

Cultural Kesselschlacht: Deep Battle in the Cognitive Dimension

A Monograph

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Abstract

Cultural Kesselschlacht: Deep Battle in the Cognitive Dimension, by Mr. David R. Craig, Defense Intelligence Agency, 38 pages.

The 2018 National Security Strategy's call to return to realism and the US Army's reorientation towards large scale combat operations against near-peer adversaries drives a requirement to change how the United States will compete in the information environment. By changing its approach to conducting MISO, the United States can achieve relative advantage in the information environment vis-a-vis its strategic competitors. Over time, by using narrative tools such as framing, reinterpretation, and altercasting, the United States can reduce the legitimacy of a competitor state's dominant social group and its ability to organize its power resources and project power during a transition from competition to violent conflict.

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Acronyms

DIME	Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic
LSCO	Large Scale Combat Operations
MDO	Multi-domain Operations
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
NSS	National Security Strategy

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Introduction

The 2018 *National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States* describes a strategic environment where the United States faces many threats. The relative hegemony achieved after the end of the Cold War allowed the United States to lose its focus on potential future emerging threats. This lack of focus, along with two decades of adherence to the principles of liberal internationalism, where powerful states cede power to weaker states in order to enmesh them in global institutions governed by clearly defined rules of international behavior and protocol, has left the United States weaker and unprepared to face the assortment of challenges that lie ahead.¹

By returning to the principles of realism, however, the United States can understand and prepare for its primary challenge: conflict with near-peer adversaries, or great powers, including China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. These states have continuously skirted the restrictions of the rules-based international order and are engaged in an active strategic competition with the United States.²

This return to realism acknowledges that competition between states is enduring and inevitable; however, competition does not necessarily lead to violent conflict. The United States must prepare to compete with and, should competition escalate into violent conflict, win against great power competitors. In order to meet this requirement, the US Army has transitioned away from a focus on fighting insurgencies in small wars and towards the concept of conducting large scale combat operations (LSCO) against potential great power adversaries. As envisioned by US Army doctrine, victory in LSCO will require the United States to conduct multiple-domain operations (MDO). MDO is necessary if the United States is to both compete and win in

¹ Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 1-4; G. John Ikenberry, "Democracy, Institutions, and American Restraint," in John G. Ikenberry, ed. *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 219-223.

² James N. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 5.

competitions short of armed conflict and, should efforts at deterrence fail, transition to conducting LSCO against a future great power adversary. This means the US Army will seamlessly and simultaneously conduct operations across the land, air, sea, space, and cyber domains and the information environment.³

Not surprisingly, the US Army has shifted its focus onto innovative operational concepts that will support operations against adversaries who are no longer at an absolute military disadvantage. In constant pursuit of achieving positions of relative advantage, *US Army Field Manual 3-0, Operations*, describes as a goal, among other things, achieving relative advantage in “legitimacy, ideas, and popular perception (including what is good versus bad, accepted versus opposed, and a believable narrative).”⁴ To achieve this goal, given this transition to LSCO and MDO, the US Army will require additional information on how to combat future adversaries in the information environment. But what is the information environment? What does it look like? How does it work? Moreover, through a realist perspective, how does the United States compete in the information environment against a potential great power adversary? Under these circumstances, what would a victory in the information environment look like? How can the United States innovate there?⁵

The shift to a realist paradigm forces the United States to not only think about how it will compete against great power adversaries in the information environment, but how it will do so in perpetuity to maintain a position of relative advantage. Greater understanding of the central role

³ US Department of the Army, *Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet (PAM) 525-3-1, Win in a Complex World 2020-2048* (Fort Eustis, VA: Headquarters US Army TRADOC, 2014), 6-12, 21; US Department of the Army, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet (PAM) 525-3-1, *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (Fort Eustis, VA: Headquarters US Army TRADOC, 2018), iii.

⁴ US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 1-18.

⁵ Trump, NSS, 1-4; Mattis, NDS, 5; US Army, TRADOC PAM 525-3-1, *Win in a Complex World 2020-2048* (2014), 20; US Army, TRADOC PAM 525-3-1, *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (2018), 6; US Army, FM 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 1-4—1-11.

narrative plays in the formation of societies may drive further understanding that narrative is an innate cognitive function and a crucial vehicle for establishing the legitimacy of any source of authority in other nations. This understanding may enable the deliberate exploitation of the pre-existing narratives of other societies in order to delegitimize their authority and weaken them through the diffusion of power. By placing greater emphasis on how narrative is paramount to shaping how various societies conceptualize the world and rationalize the actions they take, the United States may discover additional approaches to creating effects in the information environment that support strategic objectives against future great power adversaries.

Realism, State Formation and Concepts of Power in Geopolitics

Realism and State Formation

The NSS's shift to a security strategy informed by "principled realism" is, simply put, embracing the theory of realism. A Hobbesian realist describes the condition of man as one of perpetual war, influenced by his enduring mistrust of fellow men and his innate desire to survive. A man's actions to ensure his survival are met with equal distrust from fellow men, thus driving their perpetual competition. However, man's exhaustion at the endless struggle drives him to seek compromise and to establish common rules among his fellow men, which forms the basis of the formation of communities, of government, and of the national state. More than anything else, this compromise is an active, incessant balancing act that precludes the whole of man's effort from being focused on survival when it could be focused on creativity, innovation, and the concept of progress. This evolution from enduring personal war to a domestic state balanced by social contractual obligations rooted in law drives the creation of the state but does not alleviate the underlying conditions fueling this perpetual conflict. States retain distrust in other states and seek

to ensure their own survival. Thus, through states, rather than through individuals or distinct social communities, war endures.⁶

In an evolution from individuals, to social communities, to the creation of established governments, the perpetual conflict between individuals is displaced and transferred to the realm of the state (see Figure 1). While competition between individuals or distinct social communities is not eliminated, they cede the power to resolve problems through violence to the state. The state, conceived as an individual entity, acts as a manifestation of the will of the people and serves as a neutral, disinterested entity to resolve conflict. Domestic disputes can be resolved by the state through violence, as seen in a state's implementation of the death penalty, however, in seeking to fulfill its purpose as the supreme lawgiver and multiply its own legitimacy, the state seeks to resolve domestic disputes through non-violent means. This is the state's purpose. It exists, above all else, to provide for the welfare and the security of its people.⁷

⁶ Gregory Martin Reichberg, Henrik Syse, and Endre Begby, ed. *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 442.

⁷ Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, ed. *Ethics of War*, 445; Stephen M. Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories." *Foreign Policy* 110 (1998): 29-44.

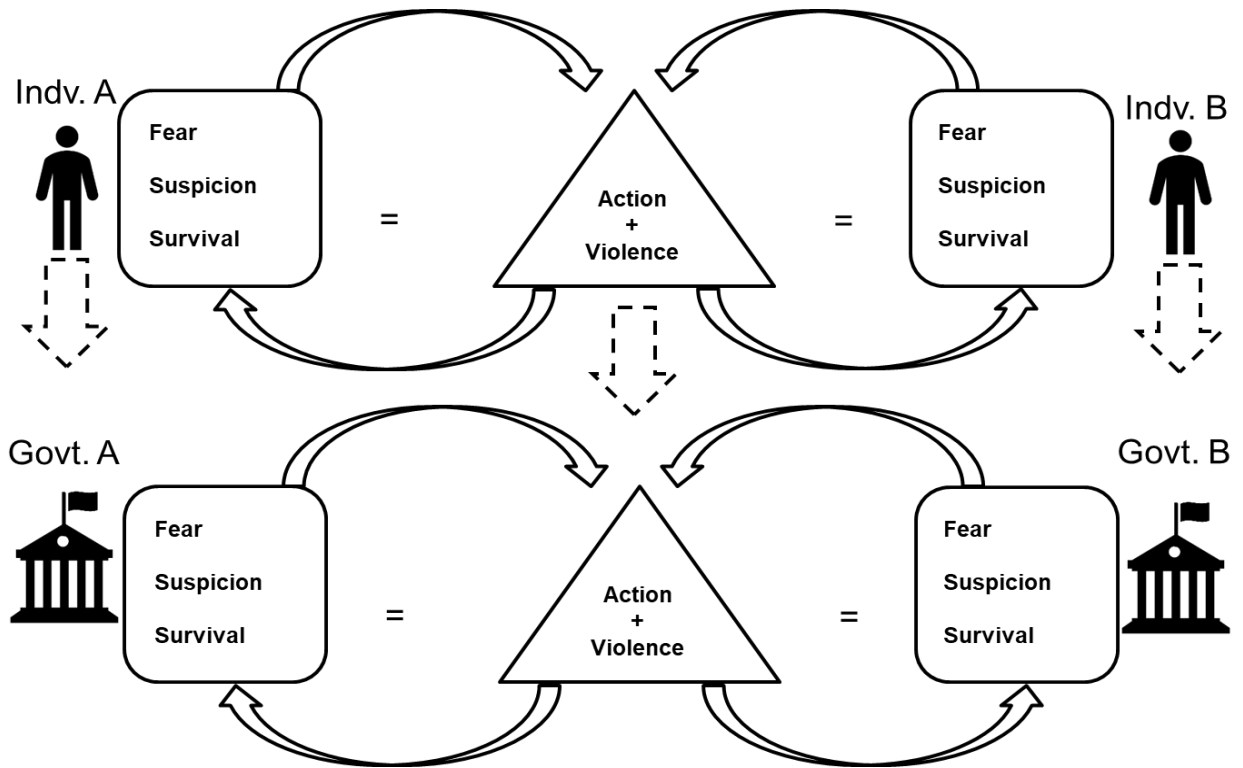


Figure 1. Realism as conflict transference from individuals to governments. Created by author.

In taking on this domestic responsibility, the state simultaneously accepts the requirement to provide for the welfare and security of its population in relation to other states. However, states cannot transfer this responsibility in the same way that individuals or distinct social communities ceded them to the state. There is no supranational entity that embodies the will of all persons on earth. From a realist perspective, the state is the perfected political entity and it alone must determine how it will interact with the world. Realism theorist Hans Morgenthau argues that states are naturally inclined to seek the acquisition of power and to use that power against other states. Other states, in an effort to survive, naturally seek to counter more powerful states in order to create polarity, or a balance of power. If any balance of power between states is achieved, it is fleeting. States, driven by distrust in other states, compete for power and relative advantage and drive other states to do the same.⁸

⁸ Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, ed. *Ethics of War*, 443; Alan Lamborn, "Theory and the Politics in World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 41/2 (June 1997): 200.

Concepts of Power

Engaged in competition for power against other states, a state must determine both what type of power to use and how to acquire additional power. Joseph Nye notes that there are three primary types of power that a state can use: hard power, soft power, and smart power. Sources of hard power are primarily the physical, tangible things a state can mobilize to employ against another state (e.g., overall population, size of territory, military capacity and capability, and economic strength). Soft power entails the promotion of ideas and the empowerment of institutions to persuade other states to take specific actions. Smart power is, simply, the use of both hard and smart power simultaneously. Nye also makes an important distinction between the resources of power and the outcomes they can achieve. He notes that large power resources do not necessarily lead to a state achieving its desired outcomes. While power resources are important, states must also consider relational power.⁹

According to Nye, relational power includes three “faces.” The first face of power is the state’s ability to compel or coerce another state to take an action that it initially perceives as contrary to its own interests. This way of acquiring power is characterized by the use of threats or the offering of rewards in order to force the other state to concede. Another face of power is the ability to shape the basic beliefs of another state so that it does not know that what is being asked of it is contrary to its interests. The last face of power is called agenda setting. States exercise power in this way through framing the discussion in a way that preemptively avoids discussing another state’s interests. An opposing state may or may not be hostile to this application of power. If a state deems the institutions or the social discourse that framed the agenda as legitimate, then the opposing state may accept the agenda and be unaware that its interests were discounted.¹⁰

⁹ Joseph Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 8.

¹⁰ Nye, *Future of Power*, 10-14.

The sum total of these power dynamics equals an international system that pits states against other states in perpetual competition. The competition itself is neither positive nor negative. It merely is. Nonetheless, states make calculations about how to apply power against other states and decide which types of power to use based on the conditions of their individual circumstances. States that hold a preponderance of power are called hegemons. However, from a realist perspective, it is natural to expect that states will compete in order to establish polarity, or a balance of power, against the hegemonic state.¹¹

The NSS suggests that this attempt at establishing polarity has been underway for several decades. It notes that the United States, emerging from World War II and the Cold War as a hegemon, has been ceding power to other states. It also illustrates the irony at play in geopolitical power dynamics. While the United States has pursued the multiplication of hard power resources such as its military strength, it has driven its natural competitors to seek polarity. Instead of driving opponents to compete against the United States in areas where the United States holds the preponderance of resources, its competitors have made the strategic decision to balance their relational power by increasing their power resources in soft power. Specifically, leading competitors such as Russia and China have sought to create strategic stand-off against the United States through the use of diplomatic and economic actions to deter the United States and its allies from mounting a coordinated response, and through the use of information warfare.¹²

Given that states have made the strategic decision to achieve polarity with the United States by avoiding symmetrical hard power confrontations, instead opting for an asymmetric approach that prioritizes the use of soft power and information warfare, how will the United States compete against them? What strategy will the United States employ to counter these states

¹¹ Walt, "One World, Many Theories," 31.

¹² Trump, *NSS*, 3; Nye, *Future of Power*, 34; US Army, *TRADOC PAM 525-3-1, The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (2018), 6.

in order to achieve relative advantage in the information environment? Answering this question first requires a definition of strategy and its ultimate aims.

Power, Strategy, and the Object of War

Against the backdrop of perpetual international competition, the United States must consider how it will compete against potential great power adversaries in the information environment. In order to unravel the problem, the United States must consider what strategy it will employ to achieve a position of relative advantage. This requires a conception of what strategy is and what it seeks to do. At its heart, strategy constitutes a prudent set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in an integrated and synchronized manner against other nation states in order to achieve theater or multinational objectives. Developing a strategy requires the conceptualization of the ends a nation is trying to achieve, the ways it will achieve those ends, and the means it will use to facilitate operationalizing the ways.¹³

Additional definitions of strategy extend its ultimate purpose. Strategy, when employed by those conducting warfare, looks beyond the current conflict and sets conditions for a better peace. This definition, which does not provide a definitive criterion for the most optimal outcome, implies that strategy never ends, but instead seeks constant, incremental improvement of one's current position. This definition of strategy recognizes that the factors that drive conflict between people and governments are never resolved and that seeking a definitive end to conflict is not possible. Rather than seeking a definitive end, seeking to attain or maintain a position of advantage over competitors is the ideal end. Defining strategy in this manner nests within the realist concept of perpetual conflict, which occurs on the individual level and on the international level between nation states.¹⁴

¹³ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Doctrinal Note (JDN) 1-18, Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), II-1.

¹⁴ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 338; Carl Everett Dolman, "Seeking Strategy," in Richard J. Bailey, James W. Forsyth Jr., and Mark O. Yeisley, ed. *Strategy: Context and Adaptation from Archidamus to Airpower* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 14-16.

Doctrinal Conception of the Employment of MISO

Framing Conflict Between States: The Strategic Competition Continuum

Collectively, the strategic competition continuum described in *Joint Doctrine Note 1-18, Strategy*, and the notional joint phasing model described in *Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Planning*, provide a conceptual framework to understand how the United States views the types of strategic international competition it will encounter and the types of actions it will take, across the range of domains. The strategic competition continuum inherently acknowledges that nation states exist in a state of perpetual competition, however, not all of these competitions are violent. The continuum classifies the relationship between nation states as follows: peaceful cooperation, competition below armed conflict, or armed conflict. Peaceful cooperation exists when nation states have similar interests and interact with one another in order to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Competition below armed conflict occurs when nation states have interests that are incompatible and when they view each other as competitors. In this type of relationship, nation states can cooperate on some issues and compete on other issues. In part, this occurs due to the distinction between a competitor and an adversary. Viewing another nation state as a competitor vice an adversary means that a nation has not decided that securing its interests absolutely requires armed conflict. Armed conflict is the relationship when physical violence is the primary means a nation state uses to secure its interests relative to another state. In this relationship, a nation state views a competitor as an adversary who must be compelled to submit through violence. This relationship occurs when a nation state determines that it cannot secure its interests through cooperation or any set of actions short of armed conflict.¹⁵

¹⁵ US Joint Staff, *JDN 1-18, Strategy*, III-2.

Framing Conflict Between States: The Notional Joint Phasing Model

The notional joint phasing model presented in *Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations*, describes an approach to engaging in strategic competition with another nation state while accounting for how the competition evolves. Within the model, a competition begins in phase zero where the primary activity is shaping. As the competition escalates, the phase transitions to a state where each competitor is trying to deter the other from escalating the competition into armed conflict. Should deterrence fail, the evolution continues and transforms into a state where nations become committed to conflict and attempt to seize the initiative over the opponent and dominate or compel them to their will. After achieving dominance, the phasing model evolves into a state of deescalating competition and transitions to a focus on stabilizing the dominated state and moving it back into the hands of a responsible civil authority. The evolution is complete with a return to a focus on shaping. In its return to the shaping phase, the notional joint phasing model is cyclical. The cycle reflects the unending, perpetual nature of the realist conception of geopolitical competition.¹⁶ The NSS, the *National Defense Strategy (NDS)*, and the *National Military Strategy* acknowledge this perpetual competition and recognize the necessity of being equipped to compete against other nations states in competitions short of armed conflict and, should the competition evolve into a state of armed conflict, prevail over them. Through the MDO operating concept, the US Army has articulated the necessity to be prepared to compete with and prevail against potential great power adversaries possessing equal, if not greater, hard and soft power capabilities. While this concept primarily deals with preparing the force to conduct military operations against nation states in scenarios where the relationship between the United States and another nation has progressed along the competition continuum from a state of competition below armed conflict to a state of armed conflict, the concept also recognizes that the

¹⁶ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Joint Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), V-13, VI-2.

United States must currently compete with other nations who have adopted an asymmetrical approach to counter the United States' current advantage in hard power.¹⁷

A useful construct for conceptualizing how to employ power resources against another nation state is the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) construct. The construct allows a nation state to envision how it will organize and employ its DIME instruments in order to advance or secure its interests. While the military instrument may be the primary vehicle to accomplish a nation's objectives in scenarios where competition below armed conflict has evolved into armed conflict, this by no means excludes the use of the other instruments. Similarly, while use of the diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments may be the primary means when engaging in peaceful cooperation or competition below armed conflict with another nation, the use of the military instrument can also be quite valuable. In the face of perpetual competition, coordinating and synchronizing the employment of these instruments in a manner that incrementally and perpetually moves a nation into a position of relative advantage over other nations defines the role of strategy.¹⁸

Competing in the Information Environment

The NDS acknowledges that strategic competitors have sought to counter the United States' advantages in hard power through the use of soft power and, specifically, by successfully exploiting the information environment. Having ceded advantage to its competitors in the information environment, the United States must evaluate how it will employ its information instrument of national power to win strategic competition at the level below armed conflict. It

¹⁷ Trump, *NSS*, 26-28; Mattis, *NDS*, 4-5; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), *The National Military Strategy (NMS) of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 1-4.; US Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (2018), iii.

¹⁸ US Joint Staff, *JDN 1-15, Strategy* (2018), II-5—II-7; Robert Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power: A Critical Examination of the U.S. National Security System* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 225-234.

must also do this in a way that prepares itself to solidify relative advantages over its competitors, should competition evolve into armed conflict and those competitors turn into adversaries.¹⁹

Competing with other nations in the information environment requires an understanding of how the United States conceptualizes the information environment and how it will deliberately seek to affect it. Current joint doctrine defines the information environment as the “aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information.”²⁰ Individuals, organizations, and systems exist in three interrelated dimensions: the physical, the informational, and the cognitive. The physical dimension of the information environment encompasses all of the tangible entities that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information. Key leaders, command and control nodes, and radio towers are examples of entities within the physical dimension. The informational dimension encompasses the movement of information, how it is stored, and how it flows between the entities of the physical dimension. The cognitive dimension relates to the minds of those who “transmit, receive, and respond to or act on information.”²¹ The cognitive dimension deals with how individuals or groups receive and interpret information about the world around them and translate that information into a decision to act. The cognitive dimension is about inherent human mental processes that allow for human beings to categorize, to assign value, and to explain the world around them.²²

This understanding of the information environment highlights the fact that the cognitive dimension is synonymous from the information environment. Competing against other nations in the information environment requires the United States to further conceptualize how it will employ military information support operations (MISO) in order to manipulate the cognitive

¹⁹ Mattis, *NDS*, 7.

²⁰ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-13, Information Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), I-1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I-3.

²² *Ibid.*

dimension of its competitors. According to *Joint Publication 3-13.2, MISO*, MISO are “planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator’s objectives.”²³ Situating the employment of MISO within the context of competition short of armed conflict places it within the shaping and deterrence phases of the notional joint phasing model. Against this conceptual backdrop, a new question arises: in competitions short of armed conflict, how will the United States conduct MISO to deliberately affect the cognitive dimension of a strategic competitor in a way that shapes or deters it in a manner favorable to American objectives? Current MISO doctrine states that the objectives of MISO during the shaping and deterrence phases of competition should be to “reinforce US policies to prevent hostilities and advocate peaceful resolutions.”²⁴ Further, current doctrine states that MISO should be used to advance US efforts to “deter aggression, clarify intent, prevent escalation of tension, ease concerns, and mitigate the potential effects of adversary information capabilities and activities.”²⁵ MISO is applied by selecting target audiences within the society of a strategic competitor or adversary, developing messages that are assumed to be appealing to those target audiences, and leveraging information related capabilities to physically deliver those messages to target audiences.²⁶

The joint force’s doctrinal conception for how to use MISO is based on many assumptions. It assumes that selected target audiences will receive the message, understand the message, and prioritize belief in the message over all other potentially conflicting messages they have received. Implicit within this approach to affecting the cognitive dimension of the

²³ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-13.2, Military Information Support Operations (MISO)* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1-2.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

information environment is the correct assumption that target audiences have different interpretations of the world around them, but also the false assumption that they can somehow be persuaded to adopt an entirely different interpretation from the United States. This approach implies that messages from the United States carry an inherent credibility lacking in those of the United States' competitors.

Principally, this approach seeks to resolve conflicts with and deter aggression from competitor societies through the gradual alignment of norms and beliefs. It is not illogical to think that, on a grand scale, the United States can perpetually retain its advantage over its competitors by convincing them to adopt similar beliefs and worldviews. However, this approach is flawed in that it fails to account for how competitor societies came to believe what they believe in the first place. In order to make the informational instrument of national power a useful tool in creating relative advantage within competition short of armed conflict and preparing for victory during the escalation of that competition into armed conflict, the United States must consider how narrative acts as an inherent cognitive process that shapes the cognitive dimension. Leveraging narrative to exploit the cognitive dimension requires a fundamental shift from the current approach that attempts to use MISO as a tool to resolve conflict to a tool that encourages, redirects, and reprioritizes conflict within the societies of the United States' strategic competitors and potential great power adversaries.

The Cognitive Dimension, Narrative and Societies

According to H. Porter Abbott, a narrative is a “representation of an event,” or action.²⁷ Arranging events or actions in a causal sequence allows human beings to create meaning and to convey and share this meaning with others. Narrative is “the universal tool for knowing as well as

²⁷ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13.

telling, for absorbing knowledge as well as expressing it.”²⁸ In other words, narrative is the primary tool that enables human beings to receive information, understand it or assign it meaning, and deliver it to others. Arranging events, characters, and actions into a causal sequence allows man to create order out of a chaotic environment. The causal linkages of narrative formation resolve the conflict of “unknowing” by developing understanding of events and their seemingly apparent consequences.²⁹ Narrative allows for a collection of events or actions to seem plausible and provides a mechanism to see how they each “belong.”³⁰ Narrative’s ability to resolve conflicts can best be seen through an examination of how an individual’s cognitive process leads to the development of social groups and, ultimately, societies who resolve objective differences through common cultural masterplot narratives.³¹

Individual Cognitive Dimension

At an individual level, philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel described this process as the dialectic. According to Hegel, individuals possess an inherent cognitive function, which drives them to incrementally refine ideas of the physical world around them in order to gradually obtain the identification of truth. The dialectic is comprised of the thesis, the antithesis, and the synthesis. The thesis represents an initial idea about the nature of an object or a forecasted result of a test. The antithesis is an idea that is inherently oppositional to the thesis or an alternate forecast of the result of a test. When the initial idea is tested, the thesis and antithesis merge to form a synthesis, or a new idea that reflects the truth of both the thesis and the antithesis but discards what appears to be untrue. The synthesis then becomes the baseline for the development of a new thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. This cycle, as a representation of human cognition,

²⁸ Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 10.

²⁹ Ibid., 45.

³⁰ Ibid., 44.

³¹ Ibid., 46-49, 55; US Joint Staff, *JP 3-13, Information Operations*, I-3, I-5.

occurs perpetually as human beings encounter new ideas, attempt new undertakings, and try to explain events occurring around them (see Figure 2). This concept also represents a perpetual conflict that remains ongoing in the human mind. Ignorance clashes with the desire for knowledge, which propels the formation of ideas that can be tested and refuted in an enduring pursuit for things that have the appearance of truth.³²

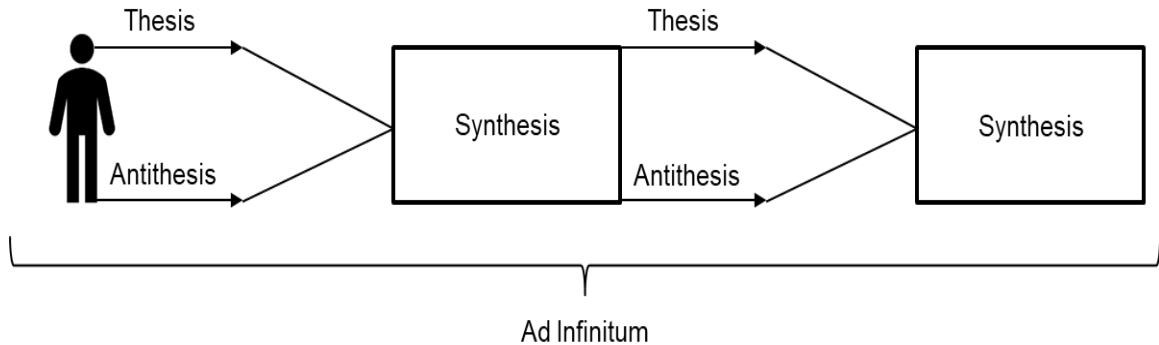


Figure 2. Hegelian dialectic as a cognitive process to create understanding. Created by author.

As an individual cannot avoid immersion in the objective physical world, he must use the cognitive dialectic process to develop a subjective understanding that provides the physical world, and his place in it, meaning. This is the difference between objective and subjective reality. To grasp that the physical world around the individual exists, including other human beings, requires no cognitive process. The truth of the objective reality is tangible due to sight, touch, taste, smell, and auditory senses. Understanding the objective reality, however, requires the individual to use the cognitive dialectic process to apply meaning to why the individual is impacted by the objective physical world. When individuals share common experiences, they form social groups, not only because they have an easier mode of communicating about the world through their shared experience, but because seeing the same experience reflected in the opinions

³² Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 130-134; Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, *Ethics of War*, 445.

of another validates their subjective interpretation of the objective world and lends credence to their synthesis.³³

Social Groups as the Result of Individual Cognition

As individuals within a social group continue their cognitive dialectic to explain the world around them, they amass gradually compounding sets of syntheses. This complete set of explanations of the world is passed on to future generations of people within the social group. In this way, this complete set of explanations, or worldview, is institutionalized. Instead of facing the task of defining the world for oneself in solitude, each successive generation within the social group inherits a pre-existing explanation for the world around them. This process is how individuals within a social group are socialized to the worldviews, beliefs, and cultural underpinnings of their respective cultures. This process acts as an expedient to collective social understanding because it empowers successive generations to attempt to identify new areas of the physical, objective world that can be categorized, explained, and assigned value, instead of having to reengage everything about the world that has already been understood and communicated by previous generations. This process also creates a pre-existing lens through which members of a social group view the world. Possessing no other knowledge prior to their existence, their socialization into the world around them by previous generations is the only way they have to understand the world. Through institutionalization and socialization, successive generations of individuals within a social group accept the subjective reality created by their predecessors as their de facto objective reality.³⁴

Language is the primary method that individuals within a social group use to receive institutionalization and socialization. Language is the tool that transfers the social group's

³³ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 21, 130-131.

³⁴ Ibid., 132-133.

subjective interpretation of the objective reality to successive generations. Language categorizes things, people, actions, and events. In combining these categories into something meaningful, language transforms them into narratives. Narrative is a conceptual framework empowering people to connect apparently unconnected phenomena around some causal explanation. It connects human action to a sequence of events in order to create meaning. In this way, social groups receive and accept narratives of previous generations explaining the world around them and use those narratives to reinforce their subjective interpretation of the objective physical world and transfer it to future generations (see figure 3). Narrative also categorizes and explains the relationship of individuals within a distinct social group, assigning and explaining social roles. Through cognitive narration, individuals in a social group can understand the different actions individuals take within the group and explain them as part of a conceptual whole. In this way, narrative can explain all objectively different social groups within a larger, distinguishable society.³⁵

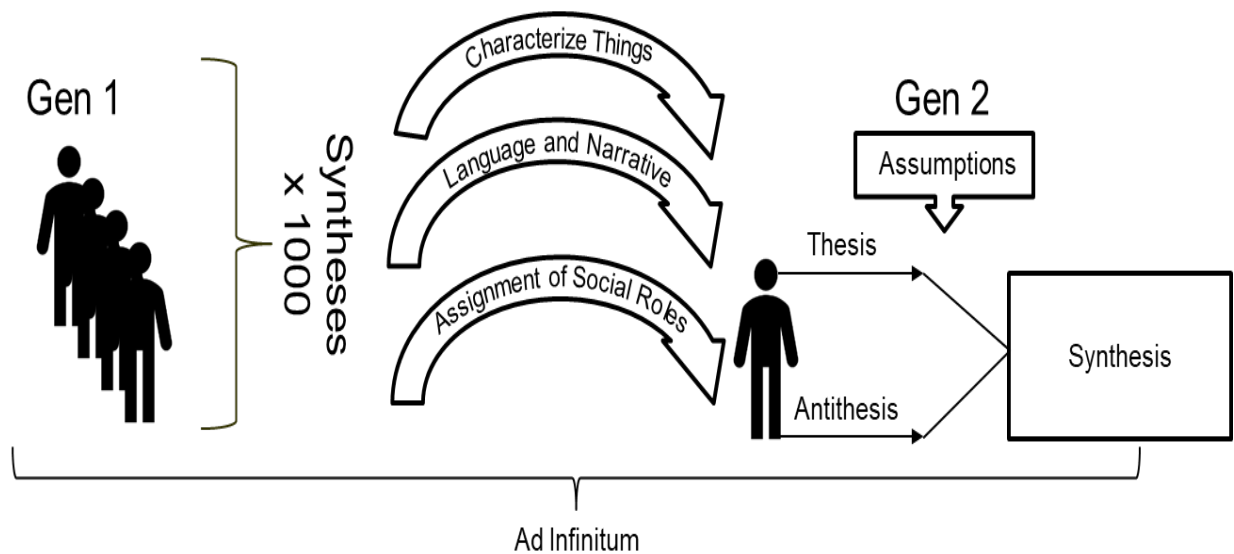


Figure 3. Generational entrenchment of ideas through socialization and institutionalization. Created by author.

³⁵ Berger and Luckman, *Social Construction of Reality*, 37; Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 5.

Society as the Organization of Social Groups Linked Through Narrative

From a cognitive perspective, societies are organizations of objectively distinct social groups who coalesce around two ideas: common subjective explanations of the objective physical world and the social roles individuals within the society should play. Together, these two ideas reflect the society's values. Values are the social principles that define what the society cares about and what drives its priorities. On a daily basis, through language and the execution of social roles, individuals within a society socialize each other through norms. Norms are the unwritten rules of behavior in a society that instruct its members how they should act toward others and how they should expect others to act toward them.³⁶

Societies, however, are not generally homogenous. There are objectively distinct social subgroups within a society who have objective differences, including different religious beliefs, ethnicities, levels of wealth, and political affiliations. Within the society, these objective differences must be explained in order to provide meaning. Narrative explanations that resonate with every objectively distinct social subgroup within the society are masterplots. Masterplots are defined storylines with actors playing fixed roles in a sequence of events that has a predetermined outcome. The story of Cinderella represents an example of a masterplot. While the presentation of this masterplot varies in European and American culture, its characters, the sequence of events, and the outcomes remain relatively unchanged. It presents the story of an innocent woman, oppressed by circumstances outside of her control, who manages, through optimism and some luck, to dramatically elevate her social status. An example of a culturally distinct masterplot is the rags-to-riches story created by Horatio Alger. The Horatio Alger masterplot is a uniquely American story where the primary character, through hard work and determination, is able to elevate himself from a life of poverty to a life of wealth and success. The rags-to-riches

³⁶ Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 195, 206-207.

masterplot serves as an inspiration for the “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” sentiment and is extremely powerful in American culture. According to Abbott, this story has been told and retold numerous times, to include descriptions of the lives of figures like Andrew Carnegie and Abraham Lincoln.³⁷

Use of masterplots to explain objective differences in a way that is meaningful to multiple social subgroups within a society enables the society to communicate effectively across social subgroups to activate commonly held desires and beliefs about what the world is, the roles individuals within the society play in it, and what actions should be taken. Societies develop multiple masterplots in order to explain different events that consistently manifest themselves through social communication. In this way, masterplots link distinct social subgroups of a society together and enable them to communicate in a way that commonly reflects the values and norms they share rather than focusing on objective differences (see Figure 4).³⁸

³⁷ Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 192-193; Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity*, 3rd ed. (Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann, 2011), 93-96; Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 46-48.

³⁸ Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 47-48.

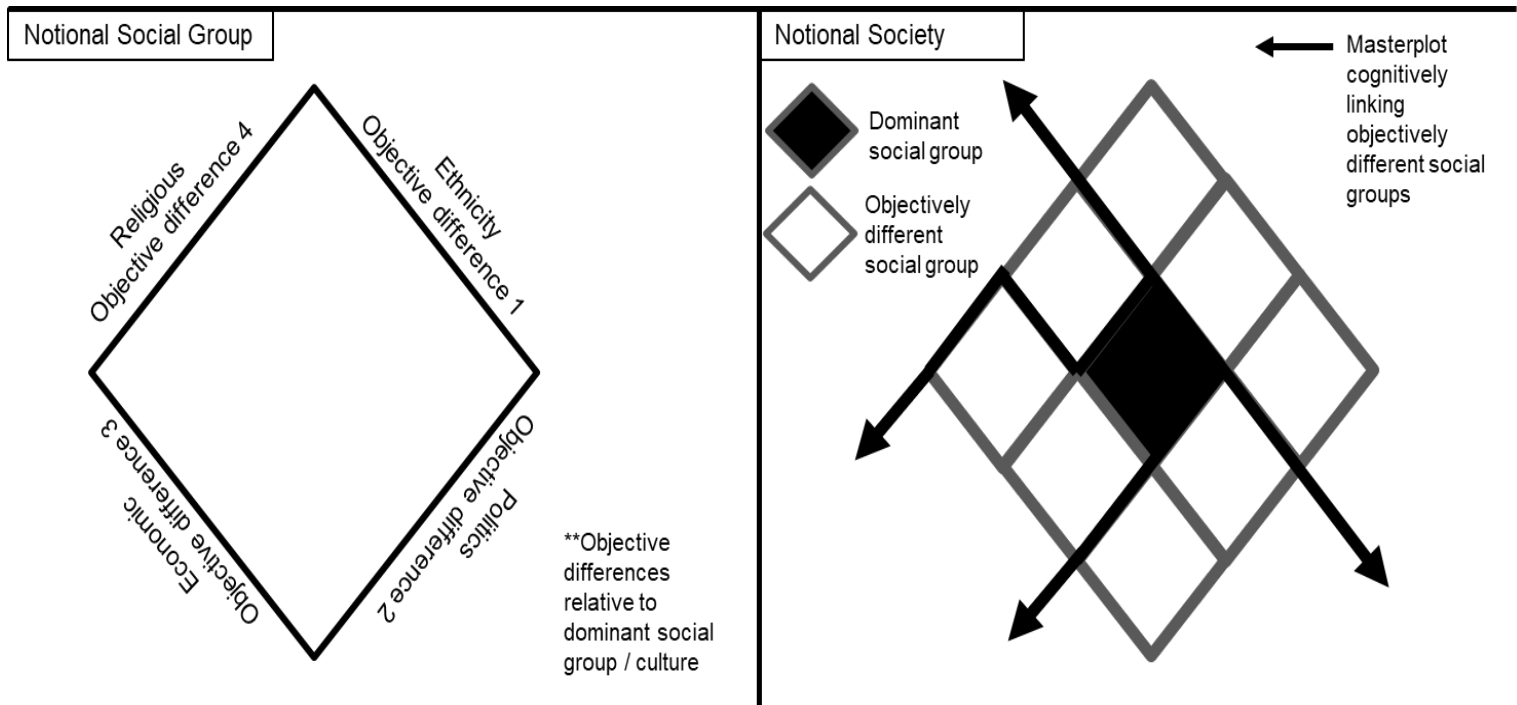


Figure 4. Society as the organization of social groups linked through narrative. Adapted from Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity*, 3rd ed. (Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann, 2011), 93-96.

Barriers and Weaknesses of Societal Narratives

The processes in cognition that drive the formation of common understanding and common purpose among social groups and contribute to the formation of distinguishable societies have inherent barriers to manipulation, as well as explicit weaknesses. An institutionalized and continuously socialized conception of the world is inherently hostile to the existence of foreign interpretations. The existence of others who hold different conceptions of the world signals that one conception is not necessarily absolute. Reconciling two different conceptions between two different social groups requires reanalyzing all of the socially accepted dialectic synthesis computations that have collectively been amalgamated and passed down from societies over time. Rather than attempting this cognitive deconfliction, the worldviews of others are rejected and their differences are attributed to a fundamental misconception of the world, a lack of knowledge, or, more nefariously, a deliberate attempt from an outside social group to corrupt the true

understanding of the world. In this way, cognitive narration acts as a barrier to narratives that emerge from outside the social group and do not communicate in ways that adhere to that society's pre-established values and norms. Because of this, narrators outside of the society have little ability to influence the conceptions of the world that that society possesses.³⁹

Cognitive narration also displays inherent weaknesses. Through the cognitive process of assigning social roles as a means of categorization and understanding the objective differences of tasks performed by individuals in society, groups within the society form subcultures based on their own roles and tasks. They develop independent languages based on their experiences of accomplishing their tasks in the objective physical world. One social role in society is to maintain and promote the society's values and norms, or its culture. Over time, social groups assigned the role of promoting the society's culture inevitably pass down a diluted version of the culture that lacks the full explanation for why the society believes the things it does, why it values the way it does, and why individuals are expected to behave the way they do. Each successive generation inherits an amalgamation of individual syntheses from the previous generation. With each generation, the amount of synthesis that must be passed down multiplies. Maintaining the full dialectic logic for how and why societies have come to their conclusions is not possible, and each successive generation gradually loses the cumulative thesis-antithesis aspects of the dialectic equation. This leaves future societies with beginning assumptions about the world, but no detailed reasoning for why those are the assumptions they have. Because of this, societies are open to manipulation through the reinterpretation of the thesis-antithesis dialectic if the ultimate synthesis remains unchanged.⁴⁰

Acknowledging the role that narrative plays in the cognitive processes of distinct societies, and recognizing the inherent barriers and weaknesses these processes have, drives the

³⁹ Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 114-116; Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 68.

⁴⁰ Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 87.

need for a reconceptualization of the employment of MISO during state competition short of armed conflict. The current doctrinal conception envisions the resolution of conflict between the United States and competitor societies and the deterrence of conflict through the gradual alignment of values and norms, with competitor nations abandoning their pre-existing worldviews in favor of adopting American ones. According to *US Army Field Manual 3-13, Information Operations*, any entity that opposes US efforts “must be influenced in some fashion to acquiesce or surrender to or otherwise support U.S. national objectives by aligning their actions in concert with commanders’ intent.”⁴¹

However, societies are inherently opposed to change as a result of the influence of an outsider who possesses a different worldview. The United States, or any nation attempting to change the values and norms of a culturally distinct competitor society, begins with no credibility as a narrator. Bypassing this barrier requires a fundamentally different approach when considering the employment of MISO as a shaping operation against future great power adversaries. Instead of looking to supplant a preexisting narrative or worldview, the United States should use MISO to exploit the weaknesses of a society’s cognitive process. This can be done by identifying the societal masterplots of strategic competitors and deliberately reinterpreting the relationships between objectively different social subgroups as relationships that do not reflect the common values and norms of that society. This approach will leverage the preexisting, accepted narratives within a competitor’s society as a tool to reprioritize the conception of the immediate threat as one that is internal to a society, rather than one that is external.⁴²

⁴¹ US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-13, Information Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 1-4;

⁴² Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 114-116; Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 68.

Deep Battle in the Cognitive Dimension

In order to develop a new basis for the employment of MISO, the United States can take cues from how previous operational artists overcame similar challenges in the physical, tangible world of the land domain. The best comparative example is the Soviet concept of deep battle, articulated by Soviet general G.H. Isserson and others.

Isserson's Deep Battle

In his 1936 treatise, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, Isserson described an evolution in Soviet thinking on the topic of how to execute large scale combat operations against adversaries who were continually employing combat forces along large fronts. Further, due to technological advancements, these fronts were reinforced with trenches, barbed wire, long-range artillery, tanks, aircraft, airborne troops, and machine guns. Collectively, the mass production and employment of these capabilities prevented traditional European armies from creating a dense mass of forces that could fix and envelop an enemy and create a *kesselschlacht*, or cauldron of slaughter. The First World War provided a case study in how these technological advancements would “thicken” a battlefield and transform battles from contests of maneuver into long, bloody contests of attrition. Noting this problem, Isserson, along with other Soviet theorists such as M.N. Tukhachevsky, B.M. Shaposhnikov, M.V. Frunze, A.A. Svechin, and V.K. Triandafillov, sought to develop solutions. Their ultimate solution was the concept of deep battle.⁴³

The concept of deep battle recognized that future adversaries would act as an interactive system, employing broad fronts to defend their national borders or any land they had acquired. Industrialization allowed these armies to incorporate infantry, mechanized and motorized infantry, and long-range artillery. While these capabilities would thicken an adversary, they

⁴³ Richard W. Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory in World War II: The Life and Theories of G.S. Isserson* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 97-98; James J. Schneider, introductory essay in G.H. Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, trans. Bruce W. Menning (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2005), vii, xiv-xvii.

would be further thickened through the establishment of several defensive belts possessing the same capabilities. As a system, the belts would be continuously fed by the industrialized economic center of the adversary, perpetuating a constant defense. Isserson and his Soviet contemporaries recognized that this evolution in the defense would require evolutions in offense if they were to counter such arrangements. Abandoning the classical idea of enveloping a single massed army, they instead recognized that this systematic defense had to be disrupted at each echelon, as quickly as possible.⁴⁴

The deep battle concept envisioned employing multiple echelons of friendly forces in near simultaneous waves to disrupt each defensive belt of an enemy front in order to neutralize it. The first and second echelons, composed of mechanized infantry, cavalry, infantry, and short-range combat aviation, would seek to fix and penetrate the enemy's initial echelon. While the first echelon remained engaged with the enemy's first echelon, the second and third echelons, composed of large, independent motorized, mechanized, and cavalry formations, would near simultaneously break through the adversary's first echelon and target the enemy's second and third echelons. Breaking through the enemy's systematic defensive front in this way afforded each of the penetrating echelons the opportunity to envelop portions of the enemy's defensive belts in a near simultaneous manner (see Figure 5).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Isserson, *Evolution of Operational Art*, 67.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

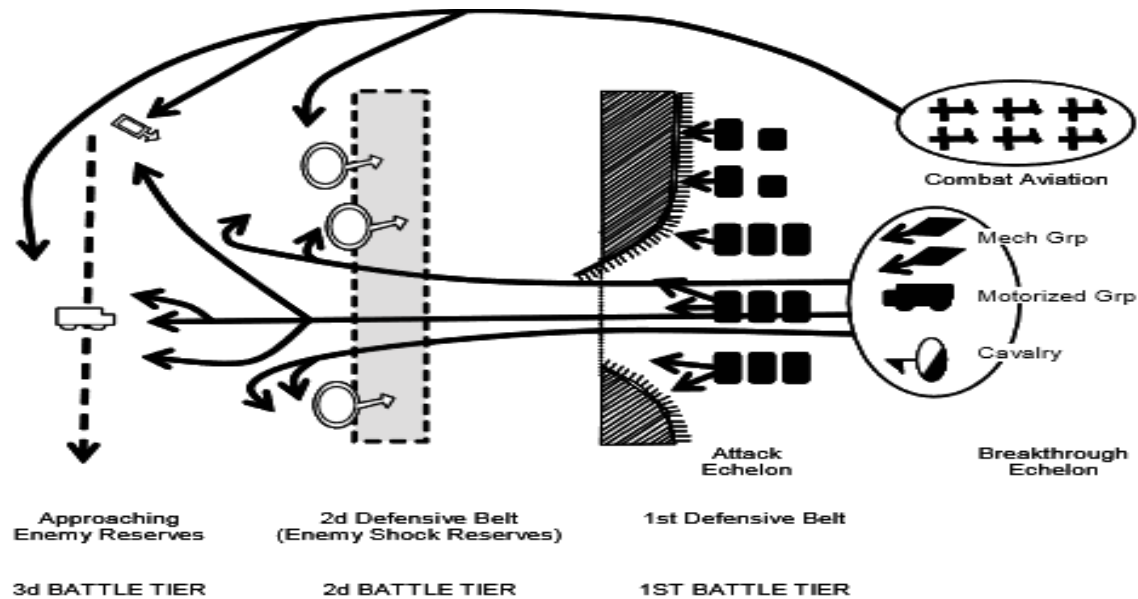


Figure 5. The deep operations for penetrating and crushing a front. G.S. Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, trans. Bruce W. Menning (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2005) 67.

The Soviet concept of deep battle recognized the adversary as a system with multiple component parts that continuously reinforced each other in order to generate defensive power. Defeating this system required a deliberate penetration of each part, followed by multiple envelopments at each echelon of the enemy's defensive formation. The totality of envelopments created by the deep battle concept allowed the Soviets to achieve a *kesselschlacht* against an adversary that employed broad fronts supported by technological advancements that thickened their defensive lines. This concept was eventually employed, to great success, on the Eastern Front during the Second World War.⁴⁶

Applying Deep Battle to the Cognitive Dimension

As a conceptual approach, the United States can employ deep battle in the cognitive dimension against its strategic competitors during competitions below armed conflict. The cognitive dimension of a strategic competitor resembles the multi-echelon enemy described by

⁴⁶ Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, xvi-xxii.

Isserson. Instead of geographically separated echelons with different units conducting divergent, but supporting functions, the cognitive dimension of a strategic competitor consists of objectively different social groups who continuously reinforce the values and norms of the society through the continuous narration of masterplots to describe and understand the physical world around them. These masterplots are also used to describe and explain how the collective society should act toward other nations.⁴⁷

In the same way that the adversary envisioned by Isserson was not vulnerable to being enveloped by a single massed army in the field, the cognitive dimension of a strategic competitor is not vulnerable to conversion from a narrator outside of the society. Because the cognitive dimension of a competitor's society is the sum of all synthesis that have been developed through the dialectic processes of the individuals within the society, reinforced over time through multiple generations, attempting a direct envelopment of their values and norms through gradual conversion is not possible. The inherent view of the world that has been embedded in members of a competitor society through institutionalization and socialization acts as a continuous reinforcement to prevent such a transformation. It also acts as a preestablished impediment to the credibility of narrators outside of the society.⁴⁸

Penetrating the echelons of a strategic competitor's cognitive dimension requires activating masterplots that resonate and connect objectively distinct social groups within the society. In this way, nothing new can be developed to penetrate the cognitive dimension of the competitor's society. Gaps within the fronts of each echelon of the cognitive dimension are preexisting and reflect the continuous subjective interpretations of the objective physical world being carried out by the individuals of objectively distinct social groups within the society. The

⁴⁷ Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 185-188; E. H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1985), 14.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Hegel*, 130-134; Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 114-116; Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 46.

connections between objectively distinct social groups are what must be activated and employed to envelop each objectively distinct social group.

From a cognitive perspective, given that a competitor's society consists of objectively distinct social groups who continuously use masterplots to effectively communicate in a manner that reinforces their values and norms, the target of MISO, in competitions short of armed conflict, should be objectively distinct social groups within a competitor's society. What is of most value should be the objective differences the social groups have in relation to the dominant social group, the group that wields the most cultural and political power. Through the deliberate targeting of objectively distinct social groups, MISO can leverage the preexisting masterplots of a society and attempt to cognitively envelop all social groups who are objectively distinct from the dominant social group.

US competitors may already be employing this approach. Russia, in its attempt to influence what it considers the "near abroad," (i.e., the former Soviet states of Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus) has consistently attempted to influence those countries' Russian-speaking populations.⁴⁹ Shared language between Russia and its neighbors' minority, Russian-speaking populations provides Russia the ability to communicate directly, leveraging shared sentiments such as:

a common feeling that the West in the late 1990s betrayed them by failing to deliver on promises of prosperity; the supremacy complex of having lost superpower status; the idea that Eurasian civilization is founded on traditional conservative values, such as family and orthodoxy; and, finally, a shared fear of violent revolutions, in which protests are portrayed as slippery slopes to bloody civil wars.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Todd C. Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

Exploiting these shared experiences, Russia has leveraged “Russian-identifying populations to amplify the Kremlin’s message, pressure those populations’ host governments, and incite unrest in their host regions or countries.”⁵¹

Attempting the Cognitive Envelopment

By harnessing and manipulating the narrative masterplots linking social groups within a competitor society, MISO can exploit a preexisting penetration of a competitor society’s cognitive front. Using preexisting narratives bypasses the inherent barrier presented by the preexisting cognitive formulations of a distinct society because it does not come with the culturally embedded values and norms of a society that exists outside of the competitor’s society. Instead, preexisting masterplots reflect the values and norms already held and deemed important to the competitor’s society. In this way, leveraging masterplots facilitates the communication of pre-accepted values and norms as a term of reference for communication between societies. Using these masterplots, MISO messaging can selectively frame and reinterpret the relationship between objectively different social groups and the dominant social group within a competitor’s society.

The cognitive envelopment occurs when a social group that is objectively different from the dominant social group interprets the actions, messages, and history of the dominant social group as misaligned with or oppositional to the values and norms of the objectively distinct social group. Creating this effect requires the use of selective agenda setting, or framing, to only characterize the past, present and future actions of the dominant social group as they relate to the objectively distinct social group that is in the midst of being enveloped (see Figure 6). Selective framing will always characterize the objectively different social group as separate and distinct from the dominant social group by addressing it in terms of what makes it objectively different. Selective framing never acknowledges that the two groups share common bonds or are part of a

⁵¹ Todd C. Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*, 9-10.

collective whole that has, in the past, resolved cognitive differences allowing them to coexist. Selective framing never acknowledges any other objectively distinct social group as being part of a collective whole. All other objectively distinct social groups within the competitor's society are characterized by what makes them objectively different from the society. This selective framing sets the agenda for what is to be discussed and zooms in on the most local level of a distinct social group, displacing it from a larger context as part of a society or a nation of people with common beliefs and objectives. Instead, through selective framing, the discussion will be centered around the objective ethnic, political, religious, or economic differences between the objectively different social group and the dominant social group (see Figure 6).⁵²

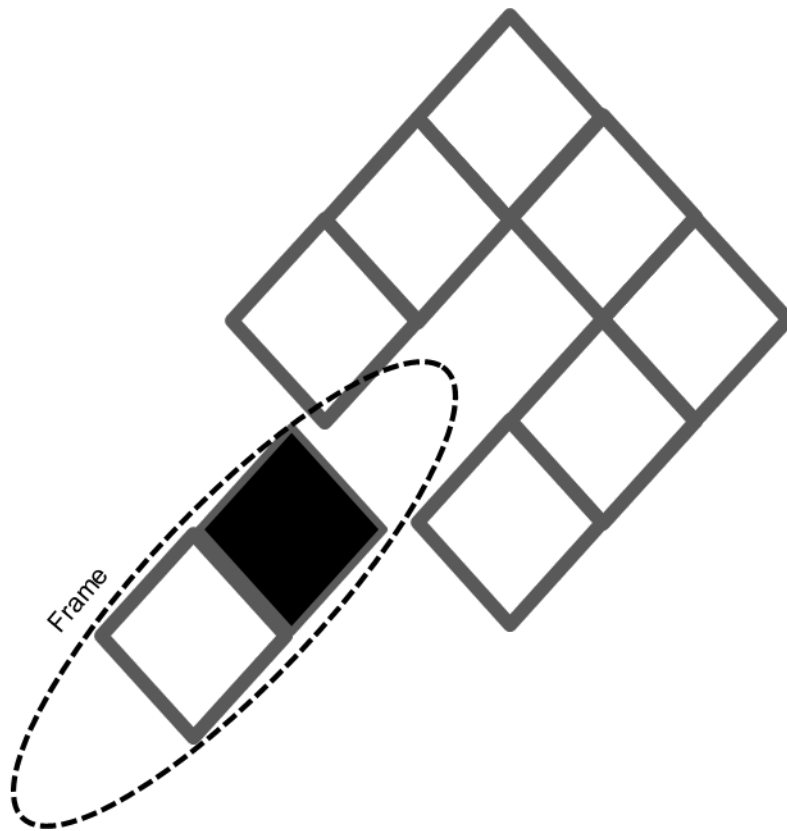


Figure 6. Dislocating social groups through deliberate framing. Created by author.

⁵² Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, 7; Nye, *Future of Power*, 93-94; Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 28-30.

Within this frame, MISO should leverage reinterpretation of the masterplot, which has allowed the objectively distinct social groups to resolve cognitive conflict about how they view the world at an individual level. The reinterpretation of the masterplot will cast the dominant social group as the archetypical antagonist, the entity, understood by both the dominant social group and the objectively different social group in question to act in a predetermined way deemed anathema to both groups. The objectively different social group will be the protagonist whose views of the world are never questioned, but implicitly acknowledged as legitimate by way of their role in the culturally accepted masterplot. Every interaction, both past and present, of the dominant social group, will be deliberately reinterpreted to be an expression of the values of the antagonist (see Figure 7). This frames the relationship between the dominant social group and the objectively different social group in a way that provides for the explanation of their objective differences as a result of the antagonist, who objectively holds cultural and political power, maintaining or exerting that power because they have not adopted the objectively different social group's view of the world. The antagonist would have power in this relationship as a result of upholding and promoting values that are anathema to the objectively different social group.

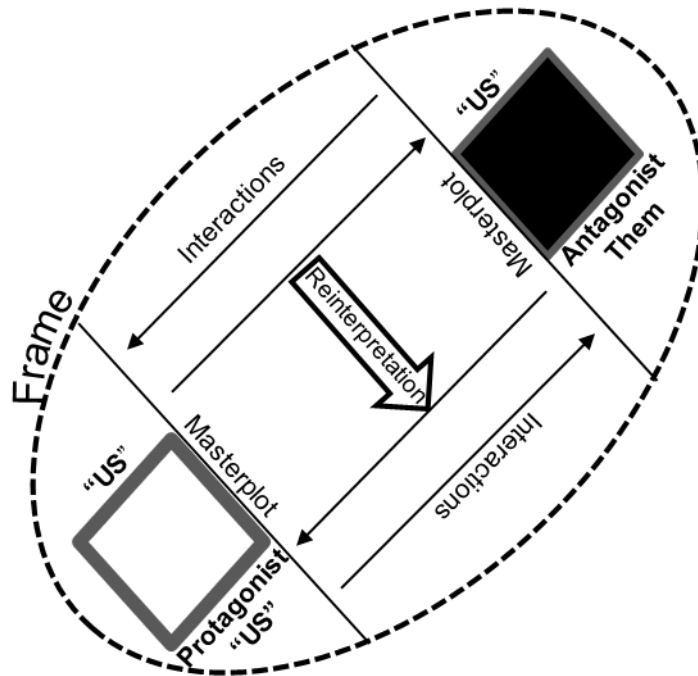


Figure 7. Altering conceptions of a dominant social group through continual reinterpretation.
Created by author.

Each characterization of the relationship between the objectively different social group and the dominant social group will also use altercasting, a form of rhetorical coercion, to reinforce the predetermined result of the masterplot being exploited. According to Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, altercasting constitutes a form of role theory that “deliberately casts a social actor into a role that automatically cues others to pressure the social actor into corresponding appropriate behavior.” By coupling a reinterpreted narrative with altercasting, the narrator can forecast the antagonistic actions of the dominant social group in response to the protagonist actions of the objectively different social group. In other words, in an attempt at entrapping the dominant social group (hereafter, “Group A”), the objectively different social group (hereafter, “Group B”) will be told that Group A will not accept this reinterpretation of their relationship. This lack of acceptance will be characterized as evidence that their relationship,

newly characterized as adversarial, holds validity. Should Group A acknowledge Group B's new characterization as valid, the same objective would be achieved.⁵³

Each social group within a society that is objectively different from the dominant social group will be targeted in this manner to simultaneously and cognitively envelop every echelon of the cognitive defense of the competitor (see Figure 8). If multiple envelopments are achieved on the cognitive level, generational assumptions regarding the relationships between Group A and Group B will have to be renegotiated in order to resolve cognitive conflict. Ideally, for some social groups, this may not be possible and will require physical tangible concessions from Group A in order to reestablish a cognitive unity binding Group B and Group A. This approach seeks to create a cognitive disruption between the parts of the societal whole in order to gradually reorient conflict from the realm of nation states who have relatively firm conceptions of the world, back to the individual level (see Figure 9).

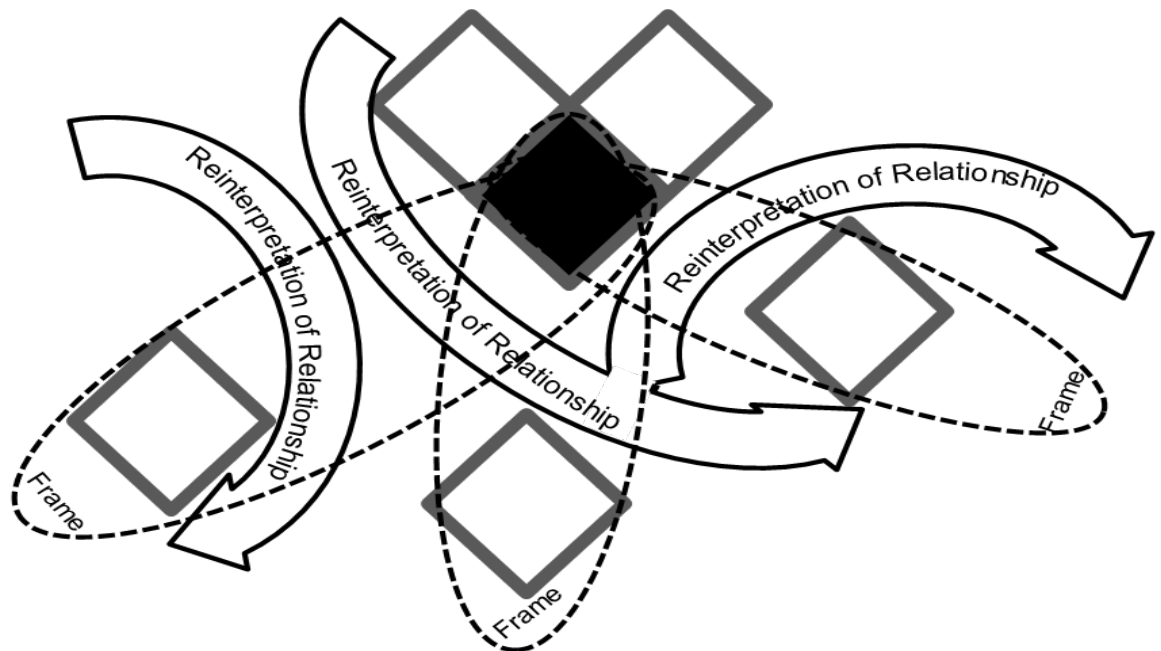


Figure 8. Deep battle in the cognitive dimension. Created by author.

⁵³ Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, 8.

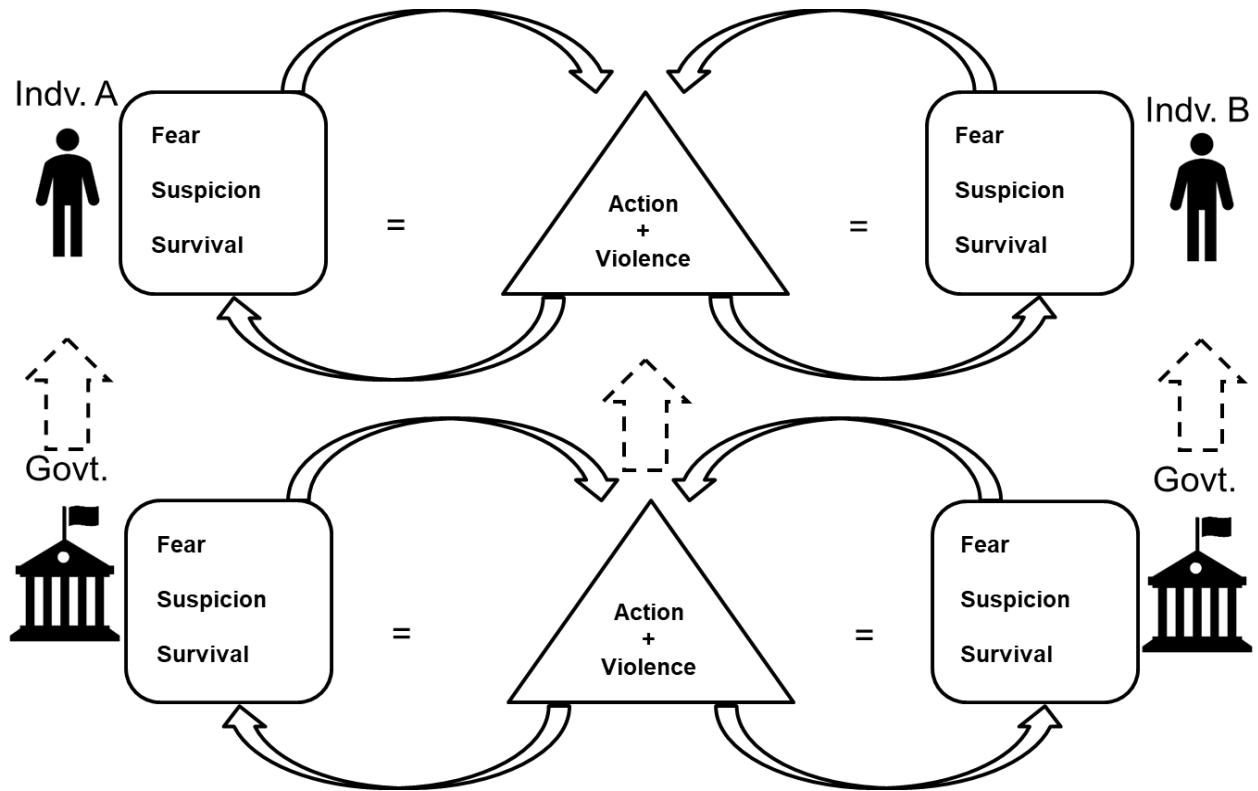


Figure 9. Achieving relative advantage through relative societal cohesion. Created by author.

Risks, Benefits and Additional Research

Nuances

This approach is nested within the application of MISO to affect the cognitive dimension of strategic competitors during competitions short of armed conflict. By deliberately attempting the cognitive envelopment of multiple social groups within a competitor society, the collective effect is to transfer conflict from one between nation states, where the competitor has resolved cognitive conflicts internally, to multiple conflicts within the competitor's society. Until those conflicts are resolved and legitimacy between the dominant social group and objectively different social groups is established, projection of power against nation states will be weaker than it otherwise may have been.

Significantly, employing this approach in situations where a competitor nation state has transitioned from competition short of armed conflict to armed conflict will be highly

problematic. In these instances, the armed actions of another state provide objective reinforcement that the priority of conflict should be on establishing the preexisting worldview, given that the inhabitants of the competitor state are physically and objectively under violent assault. This prevents the transition to reprioritizing internal conflict and incentivizes cognitive entrenchment until the armed conflict has been resolved.

This approach relies on the appearance of characterizations of internally developed masterplots, pitting objectively different social groups against the dominant social groups. Any association of this approach that can be objectively tied back to another society reduces its legitimacy. Use of altercasting in a different way may serve to counteract this defense by the dominant social group. By preemptively forecasting that the dominant social group will attempt to dissuade an objectively different social group from accepting a reinterpretation of their relationship by claiming that it is the fruit of influence from an outside nation, the objectively different social group will expect this response as evidence that the reinterpretation is valid.

Risks

A nation state employing this approach for the purposes of winning in the cognitive dimension against its competitors has little to no control over how the dissonance created between social groups within a society will manifest itself. Due to the prerequisite of remaining detached from the masterplot's reinterpretation, a nation state employing this approach must remain disengaged and maintain that it bears no responsibility for the internal matters of another country. As a consequence, the nation state must be prepared for any unanticipated outcome or contingency of cognitive conflict between social groups, including benign political manifestations or violent insurgency. The goal of this approach, creating relative advantage in the cognitive dimension should relationships between nations transition to armed conflict, inherently accepts this risk.

As it is an approach that seeks to deliberately destabilize a competitor nation for the purposes of achieving a position of relative advantage, this approach remains reserved for use against those nation states deemed as potential great power adversaries. It also has no ability to reinforce common values and beliefs between nation states that potentially hold the same views as the United States.

Benefits

According to Dolman, “strategy, in its simplest form, is a plan for attaining continual advantage.”⁵⁴ Rather than attempt to achieve a fixed and definable end state, which Cohen describes as “strategic pixie dust,”⁵⁵ deep battle in the cognitive dimension aligns with the requirements of strategy in that it is a perpetual, enduring approach that can be employed continuously against whomever is deemed a dominant social group in a competitor society. As long as the nation that employs this approach remains unnamed as the proponent, it can simultaneously continue to promote its own values and norms through strategic messaging without incoherence. Maintaining this coherence will reinforce consistency with other societies who already accept those values and norms.

Additional Research

While this approach would be considered an offensive method of warfare in the cognitive dimension, a nation state must identify how to reinforce its institutions, increase buy-in in societal masterplots, and disseminate its narrative in positive ways so that it can defend against a deliberate approach to weaken it. Additionally, refining this approach will require resolving how its use potentially conflicts with theories of cognitive dissonance. Experiments attempting to prove cognitive dissonance have suggested that individuals who have sacrificed the most to

⁵⁴ Everett Carl Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6.

⁵⁵ Eliot A. Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power and the Necessity of Military Force* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 203.

complete a task assign more value to a task than others who have sacrificed less. This finding has been attributed to a need to resolve the dissonance and place the value of what has been accomplished over the value of the sacrifice in order to resolve cognitive dissonance. Regarding this approach for conducting MISO, decisionmakers must consider whether certain social groups are invested so greatly into an idea of a social unity that it prompts them to favor the dominant social group of their society when faced with resolving dissonance between a recharacterization of their relationship with the dominant social group.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of geopolitical realism, which acknowledges enduring conflict, the United States must prepare to execute MDO in a way that creates or maintains relative advantage during the transition from competition short of armed conflict into armed conflict. Maintaining this relative advantage should drive operations to shape and deter strategic competitors during competition short of armed conflict. In considering how to maintain relative advantage in the information environment, the United States must be prepared to implement MISO to affect environment's cognitive dimension.

Societies are the result of generationally compounded cognitive conflict resolutions, which link objectively different social groups to dominant social groups through continuous narration of masterplots that reflect the society's commonly held values and norms. By adopting the concepts of deep battle in the cognitive dimension, the United States can deliberately create fissures within the societies of its competitors through continuously reinterpreting the relationships of objectively different social groups and dominant social groups through the lens of preexisting, culturally accepted masterplots in order to characterize these relationships as antithetical to the society from the point of view of each objectively different social group.

⁵⁶ Joel Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 6, 17-19.

During competitions short of armed conflict, the creation of these societal fissures within the societies of American competitors will reprioritize the competitor's conception of the immediate threat to one that is internal to the society, vice one external to the society via another nation state, in order to mediate cognitive conflicts among the relationships between the dominant social group of a society and all of its distinct social subgroups.

The above approach represents a fundamental shift away from the precepts of current MISO doctrine in that, instead of trying to resolve conflict and align values, it attempts to create and reprioritize conflict using the preexisting, culturally accepted masterplots of the societies of US competitors. It avoids the inherent obstacle of being cast as a narrator who lacks credibility, and instead emphasizes exploiting the inherent weaknesses of human cognitive processes as they relate to the creation of social groups, societies, and nation states.

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