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## OVERSEAS MISSIONS THE NEW AGE BATTLEFIELD

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**JCSP 44**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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## **OVERSEAS MISSIONS- THE NEW AGE BATTLEFIELD**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The core business of any military is to protect its nation's sovereignty. While there are many dimensions (such as Singapore's Total Defence framework and Soft Power<sup>1</sup>) within the topic of the defence, the foundation of it all is military defence.<sup>1</sup> Maslow Hierarchy of Needs suggests that the foundational "need" is physiological needs and this is a direct product of military defence.<sup>2</sup> The understanding of military defence must not be limited to just the measure of military might; it includes long-term allies – which require membership as part of a herd.<sup>3</sup> While herd memberships are fostered through a myriad of cross-boundary interactions, battlefield collaborations remain the most intimate and strongly suggest ostensible alliance of their military in the aspect of defence. Today, the battlefield takes the form of overseas missions, where nations collaborate through their armed forces.

The overseas mission is also an international stage that draws attention from nations both in and out of the mission campaign. As such, it can be seen as a subtle medium to display the prowess of any participating nations' military defence, for the purpose of deterrence. In addition, overseas missions inevitably entail real-life combat scenarios and also tactical collaborations with other militaries. Through these, the participating nations can validate its operational readiness, sharpen itself and enhance its "ability to fight" with each experience in overseas

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<sup>1</sup> "The 5 Pillars of Total Defence," , accessed 23 April, 2018, [https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/imindef/mindef\\_websites/topics/totaldefence/about\\_us/5\\_Pillars.html](https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/totaldefence/about_us/5_Pillars.html).; GREGORY G. HOLYK, "Paper Tiger? Chinese Soft Power in East Asia," *Political Science Quarterly* 126, no. 2 (Jul 1, 2011), 223-254.

<sup>2</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (Lanham: Dancing Unicorn Books, 2017), 370-396.

<sup>3</sup> Sebastian L v Gorka, *The Age of Irregular Warfare: SO WHAT?* (Washington: National Defense University, 2010), 33.

missions. While these measures are not absolute, they are a credible measure of a nation's power to protect its sovereignty.

As such, this paper takes the position that in the absence of a full-on war, overseas missions becomes the next best medium for countries with small militaries to achieve and demonstrate its function of defence and deterrence. For the purpose of this paper, Singapore and Canada will be defined as countries with small militaries (relative to the United States [U.S.], China, Russia, Indonesia) and utilised as examples to argue its position. It will do so by demonstrating how overseas mission (even in the mild degree of contribution warfare) has a protracted impact on the long-term peace and survival of western democratic nations. Next, it will illustrate that overseas missions are more often than not, combined operations amongst allied nations that strengthens international ties and interoperability. Subsequently, the paper will demonstrate that overseas missions provide the opportunity for military forces to be sharpened. Overseas mission as an international stage will also attract media coverage and thus is subtle proxy to demonstrate its prowess to achieve the effects of deterrence. The paper will also consider the risk and Return on Investments (ROI) of overseas missions as a counter-measure throughout the paper. Finally, it will propose a structured decision-making process model that comprehensively encompasses the relevant factors to consider when undertaking an overseas mission.

## **ARGUMENT 1- ALLIANCE IS CRITICAL TO NATIONAL DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE**

For Singapore and Canada, subscription to a “herd” is a critical condition for survival. As a matter of fact, as early as World War 1 (WWI), the alliances of the Allies and Axis Power

indicates that nations no longer operate in isolation. In modern day context, these alliances take the form of a more permanent establishment like NATO, NORAD and ASEAN. However, the battlefield remains the strongest testament and forging ground for long-standing and loyal alliances.

Alliances are critical for small nations in today's context because of expected decreasing military size. For instance, in the last 30 years leading up to 2017, Singapore's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) decreased from 1.96 to 1.16.<sup>4</sup> In Canada, the reading is currently at 1.61, signaling a graying and decreasing population.<sup>5</sup> The global declining replacement rates for developing countries, which best describes current day western nations suggests a declining workforce and consequently declining military sizes. While it can be argued that the development of technology can multiply the output of manpower, the same can be applied for the adversary as technology not only multiplies their human resource input but also allows them global access beyond traditional geographical boundaries. As such, most small nations will be inclined to lean towards the collective strength of an alliance for the purpose of defence and deterrence.

The extent of today's threat environment will only compound the need for small nations to rely on the strengths of a larger herd's protection and cooperation. The growth of the internet has altered the paradigms of modern day warfare. Information communication is no longer constrained by traditional landlines, telegrams, faxes or mails. Massive amounts of information can be communicated without being attributed to any geographical location or individual. Adversaries enjoy more convenient access to "weapons" through the internet with basic instructional videos on making weapons such as explosives using home-made ingredients. On

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<sup>4</sup> "Population Trends," , accessed 21 April, 2018, <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/statistics/visualising-data/storyboards/population-trends>.

<sup>5</sup> "Fertility: Fewer Children, Older Moms," last modified March, accessed 20 April, 2018, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2014002-eng.htm>.; The breakeven TFR for population growth is 2.

the sophisticated end, adversaries can now exploit 3D-printing to arm themselves. Ultimately, this alludes to the situation that the current threat of terrorism is hardly attributable to any geographical location or individual and is a global problem. No nation is less in danger than another because of where they are situated. As such, to deal with a global issue, there is a need to resort to a global conglomeration of assets in both the quantitative and qualitative aspects.

Quantitatively, no democratic country is capable of combating terrorism independently, especially for small nations such as Singapore and Canada.<sup>6</sup> Just the prospect of global intelligence would surely be a pie too big for any one country to undertake. Even the U.S. has to depend on fellow allies to share intelligence for its operations. As such, countries that face the same threats are compelled to cooperate to achieve efficiency in the defence against transnational terrorism threats (T3).

Qualitatively, international cooperation is critical when dealing with T3 because while adversaries do not respect international boundaries, conventional armed forces need to. For instance, between 2008 and 2009, a terrorist detainee escaped Singapore's custody and swam into Malaysia. The subject was arrested in Malaysia by Malaysian authorities in Apr 2009.<sup>7</sup> If the person of interest had escaped into a non-friendly country like North Korea, there would be difficulty in coordinating any North Korean efforts to search and detain Mas Selamat. Even if Singapore had the military might of the U.S. to project and conduct cross-border manhunt, sovereignty issues arising from mistrust would have prevented such a cooperation.

Additionally, an alliance offers the opportunity for every contributing nation to bring to the table their best asset(s). For instance, during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), not all allies

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<sup>6</sup> It would be easier for suppressed states such as North Korea to combat terrorism as they have absolute control of cross-border information and human flow.

<sup>7</sup> Seth Mydans, "Escaped Bali Terror Suspect is Caught in Malaysia," *The New York Times* May 9, 2009.

were able to contribute fighting troops. Countries with the relevant experiences and political tolerance such as the U.S., the United Kingdom (U.K.) and Australia provided frontline fighting forces.<sup>8</sup> Countries with leading technology in civil engineering such as Japan and Italy contributed to the reconstruction efforts.<sup>9</sup> The participation of Canada (as a nation known for its neutrality) coupled with a host of other nations provided legitimacy (in numbers). As such, given the size of threats facing small democratic nations like Singapore and Canada, being in an alliance is a necessary defence strategy and partaking in overseas missions can be seen as an overt payment of “membership fees” to remain subscribed to the herd of allies.

Finally, with the presence of the media and social media, all effects of social and international perceptions are amplified. In the context of Singapore and Canada, being subscribed to western democratic herds also implies a larger alignment and commitment to the current world order. This inspires security and stability in the other aspects of economy and politics. For instance, the Singapore Armed Forces’ (SAF) participation in Operations Blue Sapphire (OBS), indicates its long-term commitment to maritime freedom of movement in the Straits of Malacca.<sup>10</sup> This inspires confidence in the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC) along the Straits of Malacca leading into Singapore and ensures that Singapore’s port industry remains secure and lucrative for international utility.

Externally, out of the alliance, such strong herd memberships also exude deterrence towards potential adversaries such as Russia. An evident example is the annexation of Crimea

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<sup>8</sup> Quirici Col Russ, "Alliances Still Matter: The Importance of Coalition Warfare in a Unipolar World" National Defense University, Washington, 2003), , 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Operations Blue Sapphire is an anti-piracy patrol operations participated collectively by Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia along the Straits of Malacca; Benita Teo, "Maintaining a Safe Passageway," *Cyber Pioneer* (11 May, 2016). [https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/imindef/resourcelibrary/cyberpioneer/topics/articles/features/2016/may16\\_cs.html#.WtuoSchJmRs](https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/imindef/resourcelibrary/cyberpioneer/topics/articles/features/2016/may16_cs.html#.WtuoSchJmRs).

by Russia in 2014. The fundamental reason for the Russian invasion was their insecurity resulting from Ukrainian's resolve and progress towards joining NATO. This paper opined that the then-potential Ukrainian membership in the NATO herd provoked the insecurity of Russia because Ukraine would then be protected by much stronger NATO herd and present itself a threat to Russia. On the other hand, between 2015 to 2017, North Korea's willful missile-testing and nuclear development programme went unpunished kinetically despite international condemnation. This reluctance of kinetic actions from the U.S. and other allies is opined to be mainly due to the backing of China and Russia on North Korea. As such, a strong herd membership exudes deterrence. With the exception of the U.S., one's subscription in the herd is relatively volatile as it fluctuates with ongoing political decisions. A key trigger to this is a nation's willingness to participate in overseas mission. For instance, Singapore's participation in Operations ENURING FREEDOM (OEF) drew affirmation from then-President George W Bush, "Singapore has been a vital and steadfast friend in the fight against global terror."<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, following Canada's refusal to follow the U.S. into Iraq in 2003, the U.S. "hinted strongly that there would be serious consequences" and made oblique threats of a "serious economic fallout".<sup>12</sup> As such, participation in overseas mission led by the herd leader (usually the U.S.), is a critical consideration to associate with the herd.

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<sup>11</sup> Steven A. Hildreth et al., *Iraq: International Attitudes to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Reconstruction* (n.p.: Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service,[2003]).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Drache, *Big Picture Realities* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Univ. Press, 2008), 115.

## **ARGUMENT 2- “SHOW OF FORCE”- CRITICAL TO NATIONAL DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE**

Given the progressive nature of modern democratic society, there is a great reluctance to resolve conflicts via kinetic force-on-force war measure. Most nations prefer to exercise deterrence as a primary measure of national defence. For instance, the SAF’s mission is to “*enhance Singapore's peace and security through deterrence and diplomacy, and should these fail, to secure a swift and decisive victory over the aggressor*”, with emphasis on deterrence before kinetic actions.<sup>13</sup> The Canada First Defence Strategy identifies “*projecting leadership abroad*” as one of its four tenets, implying an inclination to exude deterrence.<sup>14</sup> As such, there should be equal emphasis on deterrence as there is on war-making capability albeit the former is a byproduct of the latter.

Small nations like Singapore and Canada who are without imminent threats will always seek to project deterrence subtly. On the contrary, North Korea, who faces an imminent threat of a U.S.-backed North Korea embarks on provocative deterrence measures such a missile testing and news release of its nuclear development program. For Singapore and Canada, overseas missions offer an international platform to subtly demonstrate its military capability in a necessitated operational environment. For instance in OBS, the SAF contributes its Patrol Vessels (PVs). This was deliberate as the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) boasts one of the regions most modern fleets of naval vessels. Being a regional stage, participating in OBS allows the SAF to put its naval capability to

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<sup>13</sup> "Singapore Armed Forces- Mission Statement," last modified November, accessed 21 April, 2018, <https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/about-us/mission>.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Johnston et al., "A Canadian Approach to Command at the Operational Level," *Canadian Military Journal* 14, no. 4 (Oct 1, 2014), 4.

operational demonstration without the repercussions of provoking or agitating regional tensions.

The multi-nation nature of overseas mission also provides the option of scalability. Not one nation is subjected to the entire burden of the mission. As such, economically it imposes less stress on defence budgets and brings about more quality in terms of operational inputs and outputs. For instance, the SAF would not be able to sustain OBS alone throughout the year. Even if it did, the deployment period of its servicemen will be overextended and the frequency of patrols will be lesser than what it is now, thus degrading the overall quality of the patrol.

Additionally, because the outcome of the operations is not contingent on any single small nation like Singapore or Canada, there is lesser “hard-line” tag to commit to the end of the mission. As some of these missions have proven to be an lengthy affair, small nations have the option to withdraw its troops once it fulfills its initial commitment. For instance, the SAF participated in Operation BLUE RIDGE (OBR), the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan from 2007 to 2013.<sup>15</sup> While the current operation is still ongoing, Singapore’s withdrawal had no definitive impact on the overall mission. As such, small nations can participate with limited commitment to exercise the option to exit at a later stage if required.

The scalability of overseas missions also allows nations to not exhibit their entire operational capability. For instance, since the SAF only needs to contribute PVs and operating troops, it may (hypothetically) choose to reserve its larger or more agile fleets if

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<sup>15</sup> "Operation BLUE RIDGE (OBR)," last modified 1 March, [https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/imindef/mindef\\_websites/atozlistings/army/past\\_feature/OBR.html](https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/imindef/mindef_websites/atozlistings/army/past_feature/OBR.html).

it is considered Operational Secret (OpSec). This allows nations to moderate the degree of capability exhibition to achieve deterrence but not to the extent of revealing OpSec. In the absence of a full-on war to actively demonstrate its military prowess, Singapore and Canada can leverage on overseas missions to achieve the effects of deterrence at a scalable degree and non-provocatively.

### **ARGUMENT 3 – SHARPENING OF FORCE IS THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP FORCES RELEVANT AND VALIDATED**

From a tactical perspective, in the absence of realistic combat scenarios, overseas missions provide the next best proxy to keep our forces sharp and operationally ready. The military training system requires extensive investments into systems, people and training. These also include relevant in-theatre experiences that provide the opportunity for elements of combat that cannot be replicated or simulated under any peacetime environment. Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen said at the OBR Closing Ceremony that “with each deployment, with each challenge, I think [the SAF’s] operational experiences became much sharper... as a result, I think we have a much sharper SAF today.”<sup>7</sup> Having the relevant in-theatre experience will also emphasize the SAF’s operational readiness and reflect the relevance and effectiveness of its daily training systems, as said by LG Ng Yat Chong: “What we achieved in Operation FLYING EAGLE (OFE) showed that the training system in the SAF works.”<sup>8</sup>

The in-theatre operational experience also stimulates reliable inputs into the military’s “Observe-Orientate-Decide-Act” (OODA) loop. By being part of live operations, the military is able acquire realistic and reliable combat observations as part of the OODA loop. As a result of these inputs, the OODA loop pertaining to Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP) or even

how we think about the enemy, can generate more appropriate “orientation”, “decision” and “actions”. By stimulating the OODA loop, the military has the potential to be more operationally ready, if not, more confident in future operations.

In addition to operational readiness, participating in overseas operations also exposes nations to current trends of global threats, their modus operandi and the relevant intelligence of their network and reach. This will allow participating nations to focus and develop the right capability with relevant experience drawn from the operating theatre through the operators’ experience and collaborations with other nations’ militaries. For instance, nation-building and stability operations were commonly perceived to not be a military role, and thus there was little interest for these to be developed as core competencies. However, experience from Iraq and Afghanistan has proven otherwise.<sup>16</sup> The current capability of most western militaries to be able to perform these operations is an indicator that participation in overseas deployment not only allows lessons (that can be learnt from manuals) to be learnt and adapted accordingly, but more importantly change longstanding perception because of personal operational experience.

Participating in overseas missions is also critical for nations to remain current on the operating procedures of the members in its herd. The need for operability is not a one-time off effort to learn procedures and procure compatible equipment. Due to the dynamic and evolving nature of threats, the TTP and equipment of allied nations are expected to undergo frequent updates and adaptation in order to maintain pace with the adversary. For instance, frequent collaborations between NATO nations in Iraq and Afghanistan ensued the need for interoperability in Close Air Support (CAS). This led to the common nine-line reporting directing format, standardized signal bands and common parlance developed under “Allied Joint

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<sup>16</sup> Michael R. Melillo, "Outfitting a Big-War Military with Small-War Capabilities," *Parameters* 36, no. 3 (Sep 22, 2006), 27-28., 27-28

Doctrine for Air and Space Operations” for such operations.<sup>17</sup> Such developments ensure that all participating nations remain relevant and integrated as contributing nations.

#### **ARGUMENT 4- PRE-EMPTIVE AND DIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS**

As small nations, Singapore and Canada hardly make significant contributions for coalition operations such as (Operations IRAQI FREEDOM) OIF, OEF, OBR or other major operations led by the U.S. The truth of the matter is the significant contributors will always be big nations such as the U.S., U.K. or Australia. Singapore and Canada’s participation in recent overseas deployment is best described by LGen Johnathan Vance (CDS, CAF) as “contribution warfare”.<sup>18</sup> The basis of contribution warfare is that it is still warfare that is relevant to the defence of all participating nations. The subsequent paragraphs will demonstrate that while Singapore and Canada participate in a small and contributory manner towards these operations, there is a direct impact on their respective national defence.

In modern day context, the probability of state-on-state conventional confrontation is likely to continue to decrease because technology has allowed our adversaries to strike at the heart of Clausewitz Trinity, “People” without waging a full frontal war and even without being attributed. As such, we can expect modern day warfare to be preoccupied with combating terrorism acts motivated by both state and non-state actors. The current operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan revolved around the ultimate intent of suppressing terrorist groups such as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al Qaeda. As such, to participate in these

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<sup>17</sup> *NATO Standard: Allied Joint Doctrine for Air and Space Operations* (N.P.: NATO Standardisation Office (NSO), 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Allan English et al., *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives, Context and Concepts* (Kindston, Ont: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), 271-292.

operations, is to apply our military force directly to our most immediate threat. While the strategy and effectiveness of these campaigns remains much to be debated, it can be certain that our form of contribution warfare seeks to achieve the effects of defence. As such, in consideration of the direct threats these terrorist groups have on democratic states and friends of the U.S., participating in these overseas operations can be argued to have a direct impact of the nation's defence.

Finally, by participating in operations led by the U.S., NATO or any other countries representing modern democratic values is to preserve the democratic way of life that Singapore and Canada seeks to protect. Participating in these operations is to maintain the balance of power and preserve the stability for democratic states to continue practicing democracy. As such, it is in the larger strategic interest of Singapore and Canada to participate in overseas missions that espouse these values.

## **DEFINING THE PROBLEM - GAP IN CURRENT PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS OVERSEAS MISSIONS**

Having established that overseas missions hold significant benefits for small nations like Singapore and Canada, it should be noted here that there is still no systematic way to evaluate such missions. To date, they have only been sporadically and indirectly examined through the discussion of exit strategy, through the U.S. forces' considerations for participation, and post-mortem reports on operations that involved the SAF (The subsequent gap will be illustrated using Singapore as an example).

While discussions on exit strategy have often been viewed as one of the veto factors prior to the deployment of armed troops, this is usually not explicitly discussed in the context of the SAF. For instance, the exit strategy and conditions were ambiguously stated prior to the deployment of SAF troops for OBR. Consequently, the subsequent withdrawal of SAF troops that was timed uncannily with the withdrawal of the USA and other major armed forces resulted in speculation that the SAF had a personal agenda in the whole exercise to align itself with only prominent players in the global arena. From this example, it can be seen that the absence of an explicit exit strategy may actually hinder the intended outcome from overseas missions.

The U.S. Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger outlined six conditions that are considered before US forces are deployed: (1) U.S.'s vital interests that are at stake; (2) a clear commitment to achieving victory; (3) clear political and military objectives; (4) whether the level of military engagement matches the mission's key objectives; (5) domestic and congressional support secured prior to the mission; and (6) the use of force only as a last resort.<sup>19</sup> The fundamental difference between these considerations and that of Singapore's lies in the differing interests of the two nations. The U.S., with her combat-tested army, engages in and even spearheads operations to meet international objectives; while Singapore, with her peacetime army, participates in operations to attract alliances within the group and also as an opportunity to sharpen her military's tactical proficiency. Therefore, in order to utilise Weinberger's considerations, it first must be contextualised within the three power-tenets of countries with small militaries; Herd Membership, Projection of Deterrence and Ability to Fight.

This section has shown how the undertaking of overseas missions has been discussed in a sporadic and in-silos manner, with no comprehensive appreciation of the impact of these

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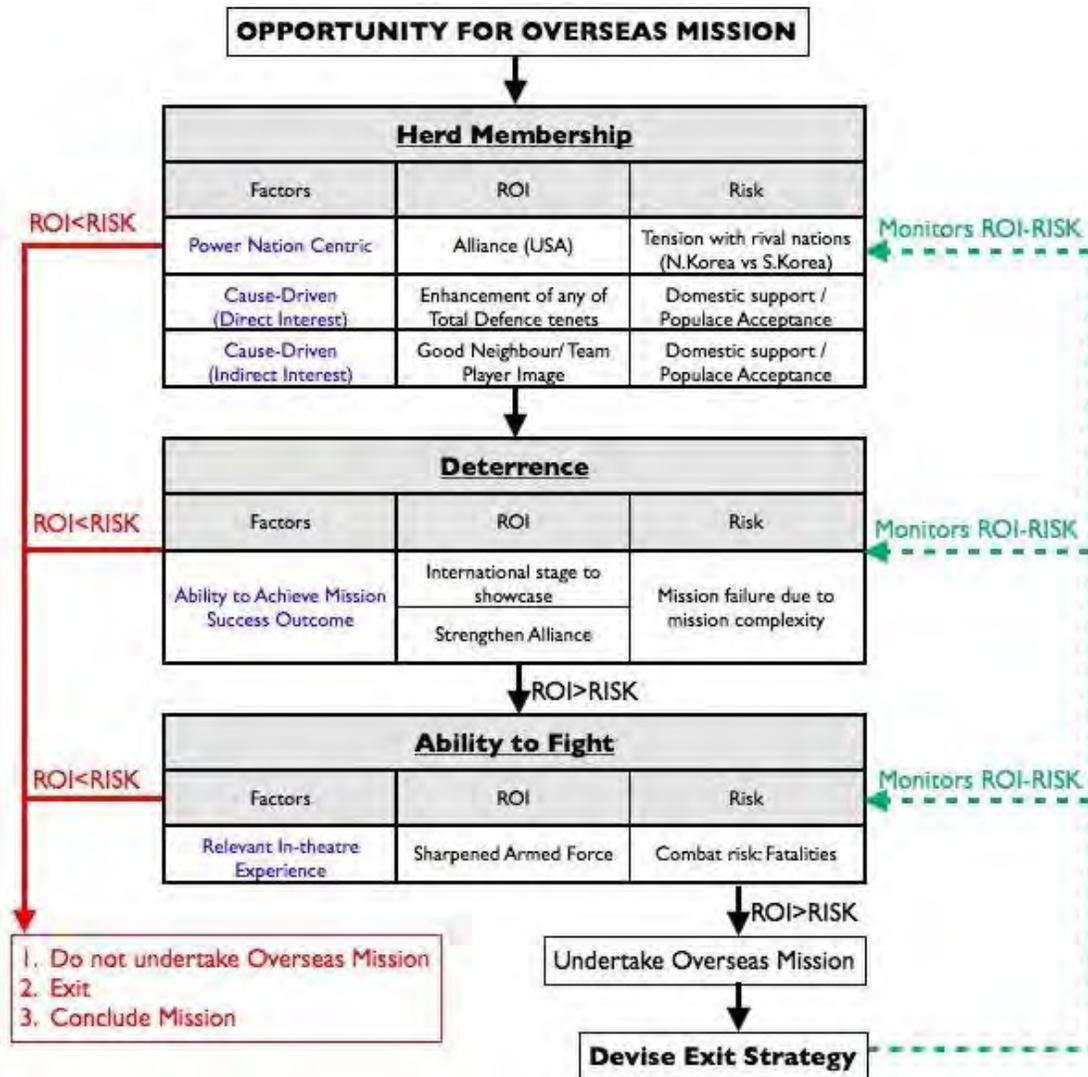
<sup>19</sup> Fen Osler Hampson and Tod Lindberg, "'No Exit' Strategy," *Policy Review* 176, no. 176 (Dec 1, 2012), 15-16.

missions at different levels. The subsequent section will propose a decision model for Singapore and Canada to decide on and monitor its undertaking of overseas missions to best achieve the effects from the three tenets.

### **PROPOSED SOLUTION – THE DECISION PROCESS MODEL**

In order to evaluate the impact of missions comprehensively, I would like to propose a decision process model that operates on a binary flowchart and evaluates the factors for undertaking an overseas mission. These factors will be contextualised from Weiner's considerations by using lessons learnt from the SAF's recent overseas missions. It will consider the key power-related components of (1) Herd Membership, (2) Deterrence and (3) Ability to Fight. Within each of these components, its direct causal factors, related to return on investment (ROI) and risk will be listed out for evaluation. It also considers the role of exit strategy to review and/or conclude the decision process. The model is illustrated in Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1: Proposed Decision Model to Evaluate Missions.



The evaluation of each factor considers both the identified ROI and risk. While these cannot be ascribed a true value, for the purpose of exercising the model, it must be understood that the evaluation of the ROI-RISK relationship is an indication of risk tolerance given the existing ROI. As such, ROI >math>> RISK</math> indicates that the risk is manageable for that particular factor. The measure of ROI is also based on the existing available ROI. Thus, upon mission accomplishment, the ROI should be measured at zero.

## **Herd Membership**

The first factor of the proposed model is the component of “herd membership”, which is examined on whether this membership is (1) centred on one or more “power nations” or (2) driven by cause.

In “power-centric herd membership”, nations can be attracted to one or more “power nations” within the existing herd, in pursuit of an alliance with these “power nations” as ROI, to enjoy good political, military and economic relationships with them. For instance, many countries are attracted to the U.S. for its influential economy and strong defence industry. On the contrary, the risk of pursuing alliances with specific nations may potentially create tension with their rivals – for example, an overt and blatant military collaboration with South Korea would result in negative tensions with North Korea.

Nations can also form herds that are united by a common cause, - “cause-driven herd membership”. ROIs are measured from both the direct and indirect benefits resulting from undertaking the mission. With mission success, the direct benefits that can be reaped include an advantageous psychological, civil, military, economic or political environment. For instance, the anti-piracy efforts through OBS protect the marine trade industry against piracy activities that may harm Singapore both economically and psychologically. On the other hand, joining a herd bound together in a neutral cause such as Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) in OFE presents indirect benefits to Singapore. These benefits are more subtle and identifies Singapore with the image of the “Good Neighbour / Team Player”.

The risk of engaging in overseas missions to pursue herd membership is the lack of public clarity towards the vital interest that the mission brings about to Singapore. This brings about the potential scrutiny for the appropriate employment of the SAF and consequently the

lack of populace acceptance. The SAF belongs to Singaporeans. If there is no local support for the operation, then there is no chance the SAF can be deployed. For example, no matter how strong the herd membership, deterrence and ability to fight is, the SAF should never send our troops to Iraq to fight the Jihadist rebels because Singaporeans will be adverse to putting our soldiers in harm's way for something that they perceive as having little to no ostensible bearing to Singapore or Singapore's interests.

Aligning to Weinberger's considerations, this section concerns itself with the factors of Singapore's vital interest, clear political and military objectives and domestic support.

### **Deterrence – Ability to Achieve Mission Success Outcome**

The second component of the model, the deterrence brought about by the SAF's ability to achieve mission success, is of paramount importance because it reflects the military prowess of Singapore on what may be seen to be an international stage. For instance, the successful completion of OBR drew praises from commanders of other nations. Commander ISAF General Joseph Dunford said about the SAF troops who were deployed in OBR: "The Singapore Army has been a valuable contributor... All these contributions by Singapore have truly made a difference".<sup>20</sup> These positive statements not only publicly reinforce the strength of the partnership, they are also a third party endorsement to the SAF's operational capability, hence enhancing its efficacy in deterring.

This deterrence factor is a function of the SAF's capability versus the complexity of the task. While overseas missions allow us to showcase our capabilities, there is a need to engineer

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<sup>20</sup> "Speech by Minister of Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at the Overseas Service Medal Presentation Ceremony," last modified 19 July, accessed 22 April, 2017, [https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/content/imindef/press\\_room/official\\_releases/sp/2013/19jul13\\_speech.html](https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/content/imindef/press_room/official_releases/sp/2013/19jul13_speech.html).

for success by scoping involvement carefully (whenever possible) to prevent overextending on a mission we are not prepared for. The next section provides examples of niche tasks that SAF selects carefully in its involvement in overseas missions. Weinberger's consideration of "a clear commitment to achieving victory" indirectly implies this consideration of 'engineering for success'.<sup>21</sup>

### **Ability to Fight – ROI of a Sharpened Armed Forces Outweighs Risk**

However, in-theatre deployment is not without its inherent risk. The SAF is a peacetime army and its commitment and risk-tolerance is different from that of the US military, which remains combat-active even during peacetime. For Singapore, fatalities that result from risk-inappropriate deployments for the purpose of sharpening the SAF in a peacetime context are difficult to justify. Taking the example of OBR, it would be tough to justify if the SAF were to assume combat tasks of street patrols, which may expose the troops to frequent and fatal ambushes, as the in-theatre experience gleaned is not deemed to be completely relevant since the outcome of the task does not directly relate to Singapore's interest. However, the combat tasks of the mission analyst, weapon location early warning and medical relief teams are considered appropriate risks as they expose the SAF troopers to an optimal amount of in-theatre experience while bearing reasonable risk, being away from known combat zones.

In another example, the SAF took on the combat task of heli-sniping in OBS, which was justifiable for two reasons. Firstly, the in-theatre experience was relevant because heli-sniping remains a peacetime requirement for counterterrorism (CT) operations; and secondly, Singapore had direct vested interest in the outcome due to her dependence on the maritime trade industry.

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<sup>21</sup> Hampson and Lindberg, "No Exit" Strategy, , 15-16

Aligning to Weiner's considerations, this section examines whether the level of military engagement matches the mission's objectives. As such, while overseas missions present a valuable opportunity for the SAF to sharpen itself, it must negotiate the parameters of the task by considering its inherent risk versus the ROI that Singapore and the SAF stands to gain.

### **Exit Strategy**

The model was designed such that the overseas mission will be undertaken as long as the factors are evaluated as  $ROI > RISK$ . This is critical because of the dynamism of overseas missions, causing both ROI and risk to be affected by a myriad of factors from multiple sources. Therefore, a clear exit strategy serves to constantly monitor the ROI-RISK relationship, enabling the SAF to be sensitive to the identified triggers that may tilt the ROI-RISK relationship and highlight the need to exit the mission once  $ROI < RISK$ . It also serves as a reminder of the original intent by constantly reviewing the available ROI.

In an ideal situation, if the SAF is successful in achieving its intended mission outcome, the ROI should theoretically be valued as zero, tilting the ROI-RISK relationship away from  $ROI > RISK$ . This therefore indicates that the SAF should conclude the overseas mission. In yet another situation, should the mission become too complex such that the non-combat zone that the SAF operates in is no longer defensible and a review indicates that  $ROI < RISK$ , the SAF should consider an early conclusion to the overseas mission.

## CONCLUSION

In the absence of a full-on war, overseas missions do provide the next best medium for militaries to achieve their functions of defence and deterrence. It is the most sacred form of international collaborations as it involves the lives of our troops and garners international attention. It demonstrates commitment and loyalty to common allegiance and cause. These alliances are important because we cannot combat today's adversaries in isolation. The modern day adversary is not bounded by geographical boundaries thus we require the assistance of fellow allies to cover their share of the globe in combating the threats. Overseas missions also provide the platform to exude deterrence to our adversaries internationally. The strong display of alliances is often amplified by the media to remind hostile nations (such as China and Russia) to consider the aggregated strength of the herd before "bullying" small nations. From a national perspective, overseas missions provide a platform to demonstrate a nation's military strength in a non-provocative manner. This is an image that is aspired by small nations such as Singapore and Canada. Overseas missions also provide the medium for military forces to be sharpened and to keep current with modern day threats. This is critical towards the real-world defence of a nation's interest. Last of all, majority of the overseas missions target at the core of our threat issues today. They identify failed states as the root cause of our problems and attempts to solve it by establishing order in states such as Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. As such, overseas missions are especially critical for small-militaries countries like Singapore and Canada.

However, the involvement in overseas missions should not be a "blind" affair just because of allegiance or the benefits listed above. Its direct bearing on Singapore's or Canada's national interest varies with mission and task type. It is not as clear-cut as fighting an enemy with immediate threat to one's home soil. As such, there exist a need for a decision-making

framework to decide and monitor the partaking of any overseas mission as a mean to balance the ROI and risk associated with overseas mission.

This paper has attempted to provide a systematic and comprehensive model to evaluate the overseas mission through the three key factors. Firstly, while there are many factors to consider when undertaking overseas missions, the overriding consideration is national interests. This is consistent with any country choosing to invest armed forces for any mission, which can be understood as one of the most valuable resources in terms of a nation's survivability. Secondly, the model acknowledges that the task-level factors under deterrence and ability to fight can be calibrated to achieve  $ROI > RISK$ . Thus, it shows that as long as there is national interest, the SAF can negotiate to vary the parameters of the task-level factors so that it can be part of the campaign. Lastly, the model highlights that all the factors are not constants. The inherent ROI and risks are dynamic and the decision process will always run in a loop, which requires constant monitoring of the factors through a clear exit strategy.

Ultimately, overseas missions are a microcosm of the new-age battlefield. Its main difference is that it is subtle and has indirect bearings to one's national interest. Therefore, there is an added challenge to justify involvement in this new-age battlefield. However, it is also scalable and thus gives the flexibility to be selective of the capability one wishes to exhibit. More importantly, it gives the flexibility to exercise the "exit strategy" once the mission exceeds its benefits for any participating nation. As such, the question about overseas missions should not be "Should we participate?", but rather "How should we be involved, and for how long?".

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