

Understanding and Communicating through Narratives

A Monograph

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Abstract

UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING THROUGH NARRATIVES, by Major Gittipong Paruchabutr, U.S. Army, 48 pages.

The military is increasingly using and relying on the term “narrative” in its lexicon. United States strategic guidance documents generally implore commanders to “shape the narrative,” doctrinal publications recommend commanders to “exploit a single narrative,” and operational plans direct commanders to execute an “operational narrative.” Although the concept of narrative is generally understood as telling a story, it is more important for practitioners to recognize narrative as a methodology for understanding and as a mode of communication. Integrating a narrative approach to military operations would be beneficial because it offers the potential to convey the meaning of our actions in a context that is relevant to a rival’s understanding.

A survey of current U.S. doctrine provides multiple and ambiguous definitions and functions of narrative. A shared understanding of narrative is required to prevent misunderstanding as future military commanders contemplate executing operations within a narrative framework. Specifically, this monograph will provide an analysis of the current military narrative development, narrative theory, and explore the current paradigm of U.S. communication efforts. Lastly, based on shared understanding this monograph provides with regard to the utility of narrative in planning and communications, it makes recommendations on potential application narrative theory to military operations. This monograph argues that the absence of understanding about what narrative is and what it can do limits the military’s ability to utilize the tool effectively. Applying narrative theory to military planning and communicating activities will make messages and actions consonant with, and part of, military operations.

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Acronyms

DARPA	Defense Advanced Research Project Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoS	Department of State
FM	Field Manual
IIA	Inform and Influence Activities
JSOU	Joint Special Operations University
MIM	Message Influence Model
PCOM	Pragmatic Complexity Model
SAMS	School of Advanced Military Studies
SCOA	Strategic Context of Operational Art

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Introduction: Acceptance and Ascendency of Narrative

The U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, published in 2006, was the first Army manual that extensively cited narrative as a concept. FM 3-24 defines narrative as “...the central mechanism, expressed in story form, through which ideologies are expressed and absorbed.”¹ This definition, along with the common definitions of narrative referenced from online sources, causes the casual military reader to associate narrative as telling a story or mechanisms associated with storytelling.² This is in contrast to the actual use of narrative terminology used in U.S. military lexicon, which connotes a greater meaning to the term than just telling a story.

Narratives functions as the central mechanism through which ideologies are created, expressed, and absorbed. This critical aspect of narrative is not properly explained in FM 3-24 or other subsequent doctrinal publications. This monograph will explore the form, function, and logic of how narratives achieve its ability to create, transmit, absorb and enact ideologies. Since its formal introduction into U.S. Army doctrine in 2006, the use of the term has gained significant popularity. Narrative is frequently referenced in official strategic, operational, doctrinal, and training guidance. Despite the commonality of this term, there is still no formal joint definition of narrative in doctrinal publications and certainly, no common understanding of what is meant with the use of the term.

The most recent utilization of the term narrative in a strategic document is from the Obama Administration’s March 2012 report to Congress entitled “National Framework for Strategic Communication.” This report specifically identifies that “Shaping the Narrative” as one

¹US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), I-14.

² Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. “narrative,” <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/narrative?q=narrative> (accessed April 25, 2012). Three definitions of a narrative are offered: (1) A spoken or written account of connected events, a Story; (2) The narrated part of literary work, as distinct from dialogue; and (3) the practice or art of telling stories. Narrative is how we make sense of reality.

of the top five priorities for the Department of State (DoS) and “Countering extremist narratives” as a top priority for the Department of Defense (DoD).³ In this example, narrative is referred to as an objective, in which the elements of national power should be used to dominate and influence.

At the organizational level, U.S. Joint Forces Command’s, 2010 *Joint Operating Environment (JOE)* devotes an entire section to “The Battle of the Narrative.” This document implies that there is a potential power in narrative—that it is more than just a communication technique but a force that can impact the operational environment. It also implies that there is singular narrative to be “won” as reflected in this statement: “In the future, influencing the narrative by conveying the truth about America’s intent, reinforced with supporting actions and activities, will become even harder.”⁴

Again, the Joint Forces Commands’ *JOE* utilizes narrative beyond the “telling a story” analogy but still fails to define the concept. Lastly, U.S. Special Operations Command’s Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) has used the narrative definition most closely associated with the story form in its call for research topic.

JSOU’s 2011 priority topic, “Winning the battle of Narrative,” requests students to research narratives with respect to operations within the following framework:

Crafting a credible narrative is a central requirement to countering the influences of irregular threats. Our adversaries exploit their knowledge of local history, culture, and religion to affect perceptions by framing their actions positively. Any area of operations is filled with supportive, conflicting, complementary, and distracting narratives about what is going on. How do we win the battle of the narrative while conducting irregular warfare? What steps are necessary to establish and sustain the most credible and visible narrative of what is going on and why? This study should also address the development of counternarratives designed to undermine and discredit those of our adversaries, a

³President of the United States, “National Framework for Strategic Communications” (Report to Congress) www.fas.org/man/epring/pubdip.pdf (accessed April 25, 2012).

⁴US Joint Forces Command, *2010 The Joint Operational Environment* (Norfolk, VA: Government Printing Office, 2010), 65.

particularly difficult task as emotional scenes of violence and destruction move quickly from mobile phones to the news media.⁵

Although application of the story form of narrative is implied by JSOU's use of the term, it also alludes to defining narrative as linear force that can be challenged by a counternarrative. In addition to these strategic and operational guidance documents, the latest doctrinal publications have expanded FM 3-24's original definition of narrative, but with detrimental effects.

U.S. Army FM 5.0, *The Operations Process*, published in 2010 and the Joint Staff J-7, *Joint Handbook for Operational Design*, published in 2011, present narrative concept in detail but further obfuscates understanding by introducing a new term entitled "mission narrative," which is defined as "the expression of the operational approach for a specified mission."⁶ FM 5-0 introduces the mission narrative concept but does not provide linkages to FM 3-24's definition nor does it provide detailed guidance on what elements should be in a narrative.

Although morphing definitions and application can be seen as a natural progression of doctrine development, misinterpretation of an important and frequently referenced term such as narrative will inevitably lead to misunderstanding and disjointed implementation. The U.S. Army narrative concept was continually and constantly re-defined from its formal introduction as a "story form of communication" in FM 3-24 (2006) to its esoteric form as "mission narrative" in FM 5-0 (2010). As of this writing, there is no formal, joint doctrinal definition of narrative. Regardless of how vague or specific this terminology is utilized, there is unquestionably a shared

⁵Joint Special Operations University, USSOCOM Research Topics 2011, <https://jsou.socom.mil/Pages/2011JSOUPublications.aspx> (accessed March 21, 2011).

⁶US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 5.0, *The Operation Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010). Chapter 3, Mission narrative will be further expounded in the monograph.

understanding on the potential of narratives. The DoD and Office of the Director of National Intelligence are currently sponsoring several studies on narratives.⁷

In October of 2011, the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) issued a broad agency announcement soliciting the research community to advance understanding in the field of narrative networks. Its primary aim was to explore and identify quantitative aspects on how a story form of communication has so much relative power over other modes of communication.

Narratives exert a powerful influence on human thoughts and behavior. They consolidate memory, shape emotions, cue heuristics and biases in judgment, influence in-group/out-group distinctions, and may affect the fundamental contents of personal identity. It comes as no surprise that because of these influences stories are important in security contexts: for example, they change the course of insurgencies, frame negotiations, play a role in political radicalization, influence the methods and goals of violent social movements, and likely play a role in clinical conditions important to the military such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Therefore, understanding the role stories play in a security context and the spatial and temporal dimensions of that role is especially important.⁸

DARPA's research solicitation highlights the broad functions that narrative provides in society, the purpose of its research is to eventually automate and operationalize narrative processes. While DARPA is interested in the automated potential of narrative theory, military practitioners can operationalize the potential of narratives through education, practice, and implementation of doctrine.

The integration of narrative theory into military operations stems from a reflection and general acceptance among leading military theorists and communication professionals that

⁷Two studies on narratives and metaphors are currently being sponsored by DoD's Defense Advanced Research Agency (DARPA) and Office of the Director of National Intelligence's Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA) to empirically study the effects narrative on neurobiology, automation, and other cognitive processes. More information on IARPA's project may be found here: http://www.iarpa.gov/solicitations_metaphor.html (accessed April 30, 2011) and DARPA's project here: <https://team.sainc.com/n2/Files/DARPA-BAA-12-03.pdf> (accessed March 5, 2011).

⁸Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, "Broad Agency Announcement Narrative Networks DSO DARPA-BAA-12-03," October 7, 2011, <https://team.sainc.com/n2/Files/DARPA-BAA-12-03.pdf> (accessed March 5, 2011).

current communication paradigm is not effective at changing attitudes of our rivals.⁹ Since 2001, The Defense Science Board report on Strategic Communication has issued three reports; all of which levied criticism on current communication strategies. The 2004 report stated:

The critical problem in American public diplomacy directed toward the Muslim world is not one of ‘dissemination of information’ or even one of crafting and delivering the ‘right’ message. Rather it is a fundamental problem of credibility. Simply, there is none--the United States today is without a working channel of communication to the world of Muslims and of Islam.¹⁰

This passage highlights the current paradigm of U.S. communication strategy and doctrine. U.S. military communication doctrine and activities are very successful at creating and disseminating information, but not narratives. Strategic communication themes and messages, public affairs guidance, and military information support objectives are written in descriptive terms rather than story format. Consequently, many of the messages that are translated and disseminated resemble descriptive statements with very little context to produce cognitive resonance to the recipients. Credibility is assigned to the entity that is delivering the message and little emphasis is given on the credibility of the message itself.

The focus of this paradigm is towards content creation and dissemination for the purpose of persuasion. Understanding language and culture are emphasized for message creation for persuasion, not for transferring meanings. These concepts are based on a positivist world-view and the message-influence model to change behavior. The basic premise for this viewpoint is based on the assumption that values can be changed by introducing messages, which transfers

⁹Current communication paradigm will be discussed in detail in the context review section.

¹⁰Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board: Task Force on Strategic Communications* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004).

meaning from one entity to another.¹¹ Narrative theory and its applications challenge this paradigm for understating and communication.

This monograph will begin with a review of how narrative theory developed in military studies and doctrine and explains why the term is being applied in many different and esoteric contexts. Next, it explores the narrative concept from an interdisciplinary approach to find actionable aspects of narrative theory and recommend a definition that is broader than “a story form” and less ambiguous than the “mission narrative.” Based on a proposed shared understanding of narrative, this monograph explores two critical aspects of narrative: how it functions to create meaning; and how it is communicated from one entity to another. Finally, this monograph will demonstrate why utilizing the narrative is a superior model for conveying meaning than our current message-influence model framework. This monograph seeks to provide the theoretical framework to incorporate narrative theory into future doctrine and operational plans.

One of the major goals of planning and executing military operations is to reduce the “Say-Do” gap. Aligning physical military actions, information activities, and policy to achieve credibility and meaning relevant to a rival to advance strategic interests is a critical task for policy makers and operational planners. A narrative framework provides the potential to synchronize these activities with a unifying logic. Planning operations via a narrative framework provides enough structure for operations to achieve unity of effort while simultaneously providing the flexibility to engage rival narratives. U.S. Army design methodology offers military planners a technique to plan operations that incorporate and can convey narratives. Operations utilizing design, implementing narratives, can legitimate United States Government actions to rivals. The absence of understanding about what narrative is and what it can do limits the military’s ability to

¹¹Steven R. Corman, Angela Trethewey, and Bud Goodall, “A 21st Century Model for Communication in the Global War of Ideas: From Simplistic Influence to Pragmatic Complexity” (Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, April 3, 2007), 7.

utilize the tool effectively. Applying narrative theory into military planning and communicating activities will make messages and actions consonant with, and part of military operations, thus reducing our “Say-Do” gap.

Review of Narrative Application in Military Doctrine: A Vague Patchwork of Ideas and Functions

Narrative theory is a relatively new concept relative to military studies. Various theoretical viewpoints highlight different functions of narrative. This section reviews the history of narrative and how it was applied to military thought in order to highlight its discontinuity. The consequences of this grass-roots approach tends to obfuscate the form, function, and logic of narrative. Although the multiple functions of narrative highlight its versatility, lack of shared understanding hinders the application of this concept in the Joint Force. Doctrine provides a vehicle to create shared understanding and this monograph recommends a joint definition of narrative to create a foundation for military application of narrative theory.

A multidisciplinary review of narrative theory, Army pre-doctrinal training, DoD doctrinal publications, and emerging narrative concepts is required in order to propose a doctrinal definition of narrative. A shared understating of what narrative is and what it can do is required for Joint Force implementation.

The common definition of narrative, according to Oxford dictionary, offers three forms for consideration: “A spoken or written form of connected events, a story; The narrated part of a literary work, as distinct from dialogue; A representation of a particular situation or process in such way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values.”¹² Of the three definitions, the first two stem directly from literary field of narrative theory. The third, and more nuanced definition, stems from application of narrative theory from fields of organization science,

¹²Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. “narrative,” <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/narrative?q=narrative> (accessed April 25, 2012).

marketing, and political science. A review of narrative application to military theory reflects all three aspects of the common definition.

The roots of modern military narrative application come from several different sources. Dr. Amy Zalman, author of Strategic Narratives blog, traced the origins and development of military narrative theory to a 2001 RAND study by military theorists John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt and to a 2006 book entitled *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs* by Lawrence Freedman.¹³

The 2001 book entitled *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, by Arquilla and Ronfeldt posit that narrative is one of the five factors which define networks.¹⁴ Specifically they argue that the narrative functions as a unifying logic that pervades all networks, especially in civil-societal networks such a terrorist groups, criminal cartels, and social activists.¹⁵

Freedman applies narrative concept to strategy in his book, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*. In its first chapter, a section entitled “Strategic Narrative,” Freedman articulates that narratives provide an essential function that enables diverse groups to cohere to each other ideologically and guides its strategy. Freedman additionally points out that military operations should be employed to emphasize the function narrative that conveys meaning “Instead of being geared to eliminating assets of the enemy, they might need to be focused on undermining those

¹³Amy Zalman, “The Definition of Strategic Narrative: An Evolving Concept in International Affairs,” Strategic Narrative Blog, entry posted March 19, 2011, <http://strategic-narrative.net/blog/2012/03/the-definition-of-strategic-narrative-an-evolving-concept-in-international-affairs/> (accessed March 21, 2011).

¹⁴The five levels of theory and practice that matter are listed as the following: the technological, social, narrative, organizational, and doctrinal levels. Arquilla argues that studying these five organizing principles of a network will yield insights into how a network is organized and elucidate its underlying logic.

¹⁵John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, eds., *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph-reports/MR138> (accessed March 10, 2011), 328-329.

narratives on which that the enemy bases its appeal and which animates and guides its activists.”¹⁶ Narrative serves an inherently strategic role, it serves as living embodiment of identity and ideology at personal, organizational, and as applied by Freeman, national level. This identity function is one of the most critical functions of narrative. The logic expressed by the identity function of narrative links individuals to more complex levels of organizations such as an organization or culture.

A sport fan provides an example of how an individual identifying characteristic expands into a function that connects it with other organizations. Identifying oneself as a New York Yankee fan connects an individual as a fan of baseball, New York, and the baseball organization itself. More specifically, being a Yankee fan implies that the individual will carry on the traditions and expectations of the Yankee organization such as a deep hatred for all things associated with the Boston Red Sox. How narrative transmits identity at the organizational level will be explored further in this monograph.

Dr. Amy Zalman approaches the narrative concept based on her background in literary theory, and expands on Freedman’s strategic narrative. Zalman states that strategic narratives are “... the story that a nation must tell itself, and the world, to wage a war or to maintain its competitive advantage in the international system.”¹⁷ Zalman recommended that narratives should be utilized, not only as a mode of communication but also, as entities that flow in an informational domain which interact with each other to create new stories.¹⁸ This describes the dialogic nature of narrative, in which new meaning is created from the continuous interaction of

¹⁶Lawrence Freedman, *the Transformation of Strategic Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2006), 32.

¹⁷Zalman, “The Definition of Strategic Narrative.”

¹⁸Ibid., 7.

two or more stories. Dialogic process differs from monologic process in which meaning is conferred in a linear, finite, and unidirectional method of conveying meaning.¹⁹

Military pre-doctrinal and training guidance has also explored narrative concept. The U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) *Art of Design* explains narrative as “...a story that is constructed a conscious bounding of events and artifacts in time and space- [which] produces an understanding of the logic of what is observed.”²⁰ In this context, SAMS heavily emphasizes that narrative can also utilized as the basis for understanding the environmental frame process of U.S. Army Design Methodology. This is a key element of narrative--its ability to convey meaning, which distinguishes narrative from other modes of communication such as a statement or description, which emphasizes the transmission of messages. The SAMS Student Text also illustrates multiple aspects of narrative from fields of historiography theory, literary theory, and linguists. The different viewpoints work to convey the universality of narrative and its power to produce meaning within an individual, groups, and cultures, a topic that will be further explored in this monograph.

Lastly, U.S. Joint Forces, *Commander’s Handbook for Strategic Communications and Communication Strategy*, version 3.0, provides for the most comprehensive application of narrative theory to military operations. Three aspects of narrative theory highlighted in this document are the enduring narrative, the battle of the narrative, and elements of a narrative. The enduring narrative concept suggests that all subordinate messages should nest and support a national-level narrative in order to ensure consistency of a message over time to various audiences. In the section entitled “Battle of the Narrative,” the handbook proposes that narrative

¹⁹T. Dean Thomlison, “Monologic and Dialogic Communication,” <http://faculty.evansville.edu/dt4/301/Dialogue.html> (accessed April 30, 2012). A dialogic modes vs. monologic mode is discussed in depth here.

²⁰US Army School of Advanced Military Studies, *Art of Design: Student Text*, version 2.0, http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/CGSC/events/sams/ArtofDesign_v2.pdf (accessed January 15, 2012), 74.

is the primary force that determines success within the cognitive dimension of warfare. Lastly, it recognizes the lack of a joint definition for narrative and proposes the following definition: “Enduring strategic communication with context, reason/motive, and goal/endstate.”²¹ This definition begins to address the elements of a narrative construction, which stems directly from literary aspects of narrative theory.

Narrative theory expanded from its roots in philosophy and literary criticism into the, history, humanities, marketing, political science, organizational science, and now as illustrated, into military theory. Based on this interdisciplinary review of narrative theory development within military context, it is clear that there is no consensus on a shared meaning of narratives or how it can be implemented into an operational framework. This monograph proposes a pragmatic, broader understanding of narrative, which highlights the two most applicable aspects of narrative theory for military operations: Narrative is a methodology for communication and understanding that creates meaning via a constructed system of story formats to transform actions, values, culture, and history.²²

In order to explore the practical implications of the proposed definition, the following sections expounds on how narrative theory aids in understanding and is a superior form of communication to change behavior verses the current paradigm of message-influence model. The proposed definition remains broad enough to be applied to current applications in doctrine and military publications.

A deeper understanding of narrative theory explains how narratives are constructed, transmitted, and interact with the recipient to convey meaning and guide actions. The unique

²¹Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Planner's Handbook for Operational Design* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/jwfc_pam.htm (accessed April 27, 2012).

²² G. Paruchabutr. The proposed definition of narrative is a component of this monograph's thesis in order to provide for a common definition of narrative form and function, as applied to military operations. A constructed system of story format is derived directly from Steven Corman's depiction of narrative, See Fig1.

capability of narrative to convey meaning, provide purpose, and identity on a personal level gives it an immense power and relevance across cultural barriers. A detailed analysis of narrative theory also creates shared understanding of how and why different parts of narrative theory have been applied to military doctrine. Most importantly, understating narratives demonstrates the vital purpose they can serve – if one understands how they function – and what they offer as a means for finding relevant action and message and for the transformative power.

Understanding Narratives: Form, Functions, and Logic

This section explains what narratives are, deconstructs the elements of a narrative, and presents a current understanding of the “central mechanism,” the aspect of which FM 3-24 describes as the narrative’s ability to transmit ideology. The purpose of this section is to provide a common understanding on the form, or structure, of narratives, what functions they provide to society, and the logic of how they create and transmit meaning. This common understanding will provide the foundation of how to utilize this powerful methodology to understand a rival’s narrative within the operational environment and ways to communicate narratives to compete and potentially, transform a rival’s narrative to one that is acceptable to our strategic interests.

Narrative theory evolved from a number of academic fields, predominantly from the humanities. The universality of narrative as a mode of understanding, or meaning-making, and communication is one of the primary reasons why many more academic fields, including the physical sciences, are now devoted to it. Extremist groups, cults, religions, cultural, and other powerful trans-historical and trans-cultural organizations already utilize narratives to convey ideology and guide actions. Military operations can and should benefit from executing operations within a narrative framework.

Dr. Steven Corman states that humanities, in contrast with natural and social sciences, promote individual scholarship and favors over generalization of concepts and unique interpretations. This is partially why there are vague, and often competing, distinctions between

concepts of narrative, story, plot, and discourse.²³ The primary references used in this monograph to explore narrative theory are deliberately limited to provide consistency in terminology and definitions. This monograph attempts to remove specialized languages from various references and provide a focused presentation of essential aspects of narrative theory because various disciplines assign different names to similar forms and functions of narrative.

The following sections of this monograph will highlight critical aspects of narratives that enable their ability to convey meaning. These aspects of narratives are its universality, fidelity, temporality, scalability, and flexibility. Additionally, narrative's ability to shape actions is derived from its potential to cue heuristic modes of thought and implore action to validate personal identity. The unique power of narrative is its ability to provide meaning and relevance to action, thus becoming a decisive factor in decision-making. Defining narratives as a mode of understating and communication allows the military practitioner to integrate narrative theory into planning and communicating activities.

Ying and Yang of Narratives: How we Make Sense of the World and Convey Meaning

Narrative is a powerful and universal phenomenon. As a mode of understanding, it defines how an individual creates meaning and correlates time and events in order to see himself in relation to his environment. As a mode of communication, every human and socially constructed entity communicates utilizing narrative format.²⁴ Roland Barthes authored some of the most cited material on the universality of narratives:

²³Steven R. Corman, "Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communications," September 2011, in *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*, eds., Laurie Fenstermacher and Todd Leventhal, http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/U_Counter%20Violent%20Extremism%20Final_Approved%20for%20Public%20Release_28Oct11v3.pdf (accessed 29 April 2012), 40.

²⁴US Army School of Advanced Military Studies, *Art of Design*, 73.

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances –as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio’s Saint Ursula), stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.²⁵

Although this statement was written in a literary context, interdisciplinary study of narratives in neurobiology, psychoanalysis, history, anthropology, and other fields reaffirmed the universality of narrative as form of expression and communication.²⁶

Narrative, as defined by the literary textbook, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narratives*, is defined in two components: the “story” and the “discourse.” A story “...is a chronological sequence of events involving entities.”²⁷ Stories, in order to be stories must have a beginning, middle, and end, and allow for apprehension of movement in time. Discourse is something that takes place between meanings, narrative and competing narratives. Competing narratives generate discourse and through that process they are refined and refine each other. This continuous feedback of one narrative affecting another is describes as the dialogic nature of narrative.

Although the definition is intended for literary audiences, an important aspect of this definition is that the story itself exists independently from the discourse, thus the same story may be narrated by different entities, formats, viewpoints, and they may present different and multiple

²⁵Roland Barthes, “On Narrative and Narratives,” *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 238.

²⁶Paul Hazel, “Narrative: An Introduction” blog, entry posted April 5, 2007, http://www.paulhazel.com/blog/Introduction_To_Narrative.pdf (accessed April 27, 2012).

²⁷H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 240.

time sequence. This illustrates how messages or actions using the same set of events, no matter how well crafted and translated, may not resonate or convey meaning if they are not relevant to the intended audience given their own narrative and self-understanding.

Scientific logic demands a casual explanation for events but narratives open up causality to multiple interpretations by virtue of how stories are presented.²⁸ This phenomenon is observed virtually every day on how one set of events, or stories, are assigned different meaning by how it is framed and which of the same observed facts are highlighted. Corman, an organizational communications theorist, illustrates how different stories, which form a system of stories, may create narratives.

Corman describes narrative as a system of stories that share themes, forms, and archetypes. The following figure graphically represents how individual stories, via a continuous discourse, can relate to one another.

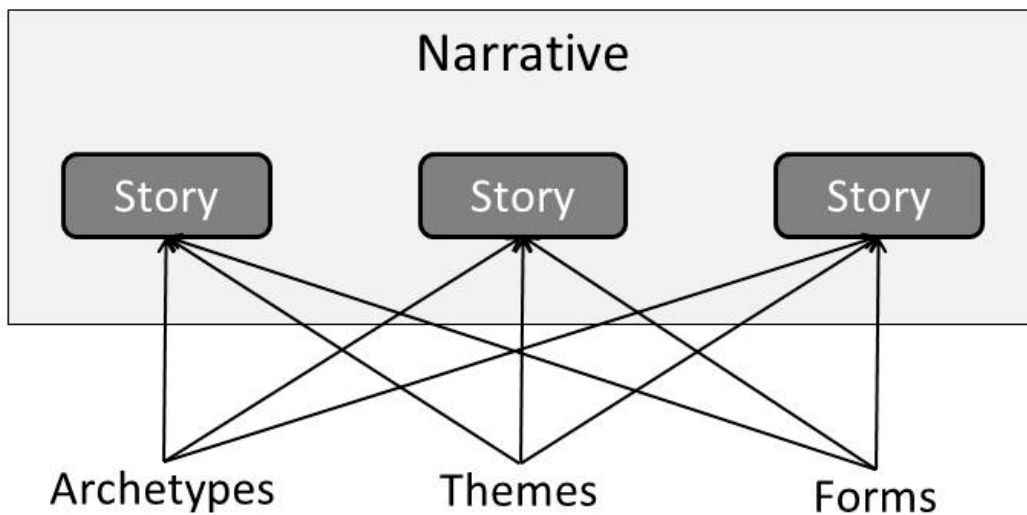


Figure 1. Narrative Elements

Source: Steven R. Corman, "Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communications," September 2011, in *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*, ed. Laurie Fenstermacher and Todd Leventhal, <http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/>

²⁸Barbara Czarniawska, *Narratives in Social Science Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 7.

Corman explains that stories within the narrative do not have to be identical in order to form a narrative. This model of communication contrasts greatly to the current military communication paradigm expressed by centralized control of messages and approval of communication products. Recurring archetypes, themes and forms that relate within a logic that provides meaning through plot is the essence of what will resonate within an audience.²⁹ Further explanations and examples of archetypes, themes, and forms and their application will be required before continued examination of narrative theory.

Archetypes are generic versions of characters such as hero, the victim, and the villain that reoccurs across the range of the narrative. This concept can also be referred to as the subject of a narrative.³⁰ On a pragmatic scale that applies to military operations and strategic communication, organizations, cultures, and nation states cast themselves as the role of the protagonist verses antagonist within a narrative. It is important to note that when constructing a flexible narrative, characters should not be crafted into one archetype. A multidimensional characterization of an organization or entity will allow flexibility to legitimize a wide range of actions.

Themes are the central topic that recurs throughout the narrative. Conflict, love, revenge, redemption, life, death, and control are typically the most recognizable themes in a story. Themes can be referred to in a story either implicitly or explicitly.³¹ According to Corman, story forms are

²⁹Corman, "Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communications, 41.

³⁰Abbott, 243.

³¹Ibid., 242.

standard patterns on which stories may be based, with typical characters, actions, and sequences.³²

Abbott cites the Cinderella and Rags to Riches as examples of story forms. The typical Cinderella story follows the format of neglect, injustice, rebirth, and reward. Rags to riches story follows the formula by depicting a character's rise from humble background to high-society through hard work, determination, courage, and honesty.³³ These two examples were chosen specifically to demonstrate another unique aspect of narratives: the master plot.

Abbott defines master plots as stories that we tell and reinforce by societal pressures to such an extent that they become part of culture.³⁴ Master plots forms the basis of how an individual defines himself, and as a natural extension, determine definitive traits of organizations, cultures, nation states, or any other socially constructed organization or network. Abbott states “We seem to connect our thinking about life, and particularly about our own lives, to a number of master plots that we may or may not be aware of. To the extent that our values and identity are linked to a master plot, that master plot can have a strong rhetorical impact. We tend to give credibility to narratives that are structured by it.”³⁵

This critical concept of how master plots shape - and reflect - identity warrants an example based from one theme. Corman cites the American Revolution as an example of a master plot that shape identity at the personal, organizational, and national level. The history of the American Revolution is taught ubiquitously in American schools. Elements of heroes, traitors,

³²Corman, “Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communications,” 42.

³³Abbott, 47.

³⁴This concept of recurring themes and story forms are defined as Master Narratives in Dr Amy Zalman and Dr. Steven Corman works.

³⁵Abbott, 46.

battles, and political intrigue are woven together in many forms and repeated to every generation. Narrative derivatives will call on different elements to serve its purpose of conveying meaning.

An example of an organization that effectively uses this master plot is the U.S. political movement “Tea Party” which espouses the values, actions, and traditions of the American Revolution, but supposes the role of the British with that of the U.S. Federal government. Both the Tea Party movement and the American revolutionaries fought to gain rights and freedom from a central power excessively imposing taxes and laws designed to exploit the electorate / subjects. The individual who inserts himself into the story and participate in rallies and demonstration enacts elements from the master plot.³⁶ At a personal level, master plots provide an individual with a framework against which he may express his identity. The individual will place himself in the role of the protagonist in this narrative to justify and legitimate his actions.

The general logic of the master plots, which builds narratives at individual, organizational, cultural, and national levels, transcends cultures. U.S. Army Design methodology implores military planners to understand narratives and the SAMS curriculum implicitly prepares its students to address master plots from the U.S. environment.

A course in SAMS indirectly instructs students on knowledge of U.S. specific master plots. Strategic Context of Operational Art (SCOA) aims “...to better understand the broader environment in which decisions to use force are made.”³⁷ An operational planner must understand master plots form history, culture, doctrine and policy imposes on him, implicitly or explicitly, options for employing military forces to achieve strategic objectives. Courses of action that do not resonate with U.S. master plots will not be feasible in either a political or an institutional context. Narratives are always in existence, whether we purposefully create them or not. They

³⁶Corman, “Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communications,” 41.

³⁷School of Advanced Military Studies, Advanced Military Studies Program, *Strategic Context for Operational Art Syllabus–2012-01* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Government Printing Office, 2011).

exist because there are concurrent narratives that drive a potential rival's identity. Every culture transmits and sustains its own narratives that provide it with its own identity and basis for actions.

From an author's perspective, an entity is part of the setting and is cast as the protagonist in an narrative. An antagonist's value and behavior will usually be perceived as irrational from the protagonist's view point. A cursory look at U.S. political rhetoric will find frequent statements that Iran, North Korea, or Al-Qaida are usually represented as "irrational" actors. Conversely, the same state of irrationality is attributed to U.S. policy makers from their point of view. Whether or not an action or message is constructed to nest within a master plot, actions and messages will be assigned meaning by a rival's narrative. Narratives are an inherently dialogic process in which meaning is achieved in a dialog between the communicator and the intended recipient.³⁸

Another important aspect of narrative is how it achieves fidelity among individuals and within cultures. Fidelity in narrative context indicate how readily an individual accesses if a story is true or believable. Narrative theory allows for subjective truths. Fidelity in narratives is not completely based on scientific evidence, but by coherence of accepted master plots. Master plots accumulate within an individual by repetitive exposure though experiences such as education, interaction, reinforcement, and observation. Jerome Bruner explores the concept of narrative fidelity and how it is not based on scientific data, but by verisimilitude:

Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can weeded out by falsification, narratives constructions can only achieve "verisimilitude." Narrative, them, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and the narrative necessity rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness.³⁹

³⁸Amy Zalman, "Strategic Communications in Irregular Wars," in *Strategic Communications for Combating Terrorism*, eds. A. Aykut Öncü, Troy Bucher, Osman Aytac (Ankara Turkey, 2010), 95.

³⁹Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Chicago Journal* 18, no. 1 (August 1991), 4.

This is an explanatory construct of how and why the narrative mode of understanding and communication was the dominant means of conveying truth before the invention of the scientific method and ascendancy of positivist thought. The narrative mode of rationalization is still prevalent today and is arguably the prevailing mechanism of how an individual validates an event as true or not.⁴⁰ Subjects do not routinely demand scientific falsification of data when presented with a story, as human memory cannot store all the facts and figures required to validate truthfulness. Narratives allow our memory to create a shortcut by modeling how a situation should behave. This shortcut mode of thought, also known as heuristic mode of thought, is based on judgmental rules rather than analytical processes to determine validity of information.

Subjects usually act, based on their understanding of how the action fits into their personal narrative, before gaining understanding of a situation. How the narrative achieves its fidelity and then transforms into action is examined in the field of organizational science via the process of sensemaking.

Organizational science researchers Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe explain the process of Sensemaking involves how an individual transforms circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a catalyst for action.⁴¹ Sensemaking research focuses more on the relationship between action and interpretation of events verses how an evaluation influences choice. The actual process is described as follows:

The ongoing retrospective of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing . . . sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actioner engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances.⁴²

⁴⁰Karl E. Weick, and Kathleen M. Sutcliffe, "Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking," *Organizational Science* 16, no. 4 (July/August 2005): 411-412.

⁴¹Ibid., 409.

⁴²Ibid.

This description of how story and identity shape action highlights the role that narratives play in sensemaking, as narratives are the central force for identity construction and as a basis for comparing retrospective thought. Master plots are the framework for comparative evaluation and action. Sensemaking processes are enacted especially when an individual confronts an ambiguous situation or when they are attempting to solve a complex problem. Weick and Sutcliffe identifies two questions that sensemaking seeks to answer when an individual confronts an ambiguous situation: “What is the story?” and afterwards, “Now what?”⁴³ Two features of sensemaking, retrospect and prospect, are directly tied to a narrative mode of understanding. An individual constantly compares situations with multiple narratives of how a situation or system is supposed to act, hence, the retrospective function of sensemaking. If an individual determines that a situation does not fit into a current narrative, master plots are referenced to take actions that are rational to the actor to resolve a situation that does not make sense.⁴⁴

Retrospective and prospective actions are extrapolated into organizational modes of thought as well. When U.S. Army leaders state that closing with and killing the enemy and controlling domains via mission command are central tenants of Army philosophy, it cues and reinforces a set of master plots and narratives that validates control and direct lethal force. These narratives are in conflict with emerging narratives reflected in statements and doctrinal guidance which state that the will of the population is the center of gravity. Admiral McRaven, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, promotes narratives that favor indirect and direct approaches, are complimentary efforts to achieve success and working by, through, and with interagency, coalition, and other actors will achieve success.⁴⁵ Depending of which of these

⁴³Ibid., 413.

⁴⁴Ibid., 415.

⁴⁵US Senate, “Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven, USN Commander, United States Special Operations Command,” Senate Armed Service Committee, 112th Congress, March 6, 2012, http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2012_hr/index.html (accessed April 30, 2012).

narratives are cued by military organization of various levels, they will have significant impact on the formulation of an operational approach.

Military communication and influencing communities must realize that narrative is essentially dialogic, or a mutually constructed process. Knowledge of how narratives create meaning and shape decision-making will assist the military to plan operations that will resonate within rivals' context and cultural milieus. Narrative, because it is a natural mode of communicating, is ideally suited to transmit information.

Communicating: Persuasion to Change Behavior vs Transformation to Shape Behavior

Communication of intent is a critical function of military operations. An examination of doctrine, guidance, and organizational policy allude to a current paradigm of communication that is focused on transmitting centralized messages utilizing a monologic process with the goal of persuading attitudes to elicit behavior change. A communication paradigm based on the logic of narrative utilizes a dialogic process to transmit a broad range of stories based on a master plot with the goal of transforming values to elicit behavior change.

An examination of U.S. DoD Joint Publication 3-13, *Joint Information Operations*, provides a framework of how doctrine organizes the information environment. The analyses highlight how U.S. communication organizations and efforts are geared creating and disseminating messages vs. creating relevant messages, which follows the monologic approach. JP 3-13 states that the information domain is a system of systems in which actors collect, process, and disseminate data.⁴⁶ The overall purpose of information operations, similar to the purposes of ground, air, and sea domains, is to dominate the information domain by gaining and maintaining

⁴⁶US Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3.13, *Information Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, February 2006).

superiority over information systems. Ethics professor Richard L. Johannesen , in his book *Ethics in Communications*, describes communication characteristics within the monologic paradigm:

A person employing monologue seeks to command, coerce, manipulate, conquer, dazzle, deceive, or exploit. Other persons are viewed as "things" to be exploited solely for the communicator's self-serving purpose: they are not taken seriously as persons. Choices are narrowed and consequences are obscured. Focus is on the communicator's message, not on the audience's real needs. The core values, goals, and policies espoused by the communicator are impervious to influence exerted by receivers. Audience feedback is used only to further the communicator's purpose. An honest response from a receiver is not wanted or is precluded. Monological communicators persistently strive to impose their truth or program on others; they have the superior attitude that they must coerce people to yield to what they believe others ought to know.⁴⁷

The narrative perspective, with its meaning-making approach, is fundamentally different than the monologic process just described. An operational approach utilizing narrative theory would favor engagement and dialog, in conjunction with dominating actions to convey meaning and intent. JP 3-13 describes the information environment in three dimensions that is immediately useful for a military practitioner who is attempting to conduct information operations through a narrative framework (see figure 2).

The three dimensions of the information domain from JP 3-13 are physical, informational and cognitive. The physical dimension represents the physical manifestation of information systems and networks where information interacts with physical world. Informational dimension is where media is processed and disseminated. Lastly, the cognitive dimension represents where decision-making takes place and “intangibles” aspects of information such as morale, unit-cohesion, public opinion, and situational awareness reside.⁴⁸ Although JP3-13 does state that the cognitive dimension is the most important, the use of the term intangibles imply a misunderstanding of knowledge to the field of humanities and social science. Consequently, U.S.

⁴⁷Richard L. Johannesen, *Ethics in Human Communication*, 4th ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1996), 96.

⁴⁸US Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3.13, I-2.

doctrine that guides organizations, infrastructures, and operational approaches directs U.S. forces to gain and maintain superiority and informational dimensions. Doctrine assumes that the superiority in physical and information dimensions will translate to superiority in the cognitive dimension.⁴⁹

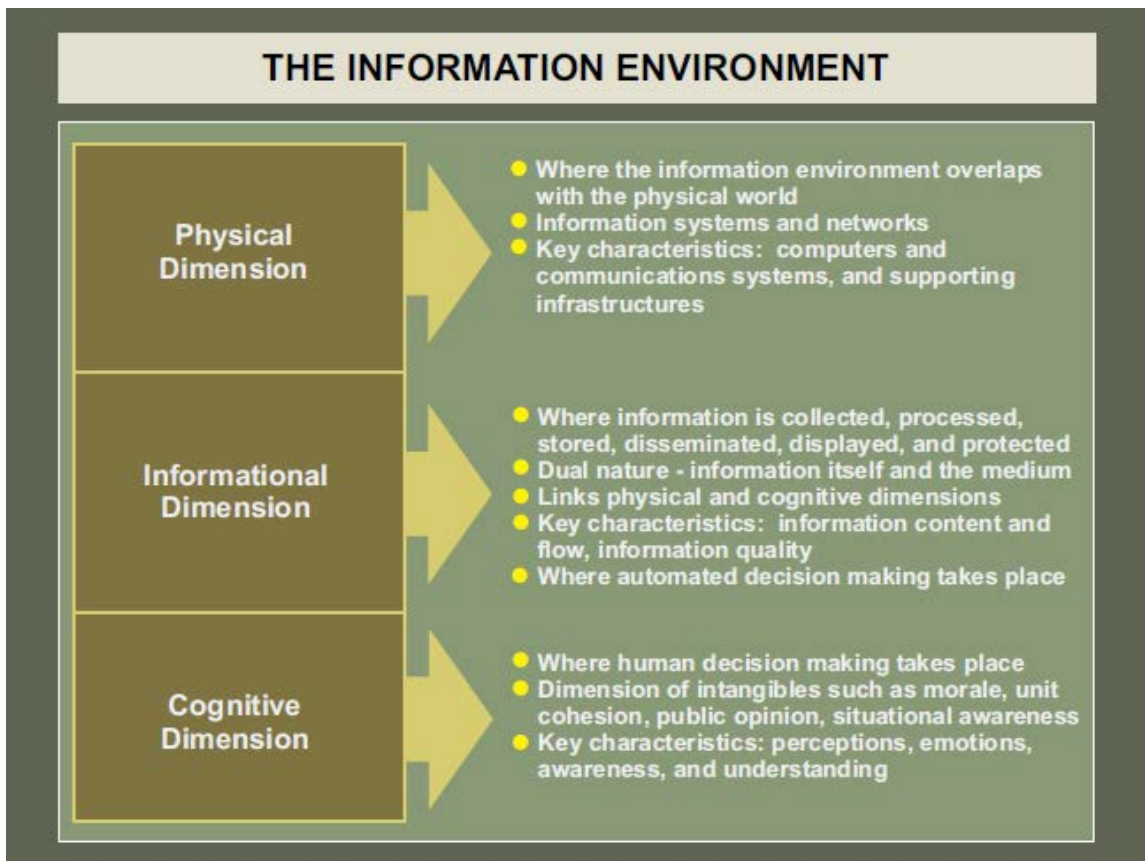


Figure 2. The Information Environment

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3.13, *Information Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, February 2006), I-2.

Narrative theory, and applied narrative research in psychology, organization science, neurobiology, communications, and political science all acknowledge that morale, public opinion,

⁴⁹Ibid., I-3-4. This assumption is based on the emphasis to dominate physical and informational domains to create and deny information to the enemy. No effort is made on how to dominate cognitive domain by creating relevant meaning.

unit cohesion, and especially decision-making are not intangible aspects of the cognitive dimension. Applied narrative research empirically deconstructs and demonstrates that narrative can and does affect rationality, decision making, and other aspects of thought processes.⁵⁰

The vast majority of effort in DoD is geared towards creating, protecting, and controlling messages. It is now time for U.S. information practitioners to leverage our vast capability to create messages with an equal amount of effort to create meaning via narrative. Although there are entire sectors of DoD dedicated to protecting, exploiting, and building physical informational networks, there is a disproportionately small amount of emphasis on the Strategic Communications, which are defined as focused United States Government activities to understand and engages key audiences.⁵¹

Military communication and influence activities such as Strategic Communications, Information Operations, Public Affairs, and Military Information Support Operations, attempt to inform and influence behavior to support military objectives.⁵² Application of narrative theory provides the framework to improve this process of how military objectives can elicit a change in behavior. In addition to potentially changing the viewpoint of how operations support a desired strategic goal, narrative theory provides a superior framework for communicating meaning as compared to the current model of communicating messages. Credibility and legitimacy is often

⁵⁰Ann Zalman, "In Support of a Narrative Theory Approach To U.S. Strategic Communications" (Paper presented to U.S. Defense Department forum sponsored by the Highland Group, 2005), 11.

⁵¹Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board: Task Force on Strategic Communications* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008). Executive summary, xi. The formal definition of Strategic Communications is: 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.

⁵²Joint Publication (JP) 1.02, Terms and Definitions. Military Information Support Operations (MISO) is the terminology now used for the activity formerly known as Psychological Operations (PSYOP).

referred to as reducing the “Say-Do” gap. The natural consequence of considering operations to support a narrative will reduce this “Say-Do” gap.

Dr. Steve Corman, Director of the Center for Strategic Communications at Arizona State University, describes how the current paradigm of communication evolved from message influence model (MIM) and recommends implementation of the pragmatic complexity model (PCOM). The message influence model was originally designed as a model for electronic communications, where a signal was transmitted from one source to another.⁵³ The purpose of this mechanism was to influence the recipient to understand the context as transmitted from the sender.⁵⁴ The manifestation of this strategy was a monologic, dissemination based communication strategy that focuses on three principles: “...insuring message fidelity, influencing attitudes/beliefs/behaviors, avoiding misunderstanding.”⁵⁵ This model of communication routinely fails to achieve long-term changes in values and behavior because it is not based on meanings to transform and shape behavior. Meaning and relevance are the precise mechanisms of how and why narratives work, and why the narrative mode of communication has been a natural and instinctive mode of communication before the advent of scientific measure of time and written language. A narrative allows us to become part of the narrative other in terms that serve our strategic interests.

The MIM assumes that a target audience can be well defined, and isolated from other audiences thus subject to more specific messages that will theoretically increase the message’s fidelity and thus increase its probability that it will change behavior. The contemporary

⁵³Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press). Shannon and Weaver, in 1949, emphasized how one mind sends a message to affect another.

⁵⁴Corman, Trethewey, and Goodall, 4.

⁵⁵Corman, Trethewey, and Goodall, 5. Fidelity in this case means consistency of messages, not on truthfulness aspect of the definition as used in the understanding portion of this monograph;

information environment of mass communication, social networks, and interconnectedness precludes this type of specific targeting to mass audiences because the very same specifically targeted messages can now easily reach unintended audiences.

The fundamental weakness of the message influence model is that it is based on transferring messages, not meaning. This assumes that the recipient is a blank hard drive awaiting the messages to be written on it and carry out its instructions. The model also assumes that the recipient culture works as a filtering lens, firewall, or other noise of rival narratives. If the message was crafted with enough fidelity and repeated constantly, the message will make its way through these impediments and finally write on the hard drive and the recipient will begin to emulate desired behavior based on the emotional appeals from the message.

To continue with the hard drive analogy, the narrative framework supposes that the hard drive of the recipient is already full of his own narrative codes based on master plots, history, culture, local context, and personal identity. Competing narratives over write one another on the hard drive, and eventually, through a dialogic process, actions are based on its verisimilitude of the master plot or narrative that is most fitting for the current situation. Corman argues that the primary effective mechanism of the pragmatic complexity model is its ability as a meaning-making process.⁵⁶ The ultimate function of narratives, as discussed in the previous section, is to assign meaning from an assemblage of events and transform the parties involved to become vested in perpetuating the narratives because it affirms ideal versions of itself.⁵⁷

The pragmatic complexity model (PCOM) is founded on systems and narrative theories. The current effort of the message influence model implores communication and influence activities to ask “How can we construct a more persuasive message?” Instead of focusing on the transmitter and fidelity of messages, the pragmatic model asks, “What kind of reality has this

⁵⁶Ibid., 7.

⁵⁷Zalman, “In Support of a Narrative Theory approach to U.S. Strategic Communications” 3.

particular system [that we are trying to influence] constructed for itself?”⁵⁸ This type of questioning leads to modes of understanding that emphasizes conveying meanings verses crafting messages.

The intellectual roots of Steve Corman’s pragmatic complexity model are from systems theory. PCOM is also completely compatible with narrative theory. PCOM complexity stems from the dialogic nature of narratives. Meaning is derived from the interaction of two or more systems, or narratives acting on one another. The PCOM mode of communication has both the transmitter and receiver “locked in a relationship of simultaneous, mutual interdependence.”⁵⁹

There are three principles of the PCOM model: “...control is impossible and dysfunctional; less is more; and perturb stable system structures.”⁶⁰ While MIM is predicated on tight, centralized message control, PCOM embraces the uncertain nature of complex system such as narrative interaction. Using fewer messages verses the message saturation of MIM allows the transmitter of messages to observe change in the system. One of the characteristics of a complex system is its inherent delayed or indirect feedback loops. Compare this outlook with the MIM, which, through its specific message targeting and focused audiences, seek to assign causality of behavior to one message or theme disseminated. Assigning behavior change owing to the persuasive power of one message is difficult to prove and less amendable to empirical measurement, especially in non-permissive environments.

PCOM recognizes the inherent complex nature of communication and proposes that variation of incremental messages may be a better model to influence sensemaking than direct messages continually repeated.⁶¹ This “less is more” approach provides a model to transform a

⁵⁸Corman, Trethewey, and Goodall, 9.

⁵⁹Ibid., 10.

⁶⁰Ibid., 5.

⁶¹Ibid., 13.

system over time using consistent, subtle changes. Moreover, PCOM is more forgiving of failure of messages, as each message only seeks a small commitment to attitudinal change. Corman provides an illustrative example of this approach using the “democratization” theme.

The current MIM approach is to continually extol the virtues of democratic values on to a society with master plots which have assigned different meanings of freedom. PCOM advocates use of smaller changes and to “invite comparison” between forms of government. This subtle, indirect method would “...reproduce Western values of freedom and thought and expression” on the subjects from within its own terms.⁶² PCOM is a superior model of communication to expose and exploit tensions in rival narratives, with the goal of transformation. MIM espouses the direct mode of communication, which seeks to change values by replacing an existing narrative. Narratives by their very nature are not replaced, but transformed.

The U.S. women’s suffrage and civil rights movements provide examples of narrative transformation. Civil activists were able to exploit the tension in a “Say-Do” gap between the U.S. master plot of freedom and equality espoused by U.S. Constitution and the legal reality and disenfranchisement of women/ black verses male/ white Americans. The master plot of freedom and equality was never changed or replaced in American society; it was transformed to include equal rights for women and black Americans in the narrative of the history of the United States.

PCOM and narrative enables “message makers to disrupt, shift, or alter the larger cultural stories that Islam tells about the West and itself. In order to figure this out, they must know not only the content of these stories, but how stories themselves work.”⁶³ Though a shared understanding of narrative and PCOM, this strategy is a possible tool for U.S. military planners.

The final principal of the PCOM is to “perturb stable system structures.” A direct application of system theory to communications, Corman states that transformative changes to a

⁶²Ibid., 14.

⁶³Ibid., 3.

system typically occur from a major shock. Shock, in this case, means any events that have the potential to change perception or alter a desired narrative. Major events such as an election, deliberate shift in policy, or commencement of a major combat operation are predictable shocks, which can and should be planned for. Conversely, there are unpredictable crisis events such as accidental civilian deaths which cannot be predicted, but also should be planned against. The effort of these plans is how to assign meaning to events, and is a function best served by narratives.

The MIM paradigm, while effective at conveying intent via messages, does not address transformative mechanism of how rivals change enduring values and beliefs. MIM does offer benefits with respect to specificity, and it is easier to measure success or failure of messages because it is based on a linear, monologic process. MIM may also be more effective in environments where the actor has greater control of the physical environment to compel and coerce behavior, such as major combat operations.

The PCOM emphasizes a systemic approach to communicating based on dialogic process. The PCOM is ideally suited for communicating via words, text, and other information based media. Physical actions can also be adapted to within the PCOM to convey narratives. Strategies that favor co-option and cooperation would be most effective under PCOM. Regardless of what and how messages are communicated, it is physical actions that should have the most unambiguous communicative effect. The power of narrative allows the practitioner to reframe physical actions to a narrative that favors his strategic interest. This is commonly referred to as “spinning” a story. The next section will explore how to convey military operations that express a narrative.

Conveying a Narrative through Military Operations: Engaging to Compete with Rival Narratives vs Reacting with Counter Narratives

Arranging tactical actions in time, space, and purpose is the essential task of the military operational planner. The purpose of these actions, for it to have any effect on an enemy, must convey meaning. Understanding and then communicating how events fit into existing narratives is an essential part of how to legitimize actions. Careful analysis of how actions will be interpreted by rival narratives enables the military planner to identify and prepare for second and third order effects.

Incorporation of narrative theory into military planning and operations already exists in FM 5-0, Chapter 3, U.S. Army Design process. As it becomes obvious in the literature review, the narrative concept is not clearly defined for practical implementation. A narrative framework from *Narratives in Social Science* offers a useful tool to convey narratives.

Organizational scientist Dr. Barbra Czarniawska outlines an eight step process to conduct narrative analysis in social science studies.⁶⁴ This methodology forms the basis for proposed military integration of narrative analysis in intelligence, planning, and execution. Merging the framework for narrative investigation in the social sciences to existing military framework for planning an execution allows for an integrative approach to applying narrative theory.

Collecting narratives must be a continual process to form a basis for intelligence analysis. Intelligence preparation of the battlefield procedures can and should incorporate narratives as a standing requirement, on par with enemy physical disposition, terrain, and infrastructure. Although a story itself may be short lived, such as most stories which are reported in a 24-hour news cycle, the master plots which are used to promote the story and make them newsworthy can be collected. This approach is more useful than the current practice of rating a story as positive

⁶⁴Czarniawska, 14.

coverage or negative coverage. Collecting narratives from all entities of the system, to include U.S., Western, rival forces, and any other narratives that pervade in an area of interest are all critical to a master plot analysis. In face-to-face activities, communication and intelligence professionals should also induce subjects to engage in storytelling instead of soliciting for surveys or direct questioning. The MIM paradigm of communication leads practitioners to weigh efforts on surveys to collect discrete data, which are descriptive and not prescriptive in nature. Meaning and context are lost when collecting only data. And worse still, that data then becomes incorporated into our own narrative context.

Analyzing collected stories for content, context, and intent aims to answer questions of what and how something is being said. Collecting stories enable the military operator to extrapolate different levels of narratives at the personal, organizational, cultural, and national levels. Additionally, stories should be deconstructed to identify common archetypes, story forms and themes that will bring out master plots. Comparing open sources of stories verses versions of the same story collected via intelligence means can expose tension between narrated and observed behaviors. Internal tension in rivals should be exploited when executing operations.

Execution involves two dimensions which, when synchronized to a purpose, will convey an intended narrative. The physical dimensions, when manifested, become task and propose for subsequent action. The informational dimension will convey meaning through dissemination of U.S. narratives. Putting together one's own story and setting it against other stories initiates the dialogic process in which the rival begins to create meaning. This type of informational activity, through strategic communication, should be conducted continuously throughout all phases of military operations. Failure to engage informational activities cedes initiative to the rival and allows their narrative to create and assign meaning to U.S. actions and policies.

A risk analysis to weigh cost of primary verses secondary effects on the impact on the narrative should also be a part of mission analysis. Long-term strategic goals may be undermined

by successful tactical actions that do not serve national narratives. Zalman illustrates how different narratives are enacted by U.S. drone operations in Pakistan:

For the United States, the attacks serve as plot turns in the narrative of the war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, but also as an element in a longer tale of the US as a superior technological power, especially in war. Pakistanis read it differently. As civilian casualties mounted, the drone attacks began to be seen as a war against Pakistanis and Muslims in general.⁶⁵

In this example, although the drone strikes were executed in a bilateral manner with Pakistani officials, internal and rival political factors ordered the same events to their advantage. This destabilizing effect, at the strategic level must be carefully weighed against short-term tactical gain. Incorporating narrative theory into operations is a critical function to mitigate unintended consequences. At the very least, identification of negative 2nd and 3rd order narratives allows the military professional to prepare for and mitigate its negative effect.

U.S. Army Design methodology, expressed in FM 5.0, defines Design as "...a methodology for applying critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe complex, ill-structured problems and develop approaches to solve them."⁶⁶ Design aims to provide a holistic understanding of environmental conditions to enable detailed planning. The narrative concept is introduced in analysis of the Environmental Frame as follows: "The environmental frame describes the context of the operational environment--how the context developed (historical and cultural perspective), how the context currently exists (current conditions), and how the context could trend in the future (future conditions or desired end state)."⁶⁷ Narrative in this context refers to the historical, personal, and aspirational stories that are currently being disseminated by rival entities.

⁶⁵Amy Zalman, "Strategic Communications in Irregular Wars," in *Strategic Communications for Combating Terrorism*, eds. A. Aykut Öncü, Troy Bucher, Osman Aytac (Ankara Turkey, 2010), 82-97.

⁶⁶US Department of the Army, FM 5-0. 3-1.

⁶⁷Ibid., 3-5.

As already shown, a shared understanding of narratives is required before an individual can begin to express narratives in context. Narratives are part and parcel of the holistic process of design methodology as it also uses systems thinking to explain interactions. Zalman points out the potential for executing narratives by visualizing “narrative flows”:

The U.S. must understand the mutual and interlocking construction of stories considered to be “theirs” and stories considered to be “ours”, if it wishes to splice and control more effectively these stories as they flow through the one world where we all live and communicate. To achieve such effectiveness, the U.S. should clarify at the most basic level the concrete ways that the West and the Middle East frame and experience values. This will be accomplished less in speeches referencing “freedom” and “tolerance,” than in focus groups and through rigorous analysis of the specific circumstances and meaning of these broad values in different cultures. In other words, the war of stories cannot be won by counterposing one story with one that we Americans feel to be better. Rather, we must understand the narrative flows in other cultures and the points of vulnerability in those flows.⁶⁸

Many operational approaches call for “countering narratives” and the “battle of narratives” as if one was to apply a kinetic, linear operational approach. Zalman points out that counterpoising a narrative is not an optimal solution, for it produces no meaning to the intended recipient itself. Counterpoising a narrative may even feed into a negative master plot, further validating a narrative that U.S. efforts are attempting to delegitimize. Narratives are rarely replaced because of system shock. They can and do often transform.⁶⁹ Systematic pressures reinforced by information and actions can transform narratives. The military planner must have a method of apprehending narrative logic of self and other in order to do so--to exploit the nature of other in order to generate transformation. Applying narrative theory in intelligence, planning, and operations will enable such transformation.

It is imperative that military operations adopt design methodology and constantly access its actions throughout operations in order to fulfill narrative direction. This explains the rational for writing a “mission narrative.”

⁶⁸Zalman, “The Definition of Strategic Narrative.”

⁶⁹Ibid.

The mission narrative is the expression of the operational approach for a specified and unique mission. It describes the intended effects for the mission, including the conditions that define the desired end state. The mission narrative represents the articulation, or description, of the commander's visualization for a specified mission and forms the basis for the concept of operations developed during detailed planning. An explicit reflection of the commander's logic is used to inform and educate the various relevant partners whose perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are pertinent to the operation. It also informs development of supporting information themes and messages for the mission and serves as a vital tool for integrating information engagement tasks with other activities during execution.⁷⁰

This holistic approach helps frame an individual as part of a system, not as one system working against another. Understanding that individual meaning arrives as a dialogic process of two or more narrative meeting within the mind of the individual is critical to this process. In order for military planner to begin the task of writing a mission narrative, one must fundamentally comprehend the form and function of a narrative.

Zalman recommends certain operational approaches to convey narratives. First, she states that strategies that focus on implementing counter narratives and the least effective approach. Antagonistic narratives create "an endless closed loop of conflicting stories."⁷¹ The opportunities to affect rival narratives emerge from where narratives intersect, and "U.S. strategists can insert persuasive storylines joining American interests to those of would-be antagonists into communities' social and discursive spaces."⁷² To begin the narrative conversation, "Mr. Y" proposes a national strategic narrative that may apply as a master plot to frame other U.S.

⁷⁰US Department of the Army, FM 5-0, Chapter 3.

⁷¹Zalman, "In Support of a Narrative Theory Approach To U.S. Strategic Communications," 8.

⁷²Ibid., 6.

narratives. Marie Anne-Slaughter, professor of politics and international relations at Princeton University states:

A national strategic narrative must be a story that all Americans can understand and identify with in their own lives. America's national story has always varied between exceptionalism and universalism. We think that we are an exceptional nation, but a core part of that exceptionalism is a commitment to universal values – to the equality of all human beings not just within the borders of the United States, but around the world. We should thus embrace the rise of other nations when that rise is powered by expanded prosperity, opportunity, and dignity for their peoples. In such a world we do not need to see ourselves as the automatic leader of any bloc of nations. We should be prepared instead to earn our influence through our ability to compete with other nations, the evident prosperity and wellbeing of our people, and our ability to engage not just with states but with societies in all their richness and complexity. We do not want to be the sole superpower that billions of people around the world have learned to hate from fear of our military might. We seek instead to be the nation other nations listen to, rely on and emulate out of respect and admiration.⁷³

This passage highlights several universal master plots of equality, opportunity, and dignity which can serve as a basis to begin constructing a narrative. The next step in the process is to begin looking at tensions within a rival narrative that espouses these values. A shared understanding of narrative, applied to existing intelligence, planning, and communicating activities will lead to a great unity of effort and offers the potential to transform, not just persuade rivals to affirming our strategic objectives.

Findings and Recommendations

A narrative is a continuous account of events and experiences that an individual utilizes to frame its reality. Values, attitudes, and behaviors are expressions of how individuals seek to shape the narrative to their ideal self. A rivalry forms when competing narratives clash for relevancy within an organization, group, or individual. Constructing and implementing a credible narrative is a central requirement to countering the influences of rivals.

⁷³Mr. Y, *A National Strategic Narrative*, preface by Anne-Marie Slaughter (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, 2011). 1.

The Pragmatic Complexity model provides a superior methodology for implementing narrative theory than the MIM. Both models can produce changes in behavior, but narratives, via the PCOM, can potentially transform values whereas persuasion of values only persist with pressure or appeal signal is applied.

U.S. Army Design methodology incorporates narrative theory as a tool to achieve understanding of the environment. US Strategic Communication Commanders' handbook applies narrative theory in a communication context. Both of these doctrinal texts highlight unique and fundamentally interconnected aspects of narrative. It is imperative that shared understanding exists of the form, function, and logic of narratives in order to implement narratives in a cohesive manner. The purpose of this monograph is to fulfill a gap in shared understanding of narrative theory as applied to military operations.

The foundations of narrative theory may be vague but shared understanding of the form, function, and logic of narratives is possible. Furthermore, education of narrative theory based on easily identifiable personal, organizational, cultural, and national narratives will enable practitioners to recognize narratives in others. The universality of narratives makes this possible. The primary hurdles of implementing narratives lie in identifying relevant tensions within rival narrative and how to tailor strategic, operational, and tactical narratives to achieve relevancy.

Although this monograph focused on the potential power of constructed narratives, the military planner must also be cognizant of the actions that feed unintentional narratives because all actions will be interpreted and assigned meaning by rival narratives. Military inform and influence professionals, especially in the field of strategic communications, public affairs, information operations, and military information support operations, should introduce narrative theory in professional military education programs. Further research will be required for each specific field on how to operationalize elements of narrative theory elucidated in this monograph.

The U.S. should be active in crafting and communicating narratives. Since all actions and messages will be interpreted within a narrative framework, Zalman recommends that the intended narrative effect can and should be planned:

All of these disciplines understand that the stories we tell and enact--through processes and actions--in our lives as social, political, creatures, can either be random and unthought, or they can be strategic and we can map them to goals we would like to achieve, and create them as spaces to be shared with the public and audiences we'd like to reach.⁷⁴

As stated earlier, to not execute narrative cedes the initiative to rival entities.

If U.S. government policy makers, strategists, planners and inform and influence practitioners can operate within a narrative framework, our actions, physical and informational, will have the potential to achieve resonance at a greater frequency in the dialogic process that conveys meaning to rival entities. Narratives, as one of the universal human phenomena for understating and communicating, provide the ideal theoretical frame work to engage and transform our adversaries in support of strategic objectives.

⁷⁴Ann Zalman, "Narrative as an Influence Factor in Information Operations," *IO Journal* 2, no. 3 (August 2010): 10.

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