REALITY BEFORE RHETORIC:

TOWARD AN AIR FORCE NARRATIVE FOR THE EARLY-MID-21ST CENTURY

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The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

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ABSTRACT

Narratives are powerful. In some ways narratives matter more than facts. That is because narratives tell stories, and stories are more powerful than any sterile compilation of facts, figures, and data. As a story, a narrative connects disparate information, ties the past to the present, and helps people anticipate the future. Strategic narratives go a step further by imbuing the audience with purpose. American Airmen have, over the decades, embraced several such strategic narratives. Some of those narratives have been more effective than others.

This thesis attempts to discover the current Air Force narrative and suggest a narrative for the early-mid-21st century. Thus, the intent is not to craft something revolutionary, but to give voice to what already exists. The work to do so progresses through several steps. First, it establishes a theoretical basis for the argument using analyses from organizational culture and strategic communication. Next, it evaluates other scholars' analyses of Air Force culture and narratives. It then evaluates the United States Air Force narratives since the Gulf War by examining what Air Force leaders said about the institution in light of what defense analysts observed in Air Force actions. It judges those narratives using four criteria: coherence, validity, cohesion, and anticipation. In so doing, this thesis reveals strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary Air Force narratives.

This analysis offers that since 1991 Air Force narratives have not been as effective as they should have been. The narrative in the aftermath of Desert Storm, "victory through air power," lacked full validity and anticipation. Its successor, "we are critical enablers," came to the fore because "victory through airpower" failed to anticipate the irregular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. But "We are critical enablers" was only valid within the specific context of a land-centric, irregular war and was not entirely cohesive. Those insights, in turn, suggest considerations for improving the current Air Force narratives. Finally, this thesis analyzes the current Air Force narratives against a prospective contender. One of the current narratives, "over not through," ties the Air Force's origin story of innovation to the present. It is not, however, fully compelling. Another current narrative, "airpower, without it you lose," is pithy but lacks validity in some contexts. A major finding of this study is that Air Force leaders are served best by matching the service's rhetoric to its reality. The best way for them to do so is to adopt a new and potentially enduring narrative, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives."

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Introduction

> *We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely . . . by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria — which is our actual experience.*
>
> - Joan Didion, 1979

> *Myth is much more important and true than history*.
>
> - Joseph Campbell, 1991

What is a narrative? Why do narratives matter to organizations? How does one know if a narrative is effective? Should an organization's narrative change over time? How does culture influence narrative, and how does narrative influence culture? Specifically, why does narrative matter to the United States Air Force (USAF)? Who are the key audiences for the USAF narrative? Finally, what is the USAF narrative and what should it be? These questions are central to the discussion of the role the United States Air Force fills in its contributions to national security. They are also the central questions of this analysis.[1]

In some ways narratives matter more than facts. That is not to suggest that facts do not matter. But it does imply that a story is more powerful than any sterile compilation of facts, figures, and data. A narrative is a story that connects seemingly disparate events. Lawrence Freedman defined narratives as "compelling story lines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn."[2] Thus, narratives tie the past to the present and help people anticipate the future. As long as humans have communicated, they have told stories. This is because narratives connect the audience to the facts. In the context of organizations, narratives are no less important; but they grow in complexity as the size and complexity of organizations grow. According to Freedman, when an organization designs and nurtures a narrative to shape its environment, the narrative becomes strategic.[3] Freedman continued, "They are strategic because

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[1] I borrowed the idea for this introduction from Stephen Rosen's introduction in *Winning the Next War*. For more see: Stephen Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, 1.

[2] Lawrence Freedman, The *Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, New York: Routledge, 2013, 22.

[3] Freedman, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, 22.

they do not arise spontaneously but are deliberately constructed or reinforced out of the ideas and thoughts that are already current."[4] In this study, a narrative can be said to be strategic if it contributes to the story of the Air Force as a whole. Taken together, this line of argument suggests that an effective Air Force narrative should build on the service's heritage, explain its present contributions to national security, and anticipate future contributions thereto.

The Air Force has work to do here. United States Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF), General Mark Welsh laments that US Airmen are not equipped to tell the Air Force story.[5] General Welsh seems to imply by his comments the Air Force has a coherent and relevant narrative and the problem lies in the inability of Airmen to communicate the story. There is, however, another possibility. While the USAF has a compelling history, its narrative may be unclear. As noted above, the past is only one element of an effective narrative. A narrative must also explain current events and allow for inferences. Fortunately, the raw materials are present for an effective Air Force narrative. On the other hand, something important appears to be missing. The aim of this study is to uncover not merely those raw materials, but also to find the missing element or elements of an effective narrative and propose what the Air Force narrative should be for the early-mid-21st Century.

Background

The USAF's struggle with forming a coherent organizational identity, organizational culture, and strategic narrative is widely recognized.[6] Perhaps the most formative work in this area is Carl Builder's *The Icarus Syndrome*, first published in 1993. Builder suggested that the initial cultural fracture in the Air Force came even before it was a service.[7] Airmen's claim that airpower could independently win wars was the essential element to the Air Force's fight for independence. As Builder argued, however, "It became increasingly obvious that the concept of

[4] Freedman, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs,* 22.
[5] For example: "The intent is for all of our Airmen who we send it to directly to understand where they fit in the broader scheme of the Air Force because most of them, know their piece really well. But they don't know a lot about the rest of it. They don't know how big the Air Force is, how many people do certain missions. Where do they fit in all that?" Gen Mark A. Welsh III, "Air Force Update," Remarks at Air Force Association's 2013 Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition, National Harbor, Md., Sept 17, 2013, 15.
[6] See for example: Carl Builder. *The Icarus Syndrome: The Role of Air Power Theory in the Evolution and Fate of the U.S. Air Force*. New edition. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2002; Ehrhard, Thomas P. *An Air Force Strategy for the Long Haul*. Washington DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009.; Geranis, Michael P. Building on Builder: The Persistent *Icarus Syndrome* at Twenty Years." School of Advanced Air and Space Studies Thesis, Maxwell Air Force Base, 2013.; Missler, Timothy B. "A Service in Transition: Forging an Integrated Institutional Identity for the United States Air Force. School of Advanced Air and Space Studies Thesis, Maxwell Air Force Base, 2000.
[7] Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome,* 141.

air power was not the *raison d'être* of the Air Force, it was airplanes and flying. When the concept of air power no longer served as the altar for common worship . . . the unifying sense of mission, purpose, and cause within the intuition began to evaporate."[8] If this critique of the Air Force identity is even partially valid, it is not surprising that the USAF struggles with its story. Airmen can hardly be expected to tell a coherent and cohesive story if the Air Force's identity is in question. Builder's work looms large for those examining USAF culture and identity, but several others have commented on the issue more recently. Senior RAND analyst Paula Thornhill also noted this phenomenon in her study of American Airmen's culture.

In 2012 Dr. Thornhill evaluated the Air Force narrative to see if it met then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Martin Dempsey's guidance to harness each service's unique culture to enhance the joint force.[9] She concluded that the Air Force has expressed not one, but five different narratives during its history.[10] She wrote, "The fact that five discernible narratives exist, however, suggests that [MIT Professor and organizational culture expert Edgar] Schein's criterion of a strong, single narrative to unite Airmen is missing. Instead, individual Airmen adopt the narrative that appeals to them most."[11] Dr. Thornhill's admonition that Airmen do not have a unifying narrative is backed up by sound analysis. But is constructing one feasible? The United States Air Force is a diverse military service. Can one narrative, one story, connect hundreds of thousands of Airmen across missions as diverse as flying airplanes, operating satellites, and defending computer networks? Despite Thornhill's work, Air Force leaders were still concerned with the Air Force story and commissioned RAND to perform a more detailed examination of the Air Force narrative.

In 2015 RAND analyst Dr. Alan Vick added to the discussion in *Proclaiming Airpower: Air Force Narratives and American Public Opinion from 1917 to 2014*. Vick argued that "When airmen come together to discuss the USAF's relative position among the services, its budget share, and its role in national military strategy, a common refrain is that the Air Force fails to 'tell its story' in an effective manner."[12] Thornhill sought a unified culture for Airmen; understanding the USAF narratives over the history of the service was her mechanism for doing so. Vick

[8] Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome*, 35.
[9] Paula G. Thornhill, *Over Not Through: The Search for a Strong, Unified Culture for America's Airmen* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, January 2012, 1.
[10] Thornhill, v. Dr. Thornhill considers the story of American Airmen, which predates the USAF as a separate service. Similarly, I consider the history of the Air Force to predate the Air Force as a distinct service.
[11] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 7.
[12] Alan J. Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower: Air Force Narratives and American Public Opinion from 1917 to 2014.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, 2015, xiii.

analyzed Thornhill's narratives over time and their "relationships to changes in public opinion toward airpower and the USAF."[13] Whereas Dr. Thornhill's work looked inward to the impact of narratives on the service, Dr. Vick analyzed the impact of those narratives on public opinion. This thesis is concerned with both internal and external aspects of the Air Force narrative and the degree to which they are consistent with each other and with the Air Force's actions. In other words, it investigates whether service rhetoric matches reality.[14] Both Thornhill and Vick correctly identify the connections between the service's identity, narrative, and culture. In fact, they are inseparable. Thus, while this paper is concerned with the service's narrative, it will necessarily discuss elements of culture and identity. But why should Air Force leaders care about the Air Force narrative? Said another way, why does the Air Force narrative matter?

The overarching aim of a narrative is to shape behavior in expected ways.[15] This applies both internally and externally. Internally, the Air Force narrative serves as a guidepost or a unifying culture.[16] It should be a clear, concise expression of the purpose of the USAF, and it should provide focus that helps Airmen understand how to achieve their missions even when events do not unfold as planned.[17] In other words, it provides a coherent and consistent lens to understand actions in the context of Air Force heritage and goals. While the Air Force narrative is "just a story," stories are powerful. In the case of the USAF, its story should remind Airmen of their identity, of what the nation expects of them, and how Airmen contribute and will contribute to national security.

Externally, a narrative comprises the core of strategic communication. The point of strategic communication is to be purposeful about information.[18] That purpose might be to increase effectiveness of recruiting and retention, to gain a larger part of the defense budget, or simply to make known the Air Force's contributions to joint warfighting. At times, the Air Force

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[13] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower,* 5.
[14] Tami Davis Biddle inspired the methodology for this thesis with her work, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bobming, 1914-1915* that sparked my interest in how Airmen talk about their service.
[15] Freedman,*Transformation of Strategic Affairs,* 22.
[16] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 8.
[17] In this way, a narrative acts as commander's intent writ very large. Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 8 November 10 defines commander's intent as "A clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned."
[18] Mari K. Eder, *Leading the Narrative: The Case for Strategic Communication.* Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2011, Preface.

narrative will serve any or all of those functions.[19] Air Force leaders need a compelling narrative tied to Air Force history, culture, values, on-going operations, future security implications, and technological trends. To the extent that Air Force actions comport with the service narrative, it reduces uncertainty for all of the Air Force's external stakeholders and connects actions to intent. This is necessary for the narrative to be consistent internally, externally, and with observed actions. Air Force stakeholders should understand not only what the interests of the service are, but know how those interests serve the needs of the nation nested in the Air Force's role of national defense.

Audience

There are two audiences for a strategic narrative, internal and external. Similarly, and not coincidentally, there are two audiences for this thesis. The first, and arguably more important, audience is internal. Airmen should know how to talk about airpower, and they should know the Air Force's story. If this study accomplishes its objective, it will suggest a persuasive narrative for leaders at all levels of the Air Force to conceptualize, internalize, and transmit. The second audience for the narrative is external. As noted earlier, a narrative is a sub-set of strategic communication. The audience for the Air Force's strategic communication might include, among others, the national command authority, legislators, policy makers, defense analysts, joint and coalition partners, journalists, academics, and citizens. Theoretically, all of the above are stakeholders in the Air Force and thus interested in the Air Force's strategic narrative.

Scope and Limitations

This study seeks to define the Air Force narrative and propose an alternative to that narrative that will provide long-term benefit. The benefit of this thesis is that it will, at a minimum, add to a meaningful conversation about the Air Force story. While the goal to improve the organization through developing a coherent narrative is not flawed, the author is. Thus, this product will be limited by his own biases and experiences over a 13-year Air Force career in space operations. Though this study suffers from lack of objectivity, it strives to be accurate. The analysis is based on evidence that the reader can consult.

The study necessarily includes some predictions about the future security environment and the USAF's role in that environment. This is necessary in order to put forth prospective narratives that anticipate the future. Predictions of this sort are bound to be wrong in part or

[19] I recognize that senior AF leaders may tailor the narrative on the margins for specific audiences, but the core must remain consistent.

whole. In considering those prognoses, the reader may take issue with them and thus disagree with the proposed narratives. This is the inherent difficulty in crafting a narrative that is sufficiently anticipatory—it can only be judged in retrospect. However, the Air Force does not have the luxury of not telling its story just because it does not know how it will turn out.

A further limitation of this study is that it only addresses a part of General Welsh's concern. This paper examines what the USAF narrative is and argues for what it should be. It does not address how to transmit or inculcate that narrative throughout the organization. As noted above, however, the Air Force has a proud heritage. If individual Airmen can connect their actions and their role to the role of the Air Force in defense of the country, it will go a long way to restoring confidence among the service. This study hopes to contribute to that end.

Sources

The evidence for this thesis comes in four categories. The first category relates to what AF senior leaders said to internal audiences. This includes speeches to predominantly Air Force audiences, CSAF introductions to USAF doctrine, and letters/emails to Airmen. This group also includes sources to indicate how the service transmitted the narrative to subordinate leaders. Sources that examine the external narrative consist mostly of what senior AF leaders said about what the service does and what it is about, including congressional testimony, transcripts from speeches, and interviews. The third comes from external analysis. It consists of studies by from knowledgeable defense analysts and academics to capture observations about what the Air Force actually did (versus internal and external Air Force statements) during the periods of analysis. The fourth and final category consists of analyses from academia on the subjects of organizational culture and strategic communication; these constitute the theoretical basis for the thesis.

Outline and Methodology

Chapter 2 reviews organizational culture and strategic communication literature to establish the role of narrative in organizations in general and the role of narrative in military services more particularly. From these analyses criteria for evaluating narratives are deduced. This chapter concludes with two brief vignettes outside the Air Force that demonstrate one example of an effective narrative and one example of an ineffective narrative. Chapter 3 examines the existing literature on the United States Air Force narrative, starting with Builder and progressing through the work of Thornhill and Vick. Taking Thornhill's suggested cultural narratives as a given, Chapter 4 evaluates the USAF narrative post-Desert Storm and through

Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. As the history of an organization is important to an effective narrative, it is necessary to examine where the USAF has been to determine an effective narrative for the present and the near future. This chapter is not a contemporary history of the US Air Force, but a review of its narratives in their historical context. Chapter 5 is the crux of this thesis, as it proposes an alternative narrative and evaluates it for effectiveness against the current narratives. It will rank-order them on their ability to meet the previously established criteria and ultimately suggest an Air Force narrative for the early-mid-21st century. In order to suggest an anticipatory narrative, this chapter offers a forecast of the future security environment and the future of the Air Force. Chapter 6 recaps the findings of the study, suggests their implications, and suggests areas of future study.

Summary

Many analysts have noted the need for a coherent Air Force narrative and similarly noted that unifying narrative is absent in the Air Force today. There are two audiences for narrative and for this paper, external and internal. Then, the present study seeks first to understand what the Air Force narrative is, and propose viable alternatives. In order to arrive at the current narrative and prospective narratives for the future, it must first lay out the contemporary narratives of the institution and judge their effectiveness. The sources for this work are a mix of primary and secondary sources, with the primary sources coming from thought and organizational leaders of the Air Force. The analysis moves from general to specific by first evaluating the role of narratives in organizations, and then evaluating the specific role and history of the Air Force narratives. The study concludes with a suggested Air Force narrative for the early-mid-21st century.

The following chapter details what a narrative is and why it matters to an organization. It then proposes criteria to evaluate narratives and uses those criteria to evaluate two non-Air Force narratives.

Chapter 2

Stranger than Fiction, Truer than Fact: The Role of Narrative in Organizations

> *Metaphors and stories are far more potent . . . than ideas; they are also easier to remember. . . Ideas come and go, stories stay.*
>
> - Nassim Nicholas Taleb, 2007

> *Any strategic narrative, to be persuasive, must have emotional as well as rational purchase on an audience.*
>
> - Emile Simpson, 2012

On 1 July 1863 General Robert E. Lee's Confederate army met General George C. Meade's Army of the Potomac at Gettysburg in one of the central battles of the US Civil War. Both sides suffered enormous casualties, but on the third day of the battle Lee withdrew to Virginia.[1] In the aftermath a local attorney, David Wills, led a campaign to establish a national cemetery at Gettysburg. The cemetery was not dedicated until several months after the battle, in part, because the keynote speaker needed time to prepare. That keynote speaker was not Abraham Lincoln, but former president of Harvard College, former US Senator, former Secretary of State, and famed orator Edward Everett.[2] Everett spoke to the crowd of 15,000 for over two hours. Afterward, President Lincoln spoke for a mere two minutes. Everett later wrote to Lincoln, "I wish that I could flatter myself that I had come as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes."[3]

Ironically, in his humility Lincoln thought his speech would soon be forgotten. He was wrong. After Lincoln's assassination, Senator Charles Sumner wrote, "That speech, uttered at the field of Gettysburg . . . and now sanctified by the martyrdom of its author, is a monumental act. In the modesty of his nature, he said 'the world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; but it can never forget what they did here.' He was mistaken. The world at once noted what he said, and will never cease to remember it."[4] Indeed, we will never cease to remember it. The address is still recited and frequently quoted in our own times. What was it about the

[1] history.com staff, "The Gettysburg Address." History.Com, 2010. http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/gettysburg-address, accessed 18 January 2016.
[2] History.com staff, "The Gettysburg Address".
[3] History.com staff, "The Gettysburg Address".
[4] History.com staff, "The Gettysburg Address".

Gettysburg Address that resonated with the audience at the time and has continued to resonate with audiences over a century later?

This chapter will describe the role of narrative in organizations as understood in the extant literature. Because there is scant academic literature on narrative as it applies to a military service, the analysis relies on social science, which often touches on the subject only tangentially. Thus, the primary sources for this part of the research come from business authors, political scientists, and defense analysts. The chapter will first describe what a narrative is. It will next highlight the roles of narrative. Next, this chapter will synthesize the sources to find threads common to effective narratives. These commonalities comprise the evaluation criteria for prospective Air Force narratives later in the paper. In order to demonstrate the utility of the criteria, this chapter concludes by evaluating one example of an effective narrative and one example of an ineffective narrative using them.

What is a narrative?

The previous chapter offered a few descriptions of a narrative; the following working definition serves as a point of departure for further analysis:

> **narrative** (*n)* a story that connects events in such a way as to allow inferences to be drawn.[5]

This is a synthetic definition derived from other sources for purposes of this analysis. Two features of this definition are worth elaboration. First, a narrative is a story. In the context of the Air Force, it is the Air Force's story, drawn from its history. The United States Air Force's history predates the Air Force as an independent service. It is a legacy that dates back to the earliest days of military aviation. Edgar Schein, author of *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, says that, "Even in mature companies one can trace many of their assumptions to the beliefs and values of founders and early leaders."[6] Thus, the legacies of early American airpower pioneers such as William "Billy" Mitchell, Henry "Hap" Arnold, and Alexander de Seversky influence Airman culture and narrative today. Second, a narrative allows the audience to draw inferences. If a story does not offer enough context for inferences, it ceases to become a story. At that point, it is merely a restatement of facts. This is why it is important that a narrative *connect* events and experiences. It is the explanation of seemingly disparate information that

[5] The author's own definition with ideas borrowed from http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/narrative?s=t and Freedman (See Chapter 1).
[6] Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership.* 3 edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010, 242.

differentiates a story from a list. This connection is what creates the plot or story arc. Connection gives a story its meaning and coherence.

Using the opening lines of the Gettysburg address, the reader can see all of the elements of a narrative.

> "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war."[7]

In just these opening few lines of the speech, Lincoln developed a story that took the audience back to the foundation of the country and its first principles. By doing so, he invoked history to tie past experiences with present experiences. Lincoln clearly drew a link between the struggle for independence and the struggle against the Confederacy. The connections allowed for inferences that the fight was righteous, that the deaths were meaningful, and that the struggle against the South was existential to the Union. Lincoln's speech certainly contained narrative, but did it have a higher purpose?

Strategic Narrative

A simplified definition of a strategic narrative is that it is purposeful. In Hollywood, a film studio's purposes might be to entertain and make a profit. In news media, a network might aim to inform, but it may also aim to entertain, or to shock. Emile Simpson argues that in military operations a strategic narrative, "Explains policy in the context of the proposed set of actions in the abstract, and then explains those actions, having been executed, in terms of how they relate back to policy."[8]

Lincoln clearly had a purpose in delivering the Gettysburg Address. In only 260 words, he reminded people of their proud heritage; placed the struggle in existential terms; commemorated the loss of the Union soldiers; and most importantly spurred the Union on to "increased devotion to the cause for which they [the honored dead] gave the last full measure of devotion."[9]

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[7] Abraham Lincoln as cited in Friedersdorf, Conor. "The Gettysburg Address at 150–and Lincoln's Impromptu Words the Night Before." *The Atlantic*, November 19, 2013. http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/11/the-gettysburg-address-at-150-and-lincolns-impromptu-words-the-night-before/281606/.

[8] Emile Simpson, *War From the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*. 1 edition. Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012, 180.

[9] Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address."

The idea of a strategic narrative is broad. In one context, the Air Force's narrative is a strategic narrative that is nested in a larger US Department of Defense (DoD) narrative, that is nested in a larger US national narrative. In another context, air component *actions* may contribute to a joint force commander's narrative for a particular campaign, which, in turn, nests in a strategic narrative for US policy goals in that war. It is this latter context that Simpson refers to above. The two contexts are closely related. The things that Airmen say about the Air Force should match Air Force actions in conflict.

Narrative Taxonomy

A narrative does not have to be at the strategic level of the organization to be strategic. Recall that for the purposes of this analysis, a strategic narrative must be important to the Air Force story. That condition can be met, however, at all levels of the organization. For this reason, in evaluating narratives a taxonomy of macro narrative, meso narrative, and micro narrative is useful.

A **macro narrative** describes the overarching narrative of an organization. While it adapts to major system shocks or changes in long-term goals, it is relatively stagnant. It ties history to vision and creates an arc for the audience to follow. In some ways this parallels a dramatic story arc in that has a beginning (history), middle (current actions), and end (vision). For the purposes of this analysis, the macro narrative is the story the Air Force tells to itself and others.

A **meso narrative** has the same elements but applies not at the organizational level, but at the subordinate organizational level. Within the Air Force, the meso narrative exists organizationally at major commands (MAJCOMs) or numbered air forces (NAFs). A meso narrative might also exist functionally among, say, fighter pilots. A meso narrative should also tie history to current actions and a desired outcome, but it must nest within the macro narrative to be effective. Narratives should be coherent, externally consistent with superior narratives, and internally consistent with actions.

A **micro narrative** refers to the story of individuals or small groups. It contains the same elements and the same requirements for consistency as macro and meso narratives, but it deals with intimate groupings of individuals. Despite the name micro narrative and the tacit implication that it is something small, if properly nested, micro narratives have great potential impact. They are stories about people, and thus are easier to relate to than stories about organizations.

With the above taxonomy established, the analysis can turn to the functions of a strategic. narrative.

Functions of a Strategic Narrative

Narratives are essential to how humans transmit ideas, as they are a more effective means of communication than lists or facts. It is intuitive to tell stories. It is far more effective to paint a mental picture for an audience, set the context, talk about actions and consequences than to merely say "do this, don't do that." In *Made to Stick*, Dan and Chip Heath used the following example to show the benefit of narrative. "Firefighters naturally swap stories after every fire, and by doing so they multiply their experience; after years of hearing stories, they have a richer more complete mental catalog of critical situations they might confront during a fire and the appropriate responses to those situations."[10] Similarly, Air Force pilots and other operators perform a post-mission debrief that serves the same function as the stories told by the firefighters. In a debrief, an operations crew shares a micro narrative about its last mission. The crew members lay out the facts as best as they can recall, note mistakes from the mission, and attempt to find the root causes of those mistakes. In so doing, the crew learns from its mistakes and develops the ability to share that lesson in the form of a story with others. Effective strategic narratives, whether firefighter's story or a post-mission debrief, fulfill four functions. They seek to inform; persuade; impart purpose; and, most importantly, shape the audience's behavior.

To begin, a narrative informs an intended audience. To be effective, narratives should contain concrete language and examples. The information function represents the logical part of the message. This function appeals to people's reason; thus for the claims of the narrative to be effective, they must be credible. In *Made to Stick*, the Heath brothers suggested that "stickiest" ideas are concrete. They use descriptive language that allow audiences to create a mental image. In their minds, "A V8 engine is concrete. 'High Performance' is abstract. Most of the time, concreteness boils down to specific people doing specific things."[11] Concrete facts are more tangible and thus more memorable.

Second, a strategic narrative attempts to convince or persuade the audience of something. Aristotle proposed three means of persuasion.[12] As Simpson recounted, "*Logos* was appeal

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[10] "Made to Stick: Introduction." *Heath Brothers*, accessed March 7, 2016. http://heathbrothers.com/made-to-stick-introduction/

[11] Chip Heath, Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*. 1st edition. New York: Random House, 2007.

[12] Aristotle, and George Alexander Kennedy. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 36. Aristotle referred to the means of persuasion in public address as *pisteis.*

through rational argument, and thus referred to the speech itself (logos meant 'word', 'speech', 'account' or 'reason' in Greek); *pathos* was persuasion through emotional appeal, by putting the hearer in a certain frame of mind; *ethos* was persuasion through one's own moral standing."[13] Though arranged differently, this model contains each of Aristotle's elements of persuasion. *Logos* is in the information and persuasion functions. Information contains the concrete facts of the story and part of persuasion is an appeal to rationality. *Pathos* resides in the persuade function as the most effective narratives appeal to emotion. Lastly, *ethos* is most evident in the key characteristic of 'validity' found in next section. A strategic narrative is more than oratory; it is an abstract confluence of words and deeds. Hence, this model, though not inconsistent, does not directly parallel Aristotle's.

Modern authors Heath and Heath recognized the power of an emotional message, too. They argued a narrative is more convincing if it can appeal to the audience's emotion, in addition to its rationale.[14] This is because if someone reacts emotionally to a story, he or she more likely to remember it and take action. Aristotle explained, "There is persuasion through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion (pathos) by the speech; for we do not give the same judgement when grieved and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile."[15] Simon Sinek explained the physiological reasons that such stories are more effective. Sinek wrote, "The neocortex is responsible for rational and analytical thought and language . . . The limbic brain is responsible for all of our feelings such as trust and loyalty. It is also responsible for all human behavior and all our decision making. . ."[16] While some leaders may think that facts and rationality are enough to drive behavior, people also make many decisions based on "feelings" or "intuition." In other words, they also make decisions unconsciously using their limbic brain. Emotional stories are much more effective at tapping into that part of the brain, than sterile stories that engage rational thought (and thus the neocortex) alone. As Aristotle understood it, an emotional story would appeal to an audience's pathos. The Heath brothers also argued the most convincing arguments rely on a combination of emotion and logic. They suggested that to motivate someone to action one has to mobilize the "elephant" (*pathos*) and the "rider" (*logos*).[17] The metaphor goes that an elephant (emotional, limbic brain) is a powerful creature, which if moving in the right direction, is a powerful ally. However, if the elephant is convinced of something, there is nothing his rider

[13] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, 188-9.
[14] Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 256-7.
[15] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 38.
[16] Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Paperback ed. with a new preface and new afterword. New York, NY: Portfolio, Penguin, 2011, 56.
[17] Chip Heath, Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*. 1st edition. New York: Crown Business, 2010.

(associated with rational evaluation in the neocortex) can do to persuade it otherwise. On the other hand, if the elephant and rider work in tandem, the duo can accomplish great things.

Third, a strategic narrative should impart a purpose. Simon Sinek admonished leaders to *Start With Why*, to inspire others to take action.[18] Effective organizations have purpose, and effective narratives share that purpose to inspire members to act. In *Made to Stick*, the Heath brothers argued that an effective narrative gets to the core of an issue.[19] They used military commander's intent to demonstrate this concept. "Commander's intent is a crisp, plain-talk statement that appears at the top of every order, specifying the plan's goal, the desired end-state of an operation."[20] While commander's intent might be a meso or micro narrative, one can extrapolate it to a macro narrative. Indeed, Thornill suggested, "A strong, common narrative shared by individuals at all levels about why an organization exists is essential to understanding not only the organization but also why it exists at all."[21]

Fourth, largely through the combination of the previous functions, a strategic narrative seeks to shape the audience's behavior. For an organization, narratives shape behavior by enabling or forestalling various behaviors. Freedman argued, "Narratives are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events."[22] In telling a story about a dangerous backdraft, a firefighter attempts to influence the way his compatriots deal with the same issue. In tying America's heritage to the Union sacrifices at Gettysburg, Lincoln sought to inspire the Union citizens and soldiers to remain dedicated to a worthy cause. Emile Simpson argued that the Gettysburg address was so effective because, "[It blended] rational argument with passion, history and vision."[23] In other words, Lincoln tied current events to purpose and engaged his audience *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. It fulfilled all of the functions of a strategic narrative. The next sections will identify four key characteristics of effective strategic narratives.

Characteristics of an Effective Strategic Narrative

An effective strategic narrative has four key characteristics. First, an effective narrative must be **coherent**. A narrative's most essential function is to connect. Lincoln connected the events on the battlefield at Gettysburg to the sacrifice required to preserve the union and the

[18] Sinek, *Start With Why*.
[19] Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 25.
[20] Heath and heath, *Made to Stick*, 26.
[21] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 1.
[22] Freedman, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, 22.
[23] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, 225.

visionary future of a "new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."[24] It tied together the past and the present. For this analysis, a narrative shall be judged coherent if it links the past and the present.

Second, an effective narrative must be **valid**. To be valid a narrative must be well grounded in fact. Emile Simpson noted, "A convincing narrative means consistency in words and actions across the globe."[25] An invalid narrative, on the other hand, reduces the appeal to an audience's *ethos* and *logos*. It undermines *ethos* because it calls into question the credibility of the speaker. Aristotle wrote, "There is persuasion through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a ways as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly than we do in others."[26] Furthermore, an invalid narrative undermines *logos* because the narrative ceases to become logical if it is factually incorrect. Aristotle argued, "Persuasion occurs through the arguments (logoi) when we show the truth."[27] Rhetoric must match reality. Tami Davis Biddle argued that leading up to World War II, both the Army Air Forces (AAF) and the Royal Air Force (RAF) over-promised on what airpower could deliver.[28] The strategic bombing narratives from the RAF and AAF created an organizational inertia that caused a flawed strategy to persist despite mounting evidence that it was unsustainable.[29] In other words, the narrative was so powerful that it trumped reality. When a narrative is inconsistent with reality, it becomes dysfunctional. For this analysis, a narrative shall be judged valid if it matches reality.

Third, an effective narrative must be **cohesive**. The meaning of cohesive is two-fold. Externally, a strategic macro narrative must bind together potentially conflicting meso and micro narratives. It should subsume those narratives in order to remain coherent. For example, the 3rd Space Operations Squadron charged with flying Wideband Global SATCOM (WGS) and Defense Satellite Communications Systems III (DSCS III) satellites could make the claim that it is "The premier satellite communications squadron" because it delivers more bandwidth to users than do

[24] Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address."
[25] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up,* 181.
[26] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric,* 38.
[27] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric,* 39.
[28] Tami Davis Biddle . *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about strategic bombing, 1914-1945*. Princeton University Press, 2009. 175
[29] For instance, the idea that "the bomber will always get through" led the United states delaying the development of pursuit aircraft with suitable drop tanks for escort. In turn, this led to taking unnecessary US bomber losses early in the war. This happened despite the fact that other country's wars from the interwar years suggested that the bomber would not always get through. "Indeed, only in 1943—after disastrous losses—would the Americans decide finally that unescorted bombers could not successfully shoot their way in and out of foreign territory." Biddle, 169-174.

other squadrons.[30] On the other hand, the 4th Space Operations Squadron, which operates Milstar and Advanced Extremely High Frequency (AEHF) satellite constellations could claim that it is the "Best SATCOM squadron" because it is the only unit to provide secure, survivable communications.[31] While the two micro narratives are seemingly at odds, they could nest nicely under the following Military Satellite Communications (MILSATCOM) meso narrative: "US MILSATCOM can deliver reliable service to any user, with any requirement in any condition."

Internally, a cohesive narrative serves as an organization's unifying cultural identity.[32] In *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, Jim Collins suggested that the most successful organizations have simple unifying principle.[33] Collins called this the Hedgehog Concept after Isaiah Berlin's famous essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox," in which Berlin wrote, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing."[34] Hedgehogs, "simplify a complex world into a single organizing idea, a basic principle or concept that unifies and guides everything."[35] A unifying narrative should contain the essential elements of the organization's purpose. For this analysis, a narrative will be judged fully cohesive if it nests within higher-level narratives and serves as a unifying cultural identity. It will be judged partially cohesive if it only performs one of those two functions.

Fourth, an effective strategic narrative helps the audience **anticipate** future actions. An effective strategic narrative has to anticipate the future so that it is not rendered irrelevant or thought to be disingenuous. By coherently connecting past events to present actions and a desired outcome, a narrative creates an arc that an audience can use to make educated estimates about the future. This is analogous to a dead reckoning technique in land navigation. If someone knows where she has been (history) and knows her heading (explanation of current actions), she can anticipate not only future actions, but also where she will end up (desired outcome). Similarly, an audience can use past statements and explanations of current actions to make reasonable predictions about future actions. In this way, a strategic narrative can make the speaker or organization not only more predictable, but more reliable. A narrative shall be deemed anticipatory if it accommodates future contexts. On the other hand, if a narrative fails to

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[30] This is a hypothetical statement, but 3 SOPS is a real squadron charged with operating WGS and DSCS. http://www.schriever.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=3914
[31] This is also a fictional statement, but 4 SOPS is real. http://www.schriever.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=3915
[32] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 8.
[33] Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . And Others Don't*. 1st edition. New York, NY: Harper Business, 2001.
[34] As quoted in Collins, *Good to Great*, 90.
[35] Collins, *Good to Great*, 91.

accommodate the possibility of future problems, it will not be judged as anticipatory. To the extent a narrative embodies all of the above criteria, it can be judged to be successful. The following sections briefly examine two narratives using the established criteria.

Narrative Vignettes

The Core of Apple

The Los Angeles Raiders defeated the Washington Redskins in Super Bowl XVIII in 1984, the year of Orwell's dystopian future. By 1984, Orwell's name was synonymous with fictional accounts of police-state dystopias, but it had been expanded to signify of any heavy-handed or authoritarian government.[36] It was in this context that Apple's first television advertisement for the Macintosh aired. During the third quarter of Super Bowl XVIII Apple ran a Ridley Scott-directed advertisement that depicted a crowd massed in an auditorium, having stoically marched in, listening with rapt attention to an authoritarian figure who said,

> Today we celebrate the first glorious anniversary of the Information Purification Directives. We have created for the first time in all history a garden of pure ideology, where each worker may bloom, secure from the pests of any contradictory true thoughts. Our unification of thoughts is more powerful a weapon than any fleet or army on earth. We are one people, with one will, one resolve, one cause. Our enemies shall talk themselves to death and we will bury them with their own confusion. We shall prevail![37]

Meanwhile, a blond heroine, wearing a tank top bearing the Apple logo, sprinted into the room and launched a sledge hammer at the screen as the speaker said the last words. Then Apple's narrated message came across the screen, "On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like '1984.'"

The advertisement was a huge success. It was named "Number One Greatest Commercial of All Time" by *TV Guide* in 1999.[38] Despite only airing once, Georgia State University communications professor Ted Friedman wrote, "The ad garnered millions of dollars' worth of

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[36] Educator Noah Tavlin would take issue with this description of Orwellian as it might be too narrow of a description of what Orwell himself may have thought. My point, however, is that for better or worse, Orwellian commonly means heavy-handed government or authoritarian. Tavlin, Noah. "What 'Orwellian' really means." *Ted-ed Original.* http://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-orwellian-really-means-noah-tavlin, accessed 27 Jan 15.

[37] "Apple 1984 Super Bowl Commercial Introducing Macintosh Computer (HD)." 24 Jun 2010. https://youtu.be/2zfqw8nhUwA, accessed 31 Jan 2015.

[38] "TV Guide Names Apple's "1984" Commercial as #1 All-Time Commercial" The Mac Observer. 29 June 1999. http://www.macobserver.com/news/99/june/990629/tvguide1984.html, accessed 27 Jan 15.

free publicity, as news programs rebroadcast it."[39] More importantly, the advertisement captured the essence of Apple. The symbolism of the message was unmistakable; the strong, independent Apple-wearing, athlete took down the tyrannical, status-quo authoritarian. Big Brother held a monopoly on technology, and Apple would democratize it for all.[40] It said: Apple is good; other technology (such as the PC) is evil. This "us vs. them," non-conformist archetype resonates with Apple users today.[41]

The "1984" commercial is not Apple's narrative per se, but a reinforcement of it. Apple's strategic narrative was that technology could help individuals break away from conformity and express their individuality.[42] Though a bit abstract, Apple's commercial was coherent with its strategic narrative. It connected Apple's cultural identity of challenging the status quo to a tangible product release. The Macintosh indeed did challenge the IBM DOS platform, just as iPod and iTunes would later challenge the status quo in the music industry.[43] The commercial was a valid incarnation of Apple's strategic narrative. The Mac was a viable challenger to the PC. Further, the commercial was cohesive with Apple's strategic narrative. It was about rebellion and change, challenging the status quo. Finally, the commercial anticipates Apple's future role and actions. Simon Sinek wrote the "1984" commercial, "is as relevant today as it was twenty-five years ago when it first aired."[44] Sinek went on to argue that "All of Apple's advertising and communications, their products, partnerships, their packaging . . . [are proof] that they actively challenge the status quo thinking to empower the individual."[45]

NASA's Challenge

In January 1986, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) planned to send the first civilian into space through the Citizen in Space program. By this point the shuttle had made 24 successful flights, and just a few years earlier Sally Ride became the first American

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[39] Ted Friedman, "Apple's '1984'" TedFiredman.com: Mythos & Logos on the Commons. http://tedfriedman.com/electric-dreams/chapter-5-apples-1984, accessed 27 Jan 15.
[40] Creative director of the commercial, Lee Clow, mentions this meaning specifically in an interview with Bloomberg Business. "The Real Story Behind Apple's Famous '1984' Super Bowl Ad. https://youtu.be/PsjMmAqmblQ, accessed 31 Jan 2015.
[41] "The Apple Revolution: 10 Key Moments: TIME looks at highlights in the computer pioneer's extraordinary history." *Time.* http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1873486_1873491_1873480,00.html. Accessed 27 Jan 15.
[42] Corman, Steven R. "The Difference between Story and Narrative, Center for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University. http://csc.asu.edu/2013/03/21/the-difference-between-story-and-narrative/. Accessed 11 May 2016.
[43] Sinek, *Start With Why*, 68.
[44] Sinek, *Start With Why*,155.
[45] Sinek, *Start With Why*, 155.

woman to travel in to space.[46] Christa McAuliffe was selected fly aboard Challenger, thus becoming the first "'ordinary' American to fly in a spacecraft."[47] The previous successes of the shuttle program combined with Citizen in Space program created the feeling in the American public that space flight was routine.[48] NASA went from being an organization that required the "right stuff" to democratizing space travel, or so people thought. "NASA had been the agency of heroes of risk taking. It was becoming the agency of the "space truck."[49] But, Christa McAuliffe never made it to space. Challenger exploded less than two minutes after takeoff killing all aboard, destroying the spacecraft, and calling into question NASA's narrative and identity.[50]

Ironically, previous successes caused a shift in the NASA narrative that left it unable to communicate effectively about the disaster. First, the narrative that spaceflight was becoming routine was incoherent with the history of spaceflight. In 1990, Mary Helen Brown, then an associate professor of communications at the University of Texas, made the case that NASA became complacent due to its recent string of successes but that it "had always been aware of the risks."[51] This was not the message the public received. Second, the minute the Challenger exploded, the facade of routine space travel evaporated. Even if NASA could make the case that the space shuttle was safe based on its past, it could not guarantee that it would always be safe. The explosion of Challenger invalidated NASA's narrative. Third, the narrative was not coherent because it could not reconcile the competing subnarratives of "maintain[ing] the public's interest and support, [upholding] a tradition of cockiness and risk taking, and [keeping] the flights as routine and predictable as possible."[52] Finally, it is clear that the narrative failed to anticipate disaster. In short, leading up to the Challenger disaster, NASA's narrative became disconnected from its organizational culture and reality. Spaceflight was still dangerous, but the narrative led people to believe otherwise.

Conclusions

This chapter began by defining a narrative, first in general terms and then driving to the specifics of a service narrative. A narrative is a story that connects events in a way that allows inferences to be drawn. A strategic narrative is also purposeful. Strategic narratives of all types

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[46] Mary Helen Brown, "Past and Present Images of Challenger in NASA's Organizational Culture." *Case Studies in Organizational Communication. New York, London* (1990): 112.
[47] Brown, "Past and Present,"113.
[48] Anastasia Toufexis, "NASA readies a nighttime dazzler." *Time*, 29 August 1983. as cited in Brown 112.
[49] S. Begley, "The mission of Challenger." *Newsweek.* 13 June 1983. as cited in Brown, 113.
[50] Brown, "Past and Present,"114
[51] Brown, "Past and Present,"116.
[52] Brown, "Past and Present," 113.

have various functions. They seek to inform; persuade; impart purpose; and, most importantly, shape an audience's behavior. Furthermore, the most effective narratives are coherent, valid, cohesive, and anticipatory. The analysis concluded with two vignettes. Apple effectively employed a strategic narrative in their '1984' advertisement, the core of which remains today. Though '1984' was stylistically and substantively different from the Gettysburg address, both narratives fulfilled the functions and criteria of an effective narrative. Shortly before the Challenger disaster, however, NASA's strategic narrative had become disconnected from its identity. This lack of congruence failed to anticipate a significant human tragedy which led to a loss of public confidence. Though both organizations have had successes and failures since then, the vignettes serve as useful reminders of the stakes of narratives.

The primary finding here is that organizations are responsible for their macro narratives and creating cultures in which nested meso and micro narratives can thrive. This suggests that the macro narrative must be at once sufficiently broad to capture the diversity of the organization and sufficiently specific enough to persuade and impart purpose. Furthermore, organizations cannot "not" communicate. Actions, inactions, stories, and silence all convey something whether intended or not. Thus, leaders should be purposeful in how they approach the construction and delivery of their narratives. The next chapter will examine the Air Force narrative as a specific case of a macro, strategic narrative. It will also examine the extant literature on Air Force culture and narrative.

Chapter 3

Icarus and Sisyphus: USAF Culture and Narrative

"Men have become tools of their tools."

- Henry David Thoreau, 1854

"The Air Force . . . Identified itself with the air weapon, and rooted itself in a commitment to technological superiority. The dark side of this commitment is that it becomes transformed into an end itself when aircraft or systems rather than missions, become the primary focus."

- Carl Builder, 1994

Several airpower analysts have claimed that the United States Air Force has problems with its culture, while others have directly criticized its narrative. This chapter first defines the role of a service narrative and then surveys literature relevant to the Air Force narrative, particularly the works of three RAND analysts: Carl Builder, Paula Thornhill, and Alan Vick. Their work spans a quarter of a century, dating back to 1986 when Builder first examined the impact of military service culture on the Department of Defense, the US government, and the nation. Several years later, Builder examined perceived problems with the Air Force identity. As noted earlier, analysts interested in Air Force culture widely cite Builder's work today. Paula Thornhill and Alan Vick are no exceptions. Thornhill's work provided the vocabulary and categorization of narratives for this thesis' analysis. Finally, Alan Vick examined Air Force narratives from 1917 to 2014. Though Vick's analysis focused on a narrative's impact on public opinion, he offered many insights relevant to this thesis. These works represent the departure point for this study's analysis. The survey starts with the works of Builder and progresses chronologically through the works of Thornhill and Vick. Before examining their work, however, it is worth examining the role of a service narrative more closely.

Service Narrative

A service narrative is a macro-level, strategic narrative. As such, a service narrative is a type of strategic communication. Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines strategic communication as "Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve

conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power."[1] A service narrative represents the core strategic communication of a military service. Alan Vick suggests that, "An effective airpower narrative must begin with a problem that matters to the nation. The classic airpower narratives all did this, presenting vexing problems that the public cared deeply about, whether it was avoiding another war in the trenches or preventing World War III. If the public is not interested in the problem as defined in the narrative (perhaps because it is overly narrow or abstract), then it will not be interested in the solution offered by the Air Force."[2] This analysis leads to the following definition

Service Narrative - A valid story that connects events in a way that allows inferences to be drawn for the dual purposes of a) informing, inspiring, and uniting its service members and b) explaining how its actions solve problems for external stakeholders in the context of service policy[3]

Having defined the purpose of a service narrative, the rest of this chapter examines the interplay of Air Force culture and narrative from the perspectives of three defense analysts.

Builder

If not the first to comment on Air Force culture, Builder is certainly the most widely known. Builder's influence requires some explanation. In 1989, Carl Builder published an insightful book, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis,* which examined the core cultures of the US military services. *The Masks of War* was influential at the time of its publication and is still widely read and cited among those interested in Air Force culture.[4] As a result of that study, the United States Air Force's Air University (AU) invited

[1] Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,* 8 November 2010 (As Amended Through 15 November 2015), 230.
[2] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower,* xv. It is worth noting that when Vick refers to an airpower narrative he clearly means an organizational narrative for the Air Force.
[3] Author's own definition derived from definitions in chapter 2, Joint Publication 1-02, and Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower.*
[4] The success of *Masks of War* is partly why AU commissioned Builder to write the *Icarus Syndrome.* As of 2015, Builder's work is still referenced at the Air Command and Staff College, this author attended a briefing titled "The Masks of War." Furthermore, Google Scholar shows that *The Masks of War* has been cited approximately 475 times in published works. Google Scholar search. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&q=masks+of+war+builder&btnG=&as_sdt=1%2C1&as_sdtp=. Accessed 3 Feb 2016.

Builder to visit the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC), to conduct a detailed study of Air Force culture.[5] Air University originally asked Builder to write an essay to remind incoming ACSC students "of the obligations of the profession of arms, their heritage in history, and where those obligations might carry them with the future of the Air Force."[6] As he talked to the students, faculty, and staff at ACSC, the problem took shape, and it was a much bigger issue than he anticipated. In a conversation with the commandant, Brigadier General Phillip J. Ford, Builder received new guidance. Builder's letter back to Ford outlining his grasp of the problem resonates today and is worth quoting at length:

> As you indicated, air power is one piece, the profession of arms is the other. One is the heart of the Air Force, the other is its soul. The senior leadership of the Air Force is the trustee of the heart; but everyone in the Air Force is a trustee of its soul. The heart is about organizational purpose or mission—air power—and the soul is about the profession of arms—the absolute and total commitment to mission (what sets the profession of arms apart from other professions is the commitment to mission, even unto death). The problem, as I see it, is that the two—heart and soul—have failed each other. The senior leadership has failed to keep the heart—the mission of air power— alive and vibrant by keeping it at the forefront of all its actions. And without that mission, the members of the Air Force have had nothing to commit themselves to except their own careers or specialties . . . *If the organization sends out mixed signals about its mission or its dedication to its mission, it can hardly complain if professionalism and commitment to the mission falter among its people.*[7]

Ultimately, Builder's project turned into *The Icarus Syndrome*. Builder's central proposition was that the Air Force lost its way when it abandoned "air power theory" as its unifying purpose. As early as 1992, Builder's analysis was already shaping debates and policy decisions within the Air Force.[8] In fact, General Merrill McPeak, then Chief of Staff wrote the book's Foreword. In many ways, Builder's work is foundational to all the work that follows on Air Force culture.[9] It is foundational here, too, because culture and narrative are two sides of the same coin.

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[5] Carl Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome: The Role of Air Power Theory in the Evolution and Fate of the U.S. Air Force*. New edition. New Brunswick, N.J.; London: Transaction Publishers, 2002. xiv.

[6] Builder, *Icarus Syndrome*, xiv.

[7] Builder, *Icarus Syndrome*, xvii, emphasis added.

[8] Builder, *Icarus Syndrome*, xviii.

[9] Both Thornhill and Vick reference Builder numerous times in their works, moreover, their lexicon is shaped by Builder's early work. The fact that all three worked under the auspices of RAND no doubt contributed to this. However, many other authors examining aspects of the Air Force culture point back to Builder as well. See the introduction of this thesis for more.

Builder argued that the Air Force had a cultural identity much like an individual has a personality and that those "personality traits" were deterministic of Air Force actions. Furthermore, he argued that the cultural fissure within the Air Force stemmed from abandoning "air power theory" as the source of the institution's identity.[10] Builder further argued that "air power theory" was synonymous with independent, strategic bombing. When the term "air power theory" is used in quotation marks, it will signify the theory of which Builder wrote, i.e., the theory of the efficacy of independent, strategic bombing. Builder pointed to the expansion of missions outside of "air power theory" as the cause for the service's abandoning of the theory. If one accepts Builder's premise, his analysis is even more relevant today than when he penned it. Since the publication of *The Icarus Syndrome* in 1994, Air Force operations have become significantly more diverse. Increased space and remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) operations and the addition of cyber operations to the Air Force's mission set exemplify that diversity. If the initial break in the Air Force's identity came as a result of friction between "air power theory" and the growing diversity of Air Force missions, the problem is more pronounced today than it was in 1994. The next two sections summarize the pertinent arguments found in *The Masks of War* and *The Icarus Syndrome.*

The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis

In *The Masks of War*, Builder described the personalities of each of the services and how those personalities influenced everything from strategy to decision making. Written in 1989, Builder's analysis addresses now-defunct or relieved organizations such as Strategic Air Command and Tactical Air Command. It also predated a relative rise in importance of space and cyber operations. Still, there is an enduring quality to Builder's work.

The central argument of the book is three-fold. First, Builder argued institutions have "distinct and enduring personalities that govern much of their behavior."[11] The implication is that the organization has an identity separate from the individuals who constitute the organization and that identity is more powerful than any single decision maker within the organization. Second, Builder argued the most powerful institutions in the American security apparatus were the

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[10] "The thesis of this analysis is that many of the unique institutional problems which now plague the Air Force have their roots in the Air Force's abandonment of air power theory as its source of institutional mission and vision . . . drifted away from air power theory during World War II as the actual demands for military aviation expanded their missions well beyond those originally conceived within air power theory."

Builder, *Icarus Syndrome*, 203.

[11] Carl Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis.* A Rand Corporation Research Study. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, 3.

military services, "not the Department of Defense or Congress or even their commander in chief, the president." The third argument synthesized the first two by suggesting that to understand the service personalities is to understand much of what has happened and will happen in national security. For the purposes of this analysis, one does not have to take Builder's argument as being entirely valid. There are important implications, however, if Builder was even partially correct. If service identity is to some degree determinate of service action; and, if the services are powerful actors in the national security arena, then the service narrative, as an outward embodiment of that identity, could have significant consequences for the national-security apparatus. In making his case, Builder made several claims about the core culture of the Air Force relevant to determining an Air Force narrative.

Builder's first claim was that the Air Force saw itself, "as an independent and decisive instrument of warfare "[12] Builder went on to suggest that this feature created a caste system within the Air Force of pilots and everyone else because pilots were the warriors in the Air Force. Though this is less true today than it was in 1989, elements of Builder's argument remain valid.

The second claim was that the Air Force worshiped at the altar of technology as the service would not exist without it. Builder did not see such worship as a deficiency, but as something the Air Force should embrace. He argued, "If the Air Force is to have a future of expanding horizons, it will come only from understanding, nurturing, and applying technology."[13] It is important to note that when Builder referred to "technology", he specifically referred to "the technological marvels of flight that have been adapted to war."[14] Builder's analysis was sound and, to an extent, remains applicable. The Air Force is linked inextricably to technology, and the extent to which the Air Force harnesses technology for national defense is a critical factor in its justification as an independent service.

Builder's third claim was that the qualities of the USAF were determined more by "cultural and institutional preferences for certain kinds of forces than by the 'threat.'"[15] Once again, if cultural and institutional preferences indeed shape the service, the narrative is critical because it is the embodiment of those preferences. The story that senior leaders tell to their peers and superiors within the Department of Defense, Congress, civic leaders, and the public both reflect institutional culture and define it. While AF leaders cannot deliberately shape every aspect of culture, their stories are the most important, have the furthest reach, and inform subnarratives throughout the organization. Thus, if Builder's second claim that Airmen "worship at the altar of

[12] Builder, *Masks of War*, 32
[13] Builder, *Masks of War*, 4.
[14] Builder, *Masks of War*, 33.
[15] Builder, *Masks of War*, 6.

technology" is correct, it reveals a potentially problematic institutional tendency. The crux of the problem is this: How should the Air Force harness its predilection for and dependence on aviation technology, while being true to needs of the nation and retaining the allegiance of non-pilots?

The Icarus Syndrome: The Role of Air Power Theory in the Evolution and Fate of the U.S. Air Force

In *The Icarus Syndrome: The Role of Air Power Theory in the Evolution and Fate of the U.S. Air Force*, Builder directly engaged the issue of the Air Force's identity. Builder's core assertion was that the Air Force sacrificed its institutional identity, which was historically grounded in "air power theory," when it accommodated other missions such as space and inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) operations.[16] Builder would certainly add cyber and remotely piloted aircraft operations to that list today. Builder was correct that the identity of the Air Force became more diffuse as it took on more missions.

Next, Builder asserted that the Air Force's loyalties were often to its aircraft and systems, rather than to its mission of national defense. Without a unifying culture, Builder argued, the organization had strong ties to technology and weak ties to the institution and its missions. As evidence, Builder cited the Air Force's resistance to the role of the ICBM and the "risk" it represented to bomber acquisition. At the time, General Curtis Lemay, newly appointed vice chief of staff, "led the Air Force's fight for the new B-70 bomber, even over the objections of President Eisenhower. It was LeMay who determined that missiles would not displace bombers and thus reduce the Air Force to being "the silent silo-sitters of the sixties."[17] While anecdotal, this story is a symptom of the organization's preference for parochialism.

Somewhat presciently, Builder's third assertion was, "Nothing will more quickly go to the vital interests of the Air Force or influence its future than the choices about what is included or excluded from the Air Force's definition of air power. Exclusions risk divestiture of Air Force power, present or potential. Inclusions risk diffusion or dilution of the mission or vision and, hence, their utility in unifying the institution."[18] It is intuitive that Air Force history is linked inextricably to aviation history. Yet, technologies and missions today extend well beyond aviation.

[16] Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome,* 203.
[17] Nick Kotz as quoted in Builder, *Icarus Syndrome, 183-4.*
[18] Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome,* 220.

Thornhill

In 2010, RAND Project Air Force studied the Air Force's particular contributions to national security. The study highlighted the importance of a strong cultural narrative for the service. As a result Paula Thornhill sought out to determine what the Air Force's cultural narrative was.[19] She concluded that the Air Force has had five distinct narratives over the course of its history rather than a single, unified narrative. Because the narratives are not mutually exclusive, Airmen tended to pick the one with which they identified, and that became their Air Force story. In other words, the narratives aligned along parochial interests. Thornhill ultimately suggested a unified narrative for Airmen. This section will survey her argument. The next chapter will evaluate Thornhill's historical narratives since Desert Storm and the fifth chapter will assess her suggested narrative for the present.

Thornhill began by quoting then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Martin Dempsey, "Each Service has a proud history, rich heritage, and distinct culture . . . [and these] Service cultures provide a source of strength for honing their unique expertise and competencies."[20] The Chairman thought that service cultures could be harnessed for the good of the country. Thornhill argued it was worth understanding what service culture is. The first work Thornhill cited was, unsurprisingly, *The Icarus Syndrome*. In response to Builder's argument, Thornhill wondered "Does total devotion to manned aviation shape the Air Force's culture even at the expense of its larger defense responsibilities?"[21] To answer this question, Thornhill sought first to understand the cultural narratives of the Air Force and, second, to propose a unifying narrative.

Airmen have always been different from their counterparts on land or sea. In an effort to "slip the surly bonds of earth," the first flyers literally broke the tradition of man's shackles to the surface of the planet. By the very nature of their endeavor to use flying machines, airmen were different.[22] When World War I began, airpower promised innovative ways of fighting. Most importantly, as the war progressed, airpower offered an alternative to the horrors of trench warfare. The following paragraph summarizes the narratives as Thornhill saw them.

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[19] Retired brigadier general, and PhD, Paula Thornhill is the director of the Strategy and Doctrine Program within RAND Project AIR FORCE.

[20] Martin Dempsey, as quoted in Thornhill, 1.

[21] Paula G. Thornhill, *Over Not Through: The Search for a Strong, Unified Culture for America's Airmen* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, January 2012, 1.

[22] "Airmen" as used here, represent the forbears to the Air Force. Air Force members throughout this text are referred to as Airmen (capitalized). Since this usage refers to those that predate the institution, it is not capitalized.

Thornhill's first historical narrative, "over not through," covered this early period of innovation.[23] Though airpower grew mightily in World War I, it did not alter the course of history. As military historian Lee Boon Kennett wrote, "While the role of the air weapon in the Great War was a modest one, the role of the Great War in the rise of air power was anything but modest."[24] Still, "over not through" coherently tied airmen to innovation and technology. It resonated with how airmen thought about their trade and how the public viewed the promise of airpower. After World War I, Billy Mitchell argued for an independent service for airpower. Thornhill's second major narrative, "give me liberty," described the message of Mitchell and his disciples.[25] Although Mitchell was not the only advocate for a separate service, he was the quintessential spokesperson for the "give me liberty" narrative. This narrative peaked during the interwar years but overlapped with the preceding narrative, "over not through", and the World War II narrative that followed. In 1942, de Seversky published his book, "*Victory Through Air Power,*"[26] which became the third Air Force narrative. Seversky articulated not only airpower theory, but advocacy for an independent, war-winning capability. This narrative continued through the end of World War II. It was seemingly justified when the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, dramatically ending World War II. With the beginning of the Cold War, Curtis LeMay and Strategic Air Command ushered in the "peace is our profession" narrative.[27] Focused on deterrence, "peace is our profession" lived and died with the Cold War. The end of the Cold War neatly coincided with the Gulf War in which airpower was perceived by some to be the dominant arm of the armed forces, thus "victory through air power" resurfaced.[28] The air-centric campaigns of Operations Deliberate Force and Allied Force seemingly reinforced that narrative. 11 September 2001 marked another inflection point for the United States Air Force. While "victory through air power" was intact in the early stages of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom, the Air Force quickly assumed a larger supporting role in the increasingly irregular conflicts. Led in part by Airman supporting those conflicts, and picked up by General Norton Schwartz, the Air Force assumed the narrative, "we are critical enablers."[29]

Each of these narratives was effective to some extent in its own context, and each has some value today. Paradoxically, the narratives' residual value and coherence is part of the current identity problem. Due to the lack of a unifying narrative, Airmen identified with the

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[23] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 3.
[24] Lee Kennett, *The First Air War: 1914-1918*. New York: Free Press, 1999, 226.
[25] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 3-4.
[26] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 4,-5.
[27] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 5-6.
[28] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 5.
[29] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 7-8.

historical narrative that most closely resembled how they saw themselves. A fighter pilot could identify with the rebelliousness of the "give me liberty" narrative.[30] A test pilot might identify with "over not through" narrative that appeals to their sense of pathfinding and innovation.[31] A conventional bomber pilot might identify with "victory through air power," while a nuclear bomber pilot might identify with "peace is our profession."[32] Meanwhile many Airmen that have contributed to the irregular conflicts over the last decade of conflict likely identify with "we are critical enablers." Of course, not every individual in every corner of the Air Force fits these stereotypes, but they are plausible and suggestive of the problem. If every Marine is a rifleman, what is every Airman?

The original RAND study that led to Thornhill's analysis concluded, "The Air Force serves the nation best when it creatively marshals its human capital and material resources to provide the president and his advisors with innovative, implementable solutions to developing, tough national security challenges."[33] Perhaps surprisingly, Thornhill found a suitable narrative from among the existing service narratives. She recommended that the USAF adopt its earliest service narrative, "over not through," to capture the importance of Airmen and innovation to the service. As the first narrative, "over not through" had a special place in the competing narratives. Innovation was foundational to the first flyers and the first Airmen. Thornhill also argued for its modern-day currency. "It ["over not through"] emphasizes the fusing of independent-minded Airmen with a willingness to embrace new technologies and a devotion to innovation that collectively produces creative solutions to vexing national problems."[34] Chapter 5 will evaluate this narrative using the criteria developed in Chapter 2.

Vick

Alan Vick continued the thread started by Thornhill. Vick took Thornhill's inward looking narratives, concluded that they matched the service's external narratives, and measured their effectiveness in positively influencing public opinion. Though this study is not interested in public opinion, per se, much of Vick's analysis and conclusions directly relate to the evaluation of contemporary narratives and development of a future narrative.

In 2014, the USAF Quadrennial Defense Review Office (HAF/CVAR) commissioned a RAND study to address two issues. First, Major General Steven Kwast, director of HAF/CVAR,

[30] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 7.
[31] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 7.
[32] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 8.
[33] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, iii.
[34] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 9.

and his team wanted help in articulating the benefit of high readiness across the USAF.[35] Second, they were interested in "gaining deeper insights into the relationship between USAF narratives and public attitudes toward the service." Dr. Vick's Report, "Proclaiming Airpower" sought to address the latter question. He evaluated the Air Force narratives for effectiveness using the social currency of aviation and airpower. According to Vick, "Social currency measures the visibility of a topic within a community or social network." As represented by public opinion polls, social currency is the dependent variable for his analysis.[36] Vick admitted, however, limitations of his data set; thus, the bulk of his analysis was qualitative.[37]

Vick reached several conclusions. First, Vick argued the Air Force narrative is generally not as influential on public opinion as Air Force leaders might believe; at best, Air Force leaders can hope to capitalize on the current events. In other words, in terms of public opinion, the best Air Force leaders can hope to do is match their rhetoric to reality in a positive way. It is partially for this reason, that this author argues the most important function of a service narrative is internal. The narrative is more valuable as a cultural beacon to Airmen than it is a means to influence the public. Second, Vick argued the service narrative may have more impact on decision makers outside the Air Force than on public opinion. Finally, Vick argued that a strong airpower narrative should fulfill four functions. The remainder of this section summarizes each of Vick's arguments in turn.

Vick's first assertion was, "Airmen developed public narratives because they believed there was a causal relationship between what they said and the outcomes they desired. The implied causal chain is (1) USAF public narrative influences public opinion, (2) a supportive public makes their views known to elected representatives, and (3) elected representatives reflect constituent views in their support for USAF budgets, independence, and major programs.[38]" As alluded to earlier, Vick concluded that this chain does not function as seamlessly as senior leaders in the Air Force believed. For instance, while the public opinion of the Air Force was uniquely high at the beginning of the 20th century, *social currency of aviation in general* was very high during that time.[39] Likewise, when public opinion of the Air Force came back to within normal

[35] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower,* iii.
[36] Vick says, "Social currency measures the visibility of a topic within a community or social network." 7.
[37] "Data limitations prevent a statistical analysis of the relationship between narrative (the independent variable) and public opinion (the dependent variable). There are no quantitative metrics to measure narrative variables (e.g., strength, breadth, depth, originality, social currency). Second, public opinion data explicitly measuring public attitudes across services are incomplete, missing for the 1917–1935 period (modern polling began in 1935), sporadic for 1935–1949, and missing entirely for 1960–2000." Vick, 5.
[38] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower,* 38.
[39] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower,*xii. Emphasis added.

levels for military services, it coincided with a fall in enthusiasm for aviation in general. From this, Vick concluded that, "It was publicity about real-world events and concrete accomplishments—improvements in aircraft, world-record flights, and performance in combat—that gave airpower its great social currency, not narratives, however carefully constructed."[40] Since World War II, however, few aviation innovations have had the public-opinion effect of the earliest exploits of air power. For instance, not even the demonstrative aerial victory in Desert Storm, nor the narrative that followed, elicited strong public support.[41] In sum, shortcomings in airpower narratives were not to blame for negative trends in public opinion.[42] Overall, narratives have less impact on public opinion than Air Force advocates typically believed.

By Vick's admission, however, his analysis did not address the role of the narrative on decision makers. Vick admitted narratives, "may have much greater sway with . . . audiences who are more directly involved in policy, programming and budgeting decisions."[43] For this reason, the impact of the narrative on external audiences, though less well understood, cannot be neglected. Related to this point, Vick cited Samuel Hunnington's admonishment that, "Every governmental agency in a democracy has a responsibility to present a compelling case explaining why the public should devote scarce resources to funding its mission."[44] Vick made a compelling case that even if the mechanism of the effect is uncertain, the Air Force had an obligation to justify not only its existence but its actions. While the effect might not be measurable across the general public, the Air Force narrative likely effects civic leaders and government decision makers.

Finally, Vick argued that a strong airpower narrative fulfills four functions.[45] First, it presents a difficult and important problem to solve. Second, it offers a big solution from airpower. Third, it focuses on technology and innovation. Fourth, it is aspirational. Though framed in a different way, Vick's functions of a narrative are compatible with those presented in Chapter 2 (inform, persuade, impart purpose, shape the audience's behavior). Combining the two suggests a strong airpower narrative informs the audience about a problem to be solved; persuades the audience that airpower was best suited to solve that problem; focuses on technology and innovation particularly suited for airpower application; and tells the audience why the problem is important to the country, with a vision toward the future. In the end, Vick suggested

[40] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower*, xii.
[41] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower*, 107.
[42] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower*, xiii.
[43] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower*, xvii.
[44] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower*, xvii.
[45] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower*, xv-xvi.

that the current USAF focus on advanced technologies and innovations offers promise, but that the Air Force should re-think how it talks about ongoing operations.[46] On the latter point, Vick argues that policy and security restrictions prevent the most effective Air Force narrative from getting out. To be compelling, the Air Force will have to loosen those restrictions.[47] Chapter 5 explores Vick's arguments in the context of this thesis' proposed narratives.

Conclusions

This chapter began by defining a service narrative as a subset of a strategic narrative with the dual purposes of informing, inspiring, and uniting service members and tying its actions and policy to the needs of external stakeholders. This chapter continued by describing three prominent authors' work on Air Force culture and narrative. Carl Builder's *The Masks of War* described service culture as the "personality" of the service. That insight helps observers understand why military services seem to have predilection for certain missions over others. In *The Icarus Syndrome,* Builder blamed many of the Air Force's problems on what he saw as the abandonment of "air power theory." If accurate, the Air Force undoubtedly has more challenges today than it did when Builder wrote his book, if only because the service has a more diverse set of missions today.

Paula Thornhill's examination of Air Force narrative focused on the macro/service narrative for the purposes of the Airmen's culture. She succinctly described five distinct cultural narratives and suggested they were not mutually exclusive. Her findings imply one of two things. Either the Air Force should have a broader narrative to subsume the competing subnarratives; or, it should offer a more compelling narrative for the current context. Thornhill concluded "over not through" was a suitable narrative for the present—a proposition that is evaluated in chapter 5.

Alan Vick examined the same narratives over almost a century of American airpower. He concluded that the narrative might not be as useful to external audiences as Airmen previously believed, but that its impact on policymakers, legislators and citizens, while unmeasurable, is not unimportant. Vick also offered alternative criteria for evaluating effective airpower narratives similar to those presented here. In sum, Vick's work reinforced the purpose of an effective service narrative. While a narrative is critical to internal cohesion it is less effective on public opinion and has undetermined value on decision makers outside the Air Force. The narrative should be tailored accordingly. This survey of the prominent thinking on USAF culture identified the historical evolution of and the functions of several components of Air Force culture which,

[46] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower,* xv.
[47] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower,* xv.

when combined with Air Force's s structural diversity make the prospect of developing and maintaining an effective narrative seem almost Sisyphean.[48]

The next chapter examines the development of the Air Force narratives from post-Desert Storm to the present. Although, Air Force history is relevant to the development of the present-day narrative, recent history weighs more heavily. Thus, the majority of the following analysis focuses there. Each narrative is judged for effectiveness against the criteria established in Chapter 2. This analysis may reveal mistakes or opportunities to consider in determining current and future narratives. In particular, it will examine the extent to which the rhetoric of the USAF's narrative matched the reality of its actions. To the extent the narratives fulfilled the functions and exhibited key characteristics established in the previous chapter, they will be deemed effective.

[48] *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Sisyphus", accessed February 26, 2016, http://www.britannica.com/topic/Sisyphus. "Sisyphus, in Greek mythology, the cunning king of Corinth who was punished in Hades by having repeatedly to roll a huge stone up a hill only to have it roll down again as soon as he had brought it to the summit." The task of creating and maintaining a narrative requires a significant effort, and it is never complete.

Chapter 4

Rhetoric and Reality: Evaluating Contemporary Air Force Narratives

"Airpower is an unusually seductive form of military strength, in part because, like modern courtship, it appears to offer gratification without commitment."
- Eliot A. Cohen, 1994

"For airpower to achieve more, it has to claim less."
- Colin S. Gray, 2012

Due to airpower's contribution to the overwhelming defeat of the Iraqi forces in Operation Desert Storm, the United States Air Force attained a cultural relevance and appeal it had not enjoyed since the height of the Cold War.[1] Most observers recognized a shift in the relative importance of the Air Force after Desert Storm, though reasonable observers still disagree about the magnitude of the shift. Some analysts went so far as to proclaim the stunning victory a revolution of military affairs (RMA). It was in this context that the narrative "victory through air power" reemerged in the Air Force's consciousness. It seemed airpower was a panacea to the challenges of modern armed conflict. Over the next thirteen years, however, that particular Air Force narrative was not always as effective as it had been in Desert Storm. While Operations Deliberate Force and Allied Force seemingly confirmed the utility and flexibility of airpower, to the careful observer the conflicts demonstrated some of the limitations of the "victory through air power" narrative. But then, the hugely successful joint campaigns in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom reinvigorated the Air Force narrative. Despite overwhelming operational successes in the initial campaigns that toppled the Taliban and Saddam Hussein respectively, the United States found itself embroiled in irregular warfare in which airpower continued to play an important role, but one that was supporting the ground forces. At this point, the service narrative became "we are critical enablers." By the end of the decade, Airmen had largely embraced this new narrative.

This chapter examines the Air Force's post-Desert Storm narratives in their historical context to see what insights might be gleaned for constructing a narrative for the present and the future. It covers the narratives post-Desert Storm and through Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. This analysis divides those operations into two sections: their initial campaigns

[1] Alan J. Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower: Air Force Narratives and American Public Opinion from 1917 to 2014.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, 2015, 108.

and the resultant irregular warfare. Dividing the wars in this way is necessary for understanding the collapse of the immediate post-Desert Storm narrative.

1991-2003: "Victory through Air Power"

Alexander de Seversky's idea of "victory through air power" came to the fore again in the wake of Desert Storm. Much as de Seversky wanted to convince the American people that "airpower had revolutionized warfare, becoming its paramount and decisive factor," many analysts claimed that airpower was the cornerstone of a RMA in the early 1990s.[2] The conditions were ripe for such a revolution. As Keith Shimko argued, "The war [Desert Storm] provided an opportunity for institutional redemption, a chance to finally exorcise the ghosts and demons of Vietnam."[3] The United States handily defeated the fourth-largest army in the world in a relatively short, relatively inexpensive, and airpower-centric campaign. The result was that the "victory through air power" narrative made its most prominent appearance since before the Cold War. The roots of the narrative's resurgence, however, existed long before Iraq invaded Kuwait.

Coming out of Vietnam, the joint forces underwent a renaissance in doctrine. AirLand Battle doctrine was the clearest indication thereof. In 1976, the US Army issued an updated Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, which critics quickly dismissed as being overly reliant on concepts of attrition warfare.[4] This dependence was problematic because intelligence indicated that Soviet forces would significantly outnumber NATO forces in Europe. In 1977, Gen Donn A. Starry took over Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) immediately after his assignment as a corps commander in West Germany. Given his background, Gen Starry was keenly interested in FM 100-5.[5] Starry saw a way in which airpower and maneuver forces could offset the numerical advantage of the Soviet forces. According to historian Robert Futrell, Starry envisioned an "extended battlefield," on which,

> A US Army corps commander would find it "essential for friendly air to keep enemy air off his back," would need "aerial reconnaissance and surveillance because he does not himself have the means to see the second echelon divisions or the second echelon army," and would have to depend on tactical air to interdict the movement forward of enemy second echelons since —except for the

[2] Phillip S Meilinger, "Alexander P. de Seversky and American Airpower," School of Advanced Airpower Studies. *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Air Power Theory*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1997, 239.
[3] Shimko, Keith L. *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 26
[4] Robert Frank Futrell. *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine. Vol. II: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907-1960*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2004, 549.
[5] Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine, Vol II*

> nonnuclear Lance missile—a corps commander's organic fire support can reach only about as far as he can see.

Starry chose to call this concept "AirLand Battle." Starry's guidance was reflected in the 1982 version of the doctrine.[6] Starry had an ally in the Commander of Tactical Air Command Gen Wilbur Creech. Dr. Harold Winton has argued that the relationship between Creech and Starry established a "well-developed institutional dialogue" that paid dividends for Army-Air Force cooperation.[7] Indeed, in 1984 the Air Force published Air Force Manual 1-1, which acknowledged the potential for air-ground cooperation.[8] Many Airmen, however, took exception to AirLand Battle. As James Slife argued, "Despite Creech and Starry's obviously shared vision, the AirLand Battle concept became a controversial issue within the Air Force for years to come. The concepts underpinning the AirLand Battle doctrine proved troublesome for many Airmen who saw it as an Army attempt to gain increased control over tactical airpower."[9]

John Andreas Olsen agreed that many airpower advocates found the doctrine wanting. To them AirLand Battle doctrine had "obvious shortcomings: it viewed air forces as supporting elements to ground campaign."[10] Chief among AirLand Battle critics was Air Force Colonel John Warden. Warden "questioned its [AirLand Battle's] fundamental premise: that the sole objective of warfare is defeat of the opposing army and that a nation must therefore direct all resources of war toward that end."[11] On the contrary, Warden thought airpower represented an independent, war-winning capability. His version of the "victory through airpower" narrative had the most far-reaching impact and is worth exploring in some detail.

Warden's first articulation of his ideas came in *The Air Campaign*, written in 1988. In it, Warden argued:

- "Air Superiority is critical to success."[12]

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[6] Harold Winton, "An Ambivalent Partnership: US Army and Air Force Perspectives on Air-Ground Operations, 1973-1990," *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Air Power Theory*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1997,
[7] Winton, "Ambivalent Partnership," 419.
[8] Winton, "Ambivalent Partnership," 418.
[9] James C. Slife, *Creech Blue Gen Bill Creech and the Reformation of the Tactical Air Forces, 1978-1984*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press in collaboration with CADRE, 2004, 35.
[10] John Andreas Olsen. *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2007, 65.
[11] Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance*, 65.
[12] John A. Warden III, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat*, National Defense University Press Publication, 1988, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/warden/warden-all.htm#retrospect, accessed 29 March 2016.

- "Whichever side first wins air superiority will reap significant and perhaps overwhelming advantages."[13]
- "In many circumstances it [airpower] alone can win a war."[14]
- "War can be won from the air"[15]

As Warden's biographer John Andreas Olsen argued, "It [*The Air Campaign]* was an air power manifesto in the tradition of air power theorists: Warden's line of reasoning shows a high degree of overlap and continuity with those of earlier visionaries."[16]

Early on, Warden's ideas met resistance, even within the Air Force.[17] This happened for primarily two reasons. The first was cultural. The second was doctrinal. While on the Headquarters Air Force Staff, several of his subordinates diagnosed the cultural problem. Lt Col Michael Hayden and Cols Jeff Watson and Jeff Barnett wrote an influential, unpublished paper that predated Builder's *The Icarus Syndrome*, but arrived at many of the same conclusions. "It argued that the air force identified itself with the air weapons and rooted itself in commitment to technological superiority, with the consequence that aircraft and systems, rather than missions and roles, had become the primary focus."[18] It is unsurprising, then, that Warden's ideas initially found little support in the Air Force. Nevertheless, Warden found essential advocates in Secretary of the Air Force Donald Rice and Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, Lt Gen Michael Dugan.[19] With respect to doctrine, the Air Force embraced AirLand Battle despite the reservations of those who had called for a more independent vision. Furthermore, President Reagan had recently signed the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 into law. Though it had not yet fully imbued the services with "jointness" by the start of the Gulf War, national policy and law pushed for more integration.[20] Inasmuch as Warden's ideas represented *independent* airpower, they faced an uphill battle.

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[13] John A. Warden III, *The Air Campaign.*
[14] John A. Warden III, *The Air Campaign.*
[15] John A. Warden III, *The Air Campaign.*
[16] Olsen goes on to compare Warden to Douhet, Mitchell, and de Seversky. Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance*,75.
[17] In fact, Warden was fired as a fighter wing commander. Olsen, Warden's biographer, suggests that being labeled an innovator was not helpful for him. He rocked the boat and the institution resented that. Major General (ret) Perry Smith said it best, "When he became a wing commander, he really ripped it in a number of senses. He tried to initiate major changes in a very short period of time, and it was so disruptive to the wing that the wing undercut him . . . When you really challenge some of the politics and doctrines that are well established within an institution, you are oftentimes considered to be not only wrong but disloyal." Smith as quoted in Olsen, J*ohn Warden and the Renaissance*, 100.
[18] Olsen, J*ohn Warden and the Renaissance*, 133.
[19] General Dugan would ultimately go on to become Chief of Staff of the Air Force before being relieved just prior to Desert Storm.
[20] Winton, "Ambivalent Partnership," 432.

Prior to becoming Secretary of the Air Force in 1989, Donald Rice had been president and chief executive of RAND where he concluded that the Air Force's biggest problem was "its inability to think conceptually." Rice once said, "When you poke a person in a light blue suit, they talk about their airplanes and their command. They do not talk about air power."[21] Just before Desert Shield, in an effort to conceptualize airpower, Rice published an Air Force white paper with one of Warden's acolytes, then Lt Col David Deptula. That paper, "The Air Force and U.S. National Security: Global Reach—Global Power," represented a shift away from the "peace is our profession" narrative of the Cold War. In some ways, it was ahead of its time as the Soviet Union still existed and the success of the Gulf War was months in the future. "Global Reach—Global Power" contained many key elements to the "victory through air power" narrative. For example, it asserted that "The Air Force's speed, range, and flexibility enable us to rapidly apply combat power against vital elements of an enemy's structure."[22] Furthermore, it openly advocated using "tactical" airpower for strategic effect.[23] This was central to Warden's argument that conventional airpower could be strategic—strategic employment of airpower no longer applied only to nuclear weapons. Finally, the landmark document predicted the import of space operations. Operational integration of air and space came of age during Desert Storm. "Global Reach—Global Power" gave Warden a strong indicator that his ideas were in keeping with the civilian head of the Air Force. Moreover, it would later inform Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney as he asked the joint staff for a plan for Iraq.

Lt Gen Dugan hired Warden to lead the Directorate of Warfighting Concepts, colloquially known as Checkmate, in summer of 1988.[24] As the planning for Desert Storm commenced, Warden perceived a lack of operational thought and decided he had the "opportunity to provide the military commanders with a swift, lethal, air-oriented campaign plan focused on the Iraqi Leadership."[25] Checkmate took an unusual approach of planning the air campaign in parallel to theater planning. Lt Gen Chuck Horner, commander of US and allied air forces for Desert Storm, initially balked at Warden's plan. In part, this may have been because Horner resented the Air Staff doing the job of the theater air commander, but Horner had other concerns. In the end, Horner kept Lt Col David Deptula in Riyadh, a Warden acolyte, to help Brig Gen Buster Glosson plan the air war. Deptula thus represented Checkmate in theater planning. The final plan was a

[21] As quoted in Olsen, J*ohn Warden and the Renaissance,* 127.
[22] U.S. Air Force. "The Air Force and US National Security: Global Reach—Global Power." *Washington, DC: US Air Force Department* (1990).
[23] Global Reach—Global Power, 8.
[24] Olsen, J*ohn Warden and the Renaissance,*101.
[25] Olsen, J*ohn Warden and the Renaissance,* 145.

composite of *Instant Thunder* and AirLand Battle. With that, the stage was at least partially set for Warden's "victory through air power." The victory was a smashing success and Warden's legacy casts a long shadow on the Air Force narrative even today.

In the aftermath of Desert Storm, the United States stood atop a unipolar world. Not only had the Soviet Union collapsed, but also the United States had just dismantled one of the largest armies in the world with a mere 100-hr ground campaign due largely to the lethality of American airpower. USAF Chief of Staff, Merrill McPeak claimed, "This is the first time in history that a field army has been defeated by air power."[26] Similarly, Lt Gen Chuck Horner argued, this was the first time the US embraced "the concept of air as the main attack versus a supporting attack for ground attack."[27] It is worth noting that not every observer shared this positive assessment of airpower in the first Iraq War. Defense analyst Jeffrey Record wrote, "Indeed, air power, intelligently applied, could not have been anything other than decisive under the conditions in which it operated in the Persian Gulf in early 1991."[28] One might call Record's narrative for the Iraq War "victory through adversary incompetence."

On the heels of the massive success of Desert Storm, however, the end of the Cold War brought other consequences. First, NATO countries wanted to reap their "peace dividend." Furthermore, the breakup of the Soviet Union called into question the need for NATO at all. When the crises in the Balkans sprang up, NATO had to act or risk irrelevance.[29] Due partly to the success of the air campaign in Iraq a few years earlier, and partly to the lack of political will to commit NATO ground force, NATO settled on airpower as the principal coercive tool to settle the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Operation Deliberate Force (1995)

Fallout from the dissolution of the Soviet Union caused Yugoslavia break into various factions with differing degrees of ethnic homogeneity. Thus, the Bosnian War had elements of nationalism and ethnic cleansing. The latter motivated the UN, and ultimately NATO, to take action against the Serbs. Domestic political debates on both sides of the Atlantic initially led to

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[26] Barton Gellman, "Disputes Delay Gulf War History." *Washington Post*, January 28, 1992. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/01/28/disputes-delay-gulf-war-history/5d473089-54e1-4910-83e7-301141c3e368/.

[27] As cited in Alan J Vick. "Proclaiming Airpower: Air Force Narratives and American Public Opinion from 1917 to 2014." RAND PROJECT AIR FORCE SANTA MONICA CA, RAND PROJECT AIR FORCE SANTA MONICA CA, January 2015. http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA621537., 72.

[28] Jeffrey Record. *Hollow Victory: A Contrary View of the Gulf War*. Washington: Brassey's (US), 1993, 104.

[29] Henriksen, Dag. *NATO's Gamble: Combining Diplomacy and Airpower in the Kosovo Crisis, 1998-1999*. Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2013, 89.

limited political will for anything other than the employment of UN peacekeepers.[30] But NATO would find out that "there was no peace to keep," and ultimately settle on air strikes as the solution.[31] The political backdrop for Operations Deliberate Force and Allied Force is the key to understanding how the "victory through air power" narrative survived the late 1990s.

The American political debate had roots in a doctrine debate that predated the Bosnia conflict. Early in his tenure as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen Powell lamented the way the United States had developed its strategy for Vietnam. As a result, he expressed a variation on what was known as the Weinberger doctrine. Powell asserted that if the United States should use force it should do so with a clear objective, for vital national interests, and use overwhelming force to accomplish its objective.[32] The results of the so-called Powell Doctrine were evident in Desert Storm. This created civil-military tension when the US State Department pushed for intervention in Bosnia. The Pentagon did not see Bosnia representing vital national interests. According to Dag Henriksen, President Bush, Gen Powell, and the Pentagon writ-large were reluctant to get involved in Bosnia.[33] During the 1992 election, presidential candidate William "Bill" Clinton said that he wanted US-led NATO airstrikes in Bosnia. As commander of the UN forces in Bosnia, General Sir Rupert Smith, wrote later in his book, "It seems to me that the most coherent imperative was the need to be seen doing something."[34] "Doing something" led to the establishment of a UN no-fly zone over all of the civil war belligerents in "Operation Sky Watch," but this action did not dissuade warring factions from using aircraft.[35] Because of that failure, NATO ramped up operations and began "Operation Deny Flight" on 31 March 1993, which began primarily as a policing action.

At the same time, the "victory through air power" narrative persisted. In June of 1993, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen McPeak recounted one of the central lessons of airpower from the Gulf War.

> The simultaneous or 'parallel' approach to warfare helps explain the decisive effect of the air campaign against Iraq. We didn't obliterate the entire country or its leadership, but we paralyzed it, and took away the ability to coordinate a

[30] Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble,* 90-96.
[31] Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble*,96.
[32] Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble*,70.
[33] Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble,* 93.
[34] As quoted in Henriksen *NATO's Gamble,* 96.
[35] Robert Owen, "Operation Deliberate Force, 1995," *A History of Air Warfare*. Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2010.
202. *CHECK CITATION*

> response. In the end, our ground forces did not have to roll back an army in linear fashion. They ran through, over, and around a broken force.[36]

This is a description Warden himself could have given, but not a description of how airpower would be applied in Bosnia months later. No doubt, General Michael Ryan, Air commander for NATO's Allied Forces Southern EUROPE (AIRSOUTH), would have liked to attack Milosevic in a "parallel" operation, but in keeping with the UN security resolution and the acquiescence of NATO allies, the air campaign predominantly targeted interdiction targets, not the strategic targets implied by the "victory through air power" narrative.

The stakes were such that NATO members believed they had to do something about ethnic cleansing in Europe, but they were hesitant to commit ground forces, even to prevent potential genocide. While NATO ultimately deployed a 10,000-troop Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) into Croatia, NATO also deployed an air capability in Operation Deliberate Force. After barely two weeks of bombing, Serb resistance collapsed. There were, however many contributing factors to the Serbs capitulation. All sides were exhausted from the conflict, Milosevic was desperate to escape the UN embargo, and the Croats and UN-recognized Bosnian government recently handed Serbs substantial losses on the ground.[37] In the end, as Robert Owen argued, "the *fact* of the bombing was more important to Serb calculations that its *means*."[38] In this way, the use of Allied airpower seemed to be a political end in itself, not a means for achieving political ends. The following sections will analyze the Air Force narrative during Operation Deliberate Force against the criteria established in Chapter 2.

Coherence

"Victory through air power" remained coherent through Deliberate Force because it tied the post-Desert Storm narrative to ongoing operations. To Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the air campaign "was the decisive factor in bringing the Serbs to the peace table."[39] As noted above, airpower was not the only factor, but it was, at least, a very important factor in the NATO victory. It was rational for NATO to see it as an airpower victory because airpower represented its primary stake in the conflict. Had NATO ground forces been present, the assessment would have been different.

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[36] Gen Merrill McPeak, "Air Power: Lessons Learned From Desert Storm." Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 7 Jun 1993.
[37] Owen, "Operation Deliberate Force," 203.
[38] Owen, "Operation Deliberate Force," 223, emphasis in original.
[39] As quoted in Owen, "Operation Deliberate Force," 222.

Validity

The narrative was valid, albeit in a limited way. Deliberate Force represented a successful employment of airpower for coercion, but the case has often been overstated. Colin Gray deemed it an "ambiguous success."[40] He argued, "It would be a considerable exaggeration to claim that Deliberate Force alone delivered the Bosnian Serbs in an abruptly if ungraciously acquiescent mood and primed for political agreement. But it is plausible to argue that the air campaign was physically and psychologically important, and perhaps decisively so."[41] Col Robert Owen, editor of the Air University Balkans Air Campaign Study concluded more definitively, "Airpower delivered what it promised in Deliberate Force. It was a decisive element in bringing a new period of peace to Bosnia—quickly, cleanly, and at minimal cost in blood and treasure to the intervening states and, indeed, to the Bosnian Serbs."[42] Airpower expert Benjamin Lambeth was less sanguine about the use of airpower; "That flirtation [with failure], reminiscent of every bad strategy choice the U.S. government made in Vietnam, should stand as a powerful reminder that however capable a tool modern air power may be, there is nothing preordained about its ability to produce winning results. Indeed, NATO air operations over Bosnia were only vindicated at the 11th hour by Deliberate Force."[43]

Furthermore, "victory through air power" as conceived by Warden aimed at creating strategic paralysis in the enemy force. During Deliberate Force, allies never attempted a parallel campaign and never achieved strategic paralysis. The Serbs capitulated for many reasons. But the ultimate reason may have been that Bosnia did not represent a vital interest to Milosevic. In other words, in combination with other instruments of power, airpower manipulated Milosevic's cost-benefit calculations such that he determined the campaign was not worth it.[44] This is very different from Warden's ideal, and this fact limits the justifiability of the narrative. In short the rhetoric of "victory through air power" only partially matched the reality of the deeds of Deliberate Force.

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[40] Colin S Gray, *Airpower for Strategic Effect.* Air University Press, Air Force Research Institute, 2012, 215.
[41] Gray, *Airpower for Strategic Effect*, 217.
[42] Col Robert C. Owen, "Summary," *Deliberate Force - A Case Study in Effective Air Campaigning: Final Report of the Air University Balkans Air Campaign Study*. Air University Press, 2000, 515.
[43] Lambeth, *Transformation of American Air Power*, 178.
[44] Robert Anthony Pape. *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1996, 16-18. Pape's theory of coercion centers around manipulating an adversary's cost benefit equation where a coercer manipulates the costs of continued resistance. In this case, the costs of resistance, in the face of allied airpower, were not worth a non-vital interest to Milosevic.

Cohesion

The narrative was internally cohesive; Airmen wanted "victory through air power" to be true and believed it to be true. Thus, the narrative continued to serve as a unifying cultural element. This was true despite the fact that the application of airpower was not fully in keeping with the "victory through air power" narrative. Externally, "victory through air power" was not cohesive with the administration's narrative. The Clinton Administration, particularly UN Ambassador Madeline Albright, saw great benefit in using a limited application of airpower as the principal instrument of coercive diplomacy, whereas "victory through air power" was much more in consonance with the Powell doctrine of decisive force. Despite this contradiction, the narrative persisted. This is probably because the success of the campaign allowed both sides to claim victory. "Victory through air power" advocates could argue that air power was decisive in the defeat of Milosevic, and the Clinton administration could claim that it was a limited application of airpower for limited means.

Anticipation

The narrative that remained after Desert Storm carried through Bosnia and Kosovo. American Airmen promised airpower could help achieve national policy objectives more cheaply and with less risk than ground forces. In the right context, this prediction of future actions was valid. Thus, the narrative was sufficiently anticipatory for the short term. Success in Bosnia created a subnarrative of "easy victory through air power." This was the proposition decision makers would look to in preparing for Operation Allied Force years later.

Operation Allied Force (1999)

Before the end of the Cold war, Serbia revoked Kosovo autonomy.[45] Soon thereafter, Kosovar Albanians suffered widespread human rights abuses. In 1993, Secretary of State Madeline Albright warned Serbian President Milosevic that if Serbia used military force in Kosovo, the United States would "be prepared to employ military force against Serbians in Kosovo and Serbia proper."[46] When hostilities ended in Bosnia in 1995, the warring factions gathered for to complete the Dayton Accords. Kosovo, however, was not on the agenda. In 1996, Serbia declared the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) a terrorist group. According to Tony Mason, Serbia used this to "[justify] indiscriminate action against suspected KLA members, political activists, and other civilians."[47] In response to the violence, the UN Security Council imposed an

[45] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," *A History of Air Warfare*. Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2010, 225.
[46] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 225.
[47] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 225.

arms embargo on Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, reports of human rights violations increased, which culminated in a massacre of Kosovar villagers in March 1998.[48]

The conditions were once again set for conflict between NATO and Serbia. The narrative of Operation Deliberate Force left an imprint on the key decision makers during the Kosovo crisis. At first glance, the problem was analogous to Bosnia. Dag Henriksen argued, "NATO went to war on the basic assumption that if exposed to its military force, President Slobodan Milosevic would quickly accede to NATO's demands."[49] That assumption stemmed directly from the experiences of those such as Secretary Albright who viewed Kosovo as being similar to Bosnia. While decision makers in the White House agreed with Albright's assessment that the alliance could easily coerce Milosevic, senior military advisors were divided. The Joint Chiefs were generally hesitant to get involved and were "skeptical of the rationale for American military involvement in Kosovo."[50] General Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, on the other hand, thought the Bosnia analogy apt. He directed the commander of US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE), Gen John Jumper, to build an air campaign to "halt or degrade systematic Serb campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo [with the] intent that the air strike . . . be coercive in nature, *on the Bosnia model*, providing a strong incentive for Milosevic to halt operations."[51] If not for the successful narrative of a low-cost air campaign during Deliberate Force, Allied Force might have gone much differently. It is conceivable that NATO might not have intervened at all.

The impact of the "victory through air power" narrative played out most clearly in operational planning. When the United States decided to act, the air commander, Lt Gen Short, wanted to focus on "Wardenesque" strategic conventional bombing. Gen Short captured his view of the "victory through airpower" narrative succinctly in testimony to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee:

> I believe the way to stop ethnic cleansing was to go at the heart of the leadership, and put a dagger in that heart as rapidly and directly as possible . . . I'd have gone for the head of the snake on the first night. I'd have dropped the bridges across the Danube.[52]

Not unlike World War II, the "victory through airpower" narrative was so strong that some viewed the Air Force's strategy as being discordant with the political constraints of the operation. Airpower historian Gian Gentile argues, "The type of targets bombed in Yugoslavia

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[48] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 225.
[49] Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble*, 3.
[50] Bradley Graham, as quoted in Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble*, 87.
[51] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 226, emphasis added.
[52] As quoted in Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 248.

and the attitudes of certain senior airmen toward the air campaign show that the traditional American concept of strategic bombing continues to shape Air Force thinking."[53]

In the end, General Clark won out. He directed a gradually escalating, coercive air campaign.[54] While this did not sit well with Airmen, the reality was that any military action in NATO required consensus of 19 countries.[55] As Secretary of Defense Cohen argued, a gradually increasing air campaign was the only strategy to which all countries would agree.[56] While airpower was the only military instrument of coercive power, Tony Mason argued that a combination of factors ultimately resulted in Serbian Capitulation: 1) Russia withdrew its support of Serbia. 2) Serbia was increasingly isolated. 3) Milosevic was named a war criminal.[57] Despite this, as Martin Van Creveld argued, "Over a decade later, the question why Milosevic finally surrendered after 78 days remains open. Whatever the answer, insofar as no NATO ground or sea forces saw action, airpower did indeed prove decisive in this strange war."[58] The salient point is that the use of allied airpower prevented moving to wage NATO's ground war in Serbia that may have required post-war occupation and would have inflamed Serbian nationalism.

Coherence

The "victory through air power" narrative persisted through Operation Allied Force more through power of will than any recognition of airpower's contributions to the ongoing fight. Nevertheless, before, during, and after Operation Allied Force, Airmen proclaimed "victory through air power." The narrative connected Operations Allied Force and Deliberate Force despite its questionable validity.[59]

Validity

Like its predecessor Deliberate Force, Operation Allied Force was not the smashing success for airpower that some made it out to be. For the purposes of coding, it could be deemed a success for the narrative, but only partially so. The reality is more nuanced, but "victory through air power" drowns out the nuance. Granted, the constraints on US airpower were political, but that made them no less real. Ultimately, after a 78-day air campaign, Serbia capitulated. As airpower was the only militarily coercive instrument, this might seem like a

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[53] Gian P. Gentile, *How Effective Is Strategic Bombing?: Lessons Learned from World War II to Kosovo.* World of War. New York: New York University Press, 2001, 191.
[54] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 229. Clark was clear to Jumper, the air operation was intended to coerce, not destroy Milosevic's government or forces.
[55] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 249.
[56] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 249.
[57] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 244.
[58] Martin Van Creveld, *The Age of Airpower*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2011, 330.
[59] The reader will recall from Chapter 2, that a to be coherent a narrative must connect events from the past to the present. In this case the narrative was relatively unchanged through the 1990s.

confirmation of the "victory through air power" narrative. The way NATO employed airpower, however, did not match the intent of de Seversky or his heir to the narrative, Warden. This was not because the senior Airmen did not want to attempt a such a campaign. In fact, Lt Gen Short would have prosecuted a by-the-book "victory through air power" campaign if allowed. In sum, he was insensitive to the need for coalition consensus and the feasibility of achieving that consensus for a "victory through air power" campaign.

Henriksen put it well,

> To the airmen approaching Kosovo, the strategic use of airpower in the 1991 Gulf War had shown that rapid escalation and overwhelming force aimed at the enemy's leadership constituted the preferable way to apply airpower . . . This approach did not fit the political nature of the Kosovo crisis . . . As a result, the U.S. Air Force was unprepared for the coercive diplomacy it was intended to support.[60]

In other words, the "victory through airpower" narrative did not fully match the reality of Kosovo. The argument here is not that airpower was not effective. The argument is that by the late 1990s the "victory through air power" narrative bordered on dogma, which adversely influenced the US Airmen's strategic approach in Kosovo. As Tony Mason wrote, "The debate over strategy went to the heart of air power doctrine. If air power can be effective only when applied with overwhelming force, claims of its inherent flexibility are groundless . . . For the first time in its history, air power had the capacity to be applied like a rapier, but there was reluctance to abandon the bludgeon."[61]

Cohesion

The narrative was internally cohesive in much the same way that it was in Bosnia. "Victory through air power" represented the core of the USAF identity in the late 1990s. Externally, the narrative was not cohesive. True, the airpower was the coercive instrument of choice for the administration. Eliot Cohen showed how the Airman's narrative was reconciled with the statesman's views.

> The apparent contribution of air power to the triumph over Iraq, and its subsequent applications—however inelegant—in Bosnia, Serbia, and Kosovo persuaded many that the air weapons employed independently offered the ideal tool for the sorts of military problems facing the United States in the 1990s . . . Air power became the weapon of choice for American statecraft.[62]

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[60] Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble*, 192.
[61] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 249.
[62] Eliot A. Cohen, "Kosovo and the new American Way of War." *War Over Kosovo: Politics and Strategy in a Global Age* (2001), 53.

Though the way airpower was applied was not what Airmen would have preferred, it raised airpower's prominence, and thus helped cement an uneasy alliance between airmen and statesmen.

Anticipation

"Victory through air power" would survive as the preeminent Air Force narrative for four years after operations in Kosovo. Thus, it was effective in the short-term. Arguably, the subsequent successes in Iraq and Afghanistan had their operational and technical roots in the air war of 1999 more so than the Gulf War of 1991. Kosovo saw widespread use of RPAs, all-weather precision-guided munitions, extended range and endurance, and rapid relay and assimilation of intelligence information.[63] While Airmen did not employ those capabilities to the complete realization of "victory through air power" in Kosovo; they would during the initial stages of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.

Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-2005)

The attacks of 11 September 2001 shocked the United States like nothing had since the attacks on Pearl Harbor sixty years earlier. Accordingly, the United States sought justice. Though no one initially claimed responsibility, the United States quickly determined it was the work of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda—the country had a target for its justice. This motivation did not, however, translate into a large-scale invasion, however. On the contrary, the original strategy relied on precision stand-off weapons with ground forces as an absolute last resort.[64] Eventually, that strategy would grow into what Benjamin Lambeth called, "a unique blend of air power, allied SOF, and indigenous Afghan opposition group combatants on the ground."[65] Analysts described the initial operations in Afghanistan as exceptionally successful. The "unique blend of airpower" came to be known as the "Afghan model." The Taliban discovered that if they massed forces to counter the indigenous Afghan formations they made excellent targets for allied airpower. Conversely, if they dispersed, they were ineffective against the those forces.[66] Five days in, the Northern Alliance captured the Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif. One month later Kabul, the traditional Taliban stronghold, fell. After about two months of operations, the Taliban fled leading Hamid Karzai to declare, "Taliban rule is finished."[67]

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[63] Mason, "Operation Allied Force," 250.
[64] Lambeth, "Operation Enduring Freedom," *A History of Air Warfare*. Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2010, 277.
[65] Lambeth, "Operation Enduring Freedom," 257.
[66] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 136.
[67] As quoted in, Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 137.

Coherence

The beginning of OEF made good on the RMA promise. In fact, the fusion of information, live intelligence and a shortened “kill chain” were more pronounced in the opening stage of OEF than at any previous point in the history of air warfare.[68] During the Afghan campaign, American Airmen perfected many of the techniques that had debuted in Kosovo, making the beginning of OEF a logical extension of the “victory through air power” narrative.

Validity

"Victory through air power" was an apt narrative for the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom. The Afghan model was a recognizable implementation of “victory through air power” inasmuch as the opponents in Afghanistan resembled a traditional foe. First, Allied airpower established air superiority by defeating the Taliban’s fighter force and surface-to-air defenses.[69] After establishing air superiority, allied airpower attacked al Qaeda (AQ) and Taliban leaders and forces. Quickly, however, offensive airpower flew predominantly “emerging targets” missions. As friendly Afghan forces took strategic positions, allied Airpower struck traditional interdiction targets such as roads and bridges. By January of 2002, strike operations had slowed dramatically. One month later, airpower’s primary role was policing.[70]

Cohesion

Internally the Air Force narrative during the early stage of Enduring Freedom was indistinguishable from ODF and OAF, with one notable exception. Airmen were exacting the retribution that the United States’ demanded. Airmen could take pride in that. Externally, "victory through air power" nested perfectly in the national narrative. The evening of the attacks, President George W. Bush said, "The search is underway for those who were behind these evil acts. I have directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."[71] President Bush perfectly captured the American sentiment for justice. Once again, Airpower was the coercive tool of choice among US instruments of power, but this time Airmen were truly the nation's sword.

Anticipation

“Victory through air power” would survive as the predominant Air Force narrative for the beginning of conflict in Iraq. Analysts of Operation Iraqi Freedom often credit American

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[68] Lambeth, “Operation Enduring Freedom,” 277.
[69] Lambeth, “Operation Enduring Freedom,” 277.
[70] Lambeth, “Operation Enduring Freedom,” 264.
[71] George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation, September 11, 2001" National Archive. https://youtu.be/rGwxw4tUzlo

experience during Operation Enduring Freedom for the rapid successes in the opening days of the Iraq conflict. Airpower and its narrative would enter Iraq intact, but the narrative would not survive first contact with irregular warfare. While the "Afghan model" was a successful incarnation of "victory through airpower," after the Taliban were defeated, the United States discovered the limits of the model. Brian Mead argued that the United States surrogates were only interested in fighting the Taliban, not al Qaeda.[72] This became problematic because the Afghan model only works if the objectives of external actors align with those of the indigenous forces.[73] When allies and indigenous forces lost their common interest of ousting the Taliban, the promise of "victory through airpower" evaporated.

As the conflict with AQ took shape, the United States increasingly assumed an enabling role. When the war moved from combat operations, to constabulary, to full counterinsurgency, the value of airpower appeared to decline. In May 2003, the United States declared that major combat operations were over in Afghanistan.[74] Soon thereafter, NATO assumed control of the international security forces in Afghanistan (ISAF). ISAF's initial role was stability and reconstruction, and airpower played only a policing role. Around 2005 previously routed fighters and new foreign fighters gathered in Afghanistan and launched a full insurgency. The less regular the war became, the more the more irrelevant "victory through air power" became.

Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003)

The road to war with Iraq in 2003 was much more complicated than Enduring Freedom. Conflict with Iraq never completely ended after Desert Storm. The limited objectives of Desert Storm and the decision to leave Saddam Hussein in power led to more than a decade of brinksmanship and oppression of Iraqis. Williamson Murray and Major General Robert Scales called this period 'containment,' "which involved UN Sanctions, no fly zones, and arms inspections."[75] While there are no direct links from Iraq to the terror attacks on 11 September 2001, it is almost certain that the Bush Administration would not have had the political will to see regime change in to Iraq if it were not for those attacks.[76] Here again, the Air Force narrative comes into play. Murray and Scales argued that by 2002, the performance of the United States in

[72] As quoted in, Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 138.
[73] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 138.
[74] Vernon Loeb, "Rumsfeld Announces End of Afghan Combat." *The Washington Post*, May 2, 2003. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/05/02/rumsfeld-announces-end-of-afghan-combat/9507f2f8-a7e8-497c-be9d-5eae475f1b47/.
[75] Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales. *The Iraq War: A Military History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2005, 33.
[76] Murray and Scales, *Iraq War: A Military History*, 39.

OEF "underlined the military capabilities the United States could project when it had the will to do so."[77] With Hussein resisting sanctions and inspections, the administration had a plausible reason to go to war and with "victory through airpower" had a compelling means for winning.

Leading up to the conflict, CENTCOM air component commander Lt Gen T. Michael "Buzz" Moseley argued that airpower should target Iraqi air defenses and leadership before any ground conflict commenced.[78] Meanwhile, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld advocated the idea of "rapid dominance" or an immediate, political, and military collapse of the enemy brought on by precision weapons. Rumsfeld sought "simultaneous aerial attacks on Iraqi leadership, command, and control targets . . . To create the paralysis envisaged by Warden."[79] Both Moseley and Rumsfeld were in effect, arguing for "victory through air power." But CENTCOM commander General Tommy Franks' staff was in charge of operational planning, and it never seriously considered the Moseley approach of an air-only portion of the operation.[80] Ultimately, planners coalesced around a rapid ground and air campaign enabled by precision ISR and integration not just between air platforms, but also with ground forces.[81] Despite this, the air campaign kicked off the war a day before air-ground operations began when Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Richard Meyers (USAF), asked Lt Gen Moseley to send in F-117s to Baghdad to attack Saddam Hussein directly. Warden's decapitation strategy and "victory through air power" were clearly evident here. The attack on Hussein failed, but the subsequent joint campaign was very successful.

Due to 12 years of no-fly zones and intermittent action against Iraq's air defense system, the coalition established air supremacy from the beginning of the conflict. The initial "shock and awe" air campaign was brutal, but it did not result in enemy capitulation as some members of the Bush administration had hoped.[82] Aside from the F-117s, the initial air campaign consisted of stand-off weapons targeted at regime leadership and government structures. Simultaneously, coalition ground forces rapidly advanced toward Baghdad. Airpower assets supported the ground advance through ISR, mobility, close air support (CAS) and interdiction. Williamson Murray argued that CAS and interdiction were airpower's greatest contribution to success in the opening stage of OIF.

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[77] Murray and Scales, *Iraq War: A Military History*, 40.
[78] Williamson Murray, "Operation Iraqi Freedom," *A History of Air Warfare*. Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2010, 282.
[79] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 147.
[80] Murray and Scales, *Iraq War: A Military History*, 93.
[81] Murray, "Operation Iraqi Freedom," 282.
[82] Murray and Scales, *Iraq War: A Military History*, 167.

> In the Iraq War of 2003, the strategic air campaign was largely ineffective. It certainly did not lead to the fall of Saddam's regime . . . Only a ground invasion that moved into the center of the Mesopotamian Valley and occupied Baghdad could succeed in overthrowing Saddam . . . Air power allowed coalition ground forces to win their overwhelming conventional victory.[83]

In other words, Airpower's contributions, while critical, did not result in "victory through air power."

Coherence

If the opening of Operation Enduring Freedom was coherent with previous iterations of "victory through air power," the opening of Operation Iraqi Freedom was even more so. The opening attacks of Operation Iraqi Freedom represented the purest incarnation of Warden's "victory through air power." The United States Air Force rapidly established air dominance, attacked Iraq simultaneously at all levels of war (tactical through strategic), attempted a decapitation strategy, and struck Iraqi critical infrastructure. That the strategic attacks were of questionable efficacy is more a question of validity than coherence. To be coherent, the narrative only had to connect to the past, the previous narrative, and ongoing events. The coalition attempted to execute Operation Iraqi Freedom in harmony with "victory through air power," and that satisfies the coherence criteria.

Validity

The United States Air Force contributed to an overwhelming victory in Iraq in 2003. As Benjamin Lambeth put it, "Unlike the first Gulf War, the 2003 campaign featured a concurrent and synergistic rather than sequential application of air and ground power . . . Allied air power quickly neutralized the already heavily degraded Iraqi air defense system and established uncontested control of the air, while at the same time paving the way for the allied ground thrust toward Baghdad."[84] Though the victory must be kept in context. As Shimko argued the deck was clearly stacked in favor of the US-led coalition. "Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was a wildly asymmetric affair in which the most powerful military the world has probably ever known took on an ill-equipped, poorly motivated, and incompetently led opponent."[85] But, the "victory through air power" narrative demanded victory in a particular way. Murray questioned the effectives of the conventional strategic attacks. First, he pointed out there was no evidence that the strategic targets significantly influenced Hussein or his colleagues.[86] None of the opening

[83] Murray, "Operation Iraqi Freedom," 296. Emphasis added.
[84] Benjamin S. Lambeth. *The Unseen War: Allied Air Power and the Takedown of Saddam Hussein*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2013, 1-2.
[85] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 158.
[86] Murray and Scales, *Iraq War: A Military History*, 288.

strikes against regime leaders succeeded, and the Iraqis were prepared for strikes on headquarters facilities. Second, the damage to government structures certainly hurt the reconstruction efforts and adversely affected civilians.[87] If Murray was correct, airpower led to victory in spite of the "victory through air power" narrative, not because of it.

It was not Warden's idea of strategic paralysis that defeated Hussein and his regime; it was soldiers and marines in Baghdad. As military theorist, Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie said, "The ultimate determinant in war is the man on the scene with a gun."[88] It is worth noting that this does not diminish the value of airpower. As Lambeth argued,

> Just as the toppling of Hussein's regime could not have occurred without a substantial allied ground presence to seize and occupy Baghdad, the ground offensive could not have succeeded with such speed and such a relatively small loss of friendly life . . . without the contribution of allied air power toward establishing prompt air supremacy over Iraq and then beating down enemy ground forces to a point where they lost both their will and their capacity to continue organized fighting.[89]

The "victory through air power" narrative was thus partially valid, but overstated the contributions of the air component during this campaign.

Cohesion

The narrative was internally cohesive because the campaign was a smashing joint success and airpower shared in that success. In this sense, it was close enough to "victory through air power" to be useful Certainly, the coalition attempted a Warden-like campaign, albeit with limited success in the conventional strategic campaign. It was externally cohesive as it nested in the Bush administration's narrative for the Department of Defense. Secretary Rumsfeld was a true believer in the RMA. He believed in a smaller, lighter, more lethal joint force and wanted to see it displayed in Iraq.[90] While airpower did not achieve strategic paralysis envisioned by Rumsfeld, it did allow for a smaller, more lethal joint force than would have been possible without it.

Anticipation

As successful as the coalition was in the initial campaign, US airpower was not well suited for the demands of irregular warfare. After more than a decade of the "victory through airpower" narrative during conventional conflicts, most people from the President of the United

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[87] Murray and Scales, *Iraq War: A Military History*, 288.
[88] Rear Adm J.C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*. Naval Institute Press, 2014, 72. Emphasis removed.
[89] Lambeth. *The Unseen War*, 4.
[90] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 138.

States to the average citizen believed in the promise of airpower in any conflict. Yet, the context changed so dramatically that airpower's role after 2004 was nearly unrecognizable from the role it played in the campaigns of the 1990s through 2003.

"Victory through Air Power" Summary and Implications

Dating back to its origins with de Seversky, "Victory through air power" consistently overstated airpower's contribution to success in war. More than anything de Seversky was an airpower publicist. Nevertheless, from Desert Storm in 1991 to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the United States Air Force enjoyed overwhelming successes that helped perpetuate this narrative. Paradoxically, the successes of the reality led to failure in rhetoric. The successes of Desert Storm and the decade following led most observers to overestimate the efficacy of conventional strategic airpower and underestimate the importance of the context of those successes. The ultimate failure of the "victory through air power" narrative was its failure to anticipate changes in the character of war. As noted in the introduction, predicting the future with specificity is impossible. The best a prognosticator can hope to do is bound the future.

Over-stated rhetoric, even if successful in the short-term, will ultimately undermine a narrative's effectiveness when the context shifts. All narratives, even macro narratives, must allow for changing context. This poses the question of whether all service narratives are bound to fail when the context changes. Perhaps they are, but the argument here is that the degree to which the narrative changes matters. The shift from "victory through airpower" to "we are critical enablers" was stark, and it fundamentally altered how Airmen thought about their service and their individual roles.

2004 - 2011: "We Are Critical Enablers"

Though dramatic, the change in context in Iraq and Afghanistan was not sudden, nor was it unforeseeable. During the period 2004-2011, the United States arguably still enjoyed something of a unipolar moment. There were, however, indicators suggesting a rising China and an increasingly aggressive and resurgent Russia. As the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan continued, many countries in the coalition faced domestic political pressure to withdraw troops from the war zones. Amid mounting domestic pressure, the United States also experienced a sharp economic recession in the autumn of 2008. These factors aggravated an already war-weary American electorate. The situation would get worse on both fronts.

In both Afghanistan and Iraq, advisors warned Secretary Rumsfeld of the likelihood of facing resistance in stability operations. Writing about Iraq, Van Creveld noted, "Though he had

been warned many times Rumsfeld seems to have been surprised by the growth of armed resistance and the extremely violent forms it soon assumed."[91] In a truism applicable to both conflicts, Van Creveld continued,

> As in all counterinsurgency campaigns, it quickly turned out that the larger and the more powerful the available aircraft, the less useful they were and the higher the cost of using the relatively few available ones . . . Having resolutely refused to face reality from the time of Vietnam on, the U.S. Air Force entered the war without a counterinsurgency doctrine of any sort.[92]

The brand of "victory through air power" that the Air Force espoused post-Desert Storm left it ill-equipped in dealing with the vagaries of irregular warfare. The story the Air Force believed about itself, that it could solve all of the nation's problems through "parallel attack" against the enemy's center of gravity, turned out to be highly contextually dependent. The "victory through air power" did not account for nuance. Airmen, policy makers, and citizens misunderstood the strengths and limitations of the instrument. As the conflicts in Operations Enduring and Iraq Freedom shifted shape, "victory through air power" slowly gave way to the narrative "we are critical enablers." One of the most interesting aspects of this narrative is that it started as a grass roots campaign.[93] It originated with Airmen doing tactical missions under Gen Jumper's tenure, but not with Gen Jumper himself or other senior leaders. This fact seems to suggests that service leaders had become disconnected from the emerging subnarratives of the organization.

Indeed, Secretary Gates fired Secretary of the Air Force Michael Wynn and Chief of Staff Gen Moseley "over disagreements regarding the size of the F-22 program buy and Gates's perception that the USAF was more concerned with protecting its high-technology programs and fighting future conventional wars than in helping win today's wars."[94] In other words, Secretary Gates believed that the Air Force narrative at the senior levels was out of touch with reality. The nation was involved in two insurgencies and needed its Air Force committed to supporting those conflicts in every way. To Gates, the Air Force seemed preoccupied with acquiring new technology. In terms that Builder would understand, this indicates that as recently as 2008 Air Force senior leaders were still worshiping at the altar of technology, and from Secretary Gates' perspective, this came at the expense of the Air Force's national-defense role.

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[91] Van Creveld, *Age of Airpower*, 419.
[92] Van Creveld, *Age of Airpower*, 419.
[93] Paula G. Thornhill, *Over Not Through: The Search for a Strong, Unified Culture for America's Airmen* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, January 2012, 7.
[94] Alan J. Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower: Air Force Narratives and American Public Opinion from 1917 to 2014.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, 2015, 76.

In many ways, the dual firing was a rejection of the "victory through air power" narrative. Moreover, Gate's firing of Gen Moseley constituted a message to the institution. Gates thought the Air Force was overly concerned with "high-tech air-to-air combat and strategic bombing against major nation states," and was not concerned with the needs of troops in combat.[95] Secretary Gates accused the Air Force of having "next-war-itis," in response Gen Moseley accused Secretary Gates of having "this-war-itis."[96] In an interview with *Air Force Magazine* General Moseley said, "I think you have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time," Moseley continued, "You have to do both: Fight today's fight and prepare for the future . . . It's not either-or."[97]

While Secretary Gates thought the Air Force should be supporting ground forces, in accordance with "we are critical enablers," Gen Moseley was firmly in "victory through air power" camp. Alan Vick postulated that this disagreement over narratives contributed to Moseley's firing.[98] If valid, this helps in two ways to explain the appointment of Gen Norton Schwartz, who was a special operations and mobility pilot with extensive joint experience, as CSAF. First, Schwarz would become the first organizational leader to embrace "we are critical enablers," a narrative more in line with Secretary Gates' thinking. Second, General Schwartz's becoming Chief of Staff was an implicit rebuke to the Air Force's fighter-pilot culture. As Edgar Schein says, the most reliable ways to see what an institution values is not to look at what it says, but what it does.[99]

The rest of this section will examine the Air Force narrative during the periods of irregular war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unlike the previous cases, which occurred serially, "we are critical enablers" occurred with simultaneous operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Operation Iraqi Freedom - (2003-2011)

The US-led coalition handled the occupation of Iraq poorly. Two weeks after President Bush declared "Mission Accomplished" aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, Paul Bremmer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), issued two controversial orders that contributed to instability in Iraq.[100] First, Bremmer ordered "de-Baathification of Iraqi Society." Second, he

[95] Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, pp. 239 and 248.
[96] John Tirpak, "Gates Versus the Air Force," *Air Force Magazine*, March 2014.
[97] John Tirpak, "Gates Versus the Air Force," *Air Force Magazine*, March 2014.
[98] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower,* 76.
[99] Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 3 edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010, 246-7.
[100] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 173.

disbanded the Iraqi Army, much of the country's police, and its internal security forces.[101] Ultimately, these directives contributed to sectarian violence, civil war, and insurgency.

In hindsight, it is also clear that the initial deployment of U.S. ground forces was too small to stabilize Iraq. In congressional testimony, Gen Eric Shinseki estimated that it would take 480,000 troops to stabilize post-war Iraq. Both Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz balked at the figure. Wolfowitz said, "It is hard to conceive that it would take more forces to provide stability . . . Than it would take to conduct the war itself."[102] That, however, is exactly what irregular-war scholars predicted.[103] But Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz did not operate from an irregular war mindset. Instead they presumed that the stability requirements would be minimal as the United States would be "[greeted] as liberators.[104]" The Air Force was complicit in the judgment errors as well. Frederick Kagan argues that more than a decade of a "victory through air power" narrative had reduced Air Force strategy to targeting, which led to a "primacy of destruction over planning for political outcomes."[105]

Iraqis responded almost immediately to the insufficient governance. After the fall of Baghdad, Iraqis began looting government buildings, museums, and hospitals. What started as minor civil unrest turned into violent interactions between Iraqis and coalition troops. Within a few months, an insurgency began, though it would take almost a year for government officials to admit that there was one. This was not a sort of fight airpower was prepared to fight. Shimko points out, "This was an enemy whose movements could not be tracked by JSTARS. Satellites and UAVs could not see into the living rooms, garages, and basements where IEDs were being assembled."[106]

For the better part of the next decade, the United States would be involved in counterinsurgency and stability operations in which airpower played a critical supporting role, but a supporting role nonetheless. Shimko highlights the limitations of the "victory through air power" narrative, "The perfected reconnaissance-strike complex that decimated the Iraqi military proved decidedly less useful for stopping looters, preventing foreign fighters from crossing the border, or making the people of Iraq feel safe and secure from insurgents, terrorists and religious

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[101] Gordon W. Rudd, *Reconstructing Iraq: Regime Change, Jay Garner, and the ORHA Story*. Modern War Studies. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011, x.
[102] As quoted in Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 145.
[103] Both the U.S. Army Center of Military history, through historical models, and the leader of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance concurred with the numbers at the time, as well. Rudd, *Reconstructing Iraq*, 140-1.
[104] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 145.
[105] Kagan as quoted in Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 162.
[106] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 178.

zealots. And it was completely useless for rebuilding Iraq's political and economic infrastructure."[107] The point here is not that airpower was unimportant, but that the "victory through air power" narrative led to acquiring high-end assets and developing doctrine that were insufficient, inefficient, and at times ineffective in irregular warfare.

Airmen conducting the mission were much quicker to notice this than organizational leaders were. As Vick argued, though the narrative began during Jumper's tenure, "This internal narrative ["we are critical enablers"] persisted and grew during General Moseley's tour as Air Force chief of staff but wasn't presented publicly by USAF leaders until General Norton "Norty" Schwartz became chief of staff in 2008." Indeed, it took the relief of Gen Moseley to usher in the new narrative. Thornhill argued that the narrative merely reflected what most airmen felt they were contributing. "While land forces provided the COIN [counterinsurgency] combat power, Airmen enabled their joint partners' operations by providing persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; inter-theater and intra-theater mobility; medical evacuation; space and cyberspace expertise; individual augmentees to support convoys, provincial reconstruction teams, host-nation training, and command staffs; and close air support to the land operations."[108] Certainly, the coalition could not have waged Operation Iraqi Freedom without airpower and airmen. Hence, airmen came to think, "We are critical enablers."

Operation Enduring Freedom (2005 - 2014)

In 2001, shortly after the attacks of 11 September, former CIA station chief, Milton Beardman penned an article for *Foreign Affairs*, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires." In it, Beardman warned against equating the Taliban with Bin Laden and of making partisan alliances with the Northern Alliance.[109] Above all, Beardman urged caution because Afghan tribes had a robust history of repelling empires: the United Kingdom in The First Afghan War (1839-42); the United Kingdom, again in The Second Afghan War (1878-1881); and, the Soviet Union in the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-89).[110] Beardman's article accurately forecast many of the problems America and its NATO allies would encounter.

The preceding section detailed the first part of this story. In an airpower-centric campaign, the US-led coalition handily defeated the Taliban. With the Taliban and AQ defeated,

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[107] Shimko, *Iraq Wars*, 203-204.
[108] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 7.
[109] Milton Beardman. "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires." Foreign Affairs. March 16, 2016, accessed March 16, 2016. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2001-11-01/afghanistan-graveyard-empires.
[110] Beardman, "Graveyard of Empires," 17-20.

The United States turned its efforts to rebuilding Afghanistan. In April 2002, President Bush announced a "Marshall Plan" for Afghanistan, "Peace will be achieved by helping Afghanistan develop its own stable government. Peace will be achieved by helping Afghanistan train and develop its own national army, and peace will be achieved through an education system for boys and girls which works."[111] The effort stalled, however, with the invasion of Iraq. In retrospect, US assumptions about the prospects of democracy in Afghanistan, the permanence Taliban's defeat, and inadequate funding for reconstruction led to fertile ground for a Taliban insurgency.

By 2005, previously routed insurgents had begun moving back into the region and challenging NATO and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) forces.[112] Deputy Combined Force Air Component Commander to US Central Command at the time, Lt Gen Allen G. Peck was unable to discern a clear strategy for dealing with the insurgency.[113] In fact, he saw two. The first strategy focused on a small footprint of US forces focused on killing and capturing individuals threatening the United States.[114] It was heavily dependent on various aspects of airpower. The second strategy, made popular by Gen David Petraeus, was a more traditional COIN strategy that relied on additional forces to ensure population control and governance.[115] Peck wrote, "It seemed we had two competing strategies or narratives at work."[116] In trying to please advocates of both strategies, the coalition compromised both. Peck continued, "In an IW [irregular warfare] environment, the traditionally recognized ability of airpower to strike at the adversary's "center of gravity" will likely have little relevance due to the decentralized and diffuse nature of the enemy"[117] In the absence of being prepared to fight any other way, they still applied conventional methods to an irregular problem. As Peck concluded, "We were trying to put the square conventional-warfare peg into the round irregular-warfare hole."

As the utility and role of force changed, so too did the role for American airpower. Thornhill argued that, in this irregular war, Airmen shifted their focus to ISR, airlift, medical

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[111] George W. Bush, "Text: Bush Calls for End to Terrorism." *The Washington Post*, April 17, 2002, washingtonpost.com edition. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/transcripts/bushtext_041702.html.
[112] Henriksen, Dag, ed. "Introduction," *Airpower in Afghanistan 2005-10: The Air Commanders' Perspectives*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, Air Force Research Institute, 2014, xxvii.
[113] Allen Peck, "Airpower: The Theater Perspective," *Airpower in Afghanistan 2005-10: The Air Commanders' Perspectives*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, Air Force Research Institute, 2014, 21.
[114] Peck, "Airpower: The Theater Perspective" 21.
[115] Peck, "Airpower: The Theater Perspective" 21.
[116] Peck, "Airpower: The Theater Perspective" 23.
[117] Peck, "Airpower: The Theater Perspective" 23.

evacuation, space, and cyberspace.[118] Once again, the Air Force contributed critical support capabilities; but they were support capabilities nonetheless.

Coherence

At first glance, “we are critical enablers” was not coherent because it represented a stark break from the past. Whereas "victory through airpower" relied on strategic application of force to defeat an enemy, "we are critical enablers" assumed that the main effort was land-centric. If one were paying attention after Desert Storm, however, elements of the “we are critical enablers” narrative were present. Here, one should recall Murray’s claim that airpower’s most vital contributions to the beginning of OIF were in close air support and interdiction. One could add to that list mobility operations that enabled marine supply lines and an ISR-fused strike complex, with everything supported by space assets. This suggests that the discontinuity in the narratives need not have been as distinct as it was. On the contrary, the narrative could have matched reality much earlier had it done so, there could have been an evolution from Desert Storm to the irregular wars in Iraq and Afghanistan rather than a sharp break. Physicist and author Thomas Kuhn argued that institutions form strong networks of commitments based on unifying ideas, called paradigms.[119] Kuhn further posited that paradigms do not evolve—they become overthrown. In other words, it takes more than conflicting information to replace a paradigm—it takes a crisis.[120] The Air Force did not face such a crisis in the Post-Desert Storm era until it confronted irregular warfare. When Secretary Gates demonstrated the reality of the crisis with the firings of Secretary Wynne and Gen Moseley, the paradigm, as Kuhn would predict, shifted dramatically.

Validity

“We are critical enablers" was valid, but not comprehensive. The narrative certainly fit for those Airmen supporting ground forces in the irregular campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Successful counterinsurgencies require engagement with a target population and control of territory. Airpower is not suited for direct contribution to either task, but is exceptionally well suited for an indirect contribution. In that respect, “we are critical enablers” was valid. On the other hand, while fighting irregular wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US Air Force also had to prepare for major conventional conflicts against a number of potential adversaries. Whether that adversary was China, Russia, or North Korea, airpower would certainly play a more central role in such a conflict than it played in Iraq or Afghanistan. Therefore, “we are critical enablers” alone was insufficient.

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[118] Thornhill, *Over Not Through*, 7.
[119] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*. Fourth Edition. Chicago ; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2012, xxiii
[120] Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 77.

Cohesion

Internally, the narrative was not entirely cohesive with its subnarratives. On one side of the ledger, it represented what much of the force was doing over a 10-year period. From the mobility air forces to space operators and defenders to logisticians, most Airmen could relate to being critical enablers since the ground campaign received the weight of effort. On the other side of the ledger, not all Airmen were excited about the narrative. Alan Vick argued, "This narrative was firmly rejected by many airmen (particularly in the fighter and bomber communities) and has lost some urgency as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have wound down."[121]

The narrative "we are critical enablers" was externally cohesive as it was consistent with the various counterinsurgency narratives rolled out by the Joint Forces Commanders.[122] Once the coalition recognized the campaigns as being counterinsurgencies, the target populations became the center of gravity. As such, airpower constituted a vital supporting element to the ground forces in direct contact with the population. "We are critical enablers" embraced that role.

Anticipation

"We are critical enablers", like "victory through air power" before it, had very specific contextual elements that had to be present for the narrative to be valid. Namely, for the narrative to be valid, the United States had to be in an irregular conflict where the weight of effort resided with the land component commander, and traditionally core missions of the air force like strategic attack and interdiction were far less important than in conventional conflict. To some extent, the anticipatory value of this narrative remains to be seen. If the next decades' conflicts look like the irregular wars of the 2000s, then perhaps "we are critical enablers" will persist. This is suggestive of the incompleteness of this narrative. While it anticipates traditional irregular war very well, it does not anticipate conventional war at all. Furthermore, even in the context of irregular war, the United States may opt for aerial intervention rather than a traditional ground-centric COIN campaign.

In fact, even before the United States concluded the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, US airpower prepared for another air-only option in Libya, an operation that would look more like the Balkans of the 1990s than the irregular wars of the 2000s. Thus, before Gen Schwartz's tenure ended, the signs of a new narrative were on the horizon.

[121] Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower*, 79.
[122] e.g. "by, with, and through"; "clear, hold, and build"; "hearts and minds."

"We are critical enablers" Summary and Implications

Simply put, the narrative was a product of a particular time for the Air Force. It was an overcorrection to the "victory through air power" narrative and undersold the significant contributions of the Air Force to joint operations. Remarking on this period, Colin Gray noted, "The 2000s have been widely regarded as registering some notable measure of retreat in airpower's relative significance."[123] He continued by suggesting that there is a "fatal fault with that narrative . . . a major reason why such an argument has enjoyed traction is because airpower's strategic story has not been developed and explained soundly and persuasively." In General Schwartz's efforts to accommodate Secretary Gates' guidance, he may have unintentionally undervalued the core mission of the Air Force. One quotation reflects this tendency:

> Let there be no doubt—we, in your Air Force, are "all in." . . . Whether it is serving alongside ground forces in convoys or in Joint Terminal Attack Controller roles, or providing game-changing Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capabilities with unmanned aerial vehicles, or helping our wounded warriors with life-saving medical care and aeromedical evacuation, or providing rapid and precise strike capabilities in counterinsurgency or close air support roles, hear me loud and clear when I say that we are all in. This is our priority as an Air Force.[124]

The Air Force exists first to provide air and space superiority, which the nation will expect of the Air Force in every conflict. Undoubtedly, the Air Force's focus during this time was support; however, a casual observer could misconstrue the statement above to think that the Air Force *exists to support* the Joint Force, *not as an equal partner* with the other services. The language of being merely "critical enablers" artificially subordinates the Air Force to other services.

Conclusions

This chapter described the post-Gulf War Air Force narratives and analyzed the extent to which they were effective. In sum, "victory through airpower" was mostly effective, but lacked full validity and anticipation. While all narratives should evolve with context, "victory through airpower" was too far off from a likely future. Had Air Force leaders adopted the rhetoric of the service to the reality of Air Force contributions, the narrative may have evolved rather than had to

[123] Gray, *Airpower for Strategic Effect*, 235
[124] Gen Norton Schwartz, *Pride in Service, Heritage*, speech to American Legion 49th Annual Washington Conference, March 3, 2009. Emphasis added.

be radically changed. In this respect, it only partially succeeded. "We are critical enablers," was also only partially effective. It too was only valid in a particular context. It was also not entirely cohesive. Many fighter and bomber pilots rejected the narrative out of hand. Finally, it did not anticipate a transition back to a preparation for "high end," major combat operations.

Overall, "we are critical enablers" created a curious position for the next Chief of Staff, Gen Mark Welsh who had to deal with the aftermath of drawing down from two wars while simultaneously preparing for a rising China and a resurgent Russia, as well as possible conventional wars against Iran and North Korea. The next chapter evaluates the current Chief and Secretary's narratives against two candidate narratives and recommends a narrative for the early-mid-21st century.

Chapter 5
Determining an Air Force Narrative for the Early-Mid-21st Century

"We find ourselves in a thicket of strategic complexity, surrounded by a dense mist of uncertainty."

- Nick Bostrom, 2014

"The true irony of airpower history is that aviation actually has been seriously undersold as a consequence of its being oversold."

- Coin S. Gray, 2012

"Strategic ambiguity" might be the most apt description of the present national security environment. While it would be historically arrogant to suggest that the present is more tumultuous than the past, there is a great deal of uncertainty in the present. The future is even less clear, as it results directly from decisions made in this ambiguous present. Strategically, the United States faces many threats. Islamic extremists threaten the West and its way of life. China's increased economic might coincides with increased appetite for regional dominance, which has become manifested in territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Furthermore, China's relative power continues to increase vis-a-vis the United States. Whether a cause or effect of that power, China has become increasingly aggressive in cyberspace. In 2010, the Commander of US Cyber Command, Gen Keith Alexander, said Chinese cyber-theft of US intellectual property represented "the greatest transfer of wealth in history."[1] Apart from China, the United States faces threats in the Middle East and along Russia's borders with NATO countries and Ukraine.

In 2014, Libya's government collapsed, Yemen broke out in civil war, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself caliph, and Russia forcibly annexed the Crimean Peninsula.[2] While the United States was negotiating with Iran to suspend its nuclear program, Iran was working directly against US interests by bolstering the Assad regime in Syria. By 2015, Syria had devolved into what can only be described as a quagmire. The Assad regime, backed by Russia, Hezbollah, and Iran continues to kill civilians while the United States-backed moderate rebels oppose the regime. Meanwhile, AQ franchises and ISIS capitalized on the lack of governance in Syria and Iraq to establish greater footholds in the region.

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[1] As quoted in Shane Harris. *@WAR: The Rise of the Military-Internet Complex*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. 53

[2] Kilcullen, David. *Blood Year: The Unraveling of Western Counterterrorism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, 2.

The present United States Air Force narratives reflect this ambiguity. On the one hand, the United States faces (and will likely face for some time) a widespread, persistent, though non-existential, threat from Islamic extremism. On the other hand, the United States faces competition bordering on hostility with China, open aggression from Russia, and wild cards in Iran and a nuclear-capable North Korea. Any of these latter threats could be existential. As noted in the previous chapter, the last two Air Force narratives failed in anticipation because they did not account for likely possibilities. This suggests that the most effective narrative must be sufficiently broad to encompass airpower's contributions to both irregular and conventional war. This reality might lead one to conclude that the Air Force narrative need only match the more prevalent of the two styles of war to be effective. This, however, could create a false dichotomy. Rather, the Air Force narrative should be sufficiently broad to cover both cases, as well as deterrence; stability operations; and, as unlikely as it may seem, nuclear war. In other words, an effective narrative cannot be biased toward a subset of ongoing operations at the expense of other forms of war.

This chapter first describes Operations Odyssey Dawn and Inherent Resolve and their influence on the current Air Force narratives. It will then evaluate the current narratives against previously established criteria. It will next put forth a prospective narrative developed from this thesis' previous analysis. Finally, it will weigh the two existing Air Force narratives against the prospective narrative and recommend a narrative for the early-mid-21st century.

Before transitioning to the analysis, however, one note is in order. Offering judgments on events as recent the 2000s, as the last chapter did, is risky. The fullness of time offers a perspective that one simply cannot gain from looking back ten or twenty years. This chapter is even riskier as it evaluates events that continue to unfold. As such, the analysis here is offered with an appropriate amount of caution.

The Current Narratives

The Tunisian Revolution began in December 2010. Within a few months, Yemen, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria joined the revolution with civil uprisings that called for regime change in what observers would later call the Arab Spring. Tunisia successfully forced its autocratic ruler, Zein al Abidine Ben Ali, from office and established a new constitution in 2014. The other five countries did not fare as well. As *The Economist* observed, "Libya and Yemen have imploded, their central states replaced in whole or part by warring militias, some backed by foreign powers, some flying the flags of AQ or Islamic State. Egypt and the island kingdom of Bahrain are now yet more autocratic, in some ways, than when the protests began. And Syria has

descended into an abyss."[3] The Arab Spring also set forces in motion that led to Western involvement in Libya and Syria.

In Operations Odyssey Dawn (OOD) and Unified Protector (OUP), NATO and several partner nations outside the alliance waged war on the Qaddafi regime.[4] These operations in Libya represented a critical inflection point for the "We are critical enablers narrative." Gen Schwartz, the narrative's primary advocate, was still Chief of Staff at the time. Those operations, however, looked far more like the Balkans than the latter phases of Iraq or Afghanistan. *Air Force Magazine* recognized the contextual shift and published an article in December 2011 with the ironic headline "Libya: Victory Through Airpower."[5] It would seem that, regardless of the CSAF's preferences, the narrative began to shift back toward something resembling de Seversky's iconic formulation.

In November 2011, President Obama announced the United States' pivot to the Pacific. Kenneth Lieberthal argued that Obama's move toward a more Pacific-centric strategy came because of a more assertive Chinese foreign policy and troop reductions in Iraq in Afghanistan.[6] This move put more emphasis on what was called AirSea Battle.[7] AirSea battle was an operational concept designed to defeat anti-access, area-denial (A2/AD) strategies.[8] Shortly after taking over as Chief of Staff in late 2012, General Welsh described what A2/AD meant to Airmen when he said, "If you're trying to operate in the A2/AD environment, you're going to look for capabilities that increase platform ranges, link and extend sensor ranges, extend weapons envelopes, and maximize stealth."[9] In other words, the capabilities needed to respond to an A2/AD strategy would be technologically advanced, expensive systems. The "pivot" to Asia-Pacific thus could have resulted in a shift of the narrative and of resources to the "high-end fight." This might have suggested a return of the "victory through air power" narrative. Gen Welsh's message, however, was more measured than a pure "victory through air power" narrative would prescribe.

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[3] "The Arab Winter." *The Economist*, 9 January 2016. http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21685503-five-years-after-wave-uprisings-arab-world-worse-ever.
[4] Odyssey Dawn represented was a coalition operation that predated NATO involvement. NATO would ultimately takeover the operation . Karl P. Mueller, ed. *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War.* Research Report RR-676-AF. Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2015. 1
[5] Adam J. Hebert, "Libya: Victory Through Airpower," Air Force Magazine, December 2011, AFA online.
[6] "The American Pivot to Asia." *Foreign Policy*, accessed March 30, 2016. https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/21/the-american-pivot-to-asia/.
[7] "Pentagon Drops Air Sea Battle Name, Concept Lives On." *USNI News*, January 20, 2015. https://news.usni.org/2015/01/20/pentagon-drops-air-sea-battle-name-concept-lives.
[8] USNI, "Pentagon Drops Air Sea Battle Name."
[9] "An Interview with Gen Mark A. Welsh III, Twentieth USAF Chief of Staff." *Strategic Studies Quarterly, Vol* 6, No. 4, Winter 2012 (n.d.).

In part, the work of Dr. Thornhill may have tempered Gen Welsh's approach. RAND published Thornhill's occasional paper, "Over Not Through," in 2012, the same year Gen Welsh became Chief of Staff. Just a few months after taking over as Chief, he was already talking about the importance of innovation to the service. "We value innovation in this business. In fact, I think we value it more than we even realize we do. We kind of started with innovation in the Wright Brothers' lab, their workshop. This service is all about it."[10] In light of the Budget Control Act of 2011 and its attendant budget reductions for the Air Force, a focus on innovation was all the more appropriate; the service did not have enough money to maintain readiness and modernize.

About the same time, Welsh debuted his second narrative, "Airpower. Because without it, you lose."[11] Though Thornhill did not identify it as a historical narrative, Welsh's second narrative was also rooted in Air Force history. Commander of the US Army Air Forces General Henry "Hap" Arnold succinctly captured the idea. "A modern, autonomous, and thoroughly trained Air Force in being at all times will not alone be sufficient, but without it there can be no national security."[12] On the surface, "Airpower. Because without it you lose" may resemble "victory through air power." The crucial difference is that the former is about dependence on airpower, while the latter is about the independence of airpower. "Airpower. Because without it you lose" claims victory requires airpower, "victory through air power" claims airpower can win independently.

While contending with a shrinking budget and a corresponding shrinking in end strength the US Air Force not only had to prepare for the Asia pivot, but also to plan and execute an aerial intervention against a new extremist threat, ISIS. In a putative Asia Pacific conflict, airpower would not be a critical enabler, but a prime player. Similarly, in Operation Inherent Resolve, directed against ISIS, the US airpower is the primary American tool being used to defeat ISIS. Thus, it is easy to see that "we are critical enablers" was not sufficiently anticipatory. As a result, Gen Welsh debuted two complementary narratives after his appointment as CSAF, "over not through," and "Airpower. Because without it you lose." Here, the reader should recall Dr. Thornhill's observation cited in the introduction, "The fact that five discernible narratives exist, however, suggests that Schein's criterion of a strong, single narrative to unite Airmen is missing.

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[10] Welsh, Mark. "Remarks Given at Air Mobility Command & Airlift/Tanker Association Air Mobility Symposium and Technology Convention." 2 November 2012. http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/csaf/amc-airlift-tanker-association.pdf.

[11] Welsh, Mark. *Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America*. Air Force You Tube Channel, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvWkNGr8RiQ.

[12] Charles M. Westenhoff, ed. *Military Airpower: A Revised Digest of Air Power Opinions and Thoughts.* Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala: Air University Press, 2007., 6

Instead, individual Airmen adopt the narrative that appeals to them most."[13] General Welsh's adoption of two narratives suggests that the Air Force still struggles to discern a strong, unified cultural narrative. Furthermore, the dramatic changes between Generals Schwartz and Welsh suggest disjointedness. The following analysis reviewing operations against the Qaddafi regime in Libya and against ISIS is intended to describe the context for the current narratives.

Contemporary Operations

Operations Odyssey Dawn and Unified Protector

In analyzing the factors that led to Operation Odyssey Dawn and the subsequent Unified Protector, one must look at the evolution of US/Libyan relations dating back to the Reagan Administration. By the late 1970s, Western powers believed Muammar al-Qaddafi to be one of the world's most foremost sponsors and practitioners of international terrorism.[14] In 1981, the State Department estimated that Qaddafi was spending hundreds of millions of dollars each year on terrorism.[15] In 1986, President Reagan ordered an air strike on Qaddafi's headquarters and support facilities in an operation named "El Dorado Canyon." Relations between Libya and the United States did not significantly improve until the United States handily defeated Iraq in 2003. It is reasonable to presume that Qaddafi feared both Western power and propensity to use it, particularly if the West thought WMD were involved. Thus, Qaddafi renounced terrorism, gave up his pursuit of WMD, and signed lucrative energy and defense contracts with Western states. Soon thereafter, Libya was removed from the list of state sponsors of terror, and its relations with the West improved for the better part of a decade, until the Arab Spring.[16]

As populist, democratic movements toppled authoritarian governments across the Middle East and North Africa in 2010, popular unrest mounted against Qaddafi. Protests in Libya turned into a full revolt, and after a few days Qaddafi launched raids and attacks on civilians.[17] Almost immediately, the United States, Britain, France, and Germany spoke out against his repression.[18] Just a few days later, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1970. This

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[13] Paula G. Thornhill, *Over Not Through: The Search for a Strong, Unified Culture for America's Airmen* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, January 2012, 7.
[14] Joseph T. Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War With Qaddafi*. Annapolis, Md: Naval Inst Press, 2002, 23.
[15] Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 23.
[16] Christopher S. Chivvis. "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*. Edited by Karl Mueller. Research Report RR-676-AF. Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2015, 12.
[17] Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview," 12.
[18] Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview," 12.

sweeping resolution consisted of imposing an arms embargo, freezing regime assets, and referring Qaddafi to the International Criminal Court. French and British leaders immediately called for Qaddafi's ouster, but the United States was initially reluctant to follow suit.[19] While the United States supported the UN resolution, it was unsure about regime change. Defense Secretary Gates was vocal that the United Sates had enough to deal with while trying to disengage from Iraq and Afghanistan, and that there was not viable consideration for post-war stability in Libya.[20] Despite the Defense Department's reservations, however, US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice and others within the Obama Administration proposed a resolution that called for "all necessary measures" to protect Libya's civilian population.[21] The United Nations approved this verbiage in Security Resolution 1973, which became the justification for air strikes against the regime. Robert H. Gregory Jr. argued that the lessons from Kosovo in 1999 led to the justification to use force in Libya in 2011. "In the aftermath of Operation Allied Force, the allure of air power unconsciously turned well-intentioned advocates of peacekeeping into warmongers."[22]

Within two days of UNSCR 1973, a French-led coalition began striking targets in Libya. Meanwhile, US and UK standoff weapons lashed out at the Libyan air defenses.[23] The coalition rapidly established a no-fly zone. Within a week, Operation Odyssey Dawn stopped the Qaddafi regime forces and gave the rebels and civilians a safe haven. Airpower analyst Karl Mueller argued that the campaign in Libya was similar to the opening months of OEF.[24] It is easy to see why. A multi-national coalition used stand-off weapons and precision strike in concert with indigenous forces to subdue an enemy rapidly.

Perhaps the most important legacy of Odyssey Dawn was what it suggested about future application of airpower. Gregory argued, "As became evident during the military interventions in Kosovo and Libya, a preponderance of the American public, politicians, and military leaders assumed that clean bombs were ideal for intervening in dirty wars where the adversary purposely blurred the distinction between combatants and noncombatants with indiscriminate force."[25] In other words, air power offered a solution without a large alliance commitment.[26] Karl Mueller

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[19] Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview,” 14-15
[20] Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview,” 15
[21] Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview,” 19
[22] Robert H. Gregory. *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars: Air Power in Kosovo and Libya / Robert H. Gregory Jr*. Lincoln, NB: Potomac Books, 2015, 217.
[23] Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview,” 21.
[24] Mueller, *Precision and Purpose*, 5.
[25] Gregory, *Clean Bombs*, 12.
[26] Commitment can be thought of as lives of soldiers, political expense, potentially monetary expense etc… All were lower with an airpower option

defines aerial intervention as a strategic approach "involving external powers intervening in a conflict primarily or entirely through the use of airpower, while cooperating to a greater or lesser degree with indigenous forces."[27] Mueller makes an important point: aerial intervention is not only airpower, it also relies on ground forces and some coordination therewith. To Gregory, the wars on the ground are always "dirty" for those on the ground, and it is only an illusion that they can be won cheaply and "cleanly" through airpower. Professor Dennis Drew captured the same sentiment expressing frustration about the now-defunct term “low intensity conflict” (LIC). “The intensity of any conflict depends on where one stands. The struggle against the Hukbalahap (Huk) insurgents in the Philippines may have been a LIC from the US point of view, but it was certainly not low in its intensity for the Filipinos”[28] Here one should recall that a subnarrative emerged after Operations Deliberate Force and Allied Force of “easy victory through air power.” It would seem that this subnarrative persisted into Western decision making. The context in Libya, however, was different from the two uses of airpower against Milosevic. While the initial support of Operation Odyssey Dawn may have proved decisive for the rebels, the coalition gave too little thought to post-war stability. Once again, tactical and operational success did not provide long-term, strategic success.

As for the long-term impact of Operation Odyssey Dawn, Libya has been engaged in a civil war since the Arab Spring. While it is impossible to determine the exact effects of aerial intervention in 2011, the country has been in a civil war since then, and Libya is becoming increasingly ungoverned. *The Economist* opined, "Five years after Western air power helped remove Muammar Qaddafi, the chances of another intervention in Libya are steadily increasing. Islamic State may be retreating in Iraq and under pressure in Syria, but in Libya it is a growing menace."[29] President Obama himself is critical of the current state of affairs in Libya, and observed that even when done well, aerial intervention might not be a winning strategy. “So we actually executed [the Libya] plan as well as I could have expected: We got a UN mandate, we built a coalition, it cost us $1 billion—which, when it comes to military operations, is very cheap. We averted large-scale civilian casualties, we prevented what almost surely would have been a

[27] Mueller, *Precision and Purpose*, 6.
[28] Dennis Drew, “Air Theory, Air Force, and Low Intensity Conflict: A Short Journey to Confusion,” *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Air Power Theory*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1997, 322.
[29] “The next Front against Islamic State.” *The Economist*, February 6, 2016. http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21690057-libyas-civil-war-has-given-caliphate-fresh-opportunities-western-military?zid=304&ah=e5690753dc78ce91909083042ad12e30.

prolonged and bloody civil conflict. And despite all that, Libya is a mess."[30] Admittedly, future aerial intervention in Libya may be the least of the bad options. Regardless of its efficacy for creating enduring change, aerial intervention is likely to remain a tool for US strategy in the future.

Operation Inherent Resolve

If success has many fathers and failure is an orphan, then the failure that led to the rise of the Islamic State is traced best to the strategic blunder in the Iraq invasion aftermath. David Kilcullen argued that both the 2003 invasion of and 2011 withdrawal from Iraq created "Ground Zero for the greatest strategic screw up since Hitler's invasion of Russia."[31] Specifically, Kilcullen argued,

> The war in Iraq . . . alienated a host of potential partners and ultimately created AQI. The disaggregation strategy, after 2005, atomized the terrorist threat, just as social media and electronic connectivity were exploding in such a way as to spread the pathogen throughout our societies, enabling remote radicalization and leaderless resistance to an unprecedented degree. The precipitate withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 revived AQI in the nick of time after it had been reduced by 90 per cent and almost annihilated during the Surge. The precipitate pullout from Iraq, the killing of Osama bin Laden, the AQ succession crisis that followed, and the failure of the Arab Spring—all in the same key year of 2011—helped turn AQI into ISIS and gave it a global leadership role it proceeded to exploit with utter and unprecedented ruthlessness.[32]

In August 2014, the United States began its aerial intervention campaign against ISIS. President Obama assured the country that the military should only act when it has a clear mandate, which he believed existed in the case of ISIS. President Obama did not feel, however, that a military solution could ultimately solve the ISIS problem.[33] Even on the first day of the conflict, *The Economist* rightly pointed out, "There [was] a contradiction between the extreme narrowness of the missions handed to American commanders, and the breadth of the crisis that senior American officials are starting to describe in Iraq."[34] It would appear that, once again, the lessons from Kosovo and Libya were influencing US decision makers. The United States

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[30] Barack Obama as quoted in Jeffrey Goldberg. "The Obama Doctrine." *The Atlantic*, April 2016. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/.
[31] Kilcullen, David. *Blood Year: The Unraveling of Western Counterterrorism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, 14.
[32] Kilcullen, *Blood Year*, 228.
[33] "A Time to Act." *The Economist*, August 8, 2014. http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2014/08/air-strikes-iraq.
[34] *Economist*, "Time to Act."

embarked on another aerial intervention, with its leaders knowing, it seems, the chances of strategic success were low.

Indeed, Kilcullen argued that the West's disaggregation strategy referred to above "carried the seeds of disaster within it."[35] In other words, by attempting to dismantle and break apart AQ, without sufficiently resourcing the operation, i.e. with substantial ground forces, the United States and its allies set the conditions for a power vacuum among Islamic extremists that ISIS ultimately filled.[36] Kilcullen criticizes the George W. Bush and Obama Administrations for similar approaches in this regard. "Rumsfeld's 'transformation' . . . Looked a lot, when it was all said and done, like President Obama's light footprint [strategy]."[37] In other words, Kilcullen argued, the revolution of military affairs-enabled aerial intervention against ISIS would not be enough to defeat it. While the hopes to defeat Islamic extremists completely are already dim, Kilcullen's analysis suggests that the United States is sowing the seeds of sustained conflict by its current aerial intervention approach.

The Future Security Environment

In order to propose a prospective narrative for the early-mid-21st century, it is necessary to posit some ideas about what the future will look like. The following anticipations fit that period. A brief disclaimer: by their nature, long-term predictions are less likely to be accurate than short-term predictions. Even seemingly insignificant events can have noticeable consequences over longer time horizons. Moreover, extremely significant events can happen over the same period. The most impactful of these are what Nassim Taleb refers to as "Black Swans," or unpredictable events that carry an "extreme impact.[38]" To hedge against such events, Taleb suggested planning for the consequences of such events, which can be known, rather than trying to predict their specific occurrence, which cannot be known. For example, it is possible to plan for the consequences of a massive earthquake on the west coast of the United States; it is not possible to predict when such a thing will happen. Thus, this analysis will make assumptions about the future, as the Air Force must still tell its story, despite not knowing how it will turn out. But it will document assumptions as such. Military futurist, Andrew F. Krepinevich warned that

[35] Kilcullen, *Blood Year*, 4.
[36] Kilcullen, *Blood Year*, pp. 4, 228-230.
[37] Kilcullen, *Blood Year*, 231.
[38] "First, it is an outlier, as it lies outside the realm of familiar expectations, because nothing in the past can convincingly point to its possibility. Second, it carries an extreme impact . . . Third, in spite of its outlier status, human nature makes us concoct explanations for its occurrence after the fact, making it explainable and predictable." Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. 2nd edition. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010, xxii.

the military services are often wrong when they count on one potential outcome to the exclusion of others.[39] The sweet spot, then, is to plan for various scenarios. Thus, any fitting Air Force narrative should account for multiple scenarios. Before continuing, it is necessary to talk about the scope of prospective narrative. Said another way, how long should the narrative last?

Ideally, a service narrative would only change in response to the most drastic changes in the character of war. Practically, this paper must make an assumption about the half-life of the prospective narrative. In order to scope the analysis, this paper averaged the length of previous Air Force narratives' efficacy. That average, as indicated below, is 19.4 years. Therefore, this analysis argues that the prospective narrative should strive for 20 years of efficacy.

Table 1: USAF Narrative Duration

Narrative	Start	Stop	Duration (in years)
"Over Not Through"	1914	1919	5
"Give Me Liberty"	1919	1942	23
"Victory Through Air Power"	1942	1945	3
"Peace is Our Profession"	1945	1991	46
"Victory Through Air Power"	1991	2005	14
"We Are Critical Enablers"	2005	2011	6
Average			19.4

Source: Author's original work derived from Paula G. Thornhill, Over Not Through: The Search for a Strong, Unified Culture for America's Airmen, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, January 2012. NOTE: "Victory Through Air Power" appeared twice, thus the values are added together in the calculation.

Predicted Geopolitical Landscape

The US and the West will occupy one pole of a multi-polar world, China another, and Russia, yet another. America's relative power will decrease, especially with respect to China. However, the American-created liberal international order will stay relevant and potent. Those partnerships and alliances will remain linked to the US ability to project power rapidly and globally, as indicated by the posture indicated in the USAF Strategic Master Plan.

[39] Krepenvich gives the examples of the Europeans thinking troops would be home before "before the leaves fall" in WWI, or the French Army assuming they would see advanced trench warfare in WWII, or the United States thinking it could "liberate" Iraq with an updated blitzkrieg. Andrew F Krepinevich. *7 Deadly Scenarios: A Military Futurist Explores War in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacksl, 2009, 14.

While Russia and China present the most dangerous threats to the United States, non-state actors will continue to present the most likely threats. In his book, *7 Deadly Scenarios*, Krepinevich provides eight possible scenarios the US military could face.[40] As noted above, the point is not to get the predictions right, per se, but rather to cover a gamut of possibilities for which the United States should be prepared. The chapter titles are instructive:

- The Collapse of Pakistan
- War Comes to America
- Pandemic
- Armageddon: The Assault on Israel
- China's "Assassin's Mace"
- Just Not-on-Time: The War on the Global Economy
- Who Lost Iraq?
- Afghanistan: The Graveyard of Empires[41]

From the titles, one can sense the types of conflict for which Krepinevich argued the United States should be prepared: a rogue nuclear arsenal, a severe attack on the homeland, a pandemic disease, an Iranian attack on Israel, a conflict with China, a coordinated attack on global energy or commerce, and the all-too familiar conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Col Jeffrey Smith argued, the implication of an uncertain future is that, "The USAF cannot afford to prepare only for those engagements it prefers; rather, it must expand its spectrum to include the full variance of possibility."[42] The prospective narratives this chapter evaluates account for a range of possible futures, including those covered by Krepinevich.

Anticipated Air Force Organization and Culture

This analysis assumes that the Air Force will continue to perform air, space, and cyber missions. Admittedly, this is a conservative prediction and it is possible that the Air Force will lose the cyber mission by the year 2036.[43] While cyber is additive and synergistic to the employment of air and space, its absence would not substantially affect the prospective narratives. This is less a commentary on the importance of cyber to the Air Force and more of a

[40] Though a bit ironic, Krepinevich added a scenario about Afghanistan in the 2nd edition bringing the total to eight scenarios, despite the title.
[41] Krepinevich, *7 Deadly Scenarios*, "Contents."
[42] Jeffrey J Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force: Tracing the Past, Shaping the Future*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013, 218.
[43] Conversations continue about whether cyber operations should be performed by an independent military service, a service other than the Air Force, or an organization external to the Department of Defense altogether.

commentary on how well cyber fits within the Air Force's enduring principles: speed, access, and economy of risk.[44]

As for the leaders of the organization, fighter pilots have held the top positions in the Air Force since the late-1980s. But fighter pilots may not dominate Air Force leadership positions 20 years hence. In *Rise of the Fighter Generals - The Problem of Air Force Leadership 1945-1982*, USAF Colonel Mike Worden demonstrated that bomber pilots led the Air Force from its inception until the late 1980s, when the fighter pilots ascended. He argued that the ascendancy of fighter generals in the Air Force resulted from ossification of the bomber generals and their inability to think through the complexity of limited war.[45]

Smith, on the other hand, predicted the decline of fighter pilot prominence. Though as of 2012, he argued it would still take several years before the USAF was forced to confront the "disequilibrium between the traditional and dominant fighter operations and the emerging external threats of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism conflicts."[46] According to Smith's analysis, "There is support to suggest some degree of organizational disequilibrium is building."[47] As such, this paper predicts that fighter pilots will share and ultimately yield a noteworthy portion of the top service leadership positions to RPA pilots, space operators, and cyberspace professionals. Reminiscent of Builder, Smith posited, "The greatest challenge that the USAF must overcome is its inability to focus on the ends rather than on the means . . . If the USAF continues to rationalize its existence under the pretense of decisive operations, continually strives to prove its independence, and views its primary mission in terms of the aircraft it flies, then its future validity and relevance is questionable."[48] Within twenty years, it is highly probable that Air Force's top leaders will be as diverse as its portfolio of missions. The narrative should reflect this diversity.

Predicted Advances in Technology

The United States is presently pursuing a "third offset" strategy to close a perceived technological gap with its adversaries. It is easiest to understand the third offset in the context of

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[44] Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force*, 226.
[45] Col Mike Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals. The Problem of Air Force Leadership 1945-1982*. AIR UNIV MAXWELL AFB AL, 1998. Worden referred to the bomber pilots as the "absolutist" and the fighter pilots as the "pragmatists" who "viewed war and airpower in more ambiguous terms. War contained rivalries, conflicting interests, changing priorities, distractions and complexities that demanded patience . . . Pragmatists inclined more than absolutists towards the Clausewitzian notion of war as a 'political instrument' and respected that politics ultimately governed the conduct of wars." 45
[46] Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force*, 117.
[47] Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force*, 117.
[48] Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force*, 221.

the first two offsets. The first was President Eisenhower's New Look Strategy. In the beginning of the Cold War, the Eisenhower Administration estimated that it would take 92 US and NATO divisions to have a reasonable chance of defending Europe from 175 Soviet divisions located in the western USSR.[49] Creating and sustaining 92 divisions was neither politically palatable nor financially feasible. Instead, Eisenhower *offset* Soviet conventional strength by expanding the US strategic nuclear arsenal. Eventually the Soviet Union countered the New Look with a very large nuclear arsenal of its own. This made the risk of using nuclear weapons to deter a conventional threat too high. Thus, the United States pursued the second offset in 1970s in what the Soviets would later call the 'reconnaissance strike complex.' Since its operational debut in Desert Storm, the reconnaissance strike complex has provided an enduring advantage to the United States. That advantage, however, is currently contested by its adversaries' A2/AD strategies.

In response, the United States is pursuing a third offset to regain a technical and operational advantage over its prospective foes. The third offset a combination of approaches aimed at pursuing new technologies and maintaining and expanding its alliances. To deter aggression successfully, this approach will also require advanced training and interoperability. Undersecretary of Defense Bob Work estimates that third offset technologies will not bear fruit until the 2030s.[50] This means the technologies of today, i.e., stealth, 5th generation fighters, space-supported ISR strike complex, will still rule the battlefields for most of the narrative period; however, employment strategies will continue to evolve.[51] While the weapons of the future will have many potential applications, none will fundamentally alter the core Air Force mission, enduring principles, or narrative. Indeed, the only parts of the third offset that will bear fruit in the next twenty years will most likely come from alliance training and doctrine.

Several other observations about technological advances are germane. First, nuclear deterrence will remain a priority for the United States. Second, United States space and cyber awareness and defense will become more robust and result in the ability to attribute attacks to specific parties. Thus, the United States will require a range of response options.[52] Finally, because of the third offset, employment will be increasingly joint and multi-domain.[53] Overall, the implication is that innovation, not invention, will define the next twenty years of combat.

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[49] Bob Work. "The Third U.S. Offset Strategy and Its Implications for Partners and Allies." *U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE*, accessed March 30, 2016. http://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/606641/the-third-us-offset-strategy-and-its-implications-for-partners-and-allies.
[50] Work, "The Third U.S. Offset Strategy"
[51] Work, "The Third U.S. Offset Strategy"
[52] *Air Force Future Operating Concept: A View of the Air Force in 2035,* September 2015, 15.
[53] *Air Force Future Operating Concept,* 17.

Analyzing the Candidate Narratives

This section analyzes three prospective Air Force Narratives. The first, "over not through," reflects Thornhill's suggested narrative. In 2012 Thornhill argued that innovation was the Air Force's original story. Similarly, Vick argued that the best Air Force narratives combined technology and problem solving to tackle tough challenges facing the nation. In this respect, "over not through" conforms to those analysts' ideas about the ideal Air Force narrative. Gen Welsh's second narrative, "Airpower. Because without it you lose" focuses on the reality that the nation in general and the joint forces in particular require airpower. The joint force will not fight without airpower. Both narratives have their roots in a resource-constrained context. As the Department of Defense seeks to reduce its budget, doing more with less in innovative ways is a common refrain. "Over not through" plays well in such an environment. "Without it you lose" also resonates well in an era of fiscal frugality.

The analysis to this point has yielded insights suggesting that the current narratives can be improved. This thesis argues ""the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" is a more effective narrative than the current Air Force narratives. "The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives"" is sufficiently broad to encompass both of the current narratives and it is valid across more present and potential future contexts. Furthermore, it has the potential to engender more cohesion than the two existing narratives.

This section evaluates each narrative against the previously established criteria. The following section scores each narrative independently in order to suggest an Air Force narrative for the early-mid-21st century.

"Over Not Through"

Dr. Thornhill argued that, "Over not through" underpins all other historical AF narratives, that it is timeless, and has broad appeal.[54]

> As with the story of our nation's founding, it is this origin story that defines why an organization exists. It is that original intent on which any organization is built; and the opportunity for that organization to thrive comes from its ability to make decisions that amplify its original, natural strengths. Using these criteria, for Airmen breaking stalemates by going "over not through" the trenches—and other tactical, operational, and strategic problems—emerges as that origin story. Airmen excelled when providing innovative solutions to significant challenges whether that was using the third dimension to break the stalemate on the Western Front; sinking a battle fleet from the air; going beyond an economic blockade to actually attacking an enemy's industrial capacity; resupplying a large, isolated city population from the air (e.g., the Berlin Airlift); perfecting long-range

[54] Thornhill, "Over Not Through", 8.

> refueling so that air fleets could reach anywhere in the world; and looking to space for solutions to precision navigation and timing, just to name a few.[55]

Gen Welsh and Secretary James talk often of innovation; it would appear that the narrative has taken root. For instance, Gen Welsh talks about a series of documents developed and updated by Headquarters Air Force under his tenure to "define the United States Air Force for the twenty-first century."[56] They describe, "who we are," "what we do," and "where we are going." The first is the Air Force Vision titled "The World's greatest Air Force: Powered by Airmen, Fueled by Innovation."[57] To Gen Welsh, this describes, "who we are." The three constituent parts of the document show up in the title: the world's greatest air force, airmen, and innovation.[58] As the document proclaims, "The story of the Air Force is a story of innovation."[59] This is clearly in line with what Thornhill would refer to as the origin story of the Air Force.

The second document describes, "what we do," it is titled "Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America."[60] In General Welsh's opening letter in the document, he states the purpose of it. "To Airmen: This document will remind you of what your fellow Airmen do across our Service and help you pinpoint how you do your part in contributing to *Global Vigilance*, *Global Reach* and *Global Power* for America . . . To our airpower advocates: This document should help you understand how our fantastic Airmen contribute to the joint team and to our Nation." This document is an attempt to connect the founding Air Force missions to present missions. Likewise, it attempts to connect Airmen to their forbearers.

This remarkable document helps Airmen tie their specific contributions to the Air Force missions, and its role to national security. As such, the themes of the document are key indicators of the current Air Force narrative. Like the Air Force Vision, "Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America" specifically links the contributions of Airmen to their ability to innovate. One particularly telling section says:

> Since the airplane was employed over the battlefields of World War I, Airmen have stood for and pioneered new and innovative ways to shape the fight and reinvent the battle itself. Whereas pre-Kitty Hawk warriors relied on breaking through fortified lines on the ground, *Airmen have always sought to go over, not through*, those fortifications to defeat our enemies and achieve the Nations objectives. This spirit of innovation, of seeing problems from an alternative

[55] Thornhill, "Over Not Through", 8.
[56] "America's Air Force: A Call to the Future." July 2014, 5.
[57] "The World's Greatest Air Force — Powered by Airmen, Fueled by Innovation." January 2013.
[58] "America's Air Force: A Call to the Future." July 2014, 5.
[59] "The World's Greatest Air Force — Powered by Airmen, Fueled by Innovation." January 2013, 4.
[60] "America's Air Force: A Call to the Future." July 2014, 5.

> perspective, is in our culture, in our heritage, and in every Airman—Active, Guard, Reserve and Civilian—regardless of his or her specialty or role.[61]

In sum, there is more than a small element of "Over Not Through" in the current AF narrative. The following sections analyze the narrative against the previously established criteria.

Coherence

While not mutually exclusive from "we are critical enablers," the return to "over not through" narrative was disjointed. In part, this disjointedness is a reflection of shifting context. Gen Schwartz' narrative reflected airpower's contributions to two irregular wars and Secretary Gates' guidance. Gen Welsh, on the other hand, transitioned from those conflicts to an Asia pivot and decreasing budgets. As noted in Chapter 2, macro narratives should be more stable than their subnarratives. For example, Apple has not substantially changed its narrative since 1984. Apple's employees and consumers today would recognize Apple's macro narrative from 1984.

This raised the question of whether "over not through" is a faulty narrative because it lacks coherence with "we are critical enablers," or "we are critical enablers" was too far off the mark in anticipation and inclusiveness and should thus shoulder the blame for the lack of coherence. This analysis is inclined toward the latter argument. Over a broader time scale, "over not through" connects Airmen today to the first Airmen and is deeply rooted in airpower history.

Validity

Undeniably, innovation is a hallmark of Airmen. From the Wright Brothers to present-day Weapons and Tactics conference attendees, innovation is in the Air Force's DNA. Certainly, Airmen have been innovative in the present conflicts. For example, Twitter's role in the Arab Spring is well known. What is less well known is that Airmen used Twitter to coordinate with Libyan rebels, to include coordinating air strikes.[62] This strange confluence of air and cyber is indicative of the ever-changing character of war in the information age. Innovation is thus a critical contribution to the Air Force's role in national security.

Cohesion

Thornhill argued, "Not only is "over not through" the first narrative chronologically, it emphasizes the fusing of independent-minded Airmen with a willingness to embrace new technologies and a devotion to innovation that collectively produces creative solutions to vexing national problems."[63] For that reason, she suggested that it created a "powerful shared

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[61] Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America, 3, emphasis added.
[62] Gregory, *Clean Bombs*, 4.
[63] Thornhill, "Over Not Through", 9.

identity."[64] On the other hand, "innovation" has become something of an empty slogan. Thus, some Airmen may consider it devoid of meaning. On balance, it is of undetermined internal cohesion.

Externally, this narrative matches the entrepreneurial and adventurist spirit of America. In 2011 the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars published, "A National Strategic Narrative" by two military officers, Wayne Porter and Mark Mykleby. They penned the piece to construct a story that answers the question, "Where are we going in this world?" They concluded that part of what fuels America's continuing advantage is innovation. "From the earliest days of the Republic, America has depended on a vibrant free market and an indomitable entrepreneurial spirit to be the engines of our prosperity . . . Inherent in our children is the innovation, drive, and imagination that have made, and will continue to make, this country great." Innovation is central to the prosperity of America. As "over not through" nests within that national narrative, it is externally cohesive.

Anticipation

On one hand, this narrative should be sufficiently anticipatory, as the service will always require innovation. In looking at the future environment, it is likely that the United States will field mostly the same technologies today for the fights of tomorrow. It may very well be that innovative employment of those technologies is the difference between the United States and its near-peer adversaries. On the other hand, this narrative's relevance hinges, in part, on a constrained budget environment, which suggests it lacks anticipation.

"Airpower. Because without it you lose"

Col Jeffrey Smith argued that, "The USAF, and airpower in general must focus less on what it independently brings to the fight, and focus more on how it empowers the U.S. military team."[65] The idea is the Nation in general and the joint force in particular are dependent on airpower. Col Smith's argument is worth quoting at length:

> The message for the service is that airpower is necessary in nearly all contexts across multiple global engagements from humanitarian to total war. All of these contexts require the attributes that airpower brings, and therefore nearly all engagements are dependent on airpower. The best advertisement for the USAF should not come from within; rather, it should come from U.S. national-level decision makers and sister services that require airpower's dominant capability in air, space, cyber. Simply understood, *there is no conceivable context where U.S. military operations could succeed without the prerequisite of airpower control . . .* In terms of strategic communication, the idea of "dependence" rather than

[64] Thornhill, "Over Not Through", 9.
[65] Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force*, 223.

> independence is significant and cannot be understated. It should and must define airpower's capability and ultimately its destiny.[66]

Gen Welsh has used several iterations of the "without it you lose" narrative. As noted above, he introduced the narrative at the same time that the Air Force released "Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America."[67] More important than the slogan itself is its underlying message. The same document claimed, "Exploiting such technologies is not unique to the Air Force, but we are the only Service that brings them together in ways that allow our sister Services the freedom to maneuver in their respective domains without fear of attack by enemy air forces . . . Air Force airpower gives America the ability to control and exploit this ultimate high ground that is essential to winning our Nation's wars."[68] This narrative is a story of reliance. The narrative argues that the nation and the joint team must have the Air Force to win the nation's wars.

"Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America" continued, "Air Superiority has been and remains an essential precondition to successful military operations . . . Without it, our Nation's military would have to radically change the way it fights."[69] The claim, however, is not related solely to air superiority, but also to space superiority, ISR, mobility operations, and global strike. In that way, this narrative ties historical Air Force missions to current missions and their necessity to joint operations.

Coherence

While not as strongly stated as "victory through air power," "without it you lose" is a significant divergence from "we are critical enablers." As mentioned in evaluating "over not through," this is probably more of a reflection on the lack of anticipation and inclusiveness of "we are critical enablers." While "without it you lose" is a stark break from its immediate predecessor, it has firm roots in airpower history. Air power prophet Giulio Douhet forcefully argued the point, "To conquer the command of the air means victory; to be beaten in the air means defeat and acceptance of whatever terms the enemy may be pleased to impose."[70] In recalling the lessons of World War I, Billy Mitchell argued, "It was definitely established during the war as an absolute principle that if you did not have sufficient control of the air to be able to operate, your ground force could not carry on against the enemy who had supremacy of the air.

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[66] Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force*, 227, emphasis added.
[67] Gen Welsh also closes out his introduction to AFDD 1 with the exact phrase, "Airpower…because without it, you lose."
[68] Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America, 2.
[69] Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America, 4.
[70] Giulio Douhet,. *he Command of the Air*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University Alabama Press, 2009, 28.

In fact, before the close of the war, if either side had been deprived of its aviation service, the opposing army certainly would have won within a few weeks. There is not a question of a doubt about it."[71] One could look at "without it you lose" as being a more defensible version of Douhet's original proposition. Like "over not through," "without it you lose" is not immediately coherent with its predecessor, but it is coherent looking back over airpower's history.

Validity

Simply put, since the advent of airpower, the US military has not fought without airpower. Whether mobility support, ISR, strike, or close air support, the joint force requires air power. As Field Marshal Montgomery said in World War II, "If we lose the war in the air we lose the war and lose it quickly."[72] It is important to note that this does not suggest that airpower guarantees victory; this is not "victory through air power." It is also worth noting that in irregular warfare from Vietnam to contemporary conflicts against violent extremists, adversaries have been very resilient in the face of airpower. This suggests "without it you lose," is not a universal and does not apply to belligerents everywhere. Rather, it suggests that American way of war requires airpower.

Cohesion

Once again, while speculative, "without it you lose" would seem to appeal internally to Airmen. Taken in the context of OOD, OUP, and OIR, airpower comprises the only military option from an alliance and coalition perspective. Unlike their peers in the other services, Airmen have been continuously "at war" since 1991. Even though the conflicts in Libya and Syria are irregular, they do not involve large contingents of US ground forces. As such, the US Air Force is providing a key capability to indigenous forces, and rebels. Without airpower, they would certainly lose. On the other hand, this narrative is framed negatively, which weakens its appeal. Ironically, this negative framing directly contributes to its validity, i.e. it is not as overstated as "victory through air power."

Externally, joint forces might bristle at the implication of the narrative as somehow demeaning to their contributions to the joint fight. *Prima facie*, other services could perceive this narrative as having an embedded value judgment against them. This is not trivial. One of the functions of a narrative is to inform policymakers and those allocating funds. On the other hand, no service would genuinely claim that they would want to operate without the US Air Force, just

[71] William Mitchell. *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power--Economic and Military*. Tuscaloosa, AL: Fire Ant Books, 2010, 140.
[72] Westenhoff, *Military Airpower*, 18.

as the Air Force cannot operate without other service. The core of this message is about dependence, not independence.

Furthermore, the Obama Administration clearly preferred airpower to other options for force in fighting terrorism. Whether killing terrorists by drone strikes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, or by B-52 strikes in Syria, President Obama's coercive foreign policy has relied on airpower not inconsistent with the “without it you lose" narrative.

Anticipation

For the near future, "without it you lose" will be widely applicable. Most military operations will require airpower. Yet it is conceivable that the United States could conduct an irregular campaign with a paucity of airpower, which calls into question the anticipation of the narrative.

“The Nation’s Air Force . . . Saving Lives”

This chapter proposes that the Air Force narrative become “The nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives.”[73] It is a story that cuts across all Air Force missions and history. More than any other narrative, it fits within the national narrative and the American way of war. As this narrative is a result of the preceding analysis, it bears explaining. The Air Force saves American lives by substituting technology for blood. The Air Force saves lives by enabling victory with less violence against adversaries than would be necessary without the Air Force and by targeting the enemy across all levels of war simultaneously.[74] The Air Force saves adversary lives through accurate targeting and precision munitions, which enables it to employ fewer munitions than in the past while still destroying the most efficacious targets with minimal collateral damage. The Air Force saves lives around the globe through rapid deployment of humanitarian assistance. The Air Force saves its aircrews’ lives through combat search and rescue. The Air Force saves American lives by providing a credible nuclear deterrent. Furthermore, space-based ISR, long-haul communications, and precision navigation and timing underwrite all Air Force capabilities. In other words, airpower saves live, space-enabled airpower saves more lives, and cyber and space-enabled airpower saves even more lives.

In short, this narrative better connects the Air Force to the nation’s needs by shifting the focus from a capability (airpower) to the institution that provides both this capability and others, i.e., space and cyber power, that are inherently germane to the nation’s defense. It improves upon

[73] The author acknowledges an intellectual debt to Col M.V. “Coyote” Smith who originally suggested the idea “Airpower saves lives.”

[74] Even intercontinental ballistic missiles meet this criterion. Paradoxically, the deterrent value of nuclear weapons depends on their ability to inflict devastating harm to civilians. While their use is terrible to imagine, in practice, nuclear weapons save lives through deterrence.

the preceding narratives in several other ways as well. This section will detail those improvements, explain what the narrative means in terms of the Air Force's enduring functions, and conclude with how the narrative performs against the established criteria.

First, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" focuses on the Air Force's contributions to the nation. All the services have aircraft and contribute to airpower. The nation, however, only has one Air Force. Thus, the first part of this narrative is externally facing and unifying.

Second, this narrative draws attention to the Air Force as an *institution*, rather than a single, albeit vital, capability. This narrative is about the Air Force, which is naturally inclusive, not just "airpower," which is only inclusive under the terms of USAF doctrine.[75] The reader should recall Builder's admonishment. "Nothing will more quickly go to the vital interests of the Air Force or influence its future than the choices about what is included or excluded from the Air Force's definition of air power. Exclusions risk divestiture of Air Force power, present or potential. *Inclusions risk diffusion or dilution of the mission or vision and, hence, their utility in unifying the institution."*[76] So far, this paper has used the term "airpower" to mean broadly "things the US Air Force does," in keeping with current Air Force doctrinal definition.[77] To have used the term literally, would have limited airpower to its original meaning.[78] While more precise, it would have left out space and cyber operations. To use it in its doctrinal form is, however, nonsensical. It is simple, easy, and wrong. In an effort to avoid this confusion, this thesis proposes an *Air Force* narrative rather than an *airpower* narrative. It is a critical distinction. Constructing a story around the organization avoids Builder's trap of broadening the term "airpower" until it approaches meaninglessness. Narratives must be uncovered from the history of the organization. Thus, the intent is not to create something revolutionary, but to give voice to what already exists and arguably has existed since the dawn of the military age in the air. Defining the narrative with respect to the organization also gives the narrative room to adapt. Should the Air Force choose to define airpower more literally in the future, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" will still be relevant.

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[75] An organizational narrative naturally includes everything the organization does. Airpower, on the other hand, has a specific domain connotation that is only inclusive based on how the US Air Force defines it.
[76] Carl Builder. *The Icarus Syndrome: The Role of Air Power Theory in the Evolution and Fate of the U.S. Air Force*. New Brunswick, N.J.; London: Transaction Publishers, 2002, 220, emphasis added.
[77] Airpower is defined as "the ability to project military power or influence through the control and exploitation of air, space, and cyberspace to achieve strategic, operational, or tactical objectives." Air Force Basic Doctrine. https://doctrine.af.mil/download.jsp?filename=V1-D21-Airpower.pdf, 27 Feb 15.
[78] Airpower can be approximated as as doing something useful in the air. William Mitchell. *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power--Economic and Military*. Tuscaloosa, AL: Fire Ant Books, 2010, xii.

Finally, "The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" improves upon previous narratives in terms of the criteria here established in three important ways. First, it is inclusive and is thus more anticipatory than "victory through air power" or "we are critical enablers." "Victory through air power" was too narrowly defined to meet the context of irregular war and "we are critical enablers" was too narrow to meet potentiality of major conventional conflict. "The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" could operate in both contexts simultaneously, from the aerial interventions in the Balkans that saved the lives of Bosnians and Kosovars, to the full-scale conventional conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan which saved lives of American troops. Even when the context shifted in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Air Force played predominantly a support role, CAS, Medevac, ISR all contributed to saving American and coalition lives. When the United States went back to aerial intervention models in Libya and against ISIS, the US Air Force saved the lives of American troops by offering an alternative to "boots on the ground." Furthermore, in both cases the nation's Air Force supported indigenous ground forces that would not have survived otherwise. Once again, the nation's Air Force saved lives.

Second, the "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" narrative resolves the other critical issue of the previous "victory through air power" narrative: insufficient validity. Regardless of whether one completely accepts the arguments about "transformation" or "revolution in military affairs," one thing is certain: the United States has put fewer Americans in harm's way because of its Air Force. Two caveats bear mentioning. First, admittedly airpower may make military adventurism more likely. Once Americans are committed to action, however, Airpower saves lives of US service members. Yet, on aggregate, fewer Americans go into harm's way. Second, this claim does not assert that the United States has correctly estimated force levels in every instance, (as noted above in the case of Iraq, it certainly did not). What it argues, is that in the absence of the Air Force, any conflict the United States has fought since Desert Storm would be more costly in terms of lives and money.

Finally, the narrative has the potential to improve cohesion of "we are critical enablers." While speculative, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" will appeal to all Airmen. From the air-superiority fighter pilot, to the cyber operator, to the wrench-turning maintainer, all Airmen contribute to the narrative "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives." This argument can only speculate the extent to which the narrative will resonate, but at the very least, it does not immediately alienate certain career fields, as did "we are critical enablers."

Another way to understand the utility of this prospective narrative is with respect to the Air Force's three enduring contributions of Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power. The US Air Force provides *Global Vigilance* by protecting the United States and its allies from

strategic surprise and safeguarding citizens, soldiers, sailors, and marines at home and abroad. The watchful eye of USAF ISR provides global over watch from strategic missile warning to tactical intelligence. It provides national leaders decision superiority by allowing them to observe, orient, and decide faster than adversaries, all of which makes Americans safer.

The US Air Force provides *Global Reach* by projecting power around the globe. Not only does this provide a significant deterrent effect, but also it can prove coercive when the United States needs to deploy forces rapidly. Furthermore, it allows the United States to provide humanitarian assistance worldwide in short order. That the Air Force saves lives by helping those immediately in need is a form of soft power for the United States that displays both US values and institutional might. In this way, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" also has deep historical roots. As USAF historian Roger Miller argued, the United States and its allies demonstrated resolve and humanity in the Berlin Airlift that not only delivered much-needed provisions to West Berliners, but also solidified the liberal institutions of the West.[79]

The US Air Force provides *Global Power* by holding targets at risk around the globe. The United States has unmatched ability to project both conventional and nuclear power around the world. Power projection contributes to US escalation dominance over its enemies from the smallest conflict to nuclear war.[80] In turn, escalation dominance is a critical element of US deterrence. Successful deterrence during the Cold War saved countless lives.

Coherence

"The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" is a break from the current narrative(s) and from "we are critical enablers." Elements of the narrative exist in today's narrative and previous narratives, but it has not taken on the stature of a service narrative. While "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" does not appear in historical rhetoric, it appears in virtually every historical action of the Air Force. For example, despite all the arguments against the efficacy of strategic bombing in Europe in World War II, the Allied Powers could not have effectively committed ground forces to the continent before 1944. As Max Hastings argued, the attrition of the Luftwaffe that eventually accompanied the strategic bombing campaign was decisive to the invading force at Overlord.[81] Through critical resupply operations such as the Berlin Airlift and "The Hump" that kept the Chinese nationalists in the war against Japan, thereby sparing

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[79] Roger C Miller. *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*. Texas A&M University Press, 2000, 179.
[80] RAND Project AIR FORCE described "escalation dominance" by saying, "Coercion is more likely to succeed when the coercer can increase the level of costs it imposes *while denying the adversary opportunity to neutralize those costs or counterescalate."* Byman, Daniel, Matthew C. Waxman, and Eric V. Larson. *Air Power as a Coercive Instrument*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1999, xiii, emphasis in original.
[81] Max Hastings. *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy*. Reprint edition. New York: Vintage, 2006, 122.

American troops, “the nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives” has strong historical resonance. In Iraq and Afghanistan, close air support allows the US Army to travel lighter in hostile terrain with massive firepower just a “phone call” away, offering soldiers speed and security. Thus, like the other prospective narratives, over the longer-time horizon, “the nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives” has historical roots, if not immediate coherence.

Validity

“The nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives” is a valid narrative. It is so much so, that it might seem trite. With dominant airpower, military forces can operate with fewer casualties. If an army were willing to pay the butcher's bill it could execute operations without airpower; but that is not the American Way of War. Hugh Rockoff argued that the United States employs a capital-intensive way of war. "Not only have Americans gone to war heavily armed, but they have been able to refine existing weapons and develop new ones, on more than one occasion even as the war has progressed. To be sure, politics has worked to reinforce economics. A democratically elected government is not likely to survive for long if it is not minimizing casualties and magnifying the enemy's casualties with massive firepower."[82] Rockoff further argued, "The airplane is the ultimate expression of America's capital-intensive way of war."[83] One need look no further than the two Balkan wars of the 1990s or the operations discussed in this chapter to see this way of war in practice—in all four cases, the United States preferred an airpower answer to an answer requiring American soldiers and marines in harm’s way. Small crews of Airmen can deliver massive amounts of firepower relative to, say a 4,400-person Brigade Combat Team. Obviously, the two do not serve exactly the same purpose, but sometimes an airpower solution does not just enhance American ground forces, it can replace them. Thus, American airpower is politically more desirable because it requires less blood and less commitment.

Cohesion

“The nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives” is pithy. Speculatively, without any additional explanation, most observers would immediately grasp the meaning. Like all narratives, it would be buttressed by Airmen who knew airpower history. Saving a life is a noble pursuit in western civilization in general and in Judeo-Christian traditions in particular. It is a noble rallying cry that is useful for internal and external audiences. Many Airmen, like many Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, undoubtedly joined the service to contribute to such a cause. If one of Gen Welsh’s

[82] Hugh Rockoff. *America’s Economic Way of War: War and the US Economy from the Spanish-American War to the Persian Gulf War*. Reissue edition. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 29.
[83] Rockoff, *America’s Economic Way of War*, 4.

intended purposes is for Airmen to understand where they fit in and to share the Air Force story, it is a useful narrative.

Externally, it is a message that resonates with the American way of war. As noted above, many administrations have preferred aerial intervention to larger intervention efforts. Certainly, this narrative is consistent with political desires to keep casualties low while achieving national objectives. One could debate the efficacy of aerial intervention, but as a strategy it has demonstrated the political desire to use the Air Force to achieve national objectives with the least possible commitment of American blood.

Anticipation

As long as the United States retains its relative predominance in aerial warfare, this narrative will be effective. Well-resourced, well-trained Airmen will almost always save lives. If an adversary has a substantial airpower threat of its own, American airpower is all the more critical to saving lives because as American adversaries have learned fighting without air superiority is a deadly proposition.

Narrative Comparative Analysis

This section analyzes the prospective narratives and assigns each a rank for each criterion (summarized in **Table 2**.) The chosen narrative is the lowest aggregate rank of the three narratives.

Coherence

Given the Air Force's legacy of innovation, "over not through" scored highest on coherence. Neither of the other two narratives had as deep of roots in the past. Elements of "without it you lose" were in Gen Arnold's lexicon, but the narrative was not as pervasive as that of innovation. As a prospective new narrative, it is unsurprising that "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" was the least coherent. One could certainly find elements of the narrative throughout the Air Force's history, but it too was a distinct break from "we are critical enablers" and did not benefit from being part of the CSAF's current narrative.

Validity

"The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" scored highest on validity. The US Air Force has provided an asymmetric advantage for US forces since the Gulf War. Undoubtedly, the United States suffers fewer casualties with a capable Air Force. But the Air Force also saves the lives of allies and potentially even adversaries. Since the advent of PGM, avoiding collateral damage has been a priority of US military operations. As noted above, through Global Reach, the American airpower also supports humanitarian and aid missions and saves lives in that way. One

anticipated argument against “the nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives” is it is not unique among the nation’s military services. The counter is that it need not be unique to the Air Force to be an effective narrative. Moreover, no service can project power as rapidly, as far, and with as much force as the Air Force. No other service can provide humanitarian assistance or combat power as quickly and comprehensively anywhere on the globe. No other service provides as extensive, persistent ISR as the Air Force.

“Without it you lose" scored second-highest on validity because airpower is a fact of joint operations. In many ways, the Air Force is the glue that binds the joint force together. Through long-haul satellite communications to rapid global mobility, joint operations do not happen without the Air Force. The worry is that policy makers take those capabilities for granted during a land-centric campaign. In part, this fear led to “we are critical enablers.” “Without it you lose” is a way to remind those in the service and those dependent on it what is at stake for an insufficiently supported or resourced Air Force.

Admittedly, it was difficult to decide on rankings for validity for the three narratives. All are valid; but this evaluation method requires a judgment. “The nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives” is the foremost expression of the American way of war. “Over not through" is less valid and more aspirational. Sure, innovation has a long history in the Air Force, but the tagline suggests that all Airmen are problem-solvers and this is not true to the extent that it was in 1914 or 1944. Simply put, if necessity is the mother of invention, the USAF has not had the impetus it once had for innovation. Therefore, “over not through” was ranked last for validity.

Cohesion

Once again, “the nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives” scored highest on cohesion. It is elegant and compelling. Admittedly, “Without it you lose" is also simply and powerfully stated so it scores in second place. “Without it you lose” puts airpower in terms to which Airmen can relate. But, its focus is on airpower, not the organization. Thus, it loses some cohesion among those who do not fit under a traditional or more exacting definition of airpower. It also loses some effectiveness due to its negative frame. Americans in general and American Airmen in particular are not interested in “not losing,” they want to win. “Over not through" simply sounds too corporate. Airmen are warriors, not businessmen. They resent buzzwords. “Over not through” ranks last in cohesion.

Anticipation

Finally, “the nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives” has the greatest anticipatory value. In his inaugural speech, President John F. Kennedy Jr passionately said, “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship,

support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."[84] Kennedy was a master of narrative and succinctly captured the American ethos and narrative in that speech. While the United States will "bear any burden" and "meet any hardship," Airpower allows it to do so with the least loss of life to Americans, friends, and even foes. The Air Force, and the capital-intensive way of war that it represents, are thus central to the American ethos.
The extent to which "Airpower. Because without it you lose" is valid, on the other hand, may depend on the future conflict. While the Air Force enables the joint force, irregular war is a ground-centric affair that requires personnel on the ground. "Airpower. Because without it you lose" ultimately seems to be a response to a competitive budget environment, which may or may not persist through 2036. It comes in second. Likewise, as the pendulum swings on budgets, "over not through" may lose some of its momentum as innovation will not have the premium it does presently. It ranks third among the narratives for anticipation.

Table 2: Narrative Comparative Analysis

	Coherence	**Validity**	**Cohesion**	**Anticipation**
"Over Not Through"	1st	3rd	3rd	3rd
"Without it you lose"	2nd	2nd	2nd	2nd
"Nation's Air Force . . . Saving Lives"	3rd	1st	1st	1st

Source: Author's Original Work.

Based on the preceding rank-order analysis, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" is the suggested narrative. "Airpower. Because without it you lose" is a close second. While it bested the suggested narrative in coherence, its negative framing and potentially narrow applicability diminished its effectiveness. "Over not through" was also promising, but it suffers like "we are critical enablers." While valid, "over not through" is a narrow narrative that can fit under a broader narrative.

Conclusion

In conclusion, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" is a strong candidate for the Air Force's near-to-mid-term narrative. It is powerful and concise, and it scores well across the

[84] John F. Kennedy Jr. "Inaugural Address." presented at Washington, D.C, January 20, 1961. http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntFl7SVAjA.aspx.

narratives. While all three narratives could work, the intent here is to identify the best service narrative. Arguably, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" could fairly easily subsume the other two proposed narratives.

The reader may wonder what he or she has gained by reading thus far if one of the current narratives could suffice. The answer is that the current narratives are diffuse. Undoubtedly, innovation is important to the service, but selling innovation harkens to previous Air Force attempts at corporate practices (see "Quality Air Force"). Innovation is a valid subnarrative for the Air Force, but it should not be *the* service narrative. Likewise, the idea of dependence represented by "Airpower. Because without it you lose," is a valid subnarrative. It is certainly an important external facing narrative in the resource battle with the other services. Their effectiveness depends on the US Air Force. "The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" is a compelling narrative for the Air Force that is broad enough to subsume the other two narratives. Airmen innovate in order to be more effective at saving lives through Global Reach, Global Vigilance, and Global Power. The US Air Force saves lives of joint partners by providing emergency close air support, MEDEVAC, and combat search and rescue. The US Air Force saves lives by directly striking at all levels of war, from tactical to strategic, thereby reducing the need for firepower and attendant casualties with larger ground forces. "The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" has a well-established past and a bright future. Since World War II, certainly through the immediate past and into the future, the nation's Air Force will save lives.

The next chapter summarizes the content of the thesis. Additionally, it offers some conclusions, implications, and suggested areas for further study.

Chapter 6
Conclusions

"Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1844

The argument presented here serve as a cautionary tale to Air Force leaders. Reality must come before rhetoric, and rhetoric must be in consonance with reality. Context is important, but a slogan derived from a single campaign does not a narrative make. A sound service narrative should include not just elements of the present, but should connect those elements to the core missions of the service, to its legacy, and to its anticipated future. It should also bond Airmen and inform citizens.

This thesis began by defining a narrative, first in general terms and then detailing the specifics of a service narrative. A narrative is a story that connects events in a way that allows inferences to be drawn. A strategic narrative is purposeful. Strategic narratives have various functions. They seek to inform; persuade; impart purpose; and, most importantly, shape an audience's behavior. A service narrative is even more specific. It is a type of a strategic narrative with the dual purposes of informing, inspiring, and uniting service members and tying its actions and policy to the needs of external stakeholders.

Effective narratives share several common characteristics. They are coherent, valid, cohesive, and anticipatory. An important finding here was that the Air Force is responsible for its macro/service narrative and creating a culture in which the nested meso and micro narratives can thrive. This suggests that the macro narrative must be at once sufficiently broad to capture the diversity of the Air Force and sufficiently specific to persuade and impart purpose. Furthermore, the Air Force is constantly communicating, whether it intends to or not. Actions, inactions, stories, and silence all convey meaning. Thus, Air Force leaders must be purposeful in how they approach the construction and delivery of their narratives.

Several analysts have commented on Air Force culture and narrative. Carl Builder's *The Masks of War* described service culture as the "personality" of the service. That insight helps observers understand why military services seem to have a predilection for certain missions over others. In *The Icarus Syndrome,* Builder blamed many of the Air Force's problems on what he saw as the abandonment of "air power theory." The problem he identified is more acute today because the Air Force has a more diverse set of missions than it did when Builder wrote.

Paula Thornhill's examination focused on the Air Force narrative as it related to the service's organizational culture. She succinctly described five distinct cultural narratives and suggested they were not mutually exclusive. Her findings imply one of two things. Either the Air Force should have a broader narrative to subsume the competing subnarratives; or, it should offer a more compelling narrative for the current context. Thornhill concluded "over not through," one of the narratives used in the past, was a suitable narrative for the present.

Alan Vick examined the same narratives over almost a century of American airpower. He concluded that the narrative might not be as useful to external audiences as to Airmen previously believed but that its impact on policymakers, legislators and citizens, while difficult to assess, is not unimportant. Vick concluded that while a narrative is critical to internal cohesion, it is less effective on public opinion and has undetermined value on decision makers outside the Air Force. The narrative should be tailored accordingly. Due to the ever-changing context in which a narrative is received, the prospect of developing and maintaining an effective narrative seem almost Sisyphean.

After establishing the theoretical basis for the analysis, this thesis analyzed the post-Gulf War Air Force narratives and the extent to which they were effective. In sum, "victory through airpower" was largely effective but lacked full validity and anticipation. Had Air Force leaders adopted the rhetoric of the service to the reality of Air Force contributions, the narrative may have evolved rather than requiring radical attention. "We are critical enablers," was also only partially effective. It too was only valid in a particular context. Furthermore, it did not impart cohesion because many fighter and bomber pilots rejected it out of hand. Finally, it did not anticipate a transition back to "high end," major combat operations. "We are critical enablers" created a curious position for Gen Welsh, who had to deal with the aftermath of drawing down from two wars while simultaneously preparing for a rising China and a resurgent Russia, as well as possible conventional wars against Iran and North Korea.

Finally, this study compared the two predominant Air Force narratives against the proposed alternative narrative, "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives." It concluded "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" is a promising candidate for the near to mid-term Air Force narrative. It is powerful and concise, and it scores well across the narrative criteria and potentially could subsume the two existing narratives.

The current competing narratives, "over not through" and "airpower. Because without it you lose" are diffuse. Innovation is important to the service, but sounds corporate. Similarly, the idea of dependence represented by "without it you lose," is a valid subnarrative but should not be the service-level narrative. "The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" is a pithy narrative for the

Air Force that is broad enough to subsume the other two narratives. Airmen innovate in order to be more effective at saving lives through Global Reach, Global Vigilance, and Global Power. The nation's Air Force saves the lives of joint partners by providing emergency close air support, MEDEVAC, and combat search and rescue. The nation's Air Force saves the lives of enemies by directly striking at all levels of war, from tactical to strategic, thereby reducing the need for firepower and attendant casualties associated with larger ground forces. "The nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" has a well-established past and a bright future. Since World War II, certainly through the immediate past and into the future, American airpower will save lives.

Implications

This study has devised a mechanism for examining the Air Force narrative and ultimately suggesting a narrative for the mid-21st century. Simon Sinek wrote, "Finding WHY is a process of discovery, not invention."[1] In consonance with that observation, this analysis had to look backward to find a way forward. It is worth reflecting on what has been discovered. There are, broadly, four implications. First, several common elements should form the core of any Air Force narrative. Second, this analysis uncovered an unpleasant truth about how the United States thinks about "airpower"—its definition is so broad as to be nonsensical. Third, Gen Welsh has done an admirable job of making the Air Force story, as he sees it, accessible to Airmen; but there is still work to do. Finally, this topic is ripe for future study. The final implication suggests such areas.

First, the Air Force more than any other service represents a special confluence of people, technology, and ideas. Surely that is what the Air Force means by, "The World's Greatest Air Force, Powered by Airmen, Fueled by Innovation." Yet, it falls flat—it is a phrase full of empty slogans. It is not intuitive, and thus requires too much explanation. So what can be done? As noted above, the Air Force must rally behind a unifying cultural narrative and avoid platitudes. Whether the Air Force chooses "airpower. Because without it you lose," "the nation's Air Force . . . saving lives" or something altogether different, it should not lose sight of the key elements that enable the Air Force's critical advantage—people, technology, and ideas. They are central to the narrative.

Second, the Air Force must rationalize the definition of "airpower." Defining airpower exceptionally broadly, presumably in an attempt to be inclusive, creates a situation in which any narrative referencing airpower must be so broad as to be nearly meaningless to practitioners of airpower, spacepower, and cyberpower, thereby leading to less cohesion, rather than more. It is

[1] Simon Sinek. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. New York, NY: Portfolio, Penguin, 2009, 214.

not a slight to spacepower and cyberpower proponents to suggest that these are different forms of power—it is merely a recognition of reality. In other words, a large part of the difficulty of constructing an Air Force narrative could be resolved if airpower, spacepower, and cyberpower are properly recognized as distinct but complementary.

Airpower alone is hard enough to understand, as Colin Gray argued. "The world is well stocked with people who genuinely are deeply knowledgeable about some features of airpower, but it is much less populated with those who have a plausible claim to understand airpower's strategic narrative."[2] Of those who have a "plausible claim," few would define airpower as does the United States Air Force. In sum, the Air Force would do well to recognize the distinct forms of powers for their own intrinsic worth. Clear writing is indicative of clear thinking. The Air Force's conceptual ambiguity concerning airpower reflects decades of muddled thinking.

Third, through Gen Welsh's tenure as Chief of Staff, one could plot a story arc about his travails in uncovering, telling, and institutionalizing the Air Force narrative.[3] In the exposition phase, he acknowledged that Airmen had difficulty telling the Air Force narrative. In the rising action phase, he led the HAF staff in creating a series of "foundational documents" to help define the Air Force in the twenty-first century.[4] Collectively, these documents represent "who" Airmen are, "what" they do, "what" airpower does for the country, and "where" the Air Force is going.

Now, the Air Force is at the complication phase just before the "climax" of the story. The complication is that even when Air Force leaders recognize how they want to tell the Air Force story, there is still the matter of transmission and inculcation, neither of which this study addressed. In 2014, The Secretary of the Air Force Directorate of Public Affairs began a website, "'Tell the Air Force Story' SharePoint site to help Airmen explain how they, and the Air Force as a whole, contribute to America's defense through the unique application of Air, Space and Cyber capabilities."[5] In 2016, Air Force Public Affairs released "United States Air Force Communications Waypoints." Brig Gen Kathleen Cook, Director of Air Force Public Affairs, says its intended purpose is "to provide Airmen the tools needed to effectively 'Tell the Air Force Story.'"[6] Clearly, the Air Force is taking its narrative seriously. Combined with the creation of

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[2] Colin S. Gray. *Airpower for Strategic Effect.* [S.l.]: Air University Press, Air Force Research Institute, 2012, 1.
[3] A narrative arc broadly has five phases: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution.
[4] See "America's Greatest Air Force — Powered by Airmen, Fueled by Innovation," "Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America," "America's Air Force: A Call to the Future," the Air Force "Strategic Master Plan" and the "Future Operating Concept" all published or re-published under General Welsh's tenure.
[5] Strategy & Assessment Division, Secretary of the Air Force Directorate of Public Affairs, 11 Apr 16.
[6] United States Air Force Communications Waypoints, Winter 2016.

the foundational documents mentioned in the previous paragraph, these actions are a good start for strategic communication. Yet, they lack the *pathos* of an effective narrative.

One recommendation to bridge the gap from the ephemeral to the tangible and emotional is for the Air Force to develop an "Airmen's history of the US Air Force." In 2005, Naval Institute Press (NIP) published *A Sailor's History of the U.S. Navy,* by Thomas J. Cutler. NIP sponsored Cutler to write an unofficial history, or as he calls it, a "heritage book" for the US Navy. The point was not to write a comprehensive history, but rather to "capture some of the magic" that made the Navy exceptional.[7] In this book, Cutler thematically delivered vignettes about the service's core values by featuring the exploits of sailors. In other words, it is a book about Sailors doing the things that make the Navy special. It is remarkable because it connects the micro narratives of Sailors to the macro narrative of the service. In an indirect, engaging, and meaningful way it tells the Navy's story. The Navy now issues *A Sailor's History* to every new officer accession.[8] The Air Force should have something similar.

Finally, there are several areas for future study. An analyst wishing to expand the scope of the work here might examine the Air Force narratives and their cultural impact across all Air Force history. Another area of interest is how to get the narrative to "stick." Gen Welsh's concern that Airmen are not equipped to tell the Air Force story might not be a question of a faulty narrative, but perhaps a question of transmission and inculcation. If one accepts the premise that the Air Force should distinguish among airpower, spacepower, and cyberpower, then some of the most important areas an analyst might examine are the historical and potential future narratives of the other forms of power. Finally, an analyst might examine the influence of narratives on law and policy makers.

Conclusion

In sum, narratives matter, and the Air Force can do better. The things the service says about itself internally and externally have consequential and lasting implications on the Air Force organizationally, operationally, and culturally. The firings of Secretary Wynne and Gen Moseley resulted, at least in part, from their narratives conflicting with that of Secretary of Defense Gates. This represented a significant organizational upheaval. In Operation Allied Force, the dominant Air Force narrative, "victory through airpower," contributed to Lt Gen Short's being at loggerheads with Gen Clark over strategy. Short wanted to pursue a decapitation strategy despite having no political mandate to do so. Thus, in a very tangible way, the Air Force narrative

[7] Thomas J. Cutler. *A Sailor's History of the U.S. Navy*. Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2005, xii.
[8] Cutler, *A Sailor's History*, back cover.

influenced operations. Secretary Gates may have intended the hiring of Gen Schwartz to be a rebuke of fighter pilot culture and fighter pilot dominance in the service. Secretary Gates put Gen Schwartz in to change the cultural narrative, and succeeded. Ironically, “we are critical enablers” sought to be inclusive, but ultimately isolated fighter and bomber pilots. For a service that prides itself on adaptability, the Air Force has been, at times, intransigent and dogmatic about its narrative to the detriment of the service. A major finding of this study is that despite pressures to oversell or undersell airpower, Air Force leaders are served best by matching the service’s rhetoric to its reality. The best way for them to do so is to adopt the narrative, “the nation’s Air Force . . . saving lives.”

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