Strategic Narrative: 21st Century Diplomatic Statecraft

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Abstract:
We introduce strategic narratives as a framework to understand what is at stake in international affairs. Attention to strategic narrative allows foreign policymakers to articulate their own intentions and interpret the intentions of others in a way that helps identify areas of potential cooperation. At a time of increasing global crisis and fragility, it is incumbent on foreign policymakers to grab this opportunity with both hands. One tool for doing this is digital diplomacy. We illustrate our argument through case studies of the Iran nuclear negotiations, Russia's disruptive relations with the West, and an analysis of identity narratives in alliance settings.

Key Words:
Strategic Narrative, Iran, Information Warfare, Alliances, Diplomacy, Communication.

Introduction: Beyond Digital Disruption

There has never been a stronger sense of the importance of communication and miscommunication in foreign policy. This urgency is reinforced by the digitalization of the public sphere. Diplomacy is no longer confined to set-piece summitry and state-to-state communication out of the glare of the public eye. Analysis of strategic narratives enables diplomats and analysts to get a grip on what's being communicated.[1] In this article

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[1] Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle (2013). *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*. New York: Routledge.

we will explain what strategic narratives are and how attention to strategic narrative allows foreign policymakers to articulate their own intentions and interpret the intentions of others in a way that helps identify areas of potential cooperation. At a time of increasing global crisis and fragility, it is incumbent on foreign policymakers to grab this opportunity with both hands. One tool for so doing is digital diplomacy. The purpose of this article is to take you well beyond that tool.

Disruption appears to dominate international affairs. Russia seeks to disrupt Western elections. Trump's advisors speak openly of disrupting and dismantling the US federal government, whilst Trump himself disrupts the norms of diplomacy through his inflammatory tweets and aggressive handshakes. European politics is disrupted by migration and terrorism crises, South America by corruption scandals, and the Middle East by seemingly irresolvable conflicts. Enter digital, a technology that promised connection and collaboration but appears to have enhanced the chaotic landscape we inhabit.

Digital disrupts the field and the game. Look at the field on which politics plays out. Digital makes the very infrastructure of communication in international affairs seem brittle. Leaks, bots, hacks, mobs: no wonder policymakers often seem paralysed when they should instead be articulating difficult positions. Channels of communication seem insecure. Spaces of communication where we used to find journalists, NGOs and publics cannot be trusted; journalism could be fake news; NGOs could be government-organised NGOs (GONGOs), designed to promote the interests of a government, but presented with the appearance of a traditional and often independent NGO; identities must be verified before we know whether a member of the public is not actually an artefact of a troll factory in Macedonia. How can we take to the field when the field is compromised? And yet, a state cannot opt out of international relations, and must dive in.

Digital has disrupted the game by redistributing power to different kinds of actors. The rise of Al-Qaeda and then Islamic State, as well as various criminal networks, led states to seek to "win" the "war" or "battle" of narratives with the adversary of the moment.[2] Yet here too, states should

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[2] See for example, Emile Hokayem, "Foreign Policy: The Middle East Channel – The War of Narratives", *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, February 8, 2011, accessed May 21, 2013, *http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/press-coverage-2011/february-2011/*

have had coherent narratives of their national identity and aspirations anyway. The age of disruption brings new technologies – but not new goals.

Daniel Aguirre Azócar, Ilan Manor and Alejandro Ramos Cardoso *define* digitalization as the overall influence digital tools have had on the practice of public diplomacy. This includes a *functional* dimension (using digital tools in public diplomacy activities), *normative* dimension (how the values of the digital society impact the practice of public diplomacy), *analytical* dimension (using digital tools to evaluate public diplomacy activities) and *institutional* dimension (how digital tools have influenced the workings of institutions responsible for public diplomacy). We examine how each of these components are visible in how foreign affairs is conducted today. This provides the basis for our focus on how these provide the framework for contestation over the very meaning of international affairs.

Strategic Narratives: A Framework for Diplomacy

A focus on strategic narratives offers a much broader reach and grasp of how power and influence work in international relations. It offers scope to build constructive relations and projects, instead of continually firefighting the latest disruption effort. Strategic narratives are a means by which political actors attempt to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors.[3] They are a vital component of how states seek to establish and maintain influence in the world.

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the-war-of-narratives/; Wayne Porter and Mark Mykleby, *A National Strategic Narrative* (Washington, D. C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011). *https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20National%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf*; UK Ministry of Defence, "Strategic Communication: The Defence Contribution Joint Doctrine Note 1/11", accessed May 23, 2013, *http://www.mod.uk/NR/ rdonlyres/7DAE5158–63AD-444D-9A3F-83F7D8F44F9A/0/20110310JDN111_STRAT_COMM.pdf* .

[3]   A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin and L. Roselle, *op. cit.*; Andreas Antoniades, A. Miskimmon, and B. O'Loughlin. "Great Power Politics and Strategic Narratives". (2010). Working Paper. Centre for Global Political Economy, University of Sussex. Available at: *http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/12302/*; L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon and B. O'Loughlin. "Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power". *Media, War & Conflict,* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2014): 70-84.

Narratives may be codified in texts, such as expressed in national security strategies, but emerge through historical experiences and events. Strategic narratives function *internally* to enhance domestic legitimacy and support and *externally* to define an actor's role, to define the nature of the system, and the challenges faced. Although tools, strategic narratives also *constrain* what leaders can say and do: narratives are grounded in a national or cultural historical experience, so a leader cannot construct a strategic narrative off-the-cuff. Additionally, the efficacy of strategic narratives is relational, dependent upon the interpretation and response of other actors. There is no point having a strong narrative about your national destiny if it seems absurd to others; it gains strength only through the reactions of audiences.

It is important to analyse the formation, projection and reception of strategic narratives. Narratives are formed (often by a governing party and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs); they are then projected, through leaders' speeches and through news reporting, cultural diplomacy, by holding sporting events, and other ways to communicate your nation's identity and aspirations; and, most fundamentally, narratives are received and interpreted by audiences at home and abroad. Research methodologies help MFAs take an increasingly sophisticated view of how foreign publics interpret their nation's narrative, and this helps identify the basis for cooperation with foreign powers. In this way, formation, projection and reception form a loop: ultimately the MFA must respond to audience interpretations and keep adjusting the narrative to maximize positive reception overseas and ensure one's narrative is not just intelligible but compelling.

When analysing and constructing strategic narratives, we must distinguish between three levels of analysis: System, Identity, and Issue/Policy. *System* narratives concern the international system, articulating how a political actor conceives their understanding of international order. *Identity Narratives* set out the story of a political actor, its values, character, and its goals. *Issue or Policy Narratives* set out why a policy is needed and desirable, and how it will be achieved. The chances of persuasion are higher when there is coherence in these three types of narratives.

There are distinct benefits to the projection of a clear strategic narrative and to conducting strategic narrative analysis. A clear narrative opens

Figure 1. The Strategic Narrative Cycle

Formation

Projection

Reception
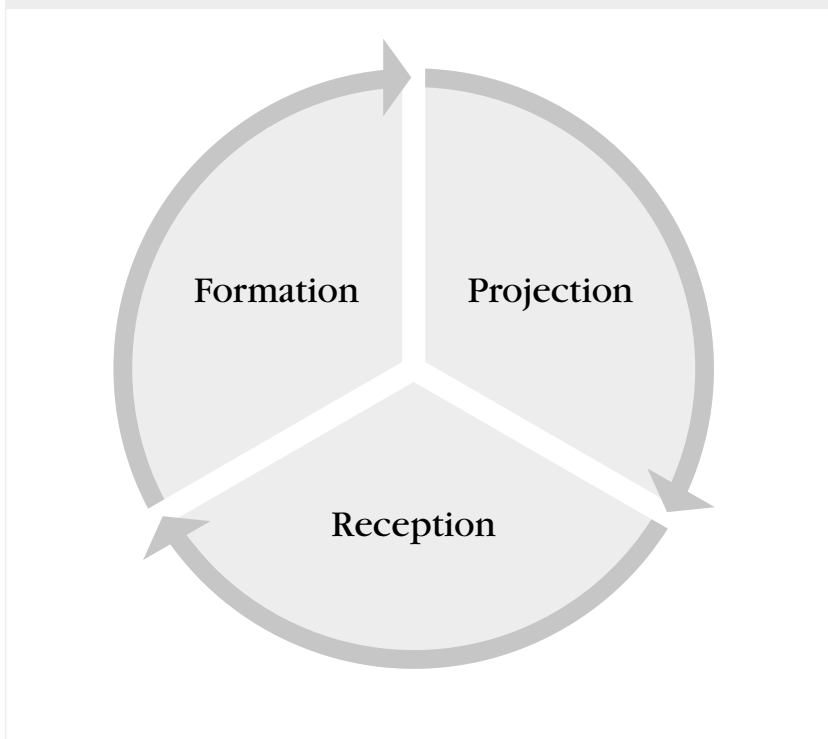
space to deal with complexity in international affairs, and is a way to signal a direction of travel for your country and for allies.

The formation and crafting of strategic narratives by MFAs involves careful and sensitive listening to political voices in parliament. Strategic narrative analysis can show what narratives are held about your state or organisation by states *as well as* public and media constituencies at home or abroad – for they are the ones who will respond and act either with against you. Conducting audience research on the reception of narratives gives more opportunity for positive reception for diplomats' communications. It reduces the risk of miscommunication by MFAs. In contrast to disinformation (deliberate lying) or misinformation (accidental lying),
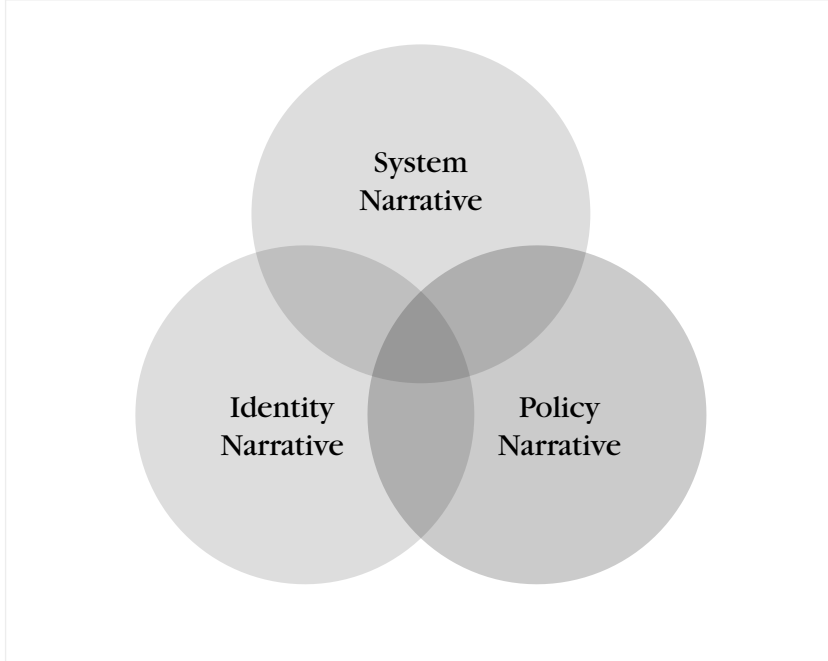
miscommunication is understood in terms of the complexity policy makers face in communicating with different publics and policy communities across the world.[4] Perfect communication is impossible. Different societies already possess different narratives about how world order has emerged, each emphasising different events and often interpreting the same events in terms of different narrative trajectories or timelines. This makes it difficult – but not impossible – to find a shared narrative across societies. Despite the great opportunities afforded to ministries of foreign affairs by digital diplomacy, the challenges of getting one's message across remains.

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[4]   On the distinction between disinformation and misinformation, see: Caroline Jack, *Lexi-con of Lies: Terms for Problematic Information* (New York: Data & Society Research Institute, 2013).

In short, strategic narrative offers a framework to understand how foreign policy actors seek to shape the terrain on which diplomacy happens. Strategic narrative allows those actors to understand how to build long-term persuasive effects on others and to build effects with third party actors.

The Digital Realm: Risks and *Opportunities*

The great disruptions in digital diplomacy present risks and opportunities. One of the risks is that it is very difficult to craft a narrative that is compelling for all audiences at home and abroad. For instance, we see examples of Trump actively weakening US force projection through his use of social media. Russia scholar Ellen Mickiewicz argues that her ongoing research in Kazakhstan shows young Kazakhs believe that Russia is more powerful than the United States because they keep hearing Trump on the news talking of US decline.[5] US (and European) media headlines circulated on social media hinting at a 'new Cold War' present the possibility of a balance of power between Russia and the West. *Social media can be used to shape the climate within which the power of states is considered*. This has implications for what becomes appropriate strategic behaviour for those states; to be a great power or a declining power comes with assumptions about how one's state should act in the world. Trump's narrative of national decline may bring tactical advantages by harnessing the votes of disaffected domestic voters, but in terms of its external function Trump's is a damaging strategic narrative.

An additional risk is that, in an age of digital archives and open source intelligence, a state risks having its narrative contradicted by evidence emerging on the internet – evidence that may have great credibility. It is important, therefore, not to let a "say-do" gap develop between what you say and what you do.

That said, attention to strategic narratives presents opportunities for diplomats and other political actors using digital diplomacy within a broader strategic framework. First, by understanding others' strategic

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[5] Reframing Russia: From Cold War to Information War? The Frontline Club, London, 12 October 2017.

narratives you can both find points of convergence or seek to exploit differences and drive wedges between adversaries. Using digital diplomacy as one tool of strategic narrative projection allows you to engage in public bargaining. One may signal movement on a certain global policy to a global audience or in a bilateral relation which may create pressure on your interlocutor(s) to respond.

Significant Cases Inform Diplomacy

Current approaches to public diplomacy, including digital diplomacy, fall *within* the framework of strategic narrative and address issues such as policy effectiveness, accountability, and reputation. Those approaches offer useful guidance on managing relations but do not address the core issues at stake in international affairs – forging and sustaining alliances and regimes, peacemaking and winding down protracted conflicts, and providing a shared vision for the future of global order. Digitalization must be viewed as a tool and part of the context, but the decisive factor in international relations is strategic narrative.[6]

Strategic narrative analysis helps identify what is at stake, in diplomatic spats and in substantive debates in international affairs. While many commentators are quick to interpret signals of different perspectives and policies as information 'warfare' between nations, such differences must be understood within the long-term narratives nations are telling about themselves and their position in an uncertain world.

In this article we explain the strategic narrative concept but we also illustrate with three case studies of vast contemporary significance.

In our first example we show how skilful use of narrative projection by Iranian and US leaders made space for the UN Security Council P5+1 and Iran to reach the landmark 2015 nuclear deal. Narrative alignment between Iran and its interlocutors only became possible when President Obama recognized Iran's grievances about the role of the US in over-

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[6]   A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin and L. Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*; A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin, and L. Roselle. *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.

throwing Iran's government during the Cold War. This shows how narrative alignment can occur through the re-contextualisation and re-narration of past events. Once Iranian President Rouhani was elected in 2013 with a determination to forge a deal, the US and Iran developed and shared a methodology to bridge the antagonism between their cultures, using mainstream news organisations and social media platforms to build a sense of momentum. They developed a common narrative about where they wished to head in the future, a narrative that emphasized common values and interests and minimized points of contention. This made space for the details of a deal to be worked out.

In the second case study, we show how strategic narrative analysis can explain why any opportunities for cooperation between the West and Russia have become increasingly difficult. Superficial convergence on international system narratives cannot provide a basis for dialogue when all parties disagree on how that system works and on what moral order it rests upon. Digital diplomacy may exacerbate these differences by using similar words but without substantive discussion of meaning and context.

In the third case study, we show that alliance narratives can structure behaviour in the international system. Alliance identity narratives can be used to evoke fears of abandonment, drawing an ally in to support specific policies or actions. Strategic narratives that foster fear of entrapment can be used by those outside or inside a state to undermine an alliance. Digital diplomacy may be used to foster these fears or fight back against them.

Ultimately strategic narrative analysis is a simplifying device to understand the main points of contention and outright contestation in international affairs. Once those points are understood, this allows foreign policymakers to forge more creative and sustainable alliances and the consensus needed to achieve policy outcomes in a complex and risk-heavy world order.

Example 1: The Iran Deal and the Potential for Construction

Communication through digital media can be used to *create space for agreement*. The 2015 Iran Deal exemplifies this. There are two takeaway points for a diplomatic readership. First, one must reach a shared narra-

tive of the past and present of your countries' relations in order to have build a common future. The cast of characters includes Iran and the US who narrated Iran's nuclear issue through the prisms of sovereignty, pride, security and God's will, particularly under the presidencies of G. W. Bush and Ahmadinejad in the preceding decade; and European powers the UK, France and Germany and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) who narrated Iran's nuclear programme as a scientific and potential economic issue. Each actor's interpretation of the issue is framed by the strategic narratives each projects about the international system and how international relations are conducted.[7] The nuclear issue becomes entwined within long term narratives about the past, present and future of international relations that each actor communicates to its home audiences and international rivals. For Europeans and the IAEA, restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme was part of the painstaking construction of multilateral, rule-governed order. For the US, it was about maintaining a power structure in the Middle East region. For Iran, the meaning of its nuclear programme was tied to challenging that structure and those who seek to uphold it. Since each actor interpreted the issue in terms of different narratives, it was difficult for them to agree on what it is they are disagreeing about in the first place. It is not simply a matter of whose story is more true[8] because any narrative and any position is based on *emotional* associations: multilateral cooperation, science-led progress, global leadership, regional hegemony and being a 'nuclear state' all entail questions of status, identity and "political symbolism".[9] Since narrative throws attention on these emotional and psychological dynamics, this again highlights the strength of the strategic narrative framework to capture how relations between states work.

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[7]   Shahram Chubin, (2010), "The Politics of Iran's Nuclear Program". *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and US Policy.* 82-85. Available at: *https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/The%20Politics%20of%20Iran%2527s%20Nuclear%20Program.pdf*.

[8]   Thomas Risse, "'Let's Argue!': Communicative Action in World Politics". *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (2000): 1-39.

[9]   Wyn Q. Bowen and Jonathan Brewer. "Iran's Nuclear Challenge: Nine Years and Counting". *International Affairs,* Vol. 87, No. 4 (2011): 923-943.

The election of Obama and Rouhani meant that, by 2013, the main antagonists in the path towards a deal were willing to move their narratives from a focus on sovereignty, security, past wrongs, and national pride towards a very tightly framed scientific and economic narrative on which the Europeans and the IAEA were most comfortable. All parties agreed to focus like a laser on a clearly defined, technical policy narrative about restricting Iran's potential to develop a nuclear weapon. But to put more contentious narratives to one side, Iran and the US had to respect each other. How was that achieved? At the conclusion of negotiations of the Iran nuclear deal in July 2015 US President Barack Obama suggested that knowing and understanding Iran's narrative was an important aspect of finding an agreement with a hitherto sworn enemy. In a *The New York Times* interview, Obama stated:

> [E]ven with your enemies, even with your adversaries, I do think that you have to have the capacity to put yourself occasionally in their shoes, and if you look at Iranian history, the fact is that we had some involvement with overthrowing a democratically elected regime in Iran. We have had in the past supported Saddam Hussein when we know he used chemical weapons in the war between Iran and Iraq, and so, as a consequence, they have their own security concerns, their own narrative. It may not be one we agree with. It in no way rationalizes the kinds of sponsorship from terrorism or destabilizing activities that they engage in, but I think that when we are able to see their country and their culture in specific terms, historical terms, as opposed to just applying a broad brush, that's when you have the possibility at least of some movement.[10]

Here we find a diplomatic actor acknowledging that, by recognizing others' memories, legacies and narratives, this allows negotiators to focus on the technical agreement.

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[10]   Thomas L. Friedman, (2015) Obama Makes His Case on Iran Nuclear Deal, *The New York Times*, July 14. *https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/opinion/thomas-friedman-obama-makes-his-case-on-iran-nuclear-deal.html*.

The second lesson concerns the role of digital diplomacy in nuancing and elaborating strategic narrative alignment which enabled leaders to seek buy-in from hostile constituencies. Once that shared history between the US and Iran was acknowledged and it was clear that both Iran and the US were committed to a shared strategic goal, *only then* could they use digital diplomacy to move towards a deal. Leaders in the US and Iran tacitly coordinated their communications to ensure they could appeal to public opinion in both countries, recognizing what "hardline" messages the other needed to say in order to prevent strong opposition at home. They allowed each other leniency to be aggressive at certain moments. They used Twitter to visually portray progress in diplomatic negotiations and used press briefings to allow journalists to feel "inside" the deal – that they were getting the big story, on the frontline of history. Note this was a hybrid media campaign, promoting content in different mediums that would ripple across digital and traditional media together. In short, the US and Iran shared a methodology to bridge the antagonism between their cultures. They could develop a common narrative across the two countries about where they wished to head in the future, a narrative that emphasized common values and interests and minimized points of contention. This made space for the details of a deal to be worked out and to be ratified through each party's domestic political systems.

Digital media can be used to create space for agreement within a broader strategic narrative. This requires craft, confidence, and commitment to a foreign policy strategy. Even amidst significant divergence on identity and system narratives between adversarial parties, there still remains scope for policy narrative alignment on issues of mutual interest.

Example 2: Russia and the Limits of Disruption

Russia's strategic narrative helps neither Russia nor the West. Since 2004 Russia has projected a consistent strategic narrative about Russia as a great power with prestige and authority, willing to take responsibility to help solve collective global crises. However, the post-Cold War order in Europe has seen the enlargement of NATO and the EU to the borders of the former USSR. Russia has complained of being excluded from decisions af-

fecting its regional geopolitics even as it has increasingly engaged in unilateral action in Georgia and Ukraine and disruption activities in the West.

Russian narratives about the international system function as a public deliberation on Russia's role in the world. The projection of these narratives is also a means of exerting state power by signalling Russia's intentions and aspirations and, in theory, acting as a persuasive force on receptive third parties. The formation and project of these narratives are a core component of the Russian state itself since they cohere an identity and, through articulation as narratives (via leaders' speeches, RT and Sputnik news, and through Russian culture generally), make that identity present both to domestic and international audiences.

At a superficial level, Russia's narrative contains great rhetorical convergence with the international system narratives of Western powers. Russia and the West continually narrate about the importance of international law and take as given a systemic shift towards an increasingly multipolar order. According to strategic narrative analysis, this convergence of understanding should create space for dialogue about solving policy problems within that system. However, what Russia and the West mean by international law and multipolarity are fundamentally different. These fundamental differences close down spaces for consensus and understanding because they lead to miscommunication and frustration on all sides.[11]

In recent years Russia might have interpreted signs that world audiences might be more receptive to its narratives. The EU has shifted, in rhetoric at least, towards a more pragmatic engagement with countries not sharing its values rather than assuming European values are universal. The Trump administration offers no strong counter-narrative to Russia. Emerging powers speak and act as if a shift to polycentric power is inevitable.

The problem is that what other powers mean by polycentrism is different to what Russian leaders mean. The latter envisage a fixed order in which the UN Security Council P5 govern the world hierarchally, in the image of the 19th Century European congress model of "fixed geometry" represented by a stable geographically defined international order.

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[11]   Fiona Hill, "Putin: The One Man Show the West doesn't Understand". *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (2016): 140-144.

However, for most of the international community, polycentrism implies that some issues are handled regionally, some intergovernmentality, and some with civil society or corporations participating. This is a model of "variable geometry" – a more fluid, coalition-based international system.[12] Nor is Russia recognised in the West as an equal, or a partner.

It will be easier for Western powers to adapt their international system narratives to this material situation. It is rational for them to invest effort in projecting narratives about an evolving international system as a means to influence its emergence and shape it to their material interests as it emerges. Russia's historically-facing narrative appears out of step with the systemic shift underway.[13] It will be particularly difficult for Russia to play the constructive role of a "good citizen".[14] This gap or divergence in the underlying substance of Russia and Western narratives is concerning for us because cooperation may become genuinely necessary, certainly on regional issues of security, energy and migration.

Our argument has important implications for those monitoring Russian narratives. First, analysis of these narratives can only indicate superficial points of convergence, but they can act as starting points to identify and narrow-down conceptual differences between ideas held by Russian leaders and those by leaders in other MFAs. Russian leaders communicate about points of connection with the West or with emerging powers, but they are also keen to stress Russian civilizational and cultural singularities. The West generally understands international law and democracy to have universal moral and technical characteristics. The Russian model of plural civilizations undermines the possibility of a shared moral basis

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[12] William W. Burke-White, (2015), "Power Shifts in International Law: Structural Realignment and Substantive Pluralism". Available at: *http://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1598&context=faculty_scholarship.*

[13] Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin, (2017), "Russia's Narratives of Global Order: Great Power Legacies in a Polycentric World". *Politics and Governance,* Vol. 5, No. 3, (2017): 111-120. *https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/1017/1017.*

[14] See also: Bobo Lo, (2015). *Russia and the New World Disorder.* London: Chatham House/Brookings Institution Press.

for international institutions.[15] A second implication concerns the failure on Western powers to recognise that democracy, law and freedom are essentially contested concepts. This makes it difficult for Western leaders to seek compromise on "cherished" values when Russia, China and others assert the importance of a system made up of plural civilizations. The recent shift by EU leaders towards value pluralism indicates some recognition that the West is approaching this dilemma differently.

In short, strategic narrative analysis can explain why any opportunities for cooperation between the West and Russia have become increasingly difficult. Superficial convergence on international system narratives cannot provide a basis for dialogue when all parties disagree on how that system works and on what moral order it rests upon. Russia may catch the eye in 2018 for its efforts at disrupting democratic elections or sovereign borders but eventually some kind of strategic alignment with the West will be necessary if Russia is not to find itself even more ostracized and lacking in the very recognition it craves.

Example 3: Alliance Narratives

Our first two cases highlighted how strategic narrative analysis can inform diplomatic relations between adversaries. The third case emphasizes the importance of alliance identity narratives and suggests that these narratives can be targeted to evoke fears of entrapment or abandonment that constrain the behaviour of an alliance member.

Snyder argues that states may fear that their allies will abandon the alliance for any number of reasons and this can threaten alliance cohesion and policymaking.[16] This is especially true as domestic political considerations or leaders change in states or as international power dynamics shift. On the other hand, as time goes on, states may fear that they are becoming entrapped by the alliance itself. Snyder's work on alliances suggests that states react in patterned ways to alleviate fears of entrapment and

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[15]   A. Miskimmon and B. O'Loughlin, *op. cit.*

[16]   Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2007.

fears of abandonment.[17] For example, a fear of abandonment may lead to "movement toward the ally". This includes making or reiterating explicit alliance pledges, alliance revisions, and appeasing or moving closer to an ally's position. States that fear entrapment "will either loosen their general alliance commitment or withhold support from their allies".[18]

Communication is the key to constructed attempts to arouse fears of abandonment and fears of entrapment. For example, digital diplomacy can be used by members of an alliance to stress alliance identity as an attempt to constrain an ally's actions perceived to be outside of what the alliance "stands for". Digital diplomacy can also be used by those outside of an alliance or by domestic political opponents within alliances states, to stir up fears of abandonment – as has been done by Russia in Europe.[19] The table below sets out the communicator (within the alliance or outside of the alliance) and fears (of abandonment and entrapment) with real world examples.

Table 1: Examples of Cases Associated with Alliance Fears		
	Fears of abandonment	**Fears of entrapment**
From inside an alliance	US narratives (under President Trump) that evoke fears that the US will abandon traditional allies or agreements (eg. the NAFTA and NATO).	US fears of entrapment in an alliance with Afghanistan under Obama.
From outside an alliance	Russian narratives that countries such as Ukraine and George will be abandoned by Europe.	Russian narratives that European countries are trapped into agreeing to economic sanctions by the US and European allies and sacrificing their own economic interests.

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[17]   *Ibid.*, p. 313.

[18]   *Ibid.*, p. 315.

[19]   Laura Roselle, "Strategic Narratives and Alliances: The Cases of Intervention in Libya (2011) and Economic Sanctions Against Russia (2014)". *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (2017): 99-110. *https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/1023/1023.*

Fears of abandonment can be raised within alliances and by actors outside. Political actors within alliances can use strategic narratives to arouse fears of abandonment in an ally, with the aim of extracting concessions from that ally. For example, one way to read President Trump's comments about the possibility of terminating NAFTA if a deal cannot be reached is to push Canada and Mexico to offer more concessions. Fears of abandonment can also be fostered by actors outside of an alliance. Russia, for example, has fostered, through its actions in Abkhazia and Crimea, the narrative that the West will abandon those whom they profess to support.

Fears of entrapment can also come from within and without. Within the United States, a narrative of entrapment in Afghanistan dominated the media as Obama came to office in 2009. The cover story of *Newsweek* magazine on January 31 directly addressed the similarities and differences between Afghanistan and Vietnam. The fear of being "stuck" in Afghanistan shaped US policy in subsequent years. A fear of entrapment can also be promoted from outside an alliance. Consider how Russian narratives may undermine or weaken alliances, particularly in Europe. There are component parts of the Russian narrative that foster a sense of entrapment within a Western alliance. These find resonance in Eastern Europe and with certain audiences in Western Europe and the United States. These components include the idea that the United States and NATO take advantage of those who are weaker, and that individual countries cannot pursue their own economic interests because they are trapped within the alliance. In the countries opposing sanctions on Russia – Slovakia, Hungary, and to a degree the Czech Republic – one can see overlapping narratives in these areas.

The new media ecology allows multiple actors to *challenge* narratives and to *push back* against narratives that might induce fears of abandonment and entrapment. For example, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto replied to candidate Trump's September 2016 tweet that "Mexico will pay for the wall!" with the tweet "Repito lo que le dije personalmente, Sr. Trump: México jamás pagaría por un muro".[20] Former President Vicente Fox Quesada's use of Twitter and YouTube to challenge President Don-

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[20]   *https://twitter.com/EPN/status/771423919978913792.*

ald Trump on the values associated with the North American alliance serves as another example. One such tweet turns the abandonment narrative around on Trump: "@realDonaldTrump said he would make America Great. Today, America is losing its place in the world because of you, and we're moving on without you by signing the TPP without you. So long Donald".[21] Instead of focusing on Trump's disruption, the narrative is turned to the construction of a new international agreement *without* the United States.

Conclusion

Strategic narrative analysis shows that policymakers can shape the environment within which decision-making occurs when digital technologies are brought into line with a foreign policy strategy. That is what is at stake, and it is a lot. Tactics to counter disruption or reach out to audiences are tools at the service of broader foreign policy strategies, and it is on strategy where our attention should focus. Diplomacy has *always* been about both disruption and forging cooperation. In recent years, some states and MFAs adapted more quickly than others to a changing media environment in which disruption becomes easier.[22] Yet while states, institutions and societies must be resilient against disruption, national leaders and MFAs must not lose sight of the importance of their long-term strategies.

Strategic narrative is an approach to international affairs that allows that mix of determined strategy with the possibility of enhanced recognition and cooperation. It is vital to understand how this works on a new digital field and with new rules. The cases we highlight exemplify this. The context for the 2015 Iran Deal was created with the acknowledgement by the US and by Iran of the other's identity narratives, and a hybrid media campaign was developed to seek buy-in from hostile

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[21]   *https://twitter.com/VicenteFoxQue/status/929775641876205568.*

[22]   Andrew Hoskins and B. O'Loughlin, "Arrested War : The Third Phase of Mediatization", *Information, Communication and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 11, (2015): pp. 1320-1338.

constituencies. Analysis of the strategic narratives of Russia and the West shows that the contested histories and divergent moral foundations held by Russia and the West make cooperation immensely difficult. Russian use of television and social media using Western terms but with different meanings exacerbates the divide. Finally, the case of alliances demonstrates that identity narratives are central to the cohesion and policy-making of alliances, and that digital diplomacy can be used to foster or counter these fears.

The implications of strategic narrative analysis are vast and the MFA serves as a bridge between strategic thinking about narratives and the tactical digital realm. States perceive their interests not based on an objective reading of an objective reality but through the prism of experience and expectation; of deeply-held characterisations of themselves and other states; based on plots about rising and falling powers or civilisations and their role within those plots. By understanding one's own strategic narrative and others' narratives it becomes possible to make the vocation of international relations a project of construction again.