Maneuver in the Narrative Space[1]

Executive Summary

War is a contest for influence. It is influence that is the combat power of twenty-first century conflict – influence to convince an enemy to accept defeat or influence to convince a partner to act. Engagement is the tool or weapon system whereby influence is delivered. The development and delivery of influence is done within the narrative space. That space, like the physical battlespace, contains key and decisive terrain that was shaped by identity and/or liminal narratives and is also being shaped by transient narratives that is detracted or amplified by words-deeds-images of any of the parties involved in the conflict. As with the physical battlespace, maneuver in the narrative space is facilitated by the depth of appreciation of the narrative space terrain. Unlike the physical battlespace, narrative space terrain can be altered to greater benefit or detriment by words-deeds-images. Opponents of the U.S. are currently maneuvering in the narrative space which they do by using ideology that is supported through engagement and kinetic operations. Success in twenty-first century conflict requires positive maneuver in the narrative space that includes the braided interaction of words-deeds-images. The emphasis is on establishing a narrative that drives the actions throughout all levels of activities and operations. Narrative is not something that only applies to strategic communications. Understanding, supporting, and advancing the narrative is important for every level – the soldier walking a presence patrol or kicking in a door to the national level. The competition of narrative requires different ways of framing the environment and considering the confrontation of conflict.

Defining winning and losing in armed conflict is as follows: if the participant accomplishes interests and enhances influence – that is victory. This is not a new definition. The nineteenth century Prussian military theorist and observer of war, Carl von Clausewitz, stated that "war is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will"[2] or a contest of wills wherein one opponent seeks to, essentially, influence the other to concede defeat. In the two hundred years since Clausewitz' combat experiences and thought the primary changes in warfare are the tools to develop, express, and impose that influence on an opponent.

The ability of an actor to achieve objectives in an armed conflict historically depended on the ability to exert superior force – the competition of violence. Due to changes in military and communications technology and the rise in democracies and democratic behaviors, the ability to achieve one's objectives

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[2] This is from Carl von Clausewitz' *On War*, Book 1, Chapter 1.2. This quote is taken from the Michael Howard and Peter Paret edited and translated edition published by Princeton University Press, 1984, page 75.

now depends at least as much on the ability to influence the will of supporters and adversaries – the competition of narrative – as on the ability to wield superior force. There are three primary elements.

1. The change in the nature of weaponry – the introduction of nuclear weapons – limits the use of force.
2. The general importance of democratic behaviors.
   a. The increase in democracies requires the generation of public opinion to prosecute conflict.
   b. Non-democratic states and non-states require the generation of public will to endure hardship over time sufficient to achieve exhaustion of the opponent.
3. Changes in communication technology have leveled the playing field between governments and adversaries in the ability to reach the desired audiences whether they be those of the protagonist or that of the antagonist.

Table 1: Rise of Competition of Narrative

		Liberal Democracy	**Authoritarian Regime**	**Non-State Actor**
Violence	**Total**	**Limitations on nuclear weapons / firepower theory** Post WWII – Nuclear Weapons Deter War Korea – Nuclear Weapons Protect State Indochina – Nuclear Weapons Allied States	**Preserve regime through nuclear weapons** Nuclear weapons provide parity Mutual Assured Destruction	**Gain control of state** Maoist Guerrilla War Vietnam – Dau Tranh
	Limited	**Contain violence in space and application** Korea – Prevent WWIII / Status Quo Ante Bellum Vietnam – Containment / Support Ally Desert Storm – Status Quo Ante Bellum	**Secure state – without and within** Anti-Colonialism Growth of Communism Cold War Support of Opposition Territorial Expansion (Limited)	**Oppose occupation** Palestinian Liberation Afghanistan – Mujahedeen Hezbollah and Hamas
	Constabulary	**Control foreigners through expeditionary violence** Iran – failed hostage rescue attempt Lebanon – Separation of Conflict Parties Grenada- Rescue Students Panama – Arrest Dictator Somalia – Provide Food / Arrest Leader Afghanistan – Build National Capacity Iraq – Provide Security / Build National Capacity	**Control populace** Counter-Insurgency/Revolutionary	**Create instability** Iranian Revolution FARC al-Qaeda – attacks on US targets
Public	**Opinion**	**Rising influence of public opinion on violence** 1952 – Democrats lose on foreign policy weakness 1968 – failure in conflict deters incumbent president 1980 – weakness on the global stage 1989 – Winning the Cold War	**Rise of democratic behaviors** Increase access to information	**Engagement to build influence** Grievance encouragement
	Will	**Declining interest in foreign adventures**	**Commitment to a cause**	**Suffering brings success** 1973/5 – Success in Vietnam 1989 – Success in Afghanistan 2000/6 – Success in Lebanon 2011 – Success in Iraq
Communication		Growth of literacy – 39% (1945) – 83% (2010) Growth of TV news channels – 6 (<1990) – 183 (2013) Mobile phones – 1.2B (2002) – ~6B (2012)	Arab Spring – Twitter revolution	Online magazines, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube

In understanding these changes one can then see how maneuver in the narrative space occurs. It is the pre-existing senses of cultural and societal identity along with deep seated grievances and humiliations to create the terrain in that narrative space. Actors in the narrative space then weave a combination of words-deeds-images into a braided whole that serves as powerful maneuver by tapping into that key and decisive narrative space terrain to gain positions of advantage. Influence is built through the use of the words-deeds-images and by connecting people to those things through engagements in person, through media, and through actions that confirm the narrative: more words-deeds-images. Finally, the kinetic or violent actions performed provide power and emphasis.

The change in warfare from predominantly being determined by the competition of violence to being predominantly determined by the competition of narrative leads to re-conceptualizing the

2

conduct of war and conceptions of maneuver. In this regard, battles and wars are won through maneuver in the narrative space.

Narrative is not exclusive in conflict. Events around the world remind observers that the competition of violence is still a part of conflict. Narrative is not new. It has been a part of conflict for thousands of years in record and maybe since the dawn of humanity and conflict itself. In fact, the United States of America was born in a conflict that was won by maneuver in the narrative space. Despite this, narrative is significantly more consequential in the contemporary world than it has ever been.

The evolution of the management of violence potential has been stark in the seventy years since the detonation of the first and second atomic weapons in anger. The commitment of a nation's power to conflict, particularly in the case of great or super powers is a small fraction of the potential power present in that nation. This theory lends itself to the development of the primary means by which opponents maneuver in the narrative space. They combine ideology with engagement and action to weave a powerful ability to achieve results without facing deadly consequences.

State, non-state, and post-state actors are adapting and changing to incorporate the realities of the current operational environment – no total war, ubiquitous means of expressing narrative, and a greater importance of public opinion and public will. Maneuver in the narrative space is what they are doing and it is what the United States needs to do. Success in Operation Desert Storm assisted the transformation of the various actors away from a primary competition of violence. It was impossible for many actors to compete with precision-guided munitions and the system designed to support them. They went another way. Unless the U.S. can demonstrate dominance in the narrative space then there will be no need for the various actors to adapt away from that space. Meaning, that so long as the U.S. remains ineffective in maneuvering in the narrative space then that is where conflict will be primarily determined. Contrary to current terminology, conflict is not in a gray zone between war and peace. Conflict has changed domain whether that conflict is mostly war or mostly peace. Understanding the gray zone will not solve the problems of present conflict unless that zone is defined within the narrative space.

Brief Explanation of Narrative Space

Narrative Space is explained here to place the remaining argument in proper context. A specific example will be used to describe the terrain in the narrative space. The following section illuminates how ISIS[3] and others conduct maneuver within that space.

Narrative, for the purposes of this theory, includes social identity, liminal narrative, and transient narrative. Figure 1 captures the imagery of this concept in that the social identity forms the core of how the society or culture sees itself and the most deeply rooted narrative structures. It is the bedrock of the later described narrative space. Liminal narrative is the crust that sits in-between the core and the atmosphere of the transient

Figure 1: Narrative Structure
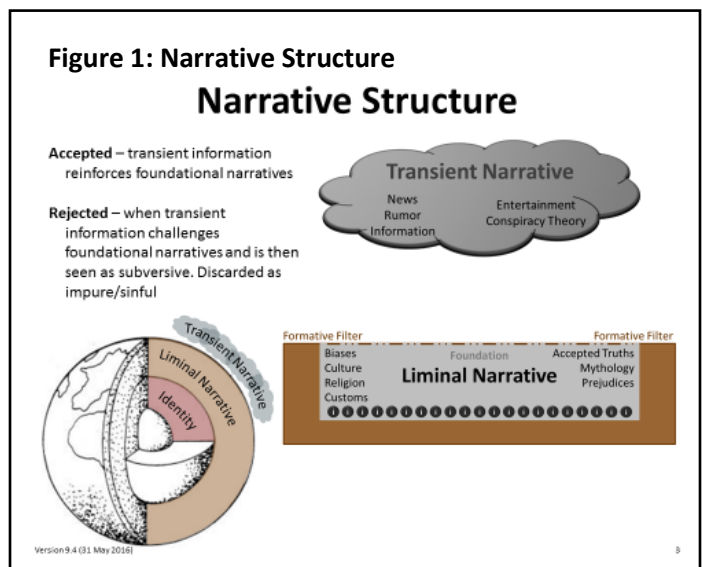
[3] ISIS is used here rather than the Islamic State, Da'ash, or ISIL for simplicity and accuracy. Simplicity as the group has changed its name multiple times and this maintains continuity across all of those name changes and accuracy because Levant has never been used by the group in their name and so ISIL is always a Western only construct.

narrative. Liminal narrative begins with the first instruction provided to a child. It includes customs, religion, culture, biases, mythology, prejudices, accepted truths, and other formative shaping means of filtering ideas and perceiving information. The transient narrative includes news, rumor, information, entertainment, conspiracy theories, and other time sensitive means of information or data flow. When a person receives new information that has potential impact on the narrative then that information is filtered through the liminal narrative. Does it challenge or confirm the narrative? Based on the answer and based on the individual's experience and the flexibility or permeability of the liminal narrative filter, the transient narrative information will either be accepted or rejected. If accepted it may slightly adjust the narrative and if rejected it maintains the existing narrative's permanence. Transient narratives are accepted when they reinforce liminal narratives or identity. They are rejected when transient information challenges the liminal narratives or identity and are then seen as subversive. This leads to the information being discarded; sometimes as impure/sinful.

An example of the interplay between transient and liminal narrative is evidenced in the fight against ISIS in Iraq. The most popular narrative in Iraq in early 2015 and continuing to 2016 is that the U.S. (and Israel) created and is (are) supporting ISIS in combat operations. For the average American this is ludicrous. The U.S. identity and liminal narrative includes concepts of freedom, justice, separation of church and state, and humanitarian behavior. What ISIS stands for, as popularly communicated in U.S. media, runs counter to this U.S. liminal narrative thus this transient narrative is discarded because the filter does not let it through. Because the transient narrative was rejected there was no counter from the U.S. government in Iraq or beyond. It was simply deemed too ludicrous to comment on. In Iraq though, the narrative grew. Some say that the narrative started with the Iranians or other Shia militia groups. Regardless of where it started, by January 2015 everyone was saying it or thinking it – Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Shia, Sunni, Christians, Yazidis. It didn't matter who – they all were thinking it was true. Why?

A way to look at the Iraqi liminal narrative may go as follows. The U.S. hates Iraq. The average Iraqi in 1990 believed they were the pinnacle of Middle East might and civilization, and because of this Israel and the U.S. wanted to weaken and humiliate the great ancient power. Starting in 1990 U.S. forces began to harm their economy through sanctions. In 1991 the U.S.-led coalition destroyed much of their infrastructure and security forces through Operation Desert Storm. From 1991 to 2003 the U.S. and its coalition allies imposed one of the harshest sanctions regimes ever leveled against a country dramatically harming not just the economy, but all of Iraqi society. In 2003 George W. Bush continued what George H. W. Bush began by invading the country and destroying the government, throwing the country into chaos. Then after eight years of occupation, instability, and mayhem, and just as things appeared to be stabilizing, the U.S. withdrew, creating another round of confusion and turmoil. Just as the prime minister was getting his hands on the problems, which a Sunni would say were the necks of the Sunnis, in comes ISIS to create more catastrophe.

Americans may say this doesn't make sense because we are providing support for the Iraqi government. Why would the U.S. support both? The Iraqi liminal narrative about the U.S. includes U.S. Congressional testimony in the 1980s where it was revealed that the American government sold arms and equipment to both Iraq and Iran at the same time during the Iran-Iraq War – therefore the U.S. has a history of double-dealing. Of course when one sees images of ISIS fighters they are typically wearing U.S. made gear and driving U.S. made vehicles. The U.S. must be equipping them. This is photographic evidence of support to ISIS. American officials say that ISIS got this equipment when they captured it from the Iraqi security forces. There are Twitter images of ISIS fighters standing next to airdropped pallets from the U.S. and other coalition countries. This will be excused by saying the pallets were blown off course and intended for the Yazidis on Mount Sinjar or Kurdish fighters in the north. When Tikrit was retaken in May 2015 the *New York Times* interviewed a Shia militia fighter who told the reporter he saw the U.S. support ISIS fighters during the battle with his own eyes.

Iraqis glean further support for their narrative from the current 2016 presidential primary campaign. Democrat candidates and many in the current presidential administration often say that the Islamic State was created through the actions of President George W. Bush and the invasion and occupation of Iraq (2003-2011). In contrast, Republican candidates and pundits on the right blame the creation of the Islamic State on the premature withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq (2011) by President Barack Obama. In either case, all sides of the U.S. political spectrum feed into the narrative that the United States, one way or the other, created ISIS.

In sum, the liminal Iraqi narrative is that the U.S. and its coalition allies have a singular purpose of making the people of Iraq suffer. Additionally, the U.S. wants to protect Israel and keeping Iraq weak and divided by Shia and Sunni killing each other serves that purpose. The Iraqi people have seen what the U.S. does when it is serious about a problem – it deploys tens of thousands of forces and mountains of gear and material. That is not what the U.S. is doing in the fight against ISIS. The U.S. through its technology can control all of its actions and sees and knows what is happening throughout Iraq or so the narrative goes, and thus nothing happens by accident. Therefore, if bad things happen the U.S. knows it and can do something about it if so desired. Because ISIS is continuing to exist the U.S. must not want to defeat them as it claims.

The liminal narrative is what takes the transient narrative and makes sense of those events for most people. It is essential to understand the liminal narrative because that is what controls the filter to accept or reject the transient narrative messages sent.

How Do ISIS and Others Maneuver in the Narrative Space?

The narrative space has terrain including key and decisive terrain – words, images, ideas – that have greater value than others. It isn't truly separate though despite the depiction in figure 2. Narrative space, cyberspace, and the physical battlespace are all interrelated. The figures show narrative space separate to communicate that it is a domain that requires a separate and different way of thinking.   The narrative space terrain preexists the maneuver of ISIS and therefore has inherent value within the community in which ISIS seeks to attain a position of advantage. Terrain, in the narrative space, is not fixed. It can be altered by present words-deeds-images of any of the conflict participants.   In general, the terrain is primarily formed by the construct of societal identity and the

Figure 2: Narrative Space Has Terrain

liminal narrative. Identity related terrain is the least likely to change as this is created over generations and sometimes centuries of beliefs and common references and values. Liminal narrative and the terrain derived therefrom has a greater potential to change though this requires significant effort. Those conducting maneuver in the narrative space often seek to use the existing key and decisive terrain to their advantage and may also seek to adjust that terrain through the transient narrative messages and the linked words-deeds-images associated with their maneuver.
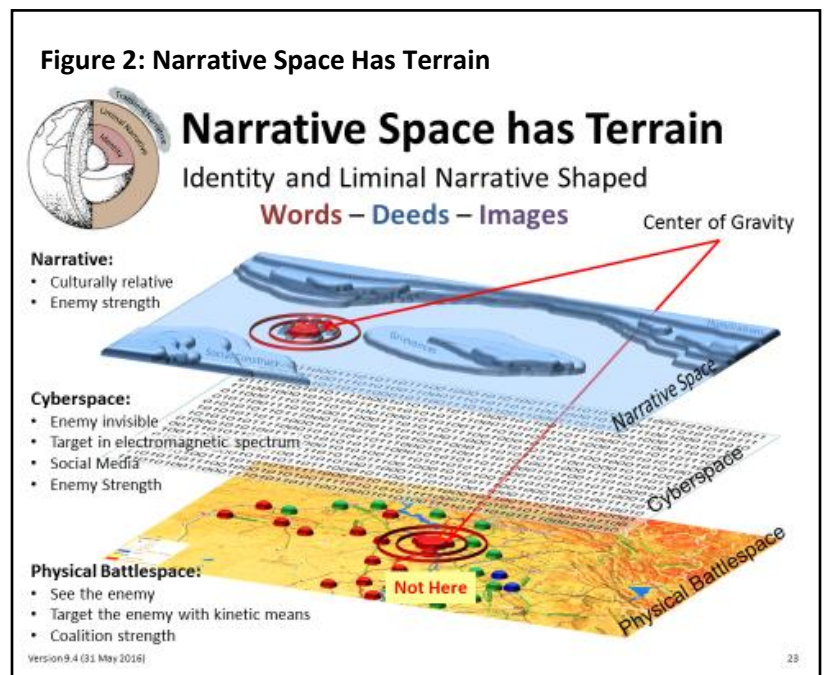
Maneuver in the narrative space is most successful as the actor increases influence through a

5

combination of effective use of ideology, engagement, and kinetic actions. In each case the actor weaves the elements of words-deeds-images.

The most important of the three or the decisive operation for ISIS is the ideology as this is also the decisive terrain. It is the liminal narrative of humiliation, disrespect, and dishonor heaped on Arabs and Muslims for generations. It is the holiness and infallibility of the faith and its founding leaders and the prophet. It is linking all of this to a reminder of a world of possibilities promised by those holy leaders. They will take Rome, they will control the world, and they will be the ones to usher in the final days. They are "Remaining and Expanding." The very use of these words is critical to communicating permanence and power. It is through ISIS that Muslims will regain their honor, their respect, and their pride. It is through ISIS that God will bless the world. The emphasis on remaining and expanding can be understood as a negative and a positive narrative element. ISIS plays on the liminal grievance narrative of Arabs and Muslims being humiliated to express the sense that now Islam is strong through ISIS and they remain in place as a strong power. They also have an aspirational narrative of growth to accomplish the prophetic vision of the earliest generations – they are expanding to fill the world. In short, they want to be perceived as being everywhere. They are the one and only authorized caliphate on the earth that acts as the governing body for the faithful of God. Their interpretation of Islam is drawn from those of the earliest generations of the faith which allows their narrative to connect to the historic past. They want their followers, their possible recruits, and their opponents to know that they are tapping into the greatest events, heroes, and accomplishments of the faith. If ISIS can be seen as an everywhere organization then it is okay for them to lose somewhere. They can lose Ramadi if they are everywhere. They can lose Mosul if they are everywhere. They could probably even lose all of Iraq if they are seen as being everywhere. So long as they are expanding elsewhere they can lose somewhere.

Remaining and expanding is unique to ISIS, but other actors have their ideological bedrock. Hezbollah uses resistance as its primary ideology as does Hamas though the two groups have specific interpretations of the similar theme. Russia draws on the identity and liminal narrative of an empire under siege and China as that of an empire resurgent. In each case the critical function is to connect the words-deeds-images to the shape and character of identity and liminally constructed narrative space.

The primary supporting or shaping operation is influence building through engagement. ISIS does this in three general ways. First is through face-to-face meetings: what the U.S. military refers to as key leader engagements. Here they use their grasp of the culture to develop relationships over time to facilitate future opportunities. Second is through media. This includes the use of social media, YouTube and similar video upload sites, internet posts, blogs, chat rooms, and email communication. This is the broadest of the three as the behavior can be broadcast or narrow cast. This involves franchisees, freelancers, and crowd sourcing as well as actual members of the organization. Third is through actions. This is similar to the secondary shaping operation, but it is also an element of influence building as well. This is not simply kinetic operations though they may play a part in building influence. Some examples will illuminate the meaning here. Destruction of artifacts in the museum in Mosul and at the archeological site at Palmyra are done to communicate both "Remaining and Expanding" as well as other decisive terrain of the Salafist ideology like the eschewing of idols and idolatry. The treatment of non-believers as chattel communicates the aspect of remaining and governance as well as the dominance of ISIS and their brand of Islam. The existence and actions of morality police also reinforce the rule of law and the idea of

Figure 3: ISIS Maneuver in the Narrative Space
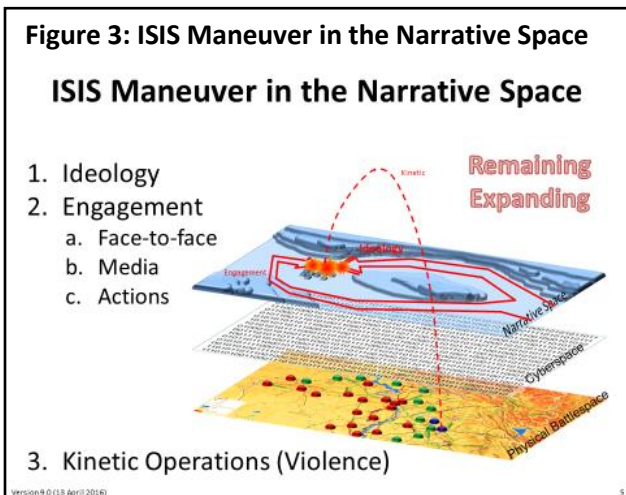
stability throughout the Caliphate. One of the stories promulgated by ISIS is when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was involved in a traffic accident and the other driver threatened to take him to court not recognizing him as the leader of ISIS. Al-Baghdadi gladly accompanied the other driver to court where the judge ruled against al-Baghdadi. This is an action that has great influence amongst populaces who believe the Iraqi and Syrian officials are all corrupt and against the people.

The secondary shaping operation is kinetic operations – acts of violence typically using the most modern weapons and capabilities available. These are done to add weight to the narrative and to the engagement. They are winning, they are sowing fear in the hearts of their opponents, and they are dominating the apostates and the crusaders. These have weight and are necessary elements because they reinforce the narrative and they provide resources useful in developing influence. Their violence is couched within their narrative. It is not a violence driven organization, but rather a narrative driven one. Yes, they kill by what many consider to be barbaric methods. The point of the barbarity is to gain attention such that they can drive home their primary message. It builds influence that reinforces the engagement and the ideology.

ISIS has been the example, but this theory applies beyond a single organization. Non-state actors as well as states are conducting similar maneuver in the narrative space to achieve their national or non-state interests.

Conflict Dialectic

Understanding the methods and motivations of ISIS and other current opponents requires a different conceptualization of the standard conflict dialectic. The western dialectic is characterized by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who posited the development of ideas through a thesis-antithesis-synthesis paradigm. In this method he suggested a collision of an idea (thesis) with an opposing idea (antithesis) that is then blended into a new and somewhat unique idea (synthesis). Carl Von Clausewitz is one of many prominent western theorists who represents the collision and blend aspects of the dialectic. He described war as follows.

> War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his immediate aim is to throw his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance.
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> War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.[4]

In this discussion the effort of direct conflict and even collision is made clear. Later Clausewitz continues with this comment.

> War, however, is not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass…but always the collision of two living forces… [T]here is interaction… Thus I am not in control: he dictates to me as much as I dictate to him.[5]

In this quote one can see an element of flow though it is a form of blending. Here is the Hegelian dialectic. The thesis of intent opposed by the antithesis of enemy intent which creates the synthesis of conflict outcomes. The end result of the collision of the two forces will be a blending of intended outcomes into a synthesis of results. In modern military parlance: "The enemy has a vote."

The eastern dialectic emphasizes flow over collision. Sun Tzu is one of the best known of these eastern theorists who suggests that one can and should seek to win without a collision at all.

> [W]inning one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the highest level of achievement. Subduing the enemy without battle, that is being the best of the best. Therefore, the best approach in war is to first attack the enemy's strategy. The next best

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[4] *On War*, Book 1, Chapter 1.2, page 75.
[5] Ibid, 77.

approach is to attack the enemy's alliances. The next best approach to that is to attack his army. The worst thing to do is to attack his cities.[6]

The preference of the engagement is to accomplish something very different in that the goal is to win by causing the enemy to believe they are defeated. The most literal example of the flowing style of this alternative dialectic is shown in the following quote.

> It can be said that the disposition of an army is like water. When water flows it avoids high ground and moves toward lower ground. The victory of an army comes from avoiding fullness and attacking emptiness. Water follows the ground in setting its flow. An army follows the enemy in shaping its victory. Therefore, armies do not have a fixed state or a constant form. One who can stay abreast of every enemy shift and change and gain a victory can be called divine. The five elements have no final relationship. The four seasons have no constant position. Days are long and short. The moon wanes and waxes.[7]

A similar logic was demonstrated by the advance of Islamic armies in the 7th century. The armies regularly sought to find weak spots at each level of war and to create opportunities by flowing around strength and drawing out the battles for days if necessary to create or exploit weakness. In these historic and sometimes mythic battles the Islamic warriors followed basic guidance given by the successor or Caliph himself to keep their route of escape open – the desert at their back. The Islamic State or ISIS did not base their current strategy on the writings of Sun Tzu or even Mao Zedong, but these East Asian writers capture quite succinctly the intent and design of the means of battle as demonstrated by ISIS.

This alternative dialectic is based on flow and in the context of this paper flow can be easily incorporated and understood as narrative. Both in the writings of those theorists and the practice of the ancient and modern Islamic warriors there is evidence of the importance of narrative.

Considerations for U.S. Maneuver in the Narrative Space

ISIS maneuvers in the narrative space. How does the west, and specifically the U.S. fare in this space? I have conducted an unscientific and anecdotal poll off and on for the last eight years or so where I ask people what is the positive U.S. narrative in this fight? The answer is usually – that al Qaeda or ISIS is bad and they need to be stopped. That answer is not a positive narrative. It is a negative one. When I point this out to the polling participants and I ask again for the positive narrative the response is typically one of silence.

In this competition of narrative we need to engage with our ideas or narratives. Ideas and narratives that will inspire peoples and nations to do the difficult things we are asking them to do. We are typically seen from the perspective of the Middle East as being about materialism and rampant sexualism. Consider images from the most popular television shows or movies. These represent in some ways a philosophy of eat, drink, and be merry. Thus the narrative that we broadcast to the world is that in America you can eat better, drink better, and be merry better than the rest of the world. In contrast, ISIS presents a message that they are the Army of God and that by joining them you are serving God and bringing about his divine plan. The average young person wants to have purpose; they want to have meaning. ISIS provides a contrasting alternative – fight for God or live in materialistic hedonism.

The recommendations below address all element of U.S. society and military as all of these are part of creating and communicating narratives and therefore help to shape and define the narrative space in which we all operate. Within the operational level three metaphors are offered to communicate

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[6] Sunzi. *The Art of War*. Translated by Gary J. Bjorge, 47–52, 59–62, 79–83, 91–95, and 103–109. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Department of Military History, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2005.
[7] Ibid.

different ways of thinking as to how the U.S. might conduct maneuver in the narrative space. This is not yet to the point of full operational application, but these suggest frames for the problem that may empower operational and tactical leaders to imagine other ways of conducting conflict against current and future opponents who function primarily in the narrative space. As previously noted this is not intended solely as an anti-ISIS discussion as the Russians and Chinese are functioning in the narrative space as well, however ISIS will be used as the example opponent throughout the metaphors.

It is essential that all of these need to be understood as linking, in concert, words-deeds-images. This is never only about messaging nor is it just about actions nor simply about better websites or videos or commercials. Everything needs to be supportive of the three-part braid: words-deeds-images.

Society

The U.S. has a profound narrative that resonates around the world. In general, it is that any person can come to America and there achieve her or his greatest potential. Immigrates still consider the U.S. to be the land of opportunity. Possibility, opportunity, and freedom to dream and achieve are all elements that sound old fashioned, but they have value and need to be communicated.

Requirement for maneuver in the narrative space.
➢ Broadcast and communicate the U.S. narrative.
➢ At a minimum, do not broadcast and communicate a narrative of the U.S. being evil.

Policy

The first element of national policy needs to be the narrative. Why is the U.S. engaged in a conflict? What are the driving interests that are being protected or advanced? What is the influence that needs to be enhanced at the conclusion of the violence? Answering these simple questions provides a useful framework for conducting maneuver in the narrative space. What has been articulated (2014-2016) so far in the conflict against ISIS does not meet this criteria. From the answers to these questions one can derive the ends-ways-means framework for basic national strategy.

Warfare will not return to World War II where the competition of violence was completely dominant of the competition of narrative. It is likely that warfare, from the U.S. perspective, will continue to be primarily defined by the words *by*, *with*, and *through*. Thus the partner's narrative space is even more important than that of the opponent.

Requirement for maneuver in the narrative space.
➢ Identify the narrative of the conflict.
➢ Identify the primary interests of the conflict.
➢ Identify the post-conflict influence desired by the conduct of the conflict.

Strategic

Influence is the combat power of importance in the narrative space. Influence means, in brief, getting a counterpart or opponent to want to do what you want them to do. Lasting influence is more than what can be produced through bribery or bullying which both can accomplish the desired endstate, but only so long as the resources are present. Eight and a half years of U.S. occupation, training, and joint operations in Iraq only went so far toward lasting influence. In part, this was because the focus of most deployed soldiers and leaders was on task accomplishment rather than on developing influence.

Achieving influence requires progressing a counterpart or opponent through several stages of thought for each discrete idea or concept: information – understanding – acceptance – advocacy. It is critical that the counterpart is intellectually moved from simple information to understanding and then

to accepting the idea as valuable and finally to advocacy for that idea. Depending on the idea and the counterpart this progression could happen in a single meeting or over dozens of meetings. The ideal of influence – advocacy – is our ability to get our "partners" to do what we want them to do, when we want them to, because they want to do it, and continue to support the idea even in our absence – becoming an advocate for that idea.

This progress includes the use of words-deeds-images. One must see and believe that what is said will be supported by what is done and shown. Conversely actions need to support the words expressed in communicating the narrative. This may be a long journey as the liminal narrative of the counterpart or the supporting population of the opponent may be diametrically opposed to the U.S. liminal and transient narrative. Thus the U.S. senior leader must reshape the terrain of the narrative space over time and consistent engagement.

In the strategic vision of these actions this is more than engagement with and intellectual movement of a single individual or small group of individuals. This is about shaping networks that, in turn, influence the influencers of the society. It affords the opportunity to reshape terrain by building and eroding as needed.

Requirement for maneuver in the narrative space.
➢ Conduct cognitive intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB).
  o What is the liminal narrative of the partner/opponent?
  o How is the U.S. transient narrative currently perceived?
  o How does the partner or opposing liminal narrative alter the reception of the U.S. transient narrative?
➢ Teach holistic understanding of environment.
  o Introspection
  o Information
  o Understanding
  o Empathetic appreciation
  o Empathetic expectation

Operational
Three metaphors are provided to address different possible operational approaches. Maneuver in the narrative space can draw some application and behaviors from maneuver in the physical battlespace, but in most ways one needs to think outside that physical battlespace conceptual box. The ideas below are offered to generate thinking rather than to specifically suggest solutions.

Metaphor 1: Flow

Because narrative can be seen as levels of current there is value in seeing the dialectic as a flow and not simply a collision. What follows includes elements of understanding derived from fluid dynamics. As none of these are complete it is acknowledged that they each have strengths and weaknesses that will not be fully addressed in what follows.

Western Dialectic. The point here is to address the opponent with behaviors that fit within current U.S. military doctrine rather than having to completely change our operations as well as our frame of perception.

• Dam – The western dialectic sees conflict as oppositional and confrontational and thus the first possibility is one of containment – to dam the flow of the opponent. George Kennan in his paper "Sources of Soviet Conduct" stated and implied that communist ideology is not compatible with human behavior and if contained it will be the source of its own ultimate

demise.[8] The same is true of ISIS. The specific interpretation of Islam that it purports is not compatible with Islam itself or Arab culture and if contained it cannot continue to exist for long.

+ Strength: less expensive and less resource intensive than full blown kinetic operations
− Weakness: time intensive and currently politically unpopular

- Change State – in seeing the opponent as a liquid then the options include changing the opponent either to being a solid or gas.
  - Liquid to Solid
    1. The first example of this comes from the Battle of Sadr City in 2008. During this battle the U.S. forces constructed a T-Wall along Route Gold to prevent the firing of rockets from Sadr City into the Green Zone. The construction of the wall created engagement opportunities for U.S. precision fires and Iraqi Army direct fires. The wall represented isolation for Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM). Both the U.S. and JAM perceived the wall in the same way and therefore JAM felt it necessary to directly attack the construction of the wall. This brought JAM personnel out of buildings and into areas where they could be identified, followed, and targeted.   This facilitated the rapid destruction of the remaining fighters and leadership. In many ways this was a battle of attrition as JAM lost nearly all of their fighters and all of their will to fight by the time Muqtada al Sadr announced a cease fire. By creating the wall the U.S. caused JAM to change from a fluid into a western-style military solid that could then be targeted and destroyed.
    2. The second example of this is at the strategic level and it is to legitimate the Islamic State. Make it a state player and by so doing cause it to function as a state on the world stage. This argument suggests that ISIS will gain elements that are targetable which it wants to protect.
  - Liquid to Gas – this is a fully kinetic solution. In essence, vaporize them.
  + Strength: this gets them to play our game. Because U.S. and coalition forces have less change to make this makes it easier to execute
  − Weakness: at least two of the above may be politically unpalatable and the third requires a different way to look at the enemy with respect to intelligence collection and operational design
- Absorb – Essentially what is being attempted here is to get absorbent material that will soak up the fluid so that the fluid is now in a manageable state where it is acceptable or removable. One example of this may be Muslim fighting Muslim.   In accomplishing this effort it would be essential to have the Islamic world lead the opposition and to get Islamic forces to be the primary face of the fight.
  + Strength: again the fluid becomes controllable and the U.S. is not the lead
  − Weakness: this is the least developed and needs more thought as everyone would agree, but it is much more complicated than explained here

Alternative Dialectic. This is a different way to address the opponent and would require greater change in U.S. military and government behavior to achieve success.

- Dilute – In neither of the examples below is this a removal effort, but an effort to make the problem tolerable. Does ISIS have to cease existing or simply moderate its behavior or be removed from urban areas? These questions need to be addressed in considering maneuver in the narrative space.
  - Overwhelm with narrative. If ISIS is pushing out a flow of filth into the environment that is equivalent to a garden hose then the U.S. needs to push out a firehose worth of narrative.

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[8] George F. Kennan, ""The Sources of Soviet Conduct" by X," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947: 566-582.

This is not counter-narrative. This is U.S. positive narrative – who we are, what we do, why we are good. Showing that Muslims in America are welcomed and able to worship freely, communicating the tremendous humanitarian support American citizens provide, and demonstrating the competence and capability of the U.S. government and military are all examples of ways to dilute the toxin of the opposing narrative.

- o Create a Solution – This is the process of making lemonade from lemons by adding sugar. What can we add to the mix to generate a tolerable solution? Of all the areas suggested this one requires the most thought and research as neither this author nor most pundits understand the issue sufficient to know the right substance to add. It is certain to be more or different than financial or humanitarian aid. This may be another case where we want Muslims leading the effort. Another way to see this problem is reversing Maoist actions where they slowly infiltrated Chinese Nationalist leadership to establish communist control. It may be possible to encourage less extreme Muslims to work with ISIS and by so doing change them from the inside. It is acknowledged that what is suggested here is very challenging and not simply a matter of pouring in a cup of sugar to fresh squeezed lemons and making a palatable beverage. Regardless, it is one, of many, options worthy of consideration.
- + Strength: reduced resources, positive message and effort that has benefit for the U.S. beyond the conflict zone
- − Weakness: this takes lots of time; requires coordination with civilian media organizations; the first elements to win over are local and regional partners – they have to believe the narrative before they will promote the narrative; and finally some element was tried by more secular Ba'athists who thought they could use ISIS to their gain, but instead were controlled by the group

Metaphor 2: Fighting the Hydra

The second metaphor is taken from the Greek myth of

**Figure 4: Fighting the Hydra**
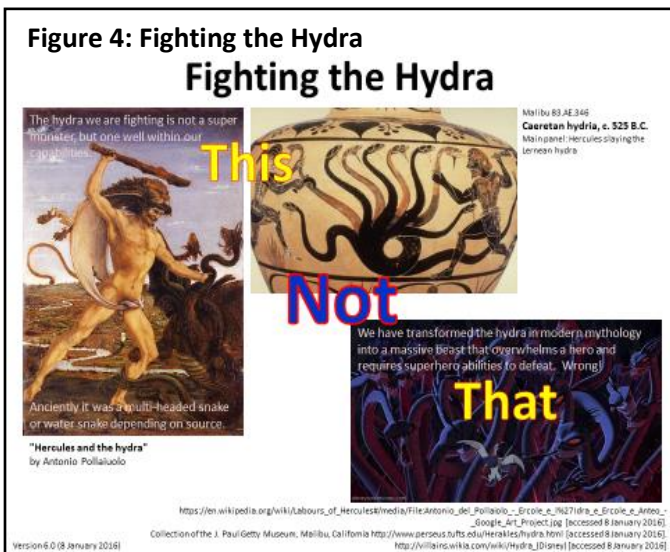
the 2nd Labor of Hercules or the Lernaean Hydra.[9] In this story Hercules fought a nine-headed serpent who replaced heads cut off with two additional heads. Hercules was also attacked by a giant crab that worked in coordination with the hydra. Thankfully Hercules had help in the form of his nephew. His nephew came up with the solution that the wounds of the hydra must be healed before they grew the additional heads. In the myth the "healing" came in the form of cauterization. A U.S. Army soldier, David Steger, used the word healing instead of cauterization which is informative for this discussion.

The hydra of ancient mythology was a snake no larger than a man. A task that was accomplishable by intelligent, strong, and innovative warriors. It was not the hydra of more modern Hollywood depictions – massive and overwhelming for all but a superhero. ISIS is like the hydra of mythology – manageable and beatable – and not the overwhelming threat and evil sometimes portrayed in the media today.

The extension of the metaphor is demonstrated in Figure 5 and will be further developed in a future product. As with all metaphors this is simply intended as a visualization and not as specifically operational.

Figure 5: Thoughts about Hydra(s)

Western Dialectic. The western way is to focus on cutting off heads as efficiently as possible. Remember that in the myth this simply produces more problems to fight. As this is a method already familiar to the U.S. military there is little here to explain.

Alternative Dialectic. The focus is on the healing. An example of this was an effort led in 2014-2015 by an Australian lieutenant colonel working in Baghdad with the coalition

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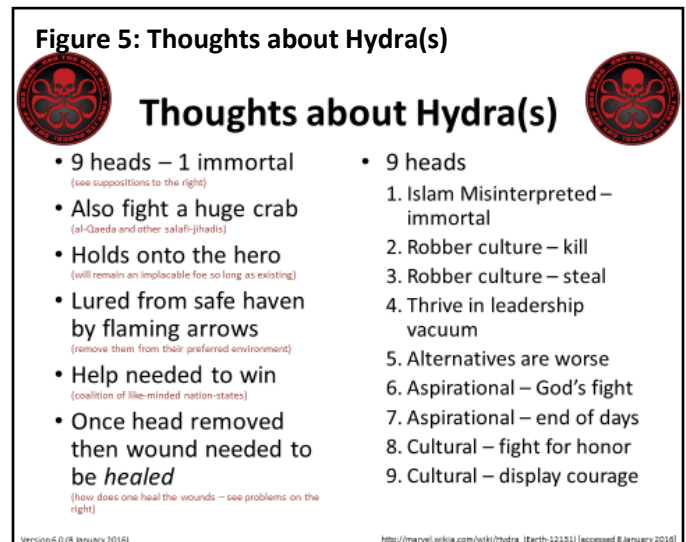
[9] The Second Labor of Hercules: The Lernaean Hydra from Apollodorus, Library 2, Book 2 of The Library, Trans. By J. G. Frazer at http://www.theoi.com/Text/Apollodorus2.html#5 [accessed 8 January 2016]. The story goes as follows:

[2.5.2] As a second labour he ordered him to kill the Lernaean hydra.105 That creature, bred in the swamp of Lerna, used to go forth into the plain and ravage both the cattle and the country. Now the hydra had a huge body, with nine heads, eight mortal, but the middle one immortal. So mounting a chariot driven by Iolaus, he came to Lerna, and having halted his horses, he discovered the hydra on a hill beside the springs of the Amymone, where was its den. By pelting it with fiery shafts he forced it to come out, and in the act of doing so he seized and held it fast. But the hydra wound itself about one of his feet and clung to him. Nor could he effect anything by smashing its heads with his club, for as fast as one head was smashed there grew up two. A huge crab also came to the help of the hydra by biting his foot.106 So he killed it, and in his turn called for help on Iolaus who, by setting fire to a piece of the neighboring wood and burning the roots of the heads with the brands, prevented them from sprouting. Having thus got the better of the sprouting heads, he chopped off the immortal head, and buried it, and put a heavy rock on it, beside the road that leads through Lerna to Elaeus. But the body of the hydra he slit up and dipped his arrows in the gall. However, Eurystheus said that this labour should not be reckoned among the ten because he had not got the better of the hydra by himself, but with the help of Iolaus.

105. Compare Eur. Herc. 419ff.; Diod. 4.11.5ff.; Paus. 2.37.4; Paus. 5.5.10; Paus. 5.17.11; Zenobius, Cent. vi.26; Quintus Smyrnaeus, Posthomerica vi.212ff.; Tzetzes, Chiliades ii.237ff.; Verg. A. 8.299ff.; Ov. Met. 9.69ff.; Hyginus, Fab. 30. Diodorus and Ovid multiply the hydra's heads to a hundred; the sceptical Pausanias (Paus. 2.37.4) would reduce them to one. Both Diodorus and Pausanias, together with Zenobius and Hyginus, mention that Herakles poisoned his arrows with the gall of the hydra. The account which Zenobius gives of the hydra is clearly based on that of Apollodorus, though as usual he does not name his authority.

106. For this service the crab was promoted by Hera, the foe of Herakles, to the rank of a constellation in the sky. See Eratosthenes, Cat. 11 (who quotes as his authority the Heraclia of Panyasis); Hyginus, Ast. ii.23.

headquarters at the U.S. Embassy. He advocated for a series of Iraqi government assessment and support teams to move in to areas liberated from ISIS. The intent was for the assessment teams to rapidly follow the leading Iraqi military elements to assess what needed to happen to restore the area. Their report would then inform the creation of a support team such that they would have the right set of skills and resources available once the area was secured. This support team would then rapidly restore basic functions (water, sewage, electricity, etc.) to the liberated area. Thus the government could rapidly heal the wounds of war before additional heads of insurrection could grow.

+ Strength: necessary action to ensure that the opponent will not simply bide their time until combat forces depart the area, arguably this is the only way this will actually work, the wounds must be healed for stability to exist.

− Weakness: this requires a level of competence and concern on the part of the host nation that most war-torn states do not possess.

Metaphor 3: Rubik's Cube

The third metaphor is that of the Rubik's Cube which is shown in the accompanying graphic. One side of the cube is the kinetic or conventional targeting fight. The other five sides represent the variety of narrative engagements that need to happen (domestic, opponent, local partners, regional, and global). As with a Rubik's cube one needs to solve for all sides simultaneously rather than trying to solve for one side at a time. If one focuses on trying to solve one side only even when the entire puzzle is nearly solved then the entire puzzle will be made worse as a result of completing the one side. This is what is happening with the current – mostly kinetic solution strategy. To make things worse, the narrative competition is not a fixed algorithm as is the Rubik's cube. It adapts in real time. What is meant is that if you have a Rubik's cube nearly solved and then walk away for several months or years you can pick it back up and complete the solution from where you left it. Maneuver in the narrative space has the cube changing colors and adapting over time. Trying to solve today's problems with yesterday's answers will be a recipe for failure. One has to adapt with and ahead of the opponent. This adapting algorithmic perspective means that one may never fully solve the entire problem.

Figure 6: Rubik's Cube Analogy
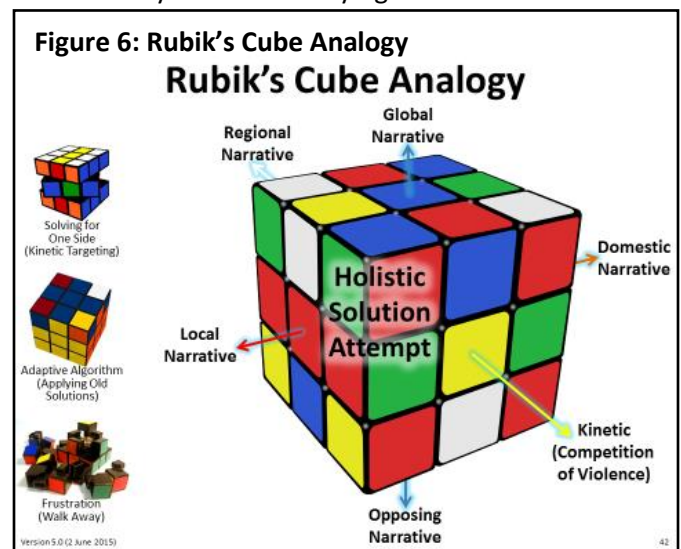
It is not the intent of this metaphor to make this seem impossible. I want to avoid the frustration that caused me, as a teenager, to break apart the Rubik's cube and then reassemble it. There is no political will to rebuild countries and little precedent of success for doing so. Those involved in the narrative competition must solve the cube as they have it, adapting and all. Even if it cannot be solved in its entirety, it is probable that it can be solved sufficiently well and more effectively for U.S. interests and influence to benefit.

Western Dialectic. The western way is focus in a single-side in a reductionist targeting model. U.S. military doctrine describes a single narrative for the commander rather than a multi-dimensional narrative. If the targeting and single narrative do not work then the solution usually reverts to the breaking of the cube and the need for rebuilding the entire structure. This method harkens back to the Marshall Plan and the reconstruction of Japan following WWII something the U.S. will probably not do again.

14

Alternative Dialectic. This is the holistic solution of solving the entirety of the cube. It is adaptive and consistent in application and thought.

Requirement for maneuver in the narrative space.
➢ Understand the opponent such that one can identify what narrative and physical places, ideas, and people can generate change in their conduct of operations.
  o How are they operating now?
  o How will they change if action X is conducted?
➢ Factor in to operational plans the necessity to heal wounds during and immediately following the combat.
  o What does the society require to heal the wounds of the conflict?
➢ Develop complex narratives that can communicate to the various necessary audiences (opponent, domestic support, partner, regional, and global).

Tactical

Kinetic targeting is a part of maneuver in the narrative space. MSG Sohail Sheikh says that to function in the current environment we need to change from shoot, move, and communicate to communicate, move, and shoot. Narrative comes first. In 2015 and 2016 U.S. special operations forces had success in killing and capturing senior ISIS officials. Military and political leaders communicated the results of these events as they happened giving the impression of a chain of events – one leading to another. Such actions allow opponents to adapt as events transpire. What was the intended narrative of these events? Did this communicate U.S. power and omniscience? ISIS has a primary narrative of being everywhere or remaining and expanding. In reality, the U.S. is the only military that can truly operate everywhere. It is the only military with the leadership, command and control, and logistics reach to conduct combat operations *everywhere*. What would be ideal would be conducting the raids mentioned above in a package – dozens of attacks conducted simultaneously across the breadth and depth of ISIS controlled terrain that is broadcast in as close to real time as possible. The words being that ISIS is not everywhere; the U.S. is everywhere. The deeds reflecting the same. The images released in close proximity to express the reality of a caliphate disintegrating.

Requirement for maneuver in the narrative space.
➢ Define a narrative under which all U.S. operations function.
➢ Sequence operations to support the narrative.
➢ Support the narrative with imagery released in almost real-time.
➢ Focus collection efforts where they matter (in rank order)
  o Social network of counterparts – who do we need to influence?
  o Influencers of host nation (media, political, religious) – who should we influence?
  o Opposing network – who do we need to kill/capture?
➢ Engage network at every level with coordinated message
➢ Demonstrate we are a partner – help them to be successful at what they want to be successful at
  o What do they want to do?
  o How can we help them?
  o Use our resources to facilitate the success and the relationship

Technical

Narrative applies just as much to soldiers walking presence patrols as it does to the Pentagon spokesperson or a Hollywood producer. Soldiers understanding of the narrative and the importance of

narrative empower them to support the words with their deeds and the images that all will see of their actions. The face of the narrative is typically a junior enlisted soldier. It may be a soldier saving a young child from a traumatic injury or it may be the image of a soldier with his boot placed on the chest or neck of a local resident. One image can enhance influence and the other can radically degrade it. Soldiers need to understand which one accomplishes which end and why. Cultural awareness training is not done to inform soldiers so that they can be more sensitive to the populace. Cultural awareness training is done to empower soldiers to engage effectively with the population to build influence and facilitate effective maneuver in the narrative space. All such training needs to be done to achieve that end.

Requirement for maneuver in the narrative space.
➢ The mission narrative needs to be placed in paragraph three of the operations order. It needs to be communicated at every level.
➢ Cultural awareness training needs to be structured such that attendees develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to conduct effective engagements to build influence.

Conclusion

Maneuver in the narrative space requires a transformation of thought in recognizing that the narrative is the decisive operation and that everything else is shaping to facilitate the decision intended. Even in this use of modern doctrinal terminology this probably miscommunicates the intent of the thought. Maneuver in the narrative space is not annihilation or decision focused. It is a competition of exhaustion.[10] It is about remaining and expanding and not about immediate accomplishment. Part of the challenge for the U.S. is that there is little intent to remain somewhere. In fact, the standard messaging is the opposite in that it communicates a short term commitment to solve a specific problem.

Why does this matter? We must fight ISIS and others within a context of understanding. Much as the ancient hero of Greek mythology – Hercules – had to heal the wounds of the hydra as he was in the process of removing the heads before more could grow back so to do we need to understand that continued kinetic efforts without healing degrades and destroys the very infrastructure needed for civilization to exist. We are thus creating an environment wherein our opponents can thrive and we cannot. We need and want civilization around the globe. They do not. They will use the tools of civilization, but if all the Twitter, and Facebook, and social media in the world ended tomorrow; if all the roads, bridges, refineries, and museums were destroyed; civilization would end, but the robbers would continue. Ignorance will continue to create a desert and call it victory. We have severely damaged or destroyed civilization in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Syria in this war. The robbers are growing there. We need another way.

We need to emphasize the importance of understanding and empathy: understanding that we are fighting enemies that challenge previously held conceptions; understanding that the opponent is motivated by an ideology and encouraged to great effort through powerful and deep flowing narratives; understanding the opponent in their complex context and the competition of narrative; empathy to develop influence with our partner; and empathy to identify our opponent's center of gravity and effectively engage and destroy it.

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[10] Hans Delbruck suggested that warfare moved between inclinations toward annihilation and exhaustion. In this exhaustion is not synonymous with attrition as one can attrit one's opponent without actually exhausting their will. Consider the actions of the U.S. vis-à-vis the North Vietnamese. The U.S. was successful in attriting hundreds of thousands of opposing fighters and yet it was the will of the U.S. that was exhausted. (Delbruck, *History of the Art of War: Volume I: Warfare in Antiquity* 1975, 135-136) (Delbruck, *History of the Art of War: Volume IV: The Dawn of Modern Warfar*e 1985, 422-433)

There is no question in my mind that ISIS is an enemy of civilization and the United States of America. They are also a group that does not have the wherewithal to pose an existential threat to the United States of America.   That said it is not in our interest to allow them to develop such a wherewithal.   It is also critical to note that others, nation-states, are also conducting maneuver in the narrative space and they pose a much more significant threat.   The information presented here is done so with the intent of communicating what one needs to develop the influence that allows one to achieve victory in the narrative space.

Polluted Water

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/next/tech/forward-osmosis/ [accessed 12 February 2016].

Lest a reader get too depressed by this it is worth noting that opposing narratives, like those of ISIS, are typically pollutants in a much larger stream of human thought, identity, and liminal narrative. There is no need to dam, absorb, or dilute all of the stream. It is only necessary to deal with toxic affluent. That is manageable. Hopefully the thoughts above communicate something useful in reframing the discussion.