

This series of U.S. Army Mad Scientist events is in partnership with Georgetown University, The Center for Security Studies.

*Dr. Ajit Maan and Mr. Paul Cobaugh of Narrative Strategies www.narrative-strategies.com are here today to talk about disinformation as **narrative warfare** in our continuing look at Weaponized Information*



- **Slides 1-7 pertain to this presentation.**
- The rest are for your own use and are the overview of an introductory NW/ Narrative Warfare course.
- Our slides are merely a rough outline of what we intend to be an interactive event.
- ***Enjoy and don't hesitate to ask questions***

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Agenda

We're losing the Information War because...
It's **NW, Narrative Warfare**, not **IW (information warfare)**

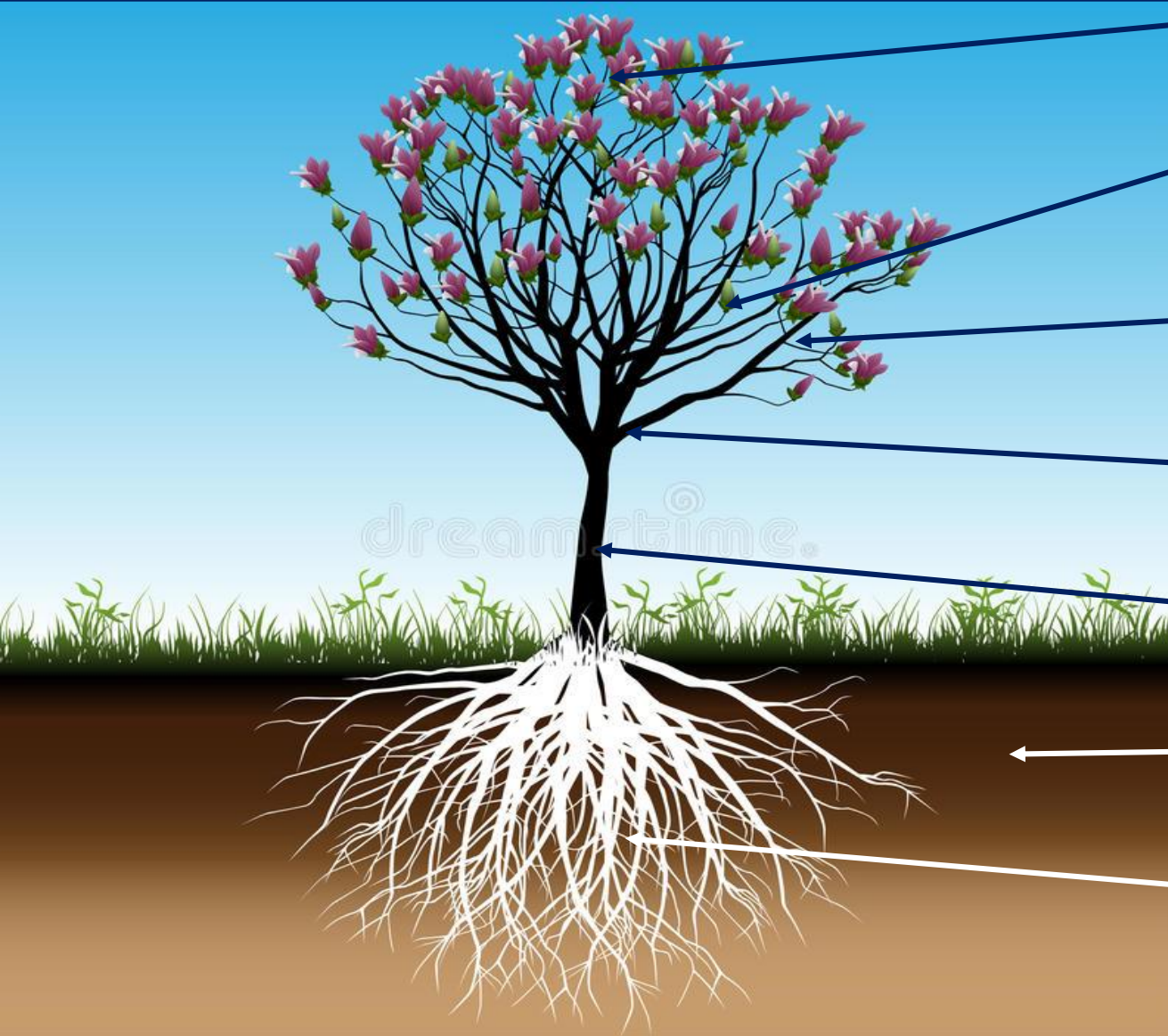
Dr. Maan

- *What is:*
 - *Narrative*
 - *What is the difference between narrative and stories?*
 - *Narrative Warfare*
 - *Why counter-narratives don't work*

Paul Cobaugh

- *Where does narrative belong in operations?*
- *What are the 5 things you need to know today about deploying a working NW natsec?*
- *Why CTs (conspiracy theories) are an insidious and dangerous threat*

Disinformation and Narrative Warfare Intro



Flower/ fruit: **changed behavior**

Leaves: messages

Twigs: themes

Branches: stories

Trunk: **narrative**

Soil: parts of identity

Roots: Identity

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1. *Where does narrative belong in operations?*

- Here's a radical thought for military and other National Security types; All campaigns and supporting operations are are influence. Therefore, all campaigns are narrative campaigns.*
- If we can understand that, we can understand the criticality of narrative principles to influence and success*

2. *What are the 5 things you need to know today about deploying a working NW natsec?*

- The current US, national security structure is obsolete in terms of being able to successfully influence*
- The US natsec community does not understand narrative*
- Our adversaries, whether nation-states or non-state actors to are not only fully operational regarding influence but also are light years ahead at employing a core narrative strategy*
- Losing audiences in a world defined by conflict, less than all-out war, is a commitment to failure*
- Success depends on understanding and being competent at the profession of influence and that competency is dependent on understanding narrative principles*

What exactly is a conspiracy theory?

From Merriam Webster: Definition of **conspiracy theory**

- a theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by usually powerful conspirators

Conspiracy theories are a unique form of a narrative

N = M + I + C + S© or Narrative = meaning + identity + content + structure

- Meaning: What the author/ narrator wishes the audience to believe
- Identity: The specific or *narrative identity* of both the author/ narrator and that of the target audience
- Content: The content or implied content the author/ narrator wishes to use to support their meaning
- Structure: How are stories and narratives expressed in regards to the unique target audience “narrative identity”

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*Resources/links & additional reading
from **Narrative Strategies***

- <https://www.narrative-strategies.com/publications>
- <https://www.narrative-strategies.com/wikidoctrine>
- <https://www.narrative-strategies.com/election-security-resources>
- <https://www.narrative-strategies.com/failed-usg-influence>
- <https://www.bookdepository.com/Introduction-Narrative-Warfare-Paul-L-Cobaugh/9781721221417>

The following slides are merely a brief class that you are welcome to if you find them of interest

Why are Conspiracy Theories so dangerous?



<https://www.chron.com/politics/texas/article/Russians-duped-Texans-into-fake-rallies-in-Houston-12326774.php#item-85307-tbla-1>

1. Once that conspiracy theories and/ or narrative is seeded, watered, fertilized and tended it is extremely difficult to manage
2. If a conspiracy theory presents or suggests options requiring an action to defend it or the “tribe” it’s assigned to, people will act
3. If multiple Conspiracy Theories are designed to pit opposing beliefs against one another or some public target, violence is not only an option but likely to occur

*Narrative is as natural to human beings as breathing, because we are meaning-seeking animals and our primary means of meaning-making is narrative. Narratives give meaning to events and circumstances by tying them together in a certain way.
Narrative is the way we create, transmit, and in some cases, negotiate meaning.*

Dr. Ajit Maan

- Without narrative ordering, life would be experienced as an unconnected and overwhelming series of random events. We organize, prioritize, and order our experiences through narratives that we usually inherit. What's more, we understand not only the world around us, but also ourselves, through the narratives we live by; our personal narratives inform our personal identities, our tribal/familial narratives inform our tribal/familial identities, and our national narratives inform our national identity. Narratives are part of the fabric of identities. They assign meaning and identity through content and structure.
- **N = MICS or Narrative = meaning + identity + content + structure**

- **Stores refer to foundational narratives.** There are many stories on a narrative landscape. Novels, movies, and fairytales are types of stories that resonate with audiences only if the audience is familiar with the foundational narrative assumptions to which the stories refer.
- Foundational narratives, often found in religious text or myths that explain the origin and identity of a culture, are often received unconsciously while stories and their effects are usually consciously recognized. Most of us, regardless of culture, inherit the narratives we are born into and we generally inherit them uncritically and the manner in which the narrative structures our world-view seems natural and just the way things are. But narratives do not describe events in a neutral manner. **Narratives are always about influence and therefore strategic.**
- Examples:
 - Religious documents
 - cartoons
 - History books
 - Media
 - Movies
 - Books
 - Social media
 - Poetry
 - Music

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Why do we use a formula?

- Narrative is a dimensional, not linear field where each part plays a complex role in the overall effort.
 - Much like a checklist used by pilots it is easy to forget repetitive tasks due to complacency
 - In narrative construction with 4 primary elements, the omission of one can have a disastrous effect on the overall use
 - The formula is also an all-important reminder to abandon a tendency to obsess over demographics so common in the US military

Meaning

Narratives are inherently strategic. In other words, they convey meaning in a manner that seeks to influence

- Strategic in this sense **does not** merely refer to the military model that breaks everything down into; strategic, operational or tactical
 - From Merriam Webster, definition #1: Definition of strategic: “of, relating to, or marked by strategy”
 - Marketers, businesses, Physicians (treatment), political campaigns etc. all have strategies which they support with a narrative



Don't let them carve THOSE faces on our mountains, published by PM Magazine on December 12, 1941, Dr. Seuss Collection, MSS 230. Mandeville Special Collections Library, UC San Diego

Identity

“Life stories do not simply reflect personality. They are personality, or more accurately, they are important parts of personality, along with other parts, like dispositional traits, goals, and values,”

Dr. Dan McAdams

- Narrative has incredible power and one of its powers is the power to trigger predictable behavior. But the first and crucial step in triggering behavior is knowing the specific narrative identity (NI) of your target audience.
- Every person has a unique NI based on their family, friends, hometowns/ states, political interests, religious affiliations and even the type of food they prefer
 - Each sub-group has its own NI as part of the whole identity. These are called layers. Groups, nations, tribes or any subset all share layers. The more layers you understand and can trigger, the more predictable the behavior you are trying to effect.
 - NI is NOT solely demographics as many assume. NI is how each layer sees the world around them. Yes, demographics are part of this but far from the whole. This is the problem associated with employing conventional TAA, target audience analysis.

“Identity: Narratives both transmit identity and co-create identity. For example; a strategic narrative when employed with supporting lesser narratives will trigger the identity layers (as many as possible) of the target audience in order to create an “us” between the messenger and the TA, or a “them” attached to the opposition.”

Dr. Ajit Maan, President, Narrative Strategies

Content

- Narrative is about something and therefore requires baseline relatable content. This is simply what your narrative is about
 - In order for a story or narrative to be believable it must contain pieces of facts, completely true or less so.
 - For example, we cannot try to influence a TA to resist Russia or any other adversary if we include only facts about dragons or Harry Potter
 - Applicable content in military terms most often will come from the S2, J2 or similar
 - It is also important to include content from digital media which will come from open source “2 shops”
 - Remember, content merely attaches the TA to your narrative. It is the narrative that tells the audience what that assembly of information means.
 - Of note, this is very often the problem with sole reliance on Public Affairs type, press releases (PR) to inform an audience. PRs generally just tell facts and very rarely tell the “meaning” of those facts from our perspective.
 - Our adversaries will invariably not only issue a PR with similar facts but they will always tell the readers what those facts mean via their own narrative. Being first with both facts and narrative is by far, the best way to “seize the initiative” and/or dominate the narrative battlefield
 - **Arguing or attempting to rebut the adversary with only facts and calling it a “counter-narrative” is futile and the adversary wins every time**

Structure

Or... how the story/ narrative is told

- This element is by far the most difficult for US and most western individuals to understand and bears considerable weight in the formula outside of the US or Western nations
- US/ western structure is based largely on an ancient Greek paradigm:
- Stories and/ or narratives have a distinct beginning, middle (some sort of conflict) and finally, a resolution to the conflict
- It is fairly common outside the west for story-telling to take a meandering path as well as be epic in nature.
- Meaning and multiple conflicts or evolutions will occur throughout the telling with characters displaying identity traits common among the elements of society most likely to hear, read, hear or watch the story
- Also, common will be that the challenges or conflict encountered will be those most common to the intended audience
- This allows the narrator to express meaning in how those challenges are met, resolved (or not) and all within the framework of identities common among intended audiences

Weaponized and Pathologizing Narratives

- Pathologizing Narratives are a method of psychological warfare.
 - A Pathologizing Narrative is a narrative with a theme that something is wrong and the thing that is wrong is inside a person or often within some community/ nation.
- Weaponized Narrative
 - Because meaning and identity are the stuff of narratives, when narratives are weaponized, they attack the identities of the target audience and cause a disorientation in the way people and cultures understand and give meaning to events.
 - Russian narratives during the 2016 election cycle in the US are good examples. Every narrative they disseminated attacked the individual segments of US society and pitted them against others.
 - Russia also simultaneously deployed their own offensive narrative that portrayed Russia as strong, moral and the defender of the world, protecting Russia and the world from the West. They painted the West as a threat to Russia and themselves
 - The term “weaponized narrative” has come into prominence in the wake of Russian efforts against the West but they are also an extremist recruiters’ favorite tools as well as our other primary threats such as China, Iran and North Korea
- Both Pathologizing and weaponized narratives often employ fear or often the “fear of others” to trigger a response

Compelling alternative narratives and counter-narratives

The US can never win at narrative warfare simply because we never compete

- Narratives, in order to be as effective as possible requires the use of a complete narrative strategy which includes primary compelling offensive narratives that dominate the cognitive space of audiences and then... counter-narratives to erode the effectiveness of the adversary's narrative strategy
 - For example, during the Cold War, if the US had merely been reactive by deploying weaponized narratives about how the Soviets were bad, evil, oppressive etc., we would have failed to convince people that democracy was better
- Our Allies and adversaries are in near constant confusion about what the US is talking about because we fail to tell them the "meaning"
 - Our alternative narratives need to explain our "meaning", regularly from top to bottom in order to dominate the cognitive space. Circumstances in conflict change and only can be deciphered by audiences via narrative
- Counter-narratives **can only succeed** if an offensive, compelling narrative exists and... we explain our meaning first.
- WW II and the Cold War are excellent examples of a complete narrative strategy

All information warfare and associated influence campaigns are actually Narrative Warfare

- The term IO in the context of an influence campaign is a misnomer. As Dr. Maan is fond of saying; *“we are not in a war over information but over the meaning of information”*.
 - The sooner we come to terms with the word “influence” the more successful we will be
- Here’s the simple logic: Narrative is always strategic in pursuit of influence. The core of any successful campaign is narrative. Narrative is primarily about meaning and identity. **Therefore, the campaign is about a narrative conflict**



Narrative hierarchy

- **Master Narratives or often called “Meta Narratives”** (the overarching narrative designed to convey the wide angle view) should be designed to influence the perceptions of the international community by framing the big picture in a way that exploits the contradictions between our adversaries walk and talk, and detail the implications of that disjunction for the international community.
- **Strategic** narrative should be designed for those at the national level tasked with implementing the required actions. It should describe what is going to happen, how it is going to happen, why it is going to happen and what role each actor will play
- **Operational Narrative is a comprehensive narrative strategy is a complete package of both offensive and defensive narratives coordinated to both degrade adversarial audiences and to build resilience within friendly audiences.** When thinking about a complete narrative strategy, a good analogy is a sport such as football that includes both offensive and defensive strategy and more importantly, a game plan which encompasses both

Narrative hierarchy; continued

- **Tactical narrative:** The meaning of the master narrative and its underlying hierarchy is translated into a tactical or local version tailored to each narrative identity specific target audience
- **Operational Narrative is a comprehensive narrative strategy is a complete package of both offensive and defensive narratives coordinated to both degrade adversarial audiences and to build resilience within friendly audiences.** When thinking about a complete narrative strategy, a good analogy is a sport such as football that includes both offensive and defensive strategy and more importantly, a game plan which encompasses both
- **FoN (family of narratives)** is a far more complex but requisite construct. At each level, there will be many individual narratives which incorporate one or more of those included in the master narrative
 - These individual narratives are often appropriate for select target audiences but not all, situation dependent

FoN example

Russia does not only deploy a WN that says the West as weak, divided and a threat to themselves and others, they also they also deploy a variety of supporting narratives about how they are good, honest and strong while contrasting

. In order to “sell” this idea they use a great many sub-narratives such as designed to:

Highlight divisive issues in Western society such as:

- Migration
- Nationalism
- Racial issues
- Economic disparity
- Hypocrisy
- Etc....

Russian strength and legitimate rights such as:

- Russian involvement in Ukraine is based on a distorted right to assert protection of Russians at risk from a corrupt Ukrainian government.
- Russia is the good and loyal friend of Syria wishing only to destroy terrorists and support the rightful government,
- NATO is encroaching on Russia’s western border and is a threat.
- Etc.

- Together these two opposing categories are indicative of offensive narratives and are deployed as a family of narratives
- Much of the social media dominating US activity in 2016 fell into these categories
- Brexit in the UK saw much the same but with different divisive issues in the UK

Type of INTEL analysis required to support a complete narrative strategy

- **(Meaning + Identity + Content + structure = Narrative)© is also the basis for the type of collection and analysis required to compete effectively in the narrative arena**
 - Like other IO planning, it essential to decide precisely what meaning you wish your TAs to understand
 - **This is not like a mission statement or necessarily commander's intent**
 - The most challenging aspect which conventional intelligence gathering and analysis does not cover is NI, narrative identity analysis. This requires cultural anthropology, a working history of the region and how psychology plays with that particular audience
 - What content will your TA respond to in order to support the meaning and behavioral changes intended
 - Much like NI, this has very specific requirements based on the NI
 - Finally, it cannot be understated that part of the research will require analysis on the consumption of media, stories, music etc. in the TA.
 - A subset of this is to derive what type of narrators enjoy the most dedicated following and influence

Pulling it all together

- The formula is your guide. In conjunction with your team, build a strategy and underlying narratives based on the formula:
 - What is the meaning you wish to convey?
 - What are the NI's of your different TA's?
 - What content will support my narrative at all levels?
 - What are the different structures required to disseminate narratives?
- Map out by way of a line and block chart the complete narrative strategy
 - At each level there will be supporting themes and messages
 - Identify the most appropriate narrators or class of narrators
- Design an assessment strategy based on the overall NS (narrative strategy)

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