

Notification

United Service Institution of India–Lieutenant General PS Bhagat Memorial Essay Competition 2026

Subject: Military Leadership Challenges in the Artificial Intelligence World

General

1. The Annual Essay Competition commemorating the leadership legacy of PS Bhagat seeks to institutionalise sustained intellectual engagement with the human dimensions of military leadership in an era of rapid Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration. At a time when AI-driven systems are reshaping warfare, decision-making, and command structures, the competition reaffirms the enduring relevance of human judgment, ethics, and leadership. It aims to stimulate original research, critical thinking, and informed debate among military professionals, scholars, and students, bridging theory and practice while examining how leadership principles must adapt to technological transformation without compromising moral responsibility and human agency.

Objective of the Competition

2. The competition aims to:

- (a) Institutionalise an 'Annual Essay Competition' commemorating the leadership legacy of Lieutenant General PS Bhagat, ensuring sustained intellectual engagement with his values and contributions.
- (b) Reaffirm the enduring relevance of the human dimension in conflict, leadership, and decision-making, despite rapid technological and AI-driven advancements.
- (c) Stimulate critical thinking and scholarly discourse on contemporary and emerging leadership challenges, particularly in the context of military leadership in the AI era.
- (d) Encourage original research, reflection, and debate among serving and retired military personnel, scholars, researchers, academicians, and students across disciplines.
- (e) Bridge theory and practice by examining how leadership principles, ethics, and human judgment must adapt alongside AI-enabled systems and technologies.

Background and Rationale

3. The rapid integration of AI into military systems is transforming the character of warfare. From intelligence analysis, surveillance, and logistics to autonomous weapon systems and decision-support tools, AI is redefining how militaries plan, fight, and sustain operations. While technological superiority has always been a key determinant of military effectiveness, the AI era presents a fundamentally different challenge—one where human leadership must coexist with machine intelligence.

4. Military leaders today are no longer required only to command troops and manage operations; they must also understand, supervise, and ethically employ intelligent systems whose speed, scale, and opacity often exceed human comprehension. This convergence of human judgment and algorithmic decision-making raises critical questions around

accountability, trust, moral responsibility, escalation control, and the preservation of human values in conflict.

5. This essay competition seeks to encourage deep reflection, analytical thinking, and original perspectives on how military leadership must adapt to remain effective, ethical, and resilient in an AI-driven battlespace.

Military Leadership Challenges in the Artificial Intelligence World

6. The advent of AI in the military domain has introduced profound conceptual challenges that extend far beyond technology itself. At the heart of these challenges lies the tension between human judgment and algorithmic decision-making, raising fundamental questions about command authority, accountability, and moral responsibility in warfare. As AI systems increasingly influence intelligence assessment, targeting, logistics, and operational planning, military leaders must operate in environments characterised by unprecedented speed, complexity, and information overload. This evolution compels a re-examination of traditional leadership concepts, including trust, control, and responsibility, particularly when decisions may be shaped by systems that are not fully transparent or explainable. The central issue is not whether AI will be used in future conflicts, but how military leaders can integrate it responsibly while preserving human agency, ethical conduct, and strategic judgment—elements that remain indispensable in the conduct of war.

Suggested Headings

7. The essay could include:
 - (a) Introduction
 - (b) AI in the Military Domain
 - (c) Changing Character of Warfare
 - (d) Key Leadership Challenges in the AI Era
 - (e) Ethical and Moral Dilemmas
 - (f) Organisational and Cultural Challenges
 - (g) Command, Control, and Accountability
 - (h) Developing Future Military Leaders
 - (i) Way Forward
 - (j) Conclusion

Rules and Regulations

8. The competition is open to all commissioned officers of the Armed Forces of India, officers of the Territorial Army and Assam Rifles, gazetted officers of the civil administration, scholars, researchers, academicians, students including Senior Division National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets, as well as retired military officers and civil servants.

9. Each essay submitted must be an original work authored by a single individual. Joint authorship is not permitted. Proper citation of all sources is mandatory and must follow the prescribed format. Any entry found guilty of plagiarism will be disqualified, and disciplinary action may be recommended, where applicable.

10. Essays must be written in English and must not exceed 5,000 words, excluding endnotes. The total word count must be clearly mentioned in brackets at the end of the

essay. Entries that exceed the word limit or fail to specify the word count are liable to rejection.

11. The manuscript must be typed, double-spaced, and printed on one side of the paper only. The essay should be logically structured and organised with clearly defined group, paragraph, and sub-paragraph headings. It must include an abstract of approximately 150 words, followed by an introduction and ending with a conclusion. The use of proper endnotes is compulsory, and essays lacking them will not be evaluated.
12. Three hard copies of the essay must be submitted along with a soft copy sent by email. Essays will be evaluated only after receipt of both hard and soft copies, as this is essential for plagiarism checks. Hard copies must be addressed to the Director General, United Service Institution of India (USI), Rao Tula Ram Marg, Post Bag No 8, Vasant Vihar PO, New Delhi-110 057. The soft copy must be emailed to cpl.essays@usiofindia.org. The submission deadline for both hard and soft copies is 15 Jun 2026. Late submissions will not be accepted.
13. All hard copy submissions must remain strictly anonymous. No identifying details of the author should appear anywhere in the essay or the covering letter. Each participant must select a 'Motto' (not exceeding ten words) and type it on the first page of all copies of the essay. A sealed envelope must accompany the submission, containing a sheet with the motto, personal number (where applicable), rank, name, date of commission and unit address (as applicable), email address, and contact number, along with a brief curriculum vitae of approximately 80 words. Only the motto should be written on the outside of the envelope. These envelopes will be opened during the USI Council meeting after the judges' decision. Any violation of the anonymity requirement will result in rejection.
14. For the soft copy submission, the subject line of the email must be the selected as the author's 'Motto'. The body of the email should contain only the line: "My entry for the Lt Gen PS Bhagat Memorial Essay Competition" is attached. No signature block or additional text should be included.
15. The essays will be evaluated by a panel of three judges nominated by the USI of India. Assessment will be based on originality and freshness of insights, depth of understanding of the subject, logical development and coherence of thought, quality of language and expression, correct and consistent use of footnotes and bibliography, and suitability of the essay, in whole or in part, for publication. The decision of the judges shall be final.
16. The judges may recommend a first prize, comprising a cash award of INR 15,000, a certificate, and gratis life membership of the USI of India, as well as a runner-up prize carrying a cash award of INR 10,000 and a certificate. Winning essay(s), if recommended by the judges, may be published in the USI Journal. The USI reserves the right to withhold awards if the entries do not meet the prescribed standard.
17. The copyright of all submitted essays shall vest with the USI of India.
18. For any queries or clarifications, participants may contact the Director, Centre for Publications and Library, at dircpl@usiofindia.org or cpl.essays@usiofindia.org.

Style Sheet

19. **General.**

- (a) Font style should be Arial, Font Size – 12 (Font Size – 10 for endnotes), with double spacing throughout the text.
- (b) All diagrams, charts, and graphs should be referred to as ‘Figure’, ‘Table’, or ‘Graph’, and must be consecutively numbered. Tables should carry only essential data and must complement the text, not repeat it. Each should have a short title, a figure or table number, and the source mentioned at the bottom.
- (c) The essay should be structured using group, paragraph, and sub-paragraph headings to enhance readability. Introduction and conclusion as group headings are mandatory. The essay must also include an abstract of approximately 150–200 words, placed before the ‘Introduction’.
- (d) English (UK) or English (India) spellings must be used consistently throughout the essay.
- (e) Dates should be written beginning with the day, followed by the month, and then the year (e.g., 11 Sep 2014). Only the first three letters of the month should be used (e.g., Jan, Feb, Sep).
- (f) There should be no paragraph numbering. Bullets may be used where required. Underlining is not permitted anywhere in the text.
- (g) Numbers should be written in words up to nine, and in numerals from 10 onwards (e.g., two, four, nine; then 10, 11, 12).
- (h) The term ‘per cent’ must be used instead of % or percent.
- (j) Acronyms and abbreviations must be written in full at the first mention, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. Thereafter, only the abbreviated form should be used. Do not create an acronym if the word appears only once in the text.
- (k) Any text written in any language other than English should be written in italics, with the meaning provided in brackets alongside.
- (l) While referring to currency, use the following formats:
 - (i) INR 2,000 cr (not 2000 crores of rupees)
 - (ii) USD 8.5 mn (not 8.5 million dollars)
 - (iii) Currency abbreviations must follow this standard: Million – mn, Billion – bn, Crores – cr.
- (m) For emphasis, words should be placed within single quotation marks only at the first mention. If the emphasis involves two words, both should begin with capital letters. If it involves more than two words, only the first word should be capitalised.
- (n) Statements by another person should be enclosed within double quotation marks. Punctuation marks should appear inside the quotation marks, while the full stop should be placed outside.

20. **Endnotes.**

- (a) Authors are encouraged to provide **complete bibliographic details** of all **books, articles, journals, and other sources** cited, as **endnotes**. This should include the **full name of the author, title of the book or article, journal name** (for articles), **issue details**, and **page numbers**. In addition to endnotes, a **bibliography may be included**, if desired. The use of Wikipedia as a reference must be avoided.

(b) When referring to a **book**, follow the format below:

Lt Gen CK Kapur, *Chinese Military Modernisation*, (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2003), pp 17–18.

(c) When referring to a **journal article**, follow the format below:

Lt Cdr Neeraj Malhotra, “Pratap Singh of the Indian Legion”, *The Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, Vol. CXXXIV, No 556, p 283.

(d) When referring to a **website**, follow the format below:

“**Escalation Control in a Nuclear Environment**”, *Report of a Seminar organised by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies on 17 Nov 2004 at New Delhi*, accessed 08 Feb 2025, www.ipcs.org (Full address of the page, not only the website).

(e) If **two successive citations** refer to the **same source**, use **ibid.**

(f) If a source is cited again **after intervening references**, use the **author’s name followed by ‘op. cit.’**, for example: **Imran Khan, op. cit.**

21. The style sheet available at <https://www.usiofindia.org/publications.php?category=7> can also be referred to for further clarity.