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SAF LEADERSHIP 24-7: A Framework for Leadership Development in the Emerging Environment

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“3rd Generation SAF officers must be prepared for a wider spectrum of operations. They will have to operate with other national security and civil agencies, with coalition partners, with NGOs, and all this in the glare of the global media. 3G SAF officers must therefore be more Joint and integrated in outlook and thinking. They must also be prepared to experiment with new ideas, technology and operational concepts. They must be able to think and act independently, understanding the objective, and exercising initiative in self-directed, self-synchronizing operations. I ... see SAFTI MI as one of the SAF’s main engines of transformation. This is where the minds of SAF officers are refreshed and opened to the changing realities in our security landscape and the evolving nature of warfare. SAFTI MI must continue to align both the content and the learning methodology to prepare the type of leaders who meet the needs of the future SAF”.¹ Defense Minister, Mr. Teo Chee Hean, 2005.

The SAF’s Emerging Environment

In 1965, when Singapore first gained its independence, our small Island-City State was highly vulnerable with a total defense capability that only consisted of two under-strength battalions, of which only half of the soldiers were Singaporeans. With our limited resources, Singapore decided to rely on a system of universal conscription to build up our defense capability. About 40 years later today, the SAF is a tri-service force comprising of about 350,000 operationally ready soldiers trained to operate with the highest standards of professionalism and equipped with the most modern of military technologies and hardware.

Today, while its core mission remains the defense of Singapore's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the SAF has also initiated efforts to transform itself to better deal with a wider spectrum of threats and operations other than war. What began as a series of limited medical or observer/adviser peace-support roles in the 1990s (e.g., Namibia in 1989, Kuwait from 1991 to 2003, Angola in 1991/1992, Cambodia in 1992/1993, Afghanistan in 1997/1998) culminated in a larger scale, 370-strong medical and logistics support force that was sent as part of a UN-sanctioned international force called INTERFET (led by Australia) to stabilize a crisis situation in East Timor. This support transited into a UN peacekeeping operation (UNTAET) that aimed to stabilize the transition of East Timor to independence from 2000 to 2002. In 2002,

MG Eric Tan Huck Gim made history for Singapore when he became the first SAF Officer to be appointed as a Force Commander for the UN peacekeeping mission UNMISSET from August 2002 to August 2003, commanding a force of over 4,000 peacekeepers.

The security environment of Singapore has certainly changed since Sep 11, 2001. Soon after the attacks on the World Trade Center in the U.S., Singapore's security agencies uncovered a plot by global terrorists to blow up several prominent structures on our island. Many of our neighboring countries were not spared either. For example, there have been several terrorist bombings in Bali and Jakarta since 2002 targeted at both the locals and the foreign visitors to Indonesia.

In recent years, the SAF has participated more actively in Joint-type operations, involving Army, Navy and Airforce assets. For example, in the Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Operation that followed the Tsunami that hit Sumatra in December 2004, and then the Earthquake that hit the Indonesian Island of Nias in March 2004. In early 2005, the SAF deployed its forces again to assist in an earthquake that struck off the Indonesian island of Nias in March 2005. The SAF also assisted when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in August 2005. In October that year, two SAF C-130s delivered aid to Pakistan after an earthquake hit parts of the country. As a responsible member of the international community, Singapore has also made our contribution to multi-national missions, particularly where they safeguard our national interests. For example, our decision to send LSTs, C-130s and KC135s to support the 30-nation effort to re-construct Iraq in 2003 that has continued to the present day.

Today, SAF not only has to deal with any conventional threat that may arise, our soldiers also work hand-in-hand with our homeland defense forces (including police and civil defense forces) to protect our key national assets like our international airport and our key industries and oil refineries. More than ever, the SAF is today a “24-7” military force – one that has to maintain a high state of readiness for a wide spectrum of operations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

SAFTI Military Institute – Tri-Service, Tri-level

How did the SAF prepare for the Joint operations? One can say that the roots of “Jointness” in the SAF began most visibly with the establishment of our Tri-Service, Tri-level Military Institute called SAFTI in 1995. Established in August 1995, the mission of SAFTI MI was “To develop a corps of SAF Officers to lead in the defence of Singapore and to safeguard its independence and sovereignty”.

In 1982, then-Singapore-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew initiated a move to build a new military institute for the SAF Officer Corps that would be a symbol of service to the Nation. As part of the establishment of SAFTI Military Institute in 1995, the SAF Officer Cadet School worked with behavioral scientists from the Singapore Ministry of Defense (or MINDEF) to derive a leadership framework called the Knowledge, Abilities and Qualities (or KAQ) Model. The effort to envision the concept of “SAFTI Military Institute” in the late-80s also brought to light the need for a set of Core Values that should encapsulate the Values System and “Character” of the SAF. In 1990, the SAF Leadership agreed on a set of seven Core SAF

Values, and a decision was made first to infuse these values to the SAF Officer Corps via the articulation of an SAF Officer's Creed, and then to later promulgate the values SAF-wide.

Transformation of the SAF

By the beginning of the 21st century, the SAF realized that it had to move beyond the inculcation of values and leadership training to respond more effectively to changes in the external environment. In 2001, a call was made by the then-Chief of Defense Lt. Gen. Lim Chuan Poh for SAFTI Military Institute to review the SAF's system of leadership development, and to chart the way forward to better prepare SAF Leaders for the future operating environment. A project group comprising experienced military commanders and military behavioral scientists was formed to develop a new "SAF Leadership Masterplan". The project group organized a series of senior leadership dialogues from 2002 to 2003 to chart the directions for enhancing the SAF's leadership development system. From these dialogues, two key imperatives were identified for enhancing leadership in the SAF – Mission and People:

- Mission. The SAF recognized that the new battlefield would be characterized by increased levels of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. This battlefield did not have clear lines of conflict, and could not be engaged effectively by merely enhancing military technology. The SAF's expanded spectrum of operations, especially in the face of terrorist threats and other forms of low intensity conflict meant that leaders and soldiers were now expected to take on new responsibilities beyond what they were traditionally trained for. In order for the leaders to effectively harness the strengths of our fighting men and women, and to make effective use of new technologies, SAF leaders would need to be self-aware and adaptive life-long learners, anchored on the SAF Core Values and committed to the Nation.
- People. The SAF recognized that with changes in Singapore society, SAF servicemen and women, both conscript and regular are becoming increasingly better educated, knowledgeable and discerning. Their leaders would therefore have to possess a wide repertoire of leadership styles and behavioral skills to motivate and bring out the best in them. Such dynamic and flexible leadership is needed to create the positive experiences, continual learning and commitment among our servicemen and women.

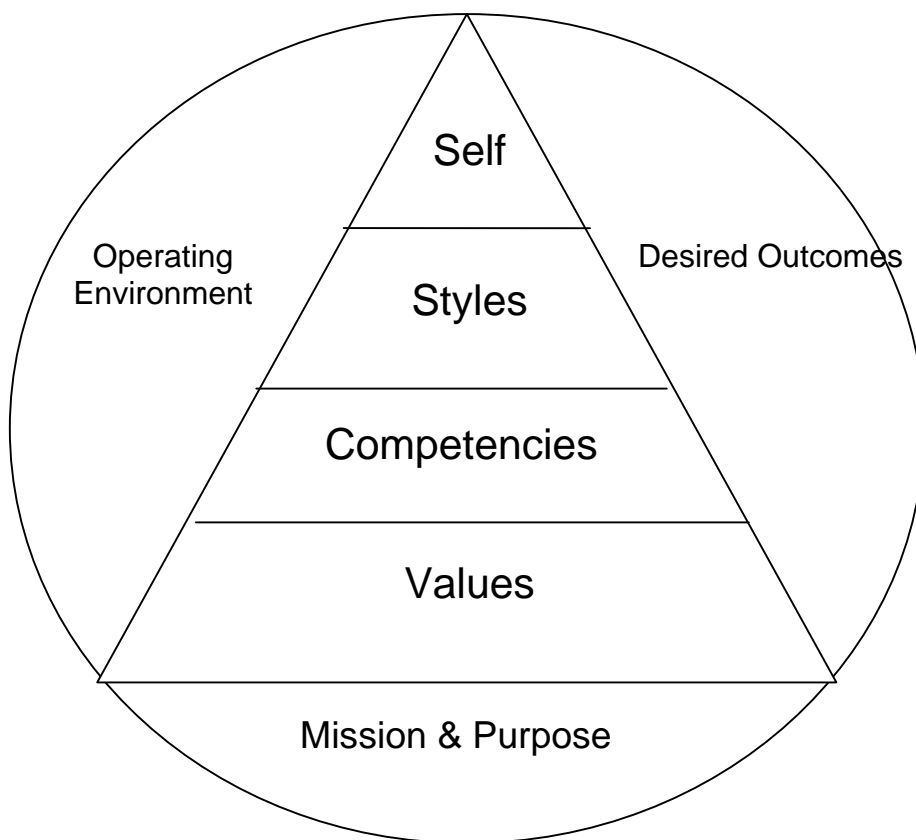
In 2003, the SAF formally announced its efforts to transform itself into a "Third Generation" or 3G military force – one that would have enhanced capabilities via the exploitation of new concepts and technologies, and, an improved ability to fight across a wider spectrum of operations.² Key to the transformation was a desire to leverage on the high level of education and technological-savviness that our National Servicemen bring with them into the organization. Hence, besides establishing new structures like a Future Systems Directorate and an SAF Centre for Military Experimentation, the SAF also embarked on an effort to transform its training and education structures, starting with the SAFTI Military Institute where a new SAF Center of Leadership Development (CLD) was created in 2002. The creation of the Center was a recognition that key to harnessing the human potential for the 3G SAF was effective and adaptive leaders who were able to influence their men to operate under the most challenging circumstances under a wider spectrum of operations.³

A New Leadership Definition and Framework

Given the SAF's new social and operational context, the project team proposed to the SAF leadership the need for a wider definition of leadership, viewing it as “a process of influencing people to accomplish the mission, inspiring their commitment and improving the organization”. This definition emphasized that leadership is a behavior that can be developed, rather than a feature of rank, personality or position. In contrast with the earlier, “task-focused” definition of leadership in the 1995 SAF Leadership Handbook, the new definition also emphasized the need for leaders to influence not only mission-outcomes, but also to build long-term commitment and to improve the larger organization.

Also endorsed by the SAF leadership in 2002 was a new SAF Leadership framework, now called “SAF Leadership 24-7” (see Figure 1). The new framework emphasizes that leadership training and development must always include two aspects – understanding of the leadership context, and, the four domains of leadership development, namely, values, competencies, styles, and the self. Along with the three aspects of the leadership context, i.e., mission and purpose, operating environment, and desired outcomes, the new Framework identifies a total of seven components that must be covered as part of the SAF’s total leadership development system.⁴

Figure 1.
“SAF Leadership 24-7”: The new SAF Leadership Framework



The framework not only expands on the list of “ingredients” for effective leadership articulated in the previous KAQ model, it also emphasizes the importance of the unique, “24-7” context in which SAF leaders are expected lead: Today, it is no longer enough just to be operationally ready to fight conventional battles to safeguard Singapore’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Today, and more so than before, the SAF has troops operating 24-hours, 7-days a week at high alert against the threat of global terrorism, working alongside other security forces to safeguard our airport, sea-lanes and key installations. Operating under difficult conditions and facing real dangers and challenges, our soldiers are expected to serve with a high degree of professionalism. Key to their success is the influence of leaders who understand the SAF’s mission and purpose, appreciate the operating environment, and who act to achieve the desired outcomes. These must be leaders who act on the basis of the SAF Core Values, are competent and flexible in their leadership styles, and possess the “meta-competency” skills of self-awareness, self-management and personal mastery.

The circle and the triangle in Figure 1 provide a heuristic for thinking and talking about the meaning of leadership in the SAF:

- *Triangle (‘Building Blocks’)*. The triangle provides a framework to specify ‘what SAF Leaders need’ for effective leadership. The hierarchy of 'building blocks' says that values must always form the basic foundation, upon which competencies and a full range of styles are best employed in leadership. The ‘Self’ (consisting of self-awareness, self-management and personal mastery) is most difficult to attain, and includes a good understanding of one's own values, competencies and styles. The hierarchy does not prescribe a sequence for development or imply that some ‘building blocks’ are more important than others.
- *Circle (‘Leadership Context’)*. The circle emphasizes that SAF Leaders must influence people with a good understanding of the SAF's mission and purpose, the operating environment and desired outcomes. It is these three aspects of the ‘leadership context’ that shape the specific contents of the framework, i.e., the specific styles, competencies, and values desired in each Service or level of leadership in the SAF.
- *Circle and Triangle*. Together, the 'building blocks' (triangle) and ‘leadership context’ (circle) spell-out the scope of concerns of leadership development system in the SAF. In other words, when we think of ‘leadership development in the SAF’, it includes education and training in the domain of values, competencies, styles and ‘self’. All these must be done in cognizance of the mission and purpose of the SAF, its operating environment, and the desired outcomes.

The SAF’s Leadership Competency Model

In its first year of operation in 2003, SAF CLD worked closely with the three Services in the SAF to develop a Leadership Competency Model (LCM; see Table 1) that would operationalize the “competency” component of the SAF Leadership Framework. The LCM improved on the original KAQ model by articulating the new “abilities” or behavioral competencies and skills at direct, organizational and strategic levels of leadership. It also

introduced three new behavioral competency domains (conceptual, developmental, self/personal) that went beyond the people/social and task/mission-related domains emphasized in the original KAQ model. The idea was that implementation of the model would result in greater emphasis in the SAF on skills such as decision-making, ethical reasoning, coaching, team building, organization development, feedback, reflection, personal mastery and self-management, that are vital in the 3G SAF.

Table 1: SAF Leadership Competencies and Skills

Competencies	“Core Behavioral Competencies” (for leader performance)				“Meta-competency” (for growth)
	Conceptual thinking	Social Competency	Mission Competency	Developmental Competency	Self Metacompetency
Skills	Critical thinking	Communicating to influence	Planning	Developing People	Personal Mastery
	Creative thinking	Interpersonal Effectiveness	Decision making	Developing Team	Self awareness
	Ethical Reasoning		Execution	Improving Organization	Self-management

Applying the Framework for Leadership in Emerging Environments

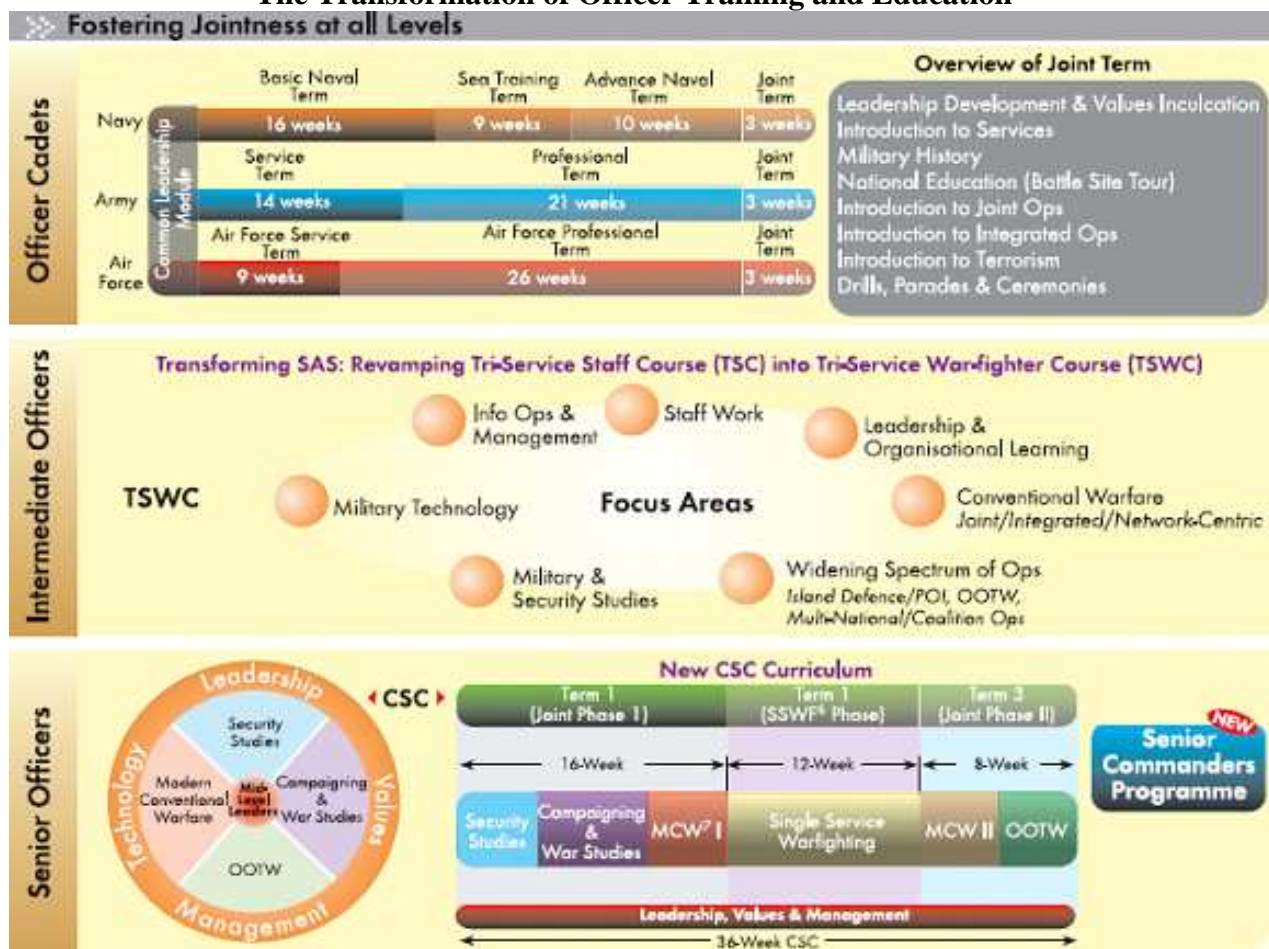
Joint Operations. Given the new Leadership Framework, what is required for effective leadership of Joint operations? In my view, the important factors are:

- Social networking of the leaders who are socialized on a shared set of values, and aligned in their understanding of mission and purpose. This is achieved in SAFTI MI via joint training of the leaders from the three Services at the Officer Cadet, Advanced School and Command and Staff Course levels.
- Understanding the unique challenges of joint operations. This is being achieved via increased education in the unique challenges of Joint Operations relative to single-service operation.
- Knowledge of joint doctrine, capabilities and decision making processes. This is being achieved via increased education on Joint Doctrine and Capabilities in the SAF.
- Equipping SAF leaders with a wider repertoire of behavioral skills, competencies and leadership styles. Specific skills in the SAF LCM that are most helpful for Joint operations include “Developing Team”, “Critical thinking”, “Creative thinking”, “Ethical Reasoning”, “Planning”, “Decision making”, “Communicating to influence”, and “Interpersonal effectiveness”.
- Developing more self-aware and adaptive leaders who are more capable of self-management and continuous learning

- Strengthening education on the “Human in Command” & the “Profession of Arms”.

At its 10th Anniversary celebrations in August 2005, SAFTI MI announced two revamped courses that emphasize the 'Jointness' of the three Services.⁵ Beginning with its 2005 cohort, the Command and Staff course (CSC) was revamped to be mostly 'joint' in outlook with TWO joint terms taking up 24 out of 36 weeks. Beginning 2006, the Tri-Service Staff Course was replaced by a Tri-Service Warfighter course that today focuses more on Joint operations and operations other than war, such as humanitarian assistance and peace support. In contrast, officer cadet-level training and education is still largely single-service-oriented with only 3 out of 38 weeks of “Joint term” (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.
The Transformation of Officer Training and Education



(source: SAFTI MI 10th Anniversary: 1995-2005, p. 57).

Multinational Operations. The challenge of preparing leaders for multinational, UN-type operations is more complex. The answer to this challenge also depends on whether we are referring to the leadership of an entire coalition or UN force, or, being the leader of one's own

forces in a coalition/UN-type operation. What are the leadership requirements of multinational or coalition operations? First, one should select the “appropriate” leader for the specific operation with the “right” knowledge of the mission and the different contributing forces: One who can build consensus, trust and alignment of interests across different forces while accomplishing the mission and dealing with the “host” nation’s leadership. Next, one should also train and resource the leader to understand different operating cultures of contributing forces and of the host nation. This in turn requires political/diplomatic astuteness and effective media management skills on the part of the leader, who also needs to be supported by appropriate legal and administrative advisors familiar with multinational/UN operations.

How has the SAF tried to achieve these? In my view, through education on UN PKO education in SAFTI Military Institute at the Advanced School and Command and Staff Course levels; and education in the unique challenges of UN Operations relative to single-service operations. We have also introduced a package called the “Human experience of Command” that is based on the series of conferences on the same title in the late 90s.⁶ Finally, we believe that our systematic efforts to develop more self-aware and adaptive leaders with a wider repertoire of behavioral skills, competencies and leadership styles, and who are capable of self-management and continuous learning will also stand them in good stead when faced with multinational operations.

Conclusion

To conclude, the SAF is today more than ever a “24-7” military force – one that has to maintain a high state of readiness for an expanded spectrum of operations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. With improvements in technology and education in our society, the SAF is also transforming itself to be a “3G” military force – one with enhanced capabilities via the exploitation of new concepts and technologies, and, an improved ability to fight across a wider spectrum of operations. It is in this context that the SAF has initiated efforts to transform its leadership training and education system, and invested in a new Centre of Leadership Development to spearhead the development of competent, adaptive and self-aware leaders who influence soldiers based on an understanding of the SAF’s mission, appreciate the complex operating environment, and, who act to achieve desired outcomes on the basis of the SAF Core Values – what we now call SAF Leadership 24-7.

About the Author

Lt. Colonel Kim-Yin Chan, Ph.D. is currently the Head of Leadership Doctrine and Research Branch, at the SAF Center of Leadership Development. He is an Infantry Officer by training, and has commanded at the platoon and company levels. He received his BSc in Psychology with First Class Honors from the University of London, U.K., in 1988, and his MA and Ph.D. in Industrial-Organizational Psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA, in 1997 and 1999. He has published academic research papers in the Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Personnel Psychology, Multivariate Behavioral Research, the Journal of Education and Measurement Research, Pointer: Journal of the SAF, and Catalyst: Journal of the Military Behavioral Sciences in MINDEF and the SAF. He has also

presented at several international conferences, and is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at the Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University.

Endnotes

¹ Speech by Mr Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Defence, at SAFTI MI 10th Anniversary Dinner, 25 August 2005. [http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2005/aug/25aug05_nr2/25aug05_speech2.html]

² Statement by Minister for Defence, RADM(NS) Teo Chee Hean, at the *Committee of Supply debate*, 15 March 2004.

³ See Speech by Mr Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Defence, at SAFTI MI 10th Anniversary Dinner, 25 August 2005.

⁴ Kim-Yin Chan and Psalm Lew describe how these four building blocks of leadership in the framework are based on four leadership research traditions or “paradigms” in the behavioral sciences in “The Challenge of Systematic Leadership Development in the SAF”, *Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces*, 30, no. 4, (2005): 5. See also Chan, Kim-Yin, Singh, Sukhmohinder, Ramaya, Regena, & Lim, Kwee-Hoon. *Spirit and System: Leadership Development for a Third Generation SAF* (Pointer Monograph No. 4; Singapore: SAFTI Military Institute, 2005), p.3.

⁵ See SAFTI MI 10th Anniversary: 1995-2005. Published by SAFTI Military Institute. See also “SAFTI Military Institute - Developing 3G officers” in Cyberpioneer. At http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/publications/cyberpioneer/features/2005/oct05_cs.html

⁶ See *The Human in Command: Exploring the modern military experience* by Carol McCann and Ross Pigeau, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York.