A Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa®) Report

September 2019

Using Narratives to Shape Chinese and Russian Behavior

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Produced in support of the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office (Joint Staff, J39)

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What is ViTTa?

NSI's Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) provides rapid response to critical information needs by pulsing a global network of subject matter experts (SMEs) to generate a wide range of expert insight. For the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Future of Global Competition and Conflict project, ViTTa was used to address 12 key questions provided by the project's Joint Staff sponsors. The ViTTa team received written response submissions from 65 subject matter experts from academia, government, military, and industry. This report consists of:

1. A summary overview of the expert contributor response to the ViTTa question of focus.
2. The full corpus of expert contributor responses received for the ViTTa question of focus.
3. Biographies of expert contributors.

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Question of Focus

[Q12] What are the elements of a narrative that lends coherence to United States military activities and can help shape Chinese and Russian behaviors?

Subject Matter Expert Contributors

Dean Cheng (Heritage Foundation), Dr. Skye Cooley (Oklahoma State University), Dr. Nicholas J. Cull (University of Southern California), Dr. John Delury (Yonsei University), Dr. Sean McFate (National Defense University), Dr. Nicholas Michelsen (King's College, London), Dr. Christopher Paul (RAND Corporation), Dr. Laura Roselle (Elon University), Dr. Scott Ruston (Arizona State University), Dr. Jaganath Sankaran (University of Texas at Austin), Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Zaborowski (US Central Command)

Summary Overview

This summary overview reflects on the insightful responses of eleven Future of Global Competition and Conflict Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) expert contributors. While this summary presents an overview of the key expert contributor insights, the summary alone cannot fully convey the fine detail of the expert contributor responses provided, each of which is worth reading in its entirety. For this report, the expert contributors consider how the United States can use narratives to lend coherence to its military activities and shape Chinese and Russian behavior.

Using Narratives to Shape Chinese and Russian Behavior

A narrative is "a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values."[1] Narratives have long been used and weaponized by competing powers as tools of influence to shape perceptions of themselves and their adversaries amongst larger audiences, both domestic and abroad.[2] Today, China and Russia use narratives to cast the United States as an antagonistic force in the world, a worldview that, if accepted more broadly amongst the international community, supports both China and Russia in their pursuits of adversarial international interests that are central to their respective global objectives. It is in the United States' interests, therefore, to develop and employ narratives of its own that both portray the United States as a positive influence in the world and counter the hostile narratives of its global competitors. More specifically, contributors encourage the United States to develop a robust messaging approach that incorporates multiple types of coherent, clear, realistic, and goal-oriented strategic narratives that can be circulated across operational systems to convey intended messages to targeted audiences across the globe.[3]

[1] Merriam-Webster. (2019). Narrative. From: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/narrative
[2] Cooke, Ian. (2014). Propaganda as a weapon? Influencing international opinion. British Library. From: https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/propaganda-as-a-weapon#
[3] See contributions from Cooley, Cull, Michelsen, Roselle, and Ruston in particular.

Chinese and Russian Narratives

For the United States to orchestrate comprehensive global narratives, it must first understand how it is currently perceived across the globe. Such understanding requires knowledge of the narratives that its competitors, particularly China and Russia, are spreading. China's and Russia's strategic narrative strategies are both inward- and outward-focused (i.e., China and Russia are interested in spreading their narratives to audiences both domestic and abroad).[4] However, while China and Russia are often grouped together as the United States' greatest global ideological competition, the narratives that they spread offer unique, distinct storylines that reflect their respective inward- and outward-focused interests and objectives.[5] The United States, therefore, may need not form just one cohesive narrative to counter both China and Russia together, but separate similar yet distinct narratives for China and for Russia that carefully address the unique elements of each opponent's storylines separately.

Preservation of Russian identity is the central theme of Russia's strategic narratives both domestic and abroad. Internationally, Russia perceives itself to be a great power. It believes that it is engaged in a global competition to realign the current United States-led international order, with which its interests often conflict, toward a multi-polar world order, with which its interests are more aligned. Russia, therefore, casts Western ideals and powers as antagonistic, branding the United States and its allies as a destabilizing influence in the proper geopolitical order. Additionally, Russia often paints China as a key political ally and emphasizes the need for a great Eurasian partnership, both of which highlight Russia's interest in counterbalancing the encroachment of Western ideals. Domestically, Russian narratives also highlight the importance of Russian cultural and national identity, and resignation to the loss of cultural linkages to the lands that Russia lost with the fall of the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the Russian government has demonstrated significant interest in minimizing any and all threats (e.g., external weaponized information, access to the Internet) that could potentially further undermine Russian cultural and national identity within its borders.[6]

Economic development and global competition are the central themes of China's strategic narratives both domestic and abroad. China perceives itself to be a global leader that is increasingly taking over the leading supporting force behind economic cooperation, multilateralism, globalization, and stability on the international stage. Chinese media portrays an optimistic outlook on China's trajectory in the global political and economic power structure. China casts a narrative that highlights rising nationalistic and isolationist tendencies across the United States and Europe that threaten the stability of the international institutions and markets that China has worked to safeguard and lead toward prosperity. Domestically, Chinese narratives highlight China's central role in leading the global economy along an upward trajectory and reaffirm the need for continued survival and legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). United States tariffs against China are portrayed as an isolating practice that is causing divide between the United States and its trade partners, forcing the international community to re-evaluate the depth at which it wants to continue economic relations with the United States going forward.

[4] See contribution from Cooley.
[5] See contribution from Zaborowski.
[6] See contribution from Cooley.

Countering Chinese and Russian Behavior and Lending Coherence to United States Military Activities

To successfully counter Chinese and Russian narratives, the United States must develop coherent narratives of its own.[7] How audiences perceive a state and its narratives is contingent on several factors, including wealth, strength, quality of exports, and, most importantly, perceptions of whether or not that state and its narratives are "good."[8] The challenge for the United States is that its competitors, particularly China and Russia, attempt to use narratives to cast the United States as a "bad" actor and antagonistic force in the world that breaks international rules and norms as it pleases to take advantage of everyone else.[9] It is in the United States' interests, therefore, to develop and employ new narratives that clearly, credibly, and persuasively cast the United States as a "good" and positive influence in the world.

Dr. Nicholas Cull of the University of Southern California offers what may be a useful example of such narratives from the past: the United States' narratives during World War I and World War II. The United States' narratives during both World Wars, Cull contends, had "both coherence and intrinsic value. People knew what the United States stood for as articulation of aims had preceded declaration of war and the message was largely matched by behavior for the duration." Other contributors offer more modern possibilities. Dr. Laura Roselle of Elon University advocates for a United States narrative that highlights United States leadership of the international system and the United States military's commitment to a stable international system that "lifts all boats." Such a narrative, Roselle argues, aligns with global preferences for United States leadership on the international stage, has been compelling in the past and can be again, and could shape Chinese and Russian activities aimed at undercutting the current global order. Similarly, Dean Cheng of the Heritage Foundation encourages the use of a narrative that highlights positive elements of the United States' democratic values (e.g., governments should reflect the consent of the governed, freedom of the press, free markets) and military forces (United States military forces defend its political system, not impose it; United States military forces operate in conjunction with local governments, but will leave if asked). Such a narrative, Cheng suggests, offers a natural challenge to the opaque operations of China's and Russia's authoritarian governments.

Regardless of what future narratives the United States pursues, it will be hard-pressed to find an audience that does not already have some preconceived notion of the United States and its military activities.[10] This is not an insurmountable challenge, however, as international audiences can be "surprisingly perceptive" to persistent and dedicated activities designed to influence and shift their preconceived notions.[11] Roselle offers a coherent multifaceted messaging approach to doing just that. Roselle's approach incorporates three types of narratives (policy, identity, and system narratives) to enhance the likelihood that strategic objectives are obtained. Policy narratives can be used to explain why an action or policy is desirable and achievable. Identity narratives can be used to tell the story of the state and the military within the state and values and objectives of both. Finally, system narratives can be used to describe how the international system is structured, who the players are, and how it works. A messaging approach that employs all three of these narratives, Roselle argues, can lend

[7] See contributions from Cull, Roselle, and Ruston.
[8] See contribution from Cull.
[9] See contributions from Michelsen and Cull.
[10] See contribution from Paul.
[11] See contributions from Cull and Michelsen.

coherence to the activities of the United States and its military, thus increasing United States positioning to counter Chinese and Russian activities.

Risk of Incoherence Within United States Narratives

A potential lack of coherence within United States narratives and messaging may challenge the United States' ability to effectively use strategic narratives to portray itself as a positive influence in the world and counter hostile Chinese and Russian narratives and behaviors.[12] Dr. John Delury of Yonsei University believes that the already emerging US narrative relating to its perception of the future of global competition and conflict may be challenged by a problematic lack of coherence. Delury explains that while framing the future of competition and conflict as a great power struggle—in which the United States will have to fight against a common challenge and threat from China and Russia (i.e., a fight between liberalism authoritarianism)—may resonate in the United States, it is unlikely that East Asian states will buy into such a narrative, as most do not view China and Russia as a united front of influence (i.e., China and Russia do not act in a coordinated fashion nor do they have especially close political ties; and China's economic, cultural, military, and diplomatic influence vastly outweighs and overshadows that of Russia in the surrounding region). Ultimately, as Delury concludes, "a story of the United States rallying allies and partners to defy authoritarianism, predicated on a conflation of Xi's China and Putin's Russia, may lend 'coherence' to the narrative told in Washington, at the cost of 'incoherence' to audiences among those allied and partner publics." Roselle echoes Delury's assessment, arguing that a narrative of "great powers playing out a game in the international system" is not the narrative that the rest of the world wants to hear. Such a narrative, Roselle contends, is "old, outdated, and disrespectful," and "undermines the ability of the United States to set itself apart from the authoritarian regimes of Russia and China—it positions the United States as just another greedy, power hungry, and selfish country."

Conclusion

Contributors largely agree that the United States will be best-positioned to use narratives to both lend coherence to its military activities and shape Chinese and Russian behaviors if it develops and employs a robust messaging approach that incorporates multiple types of clear, realistic, and goal-oriented narratives that can be circulated across operational systems to convey intended messages to targeted audiences across the globe. There is less agreement, however, as to what exactly the United States' narrative should be and whether any narrative will actually be able to shape Chinese and Russian behavior. Nonetheless, it is clear that narratives will play an important role in future global competition, which is likely to be dominated by competing powers using an array of non-kinetic and asymmetric tactics to compete for influence, and are worthy of close consideration and attention.

[12] See contributions from Delury, McFate, Roselle, and Ruston.

Subject Matter Expert Contributions

Dean Cheng

Senior Research Fellow, Asian Studies Center, Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy
(Heritage Foundation)
13 March 2019

The United States remains firmly opposed to authoritarian governments that operate opaquely. We continue to firmly uphold the idea that governments should reflect the consent of the governed, limited through a free press. We continue to believe that human potential is best realized through a system of limited government which provides rules for the free market, but does not dictate that market's outcomes. Such a system not only offers the best outcomes, but has more auto-correcting mechanisms.

American military forces exist to help ensure such a system, but are intended to defend such a system, not to impose it. We operate in conjunction with local governments, but will leave if asked.

Then, we should live by this same narrative.

Dr. Skye Cooley

Assistant Professor, Mass Communication and Strategic Communication (Oklahoma State University)
8 March 2019

Russian Narratives Related to Global Competition[13]

Russian media narratives present the future of global competition as one of shifting power balances requiring it to develop non-Western economic alliances, pursue domestic educational reforms, and bolster Russian cultural identity to maintain societal and regime stability.

- Russian narratives of global competition place itself as an "outsider looking in," nervous about shifting power balances and looking towards China to balance against U.S. and the West. Western nations, and those aligned with the West, are shown characterizing Russia as a destabilizing agent in the world order and as unwilling to offer, or accept, opportunities for meaningful cooperation.
- Russia itself is presented as among the top three major powers in the world, along with the U.S. and China; Russia has serious trepidations about the altering balances of power and global competition.
- The depression of the Russian economy due to sanctions is credited with reducing investments, creating resource shortages, and generally placing Russia at significant competitive disadvantages to that of the US-aligned global order.
- The weaknesses of the Russian economy can be addressed by a number of mentioned necessary capabilities, including: 1) The need for a great Eurasian partnership umbrellaing economic and political securities against Western dominance most clearly demonstrated by the intentional, confirmed alignment of Russian policies with those of the Chinese; and 2) The need for Russia to invest in sweeping educational programs in the promotion of science and technology most significantly through establishing Russia as a pioneering space sector, and thus, technological power.

Most interesting is the narrative of cultural protection that emerges in relation to global competition.

- The salience of, and protection of, distinctive Russian identity is seen as a major battle front in relation to global competition.

[13] For more detailed findings, see: *Full Media Ecology & Strategic Analysis (MESA) Interim Report on Russia, available through NSI & SMA. (2019).* The Media Ecology & Strategic Analysis (MESA) group is an academic collaboration between Oklahoma State University and Monmouth College.

- The dangers of external, weaponized information undermining Russian cultural identity is a significant concern and a number of initiatives and forums addressing cultural solidarity are discussed as necessary in order for state, and regime, survival.
- From discussions on the openness of the internet to those on how to best deal with and Russify rap music, culture is stated as the most significant form of competition Russia will face.
- Russia sees regional challenges to the broader conception of Rus' identity; particularly in Ukraine, but as broadly happening across all regions of former Soviet influence.
- Russian media portrays a relative resignation to the loss of cultural linkages to those areas formerly coalesced within the Soviet Union. However, the loss of those linkages are used to further the resolve for fostering, and protecting, a strong Russian national identity.

Table 1. DIME Vulnerabilities and Capabilities

	Vulnerabilities	Capabilities
Diplomatic	N=6 (9%)	N=9 (13%)
Informational	N=5 (7%)	N=13 (19%)
Military	N=1 (1%)	N=9 (13%)
Economic	N=10 (14%)	N=18 (26%)

Table 2. Alliance/Competitor & Conflict Management

	Frequency
Mentioned Competitors	N=16 (23%)
Mentioned Alliances	N=10 (14%)
Legitimate Deterrence	N=5 (7%)
Conflict/Escalation Management	N=4 (6%)
Redlines to Action	N=1 (1%)

Table 3. Perspectives on Global Order

	Frequency	Valence (1=positive, -1=negative)
Russia's Role in Global Order	N=18 (26%)	Mean = .44
Perspectives of Global Order	N= 40 (57%)	Mean = -.35
Perspectives of U.S.	N= 40 (57%)	Mean = -.53
Perspectives on Western Europe	N=33 (47%)	Mean = -.36

Chinese Narratives Related to Global Competition[14]

Chinese media narratives clearly present the future of global competition as one of economic development.

- The most pressing problem is the rise of nationalism and isolationist policies in Europe and the U.S. which undermine current international institutions safeguarding trade and providing stability in the world.
- Domestically, Chinese narratives reaffirm the need for continued CCP "open-door" policies to foster technological innovation, a "going-out" campaign for Chinese companies to compete in international markets, and continued reforms in banking/financing, education and science, and quality control and standard settings.
- Internationally, China depicts itself as a global leader, increasingly filling the role the U.S. had previously, by supporting and affirming the importance of the UN and WTO. China vehemently argues for the benefits of globalization as the primary tool for future global economic competition and multilateralism as the key component of diplomatic relations.

[14] For more detailed findings, see: *Full Media Ecology & Strategic Analysis (MESA) Interim Report on China, available through NSI & SMA. (2019).* The Media Ecology & Strategic Analysis (MESA) group is an academic collaboration between Oklahoma State University and Monmouth College.

- Overall Chinese media remains optimistic with its ability to lead the world in these endeavors, and continue its economic modernization, despite concerns regarding its ability to move out of the "middle income trap," by moving away from basic manufacturing to technological and economic innovation.

Two elements of this narrative specifically shape Chinese understandings of U.S. global influence and U.S. military activities.

- First, U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods are described as creating a legitimacy gap between the U.S. and the world which undermines the institutions the U.S. itself created. U.S. tariffs are viewed as challenging Chinese domestic innovation and economic growth which also is described as posing a problem for the global economy. China warns that isolationist, nationalist policies threatens world stability and international institutions like the UN and WTO that have helped curb global conflict post-WWII, and calls for other nations to follow China's lead in supporting peaceful, dialogic models of settling international disputes through multilateralism and free trade.
- Second, U.S. isolationism is viewed as prompting other nations to reconsider their economic and diplomatic partnerships in the changing global order, specifically in Western Europe. Additionally, the U.S. and its ally, Japan, are seen as bullying China, afraid of its increasing economic strength and international influence, with Japanese revisions to its constitution allowing for greater military capabilities being a concern for China's security. U.S. military deployment in the Asia Pacific is seen as aggressive and self-serving. In response, China has stepped up its own military modernization and strategic partnership with Russia, both of which are intended to safeguard peace and stability.

From this narrative, Chinese necessary capabilities for successful global competition include:

- The formation of strategic diplomatic partnerships ensuring closer bilateral economic partnerships with China and development of multilateral institutions including the SCO and BRICS, as well as reinforcing current institutions such as the UN, WTO, IMF, and World Bank.
- China's Belt and Road Initiative is depicted as central to its global economic development and increasing influence, and is viewed as positively contributing to global economic development by linking developing nations to the global economy by providing infrastructure development that the U.S. and West are unwilling to.
- China portrays itself as the leader of developing nations, including strengthening partnerships with the Global South and Latin America, and calls for international institutions to provide greater voice to these nations.
- These actions are linked to China's mission to promote its China Dream, Belt and Road Initiative, and a new style of great power relations in support of viewing China's rise as peaceful; resulting in economic benefits to the world and safeguarding global security.

Table 1. DIME Vulnerabilities and Capabilities

	Vulnerabilities	Capabilities
Diplomatic	N=45 (17%)	N=120 (44%)
Informational	N=26 (10%)	N=53 (20%)
Military	N=23 (9%)	N=27 (10%)
Economic	N=54 (20%)	N=147 (54%)

Table 2. Alliance/Competitor & Conflict Management

	Frequency
Mentioned Competitors	N=51 (19%)
Mentioned Alliances	N=68 (25%)
Legitimate Deterrence	N=3 (1%)
Conflict/Escalation Management	N=40 (15%)
Redlines to Action	N=5 (2%)

Table 3. Perspectives on Global Order

	Frequency	Valence (1=positive, -1=negative)
China's Role in Global Order	N=221 (82%)	Mean = .62
Perspectives of Global Order	N=203 (75%)	Mean = .1
Perspectives of U.S.	N=108 (40%)	Mean = -.59
Perspectives on Western Europe	N=49 (18%)	Mean = -.2

Dr. Nicholas J. Cull

Professor, Annenberg School for Communication (University of Southern California)
28 February 2019

In a world in which reputation is central to success, one key issue in evaluating a narrative is to know what is admired. A narrative should be judged in two ways. Based on its coherence and based on its intrinsic value. The US narrative in the two World Wars had both coherence and intrinsic value. People knew what the US stood for as articulation of aims had preceded declaration of war and the message was largely matched by behavior for the duration. In contrast the US narrative in the War on Terror lacked both coherence and intrinsic value. It was easy to argue that US was acting on a narrow self-interest of securing an energy supply or in defense of a preferred ally rather than according to its long-established narrative of international values. As Steven Corman and others have shown, the US message was scattered and lacked the coherence present in the messaging of the adversary: the Al Qaida network.

Narratives for superpowers are not like suits of clothes which can be changed on a whim. They are accumulated over decades and may be detected by audiences even if nothing is deliberately said or something else is said. North Korea may articulate a national narrative based on the people and the term 'democracy' but few outsiders recognize such qualities in its way of life.

Polling research by Simon Anholt and others indicates that international publics admire nations based on a number of perceived qualities including their wealth and strength and the quality of their exports, but that the most important factor by a long way is a perception of their being 'good'. This raises a question of exactly what 'good' might be. The collective good plainly includes elements that serve the US well such as admirable culture, music, technology, and so forth, and being a good place to visit. Other categories are more open to challenge internationally. Inequalities have opened a negative aspect to capitalism in general and the US version clearly works better for some groups than others; healthcare is plainly not all that it might be and as far as international audiences are concerned US governance is especially worrying. They do not prefer the systems offered by Russia or China, but they rate the systems of the major European powers much further ahead. The US is rated around 18th in the world in terms of government by non-US audiences. I do not see the problem as insurmountable. It takes decades for narratives of nations to take hold and international audiences can be surprisingly perceptive. International audiences are well aware that some people on Wall Street steal, that some Hollywood producers are sexual predators, that sometimes unusual characters are elected to high office and that readily available automatic weapons can be used in mass shootings, but they admire the US anyway. It is Americans who are challenged by such things as they are brought up to expect their country to be number one and conceding that Germany, France and Britain are more admired as polls seem to suggest is disturbing.

International reputations develop over decades. The positive reputation of Canadians is based on an accumulated foreign policy from the mid-1950s through to the early 2000s in which the country was seen as a good citizen of international fora. It ignores the decade from 2006 when the country stepped back from such a role. Similarly, the strength of the image of the United States in the 1980s owed as much to the ability of that era to echo and affirm values established internationally in that era rather than – as was the case domestically – for a new set of values to be established and propagated. Internationally the narrative was Eisenhower even if the spokesman was Reagan. Today the United States still has an opportunity to build on a powerful and attractive set of narrative components in the international imagination. It has an opportunity to be Reagan whoever the spokesman or woman may be.

This said the way to be seen as good is plainly to be part of collective solutions rather than 'going it alone'. A military strategy which relies on partnership is inherently more attractive that one which always has unilateral action as a plan B. Paradoxically, a United States that is genuinely dependent on a collective security will be more attractive internationally than a super strong 'go it alone' country. This has been the case historically. I see no evidence that a US with reduced defense expenditure would be less respected externally, rather it would be obliged to make its presence count and to be a genuine and an attentive member of a team.

Research by the United Nations Global Pulse unit into global priorities reveals little consensus as to which issues are of greatest concern around the world with one exception. All audiences rate education as the first or second development priority. Given the standing of the United States in the field of education, the country has an excellent opportunity to be seen as a great – perhaps THE great -- education country, but that will require sustained investment in programs which are frequently cut back, and attention to the educational sector domestically, which is compares poorly to many foreign competitors. With this said the Reputational Security of the United States would also be increased if the country were seen to be unequivocally part of the team for global action against climate change and for sustainable development.

My final thought is – as I have written elsewhere – is that nations are like tightrope walkers. To maintain stability they have to focus on a fixed point at the end of the wire. It could be behind (an idealized view of a perfect past or a burning sense of past injustice or a blend of both) or it could be ahead of them (a vision of the future). The second decade of the 21st century like the first and third decades of the 20th have seen a collective focus on the past. Yet the world's ability to transcend its three greatest crises in the previous century – the World Wars and the Cold War -- required a focus on the future and an articulation of a narrative that was so attractive that not only allies but adversaries could buy into them. In the past American leaders like Woodrow Wilson, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan were an essential part of a global articulation of a collective vision of the future. The United States as a nation far surpasses both China and Russia in terms of its credibility as a voice, and its reach as a story teller, however it has been as focused on its past as the rest of the world. To me, helping the world to identify a collective vision and advance those elements – such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the human rights framework – already agreed, would be an essential element in any future security for the United States and the wider world.

Dr. John Delury

Associate Professor, Chinese Studies (Yonsei University)
21 March 2019

"Coherence" is potentially a *problem* in the narrative that is already emerging, as framed in the 2018 National Defense Strategy and embedded in this very exercise. The NDS tell a story of the world order entering [returning to?] an era of great power competition, and argues that for the story to end happily, the US must rise to the challenge of strategic competition with rival great powers, primarily China and Russia. Great power competition thus takes the place of counter-terrorism operations—as the NDS puts it bluntly, "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern of in U.S. national security" [p. 1]. The NDS Summary goes on to define the type of great power challenge posed by China and Russia in terms of a global competition in ideology and political system: "The central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers. It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions." The competition against China and Russia is therefore something more than a great power contest among nations; it is also a universalistic struggle between liberalism—embodied and led by the United States—against authoritarianism—led by China and Russia.

The narrative contained in miniature in the NDS Summary of "return to great power competition" reflects foreign policy discourse more generally in the United States. Leading foreign affairs thinkers who disagree fundamentally on the role the US should play agree on the premise that the challenge the US faces is a return to geopolitics—reading new books by Stephen Walt (*The Hell of Good Intentions*), John Mearsheimer (The Great Delusion), and Robert Kagan (*The Jungle Grows Back)* reveals this shared premise. Kagan frames the struggle in ideological terms as liberalism vs. authoritarianism, and advocates an assertive/ aggressive foreign policy by the US to defend/advance the cause of liberalism; Walt/Mearsheimer de-emphasize values, cast the struggle in terms of national power, and advocate a much more restrained posture by the US. Yet they agree we are living through a return of great power politics.

While the idea of China and Russia representing a common challenge/threat might resonate with audiences in Washington DC, it is unlikely that many East Asians will buy into this narrative. The reason is that, from the view of actors in the region, China and Russia do not present a united front of influence. Beijing and Moscow do not act in a coordinated fashion or appear to be especially close in political terms. China's economic, cultural, military, and diplomatic influence vastly outweigh and overshadow that of Russia so far as Northeast and Southeast Asia are concerned. Thus the narrative of competing against an authoritarian bloc represented by Moscow and Beijing rings hollow. China's rise is real; it is felt on every scale, tipping further toward Beijing year by year. Most publics and leaders in the region want to counterbalance against that rise, with the United States playing an obvious and crucial role in that regard, but also want to do so carefully, avoiding a break with Beijing or acrimonious relations with China. This is a delicate [counter]balancing act that requires subtlety on the part of the United States to do well and right. Whereas, a story of the US rallying allies and partners to defy authoritarianism, predicated on a conflation of Xi's China and Putin's Russia, may lend "coherence" to the narrative told in Washington, at the cost of incoherence to audiences among those allied and partner publics.

Dr. Sean McFate[15]

Professor (National Defense University)
7 March 2019

What are the elements of a narrative that lends coherence to US military activities and can help shape Chinese and Russian behaviors? And does the US currently have a coherent narrative?

Dr. McFate: I do not think the US currently has a coherent narrative. There are some good reasons and bad reasons for this. The good reason is that we are a democracy and an open society, and that is what we want to be. Democracies are messy, and messaging is messy in democracies—whereas in autocracies like China and Russia, the government controls media and can easily create a message. But our message is muddled—probably because of who we are, and that is okay. That is the price of democracy, and I think it is a price worth paying.

The problem is, how do we compete in a world where victory is won in the information space and not in the battlefield? We need to start to develop capabilities to message. How we do that is a longer discussion. One thing we need to do, however, is paint China as an imperial power around the world, and not simply echo China's narrative of how it portrays itself. We need to also message China's domestic audience because China is certainly messaging our domestic audience. The cultural war that is going on in our country right now is all fine and good if it is homegrown and organic, but it is strategic defeat if it is being fanned by foreign powers. That is the problem and the threat. Victory goes to the cunning now, not the strong. And China and Russia have been manufacturing the fog of war for exploitation, while we have been thinking about the fog of war as a constraint to overcome. We need to manufacture the fog of war as well and cause chaos within China's and Russia's systems like they are doing to ours. Messaging is a key element of this, and I do not think we are messaging very effectively at the moment. One of the challenges of war today, however, is that secrets and democracy are not compatible, but war is getting sneakier. So, how do we do we fight sneakier wars without compromising our democratic soul?

Do you think there are US narratives or messaging tactics that could actually successfully shape Chinese or Russian behaviors?

Dr. McFate: Yes, I do, but messaging has to be used with other instruments of national power. Messaging in isolation is not sufficient. There are a couple of things that need to be considered regarding messaging. One is that a core message of US foreign policy going back to the Truman Doctrine is to uphold democracy. However, our activities in Iraq and Afghanistan and our alliance with Saudi Arabia compromises that core message, so we lose credibility. We in the US tend to overlook this, amazingly—I do not know why—but the rest of the world does not overlook it. So, I think one of the things we should consider is dropping our ideological bend to our mission in the world. I think the message of American exceptionalism has been harmful and counterproductive to us internally and externally. I think we need be more realpolitik and less ideological in our messaging. And I think we need to sort of say, "Here are our national

[15] Dr. McFate's contribution consists of excerpts from a longer interview session. For access to the full interview session, please contact George Popp (gpopp@nsiteam.com).

interests. Where we can uphold our ideological priorities, we will do so but our first interest is national security and we will go from there." I would start with messaging and broadcasting our national interests so that our position is clear to everyone.

Can US messaging breakthrough in non-democratic countries like China and Russia where there are tight controls on media and information flow?

Dr. McFate: Well, first of all, none of this can happen in isolation. Messaging has to happen in coordination with the use of economic tools of power, military tools of power, and other tools of power. Second of all, I think we need to get savvy in public-private partnerships. I think the real savants of information and messaging are in the private sector.

I think we would also benefit from finding members of the opposition in countries like China and Russia and then giving them a platform in their country and/or in the US, whether they are aware of our efforts or not. For example, we could also do something like support a Russian version of the show American Idol, which would show, subconsciously, that people have democratic choice—people can choose winners, and if people start to believe that they can choose the winners of a game show, then they might also want to be able to choose the leaders of their country.

There are all sorts of things that we can do that are non-kinetic and cunning—and "cunning," I believe, is the watchword of modern warfare. Some of these might be controversial. For example, the US has the best universities in the world and people all over the world want to study at these universities. Elites in China, especially, want to study at Ivy League universities in the US. The US could deny them that—not necessarily denying all Chinese student visas from US colleges but denying the children of the most elite in China and those that are benefitting from China's corruption. This may create a situation where angry Chinese children carry the water for us by saying to their parents that, "Because you're killing Uyghurs, I cannot have my dream of going to Harvard." And that way, we make surreptitious allies. We can find ways to do things like that. Frankly, it is Sun Tzu's manipulation, but I think that is what is happening to us, so I think we have to punch back in the same domain space.

Dr. Nicholas Michelsen

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11 March 2019

Definition: All narratives take the form of an arc, which originates in a situation of conflict or tension (the context), and the progression of which is shaped by the vision of the narrator, passing through a series of actions or events chronologically ordered, leading to a conclusion in line with the intent of the narrator.

Context: The elements of a narrative which would lend coherence to US military activities must take into account the declining credibility of the narrative of virtuous exceptionalism which has traditionally orientated US behaviour. The US role is discursively caught between its military supremacy and widespread perceptions of historic over-reach, which influences attempts to balance against it by state and non-state actors. Chinese and Russian states, alongside a range of non-state actors, are seeking to frame the United States as a 'bad player' in world politics, regularly violating international norms, so as to establish comparatively greater legitimacy. The US has a need to justify exceptional status for its military activities, from a condition of declining credibility. Russia and China are effectively leveraging decline in US credibility on the world stage in their strategic communications.

Vision: The grounding element of a narrative that lends coherence to US Military activities is one which engages directly with the source of conflict (a loss of credibility for the narrative of virtuous exceptionalism).

Legitimacy: The narrative needs be received as legitimate by diverse target audiences. This means it must be organised around existing settled international norms (sovereignty, reliability, predictability, multilateralism, diplomacy, truthfulness, etc). An existing global architecture of norms, which has taken several centuries to form, determines the conditions under which rhetorical claims put forward by all strategic communicators in international relations are received as persuasive or not. A legitimate actor is *a fortiori* one that is seen to uphold the recognised ethical rules of the game in world politics, in all words and actions.

Simplicity: The narrative needs to be sufficiently parsimonious to be articulated by all actors in the chain of command, and on multiple communications platforms.

Flexibility: The narrative needs to be sufficiently open to incorporate all activities conducted by the US military.

Resilience: The narrative must retain a long-term view and avoid short term or tactical edits which make it vulnerable to critique, and thus empower critical states and non-state actors in rhetorical contests.

Dr. Christopher Paul[16]

Senior Social Scientist (RAND Corporation)
1 March 2019

The question implies a *strategic narrative* that will somehow be adopted and accepted by Chinese and Russian decision-makers and magically change their behaviors. That is not how narrative works. The Russians and the Chinese already have narratives about and narrative frames for our military activities and with which they interpret our subsequent activities and statements. It may be possible to change those existing narrative frames, but doing so will be harder than the question implies. Here are some excerpts from the article referenced above that may help in thinking about narrative.

Despite the constant refrain of the importance of narratives and the repeated demand that we become better at fighting against, with, or through narratives, there is alarmingly little agreement about how exactly to do that, or even exactly what a narrative is. Different views of what narratives are and should be are not just matter of semantics. There are real and consequential differences about what different advocates want done when they talk about being better with narratives. So, where is there agreement about the nature of narratives? Our synthesis of the existing discussion suggests three things about which there is consensus and that are essential to explaining narratives and understanding why they are important to operations: First, they are about stories, either being stories or being composed of numerous stories, and these stories have story properties (settings, characters, plots, resolutions, beginnings, middles, and ends). Second, stories are how human beings understand and make sense of the world and their place in it. And third, the stories that get told about (or get used to make sense of) the events of military operations and conflicts affect perceptions and understandings of those operations, which in turn affect the perceived legitimacy of those operations and the extent to which one side or the other receives an individual or group's support. Remember, one man's rebel is another man's freedom fighter…

What about narratives do commanders, planners, and operators need to understand? We think there are three facts about narratives that are particularly relevant to DoD efforts to use narratives in support of operations:

(1) People use narratives to make sense of the world and their place in it; (2) compelling narratives have consistency, familiarity, and proof; (3) narratives already exist, and although they can be shaped over time, they cannot always be changed or replaced.

Narratives and other mental shortcuts help us make sense of the things we see and experience in the world. Research shows that people use stories to help structure memory, cue certain approaches to problem-solving, format new information, and define our identities.[17] Narratives also often suggest or hint at how we should feel about an event based on the emotional content of the narrative or even imply a value judgment or suggest a course of action, perhaps based on the moral of the story. "Narratives make sense of the world, put things in their place according to our experience, and then tell us what to do."[18]

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[16] For additional discussion on this submission, see: Christopher Paul, Kristen S. Colley, and Laura Steckman. "Fighting Against, With, and Through Narrative: Developing the Reasons Why We Are There." *Marine Corps Gazette*, March 2019, 103:3, 80-87.

[17] Darcia Narvaez, "The Influence of Moral Schemas on the Reconstruction of Moral Narratives in Eighth Graders and College Students," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 90, No. 1, 1998, pp. 13-24; Lila San Roque, Alan Rumsey, Lauren Gawne, Stef Spronck, Darja Hoenigman, Alice Carroll, Julie Colleen Miller, Nicholas Evans, " Getting the Story Straight: Language Fieldwork Using a Narrative Problem-Solving Task," *Language Documentation & Conservation*, Vol. 6, 2012, pp. 135-174.

[18] Mark Laity, "NATO and The Power of Narrative," *Beyond Propaganda*, September 2015, pp. 22-28., p. 23.

What happens when we can't make sense of events witnessed or accounts heard? The human brain wants the information it receives to make sense. When the brain can't make sense out of incoming information, that information is more likely to be discounted or ignored, or recombined with previous information until it does make sense.[19] So, if something new happens (say, the arrival of U.S. troops to provide humanitarian aid), it is interpreted based on the existing stories or overarching narratives held by the observing audience or individual. If the dominant existing narrative about American troops is negative (they are villains, and only come to hurt, belittle, and occupy us), then the new facts will predominantly be interpreted in a way that is consistent with that narrative, even if this requires the omission of some of the details (the part about the humanitarian aid, perhaps?), leaving the audience with a negative view.

These narrative-based perspectives are referred to in the academic literature as *narrative frames*.[20] Such frames are not necessarily derived from a single story but from an audience's whole collection of stories, created and transmitted within societies over time. These narrative frames (or lenses) shade how we view the world and help with our sensemaking.

Compelling narratives have at least three characteristics: consistency, familiarity, and proof.[21] *Consistency* refers both to the internal consistency of a story (whether the outcome follows logically from the action described, whether the characters' behavior is true to type, etc.) and to the story's consistency with other salient narratives or narrative frames. *Familiarity* is about how well known a story or narrative is; more than just awareness of the story, familiarity also implies a level of comfort with the story, which could come from sharing themes in common with stories within a broader narrative frame. *Proof* is about the evidence available in support of the narrative, and can vary widely. Proof can hinge on the perceived credibility of what is claimed, perceived credibility of the narrator, eye witness accounts, or recorded pictures or video. Note that what constitutes proof varies considerably by context and medium.

As much as different audiences will ascribe different levels of consistency, familiarity, and proof to different narratives, different audiences also have a different collection of stories and narratives available to them, and prefer to interpret new events in a way that is consistent with their existing collection of stories. Because of the substantial body of pre-existing stories available to any audience, most events they witness or experience immediately fit within, and sensemaking is supported by, at least one of those pre-existing narratives. "Audiences will without exception always interpret stories in their terms."[22] *This can make it very difficult to present a new or alternative narrative that will have any traction*.

In most cases, when U.S. forces act in foreign lands, there will already be one or more narratives in place that are going to be the dominant narratives of those events for relevant foreign audiences, regardless what themes, messages, and images accompany those actions. So, if pre-existing narratives drive the understanding of events in most cases, when and how can U.S. forces oppose, counter, or offer alternatives to those narratives? More briefly, when are there *narrative opportunities*, and what kinds of opportunities are they?

When something happens that people notice and care about, relevant audiences will become aware of it and try to make sense of it. In any given instance, one of three things will happen:

1. The event fits perfectly within one existing narrative, reinforcing that narrative, and connecting to all the other content (negative or positive) from that narrative. That narrative becomes the dominant narrative for this event.
2. The event fits reasonably well within more than one available narrative, or can be viewed through the lens of more than one relevant narrative frame. The event will be understood through one or more of the available narrative frames, but which one(s) will be dominant is unclear (and perhaps shapeable).

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[19] Gregory S. Seese and Kendall Haven, "The Neuroscience of Influential Strategic Narratives and Storylines," *IO Sphere*, Fall 2015, pp. 33-38. p 33.
[20] For more on frames and framing see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 26 (2000), 611–639. A similar concept is called "schemas" in cognitive psychology. See, for example, the discussion in Mary B. McVee, Kailonnie Dunsmore, and James R. Gavelek, "Schema Theory Revisited," *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 75, No. 4, Winter 2005, pp. 531-566.
[21] Dean J. Case II and Brian C. Mellen, *Changing the Story: The Role of the Narrative in the Success or Failure of Terrorist Groups*, Monterey, Calif.: Naval Postgraduate School, Thesis, December 2009.
[22] Zalman, 2010, p.6.

3. The event does not fit well within available narratives or mobilized narrative frames. The event will end up connected to one or more narratives (perhaps new, perhaps old) and viewed through narrative frames, but which ones and how it will be interpreted is an open question.

Each of these three possibilities corresponds to a different level of narrative opportunity.

1. If the event fits perfectly within an existing mobilized narrative, there is very limited narrative opportunity, leaving very few options. These include (A) accept and embrace all or part of that narrative (if it is positive, or has positive or at least tolerable aspects); (B) adjust planned actions so that they are not so easily connected to that narrative (if the planned action is going to connect directly to an unfavorable narrative, consider not doing that action, or finding a way to do it that will be perceived and framed differently); or (C) try to emphasize aspects of the action that suggest an alternative narrative frame (basically try to make a situation #1 into a situation #2). Just to emphasize: *sometimes the only way to create an opportunity to change the narrative is to change the actions*.
2. If events fit reasonably well within one or more alternative narratives or frames, there is some narrative opportunity. Those trying to fight with, through, and against narratives can pick the available narratives that are most favorable or beneficial to the joint force and try to emphasize aspects of the action that are consistent with those narratives, or otherwise try to frame the event so it is viewed in that way. Provided there is an alternative narrative, there might be an opportunity to emphasize how the event is not like what happens in an unfavorable narrative. Note this is **not** a sufficiently wide-open narrative opportunity to make up a wholly new narrative, just an opportunity to push toward and emphasize favorable available narratives, and perhaps push away from unfavorable narratives.
3. If the event is something new or different, people are still going to try to understand it and connect it to existing frames, but there may be greater opportunity to shape which ones or to introduce new ones. "Since narratives are neither fixed nor infinitely malleable, each side has a window of opportunity in which they may choose to change their narrative in order to address changing circumstances effectively."[23] Here, narrative opportunity is greatest, as a much wider range of available narratives or narrative frames can potentially be mobilized to help observers understand the event. It may even be possible to promote a wholly new narrative; however, it would be easier, and would likely have more traction, to try to mobilize some dormant pre-existing narrative or lens than to create a wholly new one. A dormant narrative is more likely to be consistent and somewhat familiar, whereas a wholly new narrative, even if there is an opportunity for one, will need to build its consistency, familiarity, and proof from scratch.

This question, as asked, presupposes a great deal more narrative opportunity than is likely to actually exist.

Now, there may be a considerable degree of utility from crafting an internal narrative that will help U.S. decision-makers and planners create coherence in the actions we take to compete with Russia and China. That could be very effective as an internal touchstone for guiding the things we do and why we do them. Just don't expect Russia and China to embrace, accept, or be moved by the same narrative.

Dr. Laura Roselle

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Director, Turnage Family Fund for the Study of Political Communication (Elon University)
7 March 2019

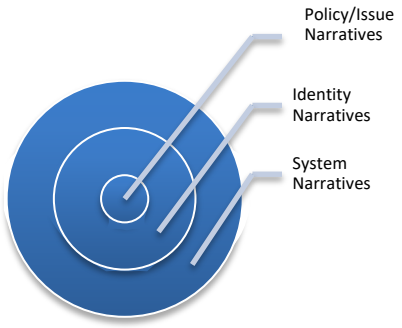
In assessing the use of narratives – or strategic narratives – it can be helpful to distinguish among different type of narratives.[24]

- Policy or issue narratives set out why an action or policy is desirable and achievable.

[23] Case and Mellen, 2009, p. 1.
[24] Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle. *Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order*. Routledge, 2014; Roselle, Laura, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin. "Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power." *Media, War & Conflict* 7, no. 1 (2014): 70-84; Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle. *Forging the world: Strategic narratives and international relations*. University of Michigan Press, 2017.

- Identity narratives set out the story of the state and the military within the state and their values and goals.
- System narratives describe how the international system is structured, who the players are, and how it works.

It is important to recognize that a coherence among these types of narratives enhances the likelihood that strategic objectives are obtained. U.S. military activities should be thought of as fitting with coherent system, identity, and policy narratives. In addition, U.S. narratives which are supported within the international system shape the international system so that others, including Russia and China, can be drawn in. This can contribute to the normalization of expectations and norms, and thus affects behavior.



In order to understand the elements of these narratives that will lend coherence to military activities, it is important to start with system strategic narratives that set the stage for how the international system and the military strategic environment is understood, and which give advantage to the U.S. military and U.S. interests.

System Narrative

Unfortunately, the title of SMA "Future of Great Power Competition and Conflict Project" already sets out a disadvantageous narrative for the United States. In my opinion, neither Russia nor China is a Great Power, but I also argue that this is the wrong way to look at this to begin with. Being guided by a system narrative that asserts a "Great Power system" undermines the ability of the U.S. to promote its interests fully and most strategically.

Why is it important whether or not Russia or China are labeled Great Powers? This label implies a system narrative that gives them greater prominence than they deserve – and, in fact, is the narrative they prefer. The narrative of "Great powers" suggest that some states have special privileges in the international system, can collude with other great powers, and do not have to abide by international norms and rules. Additionally, this narrative – of great powers playing out a game in the international system - is NOT the narrative that the rest of the world prefers or sees as relevant for the 21st century. They see this "the world is about great powers" narrative as old, outdated and disrespectful. (It also does not reflect the flattening of power in the system.) A great power narrative undermines the ability of the U.S. to set itself apart from the authoritarian regimes of Russia and China. It positions the U.S. as just another greedy, power hungry, and selfish country.

That said, US leadership is key. The rest of the world, according to public opinion data and elite interview data, identifies the United States of America as the preferred (and necessary) leader of the international system going forward. A 21 century system narrative should be based around the growing recognition of interconnectedness and the United States military as a leader, committed to a stable international system that "lifts all boats." That has been the appeal in the past of the US leadership in international organizations and US military prominence. This has weakened recently but could be made prominent again. This argument recognizes that one must start with an understanding of the audience (other political actors in the international systems) instead of starting with projection of a preconceived narrative.

Finally, a U.S. system narrative should highlight the importance of alliance in the international system as a means to face challenges by China and Russia. Few want to be allies with Russia or China (for anything more than the pursuit of very short-term objectives). One strength of the U.S. has been its alliances and this should be strengthened again.

It is difficult to give up an old system narrative (even if outdated). It can pull like a rip current. But as one deals with a rip current, one must deal with an outdated but forceful system narrative. One does not pull against it directly by saying something like: "Russia and China - you are not Great Powers." One pulls in a perpendicular manner – going off in another direction, parallel to the shore: The international system is one in which power has flattened, more states should be involved in promoting common interests, and the U.S. (especially through the stabilizing power of the U.S. military) can be a leader in alliance with others to make lives better for people around the world.

Identity Narrative

The United States and the U.S. military's identity narratives should be forward thinking, recognizing the realities of 21st century demographic change in the US and beyond. Here the US has a significant advantage over China and Russia. Demographic trends suggest that diversity will grow in the US and that should be a strength highlighted by a US military narrative.

Here's the story: The United States is a country that has been built by people from all over the world. It has core values that are aspirational. Yes, the United States may struggle at times to make real its aspirations of equality, liberty and democracy – but the struggle makes the U.S. stronger, not weaker. Diversity makes the U.S. stronger, as it does the world. This is a narrative of struggle and resurgence that is very compelling.

The U.S. military has been and continues to be committed to the strength of diversity. It led the way in desegregation in the U.S., for example. The US military has been an extraordinary laboratory for working through the challenges of difference to create working groups that are cohesive yet diverse, gaining strength through acknowledging the value of different perspectives and people.

This identity narrative fits squarely with the system narrative set out above and emphasizes a distinct and powerful U.S. identity as resilient and committed to shared interests.

Policy Narratives

Policy narratives can be quite tricky because this depends on the specific policies being pursued. If policies or military actions can be placed within a context – a narrative - with explicit ties to identity and system narratives, there is more likelihood that others in the international system will see these actions as legitimate.

Conclusion

Coherence among different types of narratives (system, identity and policy) can lend coherence to US military activities as set out above. The United States has a narrative that has been compelling and can be again. The strength of this vision for the international system, in concert with other international actors, can help shape Chinese and Russian behaviors. This is a non-zero sum game and it is not about Great Powers.

Dr. Scott Ruston

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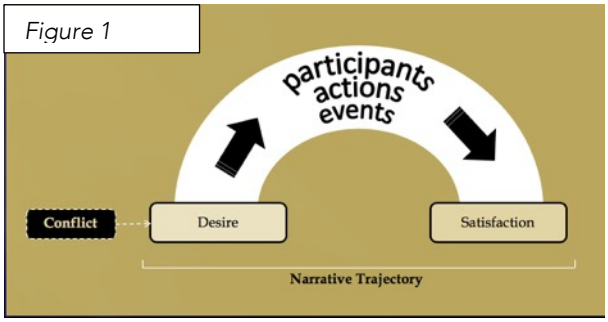
7 March 2019

In today's hypermediated information environment, we cannot have one set of ideas that explains our military actions to a domestic audience that substantially differs from the explanation to the citizens and governments where those activities take place. Nor can we effectively explain military activities, or mitigate their unfortunate side effects, after the fact—in such cases we will have ceded the information environment and lost the "battle of the narrative". Thus, in today's information environment the narratives we use to conceptualize our activities, to explain our activities, and to shape adversary behavior cannot be separate and distinct. Thus, the question asks too much. It implies a desire for a singular narrative that can address multiple goals: guide and explain US military activities (presumably for internal military consumption or possibly for a US domestic audience, or both) and also shape Chinese and Russian behavior (political behavior, military behavior, or the behavior and actions of citizens). But, a single narrative is neither possible nor appropriate.

Figure 1



While a single, universal narrative is neither possible nor appropriate to consider, understanding narratives as systems can help create nested narratives that pursue various strategic aims yet maintain both *coherence* and *fidelity*. In order to offer the reader tools for thinking and evaluating potential narrative elements to incorporate into an operations plan or strategic communication plan, this essay focuses on narratives as systems and their components, as well as the principles of fidelity and coherence—less on the selection of particular elements as a panacea, and more on thought processes to benefit the planning and decision-making processes.

Narratives as systems

Narratives are systems: they are systems made up of stories (themselves sequences of actions taken by actors in locations), characters, and the functional roles these stories and characters play—all of which participate in making meaning. The key functional roles that these stories play include: conflict, desire/goal, complicating actions, progressing actions and resolution. Key character functions include protagonist and antagonist.[25] Figure 1 illustrates a canonical arrangement of these elements in an arc progressing from conflict to resolution.[26] The role a component plays differs depending on the parameters of the system and the interactions of other narrative systems present in a given narrative landscape.[27]

It is not enough to identify particular elements (locations, actors/agents/participants, events, things); what is required is to focus on how the *system constructs meaning*. It is the interrelationship of the core conflict(s), goals, and how actions/events obstruct or progress the trajectory of actions toward the resolution. Consider two simplified abstractions of narratives of post-Cold War Russia:

1. Let's call this narrative "Russia's Geopolitical Identity as a Great Power". Here, the core conflict is Russia lack of prosperity in the wake of transition from communist regime to a democratic and capitalist system. Russia is the protagonist and the West (variously embodied by the US, NATO, EU, World Bank, etc.) is the antagonist. The desire/goal is the attainment of prosperity and power. Complicating events are the struggles of the Russian economy, uneasy democratization and unsuccessful market reforms, with blame placed on the liberal international economic order. Heroes are the oligarchs who have (seemingly) succeeded in capitalist competition leveraging Russian natural resources; Vladimir Putin's actions contesting the rules-based order are seen as progressing towards the aspirational resolution of a resurgence of Russian power. Note how at the macro-level, the components of this system (core conflict, desire, protagonist/antagonist) are abstractions of the specific actors and conflicts that make up many specific events.
2. Let's call this narrative "Russia's Corruption Problem". It is related to the narrative system above in that it shares the same core conflict: lack of prosperity and success, and this initiates a desire to satisfy the lack. However, this narrative has a different arrangement of protagonist/antagonist. In this alternative narrative, the corrupt domination of extractive industries by a quasi-governmental cabal (oligarchs and their Politburo allies) are the complicating actions, which have all but defeated the progressive promise of democratization and free market activities. Putin and the oligarchs become the antagonists, with political opposition leaders such as Navalny and Yashin representing the ideals of democracy potential.

Note that in these two simplified examples, each share the components of core conflict, key characters (Putin and oligarchs), activities (success of extractive industries) and desire (prosperity and strength). By virtue of their arrangement of elements and the functional roles they play, these two narratives shape perspective of additional events. Understood within the first narrative system, the annexation of Crimea becomes a progressing action demonstrating Russia's defiance of the West and assertion of Russian power; understood in the context of the second, Crimea becomes a symbol of corruption and manipulation of democratic principles.

Coherence and fidelity

Narrative can be seen as "a mechanism that systematically tests certain combinations and transformations of a set of basic elements and propositions about events...not simply to enumerate causes but to discover the causal efficacy of an element".[28] The causal efficacy is related to the validity of the narrative logic, which rests on two principles: *coherence* and *fidelity*. These two principles are

[25] While there has been considerable debate at least since Aristotle on the details and nuances of the components of narrative, these core elements consistently appear across most scholarly approaches to narrative.
[26] Image adapted from Halverson, et.al., (2011) *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism*, Palgrave-MacMillan.
[27] For a more detailed discussion of how narratives and their constituent stories affect one another, see Chapter 1: Bernardi, et.al., (2012) *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism and the Struggle for Strategic Influence*.
[28] Branigan, E. (1992) *Narrative Comprehension and Film*.

also useful for forecasting how new narrative elements (new stories told, new activities conducted, new events taking place) may integrate into the narrative systems present within a narrative landscape are *coherence* and *fidelity*.

Coherence is the degree to which a narrative system maintains a sense of internal logic through consistency of action and consistency of relationships between the functional roles. Russian news outlets and government press releases regularly frame actions taken by NATO as belligerent and destabilizing to Europe. Claims by Russia of military provocation following each new NATO military exercise are coherent within the first simplified Russia narrative described above. Trident Juncture, BALTOPS and Sabre Strike (as examples) fit in consistently with the actions of a belligerent antagonist bent on preventing Russia from rising to power, expanding its trade routes and controlling its sphere of influence.

Fidelity is the degree to which a narrative system rings true with narratives already believed to be true. In the first simplified Russia narrative above, reframing Vladimir Putin from a strong leader and savior of Russia to an antagonist preventing Russia from achieving its full potential lacks fidelity. Russian history is full of stories of strong figures leading Russia to greater levels of prominence, prosperity and power. Consider the sequence of heroes Peter the Great (late 17th-early 18th Century), Catherine the Great (late 18th Century), and Josef Stalin, recently reported as viewed by Russians as the "most outstanding person".[29] Stories of Putin as a strong leader, standing up to powerful European neighbors, and leading Russia to greatness, then, all exhibit narrative fidelity.

Examining narrative components

The table below offers a depiction of three simplified narrative systems (one, familiar from above; another applying to NATO; and a third, more narrowly frame context with Russia). In a more detailed examination of these narrative systems, numerous stories, events, and actions would construct the narrative components. Here these are greatly reduced to short-hand for illustrative purposes. Note how the third narrative system could nest into the larger Russia Great Power/Russia's Geopolitical Identity narrative as a progressing action component, further illustrating the usefulness of understanding narratives as systems. Charting narrative components in this way can identify areas that lack coherence, and thus erode the potency, validity and persuasive power of the narrative system. Note, for example, the inconsistency of antagonist in the NATO system (denoted by "?" in the table). Many scholars have noted a crisis of NATO identity and purpose, especially following the involvement in Afghanistan. Inconsistency of antagonist and progressing actions (along with inconsistency of member countries' definition of conflict and desire) contribute to the instability of this identity narrative.

	Conflict	Antagonist	Desire	Complicating Actions	Progressing Actions	Resolution
Russia	Lack of power, prosperity	"the West"	Power, influence, economic improvement; weakened competitors	Failed return on democracy and capitalism; sanctions;	Defiance of West in Syria; UK, US election meddling; return of Crimea	Aspirational: great power; control sphere of influence
NATO	Threats to stable, secure Europe	USSR (Cold War); ? (1990s); terrorism (2000s); Russia? (2019)	Maintain safe, peaceful secure and stable Europe; defeat aggressors	Cold War: Hungary, proxy wars, military buildups, etc.; 2000s: 9/11, 7/7;	Deterrence operations; interoper-ability exercises; NATO Expansion	Cold War: perseverance and victory;
Russia in Syria	Rules based order dom.by US marginalize Russia	US & West	Protect ally from imperialist aggressor; assert power	US and coalition troops in Syria; chemical weapons confiscation	US withdrawal; increasing Assad regime control	Russia outmaneuvers US

[29] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/06/26/for-russians-stalin-is-the-most-outstanding-figure-in-world-history-putin-is-next/?utm_term=.5e7e99d14730

Charting narrative components can illustrate how proposed activities may fit in multiple narrative systems. For example, military activities that support fledgling democracies, the rule of law, open access to markets, and protect human rights are all activities that are coherent with a US-focused narrative on supporting "western values" and maintaining the global rules-based order of the post-World War II world. However, Russia has irregularly participated in this global order, and Russian society has largely not reaped the benefits of participating post-Cold War, and thus such military activities by the US are read as complicating actions subjugating Russian society from its full potential. Thus, while such a narrative justifies and explains US activity in a variety of contexts (Syria, NATO's eastern border, Kosovo, etc.) for a US audience, it does not necessarily persuade a Russian audience.

Shaping an adversary's behavior requires disrupting or reframing the narratives motivating the undesirable behavior (actions within the narrative system defining the conflict, antagonist and desire/goals). One way to shape Russian state behavior is to offer an alternative to one of their geopolitical narratives. Russia scholars agree that restoring Russia to great power status is a primary goal/aspirational resolution of the arc of Russian activities since the rise to power of Vladimir Putin. In this narrative system, the US, NATO and EU are the antagonists governing a world order stacked against Russian success and parity. Events such as the election meddling in US and UK, the annexation of Crimea, and engagement in Syria are all actions progressing towards a resolution of Russia as a power player on the world stage. An alternative narrative would maintain the aspirational resolution (great power), but would reframe the core conflict and thus the chief antagonists. This narrative would require activities and events replacing US/NATO/EU as the chief antagonist, thereby changing the focus of Russia's combative activities (e.g., a new, mutual antagonist). Alternatively, a *counter*-narrative strategy would be to seed the narrative landscape with stories (i.e., sequences of actions by participants in locations, or military activities) that participated in the Russian narrative system as an overwhelming complicating action—a complicating action that would prevent the achievement of the narrative's aspirational resolution of return to Great Power status. If perceived as an insurmountable obstruction to achieving resolution, then this complicating action would disrupt the coherence of the Russian narrative arc (the theory of Mutually Assured Destruction rests on this very type of narrative incoherence). The "Russia's Corruption Problem" offers an alternative narrative that destabilizes the coherence of the Great Power: it reframes the lack of prosperity among the Russian populace as the result of corrupt behavior of oligarchs. When conditions for average Russians do not improve despite Great Power progressing actions, then this alternative will gain coherence.

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8 March 2019

Such a narrative should emphasize:

1. Sovereign independence of nation-states
2. Peaceful resolution of conflicts and disagreements
3. Respect for the rule of law
4. America's strong (military) commitment to its allies.

Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Zaborowski

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11 March 2019

Due to diverse nature and organic differences between Chinese and Russian ways of thinking, ambitions and behaviors, the US will have to develop strategies that allow it to properly address each one separately but also allow it to cope with potential results of tightening Chinese-Russian collaboration.

Russian opportunism requires pragmatic, straight to the point and decisive responses, since strength and power are the only means that Russia respects. It is not about escalation, but it is about being consistent and being able and ready to respond to Russian actions. It is not about disrespect or disregard, but it is about respect to thy adversary and realization to whom we are talking to. Regardless of how much the West would like to trust Russian leaders and believe in a Russia that is reliable, cooperative and willing to follow common rules and laws, Russians will simply remain who they are and will sooner or later reach to their native, generic attitudes and ways of thinking. Russia not only declares but also pursues the notion of countering the US. Putin's Russia will most likely continue pursuing an old Bolshevik method of putting the enemies to a test: "push the enemy with a bayonet. If it goes in easily, keep on pushing. If it meets steel, pull back and try another spot." Therefore, Russia's behavior under Putin will continue to push the bayonet, be it in Georgia (2008), be it in Ukraine (2014 and on), be it violations of International Air Space, be it kidnappings (just like the kidnapping of an Estonian officer in 2015), be it aggressive cyber-attacks, or be it assassinations of those inconvenient to Putin (Skripal, Litvineko, and many others). This strategy towards Russia requires maintaining good and mutually beneficial relationships with allies, especially those having history and experience with Russia. Unique, first hand experiences and deep understanding of Russian ways of thinking and behavior seem crucial in not only countering the Russian behavior, but also shaping it.

Chinese long-term and vast strategies, on the other hand, require significantly different approaches. Beijing investments and money are much welcome by governments around the world. But this willingness not always comes with proper understanding of the potential consequences of falling into the Chinese debt trap are (examples of Sri Lanka, Malaysia or Venezuela). Contrary to that, however, the populace of countries targeted by China seem to have much more awareness and concerns about crawling, silent Chinese expansion, what seems especially apparent in Central Asian States. Citizens of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan present even some amount sinophobia and call for their governments to not allow untamed 'Chinese invasion'. From this perspective, the US could focus on addressing governments willing to easily accept Chinese money and educate them about dangers hiding behind the debt trap. Furthermore, US-owned or US-led tailored investment projects could provide alternatives to Beijing's offers. At the same time, the natural reluctance among populaces towards China should be highlighted, supported and promoted. Such a comprehensive approach would even further benefit from mature, enduring and responsible alliances. Alliances ready to stand together and still against waves of Chinese expansions, whenever needed.

Another important aspect of addressing Chinese strategies and actions hides behind understanding the complexity and vastness of the Great Rejuvenation and all corresponding projects. Beijing's designed plan is so vast and multi-vectored and encompass every part of our globe, and attempt to extract the US. The plan comes with so many routes, paths and interdependencies, that focusing just on Asia

and Indo-Pacific is unlikely to stop it any more. Proper understanding of all connectivity, interdependencies and dynamics between China and each of the states and regions connecting to Beijing is needed for there to be any hope of developing the policies and mechanisms needed to cope with a China-centered scenario of the future. From this perspective, Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern European allies should play some crucial roles in US strategies to counter Chinese expansion. The US can still enjoy very positive attitudes, trust, and 'battle hardened' friendships within the territories between the Mediterranean, Black, and Baltic seas. All the countries squeezed between growing German power and reemerging Russian power will need strong and reliable allies in order to preserve their sovereignties and independence. In return, once their independencies prevail and economies build up to allow them to become better and stronger partners, they will more than willingly repay with decisive and unbroken support to oppose any malign or trickery actions. However, if left alone or not supported in their contemporary struggles, those smaller and weaker countries will have no choice but to bend the knee to new hegemonies or align with emerging powers. Therefore, it is in the US's best interests to not neglect those relationships, since they will play a significant role in either balancing the future Chinese-European links or contributing and supporting those links.

Subject Matter Expert Biographies

Dean Cheng

Senior Research Fellow, Asian Studies Center, Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy (Heritage Foundation)

Dean Cheng brings detailed knowledge of China's military and space capabilities to bear as The Heritage Foundation's research fellow on Chinese political and security affairs. He specializes in China's military and foreign policy, in particular its relationship with the rest of Asia and with the United States. Cheng has written extensively on China's military doctrine, technological implications of its space program and "dual use" issues associated with the communist nation's industrial and scientific infrastructure. He previously worked for 13 years as a senior analyst, first with Science Applications International Corp. (SAIC), the Fortune 500 specialist in defense and homeland security, and then with the China Studies division of the Center for Naval Analyses, the federally funded research institute. Before entering the private sector, Cheng studied China's defense-industrial complex for a congressional agency, the Office of Technology Assessment, as an analyst in the International Security and Space Program. Cheng has appeared on public affairs shows such as *John McLaughlin's One on One* and programs on National Public Radio, CNN International, BBC World Service and International Television News (ITN). He has been interviewed by or provided commentary for publications such as *Time* magazine, *The Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg News*, *Jane's Defense Weekly*, South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* and Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*. Cheng has spoken at the National Space Symposium, National Defense University, the Air Force Academy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Eisenhower Center for Space and Defense Studies. Cheng earned a bachelor's degree in politics from Princeton University in 1986 and studied for a doctorate at MIT. He and his wife reside in Vienna, Va.

Dr. Skye Cooley

Assistant Professor, Mass Communication and Strategic Communication (Oklahoma State University)

Skye Cooley (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is an assistant professor in the School of Media and Strategic Communications at Oklahoma State University. His research interests are in developing narrative and rhetorical analytical tools and processes that can be applied to both media content and functions. Dr. Cooley has examined narrative across a wide variety of international media in support of efforts by the US military to better understand and respond to events in the international system.

Dr. Nicholas J. Cull

Professor, Annenberg School for Communication (University of Southern California)

Nicholas J. Cull is professor of Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication, where he established the prioneering Master's Program in Public Diplomacy. Originally from Britain, he has published widely as a historian of the role of the media in international affairs, including two volumes on the history on the United States Information Agency. His latest book is 'Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age' (Polity, 2019). He is a regular speaker at foreign ministries and diplomatic academies around the world and has acted as a consultant for the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Royal Netherlands Foreign Ministry and the Internet Corporation for Assigned

Names and Numbers among others. He is currently visiting fellow at the Reuter's Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford.

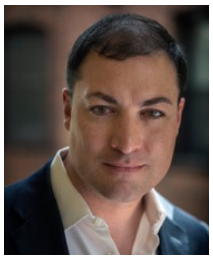
Dr. John Delury

Yonsei University

Professor John Delury is a historian of modern China and expert on US-China relations and Korean Peninsula affairs. He is the author, with Orville Schell, of Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-first Century, and his articles have appeared in the Journal of Asian Studies, Asian Perspective and Late Imperial China. He contributes regularly to Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, Global Asia, and 38 North. He is a senior fellow of the Asia Society and Pacific Century Institute and member of the Council of Foreign Relations, National Committee on US-China Relations and National Committee on North Korea. Prior to joining the Yonsei faculty in 2010, Dr. Delury offered courses at Brown, Columbia, Yale and Peking University, and served as founding associate director of the Asia Society Center on US-China Relations in New York. He is currently writing a book about US-China relations during the Cold War, focusing on the case of imprisoned CIA officer Jack Downey. He is also working on a series of articles on China-North Korea relations and co-authored book project with Patrick McEachern on North Korean politics and history.

Dr. Sean McFate

Professor (National Defense University)



Dr. Sean McFate is an author, novelist and foreign policy expert. He is a professor of strategy at the National Defense University and Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Washington, DC. Additionally, he is an Advisor to Oxford University's Centre for Technology and Global Affairs. A specialist in national security strategy, McFate was a think tank scholar at the RAND Corporation, Atlantic Council, Bipartisan Policy Center, and New America Foundation. Recently, he was a visiting Scholar at Oxford University's Changing Character of War Program, where he conducted research on future war. McFate's career began as a paratrooper and officer in the U.S. Army's storied 82nd Airborne Division. He served under Stan McChrystal and David Petraeus, and graduated from elite training programs, such as Jungle Warfare School in Panama. He was also a Jump Master. McFate then became a private military contractor. Among his many experiences, he dealt with warlords, raised armies for U.S. interest, rode with armed groups in the Sahara, conducted strategic reconnaissance for oil companies, transacted arms deals in Eastern Europe, and helped prevent an impending genocide in the Rwanda region. In the world of international business, McFate was a Vice President at TD International, a boutique political risk consulting firm with offices in Washington, Houston, Singapore and Zurich. Additionally, he was a manager at DynCorp International, a consultant at BearingPoint (now Deloitte Consulting) and an associate at Booz Allen Hamilton. McFate's newest book is *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder* (William Morrow). Admiral Jim Stavridis (retired), the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, said: "Stunning. Sean McFate is a new Sun Tzu." McFate also authored *The Modern Mercenary: Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order* (Oxford University Press) which explains how the privatization of war is changing warfare. The Economist called it a "fascinating and disturbing book." McFate also write fiction based on his military experiences. He co-authored the novels *Shadow War* and *Deep Black* (William Morrow), part of the Tom Locke series. *New York Times* #1 bestselling author Mark Greaney said: "I was blown away…. simply one of the most entertaining and intriguing books I've read in quite some time." A coveted speaker, McFate has appeared before the British House of Commons, top universities and popular audience venues. He has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Policy*, *Politico*, *Daily Beast*, *CNBC*, *Vice Magazine*, *Aeon*, *War on the Rocks*, *Military Review* and *African Affairs*. He has appeared on CNN's *Amanpour*, MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, *Fox and Friends*, NPR, BBC, *Economist*, Vice/HBO, The Discovery Channel, and American Heroes Channel. As a scholar, he has authored eight book chapters in edited academic volumes and published a monograph for the U.S. Army War College on how to raise foreign armies. McFate holds a BA from Brown University, MPP from the Harvard Kennedy

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Dr. Nicholas Michelsen

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Dr. Nicholas Michelsen is Senior Lecturer in the Department of War Studies, King's College London. He designed and created the BA International Relations, and lectures on Strategic Communications, International Relations Theory, Global Politics, Transnational Movements Networks and Revolutionary Strategy. He supervises PhD's on a range of topics. He is the author of many articles and book chapters. His book "Politics and Suicide: the philosophy of political self-destruction", was recently released in paperback by *Routledge: Interventions*. He is also editor of the Journal *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*. His current research focusses on international communications practices, norms and the role of the private sector.

Dr. Christopher Paul

Senior Social Scientist (RAND Corporation)

Dr. Christopher Paul is a Senior Social Scientist at the RAND Corporation, where he is the principal investigator for a number of defense and security related research projects. He also teaches at Carnegie Mellon University and in the Pardee RAND Graduate School. Prior to joining RAND full-time in July of 2002, he worked at RAND as adjunct staff for six years. He spent academic year 2001-02 on the UCLA statistics faculty. During the course of his more than two decades in policy and defense research, Paul has developed methodological competencies in comparative historical and case study approaches, quantitative analysis, and evaluation research. His current and recent research efforts include analyses supporting operations in the information environment, security cooperation, counterinsurgency, irregular/unconventional warfare, and operations in cyberspace. Paul has authored or co-authored dozens of RAND reports and journal articles. Recent RAND reports include RR-1925/1-A, *Lessons from Others for Future U.S. Army Operations in and Through the Information Environment*, RR-1166-1, *Dominating Duffer's Domain: Lessons for the U.S. Marine Corps Information Operations Practitioner*, RR-1742, *Monitoring Social Media: Lessons for Future Department of Defense Social Media Analysis in Support of Information Operations*, PE-198, *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It*, RR-809/1 *Assessing and Evaluating Department of Defense Efforts to Inform, Influence, and Persuade: Desk Reference*, and RR-1600-A, *Tactical Cyber: Building a Strategy for Cyber Support to Corps and Below*. Commercial books include *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates*, and *Information Operations –Doctrine and Practice: A Reference Handbook*. Paul has spoken, presented, taught, testified, or lectured before the House Armed Services Committee, for NATO audiences, to defense audiences in Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, and the Netherlands, at the National Defense University, at the Naval Postgraduate School, at the Army War College, at the Naval War College, at the School of Advanced Military Studies – Army Command and General Staff College, at AETC Air Command and Staff College, at the Center for Army Analysis, at the USA/USMC COIN Center, at the Air Force Special Operations School, and at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute, and at the LeMay Center, among others. Paul holds a PhD, MA, and BA in sociology, all from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Dr. Laura Roselle

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Laura Roselle is Professor of Political Science and Policy Studies at Elon University. Roselle holds degrees from Emory University (Math/Computer Science & Russian) and Stanford University (Ph.D. Political Science). She has served as president of the International Communication Section of the International Studies Association and of the Internet Technology and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association. She is the author of *Media and the Politics of Failure: Great Powers, Communication Strategies, and Military Defeats* (Palgrave, 2006 & 2011), and with co-authors Alister Miskimmon & Ben O'Loughlin *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (Routledge, 2013) and *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives & International Relations* (University of Michigan Press, 2017). Roselle is co-editor of the journal *Media, War and Conflict*, and co-editor of the book series, Routledge Studies in Global Information, Politics and Society. She won the 2017 Distinguished Scholar Award from the International Communication Section of the International Studies Association.

Dr. Scott Ruston

Research Scientist (Arizona State University)

Scott Ruston is a Research Scientist with Arizona State University's Global Security Initiative, a university-wide interdisciplinary hub for researching complex challenges in the global security arena, where he leads the GSI's Narrative, Disinformation and Strategic Influence research pillar. Also a member of ASU's Center for Strategic Communication, Professor Ruston's research focuses on the socio-cultural dimensions of the information domain. He has applied his expertise in narrative theory and media studies to a variety of counter violent extremism and counter violent extremist ideology research contexts, including: analysis of extremist narratives; strategies for counter or alternative narratives; and the neurobiology of narrative comprehension. He is co-author of *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism and the Struggle for Strategic Influence* (Rutgers University Press, 2012), as well as articles on strategic communication, extremist videos and the narrative potential of new media technologies. He has presented widely on topics intersecting media, narrative/counter-narrative and terrorism to military, academic and non-governmental organization audiences. Current research projects focus on analysis of propaganda and information operations in so-called Gray Zone operations, as well as narrative-based interventions influencing attitude, belief and behavior in organizational culture.

Dr. Jaganath Sankaran

Assistant Professor (University of Texas at Austin)

Dr. Sankaran works on problems that lie at the intersection of international security and science & technology. Sankaran spent the first four years of his career as a defense scientist with the Indian Missile R&D establishment. His work in weapons design and development led to his interests in matters such as the balance of military power, strategic stability, and arms control. Sankaran received his Ph.D. (in international security Policy) in 2012, writing his dissertation on the role of deterrence, dissuasion, denial and arms control in preserving peace and stability in outer space. The current focus of Sankaran's research is Asia-Pacific. Sankaran studies the growing military and nuclear weapons capabilities of China and the counter military balancing undertaken by the United States, Japan, India and other states. Sankaran has also worked on U.S.-Russia strategic stability and nuclear arms control. Sankaran has held fellowships at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University and

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Lieutenant Colonel Maciej Zaborowski

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Lt Col Maciej Zaborowski is a Polish Air Force officer, currently assigned at Combined Strategic Analysis Group (CSAG), CCJ-5, US Central Command. He serves there as analyst and a member of international sort of 'think tank' structure, unique to USCENTCOM. Lt Col Maciej Zaborowski entered military in 1993 (Military University of Technology, Warsaw; 5-year Master of Science in aviation course, commissioned officer in 1997). He began his professional carrier as a member of 36th Special Air Transportation Regiment (maintenance engineer positions, also JAK-40 and Tupolew 154M flying crew member). Prior to his current assignment, Lt Col Zaborowski served at number of positions in the Polish Ministry of National Defense and the General Command of the Polish Armed Forces as an analyst, defense planner and strategic planner. He also served at the NATO Supreme Allied Command Transformation Headquarters (Norfolk, Virginia, 2008-2011) as Curriculum Design Officer and Concept Developer, and in European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (Field Office Zugdidi, 2013-2014). He is a graduate of National Defense University postgraduate studies, with focus on leadership and negotiations. He is also a graduate of George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Germany (Program of Advanced Security Studies). His current efforts focus on Great Power Competition, with highlight on Central Asia, Russia, Kazakhstan and China.

Author Biographies

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Analyst (NSI, Inc.)

Eric Kuznar is an analyst at NSI, Inc. where he began working at the company in 2019. Prior to becoming a full-time employee, Kuznar worked part time for NSI while completing his Master of Arts (MA) in Political Science at Ball State University. While at Ball State, he completed and presented research on the impact of prescription opioid abuse on Midwestern Counties and their socioeconomic performance. Before pursuing his MA in Political Science, he completed a Bachelor of Arts at Ball State with a dual major in Telecommunications and Journalism, where he covered stories throughout Central Indiana writing for TheCurrent, which owns a string of newspapers in Indianapolis, Indiana, as well as the Ball State Daily News.

George Popp

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George Popp is a Senior Analyst at NSI, Inc. where he conducts research and analysis on a broad range of multidisciplinary analysis projects that focus on understanding the political, economic, and social dynamics of emerging conflict situations and environments throughout the world. The bulk of George's work has been in support of NSI's government initiatives, particularly leading and contributing to human behavior analytics efforts completed for the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) program on behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in support of direct requests from US Combatant Commanders to the Department of Defense. George has also supported NSI's commercial initiatives, conducting business intelligence analyses for clients in the video game industry. George's degree is in Economics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.