty-coronavirus-household-788266>.

⁵² Lim Min Zhang, "Coronavirus: SAF helps with contact tracing, calling those on stay-home notices," *The Straits Times*, April 5, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/coronavirus-saf-helps-with-contact-tracing-calling-those-on-stay-home-notice>.

⁵³ The Singapore Armed Forces, "Timeline of the SAF's journey through the COVID-19 Pandemic".

⁵⁴ Thrina Tham, "SAF-Led FAST Deployment to Help Stabilise COVID-19 Dorm Situation," *Pioneer*, April 23, 2020, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/pioneer/article/cover-article-detail/community/2020-Q2/23apr20_news1.

⁵⁵ Vanessa Lim, "Home recovery scheme to become default care arrangement for everyone, other than a few groups: MOH," *Channel News Asia*, October 9, 2021, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/covid-19-home-recovery-programme-default-2232561>.

⁵⁶ Timothy Goh, "More SAF personnel deployed to help with Covid-19 home recovery programme," *The Straits Times*, October 27, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-saf-personnel-deployed-to-help-with-covid-19-home-recovery-programme>.

⁵⁷ Aqil Haziq Mahmud, "'Brother, you're almost there': 6 SAF camps housing 3,000 recovering migrant workers with COVID-19," *Channel News Asia*, May 6, 2020. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/covid-19-saf-housing-recovering-foreign-worker-camp-936046>.

3.2 Civil Defence

Alongside medical and healthcare workers, Singapore's Home Team personnel undertook frontline duties in Singapore's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ICA officers performed additional screening measures on top of immigration clearance procedures at Singapore's aviation and land checkpoints.⁵⁸ Teams from the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) were deployed to Changi Airport to assist with temperature screening and to carry out swab tests at Government Quarantine Facilities (GQFs),⁵⁹ which were dedicated accommodation for people serving Quarantine Orders and SHNs. With the increase in the number of COVID-19 infections, SCDF first responders had to cope with a spike in calls related to emergency medical services, working continually to convey patients to hospitals whilst still attending to day-to-day medical emergencies.⁶⁰ Officers from the ICA, Singapore Prison Service, Central Narcotics Bureau, and the Singapore Police Force (SPF) joined colleagues from SAF and other public agencies in FAST Teams deployed to migrant worker dormitories to manage the daily needs of workers.⁶¹ SPF officers were also assigned to GQFs to oversee security operations⁶². Additionally, SPF carried out enforcement operations on massage and public entertainment establishments to ensure adherence to Safe Management Measures.⁶³ An effective Civil Defence was thus made possible by the dedication of frontline healthcare workers and the willingness of public officers to assume new or additional responsibilities during the COVID-19 outbreak.

3.3 Economic Defence

The government undertook various measures to promote economic resilience during the pandemic. Global supply chains were severely disrupted as countries took turns to enter lockdowns and restrictions to international movements remained in place over the course of the COVID-19 outbreak. Such disruptions impacted not only the trade and manufacturing sectors, but also the supply

⁵⁸ Desmond Ang and Ashley Tuen, "One Home Team: Responding to COVID-19 (Part 1)," Ministry of Home Affairs, February 26, 2020, [https://www.mha.gov.sg/home-team-news/story/detail/one-home-team-responding-to-covid-19-\(part-1\)](https://www.mha.gov.sg/home-team-news/story/detail/one-home-team-responding-to-covid-19-(part-1)).

⁵⁹ Singapore Civil Defence Force, "Standing United with SCDF Frontline Personnel to Overcome COVID-19 Crisis," *Rescue 995*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.scdf.gov.sg/rescue995/archive/events/standing-united-with-scdf-frontline-personnel-to-overcome-covid-19-crisis>.

⁶⁰ Ang Hwee Min, "SCDF has 'implemented various measures' following 35% spike in emergency medical service calls," *Channel News Asia*, October 15, 2021, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/scdf-emergency-medical-services-ambulance-995-call-2246786>.

⁶¹ Desmond Ang and Fazlee Rosli, "One Home Team: Responding to COVID-19 (Part 5)," Ministry of Home Affairs, June 2, 2020, [https://www.mha.gov.sg/home-team-news/story/detail/one-home-team-responding-to-covid-19-\(part-5\)](https://www.mha.gov.sg/home-team-news/story/detail/one-home-team-responding-to-covid-19-(part-5)).

⁶² Yuen Sin, "Coronavirus: About 200 police officers deployed to government quarantine facilities, says Shanmugam," *The Straits Times*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/coronavirus-about-200-police-officers-deployed-to-government-quarantine-facilities-says-k>.

⁶³ Tan Wen Wei Benjamin, "Strengthening Our Operational Capabilities," in *Singapore Police Force Annual 2021* (Singapore: Singapore Police Force, 2021), 15.

of food and daily essentials. With Singapore importing more than 90 percent of its food supplies, the Food Emergency Authority collaborated with the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) and industry partners to find ways to diversify Singapore's food sources when the pandemic broke out in 2020.⁶⁴ Importers were matched with new overseas suppliers and memorandums were concluded with new food suppliers to ensure that local demands were met.⁶⁵ To ensure that businesses remained resilient and adaptive to changes brought about by the pandemic, several initiatives were implemented to help companies, particularly SMEs, make the transition to digitalisation. Funding level for the Productivity Solutions Grant, which supports companies in the adoption of technology to enhance work processes, was increased to 80 percent of eligible costs from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020, and the scope for funding was expanded to include remote work arrangements.⁶⁶ A Digital Resilience Bonus was included as part of the Fortitude Budget on 26 May 2020 to incentivise food services and retailers to take up digital solutions.⁶⁷ Brick-and-mortar businesses with minimal or no e-commerce presence who wished to get onboard one of four appointed e-commerce platforms could receive a one-time grant support (capped at \$9,000) through the Singapore E-Commerce Programme.⁶⁸ On 5 July 2021, an additional \$1.2 billion support package for SMEs was announced in Parliament.⁶⁹

Despite the gloomy economic outlook, the COVID-19 pandemic did bring out the best in some corporate entities. Some companies stayed resilient by pivoting to new ventures, turning the challenges brought on by the pandemic into opportunities. For instance, in the wake of nightlife outlet closures during the pandemic, Zouk found other ways of optimising its space by renting out its premises to Lazada as a live streaming venue and transforming its Capital lounge into a restaurant.⁷⁰ Other companies demonstrated support and care for others by opting to either return or donate their

⁶⁴ Wong Shu Yun, "Food Supply Chain Resilience During and Beyond the Pandemic," *Challenge*, July 6, 2022, <https://www.psd.gov.sg/challenge/covid-19/stories/stronger-together/food-supply-chain-resilience-during-and-beyond-the-pandemic>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Liew Kin Meng and Sivakumar Saravan, "Accelerating the pace of digital transformation in Singapore," *International Tax Review*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.internationaltaxreview.com/article/2a6a60xld60v3b9zqdxcc/accelerating-the-pace-of-digital-transformation-in-singapore>.

⁶⁷ Infocomm Media Development Authority, "Digital Resilience Bonus for the Food Services and Retail Sectors," <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/Imda/Files/About/Media-Releases/2020/Annex-D-Digital-Resilience-Bonus.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Digital Industry Singapore, "Commerce Booster Package - Singapore E-Commerce Programme," <https://www.imda.gov.sg/Imda/disg/Programmes/2020/06/E-Commerce-Booster-Package---Singapore-E-Commerce-Programme>.

⁶⁹ Chew Hui Min, "More help for SMEs as part of S\$1.2 billion COVID-19 support package; no draw on reserves," *Channel News Asia*, July 5, 2021, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/covid-19-smes-businesses-reserves-lawrence-wong-parliament-1992716>.

⁷⁰ Tiffany Fumiko Tay, "Zouk to turn Capital lounge into eatery, rent out club space for livestreaming amid club shutdown," *The Straits Times*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/zouk-to-turn-capital-lounge-into-eatery-rent-out-club-space-for-live-streaming-amid>.

Jobs Support Scheme (JSS) government payouts in order to “redirect these funds to those most in need”,⁷¹ with some even pledging to decline future JSS payments.

3.4 Digital Defence

Singapore adopted a two-pronged approach to curb the spread of falsehoods and misinformation during the pandemic. Based on the legal provisions of the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), actions were taken against individuals and websites who had propagated erroneous information online. For instance, the POFMA Office issued a correction order to alternative news site States Times Review in January 2020 for its false assertion that Singapore had ran out of masks⁷², and again in February 2020 for making several misleading claims regarding the COVID-19 outbreak.⁷³ From the time it came into force in June 2019 to November 2021, POFMA had been used 33 times, 19 of which were for cases pertaining to COVID-19 misinformation.⁷⁴ At the same time, the government and public agencies made efforts to ensure that information about the pandemic and vaccines were communicated to the public in an efficient and timely fashion. The government regularly published articles, resources, and policy updates on its Gov.sg website. Official accounts were set up on social media platforms such as Telegram, Twitter, and WhatsApp so that subscribers could easily access information on-the-go.⁷⁵ During the pandemic’s initial wave, MOH posted daily updates about the local COVID-19 situation on its website, including health advisories, infection and vaccination statistics, as well as clarifications on misinformation. The public communication efforts of the government and its public agencies were complemented by mainstream media. Up-to-date articles published on their digital sites were at times accompanied by simple infographics and summaries to aid understanding of pandemic management guidelines and procedures. Public-private collaboration could also be observed as the government enlisted the help of internet service providers like Singtel and Starhub to disseminate and reinforce critical COVID-19

⁷¹ Linette Lai, “Coronavirus: 32 companies return \$35 million of Jobs Support Scheme payouts; others are donating the funds,” *The Straits Times*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/some-companies-are-returning-donating-jobs-support-scheme-payouts-heng-swee-keat>.

⁷² “Correction directions issued over claims of Singaporeans contracting Wuhan coronavirus, shortage of masks,” *Channel News Asia*, January 31, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/wuhan-virus-pofma-direction-article-facebook-788416>.

⁷³ Tham Yuen-C, “Coronavirus: Govt invokes fake news law against false claims by States Times Review,” *The Straits Times*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/coronavirus-govt-invokes-fake-news-law-against-false-claims-by-states-times-review>.

⁷⁴ Kenny Chee, “Singapore’s fake news law used 33 times to date, including 19 against Covid-19 misinformation,” *The Straits Times*, December 1, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/tech/tech-news/singapores-fake-news-law-used-33-times-to-date-including-19-times-against-covid-19>.

⁷⁵ Ministry of Communications and Information, “Gov.sg launches new channels to keep the public informed about COVID-19,” April 2, 2020, <https://www.mci.gov.sg/pressroom/news-and-stories/pressroom/2020/4/gov-sg-launches-new-channels-to-keep-the-public-informed-about-covid-19>.

messages to the public.⁷⁶ It was necessary that remedial actions be taken against COVID-19 misinformation. Left unaddressed, misinformation would engender confusion and discord among communities, and further heighten anxieties that had already come to the fore at the onset of the outbreak, undermining the efficacy of Singapore's broader pandemic response.

3.5 Social Defence

Singaporeans had demonstrated solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic by complying with government regulations and banding together to extend help to those in need. In adhering to mask-wearing and safe-distancing guidelines, Singaporeans undertook socially responsible actions to help limit the spread of COVID-19, contributing to collective well-being. Furthermore, notwithstanding initial reports of anti-social behaviours such as the hoarding of daily essentials, shunning of healthcare workers, and xenophobic comments against Chinese nationals, there were, in equal measure, numerous examples of ground-up initiatives organised by individuals and social groups to help different segments of the population cope with the pandemic's adverse effects. When schools were closed and lessons shifted fully online during the CB, some families with multiple school-going children faced the problem of not having sufficient devices at home to facilitate e-learning. ReadAble, a volunteer group which ran reading classes in the Chin Swee area, sourced for donated laptops to help these families and also educated the children of recipient families on cyber wellness and Internet safety.⁷⁷ SG Bono, a volunteer group made up of IT engineers and experts, repaired donated laptops and sent the refurbished devices to low-income families, as did non-profit organisation Engineering Good.⁷⁸ Inspired by her personal experience with COVID-19, Kampung Kakis was founded by Ms Mae Tan as a community support network and buddy system to match elderly residents who need help with volunteers in their neighbourhoods.⁷⁹ Following news of healthcare workers being shunned on public transport, ride-hailing company Grab, and EverydayheroesSG, an initiative to appreciate frontline personnel, started dedicated services to ferry healthcare workers to and from work.⁸⁰ In his

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Goh Chiew Tong, "Volunteers rush to deliver laptops to families in need before full home-based learning kicks in," *Channel News Asia*, April 8, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/covid19-home-based-learning-laptops-volunteers-donation-762616>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Malavika Menon, "Causes Week 2020: Recovered Covid-19 patient brings back the kampung spirit to help seniors in need," *The Straits Times*, December 20, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/causes-week-2020-recovered-covid-19-patient-brings-back-the-kampung-spirit-to-help-seniors>.

⁸⁰ Hariz Baharudin, "Coronavirus: New Grab service dedicated to taking healthcare workers home," *The Straits Times*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/coronavirus-new-grab-service-dedicated-to-taking-healthcare-workers-home>; William Wan, "Commentary: COVID-19 has shown that we can be gracious. How do we make it last?" *Channel News Asia*, June 6, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/covid-19-singapore-gracious-society-kindess-ground-up-649151>.

message to the nation on 8 February 2020, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted that “the real test” of the COVID-19 situation “is to our social cohesion and psychological resilience.”⁸¹ Singaporeans had by and large demonstrated a strong collective spirit and maintained a degree of social cohesion as the COVID-19 pandemic took root in the country.

3.6 Psychological Defence

Singapore’s national resilience and endurance was put to the test during the COVID-19 outbreak. As the nation navigated the peaks and troughs of the pandemic, Singaporeans had to steel themselves to adjust to the “new normal” of mask-wearing and social distancing, study- and work-from-home arrangements, as well as disruptions to daily routines. It was important for Singaporeans to be mentally prepared to live with the pandemic’s effects and to maintain a high level of morale as the nation persevered with efforts to fight the virus. Singapore’s psychological defence was demonstrated on three levels. First, at the political leadership level, PM Lee’s addresses to the nation and the MTF’s daily press conferences, particularly during the initial phase of the outbreak, provided stability and direction for the country amidst the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic. The multi-ministerial nature of the task force created a further sense of assurance in that it drove home the point that whole-of-government resources were directed towards managing the pandemic. Second, at the whole-of-government (WOG) level, various ministries and public agencies had worked collaboratively by pooling their expertise, resources, and manpower to tackle various issues brought about by the pandemic. For instance, control and mitigation measures involving border screening, contact tracing and quarantine operations were carried out through the joint efforts of the ICA, the Maritime Port Authority, SPF, SAF, SCDF, MOH and the Ministry of National Development.⁸² Public service officers from the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, National Environment Agency, Land Transport Authority, and National Parks Board took on the role of Safe Distancing Ambassadors to educate and remind the public on the need to maintain safe distancing.⁸³ The SFA worked closely with the Ministry of Trade and Industry Supply Chain Resilience Division to ensure the uninterrupted supplies of food and necessities.⁸⁴ The WOG efforts underscored the importance of cooperation in a time of crisis and helped foster a sense of collective unity. Third, collective unity was further reinforced at the societal level, with the proliferation of grassroots initiatives offering assistance and support to vulnerable and affected communities as Singaporeans came together to help one another. Singapore’s display of psychological resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic was

⁸¹ Lee Hsien Loong, “PM Lee: the COVID-19 situation in Singapore (8 Feb),” *Gov.sg*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.gov.sg/article/pm-lee-hsien-loong-on-the-covid-19-situation-in-singapore>.

⁸² James Low, “COVID-19 Crisis Management: An Early Look.”

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Wong Shu Yun, “Food Supply Chain Resilience During and Beyond the Pandemic.”

thus made possible by the collective actions of the political leadership, government agencies, and ordinary Singaporeans.

4. Policy Implications

Singapore's Total Defence response to the COVID-19 pandemic holds several implications. First, Total Defence retains salience in Singapore's contemporary security context and is vital to its national defence. The COVID-19 outbreak in Singapore had demonstrated that a pandemic amounts to more than a public health contingency. The COVID-19 pandemic brought repercussions beyond the health sector. It produced knock-on effects on other sectors in the economy, threatening the livelihoods of many, which left unchecked, could also lead to the emergence of society fault lines. Mitigation measures had also put a strain on individuals' mental well-being and revealed gaps in care for some groups in the community, testing social resilience and national cohesion. It was therefore imperative that all pillars of Total Defence work in concert to mobilise whole-of-government and whole-of-country resources swiftly and effectively to manage the pandemic's wide-ranging effects. From Singapore's COVID-19 pandemic experience, it can be observed that Total Defence served as a viable framework for facilitating a coordinated, multi-domain response to a non-conventional security threat. In fact, more than ever, the current security environment underscores the need for Singapore to maintain a Total Defence posture. Conflicts have evolved to become "multi-modal or multi-variant", involving the "simultaneous application of multiple modes of war."⁸⁵ Singapore must be prepared to contend against potential adversaries who are capable of inflicting physical and psychological damage by "blend[ing] conventional warfare, irregular warfare and cyberattacks with other influencing methods, such as disinformation, diplomacy and foreign political interference"⁸⁶ – the hallmarks of hybrid warfare. The persistence of non-conventional security threats (in the form of pandemics, amongst others) and the advent of hybrid wars mean that Singapore must continue to adopt a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to defence and national security, which is encapsulated by Total Defence.

Second, coordination and collaboration are key to the effective application of Total Defence. Singapore's ability to muster a whole-of-government response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be attributed to the establishment of a clear crisis management structure at the institutional level: the MTF set policy directions, the HCEG coordinated government-wide efforts, and the CMGs embarked on cross-agency collaborations to manage different aspects of the pandemic.⁸⁷ Additionally,

⁸⁵ Frank G. Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 1st Quarter 2009, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-52.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Mikael Weissmann, Niklas Nilsson, and Bjorn Palmertz, "Hybrid Threats and Hybrid Warfare: Time for a Comprehensive Approach?" *RSIS Commentary*, June 14, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/10356/152616>.

⁸⁷ James Low, "COVID-19 Crisis Management: An Early Look."

collaborations between government agencies and private enterprises have resulted in effective management strategies, particularly in the areas of public communication⁸⁸ and the implementation of containment measures such as the development of diagnostic kits⁸⁹ and the operation of vaccination centres.⁹⁰ At the grassroots level, community-based organisations and individuals came together to come up with different initiatives to meet the needs of affected groups when it became apparent that there were some lapses in care for certain segments of the population. The forging and strengthening of collaborative partnerships (i.e., government-to-government, public-to-private, private-to-private) for crisis management are integral to Total Defence capacity-building, and should be developed in times of normalcy. This will help bolster Singapore's national preparedness and responsiveness in future crises.

Third, the application of Total Defence to a current national crisis provides an avenue for the Total Defence narrative to be recontextualised for young Singaporeans. The challenge of keeping Total Defence relevant for the younger generation is a perennial one. At a community Total Defence seminar in 1984, Mr Phua Bah Lee, then Senior Parliamentary Secretary of the Defence Ministry, observed that older members of the audience had responded more enthusiastically to the concept compared to the younger members because "their experience during the Japanese Occupation has made the issue of defence more alive to them."⁹¹ More recently, Defence Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen highlighted the need for Total Defence methods and messages to be appropriately "nuanced" so as to appeal to a younger generation with "vastly different" experiences.⁹² The majority of young Singaporeans would have been exposed to the Total Defence concept through the commemoration of Total Defence Day annually on 15 February and National Education lessons taught in schools. Such engagement methods, though important and essential, may unwittingly relegate Total Defence to the realm of theory. Seeing first-hand how the collective efforts of people formed the strongest defence in the nation's fight against COVID-19 allowed young Singaporeans to understand Total Defence as a "lived experience" rather than a set of ideals or principles imposed from top-down. Amplifying the role of Total Defence in Singapore's fight against COVID-19 and incorporating it into the larger Total

⁸⁸ Ministry of Communications and Information, "Gov.sg launches new channels."

⁸⁹ Timothy Goh, "Singapore develops new test that can swiftly detect if someone has had Covid-19," *The Straits Times*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/coronavirus-singapore-develops-new-test-that-can-swiftly-detect-if-someone-has-had>.

⁹⁰ Yuen Sin, "11 Covid-19 vaccination centres now open; about 40 centres to be ready by end-April," *The Straits Times*, February 20, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/17-healthcare-providers-appointed-to-run-covid-19-jab-centres-mobile-teams>.

⁹¹ Loong Swee Yin, "Total Defence Message for the Grassroots," *Singapore Monitor*, March 2, 1984, <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/singmonitor19840302-1.2.5.4>.

⁹² Matthew Mohan, "Important to ensure Total Defence message remains relevant to future generations: Ng Eng Hen," *Channel News Asia*, February 16, 2022, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/important-ensure-total-defence-message-remains-relevant-future-generations-ng-eng-hen-2501991>.

Defence narrative will help to generate greater mindshare and heartshare for the concept among young Singaporeans and reinforce the message that every individual can contribute to Singapore's defence in their personal capacities.

5. Conclusion

Total Defence has enabled Singapore to muster a whole-of-country response to confront security threats and has served as a tool for fostering unity in times of crisis, underlining its salience as a national defence strategy. For Total Defence to retain its relevance, policymakers and practitioners must continue to build up Singapore's Total Defence capabilities and work on refreshing the Total Defence narrative so that the concept finds resonance with successive generations of Singaporeans.

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