

Leadership, Narratives and International Relations: A New “Great Game”

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A Short Taxonomy of Narratives

- The idea of *Narrative*
- The idea of *Strategic Narrative*
- The idea of *Narratives of Legitimacy*



Narratives and States

Narratives are

“frameworks constructed to allow people to make sense of the world, policies, events, and interactions.”

For these purposes: a state is

- a collection of stories connected to power.
- shaped by remembered traditions, obligations and ideologies
- in a more or less permanent competition for change
- affected by altered technologies, geopolitics, norms
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Narratives and States (2)

How do such stories evolve? Who manufactures them? How are they diffused?

A sense of loss of state power intensifies when (examples):

- significant aspects of self-characterization fall out of national control:
- when, a state or its leadership change in the global imagination from

-moral hero to delegitimized villain,

-keeper of ideals to perpetrator of evil,

-agent of desirable stability to vessel for potential protest

and disorder,

-representative of financial reliability to economic profligate.

Defining Strategic Narratives

Narratives that have a certain kind of strategic pedigree are usually:

- *The consequence of an external international agreement, either formal or tacit.*
- *That contemplates actions that enact a transformative drama of governance (including guaranteed versions of the status quo).*

International parties seek to assure

- *that the predicted narrative will take place,*
- *and threaten consequences if it does not.*

These narratives seek to introduce discipline for different actors playing key roles. They frequently revise the conditions and assumptions for legitimacy.

Strategic narratives have been defined as stories forged to achieve

“desirable end-states”

“to influence states’ perception of their interests and how the world works and should work.”

Defining Narratives of Legitimacy

Narratives of Legitimacy Include the highest-level justifications for states and regimes:

- narratives of divine right,
- narratives of electoral or democratic affirmation,
- narratives of conquest, narratives of historical entitlement.

These narratives can seem solid and eternal, yet history shows they are fragile and ephemeral, that they can vanish in a day.

They are the product of myth (birthright, for example, or manifest destiny), past achievement (e.g. of conquest) and international accord and external, if shaky, consensus.

Shifts can come

- from economic pressure;
- from ideological challenge from inside or out;
- from changes in the state's own telling of its story, both at home and globally;
- from the increasing role of other major players in accepting, fashioning or rejecting such narratives; from overwhelming dissent

Defining Narratives of Legitimacy

An effective narrative of legitimacy can reduce costs for the state—for example, costs of defense or avoidance of sanctions.

The narrative of legitimacy is hardly ever the exclusive domain of the state to which it pertains, though part of the romance of such narratives is to argue otherwise.

Narratives of legitimacy, and their alternatives, are nourished by competing groups—for example, supporters of a regime and its opponents (both domestic and foreign).

Regimes strive to maintain or deepen their narratives of legitimacy against global efforts to redefine them.

The “street,” the “society,” the “crowd,” non-state actors —fight to intervene in the process of narrative production and management, creating additional challenges for governments.

Defining Narratives of Legitimacy

Periodicity of Narratives of Legitimacy

- In the 1990s, redefinition of the post-Soviet states, assertion and protection of new formulations based on free market capitalism and parliamentary democracy.
- Shifting narratives filled the Balkans, feeding raptures of renewed nationalisms
- In Africa, the processes of narrative legitimation and delegitimization permeate the post-colonial period.
- The Arab Spring was a concatenation of narratives bidding for legitimacy and acceptance.

One Day's Narratives: New York Times

- “ Hamas Looms Over Latest Israel US Dispute
- ” Obama, Seeking Unity on Russia, Meets Obstacles
- Iran’s Leader Says Obama Has Removed Military Option
- Victory in Syrian Election is Show of Assad’s Control
- Crowds Gather in Hong Kong for Anniversary of Tiananmen Crackdown
- In Elections Across the World, Democracy is a Question of Definition (all June 5)
- *Also Nigerian Television Becomes Front for U.S. in Terrorism Fight (June 7)*

Ukraine Narratives (1)

US Narrative:

- Ukraine was in the process of working out a deal for EU economic and political cooperation.

It was nixed by the corrupt Yanukovich administration, under pressure from Russia.

- This sparked a popular rebellion in Kiev and other major cities that led to Yanukovich's flight from the country.
 - Taking advantage of the disorder in Ukraine, Russia sent special forces into the ethnic Russian majority territory of Crimea, sealed its borders, and annexed it after a farcical referendum.
 - Then pro-Russian separatists and demonstrators, supported and advised by Russian special ops, began occupying administrative buildings and territory in Eastern Ukraine, with the support of some segments of the local population.
 - Refusing to recognize the authority of Kiev's interim government, Russia is demanding a "federalization" of Ukraine, which may mean simply its de facto dismemberment.
- *Courtesy of Kevin Platt*

Ukraine Narratives (2)

- *The Russian narrative*
 - Ukraine has always been Russia's closest "relative,"
 - the borders between what counts as Ukrainian and Russian territory are arbitrary and have moved east over the course of the century,
 - there are deep economic, familial, and national ties linking Eastern Ukraine with Russia.
 - Crimea is more Russian than Ukrainian:
 - NATO illegitimately expanded to the east in the late 1990s and early 2000s.
 - Maidan was dominated by ultra-nationalist Ukrainian forces, Russophobic, Fascist and orchestrated by Western intelligence agents in order to tear Ukraine away from Russian influence.
 - Eastern Ukrainian unrest is a popular response to the illegitimate, violent and anti-Russian regime. (changing with Poroshenko)

Courtesy of Kevin Platt

Questions About Narratives

Who is the Audience for the Narrative?

- Specific elites
- Home audience of proponents of Narratives
- Audiences in target community

What instruments are mobilized or available to advance the narrative

Who are Parties to a Strategic Narrative

Is a Strategic Narrative Effective

- Because it is backed by a super power?
- Because it reflects consensus?
- Because it has internal, legitimacy-laden integrity

Changing Markers of Legitimacy?

How can an understanding of Narratives help support Leadership

A Concluding Image

