

# POINTER

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# POINTER

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# Editorial

This second issue of *POINTER* for 2013 features the top three winning essays of the Chief of Defence Force Essay Competition 2011/2012. First prize essay, “Hedging For Maximum Flexibility: Singapore’s Pragmatic Approach To Security Relations With The US and China” by CPT Cai Dexian examines how the steadily increasing political, economic and military power of China, coupled with uncertainty regarding her intentions, has far-reaching implications for Singapore’s strategic interests and prospects. He discusses Singapore’s strategic relationship with the US and describes her evolving bilateral and multilateral ties with China. He also explores the viability of balancing and bandwagoning as strategies for Singapore to adopt *via-à-vis* China. CPT Cai further argues for the importance of enmeshing both the US and China in Southeast Asia and proposes how regional institutions will be critical to ensuring a sustainable relationship between the two powers. CPT Cai concludes that while Singapore remains optimistic and works towards the prospect of a peaceful and responsible China, she continues to welcome US involvement in promoting regional stability, even as we invest our efforts in building a strong and credible Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

CPT Lee Hsiang Wei’s second prize essay, “Managing The Risks Of Social Media in the SAF” takes a critical look at the increasingly important role that social media plays in communication, the appeal of its unprecedented level of interaction and its impact on information and operational security in the SAF. CPT Lee stresses that the SAF cannot afford to ignore the risks brought about by social media that are exploited both within and outside of the military context. He states that given the speed at which social media grows and multiplies, the SAF’s social media policy needs to continually adapt quickly as new trends in social media emerge. The SAF needs to focus on three key areas: educating our personnel on the risks associated with social media, establishing clear boundaries and guidelines for our personnel to follow and reviewing social media policy in a timely and expeditious manner.

The third prize essay by CPT Matthew Ng, “Between Intelligence and Intuition” highlights the perpetual search for clarity on the “traditional” use of intuition *via-à-vis* an increasing dependence on intelligence in the conduct of military operations. CPT Ng argues that in order to achieve a balance between intelligence and intuition, the commander must integrate intelligence into his decision-making cycle, relinquish preconceived ideas and not permit ego to play on his reason. At the same time, intuition must not be completely abandoned as intelligence seldom provides a complete picture. A certain reliance on intuition is necessary if one is to decide without all the facts required. In conclusion, CPT Ng states that commanders must remember that there is no perfect intelligence and what appears to be objective intelligence is in fact subjective certainty. The role of intelligence is to aid decision-making, a process where one’s intuition is always required.

We are faced with an increasingly complex geopolitical and security landscape. As countries navigate through this landscape, it is essential that our forces remain operationally ready and adaptable against any emerging challenges and security threats. The next three articles provide insights on current and significant issues in today’s context such as the relevance of special operations and counterinsurgency strategies.

CPT Colflesh Khoon Liat’s article on “Whither Special Forces? The Strategic Relevance of Special Operations” examines the role that special operations play in strategy. CPT Colflesh explains that the current focus on special forces is not surprising when considering the demand for counterterrorist and counterinsurgency experience in the unconventional and asymmetric threat environment that is today’s battlefield. After 11 September, 2001, special forces represented the “logical policy option” that decision-makers in Washington, seeking to bring the fight to the enemy, adopted. Special forces have become a “force of choice” for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. CPT Colflesh describes how

special operations can contribute to the overall strategic equation, and how they may be employed as a strategic asset. He emphasizes that the use of special forces must be directed by a proper strategy. The fact that special forces offer solutions to the many challenges faced in the current security climate makes the importance of a proper strategy even more crucial if their misuse is to be avoided.

The next article, “The Art of Wall: A Different Look at Urban Operations” by MAJ Fan Man Poh suggests that in view of global urbanization, most of the military operations in the coming decades will be conducted in or around built-up areas. As modern armies begin to accept their inevitable involvement in the urban fight, their search for answers will evolve around improving tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) as well as developing technological solutions. In his article, MAJ Fan views technology as an enabling feature to future urban operations and urges deeper appreciation of the urban environment to overcome its challenges.

Finally, in “Lessons From The British: Counterinsurgency Strategies Applied in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus”, MAJ Timothy Ang looks at three case studies in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus, evaluating them along the full spectrum of British counterinsurgency strategies used against the armed insurgents in each of these locales. He examines the extent to which the strategies used in Malaya were successfully transplanted in Kenya and Cyprus, which lends insight to the ways in which successful strategies from the past can be adapted and effectively applied in contemporary conflicts. However, he cautioned that military strategies alone will not be sufficient. These strategies must also be applied with due sensitivity to the local content, culture and political dynamics, in order to reap more enduring long-term success.

**The *POINTER* Editorial Team**

# Hedging for Maximum Flexibility: Singapore's Pragmatic Approach to Security Relations with the US and China

by CPT Cai Dexian

## Abstract:

The rise of China is one of the defining trends of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its steadily increasing political, economic and military power, coupled with uncertainty regarding its intentions, has far-reaching implications for Singapore's strategic interests and prospects. This essay will begin with an overview of Singapore's strategic relationship with the US and describe her evolving bilateral and multilateral ties with China. It will then critically examine the viability of balancing and bandwagoning as strategies for Singapore to adopt *vis-à-vis* China. Finally, this essay will argue for the importance of enmeshing both the US and China in Southeast Asia and how regional institutions will be critical to ensuring a sustainable relationship between the two powers.

*Keywords: Hedging; Bilateral Ties; Security; US-China Relations*

## INTRODUCTION: THEORY AND INTERESTS

The rise of China is one of the defining trends of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its steadily increasing political, economic and military power, coupled with uncertainty regarding its intentions, has far-reaching implications for Singapore's strategic interests and prospects. China's rise must also be understood in the context of an evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia, with the United States as its preponderant power.

To address the question of how states respond to rising and potentially hegemonic powers, international relations theorists have argued that states will either balance against or bandwagon with the rising power. The "balancers" believe that states, especially small ones, will perceive rising powers as threats that must be checked by forming alliances (external balancing) and military modernization (internal balancing).<sup>1</sup> The "bandwagoners," in contrast, believe that states may accept a subordinate role under the rising power and leverage on that power as a source of

strength for them to advance their own interests.<sup>2</sup> Beyond these two pure formulations, the concept of "hedging" has been proposed as a third way whereby states pursue engagement and integration while continuing to emphasise realist-style security cooperation and armament.<sup>3</sup> Ba has argued that hedging may be the only viable option for smaller states as their strategic relations with the great powers are focused on mitigating their respective vulnerabilities and dependencies.<sup>4</sup>



*USS Theodore Roosevelt Deployed at Sea*

Before we examine the suitability of these options, we must first clarify Singapore's strategic interests to understand the considerations that will govern policy decisions. Above all else, Singapore's key interests are to survive and prosper as a nation. To achieve these objectives, Singapore pursues two main strategies. First, Singapore works to ensure regional stability. Lee Kuan Yew said that Singapore would progress "only if there is international order, regional peace and stability, and growth instead of wars and conflicts."<sup>5</sup> This stability is necessary for Singapore to attract foreign trade and investment, which are in turn vital prerequisites for her continued economic development. Given Singapore's small size and limited strategic weight, she has been forced to "base its balance-of-power strategy principally on borrowing political and military strength from extra-regional powers,"<sup>6</sup> utilising free trade agreements and military-to-military cooperation to maintain her relevance today. Singapore's second strategy is to maintain maximum freedom of diplomatic manoeuvre by ensuring that while she strives to make herself useful to the great powers, she also tries to be perceived as fair and objective in her role as an intermediary "between the 'Asian way' and the 'western style' of diplomacy."<sup>7</sup> This translates into a pragmatic foreign policy that treads carefully between competitive and cooperative strategies that while realist and self-reliant on one hand, simultaneously recognises that cooperation is necessary in fostering a liberal international trading regime.<sup>8</sup>

This essay will begin with an overview of Singapore's strategic relationship with the US and describe her evolving bilateral and multilateral ties with China. It will then critically examine the

viability of balancing and bandwagoning as strategies for Singapore to adopt *vis-à-vis* China. We will seek to prove that both strategies in their pure form are undesirable for Singapore, primarily because they constrain Singapore's strategic freedom and contravene her key interest in maintaining regional stability. Singapore's strategy towards China is perhaps too nuanced to fit neatly into any theoretical conception, and this essay will therefore seek to outline the ways in which Singapore has utilised pragmatic hedging with respect to China, and propose reasons for why she will continue to do so.

*China's rise must also be understood in the context of an evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia, with the United States as its preponderant power.*

Hedging may be conceived of as a range of policy options between balancing and bandwagoning, and Singapore is likely to pursue as wide a range as possible to maximise her room for manoeuvre. Finally, this essay will argue for the importance of enmeshing both

the US and China in Southeast Asia and how regional institutions will be critical to ensuring a sustainable relationship between the two powers.

## THE EVOLUTION OF SINGAPORE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US AND CHINA

Singapore has made great efforts to ensure a strong US presence in the region, viewing it as a "reassuring and stabilising force" in Southeast Asia and a "determining reason for the peace and stability Asia enjoys today."<sup>9</sup> Singapore is the only port in Southeast Asia capable of providing logistic support and berthing facilities to the US Seventh Fleet.<sup>10</sup> Since 2000, Changi Naval Base has allowed the US Navy to berth its aircraft carriers there.<sup>11</sup> Singapore is also one of America's closest partners in terms of technology transfer. Singapore has acquired F-16 and F-15 fighter jets, Apache attack helicopters and HIMARS rocket launchers from the US and is the only state in Southeast Asia to operate these

systems. Singapore is also the only Asian state that participates in the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) programme,<sup>12</sup> a sign of her extremely privileged access to cutting edge research and development. Beyond the physical equipment, Singapore also enjoys access to expensive training and basing facilities in the US, which are vital to operationalising new capabilities (Table 1 summarises Singapore's key bases and training exercises in the US).<sup>13</sup> Given Singapore's dependence on advanced technology to provide her military edge, her relationship with the US has been instrumental in enabling the SAF's rapid advancement thus far.

Notwithstanding the preponderance of the US in Southeast Asia and its strategic relationship with Singapore, China's presence in the region has steadily grown. China sees the region as an important piece of its periphery critical to safeguarding its own development. The China-ASEAN free trade area came into effect in 2010, creating the largest free trade area in the world by population, with a market of two billion people.<sup>14</sup> It would appear that China has utilised its growing economic influence as an engine to fuel its diplomatic and strategic aims. Although it has become increasingly assertive in recent years, one cannot yet conclude that its intentions are definitely hegemonic.

Bilaterally, the China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA) took effect in 2009 and was the first comprehensive FTA that China had signed with

another Asian country.<sup>15</sup> Singapore has been China's largest trading partner in ASEAN for some time, while China was Singapore's third largest trading partner in 2008.<sup>16</sup> At the diplomatic and political level, however, Singapore engages China warily and tends to do so under the framework of ASEAN-based regionalism. Singapore avoids any discourse that might paint China as a threat, but must remain uncertain about Chinese motives and therefore goes to great lengths to preserve her reputation as an independent state.<sup>17</sup> Militarily, Singapore only recently began to conduct an annual bilateral counter-terrorism exercise with China from 2009, preferring to engage the PLA in multilateral security exercises.

### **THEORIES UNSATISFACTORY IN PRACTICE: WHY SINGAPORE HAS NOT AND WILL NOT PRACTICE BALANCING AND BANDWAGONING**

At first glance, Singapore's close strategic relationship with the US appears to be evidence of balancing, given her uncertainty regarding China's intentions and future behaviour. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the closeness of US-Singapore relations pre-dates the rise of China, suggesting that its roots extend to its stabilising influence, independent of any rising or competing powers. Furthermore, there is no evidence of an acceleration in Singapore's military transformation efforts in response to China's rise, indicating that the SAF's

Platform	Detachments / Exercises
F-15SG	Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho (Peace Carvin V)
F-16C/D	Luke Air Force Base, Arizona (Peace Carvin II)
AH-64D Apache	Marana, Arizona (Peace Vanguard) Exercise Daring Warrior (Fort Sill, Oklahoma)
CH-47 Chinook	Grand Prairie, Texas (Peace Prairie)
S-70B Sikorsky Seahawk	USN Maritime Strike Weapons School, California (Peace Triton)
HIMARS	Exercise Daring Warrior (Fort Sill, Oklahoma)

Table 1: Key SAF Capabilities Acquired from the US

steady development is not solely predicated on the need to deter the rising power.<sup>18</sup> At the diplomatic level, instead of purely siding with the US on regional issues, Singapore has made it a point to work on engaging China through ASEAN's "informal, non-confrontational, open-ended and mutual" style that enables China to involve itself in the region in a positive manner,<sup>19</sup> for example through the signing of the aforementioned treaties and FTA. More significantly, perhaps, there have been instances where Singapore deferred to China on contentious issues rather than confronted it, as balancing theory would suggest. Following the Chinese outcry over Lee Hsien Loong's 2004 visit to Taiwan, Singapore made "politic displays of contrition and repeated endorsements of the 'One China' principle."<sup>20</sup> Despite her long-standing relations with Taiwan, Singapore's pragmatically cautious approach to this relationship *vis-à-vis* rising China suggest that she does not simply pursue a balancing strategy.

Although Singapore has not exhibited pure balancing behaviour with respect to China, could balancing be a viable strategy in future? This essay believes not, for two reasons that relate directly to Singapore's core strategic interests. First, Singapore will not want to prematurely and unnecessarily antagonise China. China has not demonstrated overtly hegemonic intentions in Southeast Asia and may never do so, if it accepts the perpetuation of American regional preponderance there. Perhaps more importantly, "the dual absence of geographical propinquity to China and territorial disputes with China means the PRC does not pose a direct threat to Singapore."<sup>21</sup> Singapore must be careful not to instigate hostility because China's growing military and economic power suggest that it may someday

possess the ability to prescribe its agenda to Southeast Asian countries, and even threaten the use of force, (eg. Taiwan Straits in 1996). China is more likely to be antagonised under a situation of high-intensity balancing and perceive that it has to act aggressively to get anything done. However, these actions could be destabilising and hinder the flow of trade and investment which would in turn hurt countries like Singapore. For example, Singapore may view with concern the increasing reach of China's South Sea Fleet and the potential for territorial conflict to adversely affect the safety of sea lanes of communication in the South China Sea.<sup>22</sup>

The second reason for not pursuing pure balancing is the potential loss of economic benefits that Singapore could derive from engaging China. Intra-regional trade in East Asia increased by 304% between 1991 and 2001 while China's share of East Asian exports grew from 8 to 21% between 1980 and 2002.<sup>23</sup> The growing importance of the Chinese market for Southeast Asian intermediate and final goods means that it could potentially become a lever for China to exert pressure on Singapore, should it perceive that the latter were balancing against it. Furthermore, the renminbi is likely to gain in importance in the region, especially if China further eases restrictions on its use.<sup>24</sup> Coupled with the relative decline of the US dollar, it is not inconceivable that the renminbi could one day become the reserve currency of Southeast Asia. During the 1997 Asian financial crisis, China offered contributions to the IMF's recovery programme as well as to individual states. It also refrained from devaluing its currency during that period, despite the potential gains it could have made by begging its neighbours.<sup>25</sup> This means that China could one day use its currency as a lever for coercion.

*Singapore avoids any discourse that might paint China as a threat, but must remain uncertain about Chinese motives and therefore goes to great lengths to preserve her reputation as an independent state.*



*Ex-Soviet carrier Varyag, now Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning*

Having rejected the feasibility of a pure balancing strategy, let us examine the bandwagoning theory. This was most strongly propounded by Kang, who argued that Asian states had opted to bandwagon as vassal states once did under imperial China.<sup>26</sup> Although Singapore has certainly expanded her economic linkages with China and engaged it in multilateral fora, these do not constitute a pure bandwagoning strategy because politically and militarily, it remains closer to the US. The clearest example of how Singapore has maintained her political independence is her close relationship with Taiwan, despite Chinese displeasure. Notwithstanding her adherence to the “One-China” policy and her non-establishment of formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, Singapore continues her friendly and mutually beneficial relations in the defence and economic spheres. While Singapore has at times deferred to China over the Taiwan issue (eg. voting in favour of China’s admission to the UN in 1971, as opposed to Taiwan), she nevertheless continues to display a remarkable degree of independence. For example, Singapore has declined China’s offer of Hainan Island as a training ground to replace Taiwan,<sup>27</sup> demonstrating loyalty to an old friend.

We also believe that Singapore will not pursue pure bandwagoning in future. First, because it severely limits Singapore’s policy options as she may lose privileged access to American technology.

If Singapore were to bandwagon with China, she would almost certainly lose her position as a trusted regional ally and would no longer enjoy the same kind of preferential technology, training and basing access. To the extent that the US remains the world’s most advanced military power, the SAF’s capability and credibility as a deterrent could suffer significantly in the near to medium term.

Second, Singapore would be adversely affected if Southeast Asian unity were to suffer without the stabilising presence of the US. Khong argues that one of the key reasons for ASEAN’s establishment of the ARF was to “enmesh” the US in regional institutions so as to strengthen US commitment to the region, which in turn was viewed as a vital determinant of regional stability.<sup>28</sup> The general acceptance by Southeast Asian states of US preponderance and the resultant economic and diplomatic benefits have made this arrangement relatively stable and durable. If Singapore were to band with China, there is also no certainty that China would be as ideologically accommodating as the US, nor that regional states would agree to band with China. The implications of a rising China differ among the ASEAN states: while “the more developed may see less of economic competition in a rising China but more opportunities; countries that have territorial disputes with China may view Beijing’s policies more suspiciously.”<sup>29</sup> Given that Singapore has leveraged on a relatively cohesive ASEAN in engaging the great powers and providing a stable framework within which to prosper and grow, a bandwagoning strategy with China could fracture this cohesion and make it significantly more difficult to keep these powers engaged productively in the region.

Third, bandwagoning with China could severely exacerbate bilateral tensions with Malaysia and Indonesia and destabilise Singapore’s immediate

neighbourhood, at the same time also risking domestic discontent. Singapore’s situation between two larger Malay-Muslim neighbours has made it extremely sensitive to how her relations with China are perceived. She has worked hard to shake off the label of a “Chinese island in a Malay sea” to avoid negative attention distracting it from its strategic objectives.<sup>30</sup> For example, Singapore took regional sensitivities into account when she held off normalising ties with China until November 1990, after Indonesia had done so in August 1990.<sup>31</sup> Internally, Singapore must also take into account the sentiments of her non-Chinese constituencies. If she were to adopt bandwagoning and come under Chinese hegemony, the minority races might fear that their prospects would be marginalised, thus undermining Singapore’s multi-racial, multi-ethnic social fabric.

**HEDGING: A RANGE OF OPTIONS FOR MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY**

Singapore has always taken great pride in her pragmatic, non-ideological approach to foreign policy, adhering to Lord Palmerston’s (British PM 1855-1865) invocation that “we have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.”<sup>32</sup> Singapore has not and will not adopt pure balancing or bandwagoning strategies, because neither fulfils her core interests

of survival and prosperity through regional stability and freedom of manoeuvre. Instead, Singapore must find ways to position herself *via-à-vis* the great powers in a way that will maximise her interests while minimising risk, and therefore should take up a “hedging” approach. Hedging is defined as the “behaviour in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutual counteracting effects, under a situation of high uncertainties and high stakes.”<sup>33</sup> In essence, Singapore must undertake a range of policy decisions with varying degrees of acceptance (bandwagoning) and rejection (balancing) of China (see Table 2). The five components of hedging as proposed by Kuik are: indirect balancing, dominance denial, economic pragmatism, binding engagement and limited bandwagoning (see Table 3).<sup>34</sup> We shall examine Singapore’s policy options for a balanced portfolio across the first four components, and why she is unlikely to pursue the fifth.

First, Singapore will continue her policy of indirect balancing through her continued military cooperation with the US and the SAF’s own transformation efforts, without explicitly perceiving China as a threat. As aforementioned, Singapore’s strategic relationship with the US and its military modernisation began before China’s rise in Southeast Asia, and is likely to

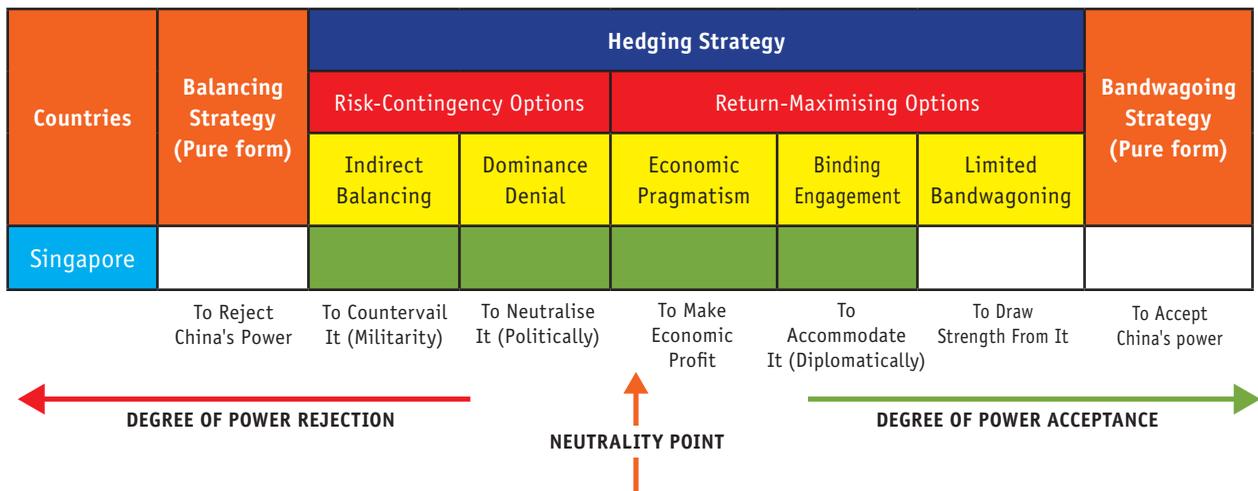


Table 2: Spectrum of Policy Options towards China<sup>35</sup>

	FUNCTIONS	MODUS OPERANDI / INDICATORS
<p><b>BANDWAGONING</b> (Pure form)</p> <p>“Profit First”</p>	To reap present or future rewards from a big power	Forging a military alliance with the big power, coordinating key foreign and defence policies
<p><b>LIMITED BANDWAGONING*</b></p> <p>“Grasp the Opportunity for Profit, But Cautiously”</p>	To reap present or future foreign policy rewards from a big power, but taking care to avoid the loss of its autonomy and any erosion of its existing relationship with another dominant power	Forming a political partnership with the power, coordinating external policies in selected areas, as well as giving deference to the dominant power on a voluntary basis
<p><b>BINDING-ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p>“Socialisation Matters”</p>	To bind a big power in institutions, to increase voice opportunities and to socialise the power with the established norms, with the ultimate goal of encouraging it to behave in a responsible and restrained way	Creating and maintaining regularised institutional links with the big power through bilateral and multilateral diplomatic platforms
<p><b>ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM</b></p> <p>“Business First”</p>	To maximise economic benefits from its direct trade and investment links with the big power, regardless of any political differences	Establishing and maintaining direct trade and investment links with the big power, as well as entering into bilateral and regional economic cooperation (such as an Free Trade Agreement) with that power
<p><b>DOMINANCE DENIAL</b></p> <p>“Ascendancy is Okay, But Not Dominance”</p>	To deny and prevent the emergence of a dominant power who might display a tendency of dictating hegemonic terms to smaller states	Making use of other powers' balancing efforts to offset the growing clout of the big power, by ensuring the involvement of other powers in regional affairs, and by giving political support to others' alliances and armaments
<p><b>INDIRECT BALANCING</b></p> <p>“Just in Case”</p>	To prepare for diffuse and uncertain strategic contingencies	Maintaining military ties (either a formal alliance or informal military cooperation) with another power, and modernising its own military, without explicitly identifying any specific target of its military efforts
<p><b>BALANCING</b> (Pure form)</p> <p>“Security First”</p>	To check and counter-balance the growing capability of a specific power	Entering into a military alliance with a third power and upgrading its own armament programme, for the purpose of containing against a specific threat

\*Limited bandwagoning (LB) is different from pure bandwagoning (PB) in three aspects. Firstly, PB often takes the form of military alignment or security alliance, where as LB mainly involves political collaboration on selective issues. Secondly, PB signifies a zero-sum scenario for big powers, that is, when a state bandwagons with one power, it simultaneously distance itself from another power. PB often occurs when there is an intense rivalry between two big powers, and smaller states are forced to take sides between the competing powers. In LB, on the other hand, a smaller state bandwagons with a rising power while maintaining its traditional relations with the preponderant power. Finally, PB implies an acceptance of a superior-subordinate relationship between a big power and a smaller partner, where as in LB, the smaller state tries to avoid the loss of its autonomy and to avoid becoming over-dependent on the big power. Simply put, PB is hierarchy-acceptance while LB is hierarchy-avoidance.

Table 3: Description of Small State Policy Responses to Power Asymmetry<sup>36</sup>

continue independently of China's rise. Following the 9/11 attacks and the discovery of Islamic terrorist cells in Singapore and Indonesia, Singapore-US cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts arguably acts as "stronger glue for the strategic relationship than the China challenge."<sup>37</sup> Regarding her military transformation, Singapore's focus on continually maintaining a marked edge in the region for credible deterrence, coupled with the SAF's *raison d'être* of securing a swift and decisive victory over the aggressor, has justified her continual development and vigilance, quite apart from China's rise. In fact, it is widely believed that Singapore's primary threats, and consequently the objectives of her military transformation, come from her immediate neighbours, particularly Malaysia.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Singapore must continue to take into account the risks of an increasingly powerful and potentially aggressive China, and should therefore continue to engage the US as a strategic ally. Former Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong stated in 2003 that "many in the region would feel more assured if East Asia remains in balance as China grows. In fact, maintaining balance is the over-arching strategic objective in East Asia currently, and only with the help of the US can East Asia achieve this."<sup>39</sup>

The second policy component is dominance denial, which Singapore will undertake as part of ASEAN's collective efforts to involve the US in regional affairs and thereby prevent the emergence of China as a hegemonic power in Southeast Asia. This option may be understood as seeking a balance of political power, in which China is induced to continue constructive engagement with Singapore and ASEAN because of the US presence in the region. Singapore is perhaps the "classic anticipatory state,"<sup>40</sup> in that she tries to anticipate strategic risks and prepare "fall-back positions" for contingencies.<sup>41</sup> In particular, Singapore is concerned about the nature of China's

rise and whether the latter will disrupt regional stability and constrain her freedom of manoeuvre. If the US were to withdraw from Southeast Asia, not only might China be tempted to exert more aggressive influence in the region, but the cohesiveness of ASEAN would probably come under severe strain as each state attempts to optimise its position in the resulting vacuum. To hedge against this, Singapore constantly seeks ways to keep the US engaged and involved in Southeast Asia to deter any attempts at Chinese hegemony. Shortly after it appeared that the US might have to close its military bases in the Philippines in 1989, Singapore announced that she would offer the Americans access to her facilities. Since 9/11, American security relationships with all the ASEAN states except Myanmar have strengthened and continue to "dwarf China," and the designation of Singapore as a Major Security Cooperation Partner is perhaps the best example of this.<sup>42</sup>

While the first two policy options are geared towards minimising the risks of a hegemonic China, the latter three seek to maximise the benefits of China's rise, especially economically. Under economic pragmatism, this essay has already discussed how Singapore has established and cultivated direct trade and investment links with China, as well as entered into bilateral and regional economic cooperation with it. Apart from the aforementioned establishment of the CSFTA in 2009, Singapore's economic engagement with China has involved the transfer of management expertise and investment, for example through the joint Suzhou Industrial Park project.<sup>43</sup> Singapore's heavy reliance on an open and liberal international trading regime means her economic linkages with China are likely to remain, if not increase in importance in future.

The fourth available policy option is binding engagement, whereby Singapore binds China to Southeast Asia through its involvement in regional

institutions like the ARF and East Asia Summit (EAS). These engagements are aimed at socialising China to Southeast Asian norms and encouraging it to behave responsibly and uphold the regional status quo. This policy is the more benign flip-side of dominance denial because it seeks to convince China of its vested interest in contributing productively to regional stability.<sup>44</sup> Given that the effectiveness of this option rests on the cohesiveness of ASEAN as a regional entity, Singapore is likely to be concerned about how the disputing claims over the South China Sea (SCS) will develop in future. Although Singapore is herself not a claimant state, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei are. If these countries were to try to leverage on ASEAN to pursue their claims as a bloc, China could sever its engagement and pursue its claims unilaterally. On the other hand, if these states were to push their individual claims more vocally while the non-claimant states continued to engage China, ASEAN's unity could possibly be fractured.<sup>45</sup> Singapore will have to negotiate this situation carefully and use her influence to ensure that ASEAN as a group continues to remain neutral with respect to the SCS disputes.

The fifth and final option is limited bandwagoning, which Singapore does not and will not pursue primarily for the reason discussed earlier, that her proximate geopolitical situation and domestic ethnic diversity mean that there is a "self-imposed limit" on the extent to which she will establish political linkages with China.<sup>46</sup> As long as both these conditions hold true, Singapore is unlikely to pursue this option even in

the future, to avoid any suspicion of being a Chinese vassal.

Having outlined the hedging policy options, it is important to note that their practicability is contingent on three key conditions: first, the absence of an immediate threat that might force a state to ally with a great power for protection; second, the absence of any ideological fault-lines between states; and third, the absence of an all-out great power rivalry which might force states to choose sides. The first condition is likely to hold given Singapore's location and the fact that she is not an immediate Chinese security concern (eg. Taiwan or

*Although China arguably has long regarded multilateral institutions as mechanisms utilised by the US and western states to exercise their influence and constrain Chinese behaviour, it actively participates in regional groupings like the APT, ARF and EAS, using these fora to reassure others of its non-belligerent intentions.*

the Korean peninsula). The second condition is likely to remain absent because Singapore's relentlessly pragmatic foreign policy will continue to further Singapore's core interests rather than abide by any strict code of ideological principles. The third condition is the most uncertain and perhaps the hardest to ensure in

future. It is to this issue that we now turn, as we explore how Southeast Asian regionalism can serve the great powers' mutual interests.

## ENMESHING THE GREAT POWERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Southeast Asian regionalism is extremely fluid and diverse, ranging from the mature ASEAN and ARF to newer mechanisms like APEC and ASEAN Plus Three (APT).<sup>47</sup> This diversity is perhaps reflective of the region itself and provides many avenues for cooperation and competition.<sup>48</sup> In the case of US-China relations, regional institutions can serve as tools to further their strategic interests, along

two key roles. First, they can mitigate the security dilemma by providing diplomatic tools and a flow of information that can dampen potential conflicts and prevent defensive measures from spiraling beyond control. In Southeast Asia's case, the ARF and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) encourage the early notification of military- or security-related actions among members and promote the peaceful resolution of disputes.<sup>49</sup>

Second, at the tactical level, great powers can use regional institutions to convey restraint and leadership. Although China arguably has long regarded multilateral institutions as mechanisms utilised by the US and western states to exercise their influence and constrain Chinese behaviour, it actively participates in regional groupings like the APT, ARF and EAS, using these fora to reassure others of its non-belligerent intentions.<sup>50</sup> In fact, China has gone beyond defensive goals and actively uses these institutions to promote the perception of its global power status.<sup>51</sup> Goldstein terms this a "neo-Bismarckian" grand strategy whereby China seeks to cooperate on regional issues while the regional states in turn, seek to use institutions and dialogue to make China's rise more predictable and less threatening.<sup>52</sup> As China becomes more powerful, however, it may want to use its strength to reshape regional institutions and rules to further its interests. Singapore has had to resist attempts by the Chinese to increase the influence of APT as the only truly Asian institution and instead promote more inclusive fora like the EAS and ARF.<sup>53</sup> This may lead China to be increasingly perceived as a security threat by Southeast Asian states. How should the US pre-empt and respond to such a scenario?

The American challenge is not to prevent China from participating in the regional order, but rather to embed a rising China in institutions in order to "strike strategic bargains at various moments along the shifting power trajectories and encroaching

geopolitical spheres."<sup>54</sup> These tactical bargains must be aligned with the larger objective of offering China a position as a regional power in return for Beijing accommodating Washington as a dominant security provider within East Asia.<sup>55</sup> In the near-to-medium term, ASEAN's interests appear to be aligned with that of the US. Evelyn Goh has argued that in effect, while China is enmeshed as a regional great power, Southeast Asian stability is nevertheless "sustained upon the predominance of US power," with regional states preferring a "moderated and implicit" type of dominance.<sup>56</sup> To the extent that the US continues to be an accommodating, stabilising superpower, Singapore's interests are likely to be best served under such an implicit hierarchy. Nevertheless, fall-back options apply both ways as Singapore continues to pursue the widest possible range of policy options for maximum freedom of manoeuvre.

## CONCLUSION

To broaden the range of policy options and balance benefit-maximisation against risk-minimisation, Singapore is likely to pursue a balanced spectrum of policies broadly termed hedging, as she seeks to maximise her room for manoeuvre and maintain regional stability. Singapore will engage and enmesh China while simultaneously continuing her strategic relationship with the US as well as her own military development. Although Singapore will always attempt to pursue her interests and punch above her weight, she cannot possibly implement hedging all on her own. Southeast Asia's multitude of regional institutions will therefore be useful for keeping the great powers engaged. Ultimately, Singapore must always be pragmatic above all else. While Singapore will remain optimistic and work towards the prospect of a peaceful and responsible China, she must always retain its fall-back options of US involvement and a credible SAF. 🌐

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# Managing the Risks of Social Media in the SAF

by CPT Lee Hsiang Wei

## Abstract:

Social media is a type of online media that expedites conversation through the creation and exchange of user generated content targeted at peers. This unprecedented level of interaction makes social media appealing and attractive to many around the world. With the speed at which social media grows and multiplies, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) cannot afford to ignore risks already exploited both within and outside of the military context. SAF's social media policy needs to continually adapt quickly as new trends in social media emerge. By ensuring several key thrusts are achieved, social media will become a manageable medium without compromising information and operational security in the Armed Forces.

*Keywords: Security; Communication Technologies; Military Policy; Adaptability and Flexibility*

## INTRODUCTION

### What is Social Media?

Social media represents a shift in the way we as a culture communicate. Social media is a type of online media that expedites conversation through the creation and exchange of user generated content targeted at peers. Examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube (see Figure 1). The key feature of social media is that it provides the common user with highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies.

Social media provides new ways to connect, interact and communicate. Users can post comments and photos, update their online profiles and even reflect their mood to others. These "sharings," once posted, are instantly available to the other users of social media, increasing the rate of which users interact with one another. This unprecedented level of interaction makes social media appealing and attractive to many around the world.

### Social Media and the SAF

The appealing and attractive nature of social media has made it a mainstay in the way we live, work and play. The social media industry has been experiencing

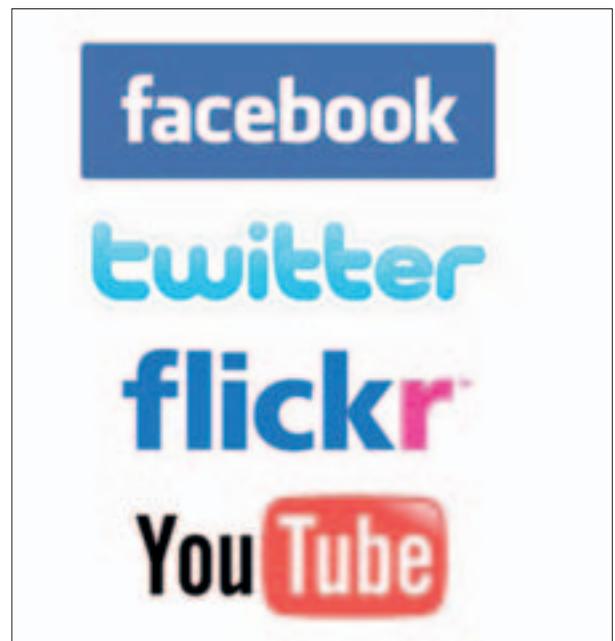


Figure 1: Examples of Social Media

phenomenal growth locally and worldwide over the past couple of years.<sup>1</sup> With the rise in popularity of mobile computing with devices like tablets and smartphones, users are able to update their online presence wherever and whenever, as well as keep abreast of the updates posted by their friends and family.

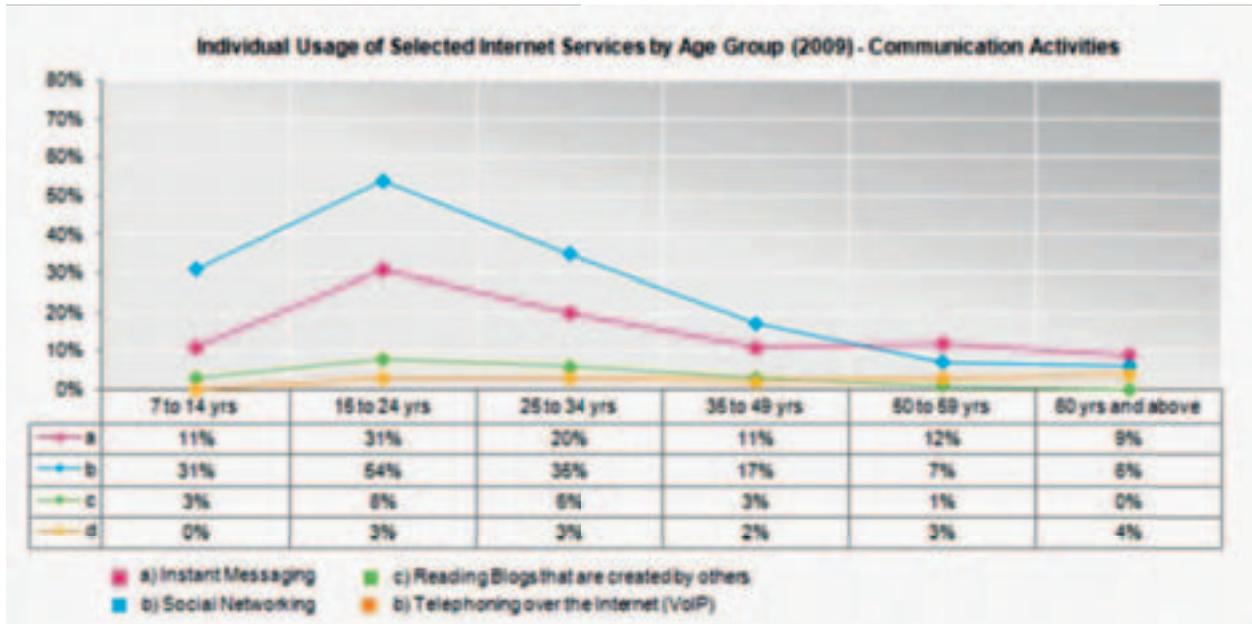


Figure 2: Individual Usage of Selected Internet Services by Age Group in 2009<sup>2</sup>

The use of social media in Singapore includes all age groups, with youths from 15 to 34 years accounting for the majority of social media users (see Figure 2). Some of the more popular forms of social media in Singapore include Facebook and Twitter, which have a significant following of approximately 2.5 million and 2.1 million users respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Although there are no official statistics documenting the use of social media in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), it is safe to assume that the service members in the SAF will probably exhibit the same usage patterns as the average Singaporean. Our service members may not use camera phones due to our security policies, but the smartphones that most carry still grant them access to social media even while at work. Surveys have shown that compared to the average web user, mobile users utilize social media more extensively (see Figure 3). While social media allows our service members to feel a greater connection to family and friends, it brings about risks as well as potential security implications for the SAF. This means that the SAF cannot afford to ignore the use of social media by its service members.



Figure 3: Mobile users utilize social media more extensively than the average web user<sup>4</sup>

This essay sets out to highlight some of the more prominent risks brought about by the use of social media faced by the SAF and provides some recommendations to mitigate these risks while embracing the social media phenomenon.

### Risks Associated with Social Media

There are five key risks that the SAF faces while embracing the social media phenomenon—Risk Through Direct Disclosure, Risk Through Revealing Locations, Risk Through User Anonymity, Risk by Design and Risk from Information Aggregation. These risks can be categorized into two broad types—user-

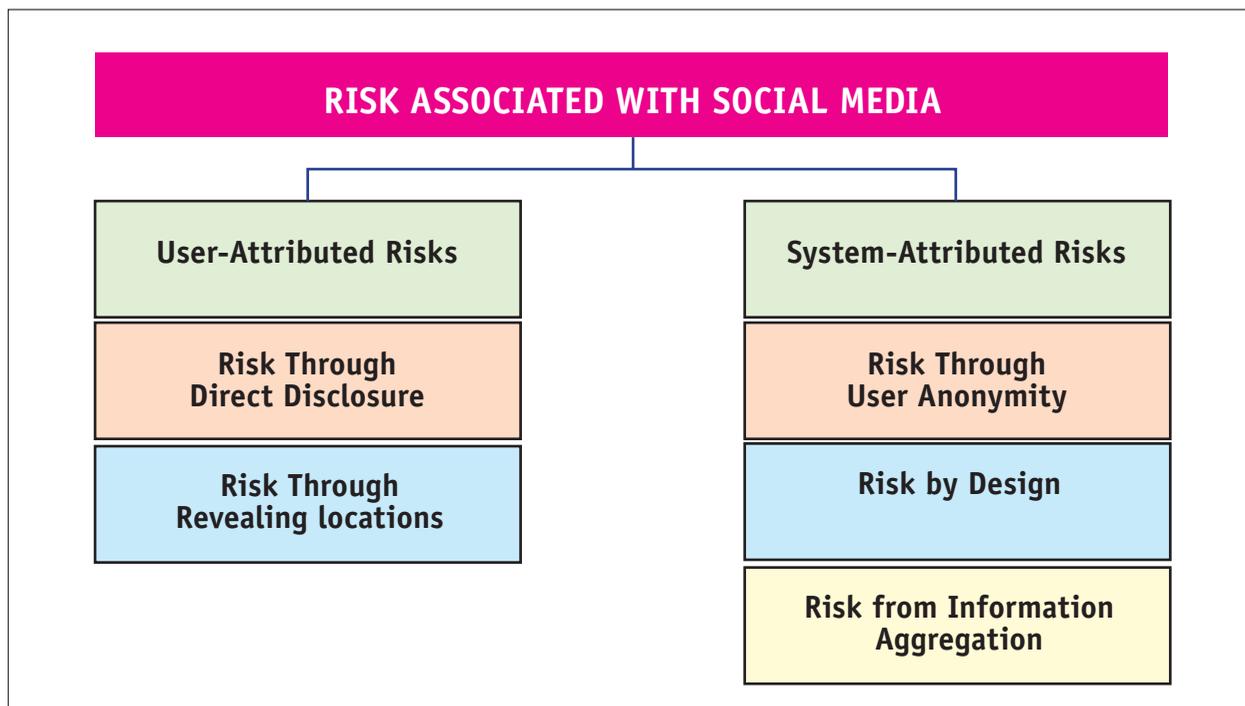


Figure 4: Risks Associated with Social Media

attributed risk and system-attributed risk. In the SAF context, user-attributed risk is where the risk originates from the actions of the service member while system-attributed risk is where the risk originates from the inherent characteristics of social media platforms. The following diagram summarizes these risks (see Figure 4).

**1) Risk Through Direct Disclosure.** Given the nature of social media, which hinges on the creation and exchange of user generated content, users are encouraged to share information about themselves. SAF service members may at times not think twice about sharing their private thoughts in their social media accounts, inadvertently revealing sensitive information to other users on social media. This direct disclosure of sensitive information posted compromises Operational Security (OPSEC).

Some of the sensitive information that may be posted online can include classified information about military organization, tactics and capabilities. These violations of OPSEC can possibly go as far as to affect national security and compromise safety of ongoing

operations. In March 2010, the Israeli military was forced to abandon plans to conduct a raid on militants in a Palestinian village after a soldier posted the location and time of the planned raid on his Facebook page.<sup>5</sup> The consequences would have been catastrophic if the raid was not called off and the militants knew of the impending arrival of the Israeli military.<sup>6</sup>

**2) Risk Through Revealing Locations.** Another risk is revealing locations of sensitive military installations or military assets in ongoing operations. This primarily manifests itself through the sharing of photos on social media as well as use of location-based services.

When a photograph is taken and uploaded to social media, it can contain information on the location of the image.<sup>7</sup> Many cameras and cell phones sold today are capable of “geotagging,” embedding geographical data into the photos.<sup>8</sup> This geographical data can be extracted from the photos even after uploading to the social media platforms. Hence, even though the photographed image does not contain any sensitive information, the embedded geographical data may compromise OPSEC.

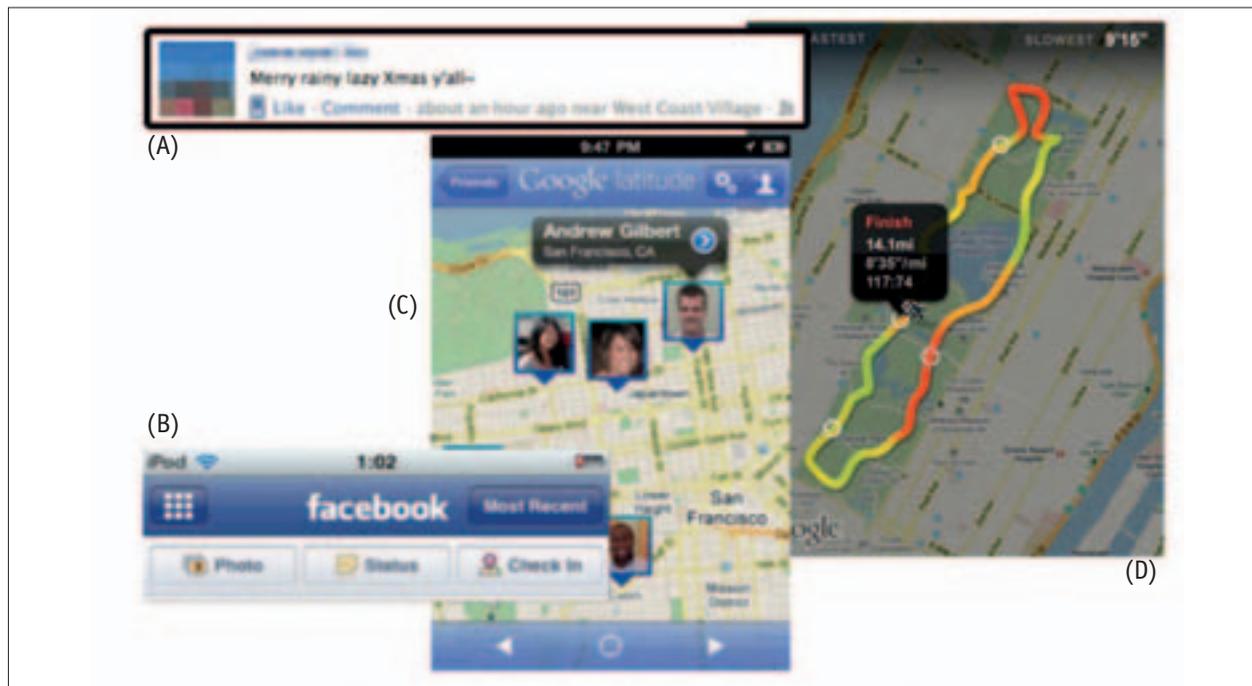


Figure 5: Various Location-Based Services on Social Media (A) Facebook Profile Status, (B) Facebook Check-In, (C) Google Latitude and (D) Nike+ Running App

There are also a variety of location-based services available on social media today, including Facebook profile statuses, Facebook check-ins, Google Latitude and applications that track users' movement, i.e. Nike+ Running App (see Figure 5). These location-based services are targeted at the users of mobile devices, encouraging them to update (knowingly or unknowingly) their geographical locations online. In December 2010, the US Army banned the use of "location-aware" applications on government-issued smartphones due to intelligence that the sudden increase in US soldiers being targeted by enemy snipers was a result of their adversaries making use of locations published on social media.<sup>9</sup>

**3) Risk Through User Anonymity.** The current state of social media lacks the necessary processes to verify the authenticity of users. There are users who take advantage of this "loophole" to create and maintain anonymous and fictitious user profiles. It is possible for a user with malicious intent to use a false identity to establish links and gain access to otherwise private information.

The "Robin Sage" experiment discussed in the BlackHat security conference in January 2011 highlighted the ease of obtaining classified information via a fictitious profile. The Robin Sage Experiment entailed creating a blatantly false identity of a female claiming to work in the military intelligence industry.<sup>10</sup> It involved convincing but fake social media under the alias "Robin Sage" which included a photo of a cute girl borrowed from an adult website (see Figure 6), and the job title of "Cyber Threat Analyst."<sup>11</sup> At the end of the experiment, "Robin" accumulated hundreds of connections through various social networking sites.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the duration of the experiment "Robin" was offered gifts, government and corporate jobs, and options to speak at a variety of security conferences.<sup>13</sup> More alarmingly, some of the information revealed was classified in nature and which "Robin" should not have been privy to.<sup>14</sup> It was discovered after the experiment that an inspection of the "Robin Sage" profile would have uncovered its fictitious nature. The outcome of this experiment is particularly embarrassing, given the numerous warnings security professionals preach about the dangers of the social media. Although this



Figure 6: Photo of “Robin Sage”

“Robin Sage” incident was purely an experiment, there have already been several instances where enemy organizations have used the anonymity of social media to obtain intelligence.<sup>15</sup>

**4) Risk By Design.** As social media sites function on the basis of exchanging and sharing user generated content, the default settings of most social media platforms tend to maximize visibility of personal information and the minimize privacy. In fact, most privacy measures currently in place in social media platforms are a result of user demands and requests.

Taking Facebook as an example, its approach to privacy was initially network-centric, where the users content was only visible to all other students in the same campus. This gradually changed where Facebook allowed users to determine which information could be shared with whom, with options of “No-one,” “Friends” or “Friends of Friends.” Subsequently, Facebook allowed companies to create applications

for its users and user content could be shared with these third party developers. Over time, Facebook added the ability for users to share their information with “Everyone.” Whenever Facebook introduced new options governing content sharing, the default was for the user to share as broadly as possible.<sup>16</sup>

One of the more prominent instances of this happened in December 2009 when Facebook required its users to reconsider their privacy settings. These contents included “Posts I Create,” “Status,” “Likes,” “Photos” and “Notes.” For each item, the two choices available were “Everyone” or “Old Settings,” with the toggle buttons defaulted to “Everyone.”<sup>17</sup> As this prompt was mandatory, users had to select an option before they were able to continue using the rest of the site. Faced with this obligatory and troublesome prompt, many users would have unthinkingly accepted the defaults, allowing much of their content to be more accessible than previous.

**5) Risk from Information Aggregation.** The risk of information aggregation stems from the potential for an alert adversary gathering and harvesting social media data of our service members, collating various bits of personal information such as family members, friends, social circles, addresses as well as contact information.

Data mining on social media is easy. In February 2010, Pete Warden, an academic researcher wrote a script that managed to harvest 215 million public profile pages from Facebook before being discovered.<sup>18</sup> Pete Warden commented that “... the data ... is still crawlable by anyone else and there are a lot of commercial companies that have grabbed the same dataset.”<sup>19</sup> Data mining on social media is perhaps more prevalent than commonly perceived. A more malicious attempt to target military personnel would definitely be more subtle and it would probably go undetected. There are already reports and known instances of such information gathering on social media.<sup>20</sup>

The alert adversary will, over a period of gathering such data, be able to make sense of them and arrive at a more complete set of information. This set of aggregated information can reveal classified information about the military organization, its tactics and even capabilities.

## CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

### SAF Social Media Policy

The current SAF policies do not address the use of social media well. These policies are largely an extension of the policies pertaining to traditional media. Hence, the policies lag behind the rapid developments occurring in the social media space. The result is that the understanding of the appropriate use of social media varies considerably across the service members in the SAF. A quick survey of our service members' accounts on Facebook shows varying degrees of personal and work-related information displayed on their profiles. These information include their employer, vocation, unit as well as their location of their unit, deployment or detachment.

### Other Approaches to Social Media

The US military's approach to social media was a haphazard and fragmented affair where the various services had different and sometimes conflicting policies on social media (see Figure 7).

It was only recently that the US Department of Defense (DoD) standardized their policies across their various services and published guidelines for service members who use social media in a personal capacity.<sup>21</sup> These guidelines attempt to educate their service members on what is inappropriate to post online. The US Central Command has published best practices, lists of "dos and don'ts" as well as articles on how to protect oneself on social media sites. In addition, the US Army recently published a *Social Media Handbook* (see Figure 8) in January 2011 that attempts to delineate the US Army policy on social media.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 7: Haphazard State of Guidelines on Social Media within the US Military (Megan)

There is not much literature regarding the social media policy of other militaries. However, it has been reported that the Chinese Military High Command has also published a list of "70 Forbiddens" which include staying away from social media websites such as Facebook.<sup>23</sup> The Israeli Army, on the other hand, has banned social media after multiple soldiers shared sensitive or embarrassing data via Facebook and other social media.<sup>24</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As we attempt to refine our social media policy, we should keep in mind an underlying principle—when SAF service members participate in social media on which they may be identified or associated with the SAF, they must be cognizant of their appearance as they are representing the SAF and Singapore. There are risks involved when service members use social media, but it may not warrant the need to ban its use, like what the Israeli Army has done. Instead, this essay proposes a three-pronged approach—Education, Clear Boundaries & Guidelines and Support Processes—that will allow service members to continue using social media in their personal capacity without posing undue risks to the SAF.

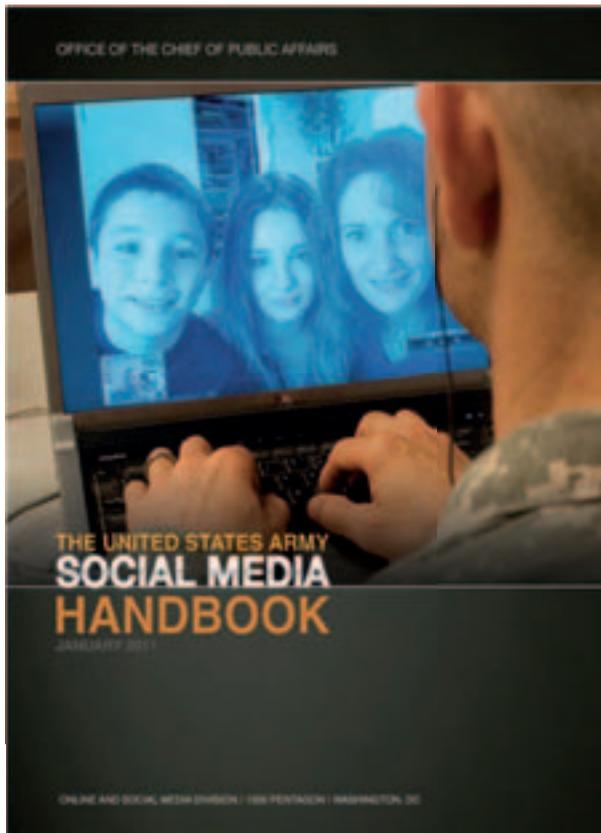


Figure 8: US Army Social Media Handbook

## Education

The first thrust to mitigate the risks of social media is to embark on a rigorous education campaign. This should consist of lessons incorporated into the various initial training schools such as Basic Military Training (BMT), Specialist Cadet School (SCS) and Officer Cadet School (OCS), sessions to update the service members on the new developments and changes in the operational units as well as subsequent courses. When crafting the SAF's social media curriculum, it is important that it goes further than platitudes like "Be Aware" and "Be Careful." The curriculum should leave no doubt in the service member's mind regarding playing his or her part. The education process should have an emphasis on communicating and convincing service members of the risks associated with social media. Relevant real life examples should also be incorporated into these lessons to give service members a better appreciation and awareness of the

risks involved in using social media. The education process should be a regular one given the constant influx of new service members into the SAF as well as the ever-changing social media landscape. The curriculum should be regularly reviewed and updated with new developments in the social media landscape. Given the pace of change in social media, it is not surprising that frequent updates will be required to ensure that the syllabus continues to remain relevant.

*When SAF service members participate in social media on which they may be identified or associated with the SAF, they must be cognizant of their appearance as they are representing the SAF and Singapore.*

## Clear Boundaries & Guidelines

The second thrust is for the SAF to establish clear boundaries and guidelines for service members to follow. In this aspect, we ought to learn from the US Army by having a publication similar to the *US Army Social Media Handbook*. The 39-page handbook lays out guidelines as to how the US Army should handle social media and it includes useful checklists as well as procedures for both commanders and soldiers. The handbook also highlights "danger areas" that can cause a service member to innocently reveal more than he should. By having a handbook or a guide easily available, every service member has literature to fall back on whenever in doubt about the use of social media. The handbook should lay out guiding principles that service members should always follow when using social media. In addition, it would be useful to include simple examples of what to do and what not to do, as well as a "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) section to answer common issues. This would go a long way towards providing greater clarity on the SAF's expectations of service members when using of social media. Additionally, there also should be a "one-stop" centre to answer queries and clarifications

that service members may have regarding SAF social media policy. Answers to these queries should also be accumulated and shared with other service members, via circulating updates, including them in the curriculum or updating the FAQ in the handbook. The ideal end state is one where social media culture within the SAF would self-police to actively minimize the associated risks of social media.

### Support Processes and Structures

The third thrust is for the SAF to set up supporting processes and structures to keep up with the ever-changing social media space. The SAF has to be able to keep up with the added functionalities that gain rapid following in social media. A dedicated team should be set up to maintain a direct oversight of the social media issues faced by the SAF. This team should not only comprise those senior enough to make executive decisions, but also a representative sample across the various age groups so as to better understand their perspectives on using social media. For example, the younger service members can bring to the table their knowledge of the latest trends and developments in social media, so that changes to curriculums or updates to policies can be made in a timelier manner.

*The SAF's social media policy needs to continually adapt quickly as new trends in social media emerge. Educating our service members on the risks associated with social media, establishing clear boundaries and guidelines as well as the timeliness of reviewing the social media policy needs to be a constant endeavor with a high priority.*

This team should also be responsible to develop and maintain the social media curriculum, manage the "one-stop" centre for SAF service members, keep abreast of social media developments and to take ownership over SAF social media policy.

## CONCLUSION

Social media increasingly plays an important role in personal communication and entertainment. Given the speed at which social media grows and multiplies, the SAF cannot afford to ignore the risks brought about by social media. These risks are very real and this essay has demonstrated that these risks have already been exploited both within and outside the military context.

SAF social media policy needs to continually adapt quickly as new trends in social media emerge. Educating our service members on the risks associated with social media, establishing clear boundaries and guidelines as well as the timeliness of reviewing the social media policy needs to be a constant endeavor with a high priority. By ensuring these three key thrusts are achieved, social media will become a manageable medium with which service members are able to communicate the right messages without compromising information and operational security in the Armed Forces.

The SAF needs a proactive social media policy. If trained and seasoned security professionals can be guilty of letting down their guard, as shown in the Robin Sage Experiment, our service members would require even more knowledge and ongoing training to safeguard the SAF against the risks of social media. 🌐

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# Between Intelligence and Intuition

by CPT Matthew Ng

## Abstract:

There is a perpetual search for clarity on the “traditional” use of intuition *vis-à-vis* an increasing dependence on intelligence in the conduct of military operations. This essay argues that in order to achieve a balance between intelligence and intuition, the commander must integrate intelligence into his decision-making cycle, relinquish preconceived ideas and not permit ego to play on his reason. Commanders must remember that there is no perfect intelligence and what appears to be objective intelligence is in fact subjective certainty. The role of intelligence is to aid decision-making, a process where one’s intuition is always required.

*Keywords: Military Operations; Intelligence; Modern Technology; Leadership*

In the field of military studies, there is a perpetual search for clarity on the “traditional” use of intuition *vis-à-vis* an increasing dependence on intelligence in the conduct of military operations. This is inevitable as human societies crave reproducibility in the effects militaries can engender as an instrument of state power. Ultimately, we want to minimize uncertainty in war by deriving a set of principles and behaviour norms that are tangible, at least “satisficing” the needs of states in any circumstances where military power is required.<sup>1</sup> As a corollary, this essay will focus on the military operational context where a commander’s thinking and decisions transcend the tactical level and contribute to the state’s strategic objective via large-scale actions on the battlefield.<sup>2</sup> The first part will define the meaning and purpose of operational intelligence as well as a commander’s intuition. Subsequently, four subsidiary topics that are pertinent to the discussion will be delineated—avoiding operational paralysis due to confusing or total lack of intelligence; what if the commander’s intuition is irrelevant; what if the commander relies excessively on his intuition and lastly, is objective or complete intelligence possible? Through this discussion, it will be argued that in

order to achieve a balance between intelligence and intuition, the commander must integrate intelligence into his decision-making cycle, relinquish preconceived ideas and not permit ego to play on his reason. At the same time, intuition must not be completely abandoned as intelligence seldom provides a complete picture. A certain reliance on intuition is necessary if one is to decide based on incomplete knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

What then is operational intelligence? Quite simply, it is up-to-date information about the enemy as well as their own forces that has been processed and distilled by experts from the mass of raw data received.<sup>4</sup> Its purpose is to assist the commander in reducing the margin of ignorance and risk, thereby optimizing his chosen course of action.<sup>5</sup> There are several caveats that must be considered. First of all, our discussion within this essay is limited to the use of operational intelligence by commanders. Strategic intelligence is precluded on the assumption that political imperatives can influence its collection and analysis, hence imposing certain restrictions on commanders that are irrelevant to our present discussion.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, intelligence cannot be

responsible for command decisions but a commander is. His personality, aptitude for risk-taking and his military upbringing are therefore the significant factors in the use of intelligence to aid the conduct of operations.<sup>7</sup> Finally, modern command, control, communications and intelligence (C4I) systems have revolutionized the art of operations and the nature of command with new and better abilities to plan and communicate in real-time as well as to acquire intelligence. At the very least, a commander is now able to obtain fairly reliable intelligence on his own forces' disposition, a critical capability that eluded those in previous eras.<sup>8</sup>

*Its purpose is to assist the commander in reducing the margin of ignorance and risk, thereby optimizing his chosen course of action.*

Intuition then, according to Clausewitz, refers to “an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light that leads to truth ... the quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection.”<sup>9</sup> By total assimilation of his mind and life experiences, the commander's thought and temperament are combined into a whole greater than its parts. This faculty of *coup d'oeil* can master uncertainty and understand the battlefield. In addition, Clausewitz also emphasized the importance of determination—a



US officer in charge of the Joint Mobile Ashore Support Terminal (JMAST), a self-contained mobile command, control, communications, computer, and intelligence (C4I) center designed to support the naval commander in joint operations

willingness to stay on a consistent course of action and act on belief despite uncertainty—as a catalytic characteristic in an intuitive commander.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary scientific studies on neurological processes yielded surprisingly comparable observations. The human mind works in a fashion analogous to that of a warehouse inventory system. Through constant absorption, comprehension and internalisation of critical information, the brain is able to rely on past experiences and knowledge acquired to combine them in novel ways that lead to greater understanding and new responses for every new situation that arises. This integrated but subconscious process of analysis and intuition is known as creative insight.<sup>11</sup> Thus for our purposes, a commander's intuition is the selective projection of past experiences, knowledge and present expectations in various combinations, with the personal commitment to follow through and work out the details along the way.<sup>12</sup>

*The battlefield experiences and insights that shaped his thinking as a junior commander will invariably form part of his intuition as a senior decision-maker wielding considerable influence and military power.*

Having defined intelligence and intuition, it is timely to explore how to avoid operational paralysis due to the lack of or deluge of intelligence in modern military operations. The solution, according to Clausewitz, is for the commander to apply his intuition to perceive the truth among the multitude of possibilities intelligence would provide.<sup>13</sup> Given that circumstances vary so frequently and extensively in war, a vast array of factors must be considered by the commander when deciding on a course of action, usually in the light of probabilities alone. As such, Clausewitz advised that commanders should

adopt the Imperative Principle where one should stick to his initial decision and refuse to alter the course of action unless proven decisively wrong by intelligence reports.<sup>14</sup> MacArthur during WWII for instance, persisted in striking at Hansa Bay, the Japanese stronghold without much success until Ultra confirmed the enemy's weakness at Hollandia. Proven wrong by precise intelligence, MacArthur intuitively launched an island-hopping operation that took the Allied forces rapidly to the Japanese Archipelago, bypassing strongholds and attacking weaker defence positions. Five Imperial Japanese Army divisions were annihilated or rendered irrelevant and the Japanese defensive perimeter evaporated.<sup>15</sup> The Pacific Campaign therefore, was an epitome of Clausewitz's evergreen Imperative Principle and the use of intuition to overcome operational paralysis.

Yet intuition is impotent without deliberate calculation. A bold commander would likely create comparatively timid enemies, shifting the burden of uncertainty onto them through surprising courses of action and compensating for his own incomplete understanding of the battlefield. However, even as improved quality and quantity of intelligence provides better resolution of the battlefield these days, the perceived sense of control and understanding could bring about complacency and inadvertently increase the enemy's chances of success through unexpected manoeuvres.<sup>16</sup> A commander must temper his boldness with deliberate risk-benefit calculations. The natural antidote to pure audacity in war would be rationality that produced certain cautiousness in commanders and Clausewitz was quick to differentiate caution from timidity, claiming that the latter resulted from character while the former was a conscious choice by the commander.<sup>17</sup> Thus what seemed to be a paradox was in fact Clausewitz's solution to the problem of operational paralysis on the battlefield—to act boldly on one's intuition tempered by caution.<sup>18</sup>

There is also the possibility that a commander's intuition becomes increasingly irrelevant to the fast-changing operational environment the higher he progresses in the military hierarchy. With the advent of modern C4I systems, high-ranking commanders more often than not are positioned at the rear with their headquarters staff. This practice tends to remove these important decision-makers from the front-line both physically and psychologically, thereby causing the commander's intuition to atrophy.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the operational environment would have altered significantly between an officer's tour as a platoon leader and a division commander. The battlefield experiences and insights that shaped his thinking as a junior commander will invariably form part of his intuition as a senior decision-maker wielding considerable influence and military power. However, these past experiences may be irrelevant to the battlefield of today.<sup>20</sup> These legitimate criticisms notwithstanding, a commander's intuition remains crucial to the conduct of operations and can be augmented by contemporary adaptations. For a start, a commander should cultivate a new type of intuition that relates less to the application of principles of war but more on his appreciation of intelligence. This will include learning more about what the intelligence staff are capable of, how he can select the pertinent pieces of intelligence most efficiently and how he can better task his intelligence staff.<sup>21</sup> It has also been pointed out earlier that the latest neurological studies have confirmed the potential of one's creative insight where old experiences could be re-adapted to tackle emerging problems. Commanders should therefore search for patterns of similarity and difference with other situations they have lived or learned about actively and apply these intuitively to solve current operational challenges.<sup>22</sup>

*Boldness must be tempered with deliberate risk-benefit calculations that will insure their plans succeed against a radical and unorthodox enemy.*

What if the commander becomes besotted with his intuition to the extent of "situating the appreciation" instead of "appreciating the situation?"<sup>23</sup> For instance, Rommel was so obsessed with capturing Tobruk in late 1941 that he "persuaded" others that the large scale Allied envelopment predicted by his intelligence staff was impossible. Rommel stubbornly rejected evidence gathered by German long-range photographic reconnaissance that revealed British preparations for a major offensive to recapture Cyrenaica. He was to pay a hefty price for his obstinacy and overreliance on intuition in the middle of November that year.<sup>24</sup> To inhibit the occurrences of self-intoxication with his own intuition, the intelligence staff must be able to win the trust of their commander. The intelligence chief should acquaint himself with the working habits, character and ambitions of his superior and then make use of this intangible knowledge to enhance the palatability of the intelligence reports, many of which could well be "unpleasant" news to the commander. Field Marshal Montgomery's intelligence advisers, for example, had to develop special "showmanship techniques"—a sort of "Monty language" that would enable them to provide him with accurate intelligence while making it more acceptable to him to authorize the necessary changes in his meticulously prepared operational plans. This entailed presenting advice in such a way as to make the commander think it was his own idea.<sup>25</sup> If Rommel had chosen more adroit intelligence officers, he would likely not have been blinded by his own intuition that led to the attack on Tobruk in 1941.

The selection of intelligence officers should be based not only on their professional abilities but also on their strength of character and ethical standards. Men of integrity who would report

without fear or favour should constitute a commander's intelligence staff.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, Wellington did rather well in his campaign on the Iberian Peninsula. He had consolidated his lessons from the earlier campaign against Dhoondiah in early 19<sup>th</sup> century India, which taught him the importance of knowing his enemy well. By 1810, Wellington had established well-resourced staff groupings responsible for the collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence on the French. His intelligence aides were also trustworthy and Wellington constantly sought their advice in matters relating to the formulation of his operational plans. Implicitly, Wellington had adopted an open-door policy and allowed his staff to report even derogatory intelligence that challenged his operational plans.<sup>27</sup> Commanders of our era should take a leaf from the pages of military history and remember the value intelligence aides can bring to the planning room. With a more prolific and trustworthy intelligence staff, overreliance on intuition can be minimized.

Yet having upright intelligence officers who enjoy good rapport with the commander is futile without credible and accurate intelligence, for the latter is the foundation for developing trust between a commander and his intelligence aides. Although Clausewitz claimed that bold intuition tempered with caution is the key to operational success, he did not discredit the use of intelligence, provided it was accurate and reliable. Under such ideal circumstances, bold intuition would be no more relevant to a commander than it is to a chess player choosing whether to sacrifice a chariot or pawn.<sup>28</sup> Of course, accurate intelligence was near impossible during Clausewitz's era, but may not be so in ours. As mentioned earlier, technological developments have improved the quality and quantity of intelligence available to commanders so much so that even

mediocre intelligence services are able to provide fairly reliable reports of the enemy's force disposition and order of battle. Stronger intelligence services from more advanced militaries are sometimes even able to discern capabilities as well as intentions.<sup>29</sup> Put simply, the pursuit of more accurate and reliable intelligence would be the key to reducing the potential over-reliance on intuition among military commanders.

One can also argue that despite the rapid advancements in modern military technology, the ideal scenario where a commander receives reliable intelligence remains largely elusive. Firstly, it must be recognized that completeness in intelligence requires the collation of many pieces of information and during the time required to achieve perfection, some of these pieces would have ceased to be accurate. The dialectical nature of strategy also meant that commanders on each side would be constantly shaping the operational environment to their own advantage and actions initiated would render imperfect the intelligence, its assessment and the resultant courses of action. Then there is the problem of limited human capacity in collecting and analysing intelligence, aggravated by the current surge of available intelligence. As the volume of intelligence increases, the level of certainty in operations first increases then plunges back to uncertainty. In fact a new kind of uncertainty emerges when the commander is overwhelmed and confused.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the intrinsic propensity in humans to ingratiate and flatter is incompatible with the production of objective intelligence. In his firsthand account of WWII, Jones recounted how he witnessed commanders being presented only with intelligence that suited their plans and personal ambitions. The presence of a bureaucracy served as a filter that eliminated the sharper criticisms and radical suggestions. Alternatively, intelligence branches would also want to protect their reputation and the resulting reports would either be overly conservative or general.<sup>31</sup> Having said that, does the lack of perfect

intelligence mean that contemporary commanders are no better off than their predecessors? Bearing in mind that technological advances in the future will further improve the quality and categorisation of intelligence, the value of intelligence, albeit imperfect and subjective, is primarily to provide the commander with more information and awareness of the different possibilities he and his army may find themselves in. Intelligence should not be perceived as a solution to operational decision-making, but rather a tool to aid planning. With persistent efforts in intelligence collection, one could then make a series of predictions of likely scenarios that his adversary might pursue. Even biased intelligence reports could spark off a re-examination of the operational plans under an astute commander.<sup>32</sup>

To conclude, this essay has found that contemporary commanders must utilize bold intuition in order to overcome operational paralysis when confronted with uncertainty, especially when intelligence reports are confusing and overwhelming. Concurrently, boldness must be tempered with deliberate risk-benefit calculations that will insure their plans succeed against a radical and unorthodox enemy. Commanders should also maintain the sharp edge of their intuition by developing a keen sense of what intelligence can do to aid their operational planning. In addition, they should draw on their previous knowledge, identify patterns or analogies within new situations related to those experiences and apply their intuition in novel ways to solve the current problems. To prevent an overreliance on one's intuition and attain a better understanding of his operational environment, the commander would do well to foster an intelligence team comprising of individuals selected for their ability to communicate influentially, strength of character, ethical standards and, most importantly, a proven capacity to produce timely and reliable intelligence. A commander should also promote a liberal culture within his headquarters staff so that his intelligence aides would

not hesitate to present intelligence estimates that are detracting against the overall operational plan. Lastly, commanders must always remember that there is no perfect intelligence and what appears to be objective intelligence is in fact subjective certainty. The role of intelligence is to aid decision-making, a process where one's intuition is always required. 🌐

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# Whither Special Forces? The Strategic Relevance of Special Operations

by CPT Colflesh Khoon Liat

## Abstract:

Today's focus on special forces is hardly surprising when considering the demand for counterterrorist and counterinsurgency experience in an unconventional and asymmetric threat environment that is today's battlefield. After 11 September 2001, special forces represented the "logical policy option" decision makers in Washington seeking to bring the fight to the enemy—they have become a "force of choice" for the 21st century. This raises the question of the role that special forces play in strategy. Is their recent popularity and success because they are simply right for the time, or is it a reflection of their contribution on a strategic level? This essay will investigate how special operations contribute to overall strategic utility, and how special forces may be employed as a strategic asset.

*Keywords: Special Forces; Counterinsurgency; Contemporary Security Environment*

## INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed a renaissance for special operations and the professionals involved in their conduct. This renewed focus on special forces is hardly surprising when considering the demand for counterterrorist and counterinsurgency experience in an unconventional and asymmetric threat environment that is today's battlefield. After 11 September 2001 (9/11), special forces represented the "logical policy option" decision makers in Washington seeking to bring the fight to the enemy—they evolved from being a "force of desperation" born during the Second World War (WWII), to a "force of choice" for the 21st century.<sup>1</sup> However, this raises the question of the role that special forces play in strategy. Is their recent popularity and success because they are simply right for the time, or is it a reflection of their contribution on a strategic level? This paper will attempt to answer this question through an investigation of how special operations contribute to overall strategic utility, and how special forces may be employed as a strategic asset. These factors taken together ensure the strategic relevancy of special forces well into the foreseeable future.

## SPECIAL MEN FOR A SPECIAL PURPOSE

*"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?  
And I said, here am I. Send me!"*

*– Isaiah 6:8*

Shrouded in secrecy and veiled from public view, it can be quite difficult to get an accurate idea of what special forces are.<sup>2</sup> Operational security requirements mean that governments often neither confirm nor deny the existence of certain special forces capabilities themselves and the missions that these men undertake.

It is useful then, for the purposes of this investigation, to begin with a definition of what special forces are. One approach to defining special forces uses its purpose—that is, the conduct of a "special operation" as one of its key distinguishing features. Indeed, Malcolm Brailey argues in favor of this approach, when he writes that it is much more fruitful to first "define what constitutes a special operation and to extrapolate from that which kind of forces are selected and trained to perform those operations."<sup>3</sup> The reason for this is that though it may be tempting to define special forces against

“mainstream or conventional military identity,” because of their special or elite status, this is not useful as different nations structure their armed forces according to different national security priorities.<sup>4</sup> Such a definition would only highlight “national differences rather than international commonalities,” and would not serve as a firm base for further inquiry.<sup>5</sup>

Colin Gray suggests that in order to have a “sufficiently holistic understanding” of special operations, it is necessary to think of them in three ways, “a state of mind; forces; and a mission.”<sup>6</sup> Following this thread, it becomes evident that what sets the special forces soldier apart from his peers is his “intellectual and philosophical capability,” his “distinct way of thinking” that “no mission is too great, no task is too daunting, and failure is not an option.”<sup>7</sup> At its core, what truly sets special forces apart is the type of people it attracts and the rigorousness of its selection processes. These are individuals with strong characters, flexible minds, physical fitness and devotion to the team. These individuals, the “non-standard operators,” form the heart of special forces. They are the ones who can then be trained and equipped to perform a wide spectrum of missions. It is only men like these who are able to meet the simple or complex, subtle and imaginative demands that special operations ask of them, only then that can they be considered a special force.

### STRATEGY: THE UTILITY OF FORCE?

Clausewitz has arguably had the single biggest influence on Western military thought, a remarkable fact considering that *On War* was written in the 19th century. Clausewitz wrote as one professional soldier to another and sought to explore the nature and dynamics of war in a theoretical sense, so that it may enlighten those responsible for the practice of war. In his own words, theory is “an analytical investigation leading to a close acquaintance with the subject” that “becomes a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from

*Whether or not special operations have strategic utility depends on how they are used.*

“center of gravity.”<sup>10</sup> War itself is regarded as an instrument of the state, the force employed has to serve a political purpose—



SAF Special Operations Task Force Troopers

books; it will light his way, ease his progress, train his judgment, and help him to avoid pitfalls.”<sup>8</sup> Clausewitz believed that understanding its theory would aid a commander in the conduct of war. He defined war fundamentally as fighting, a “trial of moral and physical forces through the medium of the latter.”<sup>9</sup> The object of this trial is to impose one’s will on the enemy by rendering him powerless, achieved by the total and complete application of force to the enemy’s

the “political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it.”<sup>11</sup> Strategy is subsequently defined as “the use of engagements for the object of the war.”<sup>12</sup>

Modern definitions of strategy that build on Clausewitz's writings remain relevant because the nature of war—the activity that is the result of the reciprocal clash of opposing wills—is constant through time. Improved technology and new tactics might alter the character of war, but the nature of this competition remains unchanged. However, this definition of strategy can be expanded on in order to make it more suitable to the subtleties of special operations and changes to the international system over time.

Michael Howard defined strategy with respect to the international system in terms of the part “played by force, or the threat of force” as wielded by political units.<sup>13</sup> Freedman expanded on this theme by considering how the concept of power fit into the theory of strategic activity. Defining power as the “capacity to produce effects that are more advantageous than would otherwise have been the case,” he uses deterrence theory to illustrate that power, as relevant to strategic theory, is more than the actual capacity to produce effects.<sup>14</sup> What is more important is the perceived capacity, that is, power exists “to the extent that it is recognized by others,” thus taking into account the authority an actor has, not simply how much force he is able to wield.<sup>15</sup> Strategy is defined by Freedman as “the art of creating power to obtain the maximum political objectives using available military means.”<sup>16</sup> This is a more subtle definition of strategy, casting it in terms of power and setting it within the context of international politics. Force still plays an integral part in strategy, but with this definition, the context is no longer confined to instances where force is being applied, that is, in cases of war, but is widened to include the threat of force and the perceived capability to carry out a specific threat.

## THE STRATEGIC UTILITY OF SPECIAL FORCES

*“When the hour of crisis comes, remember that 40 selected men can shake the world.”*

*– Mongol Warlord Yasotay*

Special operations are, by definition, “small-scale, clandestine, covert or overt.” In other words, they are usually tactical and at times, operational in scale. Yet like tactical and operational missions of a conventional nature, special operations can and do contribute to the greater strategic effort. Thus, one way of looking at the role of special forces in the strategic context is to analyze the strategic utility of special operations. Colin Gray identifies two “master claims” that form the core of the strategic utility of special forces—they provide economy of force and expansion of choice. The former United States (US) Army Chief of Staff Peter Schoomaker, himself a special operator, called this the “tailor to task capabilities” of special forces, that is, their ability to “adapt to a broad and constantly varying range of tasks and conditions.”<sup>17</sup>

*Special forces are not simply better soldiers in the sense that nuclear bombs are bigger bombs—they are entirely different and should be employed in accordance to a strategy that accounts for this.*

A point worth making here is that these two attributes of special forces are more interrelated than they seem on the surface. In a manner of speaking, the flexibility of special forces, that is their “tailor to task” capability, grants them a degree of adaptability with respect to the roles and missions that they are called on to perform. This creates the economy of force that rests at the core of the strategic utility of special operations. Therefore, it is not that special operations simply “achieve significant results with limited forces.”<sup>18</sup> Rather, they achieve significant results, with limited forces, in a diverse number of ways. For example, a special forces team deployed in an advanced reconnaissance role to gather intelligence for an impending full force invasion may also deploy with the capability to perform a direct action mission if a target of opportunity presents itself. This was taken to its logical conclusion in

Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, where US Special Operations Forces (US SOF) teams deployed to link up with indigenous elements in order to prepare the battlefield for a conventional deployment instead went on to rout the Taliban themselves, working together with a combination of local forces and precision air support.<sup>19</sup>

Generally, whether or not special operations have strategic utility depends on how they are used. Tucker and Lamb proposed categorizing special operations into direct and indirect categories, roughly based on the approach used. These labels refer to the operators achieving the missions either directly, by taking actions themselves, or indirectly through their influence on indigenous forces.<sup>20</sup> Direct missions may take the form of counterterrorist operations, for example hostage rescue scenarios like Operation NIMROD (the British SAS in London, 1980) or Operation MAGIC FIRE (the German GSG9 in Mogadishu, 1977); or counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction missions like those carried out under the ambit of the Proliferation Security Initiative. Examples of indirect missions may include aspects of unconventional warfare or foreign internal defense, such as training, equipping and working with friendly indigenous forces. However, this is not a perfect categorization and missions can have both direct and indirect elements. For instance, the USSOCOM Fact Book has indicated counterinsurgency operations as a core US SOF activity. Counterinsurgency operations do not fit neatly into either the direct or indirect categories because they themselves contain elements of both approaches and elements of the other core activities (direct action, information operations, unconventional, psychological or civil affairs operations).

Special operations missions, be it direct or indirect, may be employed independently or in support of conventional forces.<sup>21</sup> This means that special forces may achieve strategic utility either when tasked to act alone, say when conducting a hostage rescue operation; or when acting in conjunction

with a conventional force, for example conducting advanced reconnaissance in order to facilitate their deployment. There are many permutations possible, since direct or indirect methods may be employed independently or in support of a conventional effort. For instance, special forces may be deployed to work “by, with, and through” local indigenous forces in an unconventional war effort—an example of a largely indirect method of operation. This special operation may itself be an independent act, that is, the only boots on the grounds are special forces soldiers; or it may be a small part of a bigger conventional operation, with the unconventional push supporting a bigger strategy. The recent deployments of special forces to Afghanistan and Iraq are cases in point. The US SOF in Afghanistan fought alongside the local Northern Alliance in an independent role, and indeed were supported by precision munitions from the air. Conversely, circumstances led to the US SOF in Iraq being tasked with the northern push to Baghdad—to support concurrent moves by infantry, marine and armored divisions from western, southern, and eastern approaches.

The preceding discussion suggests that special forces can complete their mission directly or indirectly, either acting independently or in support of a conventional effort. In a manner of speaking, there is greater strategic value when special forces act independently, since they are the primary effort and success hinges solely on the skills that they bring to the mission.<sup>22</sup> However, when acting in support of conventional forces, special forces make a strategic contribution only to the extent that their involvement influences the success of the conventional effort.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, special forces typically support conventional forces through their direct action capabilities. Ironically, such use of special forces limits them to a tactical contribution as they are merely augmenting the conventional effort—there is less strategic value in such a role because it has more in common with what conventional forces can already do.<sup>24</sup> This is a point that will be picked up again in the following section.

## A STRATEGY FOR SPECIAL FORCES

*“Special warfare is an esoteric art unto itself.”*

*– Lt. Gen William G. Yarborough*

The lack of special forces in the “canon of strategic theory” limits its understanding by conventional military commanders and thus they have not been used to their full potential on modern battlefields. Theory is important because it provides a framework for further inquiry to proceed, as mentioned earlier, it lights the way, eases the process and trains judgment. A proper understanding of the theory of special forces in a strategic context results in better application, thereby increasing their utility. It has been pointed out that the process of developing a strategy for special forces is analogous to that of crafting a strategy for the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>26</sup> Initial proposals called for the newly developed atomic bomb to be used just as a conventional bomb would, albeit on a larger destructive scale. However, strategists soon realized that nuclear weapons were an entirely different capability and nuclear war would be an entirely different form of fighting that required its own strategy to account for its strategic, tactical, military and political idiosyncrasies.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, special forces are not simply better soldiers in the sense that nuclear bombs are bigger bombs—they are entirely different and should be employed in accordance to a strategy that accounts for this.

A useful way of approaching the question of how special forces can be employed strategically comes from identifying the reason behind the roles and missions they perform. In order to do this, it is necessary to return to the concepts of strategy and strategic utility outlined above.

The object of strategy is to impose one’s will on an adversary, to create power in order to obtain political objectives. The optimum strategy achieves this end state whilst “maintaining freedom of action with the least effort.”<sup>28</sup> These principles of strategy identified by Marshal Ferdinand Foch—freedom of action (the ability to control circumstances of an

event) and economy of force (the optimum allocation of resources)—define the strategic environment and in turn the strategic effectiveness of one kind of operation versus another. Using these principles, McRaven shows that conventional forces can provide “unparalleled freedom of action through the application of overwhelming force”—this is the strategic utility of conventional forces and there are certain operations for which they are best suited.<sup>29</sup> Special forces, on the other hand, are able to both optimize freedom of action and economy of force—echoing Gray’s argument that their strategic utility is derived from the economy of force and expansion of choice that they provide. Thus special operations are strategically advantageous when conventional operations are strategically disadvantageous—when it is necessary to maintain freedom of action with minimum force. Special forces ought to be employed in circumstances where conventional forces cannot do the job.

In such circumstances, conventional forces are only able to guarantee freedom of action through the overwhelming application of force, thereby negating economy of force. One example is the role special forces have in counterterrorist operations. Counterterrorist operations are a traditional staple of special forces missions. Many nations have some form of special unit or other trained to deal with such contingencies. Conventional forces and means are inadequate when it comes to dealing with terrorists—the experiences of the security forces in Germany during the 1972 Munich Olympics demonstrated this fact. There are two reasons for this: “not only are contemporary [conventional] weapons and tactics far too destructive to be employed in heavily populated urban regions, but also the deployment of large numbers of soldiers against terrorists simply increases the number of targets at which they can strike.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, in order to succeed against terrorist, security forces need to employ similar weapons and tactics, those of “psychology, stealth, speed, surprise, and cunning.”<sup>31</sup> This requirement was met with the development of specialized counterterrorist capabilities, in some

cases within existing military structure as with the British SAS and American Delta Force, and in other cases within police or paramilitary structures as was the case with Germany's GSG 9.

The strategic employment of special forces rests on the type of mission that special forces are called on to perform. Special forces are strategically advantageous in situations where conventional forces are strategically disadvantageous. As obvious as this may seem, this is an important point to remember as it reduces the tendency for special forces to be used as "superior" conventional soldiers—employed for conventional purposes on the mistaken belief that their training and equipment makes them better for missions that standard infantry can accomplish. Identifying roles and missions that are suited for special forces is the heart of crafting a strategy for special forces. Missions such as counterterrorism, counter proliferation, special reconnaissance and unconventional warfare, all favor the employment of special forces because they are missions that conventional forces find hard, if not impossible, to accomplish. Special forces are the strategic response that policymakers seek when faced with these contingencies, therefore when used in these circumstances, they are performing the function as strategic assets.

The aim of this section was to provide a theoretical understanding of the role special forces play in strategy. It is perhaps helpful to summarize some of the key observations made above. Special forces may act independently or in support of conventional forces. This distinction does not affect the strategic utility of special forces as it merely describes how special forces are being used in an operation. This is because the strategic utility of special forces rests intrinsically in their ability to provide economy of force, and expansion of choice to the policymaker. What does impact the strategic utility of special forces is the type of mission they are called on to perform. While it may seem evident that the role of special forces is to conduct the special operation, the lack of a proper

strategy directing their use may cause the temptation of using them for conventional purposes because they appear to be "superior" soldiers. Rather than being "superior," they are "different," and a different strategy must be present to account for this and properly direct their use. At the heart of the matter is the fact that special forces, acting independently or as supporting elements, ought not to be employed for conventional purposes.

## SPECIAL FORCES AND THE CONTEMPORARY SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

*"The top, military board is uni-polar, with the US being the only country capable of projecting global military force. The middle, economic board is tri-polar. The US, the European Union and Japan account for two-thirds of the world's economy. China's dramatic growth may make this board quadri-polar by the turn of the century. The bottom board consists of diverse transnational relationships outside the control of governments, including financial flows, drug trafficking, terrorism and degradation of the ozone layer. On this board, there are no poles."*

– Joseph Nye, 1994

Nye observed that the structure of power in the international system may be likened to a "three-dimensional chess game."<sup>32</sup> He used this analogy to explain why it would prove increasingly difficult to produce accurate estimative intelligence, arguing that it would be necessary to understand the complex interaction of factors within and between boards before accurate predictions could be formulated. This analogy is also particularly useful when looking at the nature of the contemporary security environment and the strategic role special forces play in it.

The current security climate is characterized by its great complexity. The simplest way of looking at the threat environment is to consider it a hybrid of "new actors with new technology and new or transfigured ways of war" combining with "old threats" that have to be tackled "at the same time and in the same space."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, this hybrid environment is an "ambiguous,

dynamic, and multifaceted” mix of contrasting trends: local social networks and globalized linkages; traditional conservatism and postmodern liberalism; local insurgencies and worldwide terrorism.<sup>34</sup> Technological advancement has made it more comfortable in many modern nations, and yet ironically more vulnerable as lives and infrastructure become more intertwined. Globalization has brought economic prosperity at the same time that it has emphasized the gulf between the haves and have nots, leading to a backlash against itself. To further complicate matters, this backlash is often directed at the political or cultural components of globalization whilst simultaneously embracing its modernizing technological or economic components. To return to the chess game analogy, it is as if the time and space between the chess boards have been compressed.

Contemporary strategy exists within this complex and dynamic context. Policymakers are increasingly faced with challenges that require multi-faceted solutions. Strategy, as defined earlier, is “the art of creating power to obtain the maximum political objectives using available military means.” In the traditional sense, political objectives differ from country to country, and therefore so do the strategic requirements of different nations. For instance, retaining the capability to project military force globally is an obvious strategic concern of the US, but this same concern may not necessarily be shared by other western countries such as France or Canada which may place greater emphasis on economic influence. Furthermore, countries in a state of development, most notably China, have a distinctly different strategic outlook, one that may seek to assert power more than maintain it. It follows then that the requirement for special forces tends to differ according to the strategic requirements of a particular country.

However, in the contemporary security environment, because of the compression of time and space in the structure of power resulting from the amalgamation of trends that impact security, there is a case to be made for special forces as strategic assets, regardless of the strategic requirements of a country. In other words, even though two countries may have vastly different political objectives, they may nonetheless find utility in developing their own strategic special forces capabilities. Moreover, because the interaction between boards in the chess game have intensified, special forces, being relevant in all three boards, are relevant to countries that have interests in any of the boards, regardless of their specific strategic orientation or requirements. This

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claim rests on the fact that the two key features of special forces which provide strategic utility, the economy of force and “tailor to task” capability, are ideally suited to a security environment that is a hybrid of the old and

new. In this type of environment, what is required is a means that is flexible and capable of adapting to the specific threat it is faced with—this is the essence of economy of force and a “tailor to task” capability. Special forces are the queens in this three dimensional chess game. They are versatile pieces capable of acting in all directions on individual boards; but also have applications and effects across the boards. In the three dimensional chess game, players have to be able to move “vertically as well as horizontally.”<sup>35</sup>

One of the underlying themes of this paper is that the use of special forces must be directed by a proper strategy. The fact that special forces offer solutions to the many challenges faced in the current security climate makes this an even more crucial requirement if their misuse is to be avoided.

## CONCLUSION

The current security environment demands a response that is versatile and capable of responding to a variety of contingencies. Special forces provide a measured and tailored means of exercising power. Special forces are right for the time, and the time is right for them. At its most basic level, the popularity enjoyed by special forces is a product of this match. More importantly, the success of special forces and their continual employment in operations reflects a deeper understanding of their contribution on a strategic level. Decision makers recognize that special forces present ideal solutions to challenges faced in the contemporary security environment, and are less unsure about how best to employ them.

But what does the future hold for special forces? Special forces cannot be obstinate, in other words, they must not take recent successes as a guarantee for future strategic relevance. Special forces must continue to look ahead for new missions that can expand their capabilities, thereby reinforcing the element of expansion of choice and economy of force that gives them their strategic utility. One potential area lies in the realm of integration with intelligence. Specifically, this would entail an expansion in the more traditional strategic reconnaissance role and also development of a human intelligence acting in cohort with existing networks in the intelligence community.

Special forces can act as intelligence practitioners, gathering and acting on intelligence in hostile environments. This is an emerging trend in the US, where special operators from the military and intelligence agencies jointly execute covert operations, most noticeably the “targeted killings” of high value terrorists.<sup>36</sup> However this integration needs to be more about gathering intelligence rather than acting on it in the form of covert action. Two possible benefits arise from this. First, intelligence is a crucial requirement for modern armies structured to fight “network centric war” based on information

dominance. No doubt much of the emphasis here rests on technological assets like unmanned drones and satellites with ultra high resolution cameras, but time and again it is proven that nothing is a complete substitute for “eyes on the ground.” Second, integrating special forces with intelligence works towards combating some of the transnational, non state problems on the bottom chess board. Governments increasingly demand “action-on” (or actionable) intelligence, that is, intelligence to support day to day tactical operations rather than informed policy.<sup>37</sup> Preemptive action against weapons proliferation, terrorism, piracy and so forth require quick, real time responses. Integrating special forces with intelligence assets develops the capability of transitioning from gathering intelligence to acting on it, greatly expanding the options available to policymakers. In this way, an integrated special operations and intelligence capability is a strategic asset to any country seeking to protect its citizens from transnational, non state problems. Therefore, such a capability stresses international commonalities over differences.

The concluding point made here is only one suggestion for the future role for special forces. Strategic planners dealing with the future of special forces face the fundamental problem of predicting future trends. This problem is greatly complicated because of the varied capabilities of special forces, their ability to act on all three boards of power means that strategic planners, much like intelligence analysts, must account for power distributions on all the boards. Furthermore, special forces depend on the quality of the individual operator, they cannot be mass produced—“competent [special forces] cannot be created after emergencies occur.”<sup>38</sup> The time may be right for special forces, but this does not guarantee their continual success. Special forces must continue to evolve in order to ensure that they are also right for the time. Only then will their strategic relevance be secured. 🌐

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2. Throughout this paper, the term "special forces" will be used as an umbrella term to describe those responsible for carrying out special operations. There may be confusion with another similar term, "special operations forces," used by the US for this purpose because 'Special Forces' specifically refers to the US Army Special Forces, otherwise popularly known as "Green Berets." When necessary, reference to the special forces of America in general will be done so with the full title of US Special Operations Forces or US SOF for short; and specifically to the US Army Special Forces as US SF. Thus, unless otherwise stated, the term "special forces" is to be taken as a generic one that describes special operators from all branches of the military.
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# The Art of Wall: A Different Look at Urban Operations

by MAJ Fan Mun Poh

## Abstract:

In view of global urbanization, the reality is that most of the military operations of the coming decades will be conducted in or around built up areas. As modern armies began to accept their inevitable involvement in the urban fight, their search for answers evolved around improving tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP), as well as developing technological solutions. This essay views technology as an enabling feature to future urban operations and urges deeper appreciation of the urban environment to overcome its challenges.

*Keywords: Urban Operations; Civil-Military Relations; Technology; Urban Terrain*

## INTRODUCTION

Armies have traditionally avoided built-up areas. As Sun Tzu advised: "The worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative." There are many examples that continue to reinforce the perception the urban fights will be costly, slow, and for the most part inconclusive. Body bags returning home from the Russian campaigns in Grozny,<sup>1</sup> Palestinian casualties reported in the Gaza Strip Conflict,<sup>2</sup> and the trillion-dollar military bill accrued to the American taxpayer for Operation Iraqi Freedom remind us of the human sacrifice and resource commitment resulting from urban operations.<sup>3</sup>

In view of global urbanization, the reality is that most of the military operations of the coming decades will be conducted in, or around built up areas. As modern armies began to accept their inevitable involvement in the urban fight, their search for answers evolved around improving tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP), as well as developing technological solutions. However, these measures are insufficient because tactics evolve quickly. Furthermore, the intelligent use of low or conventional technology by a motivated adversary can undermine the technological advantages of a well-equipped military.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the military must recognize that TTPs and technology

can only offer limited solutions to urban operations. More importantly, the military must reach for the fundamentals, to acquire a deep understanding of the terrain *vis-à-vis* the nature of operations as a basis to develop solutions to defeat the adversary in the urban environment. This essay views technology as an enabling feature to future urban operations and urges deeper appreciation of the urban environment to overcome its challenges.

## THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

*"Conformation of the ground is of the greatest assistance in battle. Therefore, to estimate the enemy situation and to calculate distances and the degree of difficulty of the terrain so as to control victory are the virtues of the superior general. He who fights with the full knowledge of these factors is certain to win; he who does not will surely be defeated."*

– Sun Tzu<sup>5</sup>

Terrain is neutral. As Sun Tzu foretold, the general who studies terrain carefully to exploit its limitations and opportunities will emerge victorious in battle. Just as how the military collectively appreciates the terrain, the conduct of urban operations must adopt a similar process expanded to include assessments of

the urban environment—defined by the Urban Terrain, Populace and Surrounding.

The “Urban Terrain” describes the city’s infrastructure as one that consists of surface and underground structures, and other features such as building types, urban density, iconic landmarks and transport networks. The populace consists of non-combatants who live in the city, their social behaviors, cultures, values and more importantly, how they would interact with their surroundings. Lastly, it is also vital to understand that cities do not exist in isolation but are surrounded by adjacent urban populations and fringed by nature.

### Connections within the Urban Environment

Complexities of the civil dimension are immense and cities influence the conduct of urban operations to great extents as compared to other conventional terrains. The interactive nature of populace amongst themselves, with the urban terrain, surroundings, attackers and defenders will impose challenges to the operating environment. In a conventional engagement, the relationship between the attacker and defender, shown in Figure 1, remains simple. There is a two-way interaction between two different groups.

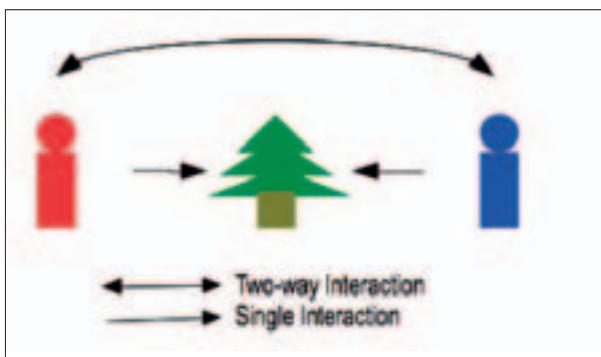


Figure 1: The Conventional Model

The opposing forces leverage on the terrain to their advantage throughout the engagement. Furthermore, opposing forces interact with each other by employing different capabilities through various means in a bid to defeat the other. In the urban environment, non-combatants will interact with opposing forces.

After introducing an additional group to Figure 1 (represented by a gray icon), the model becomes complex. The inclusion of the additional group surfaced a different set of interaction into the model. As depicted in Figure 2, the focus of study is not only understanding the civilians, but also the environment that they interacts with.

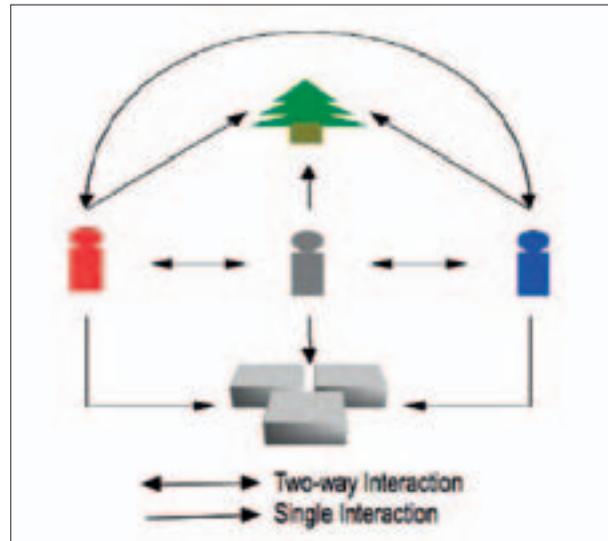


Figure 2: Urban Environment Model

*In view of global urbanization, the reality is that most of the military operations of the coming decades will be conducted in, or around built up areas.*

The number of interactive linkages follow an arithmetic progression with the inclusion of an additional group (another gray icon). As a result, the model that involved three additional groups (in total of 3 gray icons) in the urban environment would increase interaction tenfold. This illustration highlights the myriad of connections that exist in the urban environment which should be studied to draw conclusions that aid the conduct of urban operations. The appreciation of non-combatant actions and reactions is equally crucial; their behavior such as to stay or flee amidst conflict and return to the city after conflict *vis-à-vis* their degree of hostility, cooperation or assistance towards either the attacking

or defending force. Militaries should seek to exploit these connections to their advantage during urban operations.

### EXPLOITING THE LINK

The means to exploit the interaction goes beyond direct action. The use of information operations together with combat and post-combat operations provide the means for the military to confirm how non-combatants react or interact with their surroundings.

### Reversing the Relationship

The military must revisit the mindset that the urban terrain would provide the advantage to an under-modernized force, thus giving the advantage to the defender rather than the attacker.<sup>6</sup> A reversal of the relationship is to compel the defender to excessive offensive action within the urban terrain, hence subjecting the defender to the “disadvantages” of an attacker. In order to execute such a plan, one must identify what the adversary regards dear in the urban environment.

To the question, “How do I cope with a well-ordered enemy host about to attack me?” Sun Tzu replied, “Seize something he cherishes and he will conform to your desires.”<sup>7</sup>

The Battle of Arnhem, in Operation Market Garden during the Second World War (WWII) demonstrated a tactical slice of this reversal in real life. The isolated 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne executed an offensive-defense within the urban terrain. The concept was to seize a key terrain within the urban terrain, thereafter establishing a strong defense, forcing the enemy to expose himself as he tried to recapture the building, where he could be targeted and destroyed.<sup>8</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne held out for approximately six days against close to two full enemy armored divisions.<sup>9</sup> An offensive-defense planned and executed by a modern army that is well-equipped and technologically advanced could gain the upper hand in the urban battle.

### Exploiting the Underlying Relationship

Understanding the longstanding relationship between belligerents is key in order for one to exploit the other. The Chinese Nationalist Army during the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1938 demonstrated the ability to entice the Japanese Imperial Army and thereafter encircled its forces for destruction. The Chinese Army exploited the Japanese indoctrinated mindset for aggressive actions and the attitude of never losing to an inferior race.<sup>10</sup>

A series of planned defeats of smaller towns leading to the final city of Tai-erh-chuang not only bought necessary time for the Chinese to complete defense works and survey the Japanese situation, but also encouraged the Japanese to march on towards the trap. The anvil was the city of Tai-erh-chuang where the Japanese Army became embroiled in intense urban fighting. The Japanese Army lost operational awareness, had its lines of communications severed and faced annihilation.

*This illustration highlights the myriad of connections that exist in the urban environment which should be studied to draw conclusions that aid the conduct of urban operations.*

### Starving the Relationship

For the adversary that prefers victory by avoiding defeat, military action must target the relationships vital to the adversary to unhinge its hold in the urban environment. For instance, the British during the Malayan Insurgency saw the need to separate the insurgents from their source of supplies and recruits. The British strategized to progressively isolate urban areas, disrupted Min Yuen operations within the population, thereby isolating the Communists from their resource and information supply, starving them into submission.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Malayan Insurgency did not involve extensive close combat in urban environment, it highlighted the effectiveness of dislocating the adversary from its support structure—severing its interactions with the population.

### Wariness within the Relationship

During the Russo-Chechen conflict, the Russians failed to exploit the divides within the Chechen society. The Chechens were descendants of a clan-based culture that banded together in the wake of a foreign invasion. Without a common enemy, Chechens would likely be torn by internal strife.<sup>12</sup> Russia could have disrupted the Chechen cohesion by means of concessions to different groups, thereafter defeating the uncoordinated Grozny defense in detail. More importantly, the Russians could leverage on their superior numbers to draw the Chechens into extended engagements where the numerically inferior would be at a disadvantage.

### Removing the Relationship

A more extreme method involves the removal of the population from the urban environment. As demonstrated in the Battle of Fallujah, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) force evacuated a city of 300,000 people.<sup>13</sup> Removing the populace simplified the operating environment by reducing the number of interacting parties. With the civilians gone, the military had the luxury to conduct high-intensity operations. As such, this method proved extreme because it was at the expense of the civil infrastructure and civilian morale. However, such methods gave early warning and allowed the adversary to evade the fight by escaping the battlefield safely.

### TERRAIN POSSIBILITIES

With a deep appreciation for the civil dimension and the overlaying physical terrain, the military will be able to operate more effectively within the urban environment. The urban terrain must be appreciated not in isolation but in conjunction to the population and infrastructure. To reduce the urban infrastructure to rubble would be counterproductive. Collateral damage and its implications for post-conflict operations suggest that there should be minimal destruction to the existing infrastructure in the urban environment.

21<sup>st</sup> century urban operations should not resort to the leveling of cities as seen in Dresden and Grozny. Therefore, militaries conducting urban operations must appreciate the urban terrain differently and seek to exploit all that the infrastructure has to offer.

### Exploiting the Urban Infrastructure

No army possesses sufficient force to secure and control the entire urban terrain. Likewise, the defender is obliged to concentrate his defenses at selected areas in order to be effective. Defending the entire city physically is nearly impossible and unnecessary. The surface road networks and subterranean infrastructure such as sewers and subway tunnels permit different rates of movement, ease of lateral transfer of forces and provide mobility for any force that controls them. Different urban densities offer cover and concealment for troops, access to aerial insertions and screen the movement of forces. Critics may consider these terrain features as factors that reduce unit cohesion and stretch command and control, thereby creating overwhelming uncertainties.

*The urban terrain must be appreciated not in isolation but in conjunction to the population and infrastructure.*

The military, on the other hand, should view these features as opportunities. Advancing in the urban environment could be distributed yet mutually supporting. Motorized forces

possess the mobility to exploit the road networks within the urban terrain. Similarly, the presence of open parks, gardens and rooftop platforms offer airborne and helicopter-borne forces overhead entries. The employment of light and medium lift helicopters can insert sizeable forces into the depth of the urban defense to wreck havoc and dislocate the enemy from within. Nevertheless, the approaches into urban terrain should be multi-dimensional, allowing the advancing force to utilize speed and achieve tactical surprise.

### Terrain From a Different Lens

The urban terrain is much more than what is observed from the exterior. The Israeli military (IDF) demonstrated the ability to see the terrain differently during urban fights in cities of Jaffna and

Nablu. The Israeli's employment of "infestation" redefined the inside as outside and domestic interiors as thoroughfares, enabling the IDF to infiltrate towards the objective without being harassed.<sup>14</sup> Even before the term "infestation" was brought into the military context, the Israelis during their War of Independence had demonstrated this tactical innovation. At Jaffna, the Israelis carved two jagged "aboveground tunnels" through city blocks and outhouses to outmaneuver defenders and achieve the element of surprise.<sup>15</sup> Their presence behind enemy lines dislocated the defenders and sent them into a state of panic. In addition, the Israelis avoided direct confrontation. Instead, they toppled buildings on Arab defensive strong points and used rubble to trap armored columns where they could be ambushed and destroyed systematically. At Nablu, the IDF recognized the dangers of maneuvering in open streets and vulnerability to Hezbollah ambushes. They employed infestation and moved in smaller packets from different directions towards their designated objectives. Their tactical innovation paid off as IDF casualties for the Battle of Nablu were notably low.

**THE ADJACENT BATTLESPACE**

Strong points are viable only until obviated by maneuver. Defeating the enemy within the city may entail exploiting the battle space beyond the urban terrain. Decisive engagements surrounding the urban terrain could contribute to success or failure of the city fight. The contest for Stalingrad during WWII

demonstrated that losing sight of the operational level of war could lead to defeat. Similarly, the isolation of the urban terrain was as crucial to the fight within.

The contest for Stalingrad was a tactical obsession for the Germans. Embroiled in the city fight, the Germans lost operational awareness and were surprised by a Soviet encirclement. Pressured by the Fuhrer to seize the symbolic city of Stalingrad, the German Sixth Army was relentless in its attacks and wrestled with the defending Red Army not only at the expense of its reserves but also the forces guarding its flanks. Beyond Stalingrad, another Soviet Army launched a massive counteroffensive to encircle the entire German Sixth Army, forcing it into surrender.<sup>16</sup>

The isolation of the urban terrain prevents reinforcements and supplies from reaching the defending army. At Stalingrad, the German forces failed to sever Stalingrad's lines of communication. Soviet reinforcements and supplies arriving by boat from across the Volga river proved vital in sustaining the attrition battle and bought precious time for the Soviet counteroffensive. A similar lesson during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 saw the Germans and Poles caught in a bitter stalemate. The Germans eventually won after successfully disrupting Polish resupply efforts to the Polish Home Army.<sup>17</sup>

There are limitations to how much an army can isolate an urban terrain. The extreme approach resembles an encirclement by a physical force which could be manpower intensive. A more realistic method

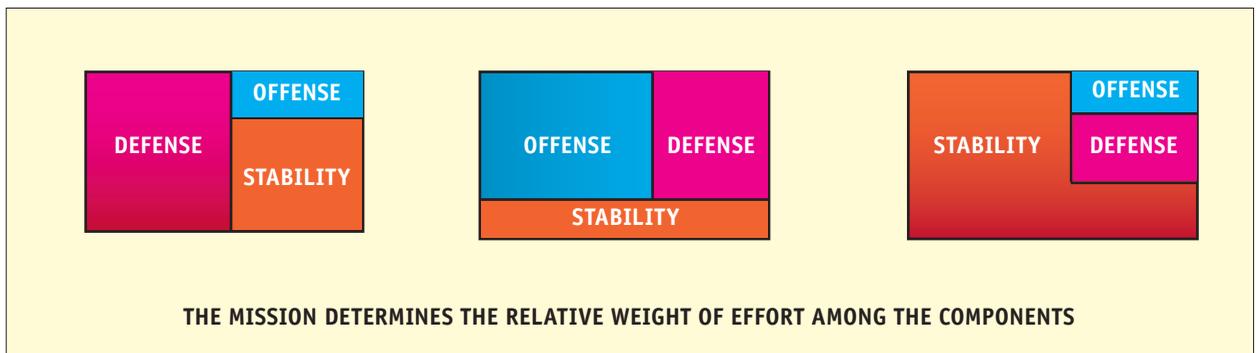


Figure 3: Full Spectrum Operations<sup>18</sup>

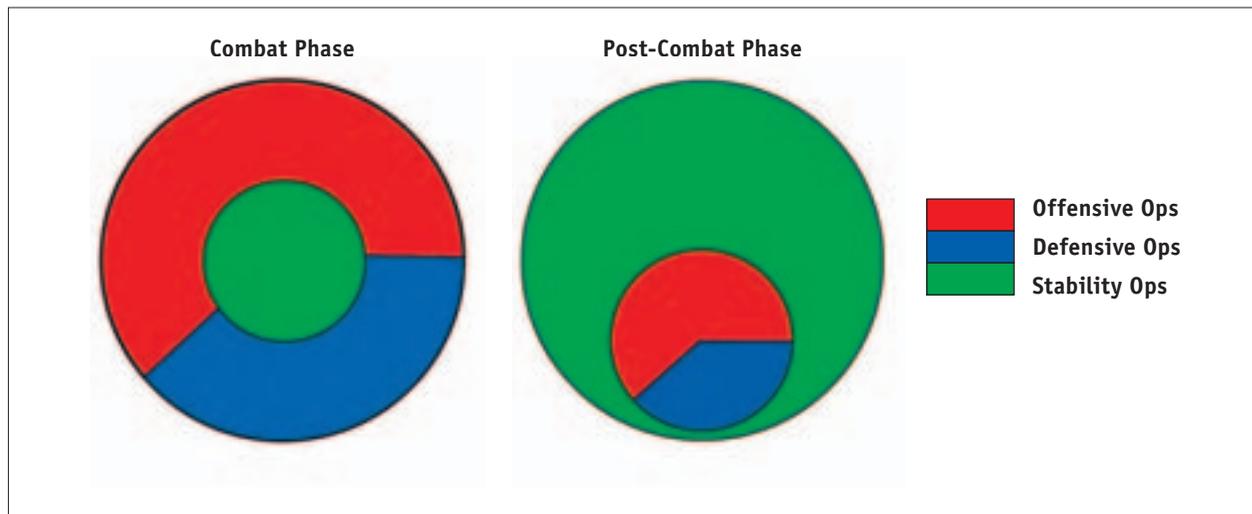


Figure 4: Nature of Urban Operations

would see the army attacker isolate the city by severing approaches into the urban terrain. Instead of physical troops, traffic control points, ambush and indirect fires could control and limit access into the urban terrain.

## THE NATURE OF OPERATIONS

Combat phases within urban operations are difficult to delineate because of a complex relationship between civil infrastructure and multi-polar nature of the civilian population. Giving no attention to managing these relationships could lead to strategic consequences. Militaries must consider requirements of post-war operations from the onset. If destruction to infrastructure is inevitable, swift mitigation such as reconstruction is necessary.

This essay borrows the concept of full spectrum operations as shown in Figure 3 and depicts urban operations in two key phases as shown in Figure 4. First is the combat phase consisting of offensive and defensive operations. Second is the post-war phase which predominantly accounts for stability type operations—note that both phases contain elements of the other. General Charles Krulak described the landscape of the future urban operations as a “three block war.” According to Krulak’s depiction of the urban battle space, we can expect to be providing

humanitarian assistance in one part of the city, conducting peacekeeping operations in another, and fighting a highly lethal mid-intensity battle in yet a third part of the city.<sup>19</sup> Figure 4 provides a better portrayal to “three block war.”

In the combat phase, provisions are made to prevent collateral damage and vital installations should be secured early to facilitate stability operations—power stations, water and waste treatment facilitates and food stockpiles, just to name a few. The identification of urban objectives would be with regard to the degree of persuasion or coercion the military intends exert to control the population. In view of a volatile urban environment, the military has to even consider protecting vital installations to deny sabotage and disruption to post-conflict operations.

In the post-war scenario, a military force tasked to secure the urban environment maintains operational flexibility by allocating sufficient force and resources dedicated to execute surgical strikes and defensive maneuvers amidst conducting stability operations. The nature of operations must not be viewed as independent parts but subsets of the other, with varying priorities depending on mission criticality.

## TECHNOLOGY

Every urban conflict scenario is unique but the fundamental characteristic of urban battles, especially at the tactical level, remains surprisingly consistent. Urban operations are pre-modern fights that require soldiers to be in close combat with “boots on the ground” to execute stability operations. The preference for fighting from a distance has limited effectiveness in the urban fight. The recent Iraqi conflicts confirmed that marines were still required to “clear” buildings in Fallujah and the Abrams Main Battle Tanks were tasked to roam the streets of Baghdad as a show of presence.

Despite recognizing the manpower demands of urban operations, the western militaries continue to invest heavily in technology. Greater bandwidth permits better communication and connection, thus improving command and control; low latency sensor-shooters coupled with precision weapons increases the confidence in conducting precision strikes; unmanned and satellite systems supported by computer software provide information, enhance situational awareness and speed up the decision making processes. Yet, there is little evidence that advanced technology can fundamentally change the nature of urban conflict in the near term. Network centric warfare and low latency sensor-shooter cycles are of boundless value to urban operations. Nevertheless, Clausewitzian imperatives of fog and friction remain valid because chaotic weather, human error, incorrect intelligence, miscommunication, black swan behavior by the enemy and human shields can easily negate any technological advantage.<sup>20</sup> Technology may still hold the key to altering the course of urban warfare in future. Scientists pursue advanced weaponry that produces little or no collateral damage, improving the odds for distant engagements. Likewise, military officers envision a futuristic urban force that is lean and empowered with a full range of urban capabilities that can replace the need for 5:1 combat ratio in urban operations and a huge occupying force for stability operations. Unfortunately, technology development for close combat has yet reached levels comparable to stand-off and precision weapons.<sup>21</sup>

Much of the resources invested in the city fight are concentrated on materials for personnel on mission: improved body protection, reactive armor, mine-resistant vehicles—much of which is promising rather than mature.<sup>22</sup> For now, technology will remain as an enabler to militaries conducting urban operations.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding the urban environment, its physical features and civil dimensions, remains key to future military operations. Technology has a key role in shaping future urban operations but advancements have been limited and largely untested in real and protracted conflicts. Nevertheless, technology continues to be an enabler to provide information to better understand terrain. Inevitably, as proven by decades of urban warfare, armies cannot win an urban fight without projecting a physical force into the immediate urban environment at some time during the operation.<sup>23</sup>

Modern armies must be prepared to fight real enemies in the urban environment through different phases of war. Until the day where an advanced urban warrior system is developed to equip the soldier with a great range of capabilities and the awareness to employ these capabilities effectively in the urban environment, armies will have to look to tactical innovations, operational-strategic planning to prepare for the man-to-man fight. As such, the success of urban operations hinges very much on the study of the city's inhabitants and terrain, *vis-à-vis* the nature of urban operations. 🌐

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# Lessons from the British: Counterinsurgency Strategies Applied in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus

by MAJ Timothy Ang

## Abstract:

The major challenge facing militaries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not arise from large scale wars of the World War II variety, but from small-scale, low intensity insurgencies. And if the historical annals of the last century are anything to go by, attempts at counterinsurgency have been dismal. It is the aim of this essay to closely examine three case studies in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus, evaluating them along the full spectrum of British counterinsurgency strategies used against the armed insurgents in each of these locales. The essay will also determine the extent to which the strategies used in Malaya were successfully transplanted in Kenya and Cyprus, which lends insight to the ways in which successful strategies in the past can be adapted and effectively applied in contemporary conflicts.

*Keywords: Counterinsurgency; British Colonialism; Peacekeeping; Civil Military Relations*

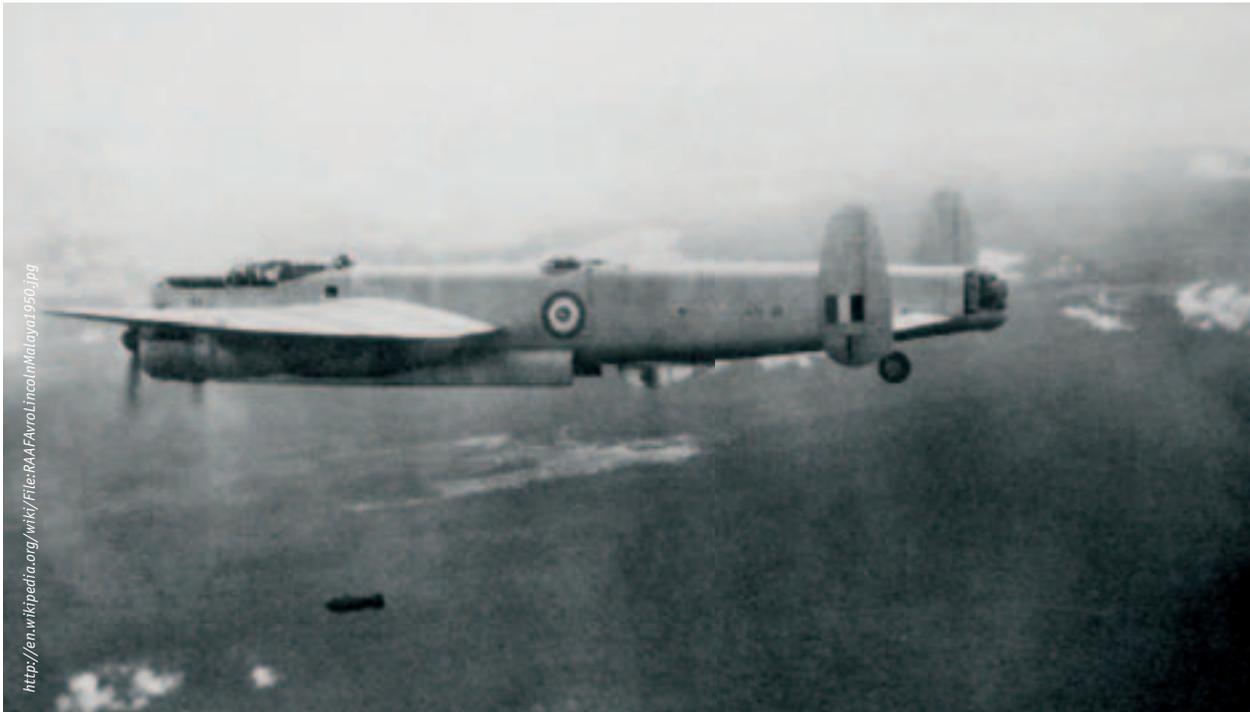
## INTRODUCTION

*“Counterinsurgency, and not major war, is the most important military problem facing humanity in the present and foreseeable future.”<sup>1</sup>*

The major challenge facing militaries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not arise from large scale wars of the World War II variety, but from small-scale, low intensity insurgencies. And if the historical annals of the last century are anything to go by, attempts at counterinsurgency have been dismal. The recent experiences of the world’s sole military superpower in Iraq and Afghanistan are reflective of this. Such is the record of failure that Martin van Creveld suggests that we should throw overboard ninety-nine percent of the current literature on counterinsurgency, since most of it has been written by the losing side and is thus of little value. What is needed is greater focus on the relatively small number of cases where counterinsurgency operations actually succeeded.<sup>2</sup>

Of the few cases of success, the British colonial emergency in Malaya (1948-1960) stands out as the counterinsurgency operation *par excellence*.

The Malayan emergency has often been singled out as a model campaign and therefore serves as a useful “textbook case” against which to benchmark counterinsurgency strategies.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the strategies used in Malaya encompassed not just military tactics but a much broader set of social, economic and ideological measures that served over-arching political imperatives. Also instructive is how the British, having achieved success in Malaya, attempted to transfer the same strategies to other insurgency situations occurring during the same period in Kenya (1952-1960) and Cyprus (1955-1959). It is the aim of this essay to closely examine these three case studies and evaluate them along the full spectrum of British counterinsurgency strategies used against the armed insurgents in each of these locales. The essay will also determine the extent to which the strategies used in Malaya were successfully transplanted in Kenya and Cyprus, which lends insight to the ways in which successful strategies in the past can be adapted and effectively applied in contemporary conflicts.



*Bomber Attacks Communist Rebel Jungle Positions during the Malayan Emergency*

## DEFINING COUNTERINSURGENCY SUCCESS

A study like this necessitates the definition of a counterinsurgency “success.” On a basic level, a strategy can be considered successful if it denies the insurgents their objectives, be they military, socio-economic, moral, political or otherwise. However, this rudimentary definition does not do justice to the multi-dimensional nature of counterinsurgency campaigns, where, more often than not, success at one level (e.g. military) could represent failure at another (e.g. moral or political). A more sophisticated assessment has to weigh up the relative achievements at these different dimensions in relation to the larger aims of insurgency and counter-insurgency. Understanding the nature of insurgency is critical in this context. Whilst sometimes similar in appearance to guerrilla wars, insurgencies are in fact defined more by their overarching political objectives.<sup>4</sup> The overall success of a counterinsurgency campaign should therefore be judged according to its political achievements and the relative success of individual strategies should be considered in the light of their contribution to this larger political objective.

The Malayan emergency is widely considered a model counterinsurgency campaign precisely because of successes on these accounts. Yet the considerable physical, cultural and political differences between Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus meant that strategies used in Malaya had to be heavily adapted to suit the local contexts of Kenya and Cyprus in order to bear the potential for success. Even then, some strategies exported from Malaya were irrelevant or even inimical to the counterinsurgency successes achieved in the alternative environments. It shall be argued here that the transferability or adaptability of each strategy depends ultimately on the depth of the solution sought and the extent to which local factors are considered, as was the case with the British in these case studies. This pattern will emerge with increasing clarity as this essay examines, in turn, the military, socio-economic and political strategies that constituted each counterinsurgency campaign.

## MILITARY STRATEGIES

We shall first turn to the military side of each campaign, which aimed specifically at tackling

the armed rebellion led by the insurgents—the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in Malaya, the Mau Mau movement in Kenya and the EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) in Cyprus. Military strategies were important, not just to curb the violence, but to create the “breathing space” necessary for more far reaching social and political reforms to be evolved.<sup>5</sup> They also constituted the one area where the pattern and principles of the British response in Malaya could be most readily and successfully adapted in Kenya and Cyprus. This was due to the typically blunt nature of the use of force, and more importantly, because of the relative similarity of the military problem across the three territories, especially when compared to the more fundamental and entrenched differences in their troubled socio-political situations. Of course, adaptation to differing local conditions such as in climate and terrain was still crucial for the successful redeployment of Malayan strategies.

Military successes achieved in Kenya and Cyprus can be largely attributed to the appropriation from the

Malayan experience of what shall be identified here as three key strategies: access to adequate resources, tactical flexibility and civil-military cooperation. The first, access to adequate resources and experience, was a vital precondition for the successful use of force against the insurgents.

Success in the Malayan emergency, which began on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1948, was bought at the price of a resource-intensive campaign that at its peak in 1952 involved around 23 battalions, 67,000 police and over 250,000 Home Guards.<sup>6</sup> Experience came most noticeably in the form of the accomplished military general, Gerald Templer, who successfully dispatched his duty as High Commissioner and Director of Operations from 1952 to 1954. When emergencies were declared in Kenya in October 1952 and Cyprus in November 1955,

the ongoing Malayan campaign provided a ready pool of resources and experience to draw on. Knowledge and experience on imperial policing, for example, was passed down the line on a significant scale, most notably through policing conferences organised in 1951, 1954 and 1957.<sup>7</sup> Military manuals such as the comprehensive Malayan publication in 1952, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations* in Malaya, ensured that accumulated wisdom would be “presented to those whose knowledge and experience is not so great.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, the policy of appointing military “supremos” like Templer to lead the counterinsurgency campaign was followed in Kenya and Cyprus with the respective appointments of Erskine and Harding as Director of Operations there.

The actual guerrilla wars in Kenya and Cyprus were met with a combination of military and police forces that conducted operations largely according to the Malayan blueprint. The earlier stages of each campaign were characterised by conventional large-scale operations, such as jungle-sweeps or

extensive cordon-and-search operations, meant to pressure the insurgents and keep them on the run. These methods, although notoriously inefficient, kept up the pressure on the insurgents and could reap handsome rewards on occasions. For example,

the massive cordon-and-search operation around the Paphos forest in Cyprus in June 1956, Operation Pepperpot, secured the highly valuable personal papers of the EOKA commander General Grivas.<sup>9</sup>

Still, victory ultimately depended on the second key strategy: tactical flexibility, embodied most in the small-unit tactics that intensified as the emergencies progressed. The decentralisation of command and control was crucial in achieving this in Malaya. It is

*Such is the record of failure that Martin van Creveld suggests that we should throw overboard ninety-nine percent of the current literature on counterinsurgency, since most of it has been written by the losing side and is thus of little value.*

illuminating to note that Templer's success lay not in his ability to impose a rigid control of operations from Kuala Lumpur, but in his ability to delegate authority effectively.<sup>10</sup> Counterinsurgency is a subaltern's or even a corporal's war. This was appreciated in Kenya, where Frank Kitson was given sufficient freedom to develop his highly effective "pseudo-gang" strategy, which involved creating counter-gangs of surrendered Mau Mau insurgents that made contact with and gain intelligence from real Mau Mau units.<sup>11</sup> In Cyprus, where urban terrorism was more rampant than in Malaya or Kenya, small-unit tactics were successfully adapted to the terrain of urban warfare. A favourite tactic, well established by 1957, was the "snatch," where a small party darted into a specified house to snatch EOKA terrorists from their very beds.<sup>12</sup> Tactical flexibility in adapting Malayan small-unit strategies to the environments in Kenya and Cyprus was instrumental to successes there.

*The overall success of a counterinsurgency campaign should therefore be judged according to its political achievements and the relative success of individual strategies should be considered in the light of their contribution to this larger political objective.*

Military success also relied heavily on the third key strategy: civil-military cooperation. The sheer complexity of the counterinsurgency campaigns necessitated close cooperation between the civil administration, the police and the military. The apparatus for such cooperation was provided in Malaya through an elaborate committee system at the district, state and federal levels, designed under Harold Briggs, Director of Operations from 1950 to 1952.<sup>13</sup> This system, which provided for regular liaisons between all the parties engaged in counterinsurgency operations, was closely replicated in Kenya and Cyprus.<sup>14</sup> An important corollary of such

inter-agency cooperation was the effective collection and dissemination of intelligence, which was critical to the success of small unit operations.<sup>15</sup>

The successful adaptation of the strategies of tactical flexibility and civil-military cooperation, underwritten by the necessary level of resources and experience, ensured that the colonial administration regained the military initiative against Mau Mau by late 1954, and the EOKA by early 1957. The brief resurgence of EOKA terrorist violence in Cyprus in 1958 in the form of the "smearing campaign" against the British was indeed a symptom of growing desperation rather than renewed strength.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

Military strategies could not have turned the tide against the insurgents without the deployment of more far-reaching socio-economic strategies. The importance of this second dimension to counterinsurgency is cleverly illustrated in Mao Tse-Tung's fish analogy on countering subversion. In the analogy, the insurgents and their armed groups are likened respectively to a fish's head and body, whilst the local population is likened to the surrounding water. If the fish eludes capture, it can nonetheless be killed by manipulating the water.<sup>16</sup> Socio-economic strategies thus aim to deprive the insurgents of their vital support-bases in the population. In Malaya, and to a significant extent in Kenya and Cyprus, this was achieved through a pattern of repression, resettlement and the redress of grievances—a complex combination of "carrot and stick."

Repression formed a substantial part of each of the campaigns. This is underscored by Anderson's and Elkin's latest research on Kenya.<sup>17</sup> Anderson has revealed, for instance, that Kenya saw the most number of executions in the history of British colonialism.<sup>18</sup> Repression went hand in hand with reform. The scope for repression was inherent in the very nature of the emergencies, which, as civil operations, allowed emergency administrations to sidestep Geneva Conventions in the conduct of what were really fully-

fledged colonial wars in all but name.<sup>19</sup> The tradition in Malaya of relying on wide-ranging special emergency powers—detention without trial, harsh penalties for offences and a host of collective punishments—was adhered to in Kenya and Cyprus with mixed success.

The Malayan example of mass repression was followed in Kenya on an even larger scale, given the relative obscurity of Kenya from international scrutiny and the particularly savage nature of Mau Mau killings. White settler agitation in Kenya was an added complication that placed more pressure on the administration to act inordinately. “The Europeans of Kenya have made the country; they also make most of the trouble,” Governor Baring quipped in October 1953.<sup>20</sup> The consequence was a spate of hasty decisions early in the emergency, meant partly to placate settler opinion that achieved ambivalent results. Operation Jock Stott (October 1952), meant to deprive Mau Mau of its leaders, succeeded only in capturing moderate Kenyan African Union (KAU) leaders such as Kenyatta, whilst radicalising the insurgent movement.<sup>21</sup> Subsequent operations were given more thought and hence more successful, such as Operation Anvil in April 1954, which managed to break Mau Mau’s mass Kikuyu support network in Nairobi. Even then, success was bought at the expense of the indiscriminate repression of the entire Kikuyu population in Nairobi, the majority of whom were innocent.<sup>22</sup>

The use of repression in Cyprus, although more circumscribed, was nonetheless considerable. Harding, in accordance with the Malayan precedent, sought permission from Whitehall to use collective punishment right from the outbreak of the emergency. Templer’s imposition of collective punishment in the

infamous case of Tanjong Malim in Malaya did receive the “full support” of then Secretary of State Lyttelton after all.<sup>23</sup> However, collective punishment in Cyprus backfired due to the detention and punishment of large numbers of Greek Cypriot youths who had been mobilised for the insurgent campaign. Such overt brutality, workable in Malaya and Kenya, failed in Cyprus under the stronger international spotlight there.<sup>24</sup> All in all, Malayan “population control” strategies floundered in Kenya (and more so in Cyprus) because they were reproduced without sufficient regard for local conditions. It is worth considering as well that the success of these strategies in Malaya was itself a function of fortuitous local factors, such as the fact that the Malayan emergency was the least reported of the three cases discussed here.<sup>25</sup>

*Even so, the overall strategy of exploiting divides to recast mass anti-colonial politics along local or tribal or communal lines was largely successful in each case as the existing divides fell in Britain’s favor.*

Resettlement was another important “population control” measure exported from Malaya. As part of the Briggs plan, resettlement played a pivotal role in dealing with the MCP’s mass support network, the Min Yuen, by relocating half a million Chinese squatters to closely supervised “new villages.” The predominantly urban support-base of the EOKA in Cyprus made such an operation irrelevant, however. Forcibly relocating half a million people in Cyprus would also have demanded a scale of repression unacceptable there. Resettlement was to have more scope for success in the more rural Kenya, where it was effectively adapted as “villagisation.” By the end of 1954 some one million people in the entire Kikuyu area were “villagised.”<sup>26</sup> This proved decisive in isolating Mau Mau from their passive wing and forcing the movement on the defensive.<sup>27</sup> Relocation, both in Malaya and Kenya, also reaped additional tactical benefits by allowing the British to deny food to the insurgents through rationing. “Food

denial” would become a key operational concept that contributed immensely to military success in both emergencies.<sup>28</sup> The mass repression that necessarily accompanied mass resettlement was but the one major drawback of these otherwise highly successful social control measures. The enclosed villages into which the Kikuyu were relocated were, according to Elkins, submitted to so much repressive control that they became detention camps in all but name.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, other inducements were necessary to secure the allegiance of the population.

Winning the “hearts and minds” of the local population—a concept popularised by Templer in Malaya—could only be achieved in the long run by addressing popular grievances.<sup>30</sup> Firstly, this involved simply recognising that genuine grievances lay at the root of each insurgency—a feat of imagination that seemed to elude the administrations in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus in the early stages of the each of the disorders.<sup>31</sup> Once recognised, grievances could then be addressed through a host of reforms. The social control policies discussed here were used in Malaya as an effective platform to address socio-economic grievances. Resettled squatters were rehabilitated by being given a combination of self-help and government aid, as well as titles to plots of land, to wean them away from radicalism. That the new village became a permanent part of the Malayan landscape—only six of 480 villages were abandoned at the end of the emergency—speaks of its long-term success as a socio-economic reform.<sup>32</sup> The Kenyan administration took the cue from Malaya in its efforts to rehabilitate the large number of Kikuyu detainees by employing them on public-work projects, for which they were paid. They were also aware, based on the Malayan precedent, that any resettlement scheme had to be considered as “a new and permanent feature of the country’s development and not merely as an emergency measure” in order to work successfully.<sup>33</sup> Hence, Baring used the emergency to push through a

land-reform programme. Mass acquiescence from the population could not have been secured without clear attempts to meet their socio-economic demands.

## POLITICAL STRATEGIES

We finally turn to the last and most decisive dimension in each counterinsurgency campaign: the realm of political strategy. Just as anti-colonial insurgencies were politically motivated, so colonial emergencies were, in Darwin’s turn on the Clausewitzian phrase, “the continuation of colonial politics by other means.”<sup>34</sup> British counterinsurgency campaign leaders were all well aware of the political problems that lay behind each insurgency, which had to be tackled if any lasting solution was to be achieved.<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note that Whitehall chose Templer over Harding for Malayan High Commissioner in 1952 because Harding had shown little interest in the political side of the conflict.<sup>36</sup> Incidentally, Harding resigned from his Cyprus Governorship in October 1957 due to his inability to reach a solution on the political front.<sup>37</sup> Political strategies were the most complicated and the least exportable because they dealt with the set of fundamental problems that differed the most from colony to colony. Political success hinged on the fulcrum of subjective local conditions more than any other dimension of the campaign.

A broad pattern can nonetheless be discerned from the political reforms employed in each of the three emergencies. Counterinsurgency reforms were all primarily concerned with what had been, from the outset, a perennial preoccupation of colonial rule: finding and creating local collaborators. This end was sought in the campaigns through two age-old tactics: divide-and-rule and cultivating “moderates.”

The strategy of playing one local grouping against another, a tactic as old as colonialism itself, was a regular feature of each campaign. Yet to say that the British divided-and-ruled would be misleading, considering that the main divides they exploited—between the Malays and Chinese in Malaya, the Kikuyu and non-Kikuyu in Kenya, and the Greek

and Turkish Cypriots—were arguably pre-existent. Furthermore, insurgencies themselves were inherently divisive, by raising the stakes of radical nationalism or by bringing one section of the population against another, thus affording the British even more local divisions to capitalise on.<sup>38</sup> The communal pattern of Malayan politics, for example, made it easy for the British to play the “ethnic card” by backing the “special position” of the Malays against the Chinese-dominated MCP.<sup>39</sup> Similarly in Kenya, the inability of Mau Mau to extend its appeal beyond the Kikuyu community made it easier for the British to stem the spread of their ideology to other tribes. Nevertheless, the administration, under Governor Baring, should be credited for their awareness of these divisions and their efforts to institutionalise them, through establishing local and tribal councils and by discouraging inter-tribal politics in Kenya.<sup>40</sup> The “ethnic card” was played in Cyprus by filling the ranks of the Cyprus Police with Turkish Cypriots—a clear parallel with the case of Malaya—in order to exploit the EOKA’s reluctance to attack the Turks.<sup>41</sup> At an international level, “divide-and-rule” was wrought by using the Turkish lever to deny the Greeks *enosis*. These divides did not always fall according to British interests however, as most clearly observed in how the same Turkish lever that the British exploited also constrained the scope of the political concessions they might otherwise have been able to offer the Greek Cypriots to their mutual benefit.<sup>42</sup> Even so, the overall strategy of exploiting divides to recast mass anti-colonial politics along local or tribal or communal lines was largely successful in each case as the existing divides fell in Britain’s favor.

With local divisions exploited, the task still remained for the British to secure their interests by cultivating collaborators. These were to be the political “moderates”—a plastic category that, as the emergencies progressed and merged imperceptibly into exercises of controlled decolonisation, quickly began to refer to anyone who was willing to cooperate. Here, the wealth of potential collaborators from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and Malayan

Chinese Association (MCA) in Malaya contrasts sharply with the situations in Kenya and Cyprus, where the British had to resort to working with Jomo Kenyatta and Archbishop Makarios III respectively, men whom they had earlier imprisoned and deported as incurable radicals. Securing the cooperation of these men no doubt required careful political manoeuvring. Only thus could Harding’s successor in Cyprus, Hugh Foot, have succeeded in driving a wedge between Makarios and the radical EOKA commander Grivas.<sup>43</sup> Yet British achievements here must be balanced with the understanding that these “extremists” whom they converted were perhaps not quite as radical as once thought. Kenyatta, despite being the leader of KAU, had little control over Mau Mau from the beginning.<sup>44</sup> Makarios’s constant willingness to negotiate, and his uneasy relationship with Grivas, also reflected moderate inclinations.<sup>45</sup> We thus observe again that British successes here depended just as much on fortuitous local factors as they did on superior political strategies.

Cultivating the “moderates” could not ultimately succeed, however, without a clear overall political direction in the campaign. In Malaya, Templer’s promise in 1952 of independence by 1957 enabled political reforms to be rolled out uninhibitedly, ranging from the “Malayanisation” of the civil service to local municipal elections and the grants of citizenship to the Chinese. This was mirrored in Kenya, albeit at a slower pace, where the political process was advanced towards the latter stages of the emergency. Africans were first elected to the Legislative Council in 1957, and independence was secured in 1963. The situation in Cyprus was more complicated given the popular cry for *enosis*, which the British could never concede.<sup>46</sup> In light of this, shifting the agenda from *enosis* to independence was itself a considerable British achievement. Ultimately, the political solution in Cyprus was arrived at through a dialectic of its own—the successive syntheses of British, Greek and Turkish political demands—rather than through any preconceived Malaya-styled template.<sup>47</sup>

The generally favourable political outcomes achieved in these campaigns suggested that colonial emergencies served as more than just measures of last resort in irretrievable situations. Indeed, the local government, rather than the insurgents, usually dictated the timing and shape of the counterinsurgency campaign. After all, it was often the very act of declaring an emergency, rather than any purported insurgent plot (usually non-existent), that ironically triggered the armed rebellion.<sup>48</sup> Never did anti-colonial pressure automatically boil over into an emergency situation. Calling an emergency was therefore a deliberate decision by the British administration to respond to local pressures by entering into the politics of containment, to regain the initiative in an unfavourable political condition—this based on the dictum that military solutions evolved faster than political ones.<sup>49</sup> When understood thus, the spectrum of counterinsurgency strategies in each campaign was, in the broadest sense, part of a grander British political strategy to secure her interests in the altered context of a diminishing Empire.

## CONCLUSION

All things considered, we may reasonably conclude that counterinsurgency strategies used in Malaya worked successfully enough in Kenya and Cyprus to significantly shape the outcome of campaigns there. Of course, the effectiveness of individual strategies varied. Tactical ground-level strategies, such as military tactics and social control measures, were usually more readily applicable—and hence effective—in the alternative environments of Kenya and Cyprus. Collectively, they were largely responsible for the similarity in the campaigns conducted in the three colonies. On the other hand, strategies designed as strategic long-term solutions, most notably political reforms, departed more radically from the Malayan template since their success depended more than anything else on dealing with entrenched local issues that differed fundamentally from one territory to another.

The British experiences in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus hold important lessons for today's armed forces. Military strategies alone will not suffice. Instead, as the British have shown, a combination of military, socio-economic and ideological strategies need to be employed in a complementary way, geared towards well-defined political objectives. These strategies must also be applied with due sensitivity to the local context, culture and political dynamics, in order to reap long-term success. 🌐

## ENDNOTES

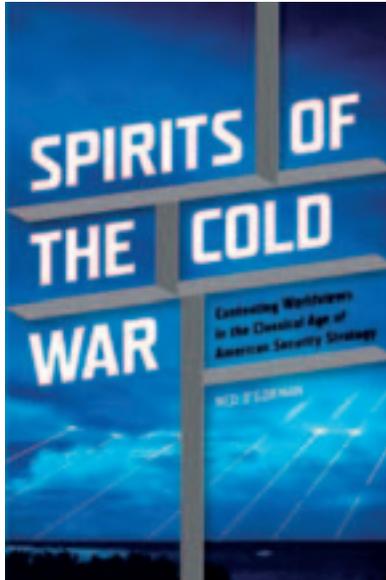
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## Book Review



**Ned O’Gorman, *Spirits of the Cold War: Contesting Worldviews in the Classical Age of American Security Strategy*, East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2012, 321 pages.**

by **Wang Jia Xing**

Project Solarium was created by United States (US) President Dwight Eisenhower in May 1953 and from this gathering of young intellectuals came policy suggestions and guidance which the US ought to follow in the aftermath of the Cold War standoff with the Soviet Union. National security at that time was of paramount importance, and it was against this backdrop that O’Gorman penned this book describing the four worldviews held by the various key players during Eisenhower’s term as President of the US. By cross-referencing primary sources against written history, O’Gorman adds credibility into his analysis of how the four deep-rooted worldviews, namely stoicism, evangelicalism, adventurism and romanticism, have had significant “world-making’ capacit[ies]” which “transcend instrumentality” as they aim for what is “transcendent, aspirational and ‘ideal.’”<sup>1</sup> The four chapters in the book show the philosophy of these views

and the relevant and practical means undertaken by believers to attain security and stability in the US amidst the turmoil.

Stoicism, the first worldview, is represented by George Kennan in the US administration as he “rose to prominence in the field of foreign affairs.”<sup>2</sup> The world was radically changing after the critical events in the Cold War struggle and he “conceived containment as primarily a therapy for the nations.”<sup>3</sup> The main aspect of this worldview resides in “non-reactivity,”<sup>4</sup> which was the primary reason why Kennan strongly opposed the arms race as the US was in a state of constant retaliation. He preached for the rational decisions on relevant actions to take to attain safety and security instead of basing everything on the actions of the opponents. The US had countered and mirrored each tactical move by the Soviets such that it was a “psychological tit for tat.”<sup>5</sup> To Kennan, the greater threat to the sovereignty of the US came from

the weakness in psychological defense in the general public instead of the prevailing conflict with the Soviet Union. Thus he advocated stability and consistency in US foreign policy against the external threat.

The second worldview was evangelicalism, which O’Gorman associates with John Foster Dulles, who campaigned for a large-scale retaliation. “Dulles saw the Cold War as primarily a ‘moral struggle’ rather than as a power political struggle.”<sup>6</sup> which can be seen in his address before the Council on Foreign Relations in 1954. His address was an amalgamation of “radicalism, activism, trans-nationalism, instrumentalism, and moralism,”<sup>7</sup> and appealed to the people’s emotions by making his approach different from the previous “immoral” one. This large-scale retaliation to Soviet acts of aggression stemmed from Dulles’s interpretation of a new world order of American hegemony that would ultimately shape the world into a moral and democratic one. An equivocation with this belief though is that evangelicalism “drew upon the universality of the moral law to propose the prospect of universal annihilation” but it did not stop this worldview from propagating and affecting the sentiments of the masses.<sup>8</sup>

The third worldview would be that of adventurism, which advocates liberation through

morally dubious means. This ideology was adopted by C. D. Jackson, head of US psychological warfare tactics. Generous acts of liberation, like providing external aid in the Marshall Plan, had the underlying intentions of making “American-style free enterprise and liberal politics” more acceptable in the eyes of others.<sup>9</sup> Jackson’s plan was to create and solidify the image of the US as a powerful and democratic hegemon in the world. To O’Gorman, adventurism had changed liberation into a push for US political-economic intervention, creating a new epoch in American foreign policy. The “World Economic Plan” (WEP) was set up by the US following the “spirit of adventurism,”<sup>10</sup> as Jackson felt that “America needed to act positively, progressively, dynamically and daringly that tied the WEP to the economic and political adventurers of old.”<sup>9</sup> This spirit of adventurism was further demonstrated in Kennedy’s Alliance of Progress and also in the space race.

The fourth worldview would be that of romanticism, which O’Gorman believed to have been set in motion by Eisenhower due to the pressure of nuclear deterrence. Eisenhower relied on the advocacy of the American spirit to aid the US in achieving and sustaining peace and freedom while simultaneously wielding a big stick to ward off aggression

from potential foreign threats, very much a romantic point of view. The most powerful appeal of the romantic worldview for Eisenhower was the “possibility of a quasi synthesis of contesting worldviews.”<sup>12</sup> It drew liberally from the various worldviews such as the language of self-control from Kennan’s Stoicism, the language of moral purpose from Dulles’ evangelicalism and last but not least, the language of heroic acts as proposed by Jackson in his adventurist worldview. Romanticism was effective and successful in promoting the American spirit of liberty and democracy as a result of its economic power and technological advancements.

Although O’Gorman states that this book is not a comparison of the moralities of American security strategies during Eisenhower’s administration, he does give his opinions in evaluating the four worldviews and the consequences and impacts of their operations under a challenging and unpredictable environment. It gives a fairly comprehensive summary of the strategies, philosophy, key players and the actions undertaken by the believers of the various worldviews and the impact these actions have generated. While the book requires certain amount of background knowledge and familiarity with the US government of the time, it does provide an

excellent portrayal of the security issues the US was going through during and after the Cold War and the worldviews that shaped the American response. 🌐

## ENDNOTES

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# Field Marshal Sir Thomas Albert Blamey

by **Nicholas Han**



## INTRODUCTION

A man who attracted controversy but retained the confidence of prime ministers, Sir Thomas Albert Blamey was the first Australian army officer to attain the rank of Field Marshal. While upholding the interests of Australia and developing the Australian Army for vital battles in the Pacific, he also brought about many inventions and innovations into the military and the police force.

## EARLY LIFE

Sir Thomas Albert Blamey was born on 24 January 1884 at Lake Albert, near Wagga Wagga, New South Wales.<sup>1</sup> He was the seventh child of Richard Blamey, a butcher who emigrated to Australia at age 16 and took jobs such as a contract drover and an overseer of shearing sheds.<sup>2</sup> Passing the New South Wales Education Department's entrance examination at the age of 15, Tom worked as a pupil-teacher at Lake Albert School, transferred to South Wagga Public in 1901, and moved to Western Australia in 1903 to be a teaching assistant at Fremantle Boy's School for three years.<sup>3</sup>

## MILITARY CAREER

In 1906 he was offered an appointment as an probationary

minister in Carnarvon but, before he accepted, he saw an advertisement promoting applications for commissions in the Commonwealth Cadet Forces.<sup>4</sup> Blamey was placed third in a national military examination, appointed lieutenant on the Administrative and Instructional Staff in November, and posted to Melbourne.<sup>5</sup> On 8 September 1909, he married Minnie Millard in Melbourne and had two children over the span of five years.<sup>6</sup> In 1910, Blamey was transferred to the Australian Military Forces and promoted to captain, taking over the brigade major of the 12th Brigade Area.<sup>7</sup> Following a competitive optional entrance examination for the Staff College, Quetta, India in 1912, he became the first Australian officer to pass, indicating his determination to make a success out of his career. In his report the commandant mentioned that Blamey came here without military knowledge. However, his work during the first year was characterized by a very genuine determination to overcome this shortcoming, succeeding beyond all expectations by the end of that year.<sup>8</sup> While in India, he also spent some time on attachment to the British and Indian Armies, namely 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps at Rawalpindi, Kohat

Brigade on the North West Frontier, Shimal Army Headquarters and 4th Dragoon Guards at Tidworth.<sup>9</sup> Blamey was promoted to major on 1 July 1914.<sup>10</sup>

## WORLD WAR I

On the outbreak of World War I, Major Blamey was transferred briefly to the War Office in London before joining the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division in Egypt as General Staff Officer (GSO), Grade 3 (Intelligence). He landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, sent to evaluate the situation on the 400 Plateau and sent reinforcements.<sup>11</sup> On 13 May 1915, when Blamey led a patrol behind the Turkish lines, an enemy party of eight Turks appeared, one attacking Bombardier A. A. Orchard with a bayonet. Blamey shot him with his revolver, and six Turks were killed thereafter. He withdrew his men back safely to the Australian lines, and for that incident he was mentioned in dispatches.<sup>12</sup> He was always curious in technical innovation, realizing the adoption of the periscope rifles in Australian trenches, first seeing it at the front line at Gallipoli.<sup>13</sup> In July he was promoted to temporary lieutenant colonel and went back to Egypt to aid the creation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division.<sup>14</sup>

On the Western Front in 1916, Blamey was made the Chief of Staff and served as GSO1 in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division.<sup>15</sup> He was also promoted to full colonel by Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood in

1 December 1916. In the 1917 New Year Honors, he received the Distinguished Service Order award for developing the successful attack plan for the Battle of Pozieres, and also received a mention in dispatches in the process.<sup>16</sup> In end 1916, Blamey commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion, and thereafter became acting commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade. When General Headquarters realized that Blamey was a staff college graduate, they commented that "it is inadvisable to release such officers for command of battalions unless they have proved to be unequal to their duties on staff."<sup>17</sup>

In June 1918, Blamey was promoted to brigadier general as the Australian Corps Brigadier General, General Staff (BGGs), and thereafter aided the success of the Battle of Hamel by pressing for new tank models to be used.<sup>18</sup> He also took note of the use of mustard gas used by the Germans, and went out of the way to arrange for a supply of mustard gas shells for the assault on the Hindenburg Line.<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant General John Monash, commander of the Australian Corps then, mentioned that Blamey "possessed a mind cultured far above the average, widely informed, alert and prehensile."<sup>20</sup> For his efforts in the Australian Corps, Blamey was appointed Companion of the Order of the Bath in 1919, awarded the French *Croix de Guerre* and also mentioned twice more in dispatches.<sup>21</sup>

## INTER-WAR YEARS

Blamey became director of Military Operations at Army Headquarters in Melbourne in October 1919, while retaining his wartime rank of brigadier general as an honorary rank. In 1920 he was promoted to substantive colonel and appointed Deputy Chief of the General Staff.<sup>22</sup> Blamey was one of the two Army representatives that aided in the creation of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) when the government set up a joint Army-Navy board for opinions.<sup>23</sup> In 1922, Blamey was involved in the establishing of the Singapore strategy (a naval defense policy which involved basing a fleet of the Royal Navy in the Far East), and although skeptical, he briefed Prime Minister Stanley Bruce on the strategy for the 1923 Imperial Conference.<sup>24</sup> In 1923, Lieutenant Colonel Brudenell White retired as Chief of General Staff (CGS), passing the role to Lieutenant General Sir Harry Chauvel, while Blamey was assigned the new post of Second Chief of General Staff, the duties of which were the same as CGS.<sup>25</sup> He transferred from the Permanent Military Forces to the Militia on 1 September 1925, assumed command of the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, then afterward the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division on 23 March 1931. He was promoted to major general, one of four in that decade.<sup>26</sup>

After the resignation of the Victoria Police Chief Commissioner, Alexander Nicholson, Blamey was recommended and received that position on 1 September 1925 for five years. He was determined

to attend to the issues that led to the 1923 Victoria Police strike, which he felt were “just, even if they went the wrong way about them.”<sup>27</sup> He raised pay and improved conditions, and applied the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the strike.<sup>28</sup> Other significant implementations were introducing police dogs, increasing police cars equipped with two-way radios and boosting the number of policewomen in the force.<sup>29</sup> He tried to call for faster promotion by merit, however it was withdrawn later as the Police Association did not favor it.<sup>30</sup>

A scandal occurred in 21 October 1925, where a raid in a brothel in Fitzroy found a man who was carrying Blamey’s police badge. Blamey’s reason for this was that he gave his key ring which included it to his friend who worked with him in France, giving him access to alcohol in his locker in the Naval and Military Club. His story was backed up by then-Captain Stanley Savige who was with him at the time. Blamey did not want to reveal the man as he was married with children.<sup>31</sup>

It has been said that, while being Chief Commissioner, Blamey was in charge of the “White Army,” a right-wing, underground army prepared to defend the state if there were any communist or Catholic attempts to overrule the state. Although Blamey’s position in this could not be determined, he was trained and was naturally an autocrat; he thought himself to be the supreme

commander of the police force and worked accordingly. The police force’s official historian noted that “Blamey’s style of dealing with public protest was confrontationalist, readily violent, and generally ruthless.” On Argyle’s United Australia Party government’s recommendation, he was knighted in 1935, but on 9 July 1936, Sir Albert Dunstan’s Country Party administration forced him to resign for issuing an untrue statement in an attempt to protect the reputation of one of his senior police officers.<sup>32</sup> Blamey was later recommended by Richard Casey and Jo Gullet to be a possible commander in chief in the event of a war, and in April 1939 was designated so by Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, who was replaced soon later by Robert Menzies, a fellow supporter of Blamey.<sup>33</sup>

## WORLD WAR II

After the start of World War II in September 1939, Blamey was promoted to lieutenant general and commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, receiving the Australian Imperial Force service number VXI.<sup>34</sup> Almost all brigade commanders and 6<sup>th</sup> division commanders chosen by Blamey had served with him in 3<sup>rd</sup> Division in Melbourne. A year later, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was formed and grouped together with the 6<sup>th</sup> Division called I Corps, with Blamey as its commander.<sup>35</sup> He was directly answerable to the Minister of Defense, instead of the Military Board, and was given a charter in 1914 that required him to keep his forces together and

to seek consent of the Australian government if he wanted to send them out.<sup>36</sup> However, he did not follow this and allowed Australian units to be deployed for the Middle East crises according to military need.<sup>37</sup> After the crises ended, Blamey requested his units to return, causing conflicts with British commanders in the process.

I Corps was tasked to Cyrenaica on 15 February 1941. Blamey insisted 6<sup>th</sup> Division to be sent before the 7<sup>th</sup>, causing a large debate with British Commander in Chief Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell.<sup>38</sup> Winning the argument, he set about plans for evacuation immediately as he noticed the chances of success was not high. Blamey managed to save many men but lost credibility when he let his son take the last seat out of Greece.<sup>39</sup> Wavell reported that Blamey “has shown himself a fine fighting commander in these operations and fitted for high command.”<sup>40</sup>

Blamey was appointed Deputy Commander in Chief Middle East in April 1941, and promoted to general in 24 September 1941.<sup>41</sup> During the Syrian campaign against the Vichy French, Blamey tried to resolve the command problems caused by General Wilson’s attempt to direct the fighting from the King David Hotel in Jerusalem by interposing Lavarack’s I Corps headquarters. For all his efforts in the Middle East, Blamey was made a Knight Commander of the

Order of the Bath on 1 January 1942, mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Greek War Cross, First Class.<sup>42</sup>

## AFTER WORLD WAR II

Blamey offered to resign his post of Commander in Chief on 15 September 1945, formally retiring 31 January 1946.<sup>43</sup> The Minister of Army Frank Forde wanted to reward Blamey for his services. Blamey wanted knighthoods for his generals but that could not be arranged. Instead, Forde gave Blamey the Buick car he had used during the war.<sup>44</sup> Blamey was duly promoted to field marshal in the King's Birthday Honors of 8 June 1950. He passed away due to cerebral hemorrhage on 27 May 1951.<sup>45</sup>

Blamey is honored in Australia in many ways, such as a square named after him in Canberra, a street and park named after him in New South Wales, and a statue of him in Kings Domain, Melbourne.<sup>46</sup> The statue reflected Blamey on a jeep instead of a horse, showing his role in the technological transformation of the Army during his years of service. 🌐

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## Quatable Quotes

*Everybody loves the underdog, and then they take an underdog and make him a hero and they hate him. But as long as they can knock you back down, it seems like if you're an underdog again, and things do surface, and they think this is real, "these guys' intentions are genuine and sincere," it seems like they will embrace you again.*

– Fred Durst (b. 1970), American musician and film director

*You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, "I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along."*

– Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), former First Lady of the United States

*Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.*

– John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), 35th President of the United States

*We must all suffer one of two things: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret or disappointment.*

– Jim Rohn (1930-2009), American entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker

*Simulated disorder postulates perfect discipline; simulated fear postulates courage; simulated weakness postulates strength.*

– Lao Tzu (604-531 B.C.), founder of Taoism, in Tao Te Ching

*On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind.*

*As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind.*

– Dan Lipinski (b. 1966), American politician

*The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.*

– Vince Lombardi (1913-1970), American football coach

*The size of your success is measured by the strength of your desire; the size of your dream; and how you handle disappointment along the way.*

– Robert Kiyosaki (b. 1947), American investor, businessman, self-help author, motivational speaker and financial literacy activist

*The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.*

– Mahatma Gandhi (1883-1944), father of the Indian Independence Movement

*I fear not the man who has practised 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practised one kick 10,000 times.*

– Bruce Lee (1940-1973), Chinese American actor and martial artist

*I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.*

– Bill Cosby (b. 1937), American comedian, author and musician

*Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.*

– Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), 16th President of the United States

*I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing.*

– Socrates (469-399 BC), Greek philosopher

*It's always too early to quit.*

– Dr. Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993), minister and author

*The enemy of art is the absence of limitations.*

– George Orson Welles (1915-1985), American actor, director, writer and producer

*The harder I work, the luckier I get.*

– Samuel Goldwyn (1882-1974), American film producer

*My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there.*

– Charles Kettering (1876-1958), American inventor, engineer,  
businessman and the holder of 186 patents

*It is the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is.*

– Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), Dutch Renaissance humanist,  
Catholic priest, social critic, teacher, and theologian

*Big shots are only little shots who keep shooting.*

– Christopher Morley (1890-1957), American journalist, novelist, essayist and poet

*Anything simple always interests me.*

– David Hockney (b. 1937), English artist

*Great tranquility of heart is his who cares for neither praise nor blame.*

– Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471), canon regular of the late medieval  
period and the most probable author of *The Imitation of Christ*

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For example:

Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City: The Armed Forces of Singapore* (St Leonard, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 4.

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Edward Timperlake, William C. Triplett and William II Triplet, *Red Dragon Rising: Communist China's Military Threat to America* (Columbia: Regnery Publishing, 1999), 34.

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Chan Kim Yin and Psalm Lew, "The Challenge of Systematic Leadership Development in the SAF," *POINTER* 30, no. 4 (2005): 39-50.

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#### Articles in Books or Compiled Works

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For example:

David Boey, "Old Soldiers Still Have Something to Teach," *The Straits Times*, 28 September 2004, 12.

Donald Urquhart, "US Leaves it to Littoral States; Admiral Fallon Says Region Can Do Adequate Job in Securing Straits," *The Business Times Singapore*, 2 April 2004, 10.

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International Committee of the Red Cross, "Direct participation in hostilities," 31 December 2005, <http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/participation-hostilities-ihl-311205>.

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"Newly unveiled East Jerusalem plan put on hold," *BBC News*, 2 March 2010, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8546276.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8546276.stm).

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