

# Narrative Leads Kinetic Warfare

## **Battles of Mosul (2014 and 2016-2017)**

Iraqi security forces attacked a home outside of Mosul on 4 June 2014. As the gunfire raged around the home, the occupant, Najm al-Bilawi al-Dulaimi, who was the reason for the attack, blew himself and the home up. The next day ISIS<sup>i</sup> launched the campaign, then named after al-Bilawi, that captured Mosul in just six days. From there, they declared the return of the successor of the Prophet Mohamed and the governed territory for all true Muslims, or caliphate. More than two years later, the government of Iraq, supported by a coalition of nearly eighty nations, took 278 days to recapture Mosul. (refer to Figure 1) In the first instance, ISIS was outnumbered almost sixty to one, yet they took the city quickly and with little destruction of the infrastructure. In the case of the coalition, ISIS was outnumbered nearly twelve to one, and it required the damage or destruction of more than sixty percent of the city. The difference between the two battles of Mosul is the difference between narrative war and kinetic war.

The battle of Mosul in 2014 that began with an intelligence tip which resulted in the self-destruction of the ISIS leader in the city was a result of successful Iraqi security force intelligence work. By the evening of 4 June 2014, Iraqi police and other security forces in Mosul had every right to consider the day a success.<sup>ii</sup> ISIS, despite suffering a setback, continued their planning. There is discrepancy about the purpose of the attack on Mosul that began the next day. Was it punitive? Was it a part of the “breaking down the walls” campaign to release prisoners from the prison in Mosul? Was it intended to establish an ISIS foothold in the eastern part of Mosul?<sup>iii</sup> At this point, it is probably impossible to get a factual answer.<sup>iv</sup> Regardless, ISIS attacked several police and security force positions beginning on 5 June and continuing for the next several days.<sup>v</sup> ISIS demonstrated a mastery of shock tactics as they directed their early efforts against the hotel that served as the command post of the Iraqi commanding officer and detonated a massive truck bomb that effectively incapacitated the Iraqi defending leadership.<sup>vi</sup> As the attacks continued, ISIS seemed to gain greater and greater steam and the security forces began to buckle and ultimately to flee the city after less than six full days of fighting.<sup>vii</sup>

Mosul was a city of between one and two million people with a reported security and

military force of about sixty thousand men.<sup>viii</sup> The use of the word “reported” emphasizes that Iraqi security forces developed a habit of reporting ghost soldiers, or false soldiers, for the sake of bringing in extra cash for their reporting commanders who were responsible for distributing the monthly payroll.<sup>ix</sup> Additionally, many soldiers who had been showing up for duty did not remain, but had been fleeing the city during the previous days, weeks, and months as a result of an aggressive and brutally graphic ISIS engagement and media campaign.<sup>x</sup>

**Figure 1: Comparison of Battles of Mosul (2014 and 2016-2017)**

All numbers are estimates. The data for this table comes from a wide variety of sources and includes assessments and adjustments by the author. Simply stated, no one knows the actual numbers for any of these areas. This might be because the real numbers just are not known. It is also possible that either the Iraqi government or ISIS is inclined toward misreporting the numbers. Therefore, the numbers below are intended to provide a general tone of the battle more than precise counts.

In 2014, the attacker was ISIS and the defender was the Iraqi Security Forces. In 2016-2017, the roles were reversed.

| <b>2014</b>     |                                      | <b>2016-2017</b>      |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (4+ yrs prep) 6 | Days                                 | (2+ yrs prep) 278     |
| 1,000           | Attacking Force                      | 110,000               |
| 60,000          | Defending Force                      | 9,000                 |
| 1:60            | Ratio of Attacker to Defender        | 12:1                  |
| 105+            | Attacking Force Killed               | (possibly 3-5x) 1,400 |
| 6,500           | Defending Force Killed               | 8,000                 |
| 1:65            | Ratio of Attacker to Defender Killed | (~ 1:2 to 1:1.1) 1:6  |
| <1%             | Infrastructure Damaged/Destroyed     | >60%                  |
| Unknown         | Civilians Killed                     | 25,000                |
| 500,000         | Civilians Displaced                  | 900,000               |

ISIS probably attacked Mosul with forces initially in the hundreds and finally slightly more than a thousand.<sup>xi</sup> None of the numbers associated with the battles for Mosul, either in

2014 or 2016-2017, can be verified, which is true for almost every statistic associated with ISIS. These are estimates. Regardless of the exact figures, the ratios are staggering. (see Figure 1) This is profound displacement.

The numbers in Figure 1 compare and contrast the ISIS narrative-led attack in 2014 and the Iraq Army and U.S.-led coalition attack in 2016-2017. The ratios for the attacking Iraqi Army in 2016 are similar to what U.S. Army doctrine would recommend for an attack into a major urban area against a prepared opponent. This is what makes the ISIS success, while significantly outmanned, revolutionary.

Some claim the revolutionary success was a result of social media generating fear.<sup>xii</sup> The social media portrayals of ISIS murders, targeted killings, executions, and drone observation probably generated fears that the group was larger than what one saw. ISIS also built upon rumors and local personal networks through its hundreds of engagements, its efforts to coerce, intimidate, and threaten people.<sup>xiii</sup> People had heard what ISIS was doing, saw it on video, and received social media posts. All of this, in combination with aggressive and prolonged violence, caused one of the largest Iraqi cities to collapse and fall into ISIS control. In the process, ISIS freed the detainees in the Badush Prison, hundreds of whom joined ISIS immediately.<sup>xiv</sup> About six hundred of the prisoners were Shia and they were driven to the desert and executed.<sup>xv</sup>

The ISIS surge in Iraq, which had been ongoing since the middle of 2013, resumed after the capture of Mosul as the group continued to displace governance in Iraq. The displacement sometimes was as simple as government officials failing to respond to pro-ISIS rallies or processions through a city or village, as in Fallujah beginning in late-2013. It may also have been avoidance of ISIS activities, the homes of known ISIS members and leaders, or the deference to ISIS preferences or policies as regularly happened in Mosul leading up to the events described above. ISIS conducted attacks in Haditha, Abu Ghraib, Hawija, Samarra and other towns and cities before Mosul.<sup>xvi</sup> By the end of 2014, ISIS had total or near-total governance of the major cities of Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala, and Anbar provinces.

How did ISIS accomplish all of this success in days and week when state run militaries failed to demonstrate similar success in months? That is the question of 21<sup>st</sup> century conflict.

## Three Years and Three Philosophies

There are three years of conflict that fit very neatly in a discussion of philosophical approaches of military conduct: 1814, 1914, and 2014. (refer to Figure 2) Each of these years can serve as a sort of description of the philosophy of the period and the major wars associated: Napoleonic wars, World War I, and the Global War on Terrorism. The three philosophies of war are maneuver, firepower, and narrative. Each is expressed in a simplified form acknowledging that much complexity is ignored in this description.

**Figure 2: Three Years – Three Philosophies**

|                  |  |  |  |
|------------------|---|--|---|
|                  | 1814  | 1914   | 2014  |
| Philosophy       | Maneuver  | Firepower  | <b>Narrative</b>  |
| Exemplars        | Napoleon  | WWI, WWII  | ISIS, Russia, China   |
| Influence by ... | Concentration   | Targeting  | Engagement  |
| Maneuver is ...  | Position  | Physics  | Cognition   |
| Age of ...       | Battles   | Combat   | Conflict  |
| Must Defeat ...  | Armies  | States   | People/Beliefs  |

Maneuver war is exemplified in the behavior and performance of Napoleon Bonaparte. This great historical figure dominated his age and expressed a type of warfare that seemed to convey that wars could be won by winning battles. To win those battles, Napoleon concentrated his force at a decisive point or he directed the center of gravity of his force against the center of gravity of the enemy. In that era there was a decisive point or center of gravity.<sup>xvii</sup> A commander could concentrate or mass and then direct the mass of his army against the mass of

the enemy army and by doing so might win the battle, drive the enemy from the field, cause the enemy to capitulate, and win the war under terms favorable to the victorious commander. Success came in defeating the enemy's army.

Firepower war is exemplified in the conduct of World War I and World War II. Commanders sought to influence the enemy through targeting – the right violence directed at the right part of the enemy at the right time. The violence, so directed, was typically in the form of explosive force delivered by a wide variety of platforms from land, sea, and air. Both of these wars, and the wars that have followed this paradigm, include near continuous violence for long periods of time – combat rather than battle. Though there are things called battles in the two World Wars it is rare that those battles began the violence or that the violence ended with the conclusion of the battle. The violence simply continued. Death occurred before and after the battle as is indicative of a combat environment. Success came from defeating states.

Narrative war is exemplified by ISIS, though there are many other non-state and state actors that have applied this same philosophy of war. In narrative war, influence comes through engagement – typically person-to-person engagement, though this engagement may come through social media, violent interaction, or other traditional forms of influence operations. Success in influence comes through changing individual and collective cognition. The change from maneuver to firepower saw a spreading out of the peak violence from battle that was somewhat isolated in time and space to combat which is larger and more diffused across both time and space. Narrative war is even more diffuse than combat such that the violence is more accurately expressed as conflict that, at times, remains below obvious triggers for combat and may often be characterized as competition. Success comes from defeating people and beliefs. The difficulty of defeating an ideology in combination with diffused violence makes it more likely that the conflict is nearly constant – never ending – a forever war.

There is no pure maneuver war, nor is there a pure firepower war, nor is there a pure narrative war. (refer to Figure 3) In every case of violent conflict, there is some combination of the three. That was true thousands of years ago when the Assyrian military machine used a story of terror to influence populations to submit, capitulate, or return to the fold. The Assyrians used violence or the firepower of their day and they used maneuver, but predominantly they relied on narrative to maintain a multi-regional empire in an era before social media or the printing press.

How does this actually work?

Figure 3: Types of War

| Maneuver  | Firepower  | Narrative   |
|---|--|---|
| Annihilation<br>Decision  | <b>Hans Delbruck's Theory</b><br>Exhaustion (Physical)<br>Attrition  | Exhaustion (Will)   |
| Napoleonic Wars (III/IV)<br>Mexican-American War<br>World War II (1939-1941)<br>OIF I (until 15 April 2003) | Napoleonic Wars (VI/VII)<br>US Civil War<br>World War I<br>World War II (1942-1945)<br>Chinese Civil War<br>Korean War<br>Syrian Civil War | Assyrian Empire (circa 700 BC)<br>American Revolution<br>Vietnam War<br>Iranian Revolution<br>Afghanistan (1979-1989)<br>GWOT / Arab Spring<br><b>ISIS</b><br>Ukraine |
| <b>Theorists</b>  |  |   |
| ←<br>←<br>←<br>←  | — Antoine-Henri Jomini<br>— Alfred Thayer Mahan  | — Sun Tzu<br>— Mao Zedong<br>— Abu Musab al-Suri<br>— Abu Bakr Naji   |

### How Narrative is the Environment of Conflict<sup>xviii</sup>

Hans Delbruck expressed in 1890 winning strategies of war as either annihilation or exhaustion. He used two German words to express these ideas that literally translate to thrashing strategy or fatigue strategy. His word *ermattungsstrategie* (literally fatigue strategy and hereafter referred to as exhaustion) is often translated as attrition, but the argument here is that this translation is wrong as it fails to grasp the full concept of fatigue.<sup>xix</sup> Attrition is about the destruction of enemy capability and exhaustion is about the destruction of enemy will. Delbruck used the ancient Athenian general Pericles as an example of exhaustion as he sought to defeat the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War through a form of war without battle.<sup>xx</sup> Exhaustion, despite the sound of the word and the image it conjures of a person at the end of a marathon or some very long race, can happen quickly as well as slowly. Observe how quickly an outmatched opponent concedes a competition as a simple example. Once a person accepts that they cannot win then they move to exhaustion.

The end of World War II accomplished a couple of key things. One, it made war illegal through the acceptance of the United Nations charter.<sup>xxi</sup> Though interstate war did not end with the adoption of that charter, it is factual that interstate wars have declined and wars between Great Powers have essentially died out as have wars between Western democracies. What this means is that current conflict occurs between actors with significant obvious power discrepancies. Second, World War II introduced existential weapon capabilities that effectively created a ceiling for violence in armed conflict. Under the threat of nuclear destruction, all post-World War II conflict did and must take into account the limits created by violence potential and by international legal constraint. Firepower was ascending from World War I through the end of World War II to the point that firepower as manifested in nuclear weapons posed a global existential threat. That threat and the unique global community embodied in the United Nations generated a new global societal narrative that included the rule of law to protect all states from existential threat. Firepower and maneuver were constrained to limited aims or internationally approved international bounds. Such constraints empower the value of narrative.

Every governing power seeks to connect its story to the existing societal narrative. Essentially, they seek to establish story-narrative resonance. Even the best and most effective government cannot perfectly make this connection. The gaps between the governing story and societal narrative or the weakening of story-narrative resonance are disruption. Successful narrative entrepreneurs seek to take advantage of the dissonance and expand that disruption and to then interpose their own story between the government story and the societal narrative.

Disruption happens through outside events and through the internal efforts of the narrative entrepreneurs. An external event can include natural disaster, invasion, or economic collapse as well as many other sources. Narrative entrepreneurs recognize the created disruption and then seek to expand it through their own efforts of engagement, media, and violence. As they do so, these actors are also trying to connect their story to the societal narrative.

As narrative entrepreneurs expand the governing story-narrative dissonance into disruption this may facilitate opportunities to displace the government's control of social functions and resources. Social functions are those things which all societies have and need: religion, security, transportation, health services, etc. Displacement can happen as disruption grows such that local people see that value of the narrative entrepreneur's story over that of the government. It also can happen as the narrative entrepreneur brings in additional resources from

outside the conflict area. These outside resources may include foreign fighters.

The opening story of the 2014 battle of Mosul clearly shows the literal displacement of the Iraqi security forces as the disruption generated by ISIS created a sense of fear and intimidation in the minds of the security forces such that remaining at their posts was no longer a viable option – they needed to flee to guarantee safety. They needed to displace. ISIS was so effective as disruption that very little (relatively speaking) violence was needed to generate the desired displacement as tens of thousands of security force personnel either no longer reported to work or simply abandoned their posts. In effect, the months and years of effort prior to the actual battle on the part of ISIS created disruption over time that was cognitively exhausting such that when the precursors of the attacks began – the ISIS opponent displaced.

### **Narrative Shape/Structure as a Facilitator of Disruption<sup>xxii</sup>**

Narrative is more than a word or a description for how people process information. The U.S. military likes to divide the environment of conflict into domains: space, air, land, sea, and cyberspace. Oddly enough, there is no attempt in the military doctrine to explain what a domain is.<sup>xxiii</sup> A basic definition from the internet that provides a useful conceptualization is “a specified sphere of activity or knowledge.”<sup>xxiv</sup> This is a case where the etymology of the word is informative. The source word is French and means that which belongs to a lord. Following this logic, a conflict domain is an area over which a power wields controlling influence. For example, the sea domain is a domain because a naval power can wield controlling influence over it, or so the argument goes.

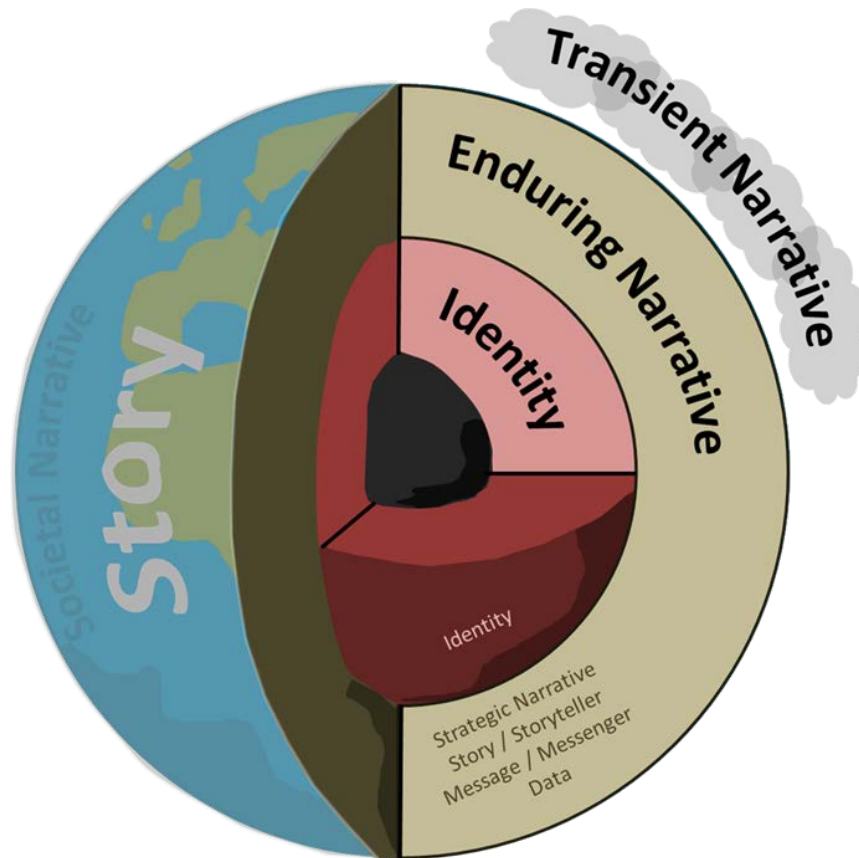
In this sense, one might question the U.S. military list of domains as at least a couple of them do not have, at the present and may never have, a controlling power.<sup>xxv</sup> For example, armies may control the land and navies might be able to control the sea, but it is debatable whether or not any force can control the air. It might be possible to control the air through a combination of electro-magnetic observation (radar), defensive systems (anti-aircraft missiles and guns), and aircraft. Who or what controls the internet or, more broadly, cyberspace? Can anything or anyone control space? Is it possible to do so through the same combination of tools as may be used to control the air?

Narrative may be a domain by this same reasoning. It is possible to control the narrative space as much as it is possible to control the land or sea. The term control may imply to much.



A good army commander doesn't actually control the land. He typically controls the ability of the opponent to act on the land or the ability of his own army to gain a position of advantage on the land. That said, all of the same attendant challenges associated with controlling the land or sea are also present in controlling narrative in that it requires an understanding of the characteristics of the land, an understanding of what portions of the land provide relative advantage, and an appreciation of the enemy intent and desire for action on that land.

**Figure 4: Geologic Metaphor of Narrative Space**



Narrative space has terrain, just as does physical space. Narrative space terrain is made up of ideas, concepts, humiliations, grievances, history, culture, language, religion, etc. that have different values in terms of shaping the thoughts, perceptions, and associated actions of people who reside in that narrative space. Narrative, for the purposes of this philosophical approach, includes social identity, enduring narrative and transient narrative. Figure 4 captures the imagery of this concept in the form of a geologic metaphor in that 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.

Enduring narrative is the crust that sits in between the core and the atmosphere of the transient narrative. It is the transition area between the daily narrative immersion and the core identity. Enduring 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.

It may be that every person has her own narrative; however, such an understanding is unworkable as no one can be expected to understand seven billion enduring narratives. The argument here is that the individual narratives coalesce into a collective or societal narrative that is comprehensible and the heart of this narrative domain.

### **Figure 5: Terrain Morphology Metaphor of Narrative Space**

The enduring narrative is a constructed environment. Terrain, in the narrative space, is dynamic and may be altered by the “words-deeds-images” of any of the conflict participants.<sup>xxvi</sup>

In general, the terrain is primarily formed by the construct of societal identity and the enduring 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. Enduring narrative and the terrain derived therefrom have a greater potential to change. Those conducting maneuver in the narrative space often seek to use the existing key and decisive terrain in this enduring narrative landscape to their advantage and may also seek to adjust that terrain through the transient narrative data/memes, messages, stories and the linked “words-deeds-images” associated with their maneuver.

Continuing with the geologic metaphor, narrative space terrain is constructed in much the same way as is physical terrain through basic processes of deposition, erosion and tectonic forces (see Figure 5), which creates a narrative landscape or narrative shape/structure. Understanding narrative shape and structure is narrative morphology. These processes, as with their physical counterparts, happen over long periods of time or can happen in violent episodic events. The primary shapers of this space are events, ideas (people-thinkers) and actions (people-doers).

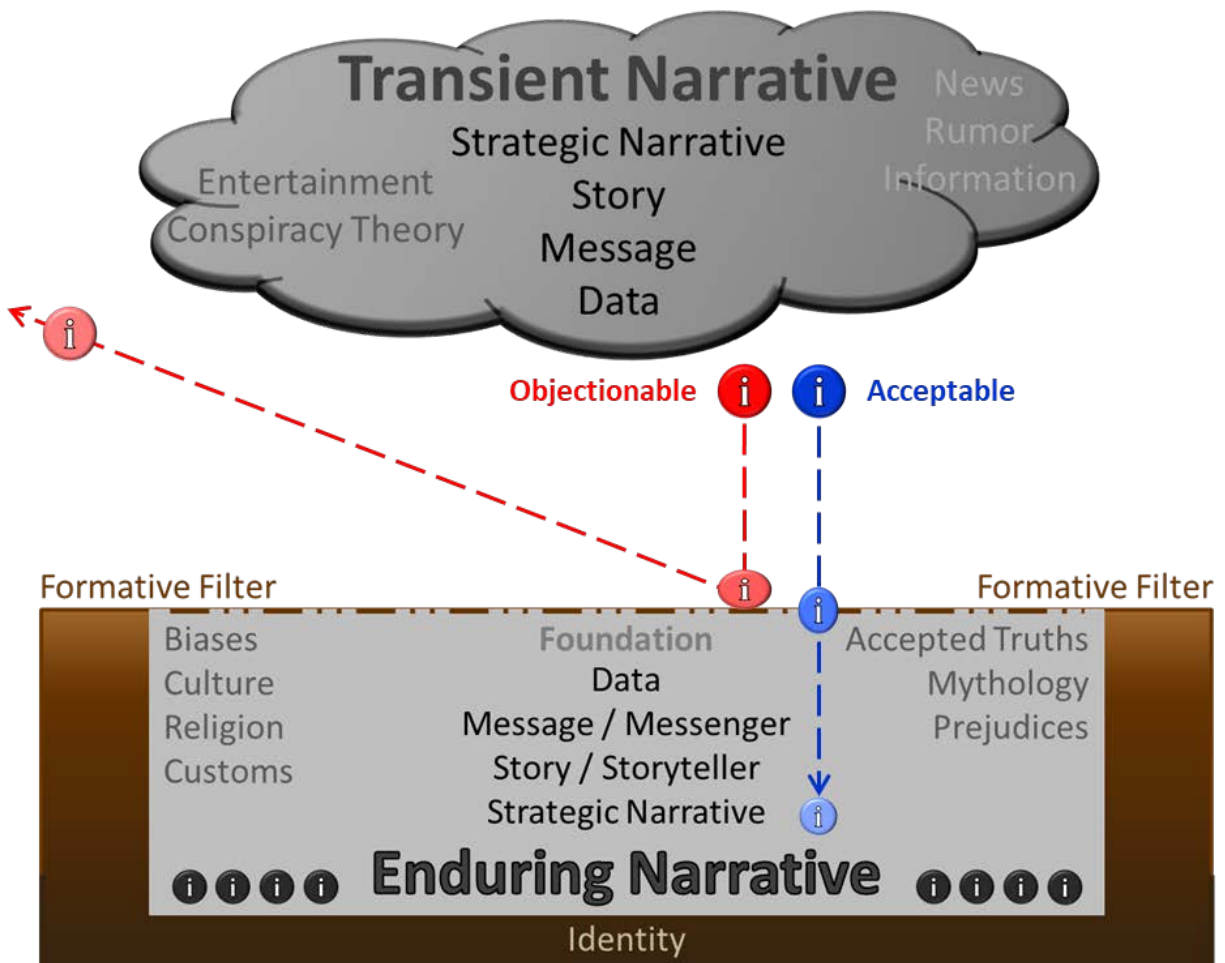
Deposition is reinforcement of the preexisting narrative structure. This is an additive process that is building, sometimes for generations, the landscape. Every time a parent tells a child a story or points to a specific event with the same conceptual moral note that proves the story true that parent participates in a depositional event. Each subsequent event or story deposits a new layer of narrative sediment upon the preexisting landscape, reinforcing the shape/structure.

Erosion is changing the pre-existing narrative structure. As with deposition, this can occur over a long time, although this tends to be more episodic than does deposition. The comparison of deposition and erosion does not necessarily mean that deposition is good and erosion is bad. One is reinforcing and the other is changing. For example, when a child arrives at school for the first time, they may be challenged with new ideas, new social norms and different information than what they learned at home. All of this is erosional, as it reshapes interpretations of the world. This is a natural part of growth and development. However, depending on the nature of the erosional event, this can also be traumatic. Violent crime challenges personal safety. Religious missionaries can change definitions of salvation. Invasion, whether physical or cultural, can reshape values and aesthetics.

The final process is tectonic in that, like physical tectonic forces, it can be abrupt and

significantly transformative in a single event. Also, like the physical counterpart, narrative tectonic events tend to work off generations of pre-existing stress that can be released in a single event. The single events are not transformative in and of themselves, but they are transformative, and sometimes radically so, because of the pre-existing conditions inclining the landscape toward change.

**Figure 6: Interaction of Transient and Enduring Narrative**



In each category, there are examples of people who are thinkers or doers who provide depositional, erosional or tectonic effects. There are also events, some natural and many man-made, that can provide the same variety of effects. The difference is in the speed of the effect. Depositional is the slowest and most consistent. Erosional can be either slow or fast, though it tends toward an opposingly similar consistent approach, as does depositional. The speed and

drama of change comes from the tectonic people and events.

The transient narrative includes and may be closely analogous to the ever-changing and ubiquitous information environment. It includes news, rumor, information, entertainment, conspiracy theories and other time-sensitive means of information or data flow. The transient and the enduring narratives have inverse hierarchies of components. For the transient narrative, the highest is the strategic narrative and then the story, the message, and data or memes. (see Figure 6)

The enduring narrative filters this hierarchy and reverses the order such that the first sorted are the data and memes and then the message, the story and finally the strategic narrative. The enduring narrative further filters messengers and storytellers for acceptability. It is given in this order as a meme or a piece of data is more likely to make it through the filter than is a fully formed story or strategic narrative.

When a person receives new information that has a potential impact on the narrative, that information is then filtered through the enduring 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 enduring 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 – as described later, these are personal examples of depositional or erosional events. Transient narratives are accepted when they reinforce enduring narratives or identity. They are rejected when transient information challenges the enduring narratives or identity and are then seen as subversive. This leads to the information being discarded; sometimes as impure or sinful. This is not simply an issue of truth or fiction, but more importantly about concordant or discordant transient narratives.

The enduring narrative has terrain. Not every word or deed or image has the same efficacy or significance to the culture or the society. Some are more significant – in essence, there is high ground and there is low ground as created over time by the deposition, erosion, and tectonic forces. That makes it more difficult for any single governing story to connect tightly to the societal or enduring narrative – there are gaps. These gaps are disruptions. As there are few states with a single, homogenous societal narrative then the variance in the narratives within the state also further expand the instances of disruption. The following example illustrates these principles.

*Example: The U.S. Created and Operationally Supported ISIS*

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

A way to look at the Iraqi enduring narrative may go as follows: the United States 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 United States wanted to weaken and humiliate the great ancient power.<sup>xxx</sup> Starting in 1990, US forces began to harm their economy through sanctions. In 1991, the US-led military coalition destroyed much of the Iraqi infrastructure and security forces through Operation Desert Storm. From 1991 to 2003, the United States 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.<sup>xxxi</sup> In 2003, President George W. Bush continued what his father 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 United States withdrew, creating another round of confusion and turmoil.<sup>xxxii</sup> 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 were providing support for the

Iraqi government. Why would the United States support both? The Iraqi enduring narrative about America includes U.S. Congressional testimony in 1987 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 as part of the Iran-Contra affair. Therefore, the United States has a history of double-dealing when it comes to Iraq. When one sees images of ISIS fighters, they are typically wearing American made gear (or something similar to it) and driving U.S.-made vehicles. The United States 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 Iraqi security forces. Most Iraqis do not know that the U.S. government sold or gave so much equipment to the Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>xxxiii</sup> There are videos showing Iraqi soldiers or militia members holding up American meals-ready-to-eat, or MREs, that they say they found in ISIS positions.<sup>xxxiv</sup> This will be excused by saying the MREs may have come from airdropped pallets blown off course and intended for the Yazidis on Mount Sinjar or Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq. When Tikrit was retaken in May 2015, *The New York Times* interviewed a Shiite militia fighter who said he saw the United States support ISIS fighters during the battle with his own eyes.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Iraqis glean further support for their narrative from political speeches such as those made during the 2016 U.S. presidential primary and general election campaigns. Democratic candidates said that the Islamic State was created through the actions of George W. Bush and the invasion and occupation of Iraq (2003-2011). In contrast, Republican candidates and pundits on the right blamed the creation of the Islamic State on the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011 by President Barack Obama.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In either case, all sides of the American political spectrum feed into the narrative that the United States, one way or the other, created ISIS.

In sum, the enduring Iraqi narrative is that the United States and its coalition allies have a singular purpose of making the people of Iraq suffer. Additionally, the United States wants to protect Israel, and keeping Iraq weak and divided by Shiite and Sunni killing each other serves that purpose. Furthermore, the Iraqi people have seen what the United States 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 United States did in the fight against ISIS. The United States, 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.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Therefore, if bad things happen, the United States knows it and can do something about it, if so desired. Because ISIS continued to exist for years after President Obama called for its destruction, then the United States must not want to defeat the group as it claimed.

*Narrative Space: Holistic Understanding*

Narrative space is not truly a separate space despite the depiction in Figure 7; rather, it includes cyberspace and physical space as they are all interrelated. The figure shows narrative space separate to communicate that it is a domain that requires a different way of thinking. Narrative space terrain preexists maneuver by any party in the conflict and denotes the inherent value within the community in which the competitors seek to attain a position of advantage. In effect, narrative determines what has value in the sense of what is the high ground and what are the resources worthy of conflict. Terrain, in the narrative space, is dynamic and nonlinear as it may be altered by the words-deeds-images of any of the conflict participants.

**Figure 7: Narrative Space: Holistic Representation**



In summing up this discussion on the construct of narrative, this is about the way humans process information and make decisions. The stories are the real world and they matter. The

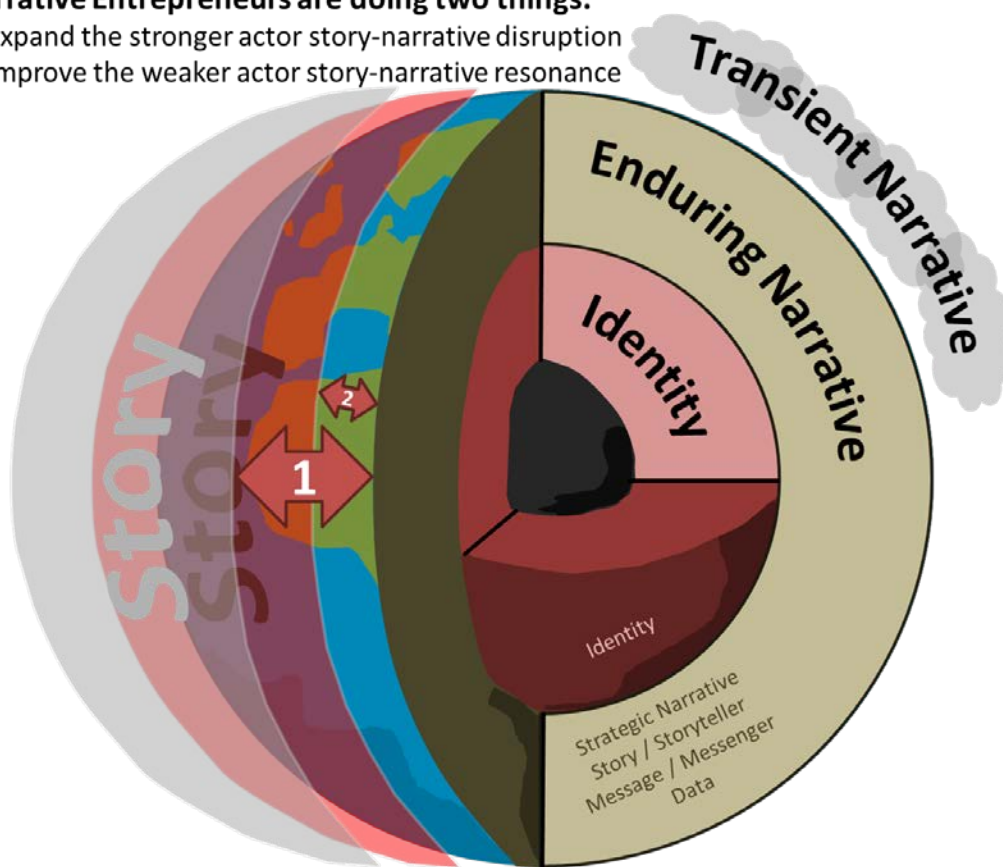


structure and organization of stories is based off the narrative shape/structure that gives shape to the stories and also provides purpose and direction to the characters in those stories. As noted in the figure where the story seems to sit nicely if imperfectly on the societal narrative, this story will always have some gap between it and the societal narrative. No governing story will perfectly adhere. The dissonance between story and societal narrative is the disruption that narrative entrepreneurs seek to expand into displacement.

**Figure 8: Geologic Metaphor Demonstrating Disruption Becoming Displacement**

**Narrative Entrepreneurs are doing two things.**

1. Expand the stronger actor story-narrative disruption
2. Improve the weaker actor story-narrative resonance



### **The Position of Advantage Provides the Place and Power for Displacement**

The narrative entrepreneur seeks to expand the separation between the governing power's story and the societal narrative while at the same time communicating clearly that its story more fully matches the societal narrative. (see Figure 8) The successful narrative entrepreneur does this by

controlling narrative high ground or using a narrative position of advantage. The U.S. Army places some emphasis and effort on defining and explaining a position of relative advantage in its key doctrinal manual called simply *Operations*. The use of the modifying term relative is important as conflict is regularly characterized as a dyadic event and therefore everything so described should be viewed in relation to an opposing party.

A position of relative advantage is a location or the establishment of a favorable condition within the area of operations that provides the commander with temporary freedom of action to enhance combat power over an enemy or influence the enemy to accept risk and move to a position of disadvantage.

Positions of relative advantage occur in all domains, providing opportunities for units to exploit. ... A key aspect in achieving a position of advantage is maneuver, the employment of forces in the operational area through movement in combination with fires to achieve a position of advantage in respect to the enemy.

Positions of relative advantage are usually temporary and require initiative to exploit. While friendly forces are seeking positions of advantage, enemy forces are doing the same. There are multiple forms of positional advantage that provide opportunities to exploit. ... Examples of positional advantage include—

- Legitimacy, ideas, and popular perception (including what is good versus bad, accepted versus opposed, and a believable narrative).
- Moral (including alignment of words and deeds, just and unjust, and international support).
- Will (including doing what must be done, continuing as long as it takes, and maintaining support from domestic leaders).<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Maneuver is the combination of movement and fires. For the sake of narrative war, fires may be a combination of violence, social media, and historical and contextual understanding or words-deeds-images. Such an appreciation was shown through the attack on the al-Askari Shrine in Samarra, Iraq in 2006.<sup>xxxix</sup> To appreciate the targeting of this shrine it is important to recognize the narrative significance of the shrine. The shrine is named for Ali al-Hadi and his son Hasan al-Askari who are known as the two Askaris and who are revered by those who adhere to Twelver Shia as the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Imams. The 12<sup>th</sup> Imam, for whom the sect is named,

is believed to have gone into occultation from this location and that he will return from occultation in the end days to this shrine. So, this shrine is really the source of the name of the largest sub-group of Shia and is also deeply connected to the eschatology of that sect. There are few other shrines in Shia Islam that are equally significant. The ability to harm such a place is attacking a narrative position of relative advantage.

The bombing of the Al Askari Shrine, on 22 February 2006, initiated a bloody civil war between Sunni and Shiite throughout Iraq, but primarily in Baghdad. Prior to the U.S. invasion and the insurgency that rose in opposition to it, Iraq was relatively nonsectarian and certainly did not include the torture and slaughter of members of other sects by private citizens – torture was reserved for Saddam’s regime. Many Iraqis were married across sectarian lines and most Iraqi tribes included families from both Sunni and Shiite sects. The transformation of this stable environment to one of bloody sectarian violence took only a matter of months. Comments by Iraqis in 2016 that they could not trust members of other sects as ISIS governed large portions of the country were relatively new and unique in Iraqi history.<sup>x1</sup> Iraqis had not been killing each other for hundreds or thousands of years. This sectarian murder started in 2003 and grew rapidly over time due to words-deeds-images in the narrative space that both erupted and shook the existing societal norms, eroded old nonsectarian attitudes and then deposited notions of fear and loathing, sowing distrust between the communities. This all happened within months and years. Narrative space terrain can change and evolve rapidly. Iraq provides a sad example of such transformation.

From 2006 to 2011, the U.S. government, through investment of personnel, equipment and money, also changed the Iraqi security forces and the trust with the populace for the better. The events and attitudes associated with the “surge” is an example of positive change through hard work to first erode the negative narrative landscape and then deposit along favorable lines for the United States, coalition forces, and Iraqi security forces. Although there are critics of this example, it is difficult to argue that violence was not reduced and trust not increased between the Iraqi people and their security forces.<sup>xii</sup> Narrative terrain can be shaped and changed by both indigenous and foreign thinkers, doers and events. And it doesn’t always take decades.

This transformation was made possible over such a short period of time because of the ability to identify and use relative positions of advantage within the narrative space. ISIS used a characterization of the U.S. as a Roman-crusader because those were terms that resonated with

the Iraqi societal narrative of an oppressive power against Muslims that existed in the past and one that was prophesied to conduct operations in the end of days. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the chaos that followed was spun throughout the Islamic world as a sign of the end of days and the rapidly approaching battle to be fought at Dabiq (or Amaq).<sup>xlii</sup> This was the apocalyptic battle where the army of the righteous would fight the Roman-crusaders and be led to victory by Jesus. The locations, the events, the opposing powers fit within the societal narrative.

Relative positions of advantage within the narrative space matter.

### *Displacement: America 2020*

I have been reticent to bring up the events of the late Spring and Summer of 2020 as I want to avoid politization of these ideas; however, the events as part of the COVID-19 pandemic and the American protests and riots provide fantastic examples of these same concepts. In effect, America had, as do all large and heterogenous countries, multiple societal narratives. One of those narratives was encapsulated in *The New York Times Magazine* “1619 Project” that was first published in August 2019. The most extreme assertion of that project was that America was founded on slavery and racism. This narrative runs counter to the more generally accepted narrative prominent since the 1960s that the United States was founded on idealist principles that have yet to be fully realized.<sup>xliii</sup> One narrative expresses a positive and aspirational American dream and the other expresses that the United States system has been, from its conception, tainted by foundational problems of racism. The death of George Floyd while under police authority in Minneapolis, Minnesota on 25 May 2020 generated a variety of stories concerning the use or abuse of police authority, the failure of the government to meet the needs of citizens, and the role of race in both. The words and phrases used connected the various stories to the competing societal narratives and served to separate groups or displace authority from dealing with those who defaced or damaged public property. Individuals and groups protested and some attacked buildings and statues as symbols that were relative positions of advantage – government facilities; police and police precincts; and statues of presidents, generals, Confederate leaders, etc.

Almost everyone agreed that what happened to George Floyd was a miscarriage of justice. However, the acts observed and reported by many rapidly moved away from points of

narrative agreement toward symbols and positions of relative advantage that were more extreme and that served to displace authority. The existence of the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (later named the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest and the Capitol Hill Organized Protest) that existed across several blocks of downtown Seattle, Washington from 8 June to 1 July 2020 was one of the most extreme examples of displacement. The people that established this zone supposedly outside local, state, and federal government authority used the disruption in the government story-narrative resonance to expand that to literal and physical displacement of police and government authority and services from the area.

In these American events, the conduct of maneuver in the narrative space is clear as the hierarchy of narrative structures exist in the form of memes, messages, stories, strategic narratives, and societal narratives clashed. Different people saw the same things and interpreted those things in radically different ways. Almost all Americans viewed the death of George Floyd while under police authority as heinous. Because of the narrative of some, this act demanded protest. Some believed it demanded revolution. Some believed it demanded reform and retraining of police. The societal narrative accepted by any given person drove what stories were accepted, what memes inspired action, and what messages to spread by that person. The recorded and broadcast death of an African-American man served as a powerful, destructive, and transformational relative position of advantage.

#### *Displacement: The Deceptive Media Halo*

In the book, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, written under the pseudonym Abu Bakr Naji in 2004, the community of believers of Islam and those willing to fight for Islam for whom the book was written are warned against the power of the deceptive media halo of the Russians and the Americans.<sup>xliv</sup> The term deceptive media halo is a fascinatingly poetic and artistic term. I recommend that a reader consider the halos of Renaissance art and the purpose of that halo. Halos were typically painted around the head or around the body of saints or holy figures so that the viewer of the art clearly understood who was being represented in the artwork. In contemporary sense this halo represents holiness or purity. In a more relevant sense to the artists painting the work and to Abu Bakr Naji, the halo represented power. Yes, it denoted purity and holiness. That purity and holiness served as a connection to God. Connection to God affords power and ability to accomplish one's objectives

as expressed by Naji.

There is no doubt that the power which God gave to the two superpowers (America and Russia) was overwhelming in the estimation of humans. However, in reality and after careful reflection using pure, human reason, (one comes to understand that this power) is not able to impose its authority from the country of the center – from America, for example, or Russia – upon lands in Egypt and Yemen, for example, unless these (latter) countries submit to those powers entirely of their own accord. It is correct that this power is overwhelming and that it seeks help from the power of local regimes controlled by proxies [*al-wukalā'*] who rule the Islamic world. Yet all of that is not enough (to completely control the satellite states). Therefore, the two superpowers must resort to using a deceptive media halo which portrays these powers as non-coercive and world-encompassing, able to reach into every earth and heaven as if they possess the power of the Creator of creation.

But the interesting thing that happened is that these two superpowers believed, for a time, their media deception: that they are actually a power capable of completely controlling any place in the entire world, and that (this power) bears the characteristics of the power of the Creator. According to the media deception, it is an all-encompassing, overwhelming power and people are subservient to it not only through fear, but also through love because it spreads freedom, justice, equality among humanity, and various other slogans.<sup>xlv</sup>

The reason that Abu Bakr Naji uses the adjective deceptive in his description of the media halo is that he is expressing that Russia and America are not pure and holy. They do not have connection to God. They are not filled with the power of God. It is the media that generates this false halo effect as it shows the powerful and technologically advanced countries as being better because of their material wealth and their, from Naji's perspective, false claims of support for concepts of human rights and justice. Naji recognizes that this deceptive media halo affords the opponents of al-Qaeda a position of relative advantage – the object of maneuver.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Hence, it is incumbent on those fighting such powers that they displace them from this position of relative advantage so that the contest is waged more appropriate to the Islamists.

From Naji's perspective, his narrative is naturally superior. It is imbued with power because it comes from and is directly connected to God.

Narrative war is not necessarily won through control of hilltops or river crossings. It is won by controlling the narrative space in the form of the social functions: the shrines, symbols, and temples that dominate the societal narrative. One does not need to control everything, just what matters. In an overly simplified explanation, Napoleon could defeat a superior force using the maneuver philosophy of war by defeating the right part of the enemy which led to the disintegration of the enemy army and victory. The firepower philosophy led to a more attritional approach to war – the destruction of large portions of the opposing military and infrastructure – such that the enemy could not sustain war. Narrative war does not need to displace the opponent from every federal building or remove every statue or capture every city. ISIS caused displacement of a massive security force from Mosul because it generated a sense of power and commitment that communicated a capability much greater than reality. It worked and it took the city.<sup>xlvii</sup>

### **Exhaustion is the Success Mechanism (Strategy)**

How do you plan to win? What is your strategy? I have asked dozens, maybe hundreds, of students this question over the years that I have taught in professional military education. The response is often confusion. The confused students do not know what I mean. This is, in part, because they have been taught that strategy is fundamentally an accounting or bookkeeping exercise – a balancing of ends, ways, and means. It is about making sure that the withdrawals associated with the desired endstate or the ends of the problem are matched up with the deposits of the associated resources needed and available to accomplish the ends. These resources are the means. The final part is the method or way to accomplish the endstate. Because, in the U.S. military we have already accepted that the right way is a way of firepower or targeting then there isn't much discussion on the methodology.

Strategy might be about making sure that the ends, ways, and means are appropriately in line with each other; however, the methodology should be open for question. A simple way to look at the available methods comes from Antulio J. Echevarria II's book *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction*. He offers ten strategies for fighting a war and he provides them in five couplets.<sup>xlviii</sup> One of his five couplets is attrition and exhaustion. There is a lot more that could

be said about strategy, but Echevarria, in combination with Delbruck, provides enough to say that exhaustion is the active strategy for narrative war.

Abu Bakr Naji illuminates the problems faced by any weaker power as it fights a stronger power. He says that there are three elements of the stronger power: centralization, overwhelming military power, and the deceptive media halo.<sup>xlix</sup> These three reside in a cohesive story. As weaker powers look at the U.S., as Naji explains, they see a large, powerfully controlled central authority, but with a variety of competing sub-groups. The only thing that centralizes the competing groups is a cohesive story. That story must be attacked and forced to lose coherence. Naji provides a level of detail as he expands on this concept.

What if this assisting element is the decree of God which He ordained in order to act upon these three axes? It would not only work to activate the latent elements of cultural annihilation but confront the military power with **exhaustion**. This confrontation and **exhaustion** directly affects the third axis, which is the deceptive media halo. It removes the aura of invincibility which this power projects, that nothing at all stands in front of it.

This is exactly what happened to the Communist superpower when it was put in a military confrontation with a power weaker than itself by several degrees; it was not even comparable. However, (the weaker power) succeeded in **exhausting** it militarily and, even more important, it activated the elements of cultural annihilation in (the superpower's) homeland:

- The dogma of atheism versus belief systems that believe in the next life and a God.
- Love of the world, worldly pleasures, and opulence versus individuals who had nothing to lose.
- Moral corruption, the least manifestation of which was that Russian soldiers or officers returned (home) – if they returned – and found that their wives had a child or relationship with someone else.
- Social iniquities clearly floated to the surface when the economic situation weakened because of the war. Then when money becomes scarce and monetary crises begin, the major thieves appear, especially if accurate accounting [?] begins.



Additionally, note that the economic weakness resulting from the burdens of war or from aiming blows of vexation (al-nikāya) directly toward the economy is the **most important element of cultural annihilation** since it threatens the opulence and (worldly) pleasures which those societies thirst for. Then competition for these things begins after they **grow scarce due to the weakness of the economy**. Likewise, social iniquities rise to the surface on account of the economic stagnation, which ignites political opposition and disunity among the (various) sectors of society [literally "social entity"] in the central country. (bold type added)<sup>1</sup>

Abu Bakr Naji's assertions express the plan for defeating the super powers. One, they are without the power of God. Two, the population important to the Muslims and the population important to the super power are deceived by the media halo that surrounds the super power and imbues it with powers in the eyes of the people. Three, the way to defeat this super power is to stay in the fight regardless of the immediate results. Remaining in the fight allows for exhaustion to occur. Exhaustion, in the expression of Abu Bakr Naji, is the way to defeat the media halo. The previous quote, given in some length, allows for a reader to understand the supporting logic applied. The mujahidin that defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989 did so because they stayed in the fight and revealed, over time, the moral weakness of the Soviet Union leading to its ultimate collapse. I expect that ISIS and other like-minded thinkers will be saying in 2020 that the same is true of America as it admitted defeat by cutting a deal with the Taliban in early 2020 only to have America torn apart with political dissent and division later that same year.

The following paragraph from Naji in combination with the last paragraph of the preceding quote provide insight into the total vision of this program. The defeat mechanism of exhaustion is not to be provided by the direct actions of the mujahidin themselves. Rather, the exhaustion comes from a third order effect. The first action is that the mujahidin attack a type of target. The first order effect is that the powerful actor responds to that attack. The second order effect is that the powerful actor and its allies fortify similar types of targets expended resources in the form of manpower, salaries, infrastructure improvements, technology, etc. All of these improvements cost lots of money. The third order effect is the economic drag and eventual

collapse of the powerful states under the economic weight of their actions to defend against future attacks.

Diversify and widen the vexation strikes against the Crusader-Zionist enemy in every place in the Islamic world, and even outside of it if possible, so as to disperse the efforts of the alliance of the enemy and thus drain it to the greatest extent possible. For example: If a tourist resort that the Crusaders patronize in Indonesia is hit, all of the tourist resorts in all of the states of the world will have to be **secured by the work of additional forces**, which are double the ordinary amount, and a **huge increase in spending**. If a usurious bank belonging to the Crusaders is struck in Turkey, all of the banks belonging to the Crusaders will have to be **secured in all of the countries** and the (economic) **draining will increase**. If an oil interest is hit near the port of Aden, there will have to be **intensive security measures put in place for all of the oil companies**, and their tankers, and the oil pipelines in order to protect them and **draining will increase**. If two of the apostate authors are killed in a simultaneous operation in two different countries, they will have to secure thousands of writers in other Islamic countries. In this way, there is a diversification and widening of the circle of targets and vexation strikes which are accomplished by small, separate groups. Moreover, repeatedly (striking) the same kind of target two or three times will make it clear to them that this kind (of target) will continue to be vulnerable. ... Hitting economic targets will force (the enemy) to goad the regimes, who are (already) exhausted from protecting the other remaining targets (economic or otherwise), into pumping in more forces for its protection. **As a result, febleness will start to appear in their forces**, especially since their forces are limited, for there is a rule for the regimes of apostasy that says: police forces and the army in general, and the forces<sup>li</sup>

The key to exhaustion is that this is economic exhaustion rather than direct military or security exhaustion. This is a long game. As America pulls out of Iraq and Afghanistan and other countries throughout the Middle East and other parts of the world, it dispels the deceptive media halo. America's own actions, so the argument goes, are proof of the proposition that

America is not all powerful. Again, international news coverage of Americans tearing their own cities apart serves to provide support to this extremist story of success. This empowers people to stay in the fight and concomitantly drags out the fighting and defensive measures such that they collapse the economies of all those in opposition to the mujahidin.

This expression of exhaustion may be directly connected to the actions of a specific type of actor; however, one can observe similar behaviors demonstrated in different actors across the globe: state and non-state alike. North Korea, Iran, China, and Russia all seek to play long games that are consistent drains on the American economy while also conducting a variety of attacks that either generate, encourage, or magnify unrest in America or attack and weaken the faith in the American political process. If America, or the West more broadly, is focused on problems at home then it won't be willing or able to conduct freedom of navigation exercises, have the consensus to deter nuclear proliferation, or to oppose arguably insignificant territorial expansion.

## **Solutions**

This section is short as the answer to the question – what kind of solutions are there? – is best answered with, it depends. The things on which such an answer depends includes the audience, the purpose of the weaker organization, the intent of the stronger actor action, and many others. Some general thoughts are still informative.

It all starts with narrative morphology. This is the study and understanding of the shape/structure of narrative space. Several key parts of narrative morphology follow. First, story-narrative resonance is a thing and it needs to be recognized and understood. Below are some questions that address how one can look at the dynamics in a specific country with which a stronger actor is or will interact.

- What is the societal narrative?
- What is the governing coalition story?
- What generated the disruption in the story-narrative resonance?
- Is the disruption increasing or reducing?
- Is the governing story desirable?
- If no, can it be reasonably changed and maintain governance?

- How can the intervening stronger actor positively affect the story-narrative resonance?
- What is the weaker actor story?
- Why is that story resonating with the societal narrative?
- How can the intervening stronger actor negatively affect the story-narrative resonance?

Second, significant disruption leads to displacement. The point at which disruption turns to displacement can vary wildly. For example, Hezbollah versus the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, U.S. operations in Afghanistan, and ISIS in Iraq involved the intervention of some level of foreign entity that created the displacement of local governance when each intervened. How did disruption lead to displacement in the Russian invasion and takeover of Crimea? At what point will China's disruptive conduct globally and in the South China Sea displace the U.S. Navy and other international actors from asserting basic norms of behavior? It is important to develop greater understanding of when disruption facilitates displacement and whether or not it is consistent. Foreign invasion or intervention is an obvious point of displacement as the government is literally no longer in control of an area of its own country. The cases previously mentioned also give examples of non-invasion displacement through consistent government failure to deliver on the basic expectations of citizens extant from the societal narrative. For example, Lebanon did not provide social services to the Shia, the Hamid Karzai government could not provide sufficient security forces nor could it control the Americans operating in Afghanistan, and Nuri al-Maliki persecuted Sunni Iraqis to the point that they no longer felt a part of Iraq. Such disruptions easily facilitated moves toward displacement. One point of note is that fractured governments seem to be easier to displace than would be a unified government. Hezbollah, the Taliban, and ISIS have all been harder to remove than were the governments that those actors displaced.

Third, exhaustion comes as resilience weakens. Resilient societies have stories, and probably master narratives, that include overcoming adversity. It is built in that the society deals with hard times and maybe existential threats and continues to rebuild and improve. Most long-lasting societies have such master narratives and stories or the society wouldn't have survived for centuries.

## Conclusion

“You know that you never defeated us on the battlefield,” said the American colonel.

The North Vietnamese colonel pondered this remark for a moment. “That may be so,” he replied, “but it is also irrelevant.”<sup>lii</sup>

Military professionals have often placed greater emphasis on violence than on narrative. After all, violence is what the military does. Since the military is the primary national instrument involved in conflict, it seems natural that the emphasis in preparation for and during conflicts would be on violence. Each practitioner of narrative war uses and used violence. In almost all cases, they used a lot of violence. The point is that such groups are or were successful because of their understanding and use of narrative and not their use of violence. The quote above addresses that reality. The U.S. war in Vietnam involved a tremendous amount of violence on both sides; however, the ultimate victor was not the actor that provided the most violence or even had the most success in the violence competition. It was the actor who best recognized and best used narrative.

A recent example of this expression happened on 29 February 2020, when the United States of America signed an agreement with the Taliban of Afghanistan that allowed the Taliban to participate in the governance process in Afghanistan and indicated that the U.S. would withdraw from the country as a fighting force after a year and a half. The details of the agreement are not particularly crucial, but the overall concept is critical. It is difficult to imagine the U.S. negotiating directly with the Taliban along these lines fifteen years earlier. The fact that these negotiations occurred and that an agreement was reached without the participation of the government of Afghanistan further speaks to the effectiveness of the philosophy outlined in this chapter. The Taliban disrupted the government of Afghanistan and its American allies until it was invited to a seat at the table. It effectively displaced the government of Afghanistan such that government representatives weren't allowed to be present as the fate of Afghanistan was negotiated. Despite numerous stops and starts, the Taliban was able to get the U.S. to agree to Taliban participation in the governance of Afghanistan because American presidents have

become exhausted with a war that seems to never end.

The seeming failure in Afghanistan – after nearly twenty years of conflict only to return to power those who were ousted at the beginning – in combination with a similar perception of Iraq – defeat one insurgency only to leave and allow in another – has generated a sense of frustration with American technological power. The U.S. has the ability to physically dominate, but not the ability to win. Winning is when one side concedes desired interests or influence to the other. In concrete terms, winning for a weaker actor is obtaining governance over territory. Why can't the U.S. win as often or as quickly or as decisively as desired if it enjoys such an overwhelming advantage in raw destructive power?

### *Summary of the Argument*

This chapter offered a unique and important approach to answering this question. Weaker actors understand the value of three conditions: understanding of the actual conflict environment at the local level, generation of support through a story that provides a believable path to victory, and consistency sufficient to generate support over time. Furthermore, weaker actors use a better and more detailed understanding of narrative to recognize pre-existing narrative disruptions. The weaker actor then expands the disruptions by actions of its own. As disruption expands, the weaker actor has greater opportunity and ability to displace stronger actor governance across a wide spectrum of social functions. Disruption and displacement are not entirely sequential. They overlap and, at times, occur simultaneously. The displacement, at its extreme, has a weaker actor behaving as the government.

Displacement occurs in situations where disruption is growing. It is caused, in part, by the perception that the weaker power (usually a non-state actor, though not always) is on the side of the people, whereas the government no longer is, if it ever had been. Under such conditions, people are inclined to side with the people like them. This isn't a benign and peaceful endeavor. This process occurs with violence; however, violence is less necessary when the weaker actor offers a story closer to the societal narrative than that of the stronger actor. Conflict is both Darwinian and utilitarian: "If you can persuade a person, you don't need to kill him."<sup>liii</sup>

Not all weaker actors seek to fully displace the governance of the stronger actor at first.

It may only be disruption and partial displacement that is sought, as the weaker actor may recognize that it does not currently possess the ability to provide the social functions or resources the community needs to maintain positive control.

All of this occurs within a strategy of exhaustion – wearing down the will of the opponent. Hans Delbruck phrased one of his two types of strategies as fatigue strategy.<sup>liv</sup> When members of the village or town government are fatigued by constant attacks and a perception of a never-ending war, they may be inclined to turn toward the weaker and seemingly ever present and ever active actor. This sentiment is best articulated by Ho Chi Minh when he stated to a French official, “You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.”<sup>lv</sup> The weaker actor communicates with its understanding of narrative that it cannot be defeated and by so doing, it exhausts the stronger actor.

Most conflicts since World War II end in something other than a stronger actor win, and as often as the stronger actor wins, conflicts tend to end in something that can’t be defined as a win or loss. Many of the conflicts turn in to some other type of conflict with a different set of opponents or across another border. Such conceptualization of conflict that transforms rather than concludes leads to an exhausting perception of unending war. The Vietnam War for the U.S. is such an example. Those who would become the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had previously been Viet Minh fighting against the French or ethnic Vietnamese fighting against the Japanese. By the time Saigon fell to Hanoi some form of war had been going on in that area for more than thirty years. Afghanistan is a similar example. The Taliban today were mujahidin who fought against the Soviets and before that tribal leaders who opposed the communist Afghan government. This sense of unending and ever morphing conflict is fatiguing.

## REFERENCED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- al-Salhy, Suadad and Tim Arango. 2014. "Sunni Militants Drive Iraqi Army Out of Mosul." *The New York Times* [10 June 2014].
- Associated Press. 2016. "10 Years on, Iraq Scarred From Attack on Shiite Shrine." *The New York Times* [21 February 2016].  
<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/02/21/world/middleeast/ap-ml-iraq-samarra-anniversary.html>.
- Austin, Jon. 2016. "'CIA created ISIS', says Julian Assange as Wikileaks releases 500k US cables." *Express UK* [29 November 2016].  
<http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/737430/CIA-ISIS-Wikileaks-Carter-Cables-III-Julian-Assange>.
- Clausewitz, Carl von. 1976. *On War*. Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Craig, Gordon A.. 1944. "Chapter 11. Delbruck: The Military Historian" in *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 260-283.
- Crooke, Alastair. 2014. "The ISIS' 'Management of Savagery' in Iraq." *The World Post* [30 June 2014]. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/iraq-isis-alqaeda\\_b\\_5542575.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/iraq-isis-alqaeda_b_5542575.html).
- Crowley, Michael. 2015. "Who Lost Iraq? Did George W. Bush create the Islamic State? Did Barack Obama? We asked the insiders to tell us who's to blame." *Politico Magazine* [July/August 2015]. [http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/iraq-roundtable-george-w-bush-barack-obama-119221#.VZFRI\\_IVhHx](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/iraq-roundtable-george-w-bush-barack-obama-119221#.VZFRI_IVhHx).
- Dabiq. 2014. "The Return of the Khalifah." *Dabiq*, issue 1. Islamic State [5 July 2014].  
[www.ieproject.org/projects/dabiq1.pdf](http://www.ieproject.org/projects/dabiq1.pdf).
- Delbruck, Hans. 1990. *History of the Art of War, Volume I: Warfare in Antiquity*. Translated by Walter J. Renfroe, Jr. from the original published in 1920. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Donnelly, Jared and Jon Farley. 2018. "Defining the "Domain" in Multi-Domain." *Over the Horizon: Multi-Domain Operations & Strategy* [17 September 2018].  
<https://othjournal.com/2018/09/17/defining-the-domain-in-multi-domain/>.



- Echevarria, Antulio J., II. 2017. *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gould, Joe. "US-ISIS Rumors Hard to Counter, General Says." *Defense News* [21 May 2015].  
<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/show-daily/sofic/2015/05/19/us-isis-rumors-hard-to-counter-general-says/27616311/>.
- Jomini, Baron de. 1992/1862. *Summary of the Art of War*. Translated from the French by Capt. G. H. Mendell and Lieut. W. P. Craighill. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. First published 1862 by J. B. Lippincott & Co.
- Lawn, Timothy B. 2019. "Narrative Landmines and Combatting Foreign Influence." *Narrative Strategies Journal*, Issue 2 [24 January 2019].
- Lister, Charles R. 2015. *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Malkasian, Carter. 2017. *Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mansoor, Peter. 2013. *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Milligan, Susan. 2015. "After Paris Attacks, Democratic Candidates Blame Bush for ISIS." *US News and World Report* [14 November 2015].  
<https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/11/14/after-paris-attacks-democratic-candidates-blame-bush-for-isis>.
- Nordland, Rod. 2015. "Iraq Forces, Pushing ISIS Out of Tikrit, Give Few Thanks for U.S. Air Strikes." *The New York Times* [April 2, 2015].  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/03/world/middleeast/isis-forces-pushed-out-of-tikrit.html>.
- Parker, Ned, Isabel Coles, and Raheem Salman. 2014. "Special Report: How Mosul fell - An Iraqi general disputes Baghdad's story." *Reuters* [14 October 2014].  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-gharawi-special-report/special-report-how-mosul-fell-an-iraqi-general-disputes-baghdads-story-idUSKCN0I30Z820141014>.
- Pittard, Dana J.H. and Wes J. Bryant. 2019. *Hunting the Caliphate: America's War on ISIS and the Dawn of the Strike Cell*. New York: Post Hill Press.
- Rayburn, Joel. 2014. *Iraq After America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.

- Rayburn, Joel D., Frank K. Sobchak, Jeanne F. Godfroy, Matthew D. Morton, James S. Powell, and Matthew M. Zais, editors. 2019. *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War — Volume 1: Invasion, Insurgency, and Civil War, 2003-2006*. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, January 2019.  
<http://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3668.pdf>.
- Rayburn, Joel D., Frank K. Sobchak, Jeanne F. Godfroy, Matthew D. Morton, James S. Powell, and Matthew M. Zais, editors. 2019. *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War — Volume 2: Surge and Withdrawal, 2007-2011*. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, January 2019. <http://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3668.pdf>.
- Shadid, Anthony. 2005. *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Shaikh, Sohail. 2017. "Narrative in the Operations Process: A case study: Voices of Moderate Islam." Presentation [23 October 2017].
- Shinkman, Paul D. 2015. "Poll: Syrians, Iraqis Believe U.S. Created ISIS, Don't Support War." *US News* [18 December 2015]. <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015-12-18/poll-majority-of-syrians-iraqis-dont-support-obamas-anti-isis-war-believe-us-created-extremists>.
- Singer, P.W. and Emerson T. Brooking. 2018. *Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.
- Sky, Emma. 2015. *The Unravelling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Sly, Liz. 2015. "Iraqis think the U.S. is in cahoots with the Islamic State, and it is hurting the war." *The Washington Post* [1 December 2015].  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/iraqis-think-the-us-is-in-cahoots-with-isis-and-it-is-hurting-the-war/2015/12/01/d00968ec-9243-11e5-befa-99ceebcbb272\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqis-think-the-us-is-in-cahoots-with-isis-and-it-is-hurting-the-war/2015/12/01/d00968ec-9243-11e5-befa-99ceebcbb272_story.html).
- Snow, Shawn. 2017. "Russia threatens US forces, calls America an obstacle to defeating ISIS in Syria." *Military Times* [4 October 2017].  
<https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2017/10/04/russia-threatens-us-forces-calls-america-an-obstacle-to-defeating-isis-in-syria/>.
- Steed, Brian L. 2011. Unpublished Personal Journal of Events as the Chief of Engagements for the Deputy Commanding General-Advising and Training, United States Forces-Iraq, Baghdad,

Iraq.

Steed, Brian L. 2015. Unpublished Personal Journal of Events as a Plans Officer for the Combined Joint Land Force Component Command-Iraq (CJFLCC-I) Command, Baghdad, Iraq.

Steed, Brian L. 2018. "Maneuvering within Islam's narrative space." *Strategic Review: The Indonesian Journal of Leadership, Policy and World Affairs*. January-March 2018, Volume 8, Number 1, 16-35.

Steed, Brian L. 2019. *ISIS: The Essential Reference Guide*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Stern, Jessica and J.M. Berger. 2015. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: HarperCollins.

Summers, Harry G. Jr. 1982. *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press.

United Nations. 1945. "United Nations Charter." San Francisco, CA, 26 June 1945.

<https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/index.html>.

United States Department of the Army. 2017. *FM 3-0: Operations*. Headquarters, United States Department of the Army, Washington DC, 6 October 2017.

United States Department of Defense. 2020. *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. United States Department of Defense, Washington DC, January 2020.

Warrick, Joby. 2015. *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*. New York: Doubleday.

Weiss, Michael and Hassan Hassan. 2015. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York: Regan Arts.

---

<sup>i</sup> ISIS stands for the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham.

"Throughout this [chapter], the term ISIS is used to identify the group from its conceptual inception at or about 1999 to the present. In reality, the group has had multiple names during that time frame. ... [H]owever, to avoid confusion, the general term used will consistently be ISIS."

"Al-Sham is an Arabic word that dates back centuries and has multiple meanings. It is often pronounced ash-Sham, because of Arabic standard pronunciations of certain letters following the definite article. It can mean the specific city of Damascus, the greater Damascus area, the modern country and boundaries of Syria, or something called Greater Syria. This last area includes the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, most of Jordan, and portions of Turkey and Egypt.

Levant is derived from Latin and French words that mean rising. Literally, it is the place where the sun rises or the east. In the case of both Latin and French speakers in the medieval period, this was a reference to the Eastern Mediterranean. In Western academic circles, the Levant includes the same general region as given in the explanation of al-Sham previously. Few Arabs use this phrase and they typically only do so in an academic setting.

Both al-Sham and Levant are conceptual terms. There is no fixed border for either of the geographic designations and they do not represent a historic kingdom. It is like referring to "the south" in the United States or "the West" in terms of culture.

The U.S. Obama administration labeled ISIS as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL whereas ISIS referred to itself as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. Some reporters and media outlets reported ISIS as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

---

When ISIS used the term, it always used al-Sham. It has never used Levant in its name. Few Arabs have ever used ISIL as a designation because it is not reflective of the Arabic acronym for the organization here referred to as ISIS. Al-Sham is a name that has ancient connections. The Prophet Mohamed used the term. He never used Levant.”

Brian L. Steed, *ISIS: The Essential Reference Guide*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2019, xi-xii, 17.

<sup>ii</sup> Dana J.H. Pittard and Wes J. Bryant, *Hunting the Caliphate: America's War on ISIS and the Dawn of the Strike Cell*, New York: Post Hill Press, 2019, 43.

<sup>iii</sup> Mosul is practically two cities with the Tigris River separating them with five main bridges connecting each half. The ancient city sits along the river on the west bank along with the most significant civic institutions like the university, airport, and government buildings.

<sup>iv</sup> Ned Parker, Isabel Coles, and Raheem Salman, “Special Report: How Mosul fell - An Iraqi general disputes Baghdad's story,” *Reuters* [14 October 2014].

<sup>v</sup> Pittard and Bryant 2019, 43.

<sup>vi</sup> Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, New York: Doubleday, 2015, 259.

<sup>vii</sup> Suadad al-Salhy and Tim Arango, “Sunni Militants Drive Iraqi Army Out of Mosul,” *The New York Times* [10 June 2014].

Parker, Coles and Salman 2014.

Warrick 2015, 258-259.

<sup>viii</sup> One author has the numbers as 3,000 ISIS fighters against 25,000 defenders in Mosul; the better part of five Iraqi divisions. Pittard and Bryant 2019, 43.

Other authors have it at between 400 and 1,500 ISIS fighters against 10,000. Parker, Coles and Salman 2014 and Warrick 2015, 258-259.

<sup>ix</sup> Parker, Coles and Salman 2014.

<sup>x</sup> Parker, Coles and Salman 2014.

Warrick 2015, 259.

<sup>xi</sup> Parker, Coles and Salman 2014.

<sup>xii</sup> Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, New York: HarperCollins, 2015.

Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, New York: Regan Arts, 2015.

P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, *Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2018.

<sup>xiii</sup> Brian L. Steed, Unpublished Personal Journal of Events as a Plans Officer for the Combined Joint Land Force Component Command-Iraq (CJFLCC-I) Command, Baghdad, Iraq, 2015.

<sup>xiv</sup> Pittard and Bryant 2019, 43.

<sup>xv</sup> Charles R. Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, 232.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid*, 231.

<sup>xvii</sup> Antoine Henri Jomini used the term decisive point rather than center of gravity. He elaborated this through a series of maxims that included the following three points: “1. To throw by strategic movements the mass of an army, successively, upon the decisive points of a theater of war, and also upon the communications of the enemy as much as possible without compromising one's own. 2. To maneuver to engage fractions of the hostile army with the bulk of one's forces. 3. On the battlefield, to throw the mass of the forces upon the decisive point, or upon that portion of the hostile line which it is of the first importance to overthrow.”

---

Jomini, Baron de, 1992/1862, *Summary of the Art of War*, translated from the French by Capt. G. H. Mendell and Lieut. W. P. Craighill, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. First published 1862 by J. B. Lippincott & Co, 461.

Carl von Clausewitz, on the other hand pioneered the use of the term center of gravity as stated in his quote, “One must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of those characteristics, a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point at which all our energies should be directed.”

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, 595.

<sup>xviii</sup> Many of these ideas are expressed in a chapter written by the author and titled “Narrative in Culture, Center of Gravity, and the Golden Azimuth” in a yet to be published anthology by Army University Press.

<sup>xix</sup> Gordon A. Craig, “Chapter 11. Delbruck: The Military Historian” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944, 260-283.

Hans Delbruck, *History of the Art of War, Volume I: Warfare in Antiquity*, translated by Walter J. Renfro, Jr. from the original published in 1920, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

<sup>xx</sup> Delbruck 1990, 136.

<sup>xxi</sup> UN Charter. WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED ... to **save succeeding generations from the scourge of war**, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, ... AND FOR THESE ENDS ... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

CHAPTER I: PURPOSES AND PRINCIPLES: Article 1

The **Purposes of the United Nations** are: To **maintain international peace and security**, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the **prevention and removal of threats to the peace**, and for the **suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace**, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace; ... (bold type added)

<sup>xxii</sup> Much of this section appeared earlier in the following publication:

Brian L. Steed, “Maneuvering within Islam’s narrative space,” *Strategic Review: The Indonesian Journal of Leadership, Policy and World Affairs*, January-March 2018, Volume 8, Number 1, 16-35.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Jared Donnelly and Jon Farley, “Defining the “Domain” in Multi-Domain.” *Over the Horizon: Multi-Domain Operations & Strategy* [17 September 2018].

<sup>xxiv</sup> <https://www.lexico.com/definition/domain> [accessed 24 June 2020].

<sup>xxv</sup> United States Department of Defense, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, United States Department of Defense, Washington DC, January 2020, 11, 55, 127, 136, 160, 198.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Matthew J. Yandura is quoted as saying ““This is not a war for hearts and minds. This is a battle of words, deeds and images: We and our Afghan allies must win all three.” In Sohail Shaikh’s presentation “Narrative in the Operations Process: A case study: Voices of Moderate Islam” given on 23 October 2017.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Joe Gould, “US-ISIS Rumors Hard to Counter, General Says”, *Defense News* [21 May 2015].

Paul D. Shinkman, “Poll: Syrians, Iraqis Believe U.S. Created ISIS, Don’t Support War,” *US News* [18 December 2015].

Russia claimed on more than one occasion that the U.S. assisted ISIS in Syria.

Shawn Snow, “Russia threatens US forces, calls America an obstacle to defeating ISIS in Syria,” *Military Times* [4 October 2017].

<sup>xxviii</sup> Liz Sly, “Iraqis think the U.S. is in cahoots with the Islamic State, and it is hurting the war,” *Washington Post* [1 December 2015].

---

<sup>xxix</sup> Brian L. Steed, Unpublished Personal Journal of Events as the Chief of Engagements for the Deputy Commanding General-Advising and Training, United States Forces-Iraq, Baghdad, Iraq, 2011.

<sup>xxx</sup> Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005, 35-39.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Joel Rayburn, *Iraq After America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance*, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2014, 243.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Steed, 2011.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Sly, "Iraqis think the U.S. is in cahoots with the Islamic State, and it is hurting the war," 2015.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Rod Nordland, "Iraq Forces, Pushing ISIS Out of Tikrit, Give Few Thanks for U.S. Air Strikes," *The New York Times* [April 2, 2015].

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Susan Milligan, "After Paris Attacks, Democratic Candidates Blame Bush for ISIS," *US News and World Report* [14 November 2015].

Michael Crowley, "Who Lost Iraq? Did George W. Bush create the Islamic State? Did Barack Obama? We asked the insiders to tell us who's to blame." *Politico Magazine* [July/August 2015].

Jon Austin, "CIA created ISIS', says Julian Assange as Wikileaks releases 500k US cables," *Express UK* [29 November 2016].

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Emma Sky, *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq*, New York: Public Affairs, 2015, 35.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> United States Department of the Army, *FM 3-0: Operations*. Headquarters, United States Department of the Army, Washington DC, 6 October 2017, 1-18 – 1-19.

The examples are edited to show those most closely connected to narrative.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Joel D. Rayburn, Frank K. Sobchak, Jeanne F. Godfroy, Matthew D. Morton, James S. Powell, and Matthew M. Zais, editors, 2019, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War — Volume 1: Invasion, Insurgency, and Civil War, 2003-2006*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, January 2019, 342, 532-533.

<sup>xl</sup> Associated Press, "10 Years on, Iraq Scarred from Attack on Shiite Shrine," *The New York Times* [21 February 2016].

Rayburn, et al. *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War — Volume 1*, January 2019, 533-539.

<sup>xli</sup> Peter Mansoor, 2013, *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Carter Malkasian, 2017, *Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Joel D. Rayburn, Frank K. Sobchak, Jeanne F. Godfroy, Matthew D. Morton, James S. Powell, and Matthew M. Zais, editors, 2019, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War — Volume 2: Surge and Withdrawal, 2007-2011*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, January 2019.

<sup>xlii</sup> Dabiq, 2014, "The Return of the Khalifah," *Dabiq*, issue 1, Islamic State [5 July 2014], 2, 4-5.

<sup>xliii</sup> The prominent American narrative prior to the 1960s essentially ignored those who had been left out of the benefits of the American dream. Starting with the new history introduced in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in American colleges and universities, there was greater and greater emphasis placed on the voices in America not represented in scholarship and popular discourse.

---

<sup>xliv</sup> Abu Bakr Naji, 2004, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, translated by William McCants, Cambridge, MA: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, 23 May 2006. There are multiple references to the deceptive media halo that begin in the introduction. The most significant discussion happens in pages 17-19.

<sup>xlv</sup> Ibid, 17-18.

<sup>xlvi</sup> I reference al-Qaeda because Naji, by all accounts was a representative scholar and strategic philosopher for al-Qaeda when he wrote this; however, this book was very popular among ISIS fighters and leaders and serves as a great tool to explain the ISIS approach to fighting.

Alastair Crooke, 2014, "The ISIS' 'Management of Savagery' in Iraq," *The World Post* [30 June 2014].

Weis and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 44-46.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Singer and Brooking, *Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media*.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria II, 2017, *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press.

The couplets are:

1. Annihilation and dislocation
2. Attrition and exhaustion
3. Deterrence and coercion
4. Terror and terrorism
5. Decapitation and targeted killing

<sup>xlix</sup> Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 19.

<sup>l</sup> Ibid, 19-20.

<sup>li</sup> Ibid, 46, 47.

<sup>lii</sup> Harry G. Summers, Jr. 1982, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1.

<sup>liii</sup> Timothy B. Lawn, 2019, "Narrative Landmines and Combatting Foreign Influence," *Narrative Strategies Journal*, Issue 2 [24 January 2019], 15.

<sup>liv</sup> Delbruck, *History of the Art of War*, 136.

<sup>lv</sup> Stanley Karnow, 1983, *Vietnam: A History*, New York: The Viking Press, 183.