

American War Narratives: An Analytic Study and Linkage to National Will

A Monograph

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2016

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10-05-2016		2. REPORT TYPE Monograph		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) JUL 2015 - MAY 2016	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE American War Narratives: An Analytic Study and Linkage to National Will				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Maj David J. Grabow, US Marine Corps				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School of Advanced Military Studies ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-2134				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT This monograph hypothesizes that effective American war narratives have consisted of components that are strongly associated with values that relate to American national identity at the time of a conflict. More specifically, this study uses the aspects of desirability and feasibility to analyze each case study in an effort to identify relevant war narrative components. Desirability is examined by analyzing two criteria: what is at stake, and is war worth it? Whereas feasibility is examined by answering the questions: who is the enemy, and how is war going to solve the problem? This methodology is applied to three separate case studies of American historical conflicts where military force was used: the American Revolutionary War, the Spanish–American War, and the Korean Conflict. This monograph concludes that central to all American war narratives is an element that pertains to the lack of humane treatment of people. This element ultimately took different forms and covered a wide spectrum that stretches from denial of basic civil rights to torture and unjustifiable killings. Lastly, this monograph found that the historical context that led to war set the conditions that guided the development and dissemination of the war narrative in terms of substance and target audience, respectively.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS national will, war narratives, American Revolutionary War, Spanish-American War, Korean Conflict					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	50	

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Monograph Approval Page

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Abstract

American War Narratives: An Analytic Study and Linkage to National Will, by Maj David J. Grabow, 50 pages.

This monograph hypothesizes that effective American war narratives have consisted of components that are strongly associated with values that relate to American national identity at the time of a conflict. More specifically, this study examines the war narrative used to legitimize three different US wars using the aspects of desirability and feasibility in an effort to identify relevant war narrative components. Desirability is examined by analyzing two criteria: what is at stake, and is war worth it? Feasibility is examined by answering the questions: who is the enemy, and how is war going to solve the problem? This methodology is applied to studies of: the American Revolutionary War, the Spanish–American War, and the Korean Conflict. This monograph concludes that central to all American war narratives is an element that pertains to the lack of humane treatment of people. This element ultimately took different forms and covered a wide spectrum that stretches from denial of basic civil rights to torture and unjustifiable killings. Lastly, this monograph found that the historical context that led to war set the conditions that guided the development and dissemination of the war narrative in terms of substance and target audience, respectively.

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Introduction

Committing national resources to fight a war is one of the most difficult decisions that policy makers face while executing their official duties on behalf of a nation. One of the more significant subsequent decisions that must be made pertains to the selection and crafting of the specific war narrative that will be used to justify the commitment of national resources in a combat role. Political parties, social organizations, and government institutions have often incorporated symbols, historical events, and artifacts together to form a logic that justifies and explains their reasons for action, thus creating a war narrative.¹ As a result, developing an effective war narrative is a crucial aspect that political elites need to consider prior to committing national resources to a combat mission.

Since the American Revolutionary War, the United States has engaged in numerous conflicts where national will has been tested and has had an impact on the conduct of military operations. Experiences in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam are only a few examples where national will shaped the strategic, operational, and tactical decisions of our nation's policy makers. Historical decisions to employ atomic weapons, when to terminate military operations in a conflict, and what rules of engagement (ROE) will be employed during a conflict are just a few examples of decisions where national will can have a significant affect. War narratives are used to shape national will and communicate a justification for the use of force and therefore can be linked to Just War Theory. This is because the narrative serves as the vehicle that disseminates the justification of how and why each war is fought, and through each of its phases: *Jus Ad*

¹ Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 1-9.

*Bellum, Jus In Bello, and Jus Post Bellum.*² Since national will does not hold constant, examining its influencing factors is required to predicatively shape them for future national interest purposes. Some of these factors include aspects such as: public opinion, successful progress of combat operations, and the moral value of the cause of the conflict just to name a few. However, another component that has historically influenced national will has been the specific war narrative used by policy makers to justify and explain combat operations.³

“A narrative is a story that gives meaning to individuals, objects, and events. Individuals, groups, organizations, and countries all have narratives with many components that reflect and reveal how they define themselves.”⁴ The lack of a clear and effective war narrative can have a corrosive and even destructive effect on the nation’s ability to most effectively wage war in numerous ways. One example is that it erodes a nation’s will to continue combat operations because the casual linkage between the originally stated purpose of the conflict and the actual realized costs, no longer exists in the eyes of the domestic population. The numerous costs of the war are no longer considered to be worth the benefit and the war can start to appear to be morally or economically unjustifiable based on the various practical costs, or perceived costs, placed on the domestic population.

Analysis of War

In order to understand and follow the linkage between national will, war narratives, and the conduct of war, this research needs to start with the definition of war itself. War has been

² Alexander Moseley, “Just War Theory,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed 11 December 2015, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/justwar>.

³ Jeffrey J. Kubiak, *War Narratives and the American National Will in War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 17.

⁴ ATP 5-0.1, 1-9.

defined as being “a violent clash of interests between or among organized groups characterized by the use of military force.”⁵ The essence of war is characterized in broader terms as being a violent struggle between multiple, independent, and irreconcilable wills that are attempting to impose themselves on one another. Therefore, the object of war is for one belligerent to impose its will on the other belligerent in an attempt to achieve their strategic aims.⁶ In order to accomplish this ultimate end state, each belligerent is required to demonstrate national will in a manner that is consistent with the definition of perseverance. The modern civilian definitions of these terms reflect a generic understanding that is slightly different when used in a military context. Generically, perseverance refers to persistence, steadfastness, and constancy.⁷ When used in a military context, perseverance means to ensure the commitment necessary to attain the national strategic end state.⁸ It should involve a patient and resolute pursuit of national goals since many situations present underlying causes that are often elusive and less than obvious.⁹ The rigorous and demanding nature of certain national conflicts can require an exceptional level of dedication to attain mission accomplishment, thus necessitating the concept of perseverance, or national will, to achieve success.

⁵ Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting* (Washington DC: Department of the Navy, 1997), 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

⁷ *Webster’s Large Print Dictionary*, “perseverance” (Blue Bell, PA: Kappa Books Publishers, LLC, 2012), 166.

⁸ Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 4-2.

⁹ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), A-4.

National Will and War Narratives

One of the numerous factors that contributes to a nation's will to persevere through the entirety of a war, or that brings a nation to war in the first place, is the war narrative. This is because the war narrative's initial purpose is to serve as the justification to initiate the war and then to sustain it through to the conclusion. Effective war narratives require elements of both desirability and feasibility. First, the war narrative contextualizes the justification for military employment and therefore explains why military force is appropriate to address a public policy problem prior to the actual use of force. Second, it serves to reinforce the acceptability of the use of military force once military force has already been initiated, but also to demonstrate that the stated military objectives are feasible.¹⁰ "The war narrative is also not completely static. A war narrative can evolve over time in response to events as they happen. To avoid a dramatic change that would threaten the credibility of the narrative, changes generally occur by highlighting one plot line in the original narrative while submerging or minimizing less compelling or completely flawed ones."¹¹

Research Question/Hypothesis/Methodology

Desirability and feasibility are qualitative aspects of a war narrative that are determined by certain components of the narrative. Identifying and examining these specific components will facilitate a pattern analysis that highlights useful trends that can develop effective future war narratives. As a result, policy makers will be better informed to craft more appropriate war narratives that unite all of America's resources when it decides to engage in future military operations. However, the key question remains regarding war narratives and the history of the

¹⁰ Kubiak, 30.

¹¹ Ibid., 29.

United States – during times of conflict, what have been the key components to building effective war narratives that relate to the categories of desirability and feasibility?

Effective American war narratives consist of components that are both strongly associated with American values and its national identity, and also convincingly reflect aspects of desirability and feasibility. As a result, this monograph research will be conducted in four steps. The first step was to define and explain the terms national will and war narrative as well as their significance in a broader war effort. Linking these terms to the definition of war as well as the object and essence of war will serve to highlight the relevance of national will and war narratives in a larger context. Subsequent historical research will primarily focus on identifying the war narratives within three selected American wars: the American Revolutionary War, Spanish–American War, and the Korean Conflict.

Desirability/Feasibility

American values, as they are linked to desirability in this research, can loosely be traced back to the foundation of the country through the writings of such individuals as Thomas Paine. Paine communicates some of these values through his description of the differences between a society and a government. He states, “Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first a patron, the last a punisher. Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil.”¹² This quote demonstrates the distinction in which society and government are viewed. Thus, Paine promotes the ideals of democracy and democratic government as a means to maximize the goodness inherent to societies and marginalize the perceived evils of government. This theme of the people being associated with goodness and

¹² Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2008), 9.

virtue while government is associated with evil is often seen in war narratives in American history when developing the aspect of desirability and feasibility.

The second step will be to conduct analysis on three case studies of American armed conflicts where war narratives were visible and instrumental: the American Revolutionary War, the Spanish–American War, and the Korean Conflict. This particular sample population of American conflicts was chosen for several reasons. Collectively, these three conflicts represent a time-span of approximately 175 years of American history from 1776 to the 1950s. Therefore, this study holds constant the variable of time in order to ensure high validity for this study; thus making the findings generalizable. Additionally, each individual conflict brings a unique set of characteristics that also increases the generalizability of this study’s findings. The American Revolution was chosen because it was the first war in American history and, established a national identity and the original war narrative and has the potential to set the conditions for future wars and their associated justifications. The Spanish–American War was selected because it was the first war that America would fight in an expeditionary capacity away from the mainland. The Mexican-American War was considered but not selected for this study since America shares a common land border with Mexico. In contrast, the Spanish–American War required American war efforts overseas to a nearby Cuba but also to the Philippines. Lastly, the Korean Conflict is an example of a major commitment of American forces where Congress never officially declared war. Since a declaration of war is the nation’s most formal manner to allow the people, through their elected representatives in Congress, to announce the initiation of war, it serves as a useful tool to capture the war narrative. As a result, when war is not officially declared, the omission of a formal declaration can impact on the war narrative itself, which will be examined in this study.

The third step will be the identification of the key components of each war narrative for these respective conflicts by examining the declarations of war, presidential speeches, and State of the Union Addresses, as well as popular slogans and media perspectives of the time. Each of the three American wars and conflicts will have its war narratives evaluated against the two criteria of desirability and feasibility. Desirability is defined as answering the questions: what is at stake, and is it worth it?¹³ Desirability refers to whether or not the conflict is worth it in the minds of American citizens and in the minds of the political elites as they perceive it to be an effective justification to initiate and sustain war. For the purpose of this study, components of desirability will be identified primarily from the perspective of the political elites and, to a lesser extent, from the standpoint of the citizenry. Feasibility, on the other hand, is defined as being the assessment of a policy's likelihood of success upon implementation.¹⁴ Feasibility addresses the questions: who is the enemy and how are they defined, and how is war going to solve the problem? This will also be viewed from the perspective of the political elites and speaks to the extent to which the rationale and justification for engaging in armed conflict is indeed achievable. The goals and aims of the war need to be attainable in tangible terms where the civilian population can clearly see progress as well as failure. When the war narrative breaks down, it fails to adequately explain to the public both the necessity of the mission and the effectiveness of the strategy used to accomplish it.¹⁵

¹³ Kubiak, 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵ Errol G. MacEachern, "Friendly Combat Casualties and Operational Narratives," (monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2015).

American Revolutionary War

The first case study to be examined is the American Revolution and its respective war narrative. One of the most reliable documents to find and reconstruct the war narrative for the Revolutionary War is the Declaration of Independence that was adopted by Congress on 4 July 1776. Herein, the colonists addressed quite specifically and boldly the question pertaining to what is at stake. In fact, the answer is most apparent in the very title of this document when it refers to the word independence. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed national independence from Great Britain as the strategic aim and the primary stakes of the war. In essence, this document tells the story and forms the war narrative that would ultimately serve as the motivation for the American people to engage in the worthy, and thus desirable, endeavor of fighting the war. Within this document, the component of independence can be seen in its opening paragraph where it states:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.¹⁶

The component of national independence served as one of the strongest components to communicating the stakes of the war; but, not surprisingly, it was not the only one.

The notion of creating a representative government, in order to give each citizen a voice in the governance of the colonies, proved to be another desirable component of the Revolutionary War narrative. The formation of a representative government was clearly another aspect that communicated what was at stake and can be seen in popular slogans of the time that refer to no taxation without representation. The yearning for a representative government was sparked by a growing distrust of the British government by the colonists. According to historian Bernard

¹⁶ *The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence*, pamphlet, 2d ed. (Washington, DC: National Center for Constitutional Studies, 2010), 35.

Bailyn, “suspicion that the ever-present, latent danger of an active conspiracy of power against liberty was becoming manifest within the British Empire, assuming specific form and developing in coordinated phases, rose in the consciousness of a large segment of the American population before any of the famous political events of the struggle with England took place.”¹⁷ Therefore, one of the remedies to correct such a conspiracy of British oppression was for the colonists to have legal representation within the British parliament to act on their behalf during the crafting of legislation and other legal and political issues. This suspicion and distrust of the British Crown had grown in the collective American psyche for half a century or more.¹⁸ The popular slogan of the time that refers to taxation without representation manifested itself in specific incidents. In 1765, Patrick Henry wrote the Virginia Resolves, and made clear the taxation without representation argument. This same year the Stamp Act Congress formed for eighteen days and concluded:

This it is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted right of Englishmen, that no taxes be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives. That the people of these colonies are not, and from their local circumstances cannot be, represented in the House of Commons in Great Britain. That the only representatives of the people of these colonies, are persons chosen therein by themselves, and that no taxes ever have been, or can be constitutionally imposed on them, but by their respective legislatures.¹⁹

The desirability of this narrative continued to grow over time and was instrumental in sparking support for the American Revolution itself. Although the slogan of “no taxation without representation” seems to be less about declaring war and more about trying to reconcile grievances with the British Crown, it did help to shift the momentum in the direction of an

¹⁷ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁹ National Constitution Center, “250 years ago today: ‘No taxation without representation!’” accessed 31 January 2016, <http://blog.constitutioncenter.org/2015/10/250-years-ago-today-no-taxation-without-representation/>.

eventual war. This is evidenced by the fact that the spirit of the “no taxation without representation” component was subsequently captured in the list of grievances within the Declaration of Independence itself where it states:

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.²⁰

Therefore, this once popular slogan had now transitioned to being a part of the official war narrative once published within this historic document. Its inclusion proves its effectiveness in terms of desirability among the political elites and the American population who were being represented by the Continental Congress.

The final component of the war narrative that addresses what was at stake relates to the concept of individual freedom and liberties. This component of the war narrative focused on a common theme that pertains to humane principles for individual citizens, and the limited role of government and its relationship to the people it governs. At the individual level, the Revolution sought to ensure that people be treated humanely by acknowledging life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as automatic ideals that are not subject to infringement by a government or leader. Ideals such as personal freedom, redressing of grievances to one’s government, and fair trials amongst one’s peers were only a few examples of how this could be achieved.²¹ Regarding the

²⁰ *The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence*, 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

government's role and relationship with the people it governs, a representative republic would serve and govern the people, and not rule them. It would be responsive to an electorate that allowed it to provide governance to them and could be held accountable to the citizens and by other mechanisms of checks and balances to ensure tyranny could never reign.²² Therefore, another purpose of a representative government was to ensure individual freedoms and liberties and thus a linkage and casual relationship is formed between these two components of the war narrative: representative government and individual freedoms and liberties.

This aspect of the war narrative pertaining to individual freedoms and liberties became an American virtue and contributed to generating support among Americans to ultimately fight the British successfully. This is clearly outlined in the American Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.²³

The desirability of individual freedoms and liberties proved to be such an effective component of the war narrative that it was seen elsewhere in practice, beyond the mere words included in the Declaration of Independence. It was seen demonstrated in the American policy when offering quarter to British soldiers as prisoners. An example of the American policy that offers quarter to prisoners can be illustrated through the Hessian experience. After the Battle of Trenton, Hessian captives could not believe they were being treated with decency and kindness. This so impressed the Hessians that of the 13,988 that survived the war, 3,194 (23%) decided to stay in America and many more would later emigrate with their families.²⁴ This would not have

²² *The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence*, 36-39.

²³ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁴ David H. Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 379.

been the case if these Hessians did not feel and experience the American values embodied in the Revolution. This level of restraint, exercised in this manner not only diminished the British and Hessian will to fight (at the individual soldier level) but simultaneously emboldened the Americans belief that they were indeed fighting for a just cause.²⁵ The American quartering policy was so uncharacteristic in warfare of this time that it clearly had a profoundly positive impact on the British and Hessian forces as evidenced by subsequent emigration patterns following the conclusion of the war. The Hessians were so inspired by these values that they would eventually return to America with their families and live out the remainder of their lives as private citizens. This demonstrated that even the Hessians experienced first-hand what the Americans were fighting for and were both persuaded and inspired by the humane treatment component of the war narrative.

The next test of desirability requires analysis that addresses the question of whether or not war is worth the effort. Is it worth the effort to achieve these previously stated components of national independence, a representative government, and individual freedoms and liberties? The last paragraph of the Declaration of Independence once again provides a good starting point for finding the answer.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.²⁶

²⁵ Fisher, 368.

²⁶ *The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence*, 38, 39.

The last sentence of this paragraph is the most significant since the drafters and signers of this document state boldly and publicly they were willing to lose everything to achieve the stakes of this war in no uncertain terms. This unequivocal statement is the clearest and most official, and therefore legitimate, example of how the signers would answer the question - is it worth it? Quite obviously, the answer is a resounding yes.

Other examples that answered the question of whether the cost of war was worth the effort can be seen in the words and actions of influential individuals of the time. The capture and execution of Nathan Hale by the British set the conditions that led to one of the war's most famous and patriotic quotes. Hale, who was executed on 22 September 1776, was an American spy for the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. While serving on an intelligence-gathering mission in New York City, he was captured by the British and executed without a trial. During Hale's execution he famously proclaimed, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."²⁷ Hale's presumed last words provide the answer to the question - is it worth it? Considering the circumstances in which he made this statement only strengthens and gives a higher level of credibility to the authenticity of the sentiment of the statement.

Many years earlier, an equally influential American colonist also made a provocative statement that answers the question of whether war would be worth the effort. Virginian delegate Patrick Henry stated on 20 March 1775, "Give me liberty or give me death!" Henry made this statement in the context of offering a proposal to raise and organize a militia unit with the intent to fight the British.²⁸ Not only considering the words of his statement but also the context in which he gave them, clearly indicates that this leader in the independence movement believed

²⁷ Thomas B. Allen, *George Washington, Spymaster: How the Americans Outspied the British and Won the Revolutionary War* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2004), 43.

²⁸ The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, "Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death!" accessed 14 February 2016, <http://www.history.org/almanack/life/politics/giveme.cfm>.

that without achieving liberty, he would prefer death. Henry's and Hale's statements, although anecdotal both provide insight as to the conviction with which leaders of this movement believed it to be a worthy cause at the time. It was such a clear demonstration of their conviction that these quotes have endured the test of time and are held as patriotic symbols of defiance against the British to promote national independence for America.

If the statements within the Declaration of Independence and by two historic figures of the time are not enough to answer the question of whether or not the war was worth the effort, then Americans' reactions to British war policies will further clarify. Although Americans had to win the war in a way that was consistent with the values of their cause (and war narrative) of expanding humanitarian ideals, the British were under no such constraint. British policies of offering quarter to American prisoners was very different. Whereas General Washington very painfully refrained from imposing a death punishment to Dr. Benjamin Church for serving as a British spy, he did not because Congress had not yet passed any laws about treason or espionage. Instead, Washington's restraint took the form of a convened court martial where Church was sent to a Connecticut prison as opposed to facing the time-honored fate of hanging.²⁹ Such restraint on Washington's part seemed out of place for the time but was consistent with the justification of the war and its respective narrative. However, restraint was certainly not a virtue demonstrated by the British towards American prisoners. European tradition normally gave the captor the option of providing or denying quarter because it was seen as a privilege. The British application of selective quarter at the Battle of Long Island enraged many Americans while Washington instituted a more humane policy of universal quarter.³⁰ British forces were notorious for mistreating American prisoners and holding them in deplorable places under less than humane

²⁹ Allen, 37.

³⁰ Fischer, 377.

conditions. Joseph Plumb Martin, who served as an enlisted American soldier during the Revolutionary War, wrote in his narrative that, “Such inhuman treatment was often shown to our people when prisoners, by the British, during the revolutionary war. But it needs no comment.”³¹ Martin’s comments serve to highlight the impression of the average American soldier that the war was definitely worth the effort since the fate of American soldiers, when in British captivity as prisoners, was a sign of things to come if they were to lose the war and be tried as traitors afterward.

Other British war policies that gave credibility to the comments of Joseph Plumb Martin and other Americans soldiers like him are abundant. British political and tactical leaders (with the exception of the Howe brothers in many cases) favored a policy of “*Shrecklichkeit*” which was the deliberate use of extreme violence and terror to crush American resistance and their will to fight.³² British forces did not offer quarter to American prisoners and were often held in ship hulks in New York harbor and died horribly in massive numbers. Others were confined in churches in New York City, which were desecrated by terrible acts of abuse and torture.³³ These policies had the opposite effect that British leaders were trying to achieve. These acts and conditions only served to embolden the American will to fight because they embodied the precise cause of the American fight—humanitarian virtues of freedom and human dignity. Americans felt these values and virtues were a gift from God, whereas the British acted as if the crown afforded these to people based on their loyalty. This is illustrated in Alexander Hamilton’s statement “the sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records.

³¹ Joseph P. Martin, *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier* (New York: Signet Classics, 2001), 211.

³² Fischer, 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, 378.

They are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.”³⁴ Therefore, the British policies were playing exactly into the American war narrative by demonstrating a clear and undeniable distinction between the values of the two sides of this war and guaranteeing that Americans would believe the cost of the war was worth the effort.

The feasibility aspect of the Revolutionary War narrative is best examined by answering these questions - who is the enemy and how are they defined? And how is war going to solve the current problem facing the colonists? To start, this study needs to identify how the colonists chose to define the enemy in their war narrative. Once again, this can be found in the Declaration of Independence where the drafters clearly refer to the King of Great Britain directly (although not by his name—King George III). They specifically name him as the root cause for their numerous grievances and the instigator of this conflict because of his delinquencies in addressing their concerns. This can be seen in the number of times the drafters of this document begin a paragraph with the words “he has,” which refers to the king specifically:

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good!

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

³⁴ Bailyn, 188.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.³⁵

These are only a fraction of the number of times that the King of Great Britain is specifically highlighted as the person who this document is addressed to and therefore the perceived enemy of an impending war. Nonetheless, it is clear who the drafters believed the enemy was by this narrative.

Further analysis of this document and its signers reveals a consistency with this conclusion that identifies King George III by name as being the enemy. John Hancock infamously signed his name to the Declaration of Independence in a very bold manner to the center of page for the intended purpose, “so that King George III would not need to use his spectacles to see it.” This perhaps was especially stinging to the King since John Hancock had attended the coronation of King George III many years earlier.³⁶ The fact that John Hancock singled out this individual is significant because it very specifically identified who the problem was for the colonists. There is no ambiguity nor is there a dilution of the blame either in the Declaration of Independence or in Hancock’s famous quote. What is just as important to identifying and defining the enemy is who the enemy is not. The proper distinction between a

³⁵ *The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence*, 36.

³⁶ Founding Father Quotes, “John Hancock Trivia,” accessed 14 February 2016, <http://www.foundingfatherquotes.com/father/id/4>.

declared enemy and everyone else helps to focus political and military priorities. This was clearly seen in the war narrative with respect to foreign mercenaries that fought against the Americans on behalf of King George III.

The colonists did not necessarily see the Hessians as the cause of the war or conflict with King George III. Clearly, the Hessian soldiers were an enemy to the Americans on the battlefield but they were viewed more as being pawns in a war that was being caused by the king's instigation. The Hessians were not the problem but the symptom of a larger problem perpetrated by the king. The Declaration of Independence puts this clearly into context:

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.³⁷

In this paragraph, the drafters contextualize this relationship by emphasizing the word he (referring to King George III). The drafters were directly accusing King George III for the deployment of foreign mercenaries to America and not the Hessian themselves. However, this paragraph also highlights the fact that the use of mercenaries had a history of being relatively unreliable.³⁸ Regardless, the Americans were able to find a way to mitigate the effects of the mercenary army by identifying the true enemy in their narrative and prioritizing policies accordingly. Since the Hessians were not fighting for a cause but for financial gain, the British had to pay for their service. This reinforced a perception at the time that the British soldiers lacked motivation. This was seen in common sayings, “though patriotism was a more compelling force in America than across the Atlantic,” and, “the American soldier, unlike British derelicts

³⁷ *The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence*, 37.

³⁸ Peter Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 19.

and Hessian mercenaries, faced the invaders by an act of free choice and beat them.”³⁹ These sayings demonstrated that Americans clearly understood who the real enemy was and who was simply fighting the Americans on the battlefield because they were essentially being forced to do so.

The last test of feasibility pertains to the question of how war is going to solve the problem that the colonists were facing. The answer to this question may seem quite obvious and intuitive at first but it is worthy of exploration. Perhaps the colonists could have tried a more diplomatic approach to redress their grievances with the king before moving to a war for independence. However, that course of action was already pursued with little progress over many years. The American war narrative highlights this enduring injustice in the Declaration of Independence:

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.⁴⁰

At this point, the only course of action that remained, and that would be appropriate to solve the problems of the colonists and change their circumstances for the better, resided in the outcomes of a successful war. This is seen in the following statement Declaration of Independence paragraph:

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them

³⁹ Michael Stephenson, *Patriot Battles: How the War of Independence was Fought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 85.

⁴⁰ *The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence*, 38.

under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.⁴¹

At this point the colonists (via the drafters of the Declaration of Independence) have reached the conclusion, in this instrument they are using to communicate their war narrative, that war with Great Britain has been a last resort and the time has now come to engage in it. No other course of action was reasonable at this point and war was the only solution left to solve the current plight of the colonists.

Spanish–American War

Examining the US war narrative in support of the Spanish–American War requires a slightly different approach than that of the American Revolution due to the unique manner in which the nation was brought to war. Part of the challenge of this analysis stems from the fact that there were actually multiple war narratives, parallel in nature, and differentiated because of their respective audiences. This research will focus on two war narratives and examine each one in depth separately regarding desirability only. Follow-on analysis of feasibility components will apply to both war narratives since no differentiation is necessary between the narratives in this respect. The two war narratives will be referred to as the people’s war narrative and the political elite war narrative. These parallel war narratives were simultaneously generated by different actors to target a different audience within the American population with the intent of boosting the desirability to go war with Spain.

The people’s war narrative has three distinct components related to desirability that answer the question—what’s at stake? Nationalism, being a key component, created a sense of pride and honor that required America and American virtues to be honored and defended abroad. American nationalism prior to the Spanish–American War loosely had its origins embedded in

⁴¹ *The Constitution of the United States and The Declaration of Independence*, 35.

the Monroe Doctrine from 100 years earlier. The Monroe Doctrine resonated in the American domestic arena to the extent that Americans felt it needed to be defended less their patriotism be sacrificed or insulted. The Monroe Doctrine played into the collective American mindset of the 1890's and how Americans perceived themselves and America's role in the world since they were becoming acutely conscious of their emerging power.⁴² According to historian George Herring, "Wonder and pride were increasingly tempered by fear and foreboding. During the 1890s, Americans experienced internal shocks and perceived external threats that caused profound anxieties and spurred them to intensified diplomatic activity, greater assertiveness, and overseas expansion."⁴³ The collective mindset of the American public facilitated willingness and a sense of acceptance of the notion of war with Spain to protect its national interests in a place so close to US soil: Cuba. Nationalism, via the Monroe Doctrine, became the prism through which continued Spanish rule in Cuba was viewed as a symbolic insult to the patriotism of American society and therefore partially served as the stakes for the war.

A component of revenge also played into the people's war narrative and further defined the stakes of the war. The sinking of the USS *Maine* in Havana harbor in 1898 only added to the anxiousness of an American society wanting to go to war. The battleship's explosion killed 266 American sailors and the perception was that Spain had caused it or at the very least allowed it to happen.⁴⁴ This point was illustrated in President McKinley's second annual message to Congress where he states, "At this juncture, on the 15th of February last, occurred the destruction of the

⁴² George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 299.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁴⁴ Louis Fisher, "Destruction of the Maine (1898)," The Law Library of Congress, 4 August 2009, accessed 23 March 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/usconlaw/pdf/Maine.1898.pdf>.

battleship Maine while rightfully lying in the harbor of Havana on a mission of international courtesy and good will—a catastrophe the suspicious nature and horror of which stirred the nation’s heart profoundly.”⁴⁵ Other reactions to the sinking of the Maine on a societal level included a national movement of sympathy for those killed and patriotism geared towards attaining revenge. For example, theater audiences would emotionally react by weeping and stamping their feet and then cheer whenever patriotic songs were played. Other examples included instances when zealous Americans would wrap themselves in flags and demand war in an effort to seek revenge. McKinley would respond by pleading for calmness and restraint but would be burned in effigy as a result.⁴⁶

The third and final component of the people’s war narrative pertains to the inhumane treatment of the Cuban people by the Spanish government. This particular component not only highlights what was at stake, but it did so in a manner that was consistent with the individual freedom and liberty component of the American Revolutionary War narrative. This similarity was not a simple coincidence. The American people were very familiar with the role that individual freedoms and liberty played in their own history. Although President McKinley did not pretend to make this component the primary justification for the use of American military force against Spain, it did play into the larger narrative that pointed towards America going to war with Spain. President McKinley points to this in his First Annual Message on 6 December 1897:

The present insurrection broke out in February, 1895. It is not my purpose at this time to recall its remarkable increase or to characterize its tenacious resistance against the enormous forces massed against it by Spain. The revolt and the efforts to subdue it carried destruction to every quarter of the island, developing wide proportions and

⁴⁵ William McKinley, “Second Annual Message, December 5, 1898,” The American Presidency Project, accessed 16 November 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29539>.

⁴⁶ Herring, 313.

defying the efforts of Spain for its suppression. The civilized code of war has been disregarded, no less so by the Spaniards than by the Cubans.

The existing conditions can not but fill this Government and the American people with the gravest apprehension. There is no desire on the part of our people to profit by the misfortunes of Spain. We have only the desire to see the Cubans prosperous and contented, enjoying that measure of self-control which is the inalienable right of man, protected in their right to reap the benefit of the exhaustless treasures of their country.⁴⁷

McKinley's words were echoing an existing popular feeling among Americans that the Cuban people were being oppressed. Parts of the speech attempt to describe an imbalanced relationship between a large and oppressive Spanish government, and an innocent and oppressed Cuban population. He tries to connect the plight of the Cuban people with that of the American people separating from Great Britain over a hundred years prior by using similar language of the time. The reference to the inalienable rights of man is similar to the language used in our own Declaration of Independence. This subtle connection was clearly used to encourage Americans to identify with the Cuban situation by drawing a loose connection to their own past and their own cause. Using an emotion-filled war narrative component to elicit sympathy on behalf of the Cuban people could be seen as a powerful means to reinforce what was at stake. This war narrative component can be seen later in the same speech by President McKinley where he states:

The cruel policy of concentration was initiated February 16, 1896. The productive districts controlled by the Spanish armies were depopulated. The agricultural inhabitants were herded in and about the garrison towns, their lands laid waste and their dwellings destroyed. This policy the late cabinet of Spain justified as a necessary measure of war and as a means of cutting off supplies from the insurgents. It has utterly failed as a war measure. It was not civilized warfare. It was extermination.

Against this abuse of the rights of war I have felt constrained on repeated occasions to enter the firm and earnest protest of this Government. There was much of public condemnation of the treatment of American citizens by alleged illegal arrests and long imprisonment awaiting trial or pending protracted judicial proceedings. I felt it my first duty to make instant demand for the release or speedy trial of all American citizens under

⁴⁷ William McKinley, "First Annual Message, December 6, 1897," The American Presidency Project, accessed 6 November 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29538>.

arrest. Before the change of the Spanish cabinet in October last twenty-two prisoners, citizens of the United States, had been given their freedom.⁴⁸

It is worth noting that although President McKinley used the humane treatment and personal freedom component in his speeches as part of the war narrative, this did not mean that it was what he or other political elites believed were the stakes of the war. This will be examined at more length later in this research.

The people's war narrative also needed to address the issue of whether or not these stakes were worth fighting a war with Spain. Examining the answer to this requires analysis of a broader concept that was characteristic of the time—yellow journalism. The yellow press was a biased strain of journalism that was essentially fanning the flames of a martial frenzy upon an ignorant public to drive weak leaders into an unnecessary war.⁴⁹ The name yellow press referenced the Yellow Kid, that it was a popular cartoon character appearing in newly colored pages of newspapers at the time.⁵⁰ The yellow press was essentially amplifying and exaggerating many aspects leading up to the war that solely served the purpose of pushing America towards war with Spain despite the lack of truth, accuracy or appropriateness of the claims. Newspaper publishers such as William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer were instrumental in placing blame on Spain and therefore influenced countless Americans.⁵¹ Many within American society wanted to believe such things and the yellow press was more than willing to accommodate the thirst for any justification that heightened tensions and brought war.

⁴⁸ William McKinley, "First Annual Message, December 6, 1897," The American Presidency Project, accessed 6 November 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29538>.

⁴⁹ Herring, 309.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁵¹ Fisher, 2.

The supercharged atmosphere of 1898 caused a willingly persuadable American public and a provokingly eager yellow press to manipulate and exaggerate many aspects of mere Spanish existence to justify war. Essentially, the question of whether or not war was worth the stakes seems to be somewhat irrelevant in this case since the reciprocal relationship between the yellow press and the American public would find a reason for war where none was readily apparent. This could best be seen in the earlier examined situation regarding the sinking of the USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor. The element of revenge that was used to highlight the stakes of a future war was not entirely accurate or appropriate. The perception and assumption was that since an American ship was safely harbored in a port, that no harm, damage, or destruction could happen to it unless it was the result of intentional foul play by a hostile actor or enemy. Originally, the official inquiry concluded that an external explosion occurred and was caused by a mine that was in the harbor.⁵² This report easily gave the impression that Spain was directly responsible for the loss of this American ship, or at least culpable.

However, the original report was not complete and sloppy in its analysis. It failed to consult with the Navy's ordnance expert or chief engineer as a means to seek professional analysis on the true cause of the sinking of the *Maine*. This eventually came to light in a subsequent investigation that took place and found that the USS *Maine* was actually sunk by an internal explosion that involved the fueling system. Historian Susan Brewer argues that, "At the time, however, McKinley fed the widespread impression of Spain's guilt by saying that anything that happened in Havana was ultimately Spain's responsibility."⁵³ The yellow press did not pursue a more detailed investigation or question the thin and relatively weak explanation given regarding the circumstances of the explosion. This lack of willingness for investigative

⁵² Fisher, 1.

⁵³ Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

journalism highlights how the yellow press really did not believe any further justification was needed to go to war with Spain. The American public seemed content with never answering the question of whether or not war was worth the stakes. As a result, it cannot be fully grasped by simply highlighting a single slogan or speech, but instead the more relevant answer can be found in the broader, collective mindset of Americans by their tolerance and acceptance of yellow journalism as a whole. War with Spain would have been worth it despite what reason was given or how deceptively the people's war narrative was crafted.

The war narrative of the political elites was largely a parallel narrative to that of the people's war narrative with limited crossover linkage between the two. The political elites used the people's war narrative to rally the people but were not necessarily convinced of those war narrative components themselves. However, according Herring, "popular perceptions nicely complemented the nation's political goals."⁵⁴ The political elites were less convinced by a sense of nationalism, revenge, or any humanitarian concerns for the Cuban people, but instead were more enticed by the notion of global economic opportunity. President McKinley told Governor Robert LaFollette that the true objective was to attain US supremacy in world markets.⁵⁵ This seemed to be what was at stake for the political elites first and foremost. American expansionists were pursuing a more indirect form of imperialism through economic dominance rather than physical occupation. Obtaining various islands from the Spanish Kingdom across the globe would undoubtedly help satisfy this quest. Not even the sinking of the USS *Maine* was an adequate justification to go to war according to President McKinley since he pleaded for restraint immediately afterwards and was burned in effigy as a result.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Herring, 321.

⁵⁵ Brewer, 16.

⁵⁶ Herring, 313.

The political elites determined this component of the war narrative was worth going to war with Spain based perhaps on the emerging popularity of theories being developed by Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan outlined theories pertaining to the fundamentals of sea power that linked naval strength to national policy and strategy.⁵⁷ He developed a doctrine of sea power where offensive action from a concentrated battle fleet could deny the use of the sea to another naval force by penetration of an enemy's coastal defense.⁵⁸ His theories especially had the opportunity to influence the war narrative when he published his book and it grew in popularity among soldiers, politicians, and naval authorities of all nations. *The Influence of Seapower upon History* published in 1890 states that the United States needed to drop its outdated strategy based on harbor defense and commerce raiding for a more aggressive and globally reaching approach that reflected the needs of the modern time.⁵⁹ Additionally, Mahan advocated for building a canal through Central America, strengthening the navy to protect trade routes, and acquiring refueling bases in the Caribbean and Pacific. Mahan's proposals were popular with President McKinley, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA), Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, and other expansionists, referred to as 'jingoos.'⁶⁰ These theories played nicely into the opportunities that were being presented through a potential war with Spain and ultimately answered the question of whether it was worth going to war for the political elites.

Assessing the feasibility of the war narrative creates a convergence between the people's war narrative and the political elite war narrative. Identifying who the enemy was in this war

⁵⁷ Ernest R. Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 821.

⁵⁸ John Shy, "The American Military Experience: History and Learning," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1971): 223.

⁵⁹ Herring, 303.

⁶⁰ Brewer, 17.

generated an element of commonality between the two narratives that was seen in various instances. Spain specifically was recognized most often as being the enemy in this war and was portrayed as such on numerous occasions. Both President McKinley and the US Congress identified Spain as being the enemy and did so in the most official way. This can be seen in President McKinley's Proclamation 413 where he states: "Whereas by an act of Congress approved April 25, 1898, it is declared that war exists and that war has existed since the 21st day of April, A.D. 1898, including said day, between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Spain."⁶¹ This clearly identifies Spain specifically as the enemy and not the Cuban people, the Filipino people or even the Spanish people. This is a direct recognition of the Spanish institutions of government, the kingdom, and perhaps the King of Spain himself, but not necessarily the people of Spain.

A more populist version of this same message in the broader war narrative came from the famous slogan that was identified earlier in this research: Remember the Maine! To hell with Spain! In no uncertain terms the people clearly identified Spain as being the enemy. Brewer claims that, "when the USS Maine blew up in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898, Americans were stunned by the loss of 266 sailors and outraged at the destruction of their ship. The administration asked for calm, appointed an expert board of inquiry to investigate the explosion, and accepted Madrid's expressions of sympathy."⁶² According to historian Walter Russell Mead, despite a reluctant President McKinley, this combined with "an irresistible tide of popular opinion drew the hesitant William McKinley into the Spanish–American War."⁶³ At this point, a

⁶¹ William McKinley, "Proclamation 413 – Standards of Conduct and Respect of Neutral Rights in the War with Spain, April 26, 1898," The American Presidency Project, accessed 6 November 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=69217>.

⁶² Brewer, 19.

⁶³ Walter R. Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Books, Inc, 2002), 44.

relationship begins to form between the people's war narrative and the political elite's war narrative. More specifically, it appears that the people's war narrative was influencing and fueling the political elite's war narrative by providing it cover for the elites to drive their true agenda.

Although war did not come immediately following the sinking of the USS *Maine* (in fact it would come a few months later), McKinley appeared to outwardly reject the notion of war while quietly ramping up for it. According to Brewer, "privately, he told Senator Charles W. Fairbanks (R-IN) that the administration would not be plunged into war until it is ready for it."⁶⁴ Thus, President McKinley started the American war machine by calling for a military buildup from Congress. Congress responded to McKinley's call by appropriating fifty million dollars, of which three-fifths went to the US Navy and the rest went to the Army. Moreover, the elites were outwardly trying to appear to be patient and reluctant participants to any anticipated war with Spain but domestic public sentiment was growing and government elites were privately moving in a different direction. Therefore, the political elites benefited from the people's war narrative since it helped them to achieve their goal to go to war with Spain, which was accomplished through the identification of a common enemy in each war narrative - Spain.

At this point, the war narrative needs to explain how a war with Spain was going to solve the problem to fully address the aspect of feasibility. McKinley had explored numerous avenues in an effort to achieve the expansionist agenda that was growing among the political elites but was initially reluctant to initiate a war as a means to achieve those ends. According to Herring, McKinley's efforts to achieve his aims without war ultimately failed due to US insistence for Spain to vacate Cuba and Spain's subsequent refusal. US insistence actually had the opposite effect on Spain since Spanish opposition to concessions only grew as a result. The Spanish resented being blamed for the sinking of the USS *Maine*. Therefore, the threat of war from the

⁶⁴ Brewer, 19.

United States only served to further provoke many Spanish citizens to fan the flames of patriotism and nationalism similar to the phenomenon in the United States.⁶⁵ These seemingly irreconcilable positions by Spain and America put both countries on an undeniable collision course primarily facilitated, up to this point, by each nation's dueling narratives.

President McKinley was also able to artfully manipulate the sequence of events pertaining to the collective American war narrative for the possible purpose of adding an element of credibility to the argument that war would solve the problem. Since he personally was less convinced war was the answer, but he knew he had to accommodate the growing will of the American people, he pursued a different political approach using the narrative as an instrument. "True to form, the president did not ask Congress for a declaration. Rather, he let the legislators take the initiative, the only instance in US history in which that has happened."⁶⁶ Congress declared war without a presidential request and thus gave the initiative, to bring to nation to war, to the Congress and by extension to the American people. This demonstrates that what was said in the war narrative was just as important as the process and sequence that was used to say it. The fact that the American public drove the argument that war was the solution created a sense of ownership among them. As a result, this particular path to war allowed the president to take a supporting role as opposed to a leading one.

Lastly, President McKinley was told that American business leaders had concluded that a war would increase opportunities for trade, investments, and profits. This was reinforced by congressional support seen in Senator Redfield Proctor's description of the suffering he witnessed under Spain's policies during his visit to Cuba. Senator Francis Warren also provided his perspective that civilized people who were born in a revolt against tyranny themselves, should not

⁶⁵ Herring, 313.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 314.

allow a similar situation to occur only a hundred miles off American shores.⁶⁷ At this point, war seemed like the only means to fix this growing problem with Spain and it appeared that it might be rather easy to achieve victory as well. “Spain had 150,000 troops in Cuba exhausted by fighting and disease, 20,000 in the Philippines, and an antiquated navy. Well aware that a single US battleship could take out one of their entire squadrons, Spanish officers steeled themselves for what they hoped would be an honorable defeat.”⁶⁸ The perception that a victory would be easily achieved war only tends to reinforce the argument that war is the answer to the problem, even though the two are not necessarily related. This subtle portion of the war narrative, although not necessarily overt or intended, seemed to be influential in bringing America to war.

Based on the evidence of this research, the Spanish–American War illustrates the complicated nature of a war narrative. The same war narrative accommodated two different audiences for different reasons in order to initiate the same action—war with Spain. Additionally, this example demonstrated that elements of timing in the delivery of the war narrative could be as influential as the actual content of the narrative. Lastly, in this example, acceptability of the war narrative proved a more complicated factor than the feasibility did due to the effort to appeal to multiple audiences for different reasons. This will prove to be just the opposite upon examination of the Korean Conflict where feasibility overshadows acceptability in the war narrative.

Korean Conflict

The Korean Conflict grew and developed in a very different manner than that of the Spanish–American War. The American public was not pushing its leaders towards war but instead the conflict was initiated in a manner that seemed very unsuspecting to most political elites. Although many South Koreans saw the growing preparations being made by North Korea,

⁶⁷ Brewer, 20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

many military experts and policy makers in the United States either willfully ignored it or actually were caught by surprise when the North invaded the South. Historian Allen Millet explains that “the sense of impending doom that grew in Seoul did not spread to Tokyo and Washington. The first filter was General Charles Willoughby, the FECOM G-2, and KLO’s sponsor. Willoughby did not accept the Koreans’ predictions for several reasons.”⁶⁹ This is relevant because the conditions that lead a nation to war can have an impact on the development and crafting of the respective war narrative.

Assessing the acceptability of the Korean Conflict’s war narrative begins with analysis of what was at stake. Defending democracy and stopping the spread of communism were two of the initial reasons and serve as the primary components for this study. Although both of these components are distinctly separate, they are also related. These two components have their roots in the collective American perception of communism and socialism that was established many years prior to the outbreak of hostilities on the peninsula. American perceptions were shaped by people such as George Kennan who served as an American diplomat in Moscow and was considered the foremost expert on Russian matters. His explanation of Soviet behavior begins by describing Soviet political philosophies and their general incompatibility with democracy. Using Lenin’s own words Kennan explains:

Unevenness of economic and political development is the inflexible law of capitalism. It follows from this that the victory of Socialism may come originally in a few capitalist countries or even in a single capitalist country. The victorious proletariat of that country, having expropriated the capitalists and having organized Socialist production at home, would rise against the remaining capitalist world, drawing to itself in the process the oppressed classes of other countries.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Allen R. Millet, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 245.

⁷⁰ George F. Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947): 566.

Kennan argued that communism is not simply a different political philosophy from democracy. He suggests the two are incompatible to the extent that they cannot coexist without inevitable violence, with the inherent aggressor being communism.⁷¹ He makes this point when he outlines the characteristics of communist thought, as it existed in 1916 where he states:

a) that the central factor in the life of man, the factor which determines the character of public life and the “physiognomy of society,” is the system by which material goods are produced and exchanged; b) that the capitalist system of production is a nefarious one which inevitably leads to the exploitation of the working class by the capital-owning class and is incapable of developing adequately the economic resources of society or of distributing fairly the material goods produced by human labor; c) that capitalism contains the seeds of its own destruction and must, in view of the inability of the capital-owning class to adjust itself to economic change, result eventually and inescapably in a revolutionary transfer of power to the working class; and d) that imperialism, the final phase of capitalism, leads directly to war and revolution.⁷²

Kennan’s view of communism, the Soviet behavior it motivated, and its relationship to capitalism, was widely shared by the American political elites, as well as much of the American public by the late 1940s. In short, communism was viewed as a threat to democracies around the world and America was in a unique position as a global super power to defend democracy as a whole against potential threats. Kennan’s views outline what was at stake during the Korean Conflict by highlighting the two components of defending democracy and stopping the spread of communism.

However, a nuanced distinction began to develop between the opposition to communism itself versus the opposition to the Soviet Union as a rising superpower that was being disguised as opposition to communism. Although efforts were eventually taken to limit the spread of communism elsewhere throughout the Far East, the Korean Conflict seemed to have a more Soviet-oriented focus. This specifically suggests that perhaps communism may not have been the

⁷¹ Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 812.

⁷² Kennan, 566.

true threat, as it would be described in the war narrative as much as it was the rising threat of a Soviet superpower. Kennan himself believed that the Soviet threat was mainly political rather than military and the Russians had no intention of actually invading areas in the Far East or Western Europe.⁷³ Although this aspect does not play a dominant role in the war narrative, it does illuminate what was actually driving the American political elites to war in Korea. As a result, it highlights a disconnect between the actual reasons for the conflict and the stated reasons within the war narrative which would later have implications on its effectiveness.

As has been demonstrated earlier in this research, the component of defending democracy not only served a critical part of the war narrative for the American Revolution and the Spanish–American War, but also in Korea as well. Both of the components of defending democracy and preventing the spread of communism were also seen through official US policies leading up to hostilities. The United States saw communism as such a threat to democracy that it pursued a policy of containment leading up to the Korean Conflict. Political scientist Ronald Krebs argues that “broad agreement on ideology and policy supposedly so took hold in the United States by late 1947 or 1948 that alternatives to militarized global containment could not get a hearing.”⁷⁴ As a result, hostilities on the Korean peninsula were not the origins of concern against the spread of communism. Instead, the Korean Conflict served as a means to address a broader problem and therefore played conveniently into an already existing narrative that democracy must be defended and the spread of communism needed to be halted. The spread of communism was not isolated to the Korean peninsula nor was America’s policy to contain it fixed solely to this single nation. President Truman pursued a much broader approach to the containment of communism, especially in the Far East.

⁷³ Gat, 813.

⁷⁴ Ronald R. Krebs, *Narrative and the Making US National Security* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 175.

On 27 June 1950, President Truman announced the deployment of US air and naval forces to South Korea to provide support and oppose the North Korean invasion. He stated that the United States was conducting this military operation to enforce a United Nations resolution that called for an end to hostilities and to halt the spread of communism throughout the region. In addition to ordering US forces to Korea, Truman also deployed the US 7th Fleet to modern-day Taiwan to protect against a possible future invasion by communist China and ordered an increase of military aid to French forces fighting communist guerrillas in Vietnam.⁷⁵ This approach of containing communism not only demonstrated an initial willingness to expand the containment policy beyond the borders of the Korean peninsula but it also demonstrated the willingness of numerous other nations to support this effort as evidenced by United Nations involvement. Therefore, the stakes of this situation were larger than simply the United States pursuing its own policy. Instead, it was a broader global effort to contain communism and this would have implications to the war narrative.

Answering the question of whether or not war was worth these stakes requires examining the difference between the perceptions of the American people and the political elites. The narrative to the American people at this point in the conflict focused primarily on preventing the spread of communism throughout the Far East. It did not focus on attacking the Soviet Union or China, which were perhaps the driving factors that were physically spreading communism throughout the region. Instead, the Truman Administration made a deliberate decision to omit these nations by name as a means to allow those nations to back away from supporting hostilities on the Korean Peninsula, and throughout the region, without losing face to the international community.⁷⁶ Truman was essentially advocating for a policy that contained the spread of global

⁷⁵ "Truman orders US forces to Korea," History, accessed 6 November 2015, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/truman-orders-u-s-forces-to-korea-2>.

⁷⁶ Brewer, 150.

communism through an expansion of American commitments outside of Korea. However, the absence of Congress making an official declaration of war, and President Truman stating that a political ideology (communism) was the adversary, as opposed to a nation-state, could account for the credibility gap between the American people and the political elites. This made it difficult to know exactly what the American public thought of the situation and this point is made clear by the following quote: “‘He was fighting against some kind of government,’ said the father of nineteen-year-old Kenneth Shadrick of Skin Forks, West Virginia, the first American soldier to be killed in Korea.”⁷⁷ Despite evidence that a growing portion of the American public may not be clear as to the purpose of the conflict or if it was in the best interest of the United States, Truman never had to worry about a peace movement sweeping across the nation and complicating his efforts.⁷⁸ However, the Truman Administration was still diligent to monitor public opinion throughout the conflict and according to a Gallup poll; eight out of ten Americans supported the president’s decisions pertaining to Korea. However, other polls showed less support with only 57% being in favor and larger numbers being unsure.⁷⁹ However, the last two sentences of the following excerpt from President Truman’s State of the Union address on 8 January 1951 clearly offer final insight as to whether or not war was worth the effort:

The present rulers of the Soviet Union have shown that they are willing to use this power to destroy the free nations and win domination over the whole world.

The Soviet imperialists have two ways of going about their destructive work. They use the method of subversion and internal revolution, and they use the method of external aggression. In preparation for either of these methods of attack, they stir up class strife and disorder. They encourage sabotage. They put out poisonous propaganda. They deliberately try to prevent economic improvement.

⁷⁷ Brewer, 151.

⁷⁸ Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion 1950-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

⁷⁹ Brewer, 151.

If their efforts are successful, they foment a revolution, as they did in Czechoslovakia and China, and as they tried, unsuccessfully, to do in Greece. If their methods of subversion are blocked, and if they think they can get away with outright warfare, they resort to external aggression. This is what they did when they loosed the armies of their puppet states against the Republic of Korea, in an evil war by proxy.

We of the free world must be ready to meet both of these methods of Soviet action. We must not neglect one or the other.⁸⁰

The above passage not only supports Kennan's earlier statements about the intentions of communism but it also simultaneously serves as introductory evidence to illustrate the feasibility of the war narrative. More specifically, who was the enemy? As noted earlier in this research, the initial identification of an enemy was essentially communism itself. Based on the problematic nature of that aspect, it became clear that a subsequent shift was needed. This shift came in the form of identifying exactly who the enemy was beyond a mere political philosophy. The North Koreans were identified for having launched a premeditated act of aggression against an independent country that was supported by the United Nations as well as the United States.⁸¹ Truman now redefined this component in the above passage by singling out the Soviet Union primarily for their supportive role in aiding the North Korean invasion to the south. He was clear not to advocate for a direct attack against the Soviet Union. Instead he highlighted the need to stop the North Koreans, and by extension, the Soviets who were serving as a reinforcement mechanism and provocateur both militarily and politically.

This revision of the war narrative was much more to the point in terms of identifying a specific enemy. Although the previous narrative described the ills of communism and reasons why it was an unacceptable political ideology, it failed to highlight a specific national aggressor. At best, it identified the area of operations where actions would be taken - the Far East in general

⁸⁰ Harry S. Truman, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 8, 1951," The American Presidency Project, accessed 16 November 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14017>.

⁸¹ Casey, 69.

and Korea in particular. The revised narrative corrected that particular shortfall by identifying the Soviet Union as the primary exporter of communism and the Soviet agenda would be fought within the international boundaries of Korea. However, not everyone agreed with President Truman's specification of this new enemy during the Korean Conflict. General Douglas MacArthur identified the enemy in a different manner.

General MacArthur recommended that the United States should pursue a strategy that amounted to a substantial escalation in the war. He wanted a comprehensive and patient plan for military mobilization to indefinitely confront the Soviet Union on a strategic level. He believed that a full national emergency would create the necessary psychological and legal basis for the required mobilization.⁸² However, the Truman Administration felt differently especially after several military set backs on the battlefield since the initial introduction of American forces on the Korean peninsula.

The Truman administration eventually abandoned its initial goal of unifying Korea and sought to negotiate. But MacArthur was convinced otherwise and continued advocating for military escalation. In December 1950, MacArthur argued that Washington's refusal to attack China was an unprecedented handicap that would hinder the war effort. He also advocated a blockade of China to bring Chinese Nationalists from Taiwan into the conflict. Lastly, MacArthur's enduring disagreements with Washington eventually culminated on April 5, 1951, when his letter was read on the floor of the US House of Representatives, in which he declared that there was no substitute for victory. As a result of this letter Truman relieved him of command and claimed that the US was trying to prevent a world war, not to start one.⁸³

⁸²Allen R. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951: They Came From the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 351.

⁸³ Jesse Greenspan, "8 Things You Should Know About the Korean War," *History*, 23 July 2013, accessed 6 November 2015, <http://www.history.com/news/8-things-you-should-know-about-the-korean-war>.

MacArthur's suggested expansion of the war illustrates, in part, how he identified the enemy differently than President Truman. Truman would ultimately prevail in this contest and he demonstrated conviction in his position when he stated:

In Korea the forces of the United Nations turned back the Chinese Communist invasion- and did it without widening the area of conflict. The action of the United Nations in Korea has been a powerful deterrent to a third world war. However, the situation in Korea remains very hazardous. The outcome of the armistice negotiation still remains uncertain.⁸⁴

The tension between these two American leaders would play out in the arena of the American war narrative regarding feasibility and how the enemy would be defined. However, MacArthur's statements would also create tension and implications to the feasibility of the war narrative in other ways as well, to include explaining how war was going to solve the problem.

General MacArthur's statement to Congress demonstrates how he thought war was going to solve the problem, more specifically that an expansion of the war was essential to solving the problem. His statement that there was no substitute for victory illustrates his belief that war was perhaps the only solution to the problem and victory in an expanded war was the only option to pursue. Truman on the other hand did not believe that absolute war or an expansion of the war outside of the Korean peninsula was going to solve the problem. Instead he eventually shaped the war narrative to support a limited war that was contained to reestablishing the previous borders between North and South Korea in order to avoid a third world war. Clearly, President Truman initially thought war was the solution to the problem but as military setbacks occurred and the implications became more complex after hostilities began he shifted to a more limited strategic aim. Although this difference between American military and political leaders played out in a

⁸⁴ Harry S. Truman, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 9, 1952," The American Presidency Project," accessed 16 November 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14418>.

very visible manner, the affect that this had on the American public needs to be considered within the context of feasibility.

The State Department projected positive results from much of the analysis they conducted on polls of American opinion during the war. Brewer explains that “its Daily Opinion Summary of July 3, 1950, confidently claimed that the vote was nearly 2-to-1 that the stand in Korea would lead to peace rather than to another world war (57 percent peace; 29 percent war; 14 percent undecided). But another view of those poll results, showing that 57 percent saw peace ahead while 43 percent did not or were not sure, indicated that a sizable number were not convinced.”⁸⁵ The Truman Administration was aware of this perception and perhaps shifted its strategic aim and war narrative as a result of knowing the American people had doubts that war was going to fix the problem. Brewer explains that in order to create one official war narrative, Truman had to define various aspects to include: the communist threat, the purpose of the war, and this new international role for the US. Additionally, since the US seemed to be caught by surprise when North Korea invaded, it was important that the US should convince its citizens that it could competently execute combat operations.⁸⁶

The confusion of the strategic aim of the Korean Conflict clearly led to a less than clear war narrative coming from the political elites initially. This confusion eventually created division between the political elites and some military leaders in a manner that played out in the public discourse. This tension undoubtedly had a trickle-down effect on the American people who were listening to an evolving war narrative and watching military leaders publically question and openly oppose the civilian leadership. As a result, the ineffective war narrative clearly affected the American public’s perception of the war and its respective support for it.

⁸⁵ Brewer, 151.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 152.

Analysis/Conclusion

Upon review of these three case studies and their respective war narratives, additional analysis highlights the relationship between war narrative components and the overall effectiveness of the war narrative. One such relationship can be seen between what is communicated about the stakes of a war and the historical context in which the war took place. Wars and conflicts rarely arise instantaneously from a single event where no previous friction points or animosity existed. Although a single event ultimately triggers hostilities, usually a slow and gradual buildup of tensions between two nations accumulate over time and reach a tipping point that leads to war. This can be seen in all three of these case studies. The American Revolutionary War saw a gradual escalation of tensions between the colonists and Great Britain since before the French and Indian War based on issues of taxation and the lack of a representative government to name a few. Similarly, the Spanish–American War was precipitated by a growing sense of American nationalism fueled by the advancements of the Industrial Revolution, expansionism, and the notion that Americans were beginning to become conscious of their status in the world as an emerging power. Lastly, the Korean Conflict was the culmination of a growing suspicion of communism that emerged from World War II. Since America drifted into the Cold War, communism became the primary concern of US foreign policy and containment was being directly challenged. The time between the initial friction points between two nations and the commencement of kinetic actions is often the space that gives rise to the development of a nation's war narrative.

The growing tensions and friction leading up to each of these conflicts created the opportunity as well as the substance for the war narratives to be developed and socialized among the American people. Although the other instruments of national power pertaining to diplomacy, the military and economic measures were more visible, deliberate, and centrally controlled by political elites, war narratives existed within the informational realm and were unique in their

character and application. Each case study specifically had a different contextual road to war, which ultimately contributed to eventual hostilities. Among these contextual lead-ups to hostilities, trends and patterns emerge that historically link America consistently going to war for many of the same reasons.

One example of a trending justification that communicated the stakes of the three case studies analyzed in this research is the notion that human rights were a universally recognized reason to cause the United States to go to war. The lack of human rights being extended to the American colonists was made quite clear in the war narrative pertaining to the Revolutionary War. This was one of the major grievances identified in the Declaration of Independence and perhaps established a precedence for future American wars. An element of human rights violations could be seen in the war narrative for the Spanish–American War as well. The poor treatment of the Cuban people by the Spanish government was well documented and served to motivate Americans to encourage their leaders to take military action against such injustices. The fact that these human rights violations were being conducted by a European power, in a nation so close to American soil, perhaps reminded Americans of their own past struggles for independence from oppressive European tyrants. This element was also part of the Korean Conflict as well, although in a different form. George Kennan’s description of communism’s contempt for capitalism painted that bleak picture of human rights violations from an overly oppressive government. The impression that Soviet and Chinese governments oppressed their people were the direct result of their communist forms of government created a link for the American people reminiscent of human rights violations from wars past.

From the American Revolution to the Spanish–American War to the Korean Conflict, universal human rights seem to be at the core of a collective US identity that has brought America to war on numerous occasions. The combination of these three case studies demonstrates this point and suggests that American national will has historically been supportive of military action

against such violations. The significance of this finding has implications for future policy makers and political elites as they observe world events and ponder the decision of American involvement. Although it is not clear if human rights violations will continue to be a convincing component of future war narratives, it is certain that it has been a consistent part of past narratives since the birth of America to the extent that it is woven into the national DNA.

Recommendations for future research would include identifying additional trends across various American war narratives that show pattern-like components that can be linked to US national identity. Thorough research on this topic would be informative to not only policy makers and how they craft future war narratives but also informative to war fighters at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels as well. Military personnel at all levels need to be familiar with the national war narrative in order to shape operations that are consistent and nested with the intent of the nation going to war. Historically, war narratives and decisions made by military leaders have had a reciprocal relationship with each other in ways that have been both beneficial as well as counterproductive. It is easy to image, or to find historical examples, where decisions regarding rules of engagement, the quartering of troops, or other aspects of military action have been consistent or inconsistent with the larger war narrative. The implications of this reciprocal relationship makes it imperative for military practitioners, especially operational artists, to have a firm understanding of the consequences their plans have on the national war narrative.

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