GOH KENG SWEE COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE SEMINAR 2013

A SEMINAR REPORT

19–20 SEPTEMBER 2013
SINGAPORE

S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

SAF - NTU
academy

Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College Seminar 2013

Winning the Narrative

REPORT OF A SEMINAR JOINTLY ORGANISED BY
THE GOH KENG SWEE COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE
THE SAF-NTU ACADEMY
AND
THE INSTITUTE OF DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES
S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

19–20 SEPTEMBER 2013
SINGAPORE

S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS PAGE

Workshop Administrator: Sandy Leong Mee Yit
Rapportuers: Chang Jun Yan, Ho Shu Huang, Collin Koh, Nah Liang Tuang
Edited By: Associate Professor Bernard Loo

This report summarises the proceedings of the seminar as interpreted by the assigned rapportuers and editors appointed by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this report.

This conference adheres to a variation of the Chatham House Rule. Accordingly, beyond the speakers and paper presenters cited, no other attributions have been included in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Narratives can be understood, using Lawrence Freedman's definition – as a compelling story line that can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn. A narrative is intuitively equated with a story with a hero and a villain and is presented as a plot and not simply a set of facts. They are social products born out of a particular context, and are dynamic, not static.

Narratives are not static, but are continuously being told and interpreted, and often become a brand that will vary geographically, as well as in the minds of the targeted audiences. As such, narratives are actually interpretive lenses with which people experience their external surroundings. They are essential in the construction of identity as they provide frames of reference to who a person is. More importantly, it allows the dichotomous presentation of an "us" and "them," and therefore the quick identification of "friend" and "foe." This is particularly important in the recruitment of members by non-state actors across national boundaries.

Above all, narratives are the foundation of strategy. They provide the organisational framework of policy as they are the anointed rhetorical handbook on how a conflict is presented, argued for and even ended. Furthermore, sound strategic narratives can offer a level of protection to the overall mission in that the stories they perpetuate can be easily adapted to changing scenarios, and therefore provide a level of flexibility for strategy to be modified and change.

With this understanding of what strategic narratives mean, the Seminar proceeded to focus on three sets of issues – the changing context of strategy, the dynamics of the 21st Century Asia Pacific security environment and the competition of narratives therein, and how narratives can apply to military operations itself thereafter.

The context in which strategy is made has changed, and to large extent, the changes have come in the realm of information. The increasing ubiquity of information technologies – both in the processing and communications realms – not only changes the manner in which strategies are constructed, they may even change the specific strategies per se. This increasing ubiquity of information also impacts on the key context of strategy, international politics. Information ubiquity means that an increasing number of actors, especially private and non-state actors, become relevant in the process of making strategy and in international politics. A key interest for state actors, increasingly, will be to ensure that there is a coherence between words and deeds; mismatches in words and deeds will undermine the credibility of the state actor, or to use the language of the seminar topic, undermine the effectiveness of the state's strategic narratives. In this regard, war can be understood as a competition of two or more conflicting narratives. Strategic success increasingly is not just about ensuring that the opponent is no longer in a position to deny one's attainment of desired political end-states, it is also about ensuring that the international community – states, international organisations, non-state actors and private citizens alike – understands that the opponent is on "the wrong side".

To a large extent, this abstract argument is being played out in reality. The international politics of the Asia Pacific is increasingly a competition of conflicting narratives. Who, in the first place, are the actors involved in the Asia Pacific? The answer, increasingly, is just about anyone who has an interest (real or imagined) in the region. Inter-state dynamics are being played out in an ever-widening audience, and in this ever-widening audience, the capacity of one side to portray its argument as just is increasingly problematic. Sino-American relations do not play out to Chinese and American audiences alone, but rather include third-party actors who may have no direct involvement in this relationship. And in the 21st Century battlespace, therefore, the influence of such third-party actors constitutes a growing difficult problem that current strategic concepts are struggling to get to terms with.

Finally, how do narratives impact on the processes of military operations? Again, the consistent theme that the papers of this Seminar have provided is the need to ensure coherence between words and deeds. From stabilisation operations in Afghanistan, the U.S. Global War on Terror, to counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, the papers indicate that when there is a serious disjuncture between words and deeds, between rhetoric and reality, strategic success becomes more and more elusive.

OPENING REMARKS

BG Benedict Lim remarked that traditionally, war had been won on the battlefield where participants were accustomed to the application of kinetic force. However, with the change of the security milieu, contemporary military forces not only have to contend with the physical but the "virtual" battlefield as well. With that, there is a need to shape norms and ideas since physical capabilities are no longer sufficient for militaries to cope with warfare of today and in the future. BG Lim concluded by emphasising that the side with the most convincing narratives, not necessarily superior physical capabilities, will prevail in conflict.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BG Tan Ming Yiak Mark began his keynote address by describing narratives as stories that relate to the past and inspire the future, and which need to be disseminated, understood and accepted by the intended audience. Narratives constitute an instrument for the attainment of political objectives. At the same time, other parties may also strive to counter one's narratives with the help of modern technologies. Therefore, BG Tan remarked, winning the narrative implies the need to convince others of one's side of the story while dispelling the counter-narratives of the adversaries. The battle of narratives is essentially about the battle of perceptions, he said. Narratives as a psychological instrument for the attainment of political objectives is no recent phenomenon, BG Tan pointed out; narratives had been an inseparable part since the times of ancient warfare. However, three factors distinguish the battle of narratives in the contemporary era from that in the past.

First of all, the modern battlefield is no longer the exclusive domain of militaries but multiple stakeholders, each with potentially competing interests and thus responses to developments at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Secondly, the proliferation of new media has enabled real-time coverage and dissemination of critical events to a wide domestic and international audience. The new media supports competing perspectives and promotes half-truths and untruths to challenge military operations. The advent of the new media, BG Tan argued, will continue to play a major role in this respect. Finally, the contemporary battle of narratives is characterised by the prominence of single events – incidents which could have been swiftly resolved may potentially escalate beyond proportion and carry wide-ranging ramifications within a short span of time, especially via the new media.

BG Tan concluded with a caution that narratives should not detract militaries from the essential roles played by the application of kinetic force and manoeuvres in times of conflict. However, he stressed, tactical-level actions should align with the strategic narratives since kinetic effects, while necessary, are no longer sufficient for the attainment of political objectives. The pertinent questions which ought to be addressed in this seminar, BG Tan proffered, were to inquire about how best militaries can react to a chain of events and deal with counter-narratives, as well as changes required for the force structures of today and tomorrow's militaries in order to cope with the battle of narratives in contemporary conflicts.

PANEL 1

RECONCEPTUALISING STRATEGY

Information and the Transformation of Strategic Affairs

Dr Grant Hammond defined strategic narratives as visions and plans of action by which war objectives are accomplished. If effective strategy is the co-evolution of such visions and plans with the respective strategic environments, it follows that as environments evolve, so must strategies and tactics. Even as old styles of warfare coexist with newer modes of combat like drones and IEDs, both states and non-state actors are facing off in cyberspace. Hence, since information is created, stored, shared, changed, managed, and disseminated quickly in massive amounts, the ends, ways and means of warfare are in flux and may dramatically change conflict and strategic affairs.

Even as traditional threats were evaluated in terms of intent to do harm, the capability to inflict damage and the opportunity to attack, these threat phases no longer needed to be carried out in a single location and can be done on separate continents as illustrated by the events of 9/11 where the decision to attack the U.S., train terrorists to carry out the attack and execute the strike itself were all done on separate continents. Thus, new ways and means, and possibly ends, are being created for global conflict. Accordingly, crafting a strategic narrative amid competing audiences such as your own, adversaries, coalition partners and even bystanders is increasingly difficult.

Concerning "information" which includes data and facts as well as findings and intelligence, this is then placed in context and processed in relation to other information in order to create knowledge. Because so much information and even knowledge is stored and processed on the Internet, this has the potential to greatly affect the strategic narrative since on-line data flows are truly colossal. Human lives have become deeply intertwined with the internet as people use social media extensively, thereby affecting their perception of the strategic narrative while on-line means of attack and downloadable satellite images generate kinetic, non-kinetic and precision strike capability for even private citizens.

As for when and how on-line operations occur, it was stressed that unrestricted warfare in cyberspace occurs round the clock on every day of the year and at ever greater processing speed while cyberspace provides a wider arena of conflict with low entry costs and high potential payoffs, allowing cyber combatants to delay, deny, degrade, disrupt or deceive adversaries via cost effective, stealthy and potentially decisive attacks.

Lastly, knowledge is the most important resource and while states might not be able to dominate the strategic narrative, they cannot afford to lose and must be able to craft an acceptable, sustainable stalemate. Accordingly, future conflicts will be conducted via the collection, processing, management and use of information, and as a result, the ends, ways, and means of past conflict and its narratives are changing.

Strategic Narratives and International Relations

Professor Christopher Coker defined narratives as a process of storytelling which has to be correctly told accordingly to strategic interests. Regarding the winning

of the narrative at the level of grand strategy, he brought up the case of U.S.-U.K. relations from 1898-1989 where Britain was managing its displacement as the pre-eminent world superpower by the U.S. In that case, it was correctly perceived that the U.S. was not the adversary of the U.K. and instead would be a protector of the international system set up after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Since this was to London's advantage, it crafted a strategic narrative that framed America as a familiar friend and partner, a narrative that has served British foreign policy well into the present day.

With regard to crafting effective strategic narratives, principles established by Richard Rummel were covered including, coherence of design where the narrative must be widely believed, everyone must believe you, insightful reframing of a competitive message and effective use of language and story-telling. However, problems like strategic ambiguity and mismatch between political and military perceptions can impede the creation of effective strategic narratives. A good example is China-U.S. relations where both sides cannot agree on whether the other is an ally or friend and where their respective militaries do not see eye to eye with their political masters regarding the possibility of China-U.S. conflict. Additionally, mistakes in narrative crafting can be damaging with prime examples being U.S. narrative missteps in Iraq from 2006-2007 (President Bush's "terrorism superbowl") and the unstable objectives of NATO in Afghanistan from 2001-2013 including national building, stability enabling and destroying Al-Qaeda.

In conclusion, narratives are dialogues and not monologues which involve listening, empathetic accuracy and social cognition where not only one's allies but also the international community and even one's enemies had to be convinced about the created narrative. The fact that Germany misread the U.K.'s strategic narrative and believed that the latter would remain neutral in future conflicts is perhaps one of the contributing factors to World War One.

From 'Strategy' to 'Narrative'

Associate Professor Bernard Loo began by noting that the traditional Clausewitzian paradigm of war posits war as a clash of wills and strategy being an attempt to impose one's will over the enemy. While the character or grammar of war might have changed because of the RMA and the increasingly effective nature of military hardware, old concepts like fog and friction still apply and commanders still need to discover their opponent's centre of gravity. Hence, in order to achieve strategic success, one needs to not only destroy an opponent's organised resistance but also achieve the political end-states that define any given war.

The modern strategic environment challenges existing militaries because of the increasing pace of technological change and the need to plot these changes against doctrines, organisational cultures and structures of military organisations that are notoriously resistant to change. Additionally, with information as a force multiplier and the objective of achieving information asymmetry or dominance, it should be noted that with the ubiquity of information and communications technologies, this dominance becomes difficult, if not impossible.

As such, even though "narratives" and their strategic utility are nothing new, the fact that narratives must always contend with opposing versions mean that in this age of technological advancement, one's strategic narrative has to win out over not only the enemy's but also the competing narratives of other significant parties. Thus, war becomes a global spectator sport where it is insufficient to simply impose one's will on adversaries and their populations but it is also necessary to shape global perceptions in order to justify one's case and strategic narrative after hostilities have been concluded.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION

An issue that emerged centred on the processes through which narratives are formed, how narratives can be appropriated, and how audiences thereafter received and responded to strategic narratives. The panel responded by noting that strategic actors always aimed for ground conditions to at least partially match the narrative; simply put, narratives had to match reality, or else the narrative would fail. However, the panel also agreed that narratives can be reinterpreted to suit the objectives of the audience, a case in point being the reinterpretation of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan as a success now that NATO is involved there.

Another issue that emerged focused on how states can create an effective and lasting strategic narrative if they face a similar situation like U.S.-PRC relations where both parties do not share a common culture, are liable to experience misinterpretations in communication and might face interference from third parties who also wish to have a stake in the narrative. This is in direct contrast to the U.K. and U.S. which both shared common cultural bases and strategic proclivities. In response, the panel noted that the reality of asymmetries in inter-state relations, which results in one side compromising and being more eager to construct a narrative than the other side, such that the narrative ends up benefitting the latter to a greater extent, in order for the narrative to succeed. (i.e. the British bending over backwards for the Americans). Alternatively, it is possible for both sides to learn to disagree but reach an equilibrium where competition "brings out the best in both American and China". On the specific issue of U.S.-PRC relations, a new strategic narrative could frame China and the U.S. as being too economically connected to consider war lightly while if Russia was brought into the picture, all three countries could agree that the only acceptable narrative was one of long-term strategic stalemate recognising the essential national interests of all three parties.

Lastly, the issues of emotional content affecting the effectiveness of strategic narratives and the framing of narratives as the strategy for the media/cyberspace battlespace were brought up. In reply to the first issue, the panel pointed out that the battle for the "hearts and minds" was not specific to counter-insurgency operations but also affected all other operations in that the emotions of any spectator audiences had to be won over. Also, the prevalence of social media increases the risk that negative actions by one's soldiers could turn public emotions against the official narrative. Regarding the latter issue, strategic narratives are difficult to establish and can easily be derailed by a failure of the main stakeholders to arrive at a consensus as to what the narrative should state. Additionally, strategy for the cyberspace battlefield needs to be rethought since small groups of hackers can wield far more power than would be possible in the real world. Narrative creation is fraught with emotion since various state actors can be classed as being driven by base emotions like appetite (China being hungry for progress), envy/resentment (Russia being resentful at the west) and fear (the west being fearful of resentful nations).

PANEL 2

COMPETING NARRATIVES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Contemporary Strategic Landscape: An Assessment

Professor Robert Ayson assessed the contemporary strategic landscape and began by highlighting the contemporary example of Syria with its twin collapse of the political authority of a particular government and also of the centralising institutions of state power. Syria's case is extreme because there are a multitude of actors, both establishment and rebels, claiming political and strategic space. Consequently, there were a multitude of narratives. This multiplicity of actors and the resulting complexity of the situation was one of the reasons the international community was reluctant to intervene.

Given the experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, there has been reluctance to intervene in complex internal situations as part of a broader change in the contemporary strategic landscape. Hence, future responses to such situations were likely to be more modest. The U.S.-Russia agreement on chemical weapons disarmament with regards to Syria highlights an interconnection between the geopolitics of great power relations between Russia, China, and the U.S. on the one hand, and the complex internal situations within the contemporary strategic landscape on the other. Hence, armed forces do not have a choice between dealing with the internal situations, such as COIN, and the inter-state action, which in effect, is a false dichotomy. In addition, the forced "migration" of the Syrian refugees introduced transnational dynamics into the mix of messy internal situations and great power rivalry, thereby further strengthening this first trend of reluctance.

Secondly, in part due to the first trend, that there will be increasing attempts to contain, and sometimes even to ignore, internal security problems in other countries rather than attempts to resolve these. The credibility of the threat of force to deal with such issues would hence decline. Thirdly, such a decline would reinforce Thomas Schelling's "diplomacy of violence," which is the threat of the use of force or limited use of force itself to influence choices others make. For instance, the diplomacy of violence between China and Japan in the East China Sea has increased.

The consequent fourth trend was the rising importance of strategic signalling via forms of military alignment, exercising and procurement given that militaries were less likely to operate in messy internal situations instead. This was perceived in Singapore's hosting of the Littoral Combat Ships for example. There is a strong foreign policy consequence of what armed forces might view as small, everyday decisions. A fifth trend is the rediscovery of territoriality despite globalisation, seen in the various territorial disputes within the region.

Concluding from these five trends in the contemporary strategic landscape vis-à-vis the seminar theme of "Winning the Narrative," these trends suggested that strategic success may increasingly come to mean the avoidance of major losses, costs and entanglements than the achievement of positive goals. Hence, the idea of victory itself was open to question. Strategy as a narrative that could be readily manipulated was therefore a problematic notion.

Asia Pacific Narratives: Who Has the Upper Hand?

Dr William Choong started by commenting that narratives were about telling a story and crafting an image; at this time in the Asia-Pacific, different countries were selling different narratives: China with its "peaceful rise;" and the U.S. with its pivot to the region as inherently peaceful and not directed at China. Hence, how one saw a narrative really depended on where one sat.

Two reasons made narratives increasingly important. Firstly, narratives were important because these needed to be sold to domestic audiences convincingly. Secondly, narratives exaggerated security dilemmas since "talk" was consequential and might be used to perpetuate realities that were actually false. Nazi Germany was exceptional at this through its use of propaganda.

Therefore, the conventional wisdom was that shared or happy narratives would lead to greater stability in the Asia-Pacific; conversely, stability plummets when there are competing or negating narratives. Defying such conventional wisdom however, a third, hybrid alternative might be possible: that for victory, two competing parties need to agree on a subjective reality so as to establish a working narrative together in order to lead the way forward towards a shared narrative instead.

This hybrid shared narrative might be plausible in the case of the Diaoyu/Senkakus dispute between Japan and China. Japan's position was based on international law whereas China's was based on historical title. In the 1970s, both parties had an agreement to shelve the dispute. Currently however, escalations have occurred with a possibility of the U.S. being drawn in. This intractable dispute could then be resolved by admitting the dispute and "fudging" the narrative; Japan could concede the existence of differences in opinions whilst China could use Japan's acknowledgement to reduce its incursions into the Senkakus thereby easing overall tensions.

In conclusion, the interdependence of decisions depended on the interplay between two parties based on the perception each has on the other and the convergence of which would lead to a way forward.

The Evolving Character of the 21st Century Battlespace

Dr Andreas Herberg-Rothe discussed the evolving character of the 21st Century battlespace, commencing with outlining a technical understanding of "battlespace" as solely centred on the conditions of applying the necessary military means. In contrast, that "battlespace" must be based on a strategic narrative, which according to Emile Simpson, "explains policy in the context of the proposed set of actions." In the twenty-first century the rise of the "poorer nations," the newly industrialised nations or the global south is inevitable. Therefore, the overarching task of policy in a globalised, multipolar world was to manage this development by avoiding great wars as well as mass violence which had a similar effect to cancer, with narratives being powerful weapons in shaping the political and social realms.

However, winning the narrative was not the equivalent of winning the war. The example of post-WWI Germany shows how a narrative can be constructed to blame Germany's defeat on internal Social Democrat and

Communist dissidents rather than on the battlefield. This narrative led to World War II, started by Germany to try to overturn the defeat and the Treaty of Versailles imposed upon it post-World War I. Hence, although Germany won the narrative then, it still lost World War II.

On the other hand, having decided to go to war, one must win the narrative ex ante since the strategic battlespace in the 21st Century was not just about winning the war in a mere military manner. Strategy, really, is the maintenance of a "floating balance" of Clausewitzian purpose, aims and means in warfare. The Clausewitzian trinity – the interplay of primordial violence, chance and probability, and war as an instrument of policy – can be reinterpreted as the interplay between legitimacy of using force, the performance of warfare, and the mutual recognition of the fighting communities after the war, due to the evolving battlespace in a globalised, multipolar world. Such an interpretation was also related to the "Just War" tradition; aspects of jus ad bellum, jus in bello, and jus post bellum or the right to wage a just war, the maintenance of rights and justice within war, and the orientation of warfare towards a just peace after the war, respectively.

Since warfare was always an extension of the political intercourse, the political realm and warfare were linked together closer than ever in a globalised world; a process, which was resulting in conflicts about world order. Within this process, a surrogate for the traditional concept of victory, which could no longer be applied meaningfully, was necessary. The containment of war and violence in world society might then be such a surrogate in a globalised world. His proposed reinterpretation of the Clausewitzian trinity could therefore serve such a purpose.

PANEL 2

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION

The boundaries between narratives, psychological operations and propaganda were queried first of all. The panel was divided on the issue of propaganda. One panellist pointed out that propaganda was not necessarily a pejorative word and hence, although there were some conjunctions between narratives and propaganda, this does not cast a negative connotation on narratives, nor should it imply that propaganda was to be normatively rejected outright. However, another panellist argued that the fundamental ideational difference was that different narratives were different perspectives or understandings of the "truth" whereas propaganda was based on falsehoods. Strategies thus needed to acknowledge these different perspectives of truth for a more comprehensive method, according to the panellist. Psychological operations, on the other hand, were seen as a particular subset of military operations designed to have a psychological effect. In contrast, strategy as a narrative possesses a more explanatory effect and an interpretative structure designed for a larger audience although potential for crossover exists.

On the question of how the hybrid narrative concept could be applied to Afghanistan, narratives were further highlighted to have a kinetic effect on war only if the will of the opponent was crushed, an interpretation of Clausewitzian strategy. Consequently, narratives would have strategic effect if it changes the will of the opponent and affect its ability to continue waging war. Applying the hybrid narrative approach to the Afghanistan conflict therefore required a negotiated settlement between the U.S. and the Taliban, although that was proving to be extremely difficult due to deep differences between the two competing parties.

The importance of the narratives of small states was then addressed, with the panel emphasising that small states were part of the narratives of great powers regardless of their own sentiments on the matter. Hence, the skill and creativity of the small state in question in navigating the narrative was of the utmost importance. The narrative of the small states within the Asia-Pacific region therefore was one of inclusiveness whereby everyone had a seat at the table, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Furthermore, regarding the media by which narratives were transmitted, the panel agreed that there were no particularly effective medium, but rather, how the narrative message was transmitted by the originating actors was more vital instead.

Last but not least, a question was raised enquiring if narratives were a fashion fad and the extent to which this would last. The panel pointed out that narratives needed to adapt to the circumstances; communication was an interactive process between the storytellers, the audience, and the situation. However, it was acknowledged that cynicism could sink in if the narrative was not realistic enough due to excessive manipulation turning fact into outright fiction. Thus, winning the narrative was not a sufficient condition for outright victory, although it remained a crucial strategy still.

PANEL 3

OPERATIONALISING THE NARRATIVE (1)

Narrative-based Strategy and Operational Design

Dr William Mitchell argued in his presentation that a narrative can neither be "won" nor "lost" from an operational perspective. Rather, the challenge lies in managing a constantly evolving micro-narrative that feeds into an equally dynamic strategic narrative.

There is a hierarchy of concepts that can be used in thinking about narratives at different levels. Multiple variables were contained within the battlespace, and the narratives told within it are thus also affected by multiple factors, in particular, the PMESII (Politics, Military, Economics, Social, Infrastructure and Information) framework. The underlying approach of these theories was fundamentally constructivist in nature, where meanings depended on individual perspectives. How one sees the battlespace will ultimately be reflected in how one talks about it. Similarly, one's perception of the battlespace will also determine how one acts.

The battlespace comprises both physical and cognitive spheres. The physical space is where the military physically carries out its operations, and typically involves the use of kinetic force. On the other hand, the cognitive space lies in how individuals involved in the battlespace – the combatants and civilians alike – interpret their experience during battle, and how they make sense of it. Both the physical and cognitive spaces, while conceptually separate, actually happen simultaneously and interact with each other. As an example of this interaction, soft power applies where strategic actors – both states and non-state actors alike – attempt to alter interpretations within the cognitive sphere to provide more manoeuvre space for military operations within the physical sphere. Another way of looking at this is to see this interaction as an attempt to turn knowledge into action to achieve a desired effect, and to reduce the Observe-Orientate-Decision-Act (OODA) loop which militaries are constantly attempt to do.

In Afghanistan, the local actors were categorised as being anti-government, pro-government and finally, "fence-sitters." The objective was less to convince those who were against the local government, but to win the "fence-sitters" over. In 2005/2006, the U.K.'s Afghanistan narrative was aimed at building strong local institutions and capacity, ensure harmony among the different ethnicities there, and to eliminate opium production by promoting the cultivating of other quality crops. This narrative, however, was less than successful in convincing the "fence-sitters." By 2010, the U.K. thus switched its narrative to one where its presence was clearly temporary, and that change in Afghanistan would be spearheaded by local institutions. Whether this change in narrative has had a better effect in the cognitive battlespace, however, still remains to be seen.

In conclusion, a narrative cannot be stopped. It can be influenced and shaped, but it will always be dynamic. Above all, if one does not engage the narrative and pay close to attention to it, someone else will.

New Technologies and Collateral Damage: The Promise and Problems of Non-lethal Weapons

Dr Stephen Coleman argued that Non-Lethal Weapons (NLW) were increasingly being turned to as a way to

reduce collateral damage to preserve the coherence of a strategic narrative based on the controlled use of violence and care for human life. However, despite its lofty promises, NLW did not necessarily reduce lethality and the damage they might inflict.

There are many types of NLW, and they often go by different names, including "soft-kill," "less-than-lethal," and "sub-lethal." The belief that NLW can subdue an enemy with minimal violence has caught the attention of many militaries seeking to portray themselves as being more humane. Furthermore, military personnel are involved in many other types of operations other than war where the use of traditional military force could be counter-productive. NLW is potentially one way of moderating the military's lack of the non-military – typically policing – skills needed in such situations.

However, soldiers are fundamentally still not police officers. Equipping soldiers with NLW does not necessarily mean they will be able to do a police officer's job without the accompanying training. NLW are not the panacea for all situations the military now face. Existing NLW might even be in violation of certain international laws. Tear gas, for instance, in some instances contravenes existing laws against the use of chemical weapons. Furthermore, the claims that NLW are less lethal were based on tests done on healthy individuals in controlled environments. Reality is not a controlled experimental environment, and NLW could actually be deadly to the less healthy in real-world environments. Above all, NLW could ironically lead to an escalation of violence as they might be more quickly used in confrontations because of the assumption that they are non-lethal. This could then lead to the use of traditional weapons as the decision to use force had already been made.

Be that as it may, NLW could still be useful in the hands of soldiers: at checkpoints, for instance, or situations where human shields were used, or when the distinction between combatants and non-combatants was unclear. An emerging trend of equipping autonomous robots with NLW is currently still problematic, as artificial intelligence is presently not sufficiently advanced to distinguish friend and foe with sufficient confidence.

In conclusion, while NLW gave the military more options in applying force, it is possible to remain sceptical they could ever truly live up to the claim that they are less lethal. Such a mentality would lead to a greater willingness to use such weapons against civilians, and soldiers might abuse the supposed non-lethality of NLW as instruments of torture.

Case Study: Battle for the Narrative in the Global War on Terror (GWOT)

Associate Profesor Ahmed Hashim began his presentation by outlining the context of the narrative battle in the GWOT. There are actually many strategic narratives in the Middle East: Arab-Israeli, Arab-Iranian, "authoritarian regimes" against "people power", and the U.S.-led GWOT, to cite a few examples of these competing narratives. The focus here centred on two specific narrative battles – between Israel and Hezbollah, and between the U.S. and Al-Qaeda in the GWOT.

In the first case, Hezbollah's narrative of its struggle against Israel is an example of the inherent dynamism in narratives. The Hezbollah strategic narrative, although consistent in its overarching message, has quickly adapted to the evolving media landscape. Hezbollah's media apparatus had grown from a pirate radio station and a collection of newspapers to a complex system that now includes a large Internet presence and satellite TV stations. The Hezbollah leadership acknowledges the importance of the strategic narrative in its struggle

and has elevated it to equal importance to the actual physical fight against Israeli forces. This was evident in the 2006 war with Israel when Hezbollah launched a media campaign against Israel that helped it gain support from the Arab and Muslim world, as well as domestically.

In the second case of the U.S. and Al-Qaeda in the GWOT, the Al-Qaeda narrative was simple and remarkably consistent at an abstract level, allowing it to reach a wide audience of core sympathisers despite having internal contradictions. Al-Qaeda's narrative is actually a broad meta-narrative that simply divides the world into Islamic and non-Islamic segments, and its history as one of a struggle between "good" Islam fighting the "evil" West. It portrays the struggle as a battle for human destiny, an extension of the initial Crusades started by the West against the Islamic world centuries earlier. Al-Qaeda conveniently uses this strategic narrative as the context for its acts of violence, arguing they are justifiable and proportionate attempts to defend Islam against the injustice done against it by the West. This strategic narrative further lends itself to the argument that it is the duty of a good Muslim to support Al-Qaeda. The beauty of this strategic narrative is that it focuses attention on generalities, rather than on the details that would reveal contradictions in Al-Qaeda's logic.

The U.S.'s counter-narrative is, by contrast less effective because the U.S. government has less unified control over it as multiple stake-holders are involved in its crafting. Under the Bush Administration, it was ineffective as the values it highlighted did not resonate with the target audience. It improved under the Obama Administration, but it still lacks coherence and consistency and therefore has not functioned well strategically.

PANEL 4

OPERATIONALISING THE NARRATIVE (2)

Strategic Communication in Military Affairs: Challenges and Practice

COL Kenneth Liow discussed the challenges posed by the Taliban to ISAF's strategic narratives. The Taliban counter-narrative contains five messages, namely: the entire Umma is supportive of the Taliban; ISAF participants are foreigners and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) is the puppet of ISAF; Afghanistan is the "graveyard of empires"; the Taliban will remain in Afghanistan once ISAF departs the country; and finally, the infidels are deliberately killing Afghan women and children. These Taliban messages are often effective and thereby pose a serious challenge to the ISAF mandate.

Faced with this Taleban challenge, ISAF has had to create an even more compelling and convincing strategic narrative. The first challenge is to engage and win in the "Battle of Mindshare". Winning this "battle of mindshare" is already difficult enough in peacetime; in conflicts and other contingencies, this battle might become even harder. The second challenge comes from competition in the strategic narratives centring on values, truth and trust. State actors carry a bigger burden of proof than their non-state actor counterparts.

As such, there five critical elements in the practice of strategic communication in military affairs. Firstly, a sound strategy is essential for the formulation and dissemination of the strategic narrative. Secondly, the strategic narrative must have substance and capable of standing up to public scrutiny and against counter-narratives. Thirdly, military organisations must hone the ability to sense and predict contending narratives and devise plausible countermeasures. Fourthly, strategic narratives must possess an appropriate structure so as to be clearly understood by the intended audience. Lastly, military organisations need to develop skills in strategic communication. For the foreseeable future, militaries will continue to confront unique and difficult challenges in the practice of strategic communications and will have to address them appropriately.

Leading in Narrative-based Operations

COL Giam Hock Koon, in examining the case of CTF151, proposed an engagement framework for narrative-based operations. The first component of this engagement framework is communication, involving the formulation of public affairs and media engagement plans. The second component is cooperation, concerning the formulation of a regional engagement plan aimed at improving relations and mutual trust among the stakeholders. The third component is about projecting influence through information operations designed to shape the will, capacity and understanding in support of the mission.

Strategic narratives in narrative-based operations have to be tailored towards distinct audiences. For instance, strategic narratives aimed at the domestic and international audience are designed for the purpose of building societal resilience and support for the mission, whereas strategic narratives aimed at the adversarial audience are designed to establish legitimacy and just cause of the mission. The following principles are also important for narrative-based operations. Firstly there

is a need to be truthful and attributable. Secondly, it is important to be credible and consistent in the messages put across to the various stakeholders. Thirdly, there is a need to balance information-sharing with operational security requirements. Finally, it is necessary to emphasise upon timeliness. Narrative-based operations revolve around both regional stakeholders and participants in the multinational counter-piracy operation.

It is important to avoid suggestions of any form of interference into the internal affairs of regional countries given the history of the region where CTF151 is operating in. Participants of the task force need to avoid projecting an image of cultural superiority over their regional counterparts. It is also important, he stressed, to avoid conflating counter-piracy with counter-terrorism operations. CTF151 also has to avoid creating the misperception that it is taking "taking sides" in regional disputes.

With respect to engagement amongst the participating nations in CTF151, each participant regards its mission within the coalition or as independent deploying states from the standpoint of its national interests. Therefore, being sensitive towards their diverse national interests and mandates is necessary in order to shape a common strategic narrative, which in the case of CTF151 is to ensure the security of international sea lines of communication plying through the regional waters.

Narrative-based operations also have to take into account the counter-narratives put forth by the adversaries; the Somali pirates being the case in this instance. Given the low-level of proliferation of new media in the region, it is necessary to resort to more traditional forms of media to counter the narratives put forth by the Somali pirates. Video broadcasts via local drama serials espousing the ills of piracy have been disseminated to the Somali populace. To date, this strategy of countering the pirates' narratives has been deemed successful.

PANEL 3

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION

To the question posed by a participant on whether any coalition can operate on a common strategic narrative despite differing national interests of the coalition's partners, the panel noted that the working ties amongst members of the coalition, as well as independent deploying nations, have been characterised by collaboration in most areas. The coalition commander needs to foster the creation of a common strategic narrative based on converging national interests while at the same time, preventing divergent national interests from spawning competition that could derail cooperation. Cordial inter-personal relationships cultivated amongst various stakeholders help in this regard.

Elaborating on the counter-narrative put forth by the Somali pirates, pirates typically describe themselves as innocent local fishermen victimised by foreign fishing fleets that encroach upon their traditional fishing grounds, as well as by marine pollution caused by foreign dumping of toxic material. The pirates thus forge their narrative of concerned local fishermen striving to defend their own waters against foreign predation. However, having escalated their actions so far in endangering innocent international shipping, the pirates have somewhat "over-reached" themselves. Their narrative based on their "innocent fishermen" image blew up in their own faces.

Regarding the "centre of gravity" (CG) in the Somali pirates' "business model", "enabling officials" within the local government bureaucracies constitute the CG which CTF151 has to deal with. In this regard, CTF151 has been trying to put across a strategic narrative to convince these "enabling officials" to withdraw their covert support for the pirates. Such cooperation goes a long way in assisting CTF151 in crippling the pirate operations. Augmenting this point, adversarial narratives are usually well-entrenched and therefore, the battle of narratives is primarily targeted at other audiences in order to sustain domestic and international support for the mission. The strategic narrative has to be backed by substance, capable of standing up to public scrutiny and dispelling adversaries' counter-narratives in order to gain acceptance.

In relation to National Service and the issue of public support therein, MINDEF's ability to generate a strategic narrative certainly plays a crucial role but MINDEF has so far been facing challenges from counter-narratives put forth by vocal netizens in the cyber space especially. These counter-narratives are usually pitched at the emotional level based on the groundswell discontent over foreign talents and opportunity costs of serving NS. However, National Service continues to enjoy widespread public support; the sustainability of National Service, however, ultimately depends on public participation to defend the strategic narrative in support of NS.

CLOSING REMARKS

COL Ng Wai Kit began his closing remarks by noting that the theme for this year's seminar is particularly relevant for the SAF, as the idea of narratives is not well-defined within the organisation's lexicon.

He shared three reflections about the discussion over the course of the seminar. The first reflection concerns the difficulty in defining the strategic narrative. Such an endeavour necessarily involves political actors. The strategic narrative is about shared meaning and will only be useful if they can effectively shape the intended audience's perception and behaviour. He suggested that narratives are not unlike advertisements, which seek to persuade customers why certain products are better than the others.

Second, there is a constant struggle between truths and untruths in the battle of narratives. A strategic narrative that contains untruths is prone to failure because of the dissonance between words and deeds. Positive actions are no longer sufficient since without conveying the narrative properly or without the ability to counter competing narratives, they can be prone to manipulation and distortion by the adversary. In other words, military organisations must master the art of communicating favourable messages to key stakeholders. Moreover, military organisations which fail to act in accordance to their stated strategic narratives will risk losing credibility.

Third, armed conflicts in the past were fought amongst militaries which had control over information for public dissemination. The victor of conflict used to possess the exclusive right to write history. However, multiple stakeholders, not merely the militaries, play a role in today and future conflicts. Militaries no longer possess exclusive control over information they choose to disseminate to the public. He concluded by noting that history is no longer written upon the termination of conflict. Instead, we should expect that history is already being written in the midst of conflict, by the multiple stakeholders.

PROGRAMME

Day One: 19th September 2013 (Thursday)

0900 – 0905h **Opening Remarks**
BG Benedict Lim
Commandant SAFTI MI
SAF

0905 – 0915h **Keynote Speech**
BG Tan Ming Yiak Mark
Chief of Staff
Joint Staff
SAF

0915 – 1045h **Panel 1: Reconceptualising Strategy**
Chair: Associate Professor Alan Chong

Information and the Transformation of Strategic Affairs
Dr Grant Hammond
Former Dean
NATO Defense College

Strategic Narratives and International Relations
Professor Christopher Coker
The London School of Economics

From Strategy to Narrative?
Associate Professor Bernard Loo
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

1045 – 1115h **Coffee Break**
Venue: Officer Cadets' Mess

1115 – 1245h **Panel 2: Competing Narratives in the 21st Century**
Chair: Assistant Professor Ong Weichong

The Contemporary Strategic Landscape: An Assessment
Professor Robert Ayson
Victoria University of Wellington

Asia-Pacific Narratives: Who Has the Upper Hand?
Dr William Choong
International Institute for Strategic Studies - Asia

The Evolving Character of the 21st Century Battlespace
Dr Andreas Herberg-Rothe
University of Applied Sciences Fulda

1245 – 1345h **Lunch**
Venue: Officer Cadets' Mess

1345 - 1545h **Syndicated Group Discussion for Participants**
(SAFTI MI Tour for Overseas Speakers)

1545 – 1615h **Coffee Break**
Venue: GKS CSC Gallery

1615 – 1730h **Students' Academic Preparation and Research**

1800 – 2000h **Happy Hour**
Venue: Officers' Mess, SAFTI MI

PROGRAMME

Day Two: 20th September 2013 (Friday)

0900 – 1030h **Panel 3: Operationalising the Narrative (1)**
Chair: Associate Professor Bernard Loo

Narrative-based Strategy and Operational Design
Dr William Mitchell
Royal Danish Defence College

Technology and the Narratives of Collateral Damages
Dr Stephen Coleman
University of New South Wales @ ADFA

Case Study: Battle for the Narrative in the Global War on Terror
Associate Professor Ahmed Hashim
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

1030 – 1100h **Coffee Break**
Venue: Officer Cadets' Mess

1100 – 1230h **Syndicated Group Discussion for Participants**
(Army Museum Tour for Overseas Speakers)

1230 – 1330h **Lunch**
Venue: Officer Cadets' Mess

1330 – 1500h **Panel 4: Operationalising the Narrative (2)**
Chair: Assistant Professor Ong Weichong

Strategic Communication in Military Affairs: Challenges and Practice
COL Kenneth Liow
Ministry of Defence

Leading in Narrative-based Operations
COL Giam Hock Koon
Republic of Singapore Navy

1500 – 1530h **Coffee Break**
Venue: Officer Cadets' Mess

1530 – 1700h **Plenary Presentation**
Chair: Associate Professor Alan Chong
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

1700 – 1715h **Closing Remarks**
COL Ng Wai Kit
Commandant GKS CSC
SAFTI MI
SAF

End of Seminar

LIST OF SPEAKERS, CHAIRS AND DISCUSSANTS

1. **Dr Ahmed Hashim**
   Associate Professor
   International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR)
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
   Nanyang Technological University

2. **Dr Alan Chong**
   Associate Professor
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
   Nanyang Technological University

3. **Dr Andreas Herberg-Rothe**
   Faculty for Social and Cultural Studies
   University of Applied Sciences Fulda

4. **Dr Bernard Loo**
   Associate Professor
   Coordinator of Military Studies Programme
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
   Nanyang Technological University

5. **Professor Christopher Coker**
   Professor of International Relations
   The London School of Economics

6. **Dr Grant Hammond**
   Former Dean
   NATO Defense College

7. **COL Giam Hock Koon**
   Commander
   Maritime Security Task Force
   Republic of Singapore Navy

8. **COL Kenneth Liow**
   Director
   MINDEF Public Affairs
   Ministry of Defence

9. **BG Tan Ming Yiak Mark**
   Chief of Staff
   Joint Staff
   Singapore Armed Forces

10. **Professor Robert Ayson**
    Director
    Centre for Strategic Studies
    Victoria University of Wellington

11. **Dr Stephen Coleman**
    Senior Lecturer, Ethics and Leadership;
    Program Director, Military Ethics
    University of New South Wales, Canberra,
    Australian Defence Force Academy

12. **Dr Ong Weichong**
    Assistant Professor
    Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS)
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
    Nanyang Technological University

13. **Dr William Choong**
    Shangri-La Dialogue Senior Fellow
    International Institute for Strategic Studies - Asia

14. **Dr William Mitchell**
    Lecturer/Researcher
    Department of Joint Operations
    Royal Danish Defence College

ABOUT THE GOH KENG SWEE COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

The Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College (GKS CSC) is the Singapore Armed Forces' premier educational institution. All SAF's leaders pass through the portals of GKS CSC.

Each year, specially selected officers attend the various courses offered at GKS CSC. Through the GKS CSC's course curriculum and extra curricula activities, these officers acquire the requisite exposure to the complexities and challenges of leading the SAF into the future.

GKS CSC is proud to be one of three schools within SAFTI Military Institute, the other two being the Officer Cadet School (OCS) and the SAF Advanced Schools (SAS). Together, these schools provide holistic officer education and training for regular and National Service Full-Time officers of the Singapore Armed Forces.

ABOUT THE SAF-NTU ACADEMY

The SAF-NTU Academy (SNA)'s mission is to create and sustain the academic capacity and knowledge needed to equip military leaders with professional military knowledge using multidisciplinary approaches. The programmes managed by SNA will contribute to the SAF's overall nurturing and engagement efforts to develop competent and committed military professionals. SNA is also charged with growing a pool of deep specialists skilled in both military and academic disciplines.

SNA oversees the SAF-NTU Continuing Education Master's (CE Master's) and the SAF-NTU Undergraduate Professional Military Education and Training (UGPMET) programmes. SNA works closely with the SAF Education Office and Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College at the SAFTI Military Institute and SAF Personnel Management Centres in the execution of its programmes.

Other than delivering education, SNA manages research, scholarship and collaboration programmes to ensure the renewal, creation and management of knowledge for educational purposes, and to raise the professional and academic standing of both the SAF and NTU.

ABOUT THE S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. RSIS' mission is to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of security studies and international affairs. Its core functions are research, graduate education and networking. It produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Region Studies. RSIS' activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific.

For more information about RSIS, please visit
www.rsis.edu.sg

S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University,
Block S4, Level B4, Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
TEL 65-6790-6982 | FAX 65-6793-2991 | EMAIL wwwrsis@ntu.edu.sg | WEBSITE www.rsis.edu.sg