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Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations

Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle[1]

Abstract

This working paper presents a new research agenda for a major problem in both the praxis and study of international relations: how states seek to influence the international system. We argue that this can best be understood through a focus on strategic narratives. Strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics, and to shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour of domestic and international actors. Specifically, by tracing the formation, project and reception of strategic narratives, we can explain how states seek to shape the international order, pursue policy outcomes, and enhance policy and political legitimacy. Conceptually, narratives offer a particular structure through which shared sense is achieved, representing a past, present and future, an obstacle and a desired end-point. States use narratives strategically, though they face various constraints in their capacities to do so. International relations scholars have struggled to trace these processes; conceptual innovation around ideas, norms and socialisation has not been matched by methodological precision or imagination. The study of communication offers several research traditions upon which these processes can be more adequately addressed. These traditions help us map the gates, channels and platforms through which states attempt to project their narratives in international relations, offer rich understandings of multi-national audience behaviour, and help us trace the oscillating temporalities and patterns of communication with which IR practitioners must grapple. Here we first set out how a research agenda on strategic narratives informs international relations theory and foreign policy in important conceptual areas. Second, we discuss how a new media ecology further necessitates a shift to a strategic narrative focus. Finally, we briefly examine instances of research designs employed by US and UK public diplomacy teams to bring such insights to bear. The framework advanced in this working paper will underpin a volume to be published in 2012 examining the role and impact of strategic narratives in critical processes in international relations, including Great Power identity, international organisations and integration, and social networks and international community.

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Introduction[2]

This working paper presents a summary of a research agenda of a major emerging trend in both the praxis and study of international relations, focusing on how states seek influence in international affairs.

This paper responds to the widely-acknowledged and renewed importance of bringing together the fields of Communication and International Relations (IR). It is striking that the theme of the 2012 International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention is *Power, Principles and Participation in the Global Information Age*, while in 2011 the plenary panel of the main professional and academic body of communications researchers, the International Communication Association (ICA), were asked to answer the question, 'Is communications the discipline of the 21st Century?' (Calhoun, 2011). Yet it is a source of continual frustration among communication scholars that political scientists, sociologists, historians and others often try to analyse the role of media and communication in the problems they study while totally ignoring the insights of the fields of media and communication. Sonia Livingstone, Head of the Media and Communications Department at the London School of Economics, commented, 'we often bemoan the fact that rarely do scholars from other disciplines come to us or our journals for advice on how to study the media; rather, they seem to us to reinvent the wheel, neglect our intellectual tradition of analysis and findings, tread on our toes' (Livingstone, 2011: 1472). IR is guilty of this, as leading scholars continue to include media through the most cursory content analyses (e.g. Kratochvíl et al., 2011). If IR embraced interdisciplinarity and the insights of media and communications then it will be able to construct more rigorous and nuanced explanations of the communicative dimensions of international politics. Similarly, media and communications scholars can contribute to IR insofar as their methods are lent to help explain IR problematics such as power balancing, regional integration, and war and conflict, not simply using IR problems as the opportunity to further refine their own disciplinary concerns with media effects or framing.

The marriage of Communication and International Relations can help bring together rich literatures on dynamics shaping international affairs. International Relations scholars have contributed greatly to our understanding of material and non-material factors shaping international order. The emergence of constructivist research by such leading figures as Katzenstein, Kratochvíl, Onuf, Ruggie and Wendt have brought the role of ideas and norms to the centre of the study of international relations. Many have sought to explain influence in international affairs through constructivist approaches, with much attention being given to dynamics of socialization and norm diffusion (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al, 1999; Ruggie, 1998). Where International Relations can be conceptually strong, it lacks frameworks and methods to effectively trace and demonstrate dynamics of influence, which is where we see the most fertile ground for cooperation between Communication and International Relations

[2] We are grateful to comments on this strategic narratives agenda from Richard Anderson, Cristina Archetti, Sanjoy Banjeree, Felix Berenskoetter, Felix Ciuta, Nick Cull, Gavin Duffy, Karin Fierke, Kathy Fitzpatrick, Bastian Giegerich, Marie Gillespie, Sandra Halperin, Stefanie Ortmann, Shawn Powers, Philip Seib, Vivien Schmidt, Hongying Wang, Antje Wiener, and Jan Zielonka. Many of these points developed from an original working paper with Andreas Antoniades. Thanks to research assistance from Lawrence Ampofo.

Being interdisciplinary is not a matter of cherry-picking concepts but a set of skills - collaboration, knowing how to learn from others, being reflexive about one's approaches, and presenting knowledge from your own field clearly. This working paper emerges from a series of interdisciplinary workshops in New York (ISA 2009 preconference workshop), London (Reframing the Nation 2010 sociology conference), Stockholm (European Consortium for Political Research 2010) and North Carolina (ISA South 2011 conference). That central problem, and our focus, is how states seek to mobilise narratives to seek influence and shape the behaviour of third parties. We aim to make a major contribution to the study of international relations by developing the concept of strategic narrative, highlighting both the conceptual novelty and utility of the concept and the explanatory power of our framework.

Why strategic narrative?

> *Strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors*.

Communication has not been given enough profile in the study of international relations. We aim to remedy this by providing a conceptual blueprint for understanding how and when communication matters in international relations. We do this through the concept of strategic narrative.

Analysing narratives allow us to do a number of things. First, strategic narratives are a tool through which states can articulate their interests, values and aspirations for the international order. Second, in policy terms, attempts at narrative shaping by leaders are seen by Risse as an attempt to overcome the domestic and international institutional constraints highlighted in much historical institutionalist literature (2011). More specifically, strategic narratives are a tool for political actors to change the discursive environment in which they operate, manage expectations, and extend their influence. These are narratives about both states and the system itself, both about 'who we are' and 'what kind of order we want'.

A recent influential publication written by two serving U.S. servicemen called for a national strategic narrative to chart the uncertain future facing U.S. foreign policy (Mr. Y, 2011). In the preface to the publication Anne-Marie Slaughter argues:

> *A narrative is a story. A national strategic narrative must be a story that all Americans can understand and identify with in their own lives…We seek … to be the nation other nations listen to, rely on and emulate out of respect and admiration* (Slaughter, 2011 in Mr Y, 2011: 4).

The United Kingdom Ministry of Defence (MoD) also points to narrative as an important component of strategic communication (2011). In a recent report the MoD states:

> *In the global information environment it is very easy for competing narratives to also be heard. Some may be deliberately combative – our adversaries for example, or*

> *perhaps hostile media. Where our narrative meets the competing narratives is referred to as the battle of the narratives, although the reality is that this is an enduring competition rather than a battle with winners and losers* (MoD, 2011: 2-10).

Despite the resonance with our own work, these conceptions of strategic narrative lack a framework to identify the reception of a narrative and the interactions that follow, both domestically and internationally. Our aim is therefore not only engaging in an academic debate about the nature of influence in international relations, but also seeks to clarify an emerging strand of government policy that is ill-defined at present. Our strength is interdisciplinarity, providing both an analysis of processes and relationships in international affairs and a means to understand the role of communication in those processes and relationships, within the new media ecology in which modern diplomacy operates.

Conceptually, narratives are frameworks that allow humans to connect apparently unconnected phenomena around some causal transformation (Todorov, 1977: 45). The end-point of this transformation bestows meaning upon all parts of the whole. At the intersection of IR and history, Geoffrey Roberts describes narrative as 'simply the practice of telling stories about connected sequences of human action' (2006: 703-704). ÓTuathail combines story and narrative: 'Storylines are sense-making organizational devices tying the different elements of a policy challenge together into a reasonably coherent and convincing narrative' (ÓTuathail 2002: 617). A narrative entails an initial situation or order, a problem that disrupts that order, and a resolution that re-establishes order, though that order may be slightly altered from the initial situation. Narrative therefore is distinguished by a particular structure through which sense is achieved. Strategic narratives are representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political actors – usually elites – attempt to give determined meaning to past, present and future in order to achieve political objectives. Critically, strategic narratives integrate interests and goals – they articulate end- states and suggest how to get there.

Many scholars have looked at the formation and evolution of great powers' ideas about themselves and the international system, and used these to make inferences about their behaviour and interactions. For instance, Legro (2007) suggests states identify their relation to the system as one of integration, revision or separation from the system's values and operations. What such analysis overlooks is, first, the importance of states *then projecting* an integrationist, revisionist or separatist identity in order to persuade domestic and international audiences of their intentions and aims; second, the effects such projections have; and third, how these communications are conditioned by the media ecology of the time. After all, each identity entails a narrative about where the system is heading (towards integration, revision or separation). This paper asks: What frameworks and methods could be used to address this?

In this paper, strategic narratives are conceptualised as future-oriented identity claims that articulate a distinctive (national/regional) position on a specific issue or policy domain, or in general with regard to the place of an actor in world politics. Key components of a strategic narrative include the following:

A. It is future-oriented. A strategic narrative may refer to the past and/or present, but as a strategic device its utility is connected to shaping politics in the future.

B. It is an identity claim. It articulates a distinctive (national/regional) position on a specific issue, policy domain or in general with regard to the place of the country within world politics or the international system (Roselle, 2011).
C. Its content is not fixed. A strategic narrative is a dynamic and ever-negotiated social product based on states' interactions both with their societies and with external significant others (Hopf, 2002; Zehfuss, 2002).
D. That said, the parameters of strategic narratives a state may draw upon is bounded by prevailing domestic and international understandings and expectations of that state. These understandings may be derived from readings of historical narratives involving that state, its prior actions or reputation. (Snyder, 1991, Roselle, 2011)
E. Its audience is both internal and external. Strategic narratives can be used to unify a public (domestic audience) via the identity claim and to delineate and communicate this claim and position within the international sphere.

Its 'narrators' are primarily elites, not just government leaders but also security experts, consultants, professors, and policy analysts in think-tanks, universities, and institutes as well as ministries who construct the strategic narrative through deliberative interaction in 'discursive communities' and then communicate it to the general public through speeches, press conferences, official documents, and more. In addition, narratives can be carried and remediated by journalists, news formats and even films and documentaries. Through all these channels and gatekeepers (see below), narratives become discussed and deliberated through media and the 'talking' or 'chattering' classes, as well as, of course, the public more generally.

We argue that our conceptual framework offers explanatory power to understand the dynamics shaping the international system. We focus on relations between major powers to help illustrate how narratives play a significant role in how powerful states seek to shape order and change in the system. Numerous scholars have sought to explain how great powers seek to shape order and socialise allies and competitors into this order. G. John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan (1990) attempt to understand the role of ideas in hegemonic orders at the end of the Cold War. They threw down a challenge to work towards a greater understanding of socialisation and hegemonic power – an issue that had until that point received limited attention due to the prevalence of studies focusing on material power. Ikenberry (2011) has continued to work on issues relating to power transition and in debates concerning socialisation of rising powers such as China into the American-dominated liberal democratic order. Without understanding how communication operates in the international system, arguments about socialisation are incomplete.

Other scholars have sought to explain how ideas and influence combine in foreign policy. Joseph Nye's concept of soft power has become an accepted component of modern diplomacy. Thomas Risse argument draws on Habermas's idea of communicative action to assert IR involves processes of states projecting and contesting truth claims (2000). Neta Crawford also highlights the importance of argument in the process of international change (2002). Risse's focus is primarily on formal negotiations rather than free flowing attempts to influence international order, which are the focus of this paper. All of these approaches refer to the importance of ideas and the importance of socialisation in IR. There is,

however, a methodological difficulty in tracking when and where ideas matter, which is where we intend to make a contribution.

Finally, narrative and strategy have often not been explicitly linked in the academic literature. Policy literature that has been more explicit in linking narrative and strategy comes out of literature in strategic communication. Two exceptions in academic writing are Lawrence Freedman and Mary Kaldor who analyse strategic narratives from different perspectives. Lawrence Freedman writes, '[n]arratives are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events' (2006: 22). Kaldor et al (2007) argue that the EU should employ a strategic narrative of 'human rights' to forge influence with others and to legitimise EU foreign policy among EU citizens. Neither explains how these processes take place, particularly when we take into account the complexity of projecting narratives in our complex media ecology. Analysis of strategic narratives demonstrates, in a new media ecology, how states seek to project narratives to shape expectations about the international system and policy behaviour. In order to chart strategic narrative we see this as a triptych of three simultaneous and reinforcing dynamics: Formation / Projection / Reception.

Table 1: Central areas addressed by Strategic Narratives in international relations and foreign policy

International System	**Foreign Policy**
Strategic Narratives construct/affect/shape expectations of the nature and workings of the international system, including • actors' understandings of polarity • identification of great powers • expectations about the behavior of 'kinds' of states, eg. great powers, rogue states • desirability and possibility of collaboration, cooperation, integration • predictions about rising and falling powers, threats, enemies, and allies • identification of interests • socialization of political actors	Strategic Narratives construct/affect/shape • the policy agenda • policy options • policy preferences • coalitions • policy legitimacy

Figure 1: Strategic narrative processes
(These processes are separated for conceptual and analytical reasons. We do not understand this as a linear process, but as a mutually (re)constituted process.)

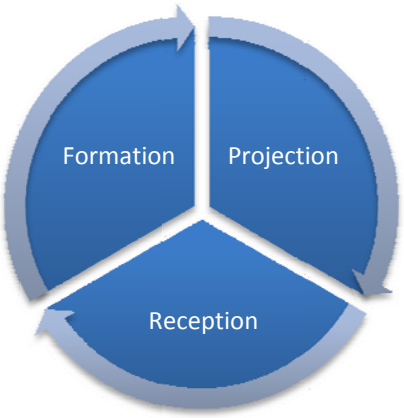

Table 2: Central areas addressed by a focus on Strategic Narrative formation, projection, and reception

Strategic Narrative **Formation**	Strategic Narrative **Projection**	Strategic Narrative **Reception**
Includes understanding how and under what conditions political actors construct narratives. Includes analyses of: - political or policy goals - the role of domestic politics in narrative formation - constraints of previous/historical narratives - events in the world	Includes considerations of how and under what conditions narratives are disseminated. Includes analyses of: - new media and technologies - issues of access - communication technique (eg. timing) - dissemination networks	Includes considerations of how and under what conditions narratives are received/understood. Includes analyses of: - credibility of messages for audience(s) - effects of competing narratives - types of receptions (support, acquiescence, protest, appropriation, etc.) - contingent factors affecting reception

Operationalising Strategic Narrative I: The problem of method

The study of communication and its effects has been hindered in IR by the intra-disciplinary divisions between rationalist, positivist scholars who understand IR as the social scientific study of state behaviour, and 'reflectivist', interpretivist scholars who aim to generate understanding of international politics, not causal explanation (Smith, 2000). The latter explicitly aim to "take ideas seriously" by accounting for their diverse forms (as myth, discourse, belief, ideology), functions (categorising, authorising) and effects (constitutive, performative), but acknowledge the impossibility of watertight explanation since these ideational processes are diffuse and observable data is often incomplete. The former reduce ideas to variables which are present/absent, e.g. road maps that feed into rational decision-making. This division is present within communication studies itself, with its own sub-fields based around psychology, framing and cognition as against historical, cultural and aesthetic trajectories (see the programs of the International Communication Association annual conventions). Communications, too, is divided between between 'the pursuit of quantitative precision and interpretative depth' (Calhoun, 2011: 1485). Thus, IR scholars can draw upon approaches to communication that align with their methodological preferences, reinforcing existing divisions.

Nevertheless, in the last decade interpretivist scholars have produced research agendas that explicitly set out the validity and replicability of their studies (e.g. Hansen, 2006; Bially-Mattern, 2004). The study of securitisation – how the communication of ideas about what is a security threat – has used qualitative methods to deliver a rich, broad set of findings that continue to generate new hypotheses and projects (Buzan et al, 1997; The Changing Landscape of European Security, Sixth Framework Research Programme of DG Research (European Commission) (http://www.libertysecurity.org/), 2004-2009; Gad and Peterson, 2011). Such projects have used a variety of quantitative and qualitative approaches to media and communication to trace the circulation and, in some cases, explain the (re)constitution, of ideas and identities over time, ideas and identities which shape the interests and preferences of agents and thus help to explain their actions.

The strategic narrative framework also seeks to transcend this division but from an alternative direction. We begin with strategic actors – rational agents with particular goals within the international system, using communication to achieve those goals (Edelman, 1988). However, we focus on their instrumental attempts to do the very ideational work most rationalist IR scholars would ignore because it is methodologically difficult to address. Recall that strategic narratives are defined as: *a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors*. This entails exploring the meanings held by relevant domestic and international actors, and tracing connections between initial intentional, strategic narrative 'work' by a state (formation and projection), changes in the meanings held by other actors (reception), and changes in their behaviour. We must identify the interaction of: material processes and events, the institutionalisation of the preferred narratives of particular powers, and the narrative work being done by 'recipient' or 'receiver' states and/or other actors.

In some instances the effects of strategic narratives can be addressed through studies of foreign policy elites and decisions; in other cases, when the communication is not simply

among elites but includes the mobilisation of publics, the study of strategic narratives entails a broader range of methods and data (see next section). Strategic narrative work may occur through diplomacy alone, or public diplomacy alone or as well.

The operationalisation of the study of strategic narratives within foreign policy elites has been largely seen in formal negotiations or within durable institutional structures. Vivian Schmidt's work on discursive institutionalism within the EU is particularly notable here (2010). Institutions are often seen as transmission belts for norms to become socialised. Frank Schimmelfennig (2003) has charted how candidate states from central and eastern Europe were able to influence the European Union and NATO through a strategy of rhetorical entrapment. EU and NATO candidate states were successful in using a rhetorical strategy which used the rhetorical commitments of the EU and NATO to 'trap' the two organisations into accepting their candidature. Hay and Rosamond have outlined how governments use discourses of economic imperatives to shape policy outcomes (2002). These are three attempts to understand how discourse can be used strategically to pursue policy outcomes. Our contribution rests on demonstrating how discursive strategies employed by states are based on a wider understanding of a strategic narrative playing a sense-making role that has domestic and international resonance.

This rationalist starting point does not preclude addressing the trickier problems interpretivist scholars tackle regarding, for instance, the formation and effect of identities (Epstein, 2008), and the constitution, negotiation and enforcement of norms through discourses and regimes (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). These matter because once we begin to explore the strategic projection of narratives, we find states' narrative options are constrained by their existing identities or by what is say-able within the international system of the time. Roselle (2011), for example, notes this in her work on US and Soviet strategic narratives during war termination. When Obama attempted to forge a new narrative for relations between the US and "the Muslim world" in 2009, his options were limited because of the need to articulate religious and geopolitical positions both for domestic audiences and as leader of a great power state (Parmar, 2011). Hence, questions of identity and positioning in the international system can explain what narratives are formed and projected in the first place – including how leaders are trapped in historical narratives (Snyder, 1991; Roselle, 2011). As Richard Anderson has suggested, 'States don't have narratives – narratives have states'[3]. Alternatively, we may find that a state's narrative may escape its own projection, for instance Ikenberry's (2011) argument that the US post-1945 story of moving towards an ever-more liberal system has been taken up and institutionalised in East Asia independently of any narrative work by the US; this leads to questions about agency and intentionality which rationalist scholars usually ignore. Studies of discourse find structuring logics that make some issues and narratives speakable, knowable and significant and others not (Roselle, 2010). For some research questions in IR, we may wish to take this into account. Finally, these questions problematise what it means to be strategic, and thus what counts as strategic communication or narrative work.

[3] Comments made at the American Political Science Association (APSA) Annual Convention, Washington DC, Preconference on Political Communication, 1 September 2010.

To summarise, our framework allows us to address conceptual and empirical questions IR has so far not adequately addressed. These imperatives become even more clear when we move beyond elite-to-elite communication to ask how citizens fit into this picture.

Operationalising II: Methods for the New Media Ecology

The proliferation of archived, digital communications in the international system offers unprecedented opportunities to study the formation, projection and reception of strategic narratives. Indeed, in the section following this, we note some initial attempts of state departments to monitor the impact of their strategic narratives in this media ecology. After flux, hype and uncertainty about media and information flows in the 2000s, identifiable patterns in international political communication now allow a consolidation of knowledge in this field. This can be demonstrated if we consider the who, how, where and when of strategic narratives.

Who: Some heralded the new affordances of a digitised media ecology as enabling a democratisation of international political communication, others feared for increased control and surveillance that enables traditional or new authorities to dominate political debates (O'Loughlin, 2011). Systematic analysis, where it exists, shows domestic institutions and cultures shape how both individuals and states adapt to technological opportunities. The recent proliferation of transnational television *channels* such as Al Jazeera, Telesur, Press TV, Russia Today, and CCTV9, alongside BBC World and CNN International, may suggest state control. However, each features *platforms* and interactive features allowing for forms of public participation and conversation, such as the BBC's 'Have your say' message boards. The result is a layering of structures which constrain who can speak to whom: despite the translation efforts of the White House, Obama's 2009 Cairo speech did not achieve presence in many national media outlets or in social media conversations in Arab-majority parts of the world (Khatib et al., 2011). And if top-down strategic narrative work is difficult, so the case for bottom-up narratives can be overstated: social media conversations are usually conducted through the templated-formats of popular sites, those on mainstream media sites are moderated, and the case of Wikileaks demonstrates that amateur, citizen narrators must still operate with, and to some extent be harnessed by, mainstream international media organisations to achieve impact (Chadwick, forthcoming).

We can better understand these oscillations in who narrates if we address how strategic narratives form and circulate. For there is a further tension between emergence and agency in the new media ecology. On the one hand, the relation between action and effect is one of emergence: relations, identities and situations emerge that could not be foreseen by simply identifying the constituent units of that society. The proliferation of digital media content and connectivities makes it impossible to know in advance what content will go viral, what movements will form, and what new political or social arrangements will result. This puts states on perpetual alert for leaks, "rogue" images and counter-narratives. On the other hand, actors still attempt to impose more direct cause-effect relations. People, organizations and institutions use media content for specific purposes, to create, steer or

inhibit social change. News values remain steady, making predictable what type of stories will reach agendas.

In recent years we have witnessed various responses to these conditions. An actor such as Al-Qaeda is caught between agency and emergence: It attempts to control its narrative via a suite of rigorously managed websites and strategically-timed statements; but in locales in different regions unforeseen actors attribute their own actions and statements to Al-Qaeda's inspiration, and Al-Qaeda can take credit for chaos beyond its initiation. Al-Qaeda becomes both a unitary and distributed actor; its narrative is both cultivated and emergent. Similarly, the 2008 Obama presidential campaign tried to steer a course between granting local autonomy to campaign teams and encouraging user generated videos in the expectation that some clips – through sheer probability – would go viral. At the same time as harnessing such emergence, there was concern to retain control of "the message" and not let Obama be held hostage to unanticipated promises made by local teams. And in his 2009 Cairo speech, Obama's office trailed and delivered his speech through a proliferation of formats and languages, through social, mainstream and niche media, whilst providing forums for international user responses. This would offer the authenticity of uncontrolled, emergent and possibly critical opinions, and the impression of a willingness to enter dialogue, but in fact through carefully managed media environments. Obama was attempting to impose agency onto an emergent media ecology; he could not impose it onto media spaces beyond his control, such as Arab media blogs (Khatib et al., 2011).

These cases show that gatekeeping still determines where narratives go. The traditional gatekeeping role of mass media editors, who would decide what stories would make the scarce pages or minutes of 'the news', appeared fatally undermined by the infinite capacity of the internet, fragmentation of news audiences and ability of audiences to gatekeep their own news through personalised filters – what Negroponte (1995) termed "the daily me". The news 'flow' would flow wherever We-the-Media let it (Gillmor, 2006). Instead, the past decade has witnessed new forms of gatekeeping that are networked (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008), institutional (Bennett et al., 2011) and often multi-lingual, hinting at more subtle changes in the form and loci of power in international communication (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2011). In 2010 CNN announced that 75% of its news hits came from links from social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) (Gross, 2010). Instead of mainstream media gatekeeping and sustaining predictable news agendas, citizens perform this function for them.

There are still gates, then, and states seeking to project strategic narratives must understand and work with them, even as they are adapting in form and personnel. Furthermore, the distribution of non-gatekept content can be tracked through social media monitoring methods. Big Data, increased computer processing power and linguistic analysis software make it possible to track narratives through the messy grammars of everyday digitized communication. This radically expands when narratives occur, since both elite and citizen projection or contestation of strategic narratives is archived, permanent and retrievable. Distributed contributions to strategic narratives are ongoing and routine.

The accumulation of a permanent, analyse-able mass of communications data and its distribution through shifting forms of gates, channels and platforms creates a modulation of order and emergence. When inter-state communication becomes public, this is the condition within which the formation, projection and reception of strategic narratives must be analysed. This is the context for constructing studies of how strategic narratives shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors. It is useful to explore how state policymakers are trying to evaluate the impact their narratives are having.

Policymakers' attempts to evaluate the success of their strategic narratives

How can you tell your narrative, and your projection of that narrative, has changed the opinions and even behaviour of other actors? What methods are needed? Two recent attempts by the US and UK governments illustrate the importance and difficulty of this challenge. In the UK in 2008, the British Council and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) piloted a framework to measure formation, projection and reception and develop consistent and reliable measurement practices (Vinter and Knox, 2008). The framework centred upon three measures and methods: (i) Outputs – changed media reporting and sentiment over 3-6 months, (ii) intermediary outcomes – impact on policy influencers over 0-5 years, evaluated through interview methods, and (iii) long-term policy impact – discernible through policy and behavioural change. For instance, with a climate change event around which the UK government promoted a particular narrative, the framework and methods showed more immediate media coverage, more awareness and understanding of the issue among policy influencers, and, in the long term, signs of public behavioural change regarding their carbon footprint. These findings illustrate the difficulty of proving 'influence', since these changes could have been the result of myriad factors.

By 2010 the US Department of State developed a framework too, evaluated in the Public Diplomacy Model for the Assessment of Performance measurement study (Matwiczak, 2010). This aimed to evaluate the impact of US electronic media outreach in many countries, and to prove that public diplomacy could be cost-effective and effective. Analysts addressed two questions. First, what effects does US public diplomacy have on foreign publics? The methods used to address this included social media link analysis and sentiment analysis using analysts with local/linguistic knowledge. They found Russians were very focused on the US because of its competitive party politics, Indonesians primarily discussed celebrities, and the Urdu Pakistani social communications being analysed turned out to be in London. Second, they asked what sort of platforms specific foreign publics are comfortable with. To assess this, they used in-country focus groups, analysis of local media technology capabilities, interviews with embassy staff, and a panel survey. They found that few people use web 2.0 to discuss geopolitics. Instead, it was recommended that embassy staff need to create social events; face-to-face communication can create positive attitudes towards the US. Like the UK study, the US attempts offer instructive shortcomings: the studies are short term and focused, whereas we might expect the formation, projection, reception and negotiation of strategic narratives to be long term processes, established through deliberative responses to many events and actions.

Conclusion: New Insights from the Analysis of Strategic Narratives

With the advent of social media monitoring – real-time automated tracking of public and elite sentiment on social media – the challenge for such strategic narrative practitioners today is constructing methodologies and interfaces that allow for the integration of diverse forms of qualitative and quantitative data, across multiple languages, bringing to bear contextual knowledge so that automated data processing intertwines with the interpretive political insight of diplomats and scholars. Such integration must be operationalised across the strategic narrative framework of formation, projection, and reception. It must be focused on specific cases and problems.

This short working paper has presented an outline of an edited volume to be published in 2012 which includes contributions by scholars who address central conceptual issues in international relations scholarship today by focusing on such cases and problems, including:

- Great power identity in a post-Cold War international order;
- International organizations and integration;
- The Global Information Economy;
- Social networks and international community;
- Domestic determinants of international relations

A focus on strategic narratives offers specific insights on how, when, and why communication makes a different to processes in international relations in all of these areas.

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