

**The Political Consequences of Divergent Strategic Narratives:
A Preliminary Exploration**

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At the beginning of the chapter entitled “Operational Art” in the 2008 United States Army’s manual, *Operations*, there is a quote from Carl von Clausewitz that summarizes the heart of the issues explored in this paper:

The first, the supreme, the more far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and the commander have to make is to establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.¹

Clausewitz’s identification of this most important first question becomes increasingly difficult and increasingly important at those times in history when the conceptualization of the nature of war in both military and popular political culture is changing. Today, the US military has begun to embrace General David Petraeus’s strategic vision of what kind of war must be fought in places such as Afghanistan. That vision has its adherents and dissenters among the military and civilian elite, even within President Obama’s administration. The US is now in a time of transition where the public, civilian leaders and military commanders are coming to grips with insurgency as the dominant form of military conflict and the relative absence of traditional wars between states.

There have been similar times in American history, times when the uncertainty generated shifting visions of the nature of warfare had consequences for the relations between a presidential administration and its military commanders. The purpose of this paper is not to examine in detail the reasons for these shifts in military paradigms but instead to explain the impact these shifts have on the ability of the American government to articulate clearly a unified message about the nature of a military conflict. The examination of historical precedents where conflicts arose between a President and a high profile military commander during times of paradigm shift can inform our understanding of both the factors that precipitate these conflicts and the political consequences the conflicts have for the public

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¹Headquarters, Department of the Army. 2008. FM 3-0: *Operations*, p. 6-1.

debate on the nation's war aims.² This paper presents the outlines of a framework for the analysis of the causes and consequences of high visibility conflicts between the President and military commanders in time of war. The message through which either a President or military commander sets out a vision of the nation's war aims and the way in which those aims will be pursued is referred to herein as a strategic narrative.

Times of Transition

This paper explores two periods in United States history during which there was a shift in the dominant paradigm defining the type of military conflict in which the nation was involved. The transition was marked by strong differences of opinion among the political and military elite and confusion among the American public. As Thomas Kuhn described in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, these were times when the old paradigm could not account for what was observed. A new paradigm began to emerge as military professionals struggled to adapt doctrine to those new observations. In Kuhn's terms, the nation struggled to come up with a new paradigm that explained the current, anomalous observations while also accounting for what was successfully explained by the older paradigm.³ Such shifts have not been linear movements where an old paradigm was clearly replaced by a new one; civilian and military leaders weren't necessarily aware of the shifts while they were occurring. These shifts took place over decades during which elements of the older paradigms retained their adherents and advocates.⁴ This paper examines the paradigm shifts that occurred during the US Civil War and the Korean War to posit a partial explanation of the conflicts that arose between the President and his high profile military commanders. The paradigm shifts were part of the reason Presidents and their commanders developed conflicting strategic narratives.

² See also, Weigley, Russell F. 1993. "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell," 57 *The Journal of Military History* 27-58.

³ Kuhn, Thomas S. 1996. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

⁴ See e.g., Weigley, Russell E. 1991. *The Age of Decisive Battle: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*.

At the beginning of the US Civil War, the predominant conceptualization of military conflict, the dominant paradigm, placed great emphasis on decisive battles. Many expected that a small number of decisive battles would bring the war to a quick end. Yuval Harari explains the era's emphasis on the decisive battle this way, "In pre-1914 battles, sizable material and cultural resources that had been accumulated in years, decades, and even centuries of hard work were expended within a few hours."⁵ He goes on to observe that battles lasting a relatively short period of time vastly changed the relative power positions of nations.⁶ Harari states that even in contemporary times, the general public continues to think of war in terms of decisive battles although their importance diminished in military thinking in the middle of the 19th century.⁷ The US Civil War began with civilians bringing picnic lunches to watch what they considered to be short-term decisive battles and ended with an understanding that war was going to be a war of multiple protracted, complex campaigns for territory that took years to unfold. The political elite of the time had to develop strategic narratives for the public to place what was occurring in a new context because the existing paradigm of the era just didn't line up well with the events the public was witnessing.

The challenge both President Lincoln and his military commanders faced was to convey their evolving strategic narratives to both civilian political elites and to the general public. Of course, even within the military and definitely among civilian elites, there were disparate beliefs on this point. A President's ability to articulate a strategic narrative that explained current events and his picture of the desired post-war end state was crucial to both the war effort and the President's ability to gain and keep political power. Lincoln needed to articulate a vision that could be shared by the military and political elite. That vision also needed to be understandable and persuasive when communicated to the general public.

⁵ Harari, Yuval N. 2007. "The Concept of 'Decisive Battles' in World History," 18 *Journal of World History* at p. 254.

⁶ Id, p. 255.

⁷ Id, p. 266.

The US involvement in the Korean War represents another paradigm shift regarding the type of warfare the country was engaged in and another time when the President faced challenges in conveying his strategic narrative to military and civilian elites as well as to the general public. World War II had been a massive use of military force by allied forces who measured their progress through a series of campaigns that gradually took sufficient territory to defeat enemy nations. The public saw the progress in newsreels that showed the movement of the allies across maps highlighting the dramatic reduction of the amount of territory still in enemy hands. The Korean War was the first major US military conflict after the advent of nuclear weapons, weapons held by nations on both sides of the Cold War. Therefore, the war in Korea was not likely to unfold in the same way World War II had even though the US was again involved in a war as part of a multinational force. The dominant paradigm explaining what kind of war the US engaged in did not fit the realities of the nuclear era. Early in the war neither the President nor military leaders were able to articulate a new strategic narrative for either political elites or the general public. President Truman's struggled to first mold and then promulgate a new strategic narrative that explained the use of limited war in the nuclear age.

During these times of transition, both political and military leaders were faced with the necessity of explaining what kind of war the US was involved in; they had to explain it to each other, to the civilian political elite and to the American public. The explanations were often not consistent over time and cracks appeared that widened into open conflict between the President and at least some of his military commanders.

The Framework for Exploration

The conflict between the President and the commander at these two times were played out on a public stage with each actor giving his version of the facts and the applicable paradigm to the public. Each man had his story of what was happening and why, his strategic narrative. In describing the role of narratives in policy conflicts, Deborah Stone explains that narratives are organizing tools that assist

people who are trying to make sense of and adapt to complex events. They give people an explanation for what has happened and a clue about what is going to happen next. “They can hold a powerful grip on our imaginations and our psyches because they offer the promise of resolution for scary problems.” (Stone, p. 137)⁸ Few problems are scarier than war and in these historical examples, the President and the commander had to develop a narrative to persuade the public of his version of the facts and his vision of the future. These narratives weren’t structured to give a dispassionate view of how the facts could be accounted for by military doctrine. These narratives were political in the sense that they were created with the goal of increasing the political power of the storyteller at the expense of the power of his opponent.

These conflicting messages promulgated by the Presidents and commanders were strategic narratives, “representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political elites attempt to give determined meaning to past, present and future in order to achieve political objectives.”⁹ This paper uses the concept of strategic narrative to explore the way in which both sides of the President/commander conflict deployed strategic narratives to persuade members of the public and the political elite to side with them against their opponent. This focus on strategic narratives will suggest ways further research can illuminate the causes, evolution and impact of these conflicts.

The President’s strategic narrative must articulate a national policy that explains US goals in the military conflict, how the nation will achieve those goals and what the desired end-state will look like when the conflict is resolved. In this policy arena, as in all others, all stakeholders with the clout to compete create strategic narratives. These stakeholders use their strategic narratives to attract

⁸ Stone, Deborah. 2002. *Policy Paradox: the Art of Political Decision Making*, revised edition.

⁹ Antoniadis, Andreas, Alister Miskimmon and Ben O’Loughlin. 2010. “Great Power Politics and Strategic Narratives,” Working Paper No. 7, The Centre for Global Political Economy, The University of Sussex, p. 5. http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cgpe/documents/cgpe_wp07_antoniadis_miskimmon_oloughlin.pdf

potential supporters to build political momentum for their version of the story. These efforts, if successful, will increase the stakeholder's political power and reduce the power of their competition.

In the sphere of public debate there are always multiple strategic narratives about US involvement in a war competing for both public and elite support just as there are multiple creators of these narratives vying for political power. When one of the stakeholders with a strategic narrative conflicting with the narrative from the President is a high profile military commander with a public image strong enough to gain public and elite attention, a President without impressive military credentials is at a disadvantage. The military expertise of the commander adds legitimacy to his narrative and the President's lack of such expertise weakens the impact of the presidential narrative. The President's political opponents will gravitate to the dissenting commander and adopt both the content of his narrative and cloak themselves in the commander's legitimacy. The conflict over war policy becomes a battle between the strategic narratives of the President and his opponents.

Antoniades, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin assert that strategic narratives are particularly important as guides for conceptualizing policy issues in times of change. Strategic narratives provide coherence, manage expectations and provide a sense of the possibility of a return to a post conflict state of order. They give their promulgator the opportunity to convince others of one particular vision of how a current state of disorder can be brought successful to a new state of order. These narratives also become a weapon used in the political battle to capture support from the public and elites.¹⁰

In times of military conflict, a President's ability to achieve his war aims and enhance his political power depends partially on his ability to gain acceptance of his strategic narrative. That narrative allows him to appear to be in control of a difficult situation and gives legitimacy to his goals. When the nation is in a transitional period with no generally accepted paradigm explaining what kind of wars it is engaged in, the President's strategic narrative can stake out a position in the swirl of competing messages and

¹⁰ Id., at 2-3.

portray certainty in a time of uncertainty. Alternatively, a less persuasive narrative can add to the public's perception of uncertainty and insecurity. The President's strategic narrative provides a descriptive and predictive message that will describe and explain:

- The underlying causes of the conflict,
- Why the US is involved and how it became involved in the conflict,
- What the US goals are,
- What the desired end-state for the conflict is, and,
- How the US is going to achieve that desired end-state.

The President's strategic narrative and those of his competitors will be judged by the audience for goodness of fit – does a narrative sufficiently account for the major aspects of the events people think are important and does a narrative seem accurate in explaining the progression of events over time. Policy narratives, “have heroes and villains and innocent victims, and they pit the forces of evil against the forces of good.”¹¹

While not speaking in terms of a strategic narrative, historian James McPherson explains the elements of the message a President must send in times of war. That message, his narrative, must include a statement of national policy, a national strategy and a military strategy. National policy, the broadest of the three levels, consists of the “war aims – the political goals of the nation in time of war.”¹² The second element, the President's national strategy, sets out a vision for the “mobilization of the political, economic, diplomatic, and psychological as well as military resources of the nation”¹³ McPherson describes the military strategy as the “plans for the employment of armed forces to win the war and fulfill the goals of policy.”¹⁴ To build and maintain the political power to pursue his wartime policy, a President must, therefore, construct and disseminate a strategic narrative that sets out his

¹¹ Stone, p. 138.

¹² McPherson, James M. 2008. *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief*, p. 5.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id.

national strategy and the US military strategy.¹⁵ However, the President's strategic narrative will become one of many narratives circulating in the policy arena. He will gain political power and support for his national policy to the extent that his narrative is more convincing and more compelling than competing narratives. When the nation is in a time of transition from one military conflict paradigm to another, the public will be particularly attentive to the clash of strategic narratives in the political arena.

Lincoln v. McClellan

At the beginning of the Civil War, there is little evidence that either the political elite or the military leadership in the United States had well developed, clearly articulated strategic visions to communicate as strategic narratives. As Cordesman says, "One sometimes has the impression that their vision of grand strategy at the start of the war consisted of trying to win the first major battle and seeing what happened next, and strategic assessment consisted of a belief in quick and decisive victory."¹⁶ President Lincoln's initial strategic narrative contained a single message on both national policy and national strategy – secession was not a legitimate response to the differences between the northern and southern states and the use of military force was justified if that is what it took to maintain the nation.

As the war progressed, President Lincoln's ideas about how military force should be used in the service of his national policy evolved. In the beginning, he sought common ground with a series of military commanders as he searched for someone who could combine a general agreement with his own goals with the professional ability to achieve progress toward those goals. Among the series of commanders with whom Lincoln spent time searching for common ground was Major General George McClellan.

¹⁵ The two elements of national strategy and military strategy are comparable to what others label 'grand strategy.' See, e.g., Cordesman, Anthony H. 2004. "Iraq, Grand Strategy, and the Lessons of Military History," S. T. Lee Lecture on Military History, <http://people.cohums.ohio-state.edu/grimsley1/dialogue/cordesman.htm>; and Stoker, Donald. 2010. *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War*. Stoker provides a clear portrayal of the lack of unified vision among both military and political elites of the time and the movement over time from one paradigm to another.

¹⁶ Cordesman, id.

When General McClellan came to Washington at the President's request in mid-1861, he was hailed by the press as a "Young Napoleon" and seen as the savior of the union.¹⁷ The general began by articulating for Lincoln a complex military strategy that involved the use of combined land and naval forces to attack the Confederacy across the breadth of its territory. General McClellan exuded the aura of a decisive commander about to take charge and move forward providing victories that had not been possible under his predecessor, the more reticent Lieutenant General Winfield Scott. Of course, the reality turned out to be anything but the promise. Over the next year, Lincoln became increasingly frustrated as General McClellan found ways of not moving against the Confederacy.

Victories in the west by more aggressive commanders and political pressures within President Lincoln's Republican Party slowly moved him from a strategic vision that was ambiguous on the point of military strategy to one that became more clear on exactly what had to be done if the national policy of reunification through the use of military force was to be realized. As the Civil War progressed, two general visions of military strategy began to emerge among Lincoln's commanders.¹⁸ These two visions differed in the instructions to be given the union forces as they moved into Confederate territory. The advocates of hard war argued that the only way victory could be achieved was through the use of military force to disrupt the southern economy and social structure through freeing slaves and destroying infrastructure that could be used to support the rebellion. Hard war advocates favored the confiscation of southern property to support union military advances, the arrest or expulsion of southern civilians who interfered with union advances and were unwilling to sign loyalty oaths, and the use of freed slaves in the union military. Soft war advocates argued for limited use of military forces to bring out latent support for national reunification among the southern civilians. The soft war proponents argued that a few decisive battles, particular the capture of Richmond, would be sufficient to bring this latent pro-union feeling forward and achieve reunification without destruction of the

¹⁷ McPherson, pp. 44-45.

¹⁸ *Id.*, 103-105.

economic and social infrastructure of the south. Victory could be had without causing pain to southern civilians and without disturbing the institution of slavery. When Lincoln and his commanders embraced the hard war option, they moved the dominant US paradigm for warfare further away from the age of decisive battles and toward the era of total war.¹⁹

For over a year, President Lincoln straddled the fence between the hard war and the soft war factions in both the civilian and military elite. The lack of a national consensus among the union leaders encouraged Lincoln to maintain ambiguity in his strategic narrative to keep as many factions in his coalition of Republicans and Democrats as possible. His political opponents in the Democrat Party were predominantly soft war adherents, except for those who opposed the war altogether. By not openly rejecting the soft war alternative, Lincoln took advantage of the split among the Democrats. However, he also aggravated factions within his own party. The radical Republicans were becoming increasingly disenchanted with President Lincoln as the war progressed without what they viewed as adequate progress. The South had not been subdued; the slaves had not been freed.

President Lincoln's reliance on General McClellan was part of his efforts to keep all parties in the union coalition. McClellan, a Democrat, favored the soft war approach and had a low opinion of President Lincoln as a leader. He was popular with the press, the public and his troops. However, as 1862 progressed, it became increasingly clear that General McClellan was not going to give the President the victories he needed to achieve his national strategy. Lincoln grew increasingly less willing to pacify the soft war advocates and moved more decisively toward the hard war option. This movement was encouraged by victories achieved by commanders who adhered to the hard war paradigm. By the end of 1862, Lincoln's strategic narrative was that of the hard war camp: the war for reunification would be fought by taking southern territory through military force, freeing slaves as the

¹⁹ Sutherland, Daniel E. 1992. "Abraham Lincoln, John Pope, and the Origins of Total War," 56 *The Journal of Military History* 567-586.

territory was taken, allowing union troops to live off the land at the expense of southern civilians and punishing southern civilians who offered opposition to union progress.

Just as Lincoln's strategic narrative solidified, so did General McClellan's. The General became more open about his views that the President was acting in violating of the rights of southern civilians and using the war as a subterfuge to mask the radical Republican abolitionist agenda. General McClellan made the case within his party and among other military leaders that the lack of victory had nothing to do with his failure to move aggressively and had everything to do with Lincoln's incompetence as a wartime leader. The rift between the President and the general widened to the point that President Lincoln finally relieved General McClellan of his command and sent him home.²⁰

The politically astute President did not move against General McClellan until after the 1862 elections were complete. Almost immediately upon his removal from command, General McClellan was recruited by the leaders of the soft war faction in the Democrat Party to run against President Lincoln in the 1864 election. President Lincoln's political opponents realized the political value of a militarily credible general whose strategic narrative provided a basis for arguing that the President's strategic narrative had led to disaster for the union.²¹ The election became a contest between the strategic narratives of the two candidates – a battle between the hard and soft war strategies.

Truman v. MacArthur

On March 12, 1947, President Truman addressed a joint session of Congress articulating his vision of national policy, what became referred to as the Truman doctrine. That national policy became the cornerstone of his evolving strategic narrative. The Truman doctrine was built on the President's identification of multiple locations around the globe where governments were facing imminent threats to national sovereignty from either internal insurgents or the armies of adjoining nations. Truman

²⁰ Waugh, John C. 2010. *Lincoln and McClellan: the Troubled Partnership Between A President and His General*, pp. 177-186.

²¹ *Id.*, 195-202.

emphasized the role the United Nations could play in resisting the spread of totalitarianism and then stated “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”²² The Korean War provided President Truman with the opportunity to act with the United Nations on the national policy he had articulated.

The United States became involved in the Korean War at a time when elites, both political and military, saw the next great threat to the United States coming from the expansion of communism. Opinions differed about where the next large push by communist forces would occur and about how the United States should respond. When North Korean troops invaded the south in June of 1950, the United States and its allies were in a reactive mode. President Truman began the war with no clear strategic narrative beyond the Truman Doctrine as a statement of national policy. The only element of his national strategy that was visible had been summarized in his earlier address to the joint session of Congress where he asked Congress to authorize foreign aid for Greece and Turkey because, “The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive.”²³ There is little evidence that he had a vision of a military strategy that should be employed if military force was needed to carry out national policy.

The United States entered the Korean War as the leader of a multinational force authorized by the United Nations Security Council. The President’s choice to respond militarily in Korea as part of a multinational force and the directives of the Security Council Resolutions became the most visible statement of his national strategy for the Korean War. In a series of four resolutions, the United Nations Security Council called for an end to hostilities and the withdrawal of North Korean forces to above the

²² President Harry S. Truman. *Address Before Joint Session of Congress*, March 12, 1947, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp

²³ *Id.*

38th parallel.²⁴ The Security Council then authorized the use of military measures to restore international peace and security. It recommended that member nations provide assistance to push back the North Korean attack.²⁵ That assistance was placed under a unified command led by the United States and the Security Council asked the US to designate a commander of those unified forces. Given President Truman's strategic narrative became focused on explaining to the public that the United States would become militarily involved in the Korean War as the leader of a multinational force seeking to expel the North Korean army from the south with the goal of reinstating the border at the 38th parallel. He presented a strategic narrative emphasizing limited war. This paradigm of limited war in the shadow of nuclear weapons was new to civilian leaders and the political elite. It was something very different from what the post-World War II public was used to seeing when their nation went to war.

It is important to emphasize that the President and the allied nations saw Korea as merely one of many points of potential threats from communism around the globe. Truman's reactions to events in Korea occurred in the larger context of his fears that the communists might move militarily in other areas. He also feared that moving too far or fast in Korea might be used by the Soviet's as a pretext to escalate the Cold War to a hot war leading to the use of nuclear weapons. While stopping the spread of communism in Korea was a worthy goal, it was not one he wanted to risk nuclear war to attain.

Initially, the President's actions were lauded in the press as the valiant stand of the free world against the spread of tyranny. However, as the war progressed, distance between the events the public heard about and the message they received from the President grew. He faced an increasingly disenchanted, war weary public moving between conflicting urges for isolationism and a growing fear of communism.²⁶ Congress also was on board with the President at the beginning of the war when it

²⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 82, June 25, 1950, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/064/95/IMG/NR006495.pdf?OpenElement>

²⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolutions 83 and 84, June 25, 1950, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/064/96/IMG/NR006496.pdf?OpenElement>

²⁶ Fehrenbach, T. R. 1963. *This Kind of War*, pp. 26-33.

authorized the reinstatement of the draft; but as the war continued and victories were harder to illustrate on a map, their support waned.

President Truman also faced the challenge of holding together the multinational alliance that fielded forces in Korea. Again, the pattern was one of initial agreement followed by growing disquiet. In a November 30th interview in 1950, the President exacerbated his situation and muddied the message in his strategic narrative. When asked by a reporter what steps the US would take to achieve its goals in Korea, the President indicated that the nation would use every weapon it had. When asked to clarify whether that included atomic weapons, the President seemed to say that their use was under consideration. The United States' European allies responded forcefully and negatively asking the President to clarify that the United Forces did not intend to use atomic weapons in Korea. He provided that clarification through a series of further messages.

The political elites were divided along partisan lines and within the parties. Truman's Democrats were divided between those who saw military conflict with the communists as inevitable and those who sought military disengagement from Korea. For this later group, the specter of nuclear war as an intentional or accidental consequence of more limited war loomed over all.²⁷ The President's opponents in the Republican Party strongly objected to the two main elements of Truman's strategic narrative – his multilateralism and his limited war aims. They portrayed the President as soft on communism and too willing to buckle under to the restraining demands of the European allies who may themselves be reacting to communist influence. When Truman responded to European anxiety over his statement hinting at the use of atomic weapons in Korea, his Republican opponents, including Senator Eugene

²⁷ Wiltz, John Edward. 1975. "The MacArthur Hearings of 1951: The Secret Testimony," 39 *Military Affairs* 167-173.

McCarthy, called for the dismissal of Truman's foreign policy team and impeachment of the President for putting European interests before those of the United States.²⁸

Carrying out the directions of the Security Council, President Truman selected a commander for the joint United Nations forces in Korea, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. General MacArthur assumed command of the United Nations forces in Korea and conducted his duties from his headquarters in Tokyo where he also oversaw the reconstruction government of Japan. The appointment of General MacArthur as the commander in Korea was very popular with the public who responded to his image as the Congressional Medal of Honor winning savior of the Allied cause in the Pacific during World War II.²⁹ General MacArthur's initial military success against the North Korean Army provided the seeds of his conflict with the President and lent legitimacy to his strategic narrative. As the General drove northward, his strategic narrative and its disjunction with that of the President became increasingly visible and increasingly public. General MacArthur saw the Korean War as the first step in a United States war to end communism in Asia. He hoped to do this by moving northward through Korea into China while allied Nationalist Chinese forces moved from Formosa against the Chinese communist government. His military strategy centered on the use of the United States' industrial and technological superiority in weapons and supplies. Heavy reliance on air power to bomb the Chinese into submission included plans to use nuclear weapons if needed.³⁰ The general also objected strongly to President Truman's responsiveness to the desires of the European allies for restraint and saw that as further evidence of Truman's inability to lead in this critical moment. When General MacArthur expressed his opinions in a letter read on the floor of Congress after the President

²⁸ Laura Roselle provides an insightful discussion of the role strategic narratives play in the maintenance of alliances. "Strategic Narratives of War: Fear of Entrapment and Abandonment During Protracted Conflict." Paper prepared for the American Political Science Association Meeting, Washington DC, 2010.

²⁹ Hastings, Max. 1987. *The Korean War*, pp. 59-63.

³⁰ Halberstam, David. 2007. *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, pp. 591-601. See also, Ryan, Halford Ross. 1981. "Harry S. Truman: A Misdirected Defense for MacArthur's Dismissal." *11 Presidential Studies Quarterly* pp. 576-582.

had issued two clear direct orders to him that such communications cease, President Truman removed him from command.

The political consequences of this public clash of strategic narratives between the President and General MacArthur were widespread. The groundwork for General MacArthur's transition to partisan political had already been established. Elements of the Republican Party leadership had hoped to have General MacArthur as a running mate against President Roosevelt in 1944.³¹ General MacArthur embraced the opportunity enthusiastically and ran in early party primaries, though winning only in Illinois.

President Truman was barred from running for re-election in 1952 but the Republic Party successfully used the elements of General MacArthur's strategic narrative to defeat the President's party in 1952. General MacArthur had been considered as a Vice-Presidential candidate in 1952 but his speech at the convention was not well received and he was dropped from consideration. However, the MacArthur strategic narrative was embraced by the right wing of the Republican Party and became the message with which the more centrist Republic Candidate Dwight Eisenhower had to contend. For the Democrats, the political consequences were clear. Fehrenbach describes the failure of the Truman administration to place the Korean War in a context that could be comprehended by the public:

It would not be a crusade because neither Harry Truman nor the men who handled his foreign policy were crusaders across the water. Because it was different, it would have far-reaching results. It would be the first war to bring down a government, to oust the party in power, not because of the actions that party had taken, but because the policy makers were never able adequately to explain those actions to a troubled and increasingly hostile public.³²

³¹ Briggs, Philip J. 1992. "General MacArthur and the Presidential Election of 1944," 22 *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31-46.

³² Fehrenbach, p. 29.

Directions for Further Inquiry

This paper has explored two incidents in American history where the political and military elite grappled with a military conflict that did not fit neatly into the existing paradigm for prosecuting a war. This absence of consensus left room for the emergence of clashing strategic narratives from a President and from a high profile military commander. At the beginning, the differences of opinion were muted and the strategic narratives of the Presidents were at best ambiguous. As the war continued, both experience and political pressures on the President led to a sharpening of his narrative. The differences between the President's and the general's narratives became solidified and the conflict became public. In both instances, the President relieved the general of his command after which the general became active in partisan politics. The general's narrative became the campaign position of the President's political opposition which emphasized the expertise of the general in their attempts to legitimize their position and stigmatize that of the President and his party.

Further scholarly inquiry into the pattern that emerges could begin by fleshing out the general outlines provided here. A content analysis of the public pronouncements of both the President's and the General's could describe the emergence of the competing narratives and identify the factors influencing their development. An examination of the audiences sought by the President and the commander could suggest the relative power of stakeholders competing in the policy arena. The growing conflict between the strategic narratives could be mapped alongside the movement in public and elite opinion on support for the President and for the war.

Scholars have examined public opinion during wars by focusing on the public's tolerance of casualties and the impact it has on support for the war.³³ However, it would be useful to gain a broader understanding of how the public conceptualizes war by seeking data on the details of the public's understanding of conflicts. Does the public understand the President's strategic narrative? Do they

³³ For example, Gelphi, Christopher, Peter Feaver and Jason Reifler. 2005. "Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq." <http://www.duke.edu/~gelpi/iraq.casualties.pdf>

have a general understanding of the President's position on the underlying causes of the conflict, why the US is involved and how it became involved in the conflict, what the US goals are, what the desired end-state is for the conflict, and, how the US is going to achieve that desired end-state. Is Harari correct in proposing that the great battle paradigm is still dominant in public thinking? In all probability, the public's view of the conflict is based not on this level of detail but on whether the symbols deployed by those seeking to influence them resonate. Similar questions could be asked about elite opinion among those both in office and those seeking to influence those in office.

In the broader area of domestic policy studies, what is the impact of growing public disillusionment with the symbols deployed to gain their acquiescence if not their support for a war? The same question can be asked regarding the members of the military: are they becoming disillusioned with the dominant strategic narrative? What are the consequences of their disillusionment with the dominant message explaining their deployment? At what point does public or military rank and file disquiet present a political vulnerability to the President that is sufficient to sway the alignment of stakeholders competing in the policy domain? These issues can also be explored by seeking to identify the impact on public and military opinion of highly visible former military personnel below the level of the commanders focused on here. For example, in today's modern media ecology, what is the impact of someone such as Colonel David Hackworth (ret.) who was an early and vocal critique of US military involvement in Iraq?

Our understanding of civil/military relationships could benefit from a comparative analysis of these two historical incidents with other incidents in which dissident generals stayed aloof from partisan politics. This analysis could illuminate the factors that distinguish those generals whose disagreements with the civilian administration become public and partisan from those who maintain a lower profile while disagreeing with the President.

The Next Conflict?

In June of 2010, President Barak Obama removed General Stanley McChrystal from command of the US forces in Afghanistan because of General McChrystal's public airing of his disagreements with members of the Obama administration over the strategic vision for that conflict. General McChrystal was replaced by Lieutenant General David Petraeus, the commander portrayed as having produced victory from quagmire in Iraq and the intellectual godfather of the *US Army/Marine Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. That manual articulates General Petraeus strategic narrative for the type of wars he sees the US fighting in the immediate future. That narrative stresses unity of effort including use of NATO forces to hunt down and destroy insurgents while also engaging civilians in what has often been referred to as nation building. He sees US engagement as something lasting years. As with Presidents in the two historical incidents discussed herein, President Obama's strategic narrative remains somewhat ambiguous as he balances the factions within his own party and their disparate opinions on what candidate Obama promised to do in Afghanistan once elected. However, Vice President Biden has been public in his commitment to an early withdrawal from Afghanistan and a reduction in the commitment of US troops and financial support to that conflict. The Republic Party contains those, including former Presidential Candidate Senator John McCain, whose public pronouncements appear to fit well with the Petraeus strategic narrative. As we approach the 2012 presidential election, do we see the pattern of clashing Presidential and commander strategic narratives repeating?

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