

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 21st 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