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NARRATIVE AND COUNTER-NARRATIVE IN INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Narratives are more than simply stories told by individuals and organizations. They can be used to attract people to a cause and to motivate followers. They can be used to influence populations and to convey messages in ways that have great impact on the target audience. Military commanders and Influence Activities practitioners are confronted with narratives on a daily basis and must understand their power and how to counter dangerous narratives. This is an essential skill in the contemporary operating environment where an increasing amount of military activity is focused on information operations and strategic communication. This research paper examines the concepts of narrative and counter-narrative within a military context. Starting with the doctrinal basis for narrative and counter-narrative work, the paper then goes on to look at the psychological and literary theories underpinning narrative. Culture, along with symbols, metaphors, myths and media are all important elements of narratives which are also examined. This paper will also look at the analysis of narratives, including a recommended narrative analysis model, as well as a brief survey of counter-narrative strategies. Finally, a case study of the Taliban and narrative is included.

Introduction

In the spring of 1996, Muhammad Omar, better known as Mullah Omar, came into the presence of the Cloak of the Prophet. It was a critical moment in the history of the Taliban movement. At that point, the Taliban had yet to solidify their hold on power and the fall of Kabul was months away. Under the leadership of Omar, a small group of religious students had ridden a wave of support, fuelled by frustration with lawlessness, into an unlikely position of power.[1]

Mullah Omar came from a small village near Kandahar City and went on to study Islam in a Saudi sponsored Pakistan madrassa. Though he never completed his Islamic studies, he apparently still refers to himself as a "Talib" or religious student, and this fact has not prevented him from becoming a dedicated, fundamentalist leader. Allegedly, Omar leads the Taliban based on direction from Allah delivered in dreams and visions. It is not surprising that such an individual would be drawn to an object such as the Cloak of the Prophet.[2]

Held in a special shrine in the centre of Kandahar, the Cloak of the Prophet is an object of tremendous reverence in Islam. The cloak is believed to have been given by God to the Prophet Muhammad. It was brought to Kandahar in 1768 by Ahmad Shah Durrani, the father of modern Afghanistan. When displayed, it is said that the cloak can

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[1] Norimitsu Onishi. "A Nation Challenged: A Shine; A Tale of the Mullah and Muhammad's Amazing Cloak." *New York Times*, 19 December 2001, journal on line; http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/19/world/a-nation-challenged-a-shrine-a-tale-of-the-mullah-and-muhammad-s-amazing-cloak htmlInternet ; accessed 9 March 2011.

[2] Robert Marquand. "The Reclusive Ruler Who Runs the Taliban." *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 October 2001, journal on line; http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1010/p1s4-wosc.html ; accessed 9 March 2011.

end disasters and cure diseases. It was displayed twice in the Twentieth Century to end cholera and drought. It has also been used for reasons of politics and power.[3] When Mullah Omar gained access to the cloak, its influence was well understood by the Taliban leader.

On that spring day in 1996, Omar ignored the protests of the guardians and removed the Cloak of the Prophet, taking it to the rooftop of a nearby mosque. There he displayed the cloak, even at one point "wearing" it. The gathered crowd, alerted to Omar's appearance by radio announcements, cheered and the cry of *amir al-mu'mineen*, "commander of the faithful" was heard. It was here where Mullah Omar accepted the title held by the successors of the Prophet, one not used by Muslims for 1000 years.[4]

This act was a dangerous gambit for Omar. Had the people balked at this audacious move, his Taliban movement may have floundered. As it turned out, he was able to solidify his power and gain the momentum he needed to take Kabul. By using such a powerful symbol as the cloak and declaring himself *amir al-mu'mineen*, Omar was at once connecting himself directly to the Prophet Muhammad and to the revered King Ahmad Shah Durrani. By extension, Omar was drawing from two very strong sets of narratives, the first being that of Islam and the second, that of the Pashtun legends surrounding Ahmad Shah. Thus one act can communicate a myriad of messages – though stories, symbolism and metaphors. This is the power of narrative.

Within the complex, asymmetric security environment in which the Canadian Forces operate, commanders and Influence Activities practitioners are confronted by

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[3] Wood, Graeme. "Security Blanket: Afghnaistan's most venerable relic faces its greatest challenge." *The Atlantic*, January/ February 2009, journal on line; http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/01/security-blanket/7202/ ; accessed 9 March 2011.
[4] Marquand, *The Reluctant Ruler who runs the Taliban.*

narratives on a daily basis. These narratives are the stories that encapsulate the aims, ideologies and methods used by organizations – friendly, neutral and hostile - to operate, attract recruits and influence populations. Indeed, stories are a fundamental aspect of terrorist organization and other violent non-state actors. It is argued in Canadian doctrine and by scholars that understanding narratives is critical to understanding these groups and their threat to security.   Further, it is important to understand one's own narratives so as to defend against adversaries who are savvy to the concepts of counter-narrative.[5] This study argues that although current Canadian and allied doctrine, in particular counterinsurgency doctrine, identify the importance of narrative to military activities and assign the crafting of counter-narratives to the influence activities discipline, little practical guidance for the understanding of narratives and the development of counter-narratives is found in them.

The aim of this study is to examine the role of narrative in military activities, specifically the concepts and theories behind narrative structures, the analysis of narratives and models of counter-narrative development. This study will also propose specific counter-narrative tools for use by influence activities planners. The study of narratives and counter-narratives is a cross disciplinary effort in which "the range of voices is sometimes so wide that it is difficult to know whether they are all involved in the same discussion at all."[6] The disciplines of psychology, philosophy, literary studies,

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[5] William D. Casebeer, and James A. Russell "Storytelling and Terrorism: Towards a Comprehensive 'Counter-Narrative Strategy'." *Strategic Insights,*Vol IV, Issue 3 (March 2005): 3; http://www.nps.edu/Academics/Centers/CCC/Research-Publications/ ; Internet; accessed 04 Jan 2011.

[6] James V Wertsch "Specific Narratives and Schematic Narrative Templates," in *Theorizing Historic Consciousness* edited by Peter Siexas, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 48.

mythology, religious studies and communications theory all form part of the discussion and would, in other circumstances, merit individual research efforts. While his research project will explore these foundational elements of narrative theory, it is necessarily limited in scope and depth.

This paper consists of five chapters. The first will examine current concepts of narrative and counter-narrative as reflected in Canadian, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and allied doctrine. The second chapter will focus on the psychology of narratives, meta or master narratives and narrative structures. The third chapter will look at the role of culture in narratives, including the myths, metaphors and media pathways. The fourth chapter will examine target audience and propaganda analysis and the crafting of counter-narratives. It will also contain recommended practical tools for the analysis of narratives by Influence Activities practitioners. Finally, chapter five contains a case study of the use of narrative by the Taliban and the counter-narrative efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and its NATO partners.

Chapter One

Narrative and Counter-narrative in Doctrine

What is narrative and how does narrative fit into the arena of military activity? Simply put, a narrative is a story, and stories are one of the most important methods of communication between human beings. Journalist Robert Fulford has described the story as the most versatile and most yet most dangerous method of communication.[7] The potential danger comes from the power of stories to connect people and events across time and distance and the power of the narrative form to influence audiences. What makes up a story and how stories influence are the subjects of further chapters. First we need to examine the military context of narrative.

Dr. Michael Vlahos, a senior researcher at John Hopkins University, wrote that "In war, narrative is much more than just a story. 'Narrative' may sound like a fancy literary word, but it is actually the foundation of all strategy, upon which all else - policy, rhetoric and action - is built."[8] Vlahos sees war narratives as achieving three things. First, they provide a people friendly foundation and framework for policy. Second, they provide existential "truths" which are hard to critique. Third, they provide the "talking points" for those who argue for and work to "sell" the war narrative.[9] In his *Strategic Communications: A Primer*, Royal Navy officer and academic Steven Tatham agreed with Vlahos as to the purpose of war narratives, summarizing that "Narratives are the

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[7] Robert Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1999), x.

[8] Michael Vlahos. "The Long War: A Self-defeating Prophecy." *The National Interest*, 5 September 2006, [journal on line]; http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-long-war-a-self-fulfilling-prophecy-of-protracted-conflict-and-defeat-1061; Internet; accessed 31 January 2011.

[9] *Ibid*.

foundation of all strategy."[10] Tatham further suggested that "narratives should provide structure and relevance to the meaning of a particular situation."[11]

For the purpose of this study, a more concrete definition of narrative is needed. The current United States Army and United States Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual describe narrative as "the central mechanism, expressed in story form, through which ideologies are expressed and absorbed."[12] Further, the manual notes that a narrative is "a story recounted in the form of a causally linked set of events that explains an event in a group's history and expresses the values, character, or self-identity of the group."[13] Noted counterinsurgency expert Dr. David Kilcullen describes a narrative as "a simple, unifying, easily-expressed story or explanation that organizes people's experience and provides a framework for understanding events."[14] Common then, among these descriptions of narrative, are the elements of values and ideals. Narratives provide frameworks and links to events and to others, present in the story form. Given the psychological nature of this process, a quick look into the psychological elements of military activity is required.

Military thinkers and soldiers alike have understood that the military domain has both a physical and psychological dimension. As Sun Tzu, the source of much ancient military wisdom suggests, "the skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any

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[10] S.R. Tatham, *Strategic Communications : A Primer*, (Shrivenham: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 2008), 9

[11] *Ibid.*, 9.

[12] United States. Department of the Army. FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency*. (Washington, DC, 2006) Glossary 6

[13] *Ibid.*,3-50.

[14] David Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency." *IO Sphere* (Summer 2006): 33.

fighting."[15] To be able to defeat an opponent with resorting to use of physical force is therefore preferred as a military stratagem.

Both the psychological (sometimes called the moral) plane and the physical plane are directly connected and interrelated. Military forces possess capabilities which can produce effects on both the psychological and physical planes. Combat operations, such as a deliberate attack, will result in physical effects on a target such as the destruction of vehicles and weapons systems and thus a reduction in the physical capabilities of the opposing force. This reduction in capability is described as a first order effect on the physical plane. Similarly, a psychological operation such as radio broadcasts or leaflet drops will produce psychological effects on the perception, understanding and ultimately the will of the adversary. The result would be a first order effect[16] on the psychological plane. First order effects on both the physical and psychological planes are intended to change the behaviour of a target group, and it should be understood that activities on both planes will have second order effects on the other plane. Thus leaflet drops reduce military capability through desertion and physical destruction affects the soldier's will to fight.

In the Canadian Forces, the military capabilities designed to produce first order effects on the psychological plane are grouped as Influence Activities, a doctrinal sub-set of Information Operations.[17] Canadian Land Operations doctrine defines influence

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[15] Sun Tzu, "On the Art of War," in Thomas R. Phillips (ed.), *Roots of Strategy* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1985): 27.

[16] As defined in Canadian *Land Operations* doctrine (5-2 – 5-23), effects are the results of an activity. These results can be both intended and unintended, direct or indirect. A first order effect is a direct, intended result, whereas second and third order effects are additional effects with result from the first. An example of a first order effect is that attacking an insurgent strongpoint in a village will defeat the insurgents, however a secondary order effect might be villagers fleeing and blocking roads.

[17] Canada. Department of National Defence. B-GL-300-001/FP-001 *Land Operations*. (Ottawa, 2008), 5-51 – 5-54.

activities as "any activity for which the primary purpose is to influence the understanding, perception and will of the target audience, be it friendly or hostile."[18] Influence Activities specialists are focused on the psychological plane and the interconnections with the physical. To work in this field, they need tools and doctrine.

The next step in this examination is to survey existing doctrine for the concepts of narrative and counter-narrative. We will briefly look at Canadian doctrine, selected allied doctrine and the NATO doctrine.

CANADIAN DOCTRINE

Within Canadian doctrine, the concept of narrative and counter-narrative are largely found in Information Operations doctrine, Counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine and Psychological Operations doctrine. In terms of Land Force Information Operations doctrine, the previous manual has been replaced by B-GL-300-001/FP-001 *Land Operations*. Section 9 in Chapter 5 discusses Information Operations, Influence Activities and the psychological plane, a description of which is found above. References to Information Operations are found throughout the document, but specific reference to narrative is found only in the discussions surrounding centres of gravity, in particular the concept of moral centres of gravity (COG). The doctrine describes this concept as follows:

> A moral CoG in many campaigns may be the will of the majority of a population, or the will of a particular segment of the population. Such will be the case in a COIN campaign. The key battle between the insurgent and the campaigning forces will be to win the enduring support of the populace.[19]

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[18] *Ibid.*,2-14.
[19] *Ibid.*,6-11.

A moral CoG is connected to people, individuals and organizations, which create and maintain will. Ideas, while not CoGs in and of themselves, create influence among the populations and therefore "this is the aim …of the narrative formed by insurgent forces."[20] It is in Canadian COIN doctrine that narrative gets some measure of discussion.

Along with a suitable cause, leadership, popular support, and organization and actors, narrative is identified as one of the five elements, or basic tenants of an insurgency.[21] As seen elsewhere, Canadian COIN doctrine emphasizes that narrative provide for insurgencies and tools to recruit members, to justify insurgent actions and to undermine the credibility of the national government. "At the basis of an insurgency" stresses the doctrine, "is a narrative that contains an idea and founding cause for the insurgency."[22] It also notes that, in addition to insurgent groups, narrative is used by terrorist groups, governments and cultural groups, religions and even individuals. This is important not only in the effort to craft counter-narratives, but also in light of the importance of counterinsurgency forces in supporting their own narrative. Canadian COIN doctrine discusses the concept of propaganda. It is used in the pejorative sense and contrasts "propaganda" with "information" by suggesting that "information" is always truthful, whereas "propaganda" is likely to contain some untruths. While it is clear that Canadian COIN doctrine places considerable importance in understanding and countering insurgent narratives, the "how to" is limited, being summed up as follows:

> Information operations (influence activities) must work to counter the insurgent
> narrative and its supporting propaganda. Countering the narrative will require
> the symbiotic use of words and deeds that seek to redress the grievances

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[20] *Ibid.*,6-12.

[21] Canada. Department of National Defence. B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter Insurgency Operations*. Ottawa: DND (Ottawa, 2008), 2-8

[22] *Ibid.*, 2-10.

exploited by the insurgent narrative while promoting the desired narrative of the host-nation government and coalition.[23]

The other key piece of Canadian doctrine related to narrative is *Psychological Operations*. Canadian doctrine, borrowing directly from NATO doctrine, defines Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) as:

> Planned psychological activities using methods of communications and other means directed to approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives.[24]

PSYOPS is a key component of Influence Activities and, logically, should be concerned with narratives and counter-narratives. Narratives give the context and language to craft themes and messages and to plan activities to counter the narratives of other actors. Strangely, Canadian PSYOPS doctrine does not mention narrative once. The doctrine does have a limited discussion of what is described as "Counter Psychological Operations" which are activities designed to protect friendly audiences from hostile messages, reduce the adversary's prestige – real or imagined – and to inform the target audience of the Canadian Forces' intentions. The focus of the doctrine is the analysis of propaganda and of target audiences, which will be looked at in greater detail in a later chapter.[25]

ALLIED DOCTRINE

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[23] *Ibid.*, 2-11.
[24] Canada, *Psychological Operations* …,1-1.
[25] *Ibid.*, 1-5.

The US military certainly recognized that important role played by narrative. The US Army *Joint Operating Environment 2010* document, describes a so called battle of the narratives, stating that "the battle of narratives must involve a sophisticated understanding of the enemy and how he will attempt to influence the perceptions not only of his followers, but the global community."[26] Current US Army and Marine Corps COIN doctrine, the work of Generals David Petraeus and James Mattis, describes five overarching requirements for a successful COIN operation. One of these five is the conduct of Information Operations and, within that, the requirement to "discredit insurgent propaganda and provide a more compelling alternative to the insurgent ideology and narrative."[27] Elsewhere in the doctrine, Petraeus and Mattis discuss culture and cultural forms such as rituals, myths and symbols. Each of these forms can constitute a medium for communications. These communications, in turn, influence thought and behaviour, spread ideologies and mobilize populations. "The most important cultural form for counterinsurgents to understand" write the authors "is the narrative."[28] Insurgents often will try to tap into local history and myths to exploit local narrative for there own purposes. Counterinsurgents are encouraged to develop an alternative narrative or "an even better approach is tapping into an existing narrative that excludes insurgents."[29] Petraeus and Mattis describe the importance of understanding the local culture and getting to know what motivates the local population in an effort to shape an

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[26] United States. Joint Forces Command. *Joint Operating Environment 2010*, (Suffolk, VA, 2010), 58.
[27] United States. *Counterinsurgency …*,5-2.
[28] *Ibid.*, 3-7.
[29] *Ibid.*, A-7.

effective counter-narrative to that of the insurgency. The creation and use of counter-narratives, they conclude, is "art, not science."[30]

In terms of British doctrine, narrative does get some mention.   In *Operations in the Land Environment*, the concept of narrative is briefly explored with a focus on the importance of a British narrative to the British forces. Adversaries exploit narratives and have become expert at using new technologies. The doctrine goes on to suggest that the battle of narratives is equally important as other aspects of a campaign. "The strategic narrative" it states, "sets the scene for expressions of intent and main effort, providing the benchmark against which tactical actions are tested."[31] A friendly strategic narrative helps to unify tactical action with a campaign plan by giving subordinate commanders and soldiers useful tools to integrate military action and other elements of power, such as diplomacy and economics; therefore narrative is central to Influence Activities.[32] Discussions of narrative and counter-narrative are found in neither UK Information Operations doctrine nor Psychological Operations doctrine.

While not formal doctrine, Tatham's *Strategic Communications: A Primer* looks at narrative and counter-narrative, declaring that "narratives are the foundation of all strategy."[33] In addition to stressing that narratives unite the actions of organization, he also points out that narratives, to be successful, need to be flexible so that they can respond effectively to changing events. The crafting of counter-narratives, Tatham assesses, is difficult and such counter-narratives need to based on a thorough analysis of the adversaries' narratives, culture and history. He sums up by declaring that

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[30] *Ibid*., A-7.
[31] United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence. *Operations in the Land Environment*. Draft, (February 2010), 2-9.
[32] *Ibid*., 10-7.
[33] Tatham, *Strategic Communications …*, 9.

understanding an adversary's narrative is "an extremely challenging area of campaign planning."[34]

The somewhat limited discussion of narrative within NATO doctrine is found embedded in the concept of strategic communication. The focus for NATO appears to be the relevancy and currency of the existing NATO narrative. The priority is the updating of the NATO story and efforts to get partners to adapt and use this story at all levels.[35] Other writing on this topic reinforces the need for consistency and credibility of a NATO narrative. Further, this narrative must be harmonized across NATO members and partners to be effective in the "battle of narratives."[36] NATO Information Operations and Psychological Operations doctrine do not mention narrative and counter-narrative.

A brief survey of Canadian and select allied doctrine has revealed that there is an increasing level of importance placed on the concept of narrative. At the strategic level, the doctrinal focus on narrative is found in an appreciation of the importance of one's own narrative in unifying collective efforts. In terms of operational and tactical discussions of narrative and counter-narrative, these are found solidly embedded in counterinsurgency doctrine. While the importance of counter-narrative work is stressed, a reoccurring theme in the documents is one of caution. It is seen as a dangerous path, fraught with cultural landmines. Beyond this, there is little practical guidance. The next chapter will look at narrative structures and theories – stories and what makes them work.

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[34] *Ibid.*, 10.

[35] North Atlantic Treaty Organization. ACO Directive 95-2 ACO Strategic Communications. (Belgium, 2008), 2-2.

[36] Viorel Mihaila. "NATO's Strategic Communications in Combating Terrorism", NATO Research and Technology Organisation RTO-MP-IST-086, 1-10. Report on line; http://ftp rta nato.int/public//PubFullText/RTO/MP/RTO-MP-IST-086///MP-IST-086-01.pdf ; Internet; accessed 14 January 2011.

Chapter Two

Why Narratives work: Psychology and Folktales

The previous chapter consisted of a survey of the doctrinal basis for examining narrative in an effort to counter them. Clearly narratives form a part of the "influence arsenal" of military forces and non-state actors, and so the next step is to look at the elements of "stories" themselves. It will examine some of the reasons why stories have such impact on audiences, both military and civilian. This chapter will also briefly look at some of the psychological foundations of narratives and the concepts of framing and meta-narratives. Finally, the focus will turn to narrative structures.

PSYCHOLOGY OF NARRATVES

Why do narratives have the power to influence audiences? Much of the reason is due to human psychology. Some research suggests that human cognition is based on analogy and metaphor. Further evidence shows that stories aid in recall, change emotional states and motivate individuals.[37] Literary Theorist Teun Van Dijk argues that narrative structures have a psychological reality because they correspond to model of cognitive information processing.[38] Several studies indicate that the human mind deals with information, both in terms of storage and recall, using schema. Schemas are templates that allow for easy storage and recall by comparing ideas to like ideas. They

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[37] Casebeer and Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism…*, 5.
[38] Teun A.Van Dijk "Narrative Macro-structures: Logical and Cognitive Foundations." *PLT: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature I* (1976): 547.

consist of "pre-recorded" information made up of concepts or categories of concepts which are available to the listener. These schema are accessed when one is told "A is like B" and, in knowing characteristics of B, can quickly get the idea of A. Schemas can be stretched to unfamiliar territory to help introduce new ideas and concepts.[39] Narratives using schema are constructed in a similar fashion to the human cognition and thus allow for a quick and efficient exchange of concepts.[40] Perhaps a perfect example of this at work is the proverb. Proverbs are short, simple sayings which have a core piece of wisdom. Polished over time to be very functional, proverbs are easy to remember and have near universal appeal. They are a useful template when looking at crafting messages.[41]

In terms of influence psychology, stories work largely due to the concepts of commitment and consistency. Psychologist Robert Cialdini notes that "once we make a choice of make a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressure to behave consistently with that commitment."[42] By retelling a story, and especially by putting it in writing, the individual establishes a commitment to the ideas within the narrative. The desire to remain consistent with a commitment can last a long time and can over-ride somewhat more logical behaviour.[43]

Other lines of research shed light on how the brain is affected by stories. Memetics is the study of how ideas (memes) spread through populations, not unlike the

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[39] Chip Heath and Dan Heath. *Made to Stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*. (New York: Random House, 2007),54-55.
[40] Wertsch, *Specific Narratives…*, 56-57.
[41] Heath, *Made to Stick …*, 47-48.
[42] Robert B Cialdini. *Influence: Science and Practice*. (Boston: Pearson, 2009), 52.
[43] *Ibid.*, 95.

spread of a virus, and how new ideas can replace old ones.[44] According to academic

Andrew Sullivan, who has been studying memetics, memes primarily are spread through

word of mouth pathways. Memes can explain a wide range of social learning

phenomena, the most prominent of which is the spread of religions ideas. Sullivan

articulates four stages of a successful meme. The first is the assimilated and internalized

by the host. Second, the meme is embedded in the memory of the host for future use.

Third, the meme is exposed to others, likely through verbal or behavioural expressions.

Finally, the meme is transmitted to a new host and the cycle is complete.[45] Sullivan

argues that memetics is a powerful new tool in the counter-terror efforts against Al

Qaeda, the Taliban and other similar groups who spread extremist ideas in this manner.[46]

More about how ideas stick will be discussed later in this chapter when we look at

narrative structures.

FRAMING

Framing is an important element of communication, as it helps individuals

understand and interpret events and the world around them. Frames form the bridges

between individuals and the socio-cultural context, thus between cognition and culture.[47]

Frames borrow meaning from symbols and metaphors and, significantly, from narratives.

Once an issue is framed, narratives and messages have a context. To illustrate using a

military context, framing a conflict as an "insurgency" versus a "civil war" orients an

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[44] Andrew Brian S. Sullivan. "Innovations in Strategic Communications: A New Approach." *Canadian Army Journal* Vol. 12.1 (Spring 2009), 76.
[45] *Ibid.*, 77.
[46] *Ibid.*, 75.
[47] Keely M. Fahoum and Jon Width "Marketing Terror: Effects of Anti-Messaging on GSPC Recruitment." *Strategic Insights,* Vol V, Issue 8 (November 2006): http://www.nps.edu/Academics/Centers/CCC/Research-Publications ; Internet; accessed 04 Jan 2011

audience in a certain direction and military doctrine.[48] The "war on terrorism" is an example of a frame designed to mobilize efforts against certain non-state actors. The frame was careful to avoid declaring war on someone of some organization, as there was a fear that such a declaration would give these organizations legitimacy. Further, labelling terrorism as a criminal activity also denies legitimacy. Michael Vlahos points out that such framing can in fact obscure the true intent of the actors and can lead to narratives misaligned within a frame. The attack on the USS *Cole* was labelled as a terrorist attack by the US government, but it would appear to be a legitimate military target through a different frame.[49]

To be useful, frames must resonate with its audience. Simply put, if an audience member does not understand the frame, or it does not connect to previous beliefs or culture, then it can fail. Frames can be adjusted or realigned so as to become more effective or to react to counter-narratives developed by opposing groups.[50]

METO-NARRATIVES

Meta-narratives, or master narratives as they are often called, are a type of frame which provides a context for narratives. "A master narrative is a dwelling place" writes Fuford, "we are intended to live in it."[51] A meta-narrative is an attempt to explain a wide variety of things, if not everything, with a single theory. Religions present master narratives, such as those found in the Bible or the Quran. It is a meta-narrative that is

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[48] Christopher R. Paparone "Design and the Prospects for Frame Reflection." Small Wars Journal Vol 6, no. 10 (2010): 2 ; http://www.smallwarsjournal.com ; Internet; accessed 27 Oct 2010.
[49] Michael Vlahos. *Terror's Mask: Insurgency within Islam*. (Laurel, Maryland: John Hopkins University, 2002), 2.
[50] Fahoum and Width, *Marketing Terror*…
[51] Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative*…, 32.

used by Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, one nestled with the Islamic master narrative.[52] Historians such as Edward Gibbon, H.G. Wells and Alan Toynbee each attempted to explain human history in a way that lessons could be draw for the future. Perhaps the most notable meta-narrative impacting the Twentieth Century is that of Karl Marx. He attempted to explain all of history and present a model of future behaviour which still resonates in the Twenty-first Century. [53]

The use of meta-narratives is widespread, as "each society develops a master narrative to which it frequently refers, particularly in moments of crisis."[54] They are often used by politicians in an attempt to support military actions. Former US President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" narrative is a noteworthy example. By describing Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the "Axis of Evil", President Bush drew a direct comparison between these states and the "axis" powers of World War II. He further tapped into the powerful narrative of the Second World War as a "good war" and a noble endeavour which is strong in American consciousness.[55]

The utility and trustworthiness of meta-narratives has come under fire in recent years. The chief flaw of meta-narratives is that they tend to focus on a few central concepts or figures to the exclusion of less prominent ones. Fulford illustrates this point by noting the decline in credibility of Gibbon's work on the Roman Empire and the virtual abandonment of the "Christopher Columbus discovery of America" narrative around 1992.[56] The primary academic criticism centres on the tendency of meta-

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[52] Vlahos. *Terror's Mask* …, 9-10.
[53] Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative*…, 30-33.
[54] *Ibid*., 34.
[55] Vlahos, *The Long War*.
[56] Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative*…., 34-37.

narratives to "treat facts as props"[57] which can lead to misinterpretation, be it intentional or not.

When attempting to understand any given narrative, it is vital to identify what meta-narrative or meta-narratives are at play. In understanding the meta-narrative, one can potentially get to the context and to elements of the narrative that connects to the audience. Care must be taken so as not become over reliant on meta-narratives to decode narratives, but it is essential to the crafting of counter-narratives.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

What makes up a story? In their work on counter-narrative strategy, William Casebeer and James Russell suggest that there are no common definitions of what a story is. The "post-modernist" school of literary criticism, they note, is based on the concept that there is no set model for a "story." They do go on to argue that even in a post-modernist view, the concept of "story," similar to the concept of "game," has value.[58] Literary theorist Patrick Colm Hogan also acknowledges the contemporary arguments against a universal theory. He does, however, counter these arguments with precisely that – a universal literary theory.[59] Hogan suggests that most features of stories are universal, particularly the use of symbolism and imagery. He describes certain universal techniques or schemata, such as poetry and the verbal art.[60]

As a basic model of narrative structure, Casebeer and Russell turn to the work of 19th century theorist Gustav Freytag. In their study, they examine the "Freytag Triangle"

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[57] *Ibid.*, 36.
[58] Casebeer and Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism…*, 4.
[59] Patrick C.Hogan, "Literary Universals" *Poetics Today*, Vol. 18, N0. 2 (Summer, 2002): 223 – 228.
[60] *Ibid.*, 229-230.

which simply is based on a beginning, middle and end. A story will have complications

and rising action, a climax or crisis, and falling action toward the end.[61] This has become

a standard model. Van Dijk uses the same model, but notes that there can be flexibility in

aspects of it. Van Dijk sees the *introduction* or *complication* as usually having several

developing events requiring actions by various agents. These events will be of either a

major or minor nature - the assessment of each being based on the consequence of failure

to the agent. In a more complex narrative, further events with their associated

consequences may arise and be dealt with. The *consequence* represents the climax of the

story that is the point when the agent reaps the reward or avoids a negative effect. At the

end, Van Dijk describes an *evaluation*. This is an assessment of the events by the

narrator or agent and possibly takes the form of a moral.[62] This "triangular" model is

simple and useful for basic analysis. There are some more complex models.

One of the more famous models is the one developed by the Russian Formalist

Vladimir Propp. He studied Russian folk tales in an effort to find a universal structure

and characters.   After much research, he observed that within these traditional stories the

functions of characters were constant, that the number of functions in a tale was limited

and that the sequence of these functions was always the same.[63] Propp ultimately

concluded that "all fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure"[64]

To appreciate this approach, a quick look at Propp's work is necessary. Propp

proposed that there were 31 distinct functions in every tale. While he insisted that the

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[61] Casebeer and Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism…*, 4.
[62] Van Dijk, *Narrative Macro-structures…*, 554 – 557.
[63] Vladimir Propp. *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 21-22.
[64] *Ibid*., 23.

sequence need to be the same, he acknowledged that many of the functions could be

combined. A chart listing the 31 functions follows.[65]

Function Number	Vladimir Propp's 31 Functions of a Folk Tale
1.	One of the members of a family absents himself from home.
2.	An interdiction is addressed to the hero.
3.	The interdiction is violated.
4.	The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.
5.	The villain receives information about his victim.
6.	The villain attempts to deceive his victim by using persuasion, magic, or deception.
7.	The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy.
8.	The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family.
8a.	One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something.
9.	Misfortune or lack is made known: the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched.
10.	The seeker (hero) agrees to or decides upon counteractions.
11.	The hero leaves home
12.	The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc. which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper.
13.	The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor
14.	The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.
15.	The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search.
16.	The hero and villain join in direct combat.
17.	The hero is branded.
18.	The villain is defeated.
19.	The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.
20.	The hero returns.
21.	The hero is pursued.
22.	The hero is rescued from pursuit.
23.	The hero, unrecognized, arrived home or in another country.
24.	A false hero presents unfounded claims.
25.	A difficult task is proposed to the hero.
26.	The task is resolved or accomplished.
27.	The hero is recognized, often by a mark or an object.
28.	The false hero or villain is exposed and / or punished.
29.	The hero is given a new appearance.
30.	The villain is pursued.
31.	The hero is married and ascends the throne.

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[65] *Ibid.*, 25 - 65.

Propp's functions can be aligned with the triangle models of Freytag and Van

Dijk. The functions can be allocated to the *introduction*, *complications*, *consequence* and

evaluation as dictated by the individual narrative. Propp also examined the characters in

folk tales and established that there are seven set roles. Like the functions above, the

several roles can be combined into on character. Further, a single role may be taken on

by several different characters. A chart listing of the seven characters follows.[66]

Role Number	Vladimir Propp's Seven Characters of a Folk Tale
1.	The *Villain*, who struggles with the hero;
2.	The *Donor*, who prepares and/or provides hero with magical agent;
3.	The *Helper*, who assists, rescues, solves and/or transfigures the hero;
4.	The *Princess*, a sought-for person (and/or her father) who exists as goal and often recognizes and marries hero and/or punishes villain;
5.	The *Dispatcher*, who sends the hero off;
6.	The *Hero*, who departs on a search, reacts to the donor and weds at end;
7.	The *False Hero*, who claims to be the hero, often seeking and reacting like a real hero.

These characters or character groups can be found in most narrative forms and

across time. The modern character of James Bond, for example, can easily be compared

to Beowulf. Although the style is different, each represents male fertility and a hero who

saves humanity from disaster [67] While Propp's work is rooted in the Russian tradition,

there is evidence that his theories are applicable in other cultures, including African and

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[66] *Ibid.*, 79 – 83.

[67] Julius E. Heuscher, *A Pychiatric Study of Myths and Fair Tales* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1974), 387.

North American native stories. Further, the 31 functions appear to connect to the structure of the epic, including the *Odyssey*.[68]

Theorist James Wertsch argues that modern states have engaged in significant efforts to create collective memories by using tools such as the provision of official accounts of history, but also controlling the ways that accounts are used. To illustrate this, Wertsch looked at a key narrative from Soviet and post-Soviet Russia – specifically those of the Great Patriotic War. The study he cites suggests that those individuals who were products of the Soviet education system employed an episodic or time-based schematic narrative template, one used in the Soviet era textbooks. Individuals educated in the post-Soviet era, appeared to fall back on older models of schematic narrative templates, very much like those explored by Propp.[69]

More contemporary work has looked at the issue of narrative structure and its effect on understanding and influence. In 1999, an Israeli study looked at the most effective advertisements to see if there were common templates. These templates, termed *creativity templates*, were studied in part to see if they could be used by untrained subjects to create effective ads. In their study, the researchers identified six general schemas with 16 variations. The six templates are as follows[70]:

1. *The Pictorial Analogy Template*. A symbol, or its replacement, is introduced and discussed.

2. *The Extreme Situations Template*. An unrealistic situation designed to enhance the qualities of a product (or person).

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[68] Propp, *Morphology....*, 23.
[69] Wertsch, *Specific Narratives…*, 50-55.
[70] Jacob Goldenberg, David Mazursky and Sorin Solomon "The Fundamental Templates of Quality Ads." *Marketing Science*, Vol 18, No. 3 (1999): 339 – 344.

3.   *The Consequences Template*. Demonstrates the implications of doing or failing to do what is advocated.

4.   *The Competition Template*.   One product (person or idea) competes against another.

5.   *The Interactive Experiment Template*. The audience is invited to engage in an experiment – real or imagined.

6.   *The Dimensionality Alteration Template*. The "product" is manipulated in relationship to its environment.

The authors of this study caution that these templates may change over longer periods of time, as they are subject to shifts in ideas and social norms.[71] Culture plays a key role.

In a similar vein, Chip and Dan Heath studied inspirational stories, ones that appeared to have the most impact and that left a longer impression on readers. The results led them to conclude that there were three essential story templates. These are the *Challenge Plot*, the *Connection Plot* and the *Creativity Plot*. In the *Challenge Plot*, a protagonist overcomes an obstacle to succeed. There are many examples of this type of story, including most Hollywood block-busters. The *Connection Plot* is about people building relationship, usually in spite of barriers and gaps. The Heath Brothers cite *Romeo and Juliet* as a classic example of this plot type. Finally, in the *Creativity Plot*

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[71] *Ibid.*, 333.

someone makes a breakthrough or solves a problem in an innovative way. In some ways this is about mental versus physical challenges.[72]

There are other models of narrative structure, but there are enough universal qualities that an analyst studying narrative can begin to compare templates, schemas and characters. As Wertsch comments, "the narratives we use to make sense of human action are coming from a 'stock of stories' from which any particular individual may draw."[73]

There are obstacles to applying a universal template. Culture is a significant filter through which a narrative can be "brought to life" for those from with that culture or a narrative can become incomprehensible to those outside. Metaphor and symbols, and even the type of medium through which a story is told are often unique to a region or people. The next chapter will examine the impact of culture, metaphors and media on the narrative.

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[72] Heath, *Made to Stick …*, 226 – 230.
[73] Wertsch, *Specific Narratives…*, 50.

Chapter Three

Culture, Myths and Media Pathways

Narratives are not created, communicated and understood in a vacuum. As Arthur Frank observed, "it seems inescapable that any stories will be told in the conventional rhetoric of a cultural context."[74] That cultural context is critical to the analysis of any narrative. In this chapter, we will look at culture in general, but symbols, metaphors, myths and the media pathways in particular.

CULTURE

Culture is a concept which is notoriously difficult to define. Described as "spongy," the complex web of relationships, hierarchies, history and language that make up culture can be bewildering to military commanders and staff. Historically, some military commanders have been successful at understanding culture and using it to their advantage. T.E. Lawrence, or "Lawrence of Arabia," was highly successful at using his detailed understanding of Arabic culture to influence Prince Feisal. As a result, he was able to build relationships which were used to leverage tactical successes.[75] Culture has become a critical dimension of the contemporary operating environment and the need to understand it has become vital to senior military leaders.[76] The United States Marine Corps has a long history of unconventional military activities, often working among what they would describe as foreign populations and cultures. This fact has shaped the Marine

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[74] Arthur W. Frank, "Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis." *International Jounal of Qualitative Methods 1*(Winter, 2002), 13.

[75] Emily Spencer and Tony Balasevicius. "Crucible of Success: Cultural Intelligence and the Modern Battlefield." *Canadian Army Journal* Vol. 9.3 (2009): 41.

[76] Emily Spencer, *Solving the People Puzzle: Cultural Intelligence and Special Operations Forces*, (Toronto: Dundern Press, 2010), 65-69.

Corps so that, as a war-fighting institution, there is a significant appreciation for the role that culture plays in their operational activities. In 1940, the authors of the *Small Wars Manual* attempted to capture a century of Marine Corps experience, including the cultural dynamics. They observed that "human reactions cannot be reduced to an exact science, but there are certain principles which should guide our conduct."[77] The critical importance of culture to military operations is still well known the Marine Corps, which recently published a guide to culture for its members. In this text, much effort is spent discussing the definitions, and challenges in defining, culture. In the end, the definition that the Marine Corps chooses for culture is "the shared world view and social structures of a group of people that influence a person's and a group's actions and choices."[78]

Given the importance of understanding culture, considerable effort has been made to assist organizations to navigate in this cultural environment. A key concept used in this effort is that of Cultural Intelligence, or CQ as it is known. CQ is "the ability to recognize the shared beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours of a group of people and … to apply that knowledge to a specific goal."[79] An exploration of this model is warranted as it leads itself to an analytical approach.

Dr. Bill Bentley of Canadian Forces Leadership Institute advocates looking at culture as a system. He observes that "culture is an integral part of any human activity system, be it a civilization, a nation, any organized social or political community" adding

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[77] United States. United States Marine Corps. *Small Wars Manual*. (Washington, DC, 1940), 18.

[78] Barak A Salmoni. and Paula Holmes-Eber. *Operational Culture for the Warfighter: Principles and Applications*. (Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps University Press, 2008), 37.

[79] Spencer, *Solving the People Puzzle…,*11.

that "these systems are non-linear and must be conceived holistically."[80] Bentley

describes culture as a complex and non-linear system. Such a system is characterized by

the fact that inputs can have disproportionate effects to their relative size. This is in

contrast to a linear system, one in which inputs have more proportional effects. Systems

like cultural systems are sometimes called complex adaptive systems.[81] The work of well

known cultural theorist Geert Hofstede is in agreement, as he defined culture as

"collective mental programming of the people in an environment."[82]

Society and culture form an intertwined web, each with its key elements. Society

can be defined as a "population whose members are subject to the same political

authority, occupy a common territory, have a common culture and share a sense of

identity"[83] In some senses, society is the "hardware" of the system. Culture, in turn, is the

"software." Without this "software," narratives lack meaningful context.

The analysis of culture is important to narrative work and the social structure

within a society provides a good starting point for analysis. Brent Beardsley and Karen

Davis suggest that the first step is to identify what groups (religious, tribal, racial, etc.)

are present and then examine how these groups interact or relate. Next they look to

institutions, described as the building blocks of society. Many institutions, like schools

or communications institutions like the media, may be linked to a specific group, but

other cut across society and group boundaries. Finally, in the view of Beardsley and

Davis, the roles and status of individuals must be examined, both to understand the

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[80] Bentley, Bill. "Systems Theory, Systems Thinking and Culture," in *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership: An Introduction for Canadian Forces Leaders* edited by Karen Davis, (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 4.
[81] *Ibid.*, 5.
[82] Geert Hofstede "Motivation, Leadership and Organization: do American Theories Apply Abroad ?" *Organizational Dynamics* (Summer, 1980), 43.
[83] Bentley, *Systems Theory...*, 2.

potential audiences and to guide the interactions between Canadian Forces personnel and local populations.[84]

Once the social structure is understood, at least to some degree, then the culture can be examined. Hofestede focused on four value dimensions in an effort to understand culture. These values are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism and masculinity.[85] For Beardsley and Davis, the first key to culture is identity and identity development, as it "provide(s) clues to how one makes meaning of the world around him/her, and thus how individuals and communities choose to engage with other individuals and communities."[86] Understanding identity will lead to an insight into values, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. A further key element of culture is that of language. Several theories of language and its role in culture have been developed, and while they do not always agree, it is clear that language is a significant factor.[87] The need to study the language goes beyond merely the technical aspects. Language forms "a broader system of communication including … symbols, 'body language,' and patterns of activities."[88] Power, influence and small group dynamics, especially in an unstable context with military and various armed actors, form significant factors in a cultural analysis.[89] Power and authority, be it "coercive, social, economic, rational-legal based, charismatic or traditional authority"[90] must be identified and be mapped out. These

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[84] Brent Beardsley and Karen Davis "Applying Cultural Intelligence in the Canadian Forces," in *Cultural Intelligence and Leadership: an Introduction for Canadian Forces Leaders* edited by Karen Davis, (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 107.
[85] Hofstede, *Motivation, Leadership and Organization*…,44-46.
[86] Beardsley and Davis, *Applying Cultural Intelligence*…, 108.
[87] Kelton Rhoads. "The Cultural Variable in the Influence Equation." 2006; http://www.workingpsychology.com/download_folder/Culture_And_Influence.pdf ; Internet: accessed on line 29 July 2011, 2.
[88] *Ibid.*, 109.
[89] Rhoads, *The Cultural Variable in the Influence Equation*…, 4.
[90] Beardsley and Davis, *Applying Cultural Intelligence*…, 109.

relationships are critical to a proper analysis. Finally, in the view of Beardsley and Davis, the interests of the groups must be identified. Understanding the core motivation of all the actors in a society is important, and yet challenging work. It can best be achieved through the gathering and understanding of the information listed above.[91] These aspects, combined with the knowledge of group relationships, will proved a good cultural overlay for a military planner.

It is worth looking at the cultural analysis model discussed in British military doctrine. While in general, it corresponds to the above model, they have reduced the essence of it down to three basic questions, each in comparison to one's own culture. First, what is similar? This looks for the common ground. Second, what is unfamiliar? This question speaks to the strangeness of a culture from the outsider's perspective. Third, what is hidden? This looks at the foundations which lie at the heart of a culture.[92]

To analyze a complex adaptive system like culture, Bentley suggests that the following elements be examined: Observed behavioural regularities when people interact, Group norms, Espoused values, Formal philosophy, Rules of the game, General feeling within the group (climate), Embedded skills, Habits of thinking – mental models, Shared meanings, and "Root metaphors" or integrating symbols.[93]

For the authors of the United States Marine Corps' *Operational Culture for the Warfighter*, the study of culture for military purposes is best done by examining five dimensions. These dimensions are the physical environment, the economy, the social structure, the political structure and beliefs and symbols. Broader than those of Beardsley

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[91] *Ibid.*, 109-110.
[92] United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence, JDN 1/09 *The Significance of Culture to the Military.* (London: MOD UK, 2009), 4-8.
[93] Bentley, *Systems Theory...*, 1-2.

and Davis and the CQ model, they are more tailored to a military planning process. Each

of the dimensions is further broken down into detailed factors, such as the dynamics of

ethnicity, issues of tribal membership[94] and issues surrounding informal economies.[95]

Relevant to the discussion of narrative is the fifth dimension, Belief Systems. "In an

operational culture sense" write the authors, "'history' is a tool at the disposal of actors in

the present."[96] History forms the basis for imagined memory, which are memories

selectively chosen or influenced by beliefs. In a group setting, these memories form

collective memories. History in the Islamic context, for example, permeates literature

and is seen as key to everyday living.[97] In narrative analysis, these memories in various

forms become essential.

> Historical stories (and quasi-historical tales such as myths, legends and
> folklore) are important keys to revealing underlying cultural themes and
> beliefs. In simple terms, folklore is a group's collection of stories, sayings,
> and narratives of history passed down through the generations. Each
> generation receives this inheritance, imbues it with new meaning, and adds
> new narratives based on new collective experiences.[98]

The Marines evaluate these memories by looking at them in several ways. First, it is

Memory as Constructed. This describes the situation where an event happens and then

meaning and importance are added later. *Memory as Ideological Fabrication*, which is

the creation of false events imbued with meaning. Finally, *the Event Evokes the Memory*

and the Meaning, which describes events with multiple means for different audiences.[99]

A similar model is espoused by academic Beatrice de Graaf. She describes these events

as "signifiers" and the memory as "legend". "Signifiers" can be a wide variety of things,

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[94] Salmoni and Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter…*,171.
[95] *Ibid.*, 81.
[96] *Ibid.*, 167.
[97] Vlahos, *Terror's Mask…*, 9.
[98] Salmoni and Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter…*,169.
[99] *Ibid.*, 169 - 170.

ranging from historic or recent events to public policy or laws. The "legend" is then

created around the "signifier", thus linking meaning to the original. "Legends" can, of

course, be distorted and reshaped to fit any agenda.[100]

As discussed above, social structure is a key building block in the examination of

culture. While there are several important elements of political and social structure, one

in particular is worth a brief examination. The tribe is an enduring form of human

communal structure. Salmoni and Holmes-Eber, writing for the Marine Corps, espouse

the concept that tribes have three elements. First, a tribe has a corporate identity,

possibly based on a common ancestor (real or imagined.) Second, there is a structuring

principle within the tribe, linked to the corporate identity. This may involve issues of

lineage and social status. Third, the tribe will have leaders and leadership, likely based of

inherited power.[101] In his RAND working paper, David Ronfeltd described the tribe as

the "once and forever form."[102] He theorizes that there are four stages in the development

of human society, being tribal, institutional, market and network. The tribal form

originated thousands of years ago but persists throughout the evolution of society. The

institutional form was more hierarchical in nature and is illustrated by the Roman Empire

and medieval church. The market form rose in the 18th Century with the predominance

of commercial competition. The network form, now becoming dominant, is about

individuals and groups connecting directly. At its core, the network form is technology

based.[103]

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[100] Beatrice De Graaf, "Counter-Narratives and the Unrehearsed Stories Counter-Terrorists Unwittingly Produce." *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol III, Issue 2 (2009): http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/issue/view/20 ; Internet; accessed 26 Jul 2010, 4-5.
[101] Salmoni and Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter…*,126.
[102] David Ronfeldt. *Tribes: The First and Forever Form* (RAND Pardee Center: 2006), 54.
[103] *Ibid.*, 1-2.

Elements of tribalism are found in the most complex society, taking the form of such things as nationalist movements and sports fan clubs. Further, it is the "ultimate fallback form."[104] When society is stressed and government institutions begin to fail to protect the people, society can quickly return to a tribal model. Tribalism is a common basis for insurgencies and civil wars, as is evidenced by the Tutsi and Hutu struggles in Rwanda.[105] Events in the former Yugoslavia during the civil wars of the 1990s certainly illustrate how a modern society can revert to an earlier form for protection.[106] Given an emergence of "extreme tribalism"[107]and the presence of tribalism in most cultures, an understanding of its dynamics and effects on communication will be necessary to the analysis of a culture or a narrative.

SYMBOLS AND METAPHORS

Symbols can be powerful communications tools. Symbols are "something" which has a broader meaning that connects to something else. They can be objects, words or phrases or even people and activities. The key is that the symbol must, for the audience, remind them of some other meaning. Symbols can help people deal with complex ideas, concepts or emotions. Symbols are rooted in culture and, therefore, the use of them requires detailed understanding of the "language" of the broader context.[108] Physical symbols can be virtually anything. Flags, banners, logos can all be obvious symbols of a group, but physical cultural symbols can include something as simple as a pile or rocks which could indicate a grave or shrine. Colours often have symbolic meaning, as can

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[104] *Ibid.*, 61.
[105] Vlahos, *Terror's Mask…*, 3.
[106] Ronfeldt, *Tribes: The First and Forever Form…*, 62-63.
[107] *Ibid.*, 75.
[108] Fahoum and Width, *Marketing Terror…*

images of objects and creatures. Written language also constitutes a form of physical symbology. Both formal signage and graffiti can have meaning including an expression of ownership, group membership or political allegiance.[109] Verbal and non-verbal symbols represent an important aspect of cross cultural communication. Languages come in both formal and informal modes, therefore dialects and slang can use symbols which may be unfamiliar to outsiders. Non-verbal communications consist of many aspects of body language including hand and facial gestures. While some non-verbal symbols appear universal, such as smiling, many are unique to a given culture and even a specific location. For the cross-cultural communicator, an incredible array of diverse physical symbols awaits. Handshakes, eye contact, foot position and physical distance are all well known variables. Care must be taken in learning to interpret these symbols and understanding that meaning can vary within groups.[110]

One form of culturally charged symbol is the icon. An icon can be a physical object which may represent some aspect of religion or deity – be it good or bad in nature. Icons can also be in the form of a person. Such a person can be a hero or role model for a cultural group and can have significant influence. The mention of an iconic person can tap into shared memories and values. Understanding who the heroes and villains within a culture is critical activity in narrative analysis.[111]

Metaphors are also an important factor when looking at a narrative. Metaphors are different from symbols, but very much like symbols, must be carefully interpreted so as not to be misread. This especially true in the context of religion, where several layers

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[109] Salmoni and Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter…*,178-179.
[110] *Ibid.*,180-183.
[111] *Ibid.*,174-177.

of meaning may be present.[112] A metaphor is essentially "an image that suggests something else",[113] thus a description of something which is not literally true. The model for a metaphor is "X *is* Y" rather than "X *is like* Y." Metaphors are found in virtually every culture and are thus "indigenous to all human learning from the simplest to the most complex."[114] Context is critical to metaphors, be it in time (historic versus contemporary) or interpretive context, i.e. religious tradition, social and cultural context.[115] Metaphors can be "living" or "dead". "Living" metaphors are newer to the language or culture and still retain the original sense of two ideas connected. "Dead" metaphors are ones which have been in use so long as to have become rooted in every day language, and therefore represent only one idea.[116] The study of metaphors and the need to understand them has become an important topic for the U.S. Government, who has tasked its Intelligence Advanced Research Project Activity to develop methods to better interpret metaphors in languages such as Spanish and Farsi. These methods and programs will be used by intelligence agencies to better understand intercepted communications from terrorist and criminal groups.[117]

MYTHS

Myths are different from folk tales since they are linked to a specific time and place, whereas folk tales can be anywhere or any time. Joseph Campbell defines

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[112] Joseph Campbell. *The Power of Myth*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 70.
[113]*Ibid*., 67.
[114] Sallie McFague. *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 32.
[115] *Ibid*.,2-3.
[116] *Ibid*.,14-15.
[117] Alexis Madrigal, "Why are Spy Researchers Building a 'Metaphor Program'?" *The Atlantic*, 25 May 2011, journal on line; http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/05/why-are-spy-researchers-building-a-metaphor-program/239402 ; accessed 18 June 2011.

mythology as "an organization of symbolic images and narratives, metaphorical of the possibilities of human experience and the fulfillment of a given culture at a given time."[118] He goes on to describe what he sees as the four functions of myths. The first is the reconciliation of the mind to the universe – that is the mystical dimension of the human. The second is the explanation of the order of the cosmos. The third is a sociological function which serves to validate and support a social order. The final function is to guide the individual through the stages of life by teaching them how to react to events.[119]

Myths embody key aspects of culture which help group members understand their social surrounding, their sense of justice, outlooks and superstition. In effect, myths help individuals understand what is "normal."[120] Myths are frequently connected to a historic event, often a foundation event. Myths, in particular foundation myths of organizations, can be grouped into two basic categories - transactional and transcendental. Transactional myths can be pragmatic, emphasizing material goals. Transcendental myths focus on the "otherworldly", non-material elements. Some groups may have foundation myths that are both transactional and transcendental.[121]

Myths appear to have universal qualities, the central one being the hero. Campbell believes that there is essentially "one archetypal mythical hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people."[122] Each hero follows as similar path or adventure. Odysseus, Moses and Buddha have all followed what Campbell

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[118] Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2001), 1-2.
[119] *Ibid.*, 2-5.
[120] Salmoni and Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter…*,32.
[121] Casebeer and Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism...*, 7.
[122] Campbell, *The Power of Myth…*,166.

describes as an archetypal adventure – that is a three part journey of departure, fulfillment and return.[123] Hero figures, and indeed other mythological characters such as villains, helpers and false heroes can play critical roles in narratives. Mythical characters provide a template which, once attached to a given actor, can transfer the properties, be they good or bad, from the original. While examples from various mythologies could be explored, an example of recent, constructed mythology may be useful. Historian Jonathan Vance, in his study of the war-time mythology which developed in Canada immediately after the First World War, noted that mythic character constructs, as they were promoted in popular culture, were formed using Vaudeville theatre as a template. Stage productions, books and films concerning the war were filled with borrowed stock character tropes, many of which are still in use today.[124] While endeavouring to prove the how united Canada's founding nations were in battle, native Canadians became stock characters in the post war myth, as did French-Canadians.[125]

For Islam, the key hero/founding figure is Mohammad. Within the narratives shaped by Osama Bin Laden and Mullah Omar, they attempted to follow in the footsteps of this hero. Through this association and the suggestion that each had also completed their own hero journey, these leaders attempt to gain mythical status for themselves and for their actions.[126] The key mythology which Islamic fundamentalists use comes from the era of the Crusades. Such myths are easy to compare to the current situation where the West is seen by some to be meddling in the Islamic world. Such myths also rely on

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[123] *Ibid.*, 164 – 168.
[124] Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble*. (Vancouver, UBC Press: 1997), 84-85.
[125] *Ibid.*, 247-253.
[126] Campbell, *The Power of Myth…*,7-8.

the imagery of defensive armed struggle and, given that the Crusader era was approximately 200 years long, a sense of history and patience.[127]

Myths generally form a significant pool from which the crafter of narratives can draw. Careful study of relevant mythology is equally important to the narrative analysis and counter narrative efforts. In this process, special care should be taken to identify mythical characters and their associated qualities.

MEDIA

The process of interpersonal communication, and in particular the various communications pathways, is a vast field of study. In an exploration of narrative and counter-narrative, it is critical to examine how communications works and some of the factors regarding pathways or media.

A basic model of communication is the "message influence model", which suggests that a source sends a message through a channel to an audience. A (the source) has an idea or information which is converted to a message. The message is transmitted through a channel (media) and is received by B (the audience) to be decoded and understood: thus A → Channel → B. This model is based on the assumption that nothing has interrupted the channel or modified the message.[128] Author and literary theorist Umberto Eco espoused a similar concept, labelled the "model reader." Eco sees the empirical author and empirical reader as A and B, but establishes a model author and

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[127] Vlahos, *Terror's Mask…*, 19.
[128] Statham, *Strategic Communications…*, 6-7.

model reader as "filters" between the two. He further sees the text, or channel, as another filter.[129]

A more sophisticated model is found in the "pragmatic complexity model". This model suggests that the process of communications is not simply the transmission of A's message to B, but that there are external factors influencing the message and that B's perceptions and reactions alter the message. So once A sends the message through a channel, it becomes "contextualized" and will be viewed through filters. Upon receiving the message, B then applies personal filters, opinions and attitudes. The model looks like: A → Channel→ (Context and filters) → B (Opinions and attitudes). This model also factors in the feedback that B will provide to A, thus potentially influencing the next message and creating more of a cycle.[130] The selection of channel or medium is clearly influenced by the context and the cultural filters, both external and internal to the recipient.

There has been a revolution in how information is communicated to target audiences, how that information is interpreted and if it will change attitudes or behaviours. Key to this revolution is the erosion of the control of the flow of information by nation states. Access to various media, including social media, now enables virtually any individual or group to tell their story to the world. With an explosion of new media outlets, audiences have broad exposure to narratives, with a corresponding reduction in "filters" or analysis. The traditional news cycles have shortened and stories are repackaged quickly. Governments and organizations such as NATO have been

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[129] Eco, Umberto. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8-25.
[130] Statham, *Strategic Communications…*, 7-8.

struggling to understand this new information reality. New media are difficult to map, let alone control and miscommunications is a constant threat.[131]

Organizations tell their stories using every type of media at their disposal. In addition to accessing the news media as discussed above, actors also "utilize the arts, including paintings, poetry, and song writing, and post flyers, distribute leaflets, author articles, and even publish their own newspapers and magazines."[132] Even the increasingly popular and widespread medium of the video game can be seen as a conduit for story telling. The use of narrative in video games, in particular the hero's journey narrative template, has become common.[133]

New media has given organizations and individuals remarkable reach in terms of communications pathways. Cellular phone service has become incredibly widespread, and with it, the use of short message service (SMS) texting. The internet provides cheap and easy methods of disseminating a narrative, ones that are very accessible by both sender and target audience. Videos uploaded to sites such as YouTube can go "viral" and often such imagery and messages are taken up by smaller or less reputable news agencies and spread to the larger ones.[134] Newer internet tools such as Twitter have had remarkable impact on the passage of information among the civil population, as was observed during the Egyptian uprising against the government of Hosni Mubarak[135] and other events of the so called "Arab Spring." The challenge has become telling a story in 140 characters.

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[131] Mihaila, *NATO's Strategic Communications…*, 1-2 – 1-3.

[132] Andrew Garfield."The U.S. Counter-propaganda Failure in Iraq." *The Middle East Quarterly,* Vol 14, No. 4 (Fall 2007): 24.

[133] Jakub Majewski, "Theorising Video Game Narrative,"(Master's Thesis, Bond University, 2003), 5.

[134] *Ibid*., 23-32.

[135] Ungerleider, Neal. "Massive Egyptian Protests Powered by YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Twitpic." *Fast Company*, 25 January 2011, journal on line; http://www.fastcompany.com/1720692/egypt-protests-mubarak-twitter-youtube-facebook-twitpic ; accessed 26 May 2011.

While new electronic media has a revolutionary quality as a communications pathway there are drawbacks. Andrew Sullivan notes that in spite of the impressive reach of both the traditional radio broadcast medium and the internet, the impact on the target audience may not be that great. The problem, he notes, is that these media are now flooded with information and individuals can pick and choose what programs, stations or websites they want. Getting the attention of the audience becomes the real challenge.[136]

While very low tech, one the most effective means of passing information is face to face. "Person-to-person communications," writes Andrew Sullivan "stands as one of the most fundamental and universally trusted realms of information in contemporary societies."[137] Sullivan, in his work on social epidemics and memetics, found that memes have the most success at attaching to a "host" and being replicated, when the idea is passed directly from person to person. Word of mouth, passed through existing social networks, can create social contagion epidemics – much like a virus.[138]

The selection of a particular media will have considerable impact on how a message is received. Each media is subject to filters such as body language for face to face communications or webpage design for the internet. Even the selection of a specific media can give the analyst important clues to the deeper meaning in a message.

This chapter has looked at several aspects of culture and briefly examined various models of cultural intelligence. Further, this chapter has examined concepts of communications and media pathways. Culture in this context is the palette for the creation and communication of narratives, along with the key to understanding the

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[136] Sullivan, *Innovations in Strategic Communications…*, 75-76.
[137] *Ibid.*, 76.
[138] *Ibid.*, 76-78.

messages. The next chapter will be concerned with methods of analysis of narratives and

issues surrounding the crafting of successful counter-narratives.

Chapter Four

Narrative Analysis and Counter-narrative Strategies

Having looked at what constitutes a narrative and the various elements of culture

and media, this chapter will focus on analysis and the crafting of counter-narratives. We

will first examine briefly target audience analysis and the analysis of propaganda. Next,

a survey of suggestions as to the crafting of successful counter-narratives will be

completed. Finally, the chapter will finish a look at the analysis on narratives and

narrative structures with a view to understanding an adversary's narrative and to find

areas to exploit for counter-narratives. This will include a proposed model for narrative

analysis.

TARGET AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

During the conduct of psychological operations, a thorough analysis of the human

and psychological terrain is required. Analysts, working with military intelligence and

other sources of information, will study various aspects of their operating environment.

The factors that will be examined through this process are varied, but will certainly

included social, cultural, religious and historical elements.[139]

In Canadian doctrine, the function dedicated to this process is called Target

Audience Analysis (TAA.) TAA looks at a select group/audience to determine underlying

beliefs, perceptions and attitudes, a process which is essential to the development of

effective PYSOPS products. Such products must be designed specifically for each

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[139] Canada, *Psychological Operations…*, 5-1.

potential audience or it will fail to communicate its message. A TAA of an environment

will examine both the current and historical aspects of a range of topics including such as

the distinct groups, their interrelationships, customs and tradition, and power structures;

the leadership, both formal and informal; Pan-national relationships or movements

involved; tribal and class barriers; and ideological credos of various groups/actors.[140]

Within the United Kingdom Information Operations doctrine, target audience analysis

focuses on leadership (political, social and cultural,) differences in perception,

rural/urban divides and differing value sets (motivation and beliefs.)[141]

A further aspect of a TAA is the medium. Analysts will study an audience to

understand how information is passed. This will help in determining what product is

appropriate for a giving audience, be it leaflets, posters, radio broadcast or television.

What communications methods are accessible to the population and how well each is

trusted plays and important role as does the level of literacy and education.[142] This

analysis will focus on items like communications structures (like tribal structures),

language, music and social taboos.[143]

COUNTER PROPAGANDA

PSYOPS doctrine does not have a specific tool for the analysis of narratives. The

closest process is that of propaganda analysis and counter propaganda, both being related

to narrative analysis and are subjects which bear examination. Propaganda is defined as

"information, ideas, doctrines, or special appeals disseminated to influence the opinion,

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[140] *Ibid.*, 5-5 – 5-6.

[141] United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence, JWP 3-80 *Information Operations.* Shrivenham: MOD UK, 2002, 3B-3.

[142] *Ibid.*,3B -4.

[143] Canada, *Psychological Operations…*,5-7 – 5-8.

emotions, attitudes, or behaviour of any specified group in order to benefit the sponsor either directly or indirectly."[144] Operators analyze the adversary's propaganda to discover weaknesses and strengths of the opponent's understanding of the target audience, themes and messages, opponent intentions and errors which can be exploited. It is challenging work which can have a powerful effect on friendly force morale while attacking the same within the adversary's ranks.[145] While several different approaches to propaganda analysis exist, a simple model is the source, content, audience, media, and effects (SCAME) approach.[146] This approach leads to conclusions drawn from the effects or desired effects identified for each category. SCAME breaks down as follows:[147]

S	Source Analysis: What is the real source? 1. Authority: 2. Authenticity and Credibility: 3. Type: White (open), Grey (hidden), Black (disguised)
C	Content Analysis: What the propaganda tells about: 1. Morale: 2. Involuntary Information: 3. Biographic Information: 4. Economic Data: 5. Propaganda Inconsistencies: 6. Geographic Information: 7. Intentions:
A	Audience Analysis: Who is the audience? What are its characteristics (location, size, importance, political influences, religious influences, economic influences and ethnic influences)? 1. Apparent Audience: 2. Ultimate Audience: 3. Intermediate Audience: 4. Unintended Audience:

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[144] *Ibid.*, GL-1.
[145] Garfield. *The U.S. Counter-propaganda Failure in Iraq…*,3.
[146] Canada, *Psychological Operations…*,A-2.
[147] *Ibid.*, A-2 – A-4/.

M	Media Analysis: What media are used and why? 1. Type: 2. Frequency: 3. Reason:
E	Effect Analysis: What impact is this propaganda having? 1. Method used in analysis: 2. Indication of effect: What events appear to be a result of this propaganda effort?

For PSYOPS practitioners, SCAME is a highly useful tool. In the hands of an experienced analyst, who can dig much deeper and more thoroughly into each category, this model can yield much information used to develop counter-propaganda products as part of the Influence Activities plan.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

While the analysis of propaganda as a general concept is relevant to narrative study, there is a need to focus on specific narrative elements and to dig deeper into culture, language, etc. A careful analysis of narratives is essential to the crafting of counter-narratives. William Casebeer and James Russell argue precisely for a detailed understanding of narratives so as to counter them, while also arguing that such an understanding of a story's content, components and context will enhance the ability to assess the effectiveness of such a story on a target audience. As a simple analytical tool, Casebeer and Russell propose the use of a rhetorical model offered by the philosopher Aristotle. This model consists of *Ethos*, *Pathos* and *Logos*. *Ethos* is the quality of the story which addresses the credibility of the speaker. *Pathos* is the appeal to the emotions of the audience. *Logos* is the quality of logic or facts in a story. Simply put, is the story

from a trustworthy source, does it "connect" to the audience and ultimately does it make sense?[148]

Other story models discussed earlier are useful in such analysis. Many of the narratives offered by al-Qaeda follow the basic three part story structure – set-up, climax and resolution. The first part will set up the problem or grievance. The second will show the potential solution or present the hero in action. The third part will show either the solution to the situation or present a challenge or call to action for the recipient of the story. For al-Qaeda narratives, the reoccurring themes that commonly dominate the three part story structures are (1) Islam is under attack, (2) only al-Qaeda and its followers are fighting the oppressors and (3) if you are not helping al-Qaeda, then you are helping the oppressors.[149]

CRAFTING AND COUNTERING NARRATIVES

A common thread found in the literature concerning issues of narrative and counter-narrative is that this is not easy work. Although he promotes narrative as an essential part of strategic communications and campaign planning, Steve Tatham concedes that these efforts are "extremely challenging."[150] Others, like Professor Beatrice de Graaf, doubt that counter-narrative work can be productive. She specifically questions the ability of any government to produce credible counter-narratives.[151] For the most part, the consensus among the commentators is that successful narratives and

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[148] Casebeer and Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism…*, 10.
[149] Tom Quiggin. "Understanding al-Qaeda's Ideology for Counter-Narrative work." *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol III, Issue 2 (2009): http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/; Internet; accessed 26 Jul 2010, 8-9.
[150] Tatham, *Strategic Communications …*, 10.
[151] Graaf, *Counter-narratives and the Unrehearsed Stories …*, 8.

counter-narratives created by governments, militaries and international organizations can be effective and are worth attempting.

In essence, there are two categories of narratives which are of concern to the military IA planner. First, there are our own narratives - these are the stories we are telling about ourselves. Second are the adversary's narratives which we must strive to counter. For the most part, the rules that govern the crafting of narratives apply both to our own narratives and the adversary. We strive to strengthen our narratives and defend them, while conversely trying to find weaknesses in adversary's stories. Applicable to the crafting of narratives and any attempt to counter-narratives, the concept of "narrative fidelity" becomes an important element. At its most basic level, "messaging about a better life loses effect when sewage remains in the streets, electricity is only available six or seven hours per day and life is cheap."[152] On a deeper level, a successful narrative which draws on myths and cultural building block such as metaphors may resonate with its audience, but if it is at odds with its cultural foundations, it can fail. Similarly, narratives which are not synchronized with other narratives from the same organization or within the same information campaign will weaken the message and give opponents potential opportunities to both the message and the credibility of the sender.[153] Narrative fidelity can be a significant issue when a meta-narrative is in play. This underscores the challenge of creating narratives, particularly with multiple partners and meta-narratives at play. NATO, for example, has a challenge to create a robust, functional narrative when there are 28 nations working with their own narratives. Further, a strategic NATO narrative – a meta-narrative in effect - must be able to support tactical level activities.

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[152] Garfield, *The U.S. Counter-propaganda failure…*, 25.
[153] *Ibid.*,3.

Finally, narrative fidelity becomes a significant issue in such a multi-national milieu.[154] Even within a single country, narrative and counter-narrative efforts can quickly be undermined by the actions of security forces and elements of the government which fail to match the narrative.[155]

Casebeer and Russell offer some practical suggestions for counter-narrative strategies involving what they describe as six generic principles. These principles are: competing myth creation, foundational myth deconstruction, creation of alternative exemplars, metaphor shifts, identity gerrymandering, and structural disruption.[156]

These principles underscore, among several elements, the importance of myths. As discussed before, the authors of any narrative must be "intimately familiar with the culture and symbols of a particular target group."[157] With an understanding of the foundation myths used to support a narrative, a counter-narrative can be developed in two key ways. First, key elements of the myth, such as events or people, can be reinterpreted to either discredit the adversary's narrative or to support a competing narrative. Second, an alternative or "better" myth can be promoted, challenging the original foundational myth.[158] Graaf argues that the only effective way to counter a narrative based on myths or legends is to focus on the true elements of the events – thus fighting a narrative solely with the "truth" rather than attempting to construct a formal counter-narrative.[159]

Another of Casebeer and Russell's principles is the creation of alternative exemplars. This involves identifying "characters" that might include leaders – current,

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[154] NATO, *ACO Strategic Communications…*,2-2.
[155] Graaf, *Counter-narratives and the Unrehearsed Stories …*,4.
[156] Casebeer and Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism…*,8.
[157] Fahoum and Width, *Marketing Terror…*,6.
[158] Casebeer and Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism…*,9.
[159] Graaf, *Counter-narratives and the Unrehearsed Stories …*,8.

historic or mythical – or other actors upon who the target audience can be encouraged to focus. In effect, this tactic is an effort to influence an audience to "switch role-models" and thus expose them to an alternate model of behaviour. [160]

Perhaps one of the best well known counter-narrative principles is that of the metaphor shift. This entails to switching of one metaphor description – complete with all the extra meaning – with a new metaphor. The key is to ensure that the shift is not too dramatic or the audience may not make the leap.[161] A somewhat hackneyed example is the framing statement "one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter." The label terrorist versus freedom fight brings with it considerable baggage. As an example, during the Malayan Emergency of the 1950s, the British deliberately stopped referring to the insurgents as the Malayan Communist Party, but as "bandits" and later "Communist Terrorists" in an attempt to delegitimize the insurgency and to give them a less credible and "criminal" label.[162]

A consideration in the construction of narratives and counter-narratives is that of flexibility. As discussed above, narrative fidelity is very important to the credibility of a narrative and its perceived author. Too rigid an adherence to a strategic narrative can expose stories to easy criticism at the local or "tactical" level. Successful narratives require flexibility to adapt to local conditions and ever-shifting events. This is a particular challenge when dealing with a rigid meta-narrative.[163]

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[160] Casebeer and Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism…*,9.
[161] *Ibid.*, 9.
[162] Phillip Deery. "The Terminology of Terrorism: Malaya, 1948-52." *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol 34, No 2 (2003): 231-247.
[163] Tatham, *Strategic Communications …*, 9.

Finally, in practical terms, the most effective and successful narrative and counter-narratives are going to be "sticky." Does a story resonate with its audience and why? Do people retain the ideas and elements of the narrative? As discussed earlier, Chip and Dan Heath cite parables and urban legends as examples of "sticky" narratives which are highly effective. Their essential story templates, the three being the *Challenge Plot*, the *Connection Plot* and the *Creativity Plot*, form simple counter-narrative templates to start with.[164] Understanding the target audience remains essential, as the most "sticky" of stories will fall flat if it fails to resonate.[165]

A NEW NARRATIVE ANALYSIS TOOL

While the SCAME model for the assessment of propaganda is a proven and reliable tool, something more specialized is required for narrative analysis. Such a template would share certain characteristics with the SCAME approach, given that there are similar elements to be examined, however, an effective narrative analysis tool will need to look deeper in key areas and will focus on the details of narrative structure and cultural elements. Here, then, is a proposed model for use in narrative analysis.

In keeping with the utilitarian approach of SCAME and other such tools, this model is structured as Actors, Context, Content and Effects (ACCE.)[166] The basic template is as follows:

A	Actors: Who are the parties involved, directly or indirectly, in this narrative? 1. Source: Author or perceived author. 2. Audience(s): Who is the intended audience? Who are the secondary

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[164] Heath, *Made to Stick …*, 226 – 230.
[165] Tatham, *Strategic Communications …*, 9-10.
[166] This ACCE model was developed by the author based on the research conducted for this project and is offered as a practical tool for Influence Activities practitioners.

	audiences and unintended audiences? 3. Characters: Who are the characters in the narrative? They may be real, historic or fictional and may be referred to directly or indirectly.
C	Context: What are the filters and communication pathways? 1. Meta-narrative(s): What Meta or Master narrative(s) is/are at play? 2. Culture: What general cultural systems are at play? Are both the source and audience from the same culture? Historic signifiers present? 3. Social Structure: Tribalism at play? What is the human terrain? 4. Myths: Are there myths and legends referred to in the narrative, either directly or indirectly? 5. Language: Both written and spoken language to be looked at. Are symbols a factor? 6. Metaphors: Search for metaphors. 7. Media: Media in relation to the audience. Physical aspects (Radio, print, TV face to face, etc) and cultural qualities of the medium chosen.
C	Content: 1. Structure: Look at the elements of the story. Freytag's triangle or Propp's 31 functions. 2. Characters: Each character may have a cultural connection and/or a narrative function. 3. Truth. Is the story fact or fiction, or a mix of both? 4. Open Messages: What was the clear message? Was it intended or unintended? 5. Hidden Messages: Are there hidden messages, implied or suggested.
E	Effects: 1. Intended Effects: What effect was assessed as the primary effect on the primary audience by the author? What was the actual effect on the primary audience? 2. Unintended Effects: What effects may have happened which appear unintended or and effects on an unintended audience? 3. Measure of effectiveness: Does the assessed intended effect work on the target audience? 4. Narrative Fidelity: Does the story mesh with the Meta-narrative(s) or other narratives from the source? Is it credible? Does it reinforce an established narrative? 5. Threats: How do the effects threaten friendly activities and narratives? What mitigation strategies are required? 6. Opportunities: What elements of the narrative are open for counter-narrative?

This ACCE template will now be discussed in detail.

Actors. In all communications there are various actors. It begins with the author (Ecco's ideal author) who may or may not be the perceived author or authors (model author.) The perceived author may also be the deliverer of the narrative, at which point the source blurs with the media (discussed below.) The audience is the other key partner in the communications process. This analysis needs to look for evidence as to who the intended audience (model reader) was and actually received the narrative. There are unintended audiences which need to be examined. The third category of actor is that of the characters found in the narrative itself. A narrative may be populated with characters that could range from real living (but idealized) figures, historic figures, fictional or mythical characters. These characters may appear directly in a narrative, but may also appear in "disguise" or may simply be hinted at or referred to indirectly.

Context. This portion of the analysis is concerned with the "packaging" of the narrative.   The first critical step is to identify any Master or Meta-narratives which may be at play. They may be hidden and there may be multiple Meta-narratives at play. It should also be established if the communication is cross-cutting one or more Meta-narratives. The next key element of context is culture. Identifying which cultural system or systems are involved is critical to the analysis process. Does the narrative cross-cut culture? Are historic events or legends directly or indirectly mentioned in the narrative? If so, what "signifiers" or meaning is attached? In addition to the historic "terrain" the social structure and "human terrain" or demographics must be examined. The cultural context will help in the search for references to myths and metaphors, although care must be taken to look for cross-cultural and pop cultural references so as not to be blinded by a single cultural template. Language and symbols are examined here, again looking cross-

culturally. The final critical aspect of context is that of media. The communications pathways (radio, night letter, film, face to face, etc.) all have their characteristics which need to be examined. Media has a dynamic relationship with the actors – from perceived authors to target audiences – and some actors can become fused with the media. Analysts need to take care to understand this relationship.

Content. At this stage, the analysis looks at the narrative structure. While this could be as simple as looking at basic models of narrative structure such as those espoused by Van Dijk or Freytag, more complex models can be use such as Propp's 31 functions. Understanding the details of the functional elements of the story can give clues to deeper messages and can assist in later counter-narrative efforts. The same is true with respect to characters. While a variety of characters, present or in the shadows, will have been identified in the list of actors, it is here where each character will be assessed for narrative function and cultural significance. Finally, the content will be analysed for its messages. While some messages will be straight-forward, others may be hidden, implied or suggested.

Effects. An Analyst will have to examine a narrative to assess what were the intended effects, both primary and secondary, on the various audiences. Next, the actual effects must be assessed. Did the intent match the result? A further assessment needs to be made as to whether or not the narrative was truthful, credible and if it in line with any Meta-narratives or previous narrative arcs. The analyst must further examine how the narrative may threaten friendly activities, communications and narratives which will drive mitigation strategies. Finally, an assessment must be done to seek opportunities with may arise from the hostile narrative. Can elements of the narrative be exploited?

In this chapter, we have examined briefly target audience analysis and the SCAME approach to propaganda analysis. Next was the introduction a proposed model for the analysis of narratives, specifically looking at Actors, Context, Content and Effects (ACCE.) Finally, this chapter dealt with some suggestions for the crafting of successful narratives and counter-narratives. While challenging, the work of understanding narratives and crafting counter-narratives is an achievable and essential task for Influence Activities practitioners. In the next chapter, I will present a case study of the use of narrative by the Taliban and issues surrounding Coalition counter-narrative efforts.

Chapter Five

Case Study – The Taliban and Narrative

INTRODUCTION

In order to better understand the importance of narrative in an operational context and to see how the previously discussed elements of narrative actually function, a case study of the Taliban will be presented. The Taliban has used narrative in many of the facets of their operation, as does NATO and the Afghan Government. All parties in this conflict attempt counter-narratives in the struggle to influence the resident population and other audiences around the world.

Although far from exhaustive in nature, this study is intended as a real world example and a starting point for further analysis. While it is recognized that the Pashtun based insurgencies in both Afghanistan and Pakistan consist of various actors and groups which have evolved over time through amalgamation and schism, the term "Taliban" will be used throughout this study as an overarching identifier.

THE TALIBAN AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS

The Taliban, both Afghan and Pakistani, are best viewed within the same framework. That said, they are far from homogenous and individual members of the Taliban vary widely in training and in motivation. Some are dedicated Jihadists from the Madrassas of Quetta whereas many are simply Taliban of convenience, fighting for pay

or on the orders of local tribal leaders.[167] The origins of all the Taliban factions are the same. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces and the collapse of the Afghan Communist government in 1992, there was a period of violence and turmoil. Opposed to the government of Buhanudden Rabbini and compelled by the lawlessness and violence of the warlords, a group of Pashtun religious students (or Talib) banded together under the leadership of Muhammad Omar. The Taliban quickly gained a reputation as devoutly religious warriors who brought security and put an end to the criminal behaviour of the warlords. By November 1994, they had captured Kandahar. Within 18 months, the Mullah Omar's forces would capture most of Afghanistan and govern it according to his fundamentalist Islamic vision until the post-September 11, 2001 U.S. intervention. From the early days of the Taliban, Mullah Omar established an enduring narrative of security at all costs.[168]

In terms of Information Operations and Influence Activities, the Taliban have a reputation as being highly capable, especially when compared to NATO. They have come to use many of the tools of modern communication while continuing to use the traditional methods as well. Analyst Thomas Nissen argues that the Taliban are much more effective than ISAF at local influence and at synchronizing their information activities with their tactical actions. He further suggests that the Taliban are focused on information dominance and that the credibility of NATO is their primary target.[169] It has also been noted that Taliban effectiveness in the information domain is due not only to their perceived savvy, but their speed at getting the message out combined with no need

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[167] Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, *The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan*, (New York: Routledge, 2007),25.

[168] Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke and Beth Grill. *Victory has a Thousand Fathers: Detailed Counterinsurgencies Case Studies*. RAND Corporation, 2010. 190-193.

[169] Nissen. *The Taliban's Information Warfare…*, 9.

to verify facts or work with the truth.[170] Not all observers agree. Researcher Tim Foxley

counters the belief that the Taliban have an effective Information Operations campaign

by looking at measures of effectiveness. "Speed-dialling journalists to take credit for an

attack," writes Foxley, "does not necessarily make the Taliban effective."[171] The Taliban

messages are still unsophisticated and focused very much on fear. While they have a

potentially better understanding of the local culture and, though traditional means, can

gain local superiority of information pathways, their messages are still uncoordinated and

they have trouble dealing with negative press, relying on denial as their main reactionary

tool. At the higher levels, Foxely suggests that they simply lack the understanding to deal

with strategic narratives and dialogue.[172]

META-NARRATIVES

An interesting feature of the Taliban context is that there are essentially two

significant meta-narratives at play; that of Pashtunwali and of Islam. The Code of

Pashtunwali is an ancient meta-narrative which helps to form a "Pashtu national narrative

(which) plays on the strong sense of resistance built upon the collective myth of

combating foreign forces since the time of Alexander the Great." The Taliban also use

the international Jihadist narrative, which describes a struggle of Muslims against foreign

occupiers which extends across borders to all Muslim lands.[173]

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[170] Christopher Sargent. "Public Affairs in the Afghan Theatre and the STRATCOM 'Dynamic'." *NRDC-ITA Magazine*, Issue 13, 21.
[171] Tim Foxley. "Countering Taliban Information Operations in Afghanistan." *Prism*, Vol 1, No. 4 (September 2010), 84.
[172] *Ibid.*, 85-89
[173] Hode and Sedra, *The Search for Security…*,26.

The Islamic meta-narrative is certainly an enduring one. For the Taliban, Muhammad is the central figure, and the "teller of the ultimate and even only story."[174] Exported from Saudi Arabia into the madrassas of Pakistan, the version of Islam which has dominated the Taliban is Wahabbism. The Wahabbist brand of Islam comes from the 18th century and represents a strict and conservative approach. It is, in effect, an attempt to replicate the type of Islam thought to have been practiced by Muhammad and his followers. Wahabbism is a very intolerant system which is dominated by the belief that only they are correct and that adherence to the Wahabbist ideals is mandatory. This stands in contrast to Panshtunwali, which is voluntary in nature, and led to the suppression of Sufi and Shia Muslims during the Taliban reign.[175]

Central to Islam, and critical to the identity of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, is the concept of *jihad* or "struggle." The Taliban refer to themselves as *mujahidin* or "religious warriors" and they have embraced a focused concept of *jihad*, making it a central narrative.[176] The radical view of *jihad* is that it is primarily about armed warfare against the enemies of Islam such as infidels and apostates. The moderate scholarly view is more balanced and diverse. *Jihad* is to strive for excellence in many differing fields including goodness, nation-building, poverty, education and even self-improvement.[177] Some scholars believe that *jihad* was originally designed to give early Islam some momentum and to keep the movement fresh. A further component of *jihad* is legitimate leadership. *Jihad* must be led by a sanctioned leader, a fact that Mullah Omar played on

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[174] Vlahos. *Terror's Mask …*, 8.
[175] Robert Cathell. "Human Geography in the Afghanistan - Pakistan Region: Undermining the Taliban using Traditional Pashtun Social Structures." (Thesis, US Naval War College, 2009), 11-12.
[176] Vlahos. *Terror's Mask …*, 11.
[177] Quiggin. *Understanding al-Qaeda's Ideology…*, 5-6.

in 1996 when he wore the "Cloak of the Prophet" and declaring himself *amir al-mu'mineen*.

The Taliban culture is a divided one. While Islam in general, and the specific version of Islam upon which the Taliban was founded are culturally Arabic, the Taliban is also firmly rooted in the Pashtu tradition. The Afghan-Pashtun culture is very independent in nature and stands in contrast to the nomadic ways of the Arabic culture.[178] At its foundation, the Pashtun meta-narrative is encapsulated in the Code of Pashtunwali.

By tradition, Pashtuns (also known as Pathans) are all father-line descendants of a legendary figure named Qais, who was also know as Patan. Qais is believed to have lived around the time of Muhammad and was a convert to Islam.[179] There are 24 Pashtun tribes with numerous sub-tribes. These tribes are divided into two confederacies, the *Durrani* and the *Ghilzai*, with the *Durrani* being historically more politically powerful.[180] In spite of the numerous tribes and sub-tribes, all the Pashtun people are united within Pashtunwali. While it has been suggested that Pashtunwali is over 5000 years old, the first written evidence of it was recorded only 500 years ago, but the rivalry between Islam and Pashtunwali is very old.[181]

Pashtunwali is the foundation of what it is to be a Pashtun. It stipulates aspects of honour and guides the day to day interactions of Pashtuns. Further, it provides a legal framework and the basis of governance through the establishment of a *shura* (a tribal council) and the *jirga* (a tribal gathering.) A fundamental principle of Pashtunwali is that

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[178] Vlahos. *Terror's Mask* …, 14-15.
[179] Lutz Rzehak. "Doing Pashto: Pashtunwali as the ideal of honourable behaviour and tribal life among the Pashtuns", *Afghanistan Analysts Network Thematic Report* 01/2011, http://aan-afghanistan.com/uploads/20110321LR-Pashtunwali-FINAL.pdf ; Internet; accessed 11 July 2011, 7-8.
[180] E.A. Zahine. "Good Governance in the Tribal Areas: Kandahar Research Project." Tribal Liaison Office, 15 September 2005, 11.
[181] Staff Writers. "Honour Among Them." *The Economist*, 19 December 2006 accessed 08 June 2011, 2.

every Pashtun is equal and none have power or status above the others.[182] The foremost element of Pashtunwali is that of *Nang* or honour. The dignity and trust of both individual Pashtuns and that of their family and tribe is fundamental. Honour must be defended, often through revenge, and it underpins all other aspects of Pashtunwali.[183] Because Pashtun honour can be slighted in many ways – transgressions involving women, land and money being common - vengeance is a common story-line in Pashtu narratives. While being a culture of retribution and revenge, one prone to blood-feuds which last generations, the cultural code has evolved to mitigate and prevent such activities.[184] Part of this balance includes *Nanawatai* or sanctuary and *Malmastai* or hospitality, each providing checks and balances.[185]

There are significant gaps between Islamic Shari'a law and Pashtunwali. Perhaps most significant is the treatment of women. For example, under Shari'a, a woman can inherit property and easily obtain a divorce whereas under Pashtunwali, a woman cannot inherit and divorces are nearly impossible.[186]

A third and somewhat fringe meta-narrative at play among the Pashtu people is that of class war. The historic relationship between Afghans and Communism is not a happy one, and most aspects of Marxist thought is significantly opposite of the Wahhabist inspired Taliban. Yet, some elements of class struggle are present. "The Taliban's ability to exploit class divisions" observed journalists Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah, "adds a new dimension to the insurgency and is raising alarm about the

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[182]Zahine. *Good Governance in the Tribal Areas…*,8-9.
[183] Rzehak. *Doing Pashto…*,9.
[184] UK MOD, JDN 1/09, 1-5.
[185] Rzehak. *Doing Pashto…*,2.
[186]Richard Tod Strickland. "The Way of the Pashtun: Pashtunwali." *Canadian Army Journal* Vol. 10.3 (Fall 2007): 51-52.

risks to Pakistan, which remains largely feudal."[187] The situation allows the insurgents to take advantage of the divisions between the poor farmers and wealthy landlords. The Taliban can then "offer economic spoils to people frustrated with … corrupt government even as the militants imposed a strict form of Islam through terror and intimidation."[188]

Socialist academic Michael Skinner argues that there is a significant shift in the "anti-imperialist" narrative which has dominated the situation in Afghanistan. He suggests that the western media gives all the credit for anti-coalition and anti-government violence to the Taliban, ignoring Maoist insurgents and other non-violent socialist activities. This, in effect, is an attempt to suppress the Afghan socialists in favour of Islamic Warlords who support a western capitalist system. Skinner claims that many varied socialist groups have now come together under a Maoist banner and are competing with the Taliban for the hearts and minds of the people. Further, he predicts that the class struggle narrative will replace what he sees as the faulty narratives that only the Taliban are the oppressors of women and that the liberation of women is the primary goal of the Coalition. While potentially using aspects of class division to their own ends, the Taliban are unlikely to move too far toward a Marxist position, given that the narrative of Marxism is *transactional* whereas the narrative of Islam is *transcendental*. "There is," Skinner observes, "no Islamic equivalent of Latin American liberation theology or Canadian Christian socialism in Afghanistan."[189]

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[187]Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah."Taliban Exploit Class Rifts in Pakistan" in *The New York Times* 16 April 2009 accessed 25 Apr 2011.
[188] *Ibid*.
[189] Michael Skinner, "Reframing the War in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a Class War" in The Bullet, E-Bulletin No. 209 April 25, 2009 accessed 25 Apr 2011.

THE PASHTU CONTEXT

The primary target audience of the Taliban is the Pashtuns of southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan. As they are from the same cultural framework, it should be relatively easy for the Taliban to draw upon the traditions, myths and metaphors of their common Pashtu heritage when producing narratives. There is a strong literary tradition among the Pashtuns which encompasses stories and poetry. History in the forms of legends and myths play their part. In Kandahar, and Afghanistan in general, the key foundational figure is Ahmad Shah Durrani. Ahmad Shah, who added Durrani to his name once in power, was the founder of the *Durrani* tribal confederation and is considered the father of Afghanistan. He became king of what was then Afghanistan in 1747, besting rival tribal leaders and establishing tribal rivalries which still exist. His reign lasted 25 years, during which he established Kandahar as central to Afghan and Pashtun culture and politics. He was also able to reinforce the independence of Pashtuns and the tribes, while also creating a somewhat contradictor centralized power and rule of law. He is highly regarded to this day and is a common figure in Afghan narratives of all types. Both his mausoleum and that of his politically astute mother are the sites of pilgrimage.[190]

The Pashtuns are an interesting mix of farmers, warriors and poets. Poetry has been a powerful element of Pashtu society and poets, both past and current, are revered. Two influential historic poets, Khushhal Khan Khattak (1613 -1689) and Rahman Baba

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[190] Sarah Chayes. *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan after the Taliban*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 86-102.

(1653 – 1711), are highly regarded and their work still popular.[191] The Taliban are able

to draw from both the rich poetic traditions of the Pashtuns and that of the Arab Islamic

tradition. This common tradition of heroic poetry may, in fact, be a binding element

bringing the two meta-narratives together.[192] Poetry is not, however, the sole purview of

the Taliban. Poetry continues to thrive among the Pashtuns and young poets are actively

writing and presenting their work. Not surprisingly, the violence of the insurgency has

influenced their work and themes of mourning, the desire for peace and the scourge of

suicide bombers fill their work.[193]

     The traditional Pashtu stories are remarkably similar to traditional stories of other

cultures. While a full survey of Pashtu stories is not possible here, it is worth looking

briefly at one example. Pashtu stories are generally like most folk stories, containing

many of the same rhythms and themes as one would find in Aesop or similar fables. A

brief survey of available Pashtu stories reveals themes of trickery and violence, which are

not unique but suggests the influence of Pashtunwali. As an example, a common Pashtu

story is the *Seven wise Men of Bunair*.[194] This story follows a familiar pattern, one

generically described by as "Fools who cannot count themselves."[195] As with other

similar stories from differing cultures, the plot revolves around a group of travelers who

attempt to count themselves, but keep coming up one short because the counter fail to

count themselves. When a stranger arrives and successfully counts the group, they thank

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[191] Dawood Azami. "Afghan Poets Tackle Scars of War." *BBC News*, 25 April 2009, journal on line; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8008754.stm ;Internet; accessed 18 June 2011.
[192] Vlahos. *Terror's Mask* …, 14.
[193] Azami. *Afghan Poets*…,1-2.
[194] Although discussed elsewhere, this story was found in Charles Swynnerton. *Folk Tales from the Upper Indus*, (London: Elliot Stock, 1892) located at http://www.khyber.org/pashtolanguage/pashtostories/folk/sevenwisemen.shtml , accessed 21 July 2011.
[195] Aarne-Thompson-Uther system of folktale classification type 1287 as described at D.L. Ashliman's Folktexts website; http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type1287.html ; accessed 10 July 2011.

him for "finding" their "lost" companion. This story is found in many cultures, but the Pashtu version has a unique second part. This version has the "wise men," in an effort to thank the stranger, offer to work for him. He accepts, but the fools proceed to ruin his life through stupidity. The moral appears to be that one does not profit from taking advantage of a false sense of obligation - perhaps a subtle influence of Panshtunwali.

A study of the Pashtu language and all its metaphors is well beyond the scope of this project, but such a study would be vital to any counter-narrative activities. The importance is underscored by the following case. During Coalition operations in Kandahar Province in 2005- 2006, a common metaphor in use by English speaking Coalition officers, in the context of solving local problems, was "let's put an Afghan face on this issue." What was meant by these officers was that local Afghans need to solve their own problems, or at least be perceived to be solving these problems. The trouble was that this metaphor, when often translated verbally into Pashtu, came out as "let's make an Afghan puppet", since "put a face on" translated most closely as a Pashtu metaphor for "making a puppet."[196] This metaphor, used broadly by Taliban narrators, is derogatory, and while not intended, would be perceived as an insult.

MEDIA

The Taliban exploit various traditional non-traditional media. These range from simple (but effective) face to face communications and night letters to others including print, broadcast and the internet. The Taliban use publications such as *The Vanguard of*

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[196] This is drawn from the direct experience of the author, who served in the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, 2005-2006, who as a Civil-Military Cooperation Officer, worked closely with local leaders and interpreters.

Khorasan, Tora Bora, Estiqamat and *Tanweer*. These contain material in both Arabic and Pashtu and The *Vanguard of Khorasan* and *Tora Bora* are both available on the internet in PDF format. DVDs are mass produced and distributed widely. There are up to 70 radio stations broadcasting Taliban information to the Tribal Area.[197]

Shabnama or night netters were used extensively during the Soviet occupation. They are typically aimed at public servants, teachers, pro-government clerics and sometimes poppy farmers. Their purpose is usually to dissuade individuals from working with or supporting the government or foreign forces.[198]

In spite of early pronouncements against technology, the Taliban have certainly embraced the internet to get their messages out. Further, they use cellular phones and SMS text messaging to target both media and local populations. The Taliban, however, suffer from the same technological challenges as other institutions. Recently, *The New York Times* reported that the Taliban had sent e-mails and text messages announcing the death of their leaders Mullah Omar, only to have their top spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, subsequently deny the event. Mujahid claimed that the Taliban telephones and internet sites had been "hacked" by the "enemy" who was spreading false rumours.[199]

An interesting emergent media form is that of the video game. In May 2010, Electronic Arts, the successful California based video game producer behind the *Medal of Honor* series, announced their next product would include the Taliban as a play option. The updated *Medal of Honor* set in Afghanistan was slated for release in October and had a feature which would allow gamers to take on the role as Taliban fighters, pitted against

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[197] Hode and Sedra, *The Search for Security…*,28-29.
[198] *Ibid.*,30.
[199]Allisa J. Rubin. "Afghanistan: Taliban deny reports of leader's death, Cite hacking." *The New York Times*, 20 July 2011, journal on line; http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/20/world/asia/20briefs-talibanbf.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=taliban%20hacked&st=cse ; accessed 22 July 2011.

Coalition troops. There was considerable outcry in the United States, especially among

veterans and the families of soldiers killed in Afghanistan, who viewed the option as

disrespectful of the fallen.[200] Politicians were quick to follow in condemnation, including

Canadian Defence Minister Peter Mackay and United Kingdom Defence Minister Liam

Fox.[201] Electronic Arts, and supporters in the gaming community defended the Taliban

option by stressing that it is just a game and that it was no different than "cops and

robbers."[202] Under pressure from families and US military organizations, Electronic Arts

abandoned the Taliban feature, although they retained the ability to play a generic

"opposing force."[203]

In November 2010, Electronic Arts' rival Activision released *Call of Duty: Black

Ops*, a similar game set during the Cold War. Within the first 24 hours, *Call of Duty:

Black Ops* had sold 5.6 million copies in North America and 1.4 million in the United

Kingdom.[204] This record setting sales figure underscores the remarkable reach that video

game media has developed. Understanding this fact reveals the true threat of the *Medal

of Honor* Taliban option. Through this powerful new media path, *Medal of Honor* would

have presented a Taliban narrative to millions of citizens of NATO partner countries. As

an example of a "first person shooter" type of game, players of *Medal of Honor* are

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[200] Joe Gould. "Play-as-Taliban game option causes stir." *Army Times*, 30 August 2010, journal on line; http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/02/arts/television/02medal html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=taliban%20video%20 game&st=cse; Internet; accessed 14 January 2011.

[201] Seth Schiesel. "Whose Side Are You On? It Might Be the Taliban's." New York Times, 01 September 2010 journal on line; http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/02/arts/television/02medal html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=taliban%20video%20 game&st=cse; Internet; accessed 14 January 2011.

[202] Gould, *Play-as-Taliban*…

[203] Schogol, Jeff. "Video game replaces "Taliban" multiplayer option." *Stars and Stripes*, 01 October 2010, journal on line; http://www.stripes.com/blogs/stripes-central/stripes-central-1.8040/video-game-replaces-taliban-multiplayer-option-1.120331; Internet; accessed 14 January 2011.

[204] Relaxnews. "PC download charts: 'Call of Duty: Black Ops,'." *The Independent*, 15 November 2010, journal on line; http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/pc-download-charts-call-of-duty-black-ops-fallout-new-vegas-2135057 html ; Internet; accessed 12 March 2011.

encouraged to subjectively "experience" the condition of the character they play and often bond with their characters.[205] By being offered a chance to play as a Taliban fighter, the player would have been offered a dramatic narrative which is sympathetic to the Taliban as individuals and which would likely add some measure of legitimacy to their cause. While such sympathy among younger members of western populations may not have resulted in dramatic impacts, it may have softened some of the grass-roots support for military engagement in Afghanistan. It may have further encouraged those in support of the Taliban and the related Islamic Jihadist movements.

NARRATIVE CONTENT

To gain some understanding of some the Taliban narratives, a brief analysis of what they are saying to the media (strategic narratives), what they are saying to themselves (operational narratives) and what they are saying to the Pashtu people (tactical narratives) is in order. Further, this section will also examine a few literary elements of the Pashtu people.

Literature plays an important role in Pashtun culture. Folk stories and poetry have helped preserve the traditions of the Pashtun tribes for centuries, and the use of narrative during times of struggle is evident from the 19th century wars with Britain to the Soviet invasion. Such narratives are very important to semi-literate, rural tribes and have been effectively used by the Taliban in several media.[206]

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[205] Majewski, *Theorising Video Game Narrative…*, 17.
[206] Thomas H. Johnson, "The Taliban Insurgency and an Analysis of *Shabnamah* (Night Letters)" in *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol 18, No. 3, (September 2007), 319.

The Taliban have been attempting to speak to various international audiences

through multiple methods. These include the all the traditional print and broadcast media

and the internet. A basic narrative analysis of Taliban press releases, as found on the

Taliban website "Alemarah-iea.net" from the period 21-22 June 2011, reveals some

interesting trends. First, these press releases are short and simple. They are mostly

structured alike, having a headline, location and date, and two or three sentences

describing the events – unusually covering most of the journalists five Ws – who, what,

where, when and why. A typical example follows:

> 6 NATO invaders killed, 4 four wounded in Wardag WARDAG, June 22 – At
> least 2 NATO invaders were killed with four of the puppets and four NATO
> troops got seriously wounded during an attack conducted by Mujahideen (sic) on
> the patrol of joint enemy in Chaghto district of Wardag province on Tuesday.[207]

This format is media friendly and increases the chances that it will get picked up by some

journalist or media outlet. A content analysis reveals that virtually all these narratives are

focused on "body count" and are dominated by the language of warfare. These narratives

contain no positive themes and make no attempt to address issues of local concern such

as governance, justice, or healthcare.[208]

This example also highlights some of the reoccurring descriptors in use by the

Taliban. The key characters in this story are the "Mujahidin" who are the victors over

NATO "invaders" and their local "puppets." By labelling NATO soldiers as "invaders"

the Taliban are attempting to link them to the "crusader" metaphor, while also linking

Afghan National Security Forces to the "crusaders" by labelling them with the term

"puppet." The use of the term "mujahidin" to refer to the Taliban fighters plays on

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[207] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 22-6-2011 News, Webpage, http://alemarah-iea.net/english htm ;
Accessed 22 Jun 2011. English translation was at the source.
[208] Foxley. *Countering Taliban Information Operations…*, 88.

collective memories of the Soviet invasion. It is effective because it not only elevates the Taliban fighters in status, but it further associates NATO troops with the Soviet occupiers.[209]

Truth and accuracy of these press releases is certainly questionable. Numbers of casualties and the amount and type of vehicles destroyed are heavily inflated. Tim Foxley suggests that there are various reasons of such inaccuracies, ranging from the fact that the Taliban may not have accurate facts, that they deliberately are lying, or that they genuinely believe it.[210] Some of these inaccuracies can be very specific. On June 21st, the Alemarah-iea.net website reported that "Mujahideen (sic) of the Islamic Emirate carried out martyrdom attack on the vehicle carrying the provincial (governor) of Parwan province" adding that "the provincial governor got fatally wounded during the attack with two of the drivers, while two of his bodyguards were killed."[211] While some aspects of the Taliban narrative of the attack on Governor Abdul Basir Salangi appear accurate, the key fact that he survived the attack is clearly misrepresented and that one of the fatalities was a 14 year old girl is omitted.[212] Robert Fulford wrote that "in narrative, precise detail can give legitimacy to even the most outlandish tale."[213] This phenomenon is seen frequently within these Taliban narratives, specifically with numbers of casualties, times of attacks and locations. Descriptions such as "US armoured motorcycle" and "green colored tank"[214] add details so as to enhance the credibility of the stories presented.

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[209] Nissen. *The Taliban's Information Warfare…*, 6.
[210] Foxley. *Countering Taliban Information Operations…*, 85.
[211] Alemarah-iea.net, accessed 22 June 2011.
[212] Associated Press. "Failed Suicide Attack on Afghan Governor Kills 2." *CTV News*, 21 June 2011, journal on line; http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/World/20110621/afghan-governor-convoy-attacked-110621 ; Internet; accessed 7 July 2011.
[213] Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative…*, 67.
[214] Alemarah-iea.net, accessed 22 June 2011.

A further insight into the Taliban narrative is through the *Layha* or code of conduct. First issued by the Taliban in 2006, and re-issued in 2009 and 2010, the *Layha* is a written book aimed at regulating the behaviour of its commanders and fighters. This was an attempt to address problems which had hindered the Taliban and damaged their reputation. It is also an aspirational document given that its narrative themes include Islam, rule bound *jihad* and Islamic government.[215] While also promoting the image of the Taliban as the bringers of security and justice, it also suggests a sub-text of power struggle between commanders, such as the late Mullah Dadullah, and Mullah Omar. As with other Taliban narratives, all the *Layha* issued to date are vague on issues concerning development, health care schools and aid workers. While the discipline of the *Layha* may be seen as protection for health care workers, teachers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the code of conduct falls short of International Humanitarian Law.[216] Insight into the struggle between the Wahhabist and Pashtunwali meta-narratives is also evident in the Taliban code of conduct. In the *Layha* issued in August 2010, the Taliban stipulate that in judicial matters, Pashtunwali should be the first recourse. Only after the problem cannot be solved by a local *jirga* in the traditional manner should the case be referred to an Islamic court. While this may be a short-term, pragmatic approach, it does suggest a softening of the Taliban position toward Pashtunwali.[217] The *Layha* may ultimately prove to be source of vulnerability to the Taliban, as it can highlight the

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[215] Kate Clark. "The Layha: Calling the Taleban to Account", *Afghanistan Analysts Network Thematic Report* 06/2011, http://aan-afghanistan.com/uploads/Appendix_1_Code_in_English.pdf ; Internet; accessed 11 July 2011, 1-2.
[216] *Ibid*., 3,15-16.
[217] Rzehak. *Doing Pashto…*,17.

differences between the Taliban leadership and the rank and file while also presenting a

wedge between Islam and the tenets of Pashtunwali.[218]

Key to the Taliban's tactical communications strategy is the use of night letters.

Night letters are blunt instruments of intimidation, yet they can be a sophisticated blend

of history and poetry. Unlike NATO PSYOPS leaflets, night letters are often handwritten

and individually targeted.[219] Taliban night letters frequently reference the grand history of

Afghanistan; in particular they will reference important figures that carry great meaning

to both Pashtu and Islamic traditions. Chief among these historic figures is Ahmad Shah

Durrani (Abdaali). A translated night letter contained in a work by Thomas H. Johnson of

the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School demonstrates this reference to history and this hero

figure:

<div align="center">Message to the "Mujahed" (Freedom Fighter)</div>

> You have served Islam a great deal throughout history and have defeated the
> non-Muslims of the world. Your ancestors such as Amhad Shah Abdaali …
> and other great heroes have recorded a great history in fighting against the
> non-Muslims, but it is a pit today that some American-trained servants under
> the name of bright-minded have destroyed the honoured history of
> Afghanistan.[220]

This night letter goes on to list a series of transgressions made by the "non-Muslims" and

to encourage the target audience to join the struggle and become a martyr. It ends in a

poem. Taliban night letters often will contain detailed Islamic references, specifically

invoking the name of Allah. They will also likely be delivered so as to be timed with an

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[218] Greg Kleponis. "Throwing the Book at the Taliban: Undermining Taliban Legitimacy by Highlighting Their Own Hypocrisy." *Small Wars Journal* Vol 6, no. 10 (2010): http://www.smallwarsjournal.com ; Internet; accessed 27 Oct 2010, 9.
[219] Nissen. *The Taliban's Information Warfare*…, 6.
[220] Johnson, *The Taliban Insurgency*…,321-323.

action or a deed – such as an execution – so as to enhance the intended threat.[221] The religious themes will likely be used to play up the aspect of the ultimate struggle – one between Islam and the infidels. Language like that found in the Taliban press releases is common, thus the struggle is between the "innocent Afghan brothers and sisters" and the "crusaders and their domestic servants."[222]

COUNTERING THE TALIBAN NARRATIVE

There is a considerable challenge for NATO in understanding Taliban narratives and counter-narrative efforts. Even the Karzai Government, which is significantly more culturally attuned, has to work hard to counter Taliban efforts. Below is a brief survey of some of the anti-Taliban efforts.

To internal Afghan populations, radio is still a dominant medium for communications. Both the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan – with their NATO allies – use radio to pass narratives to their target audiences on a continuous basis. The now defunct Radio Rana was set up in Kandahar by the Canadian Forces as a sophisticated PSYOPS tool which used a mix of music, news, public service announcements and call-in programs to entertain and influence the younger demographic of the Kandahari population. Over the life of the station, it attempted to connect to traditional Pashtun culture, including poetry.[223] NATO Radio Sada-e Azadi also seeks to

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[221] Tim Foxley. "The Taliban's propaganda activities: how well is the Afghan insurgency communicating and what is it saying?" SIPRI Research Paper, 2007, 9-10.
[222] Johnson, *The Taliban Insurgency…*,331.
[223] Radio Rana; http://www.ranafm.org/; accessed 12 July 2010.

use traditional narratives for its own effect. Their website includes traditional Afghan folk stories in addition to new stories crafted in the traditional style.[224]

Once banned by the Taliban, access to television by average Afghans has been increasing, especially in the urban areas. Tolo TV, which claims to be Afghanistan's first commercial television station, provides a variety of programming such as game shows, dramas and reality TV. Tolo claims a large audience through free air broadcasting into 14 Afghan cities and satellite broadcast in central Asia, Europe and North America.[225] While anti-Taliban and pro-government narratives have been present on television for some time, new ways to tell these stories are emerging. One such example is a relatively new television program funded by the US Government called *Eagle Four,* a police drama modeled after western thrillers which features plenty of action and car chases. The story focuses on an elite police team who fight criminals in war-torn Afghanistan. The intent is to paint the Afghan National Police in a more positive and professional light. The program also pushes the envelope in somewhat controversial ways by having female actors featured as police officers in prominent roles. While *Eagle Four* has been getting mixed reviews and it is difficult to know how many Afghans are watching, it does represent a broadening of media pathways and narrative templates in the bid to communicate to the population.[226] Canada has also embraced this approach by funding a

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[224] http://sada-e-azadi.net/Joomla/ ; accessed 12 July 2010.
[225] http://tolo.tv/content/blogcategory/21/39/lang,english/: accessed 13 July 2010.
[226] Corey Flintoff. "Afghan TV Show Aims to Burnish Police Reputation." *NPR*, 07 December 2010, journal on line; http://www.npr.org/2010/12/07/131857237/afghan-tv-show-aims-to-burnish-police-reputation ; Internet; accessed 12 July 2011.

similar police drama called *Separ* (Shield) intended to "educate the country on the proper roles and duties of the Afghan National Police."[227]

Methods of countering Taliban narrative using traditional ways have included one Canadian innovation, that of using night letters. Starting in February 2011, ANSF patrols began to distribute Canadian produced night letters in villages in the Panjwaii District of Kandahar. These letters were designed to be similar to the night letters of Taliban origin, but with a very different message. Complete with ANSF imagery and symbols, the message is that the ANSF is here to stay and are protecting the villages at night. Although there was some initial reluctance to the concept of using a method so closely associated with the Taliban, the perceived benefits won out over the negatives. In addition to delivering the ANSF message of security, these night letters also demonstrate an ability to take over Taliban communications pathways and, therefore, undermine the Taliban narrative of dominance.[228]

How effective has the counter-narrative work of the Karzai Government and IASF been against the Taliban narratives? As argued by Tim Foxely, getting a measure of effectiveness of either campaign is extremely difficult. There is some evidence that local, traditional narratives – delivered face to face or with night letters can have an immediate effect (especially if combined with deeds such as assassinations), but such tactics may not have long term impacts.[229] With new media comes new ways of tell stories and while it is easy to gain insight into the impacts of television and the internet in

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[227]Alan Woods. "Canada Finances TV cop show in Afghanistan." *The Star*, 23 November 2010, journal on line; http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/afghanmission/article/895066--canada-finances-tv-cop-show-in-afghanistan ; accessed 22 July 2011.

[228] Tara Brautigam. "Canada pens own night letters in Kandahar." *Metro News*, 24 February 2011, journal on line; http://www.metronews.ca/vancouver/canada/article/783566--canada-pens-its-own-night-letters-in-kandahar ; Internet; accessed 03 March 2011, 1-3.

[229] Foxley. *The Taliban's propaganda activities…*, 83-85.

Western society, it is much harder in a transitional society like Afghanistan. In

Afghanistan, drawing on culturally connected narratives to influence the target

population combined with the continued use of all media pathways, is most likely to have

long term impact. Developing and employing narratives which exploit the fissures

between Wahabbist Islam and Pashtunwali may present the best opportunities. Such a

counter-narrative strategy "should remind Pashtuns that their individual and collective

honor is at stake, and that honor will only be cleansed when the Taliban is no more."[230]

Additionally, a focus on narratives concerning empowerment of the people may help

counter the negative Taliban narrative of destruction.[231]

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[230] Cathell, *Human Geography*…,20-21.

[231] A. Lawrence Chickering. "Humanizing the 'Man:' Strengthening Psychological and Information Operations in Afghanistan." *Small Wars Journal* Vol 6, no. 10 (2010): http://www.smallwarsjournal.com ; Internet; accessed 27 Oct 2010, 7-8.

Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to examine the role of narrative and counter-narrative in military activities, specifically in the arena of influence activities. Although relevant throughout the history of warfare, narrative and counter-narrative as military tools has increased in importance. This era of information operations and strategic communications, the ability to influence audiences and to protect one's own forces and populations is critical. Arthur Frank remarked that "if stories are dangerous, this is because they are powerful."[232] This was the challenge of this study, to delve into the various disciplines to appreciate the "danger" and to understand the "power." In an operational context, narrative is an enduring method of attracting people to a cause and to influence population, especially in the counterinsurgency environment where the population play such a significant role. Further, it helps guide organizations and bind partners in coalitions or alliances. It is not just the business of specialists, but part of the commander's arsenal.

During the brief survey of Canadian and allied doctrine it was found that narrative and counter-narrative concepts are recognized as important elements of the contemporary operating environment, especially in the context of counterinsurgency operations. Canadian COIN doctrine boldly states that "the power of narrative cannot be underestimated,"[233] a sentiment largely echoed by allied doctrine. In spite of this recognition, most doctrine warns that attempting counter-narrative strategies is highly challenging and risky. Largely absent from the doctrine was any meaningful guide to the crafting of narratives and counter-narratives for use in military activities.

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[232] Frank, *Why Study People's Stories?...*,6.
[233] Canada, *Counterinsurgency Operations…*,2-11.

Psychology and literary theory form the foundation of understanding how narratives work. In chapter two, a look at models drawn from influence psychology and marketing aided in grasping these principles. Framing and meta-narratives help guide audiences into a general direction. Narrative templates like the ones explored by theorists Vladimir Propp and Teun Van Dijk serve to give an audience information in a familiar format.

Culture fuels the narrative machine. Myths, symbols, language and tribalism are all elements of culture which must be understood and analyzed before crafting narratives and counter-narratives. Chapter Three examined several models of analyzing culture in the influence and narrative context, including the concept of cultural intelligence. The chapter also examined media pathways and communications theory. Both traditional and "emerging" media have unique qualities and must be understood to be effectively used.

Chapter Four looked at the analysis of narrative by first exploring counter-propaganda and target audience analysis. While often described as a very challenging task, there are practical approaches to counter-narrative work. An important requirement in this process is a good analysis of adversarial narratives. Presented in this chapter was a proposed model for narrative analysis - Actors, Context, Content and Effects (ACCE.)

Within the case study of the Taliban presented in Chapter Five, practical aspects of the use of narrative were examined. The struggle between the Taliban's two meta-narratives – Islam and Pashtunwali – is a dominant feature of the narratives and counter-narratives at play in southern Afghanistan and Pakistan. New and traditional media are being used by all sides, ranging from night-letters to the internet. Afghan poets are still admired, but increasingly, so are the characters in Afghan television programs.

This research project was a brief survey of the many disciplines which make up the study of narrative and counter-narrative. For the Influence Activities practitioner, the challenge is to delve deeper into critical areas. As a start, three areas present themselves for further study and research. First, more needs to be understood about the relationship between narrative structures and the "science" behind what psychologist Robert Cialdini called the "weapons of influence."[234] Second, a detailed study of the culture terrain of relevant peoples needs to be done. Combing through the literature – myths and stories – is a daunting task, but is the essential work required to pursue counter-narratives. The final recommendation to the Influence Activities practitioner is to look to the master story tellers. During the Second World War, the Soviets had great narrative success with the story of *Alexander Nevski*, a national hero of Russia who defeated the German Teutonic Knights in 1242. In the hands of film-maker Sergei Eisenstein and composer Sergei Prokofiev, this story found new life and had a tremendous effect in bolstering the war efforts of the Russian people.[235] Today's Influence Activities practitioners can turn to the story tellers of Hollywood who have great successes in shaping and retelling our myths and legends – using both the "science" and "magic". They must, however, also look to "Bollywood" and beyond.

For the Canadian Forces to better equip its people to deal with narrative and counter-narrative work, more effort must be put into the doctrine, which is currently limited. Further, those individuals who work in this domain regularly, Public Affairs

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[234] Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*…,2-5.
[235] Anthony Tommasini, "Music in Review: Alexander Nevsky." *The New York Times*, 21 October 2006, journal on line;
http://query nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B05E5D8163FF932A15753C1A9609C8B63; accessed 10 August 2011.

Officers and Psychological Operations Operators, need to be better exposed to the

underlying elements of narrative theory and practice. Finally, basic narrative concepts

should be included with theatre mission specific cultural training aimed at all members

deploying into a theatre of operations. General awareness can only enhance the ability of

the Canadian Forces to excel within the psychological and information planes of military

activity.

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