

**War Narratives:  
Framing Our Understanding of the War on Terror**

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In previous U.S. wars, a central narrative has been a critical element in developing support and directing the war effort. This is not the case with the present “war on terror.” Specifically, we found no evidence of a central war narrative in a sample of public administrators. The United States declared the war on terror with no established or emergent “state of war narrative.” Since this had proven to be a critical element in the conduct of past wars, it may be useful to evaluate the implications of this historical condition. Of special interest will be the implications for public service employees who, given their closeness to the conduct of wartime activities, might be expected to coordinate their efforts by reference to a common war story. We begin our consideration of the absence of such a story by highlighting war as a cultural phenomenon, and then turn our attention to the important role that narratives play in shaping the actions and decisions of public administrators. We then consider the circumstances surrounding the current “war on terror” in light of the absence of a clearly articulated state of war narrative. Specifically, we will focus on the meaning of four “latent” war narratives that have filled that void and explore the impact this has had among three groups of public administrators whose work and lives are being impacted by the current state of war.

A photo of that moment is etched for history. The president's hands are folded formally in his lap, his hand turned to hear [Andrew] Card's words. His face has a distant somber, almost frozen, edging on bewilderment. Bush remembers exactly what he was thinking: "They had declared war on us, and I made up my mind at that moment that we are going to war." (Woodward 2002, 15).

The idea of "going to war" seemed obvious enough at first blush. We have been attacked, and we plan to respond in kind. It was that simple. Or was it?

Despite the analogies drawn to the attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, the decision to enter a "state of war" after September 11, 2001 was a unique event in American history. Although other American wars are associated with "triggering" events (e.g., the bombardment of Fort Sumter, the sinking of the Battleship Maine, Pearl Harbor, the invasion of Kuwait), none of those past instances occurred in a "narrative vacuum". In each previous case, the road to war had been well paved materially, politically and psychologically over an extended period of time. The shelling of Fort Sumter by South Carolinian troops was the culmination of events that had unfolded over several months after the election of Lincoln and after many years of heated discussion and debate (Agar 1966). The public clamor for war with Spain was already several years old when the battleship Maine exploded and sank in Havana in February 1898, but even then two months passed before Congress declared war (Paterson 1996). The U.S. entry into the First World War is often associated with the loss of American lives when the Lusitania was sunk – but nearly two years and a great deal of preparation passed between that event and the declaration of war (Smith 1956; Thompson 1971). While the attack on Pearl Harbor was a military surprise, it took place in the midst of a debate over plans for mobilizing and ongoing preparations for war that had been building for at least two years (Sagan 1988; O'Neill 1993; Fleming 2001). And the extended buildup – psychologically as well as militarily -- to the Persian Gulf War was still fresh in our memories as the process was repeated in 2003 (Gordon and Trainor 1995).

The “war on terror” triggered by the events of September 11 had no such gestation period. The state of war was declared by President Bush and others without hesitation, but it was also done without any troops or plans in place to confront this particular enemy. As important, it occurred in context of public indifference to and/or ignorance of the threat posed by terrorists. There had been discussions within intellectual communities about possible “blowbacks” (Johnson 2000) and a coming “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996). There were also warnings issued in a series of reports by a relatively obscure advisory commission<sup>1</sup> chartered in 1998 by Secretary of Defense William Cohen. But otherwise little attention was given pre-September 11th to establishing a scenario for anything resembling a “war on terror”. Such matters as terrorist threats remained stories of law enforcement, criminal investigations and the prosecution of bombers and their co-conspirators. The bombings of the World Trade Center in 1993, of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, and the exploits of the Unabomber were perceived as the criminal acts of fringe fanatics who would be brought to justice through the normal channels of law and order. Until the morning of September 11, 2001, however, there was no substantial “storyline” in the popular press or from the government about a war on terror.

### **War as a Cultural Institution**

Despite centuries of debate and study, the nature and origins of war remains a point of contention dividing intellectual communities. This is true whether they approach the subject from abstract philosophical positions or the practical views of military tacticians. Even the most fundamental and defining issues about war – whether war is a product of nature or nurture – remains in dispute. The Hobbesian view of war as a pre-social condition has not only retained credibility among students of politics, but has garnered scholarly support from the work of ethnologists and sociobiologists who stress the continuing impact of innate drives on individual and collective human behavior. In contrast, the Rousseauvian position that war

is a social artifact imposed on humankind through civil and political institutions has relied on the growing body of historical and anthropological research that traces the development of “war machines” to collective actions first initiated in Neolithic cultures approximately 13,000 years ago.<sup>2</sup>

Where the various positions converge in somewhat superficial agreement is on the point that wars have significance beyond the immediate enlistment and engagement of fighting forces. Wars are not merely intermittent military endeavors involving the mobilization and strategic manipulation of troops and armaments. Whether rooted in human nature or social calculation, war soon becomes a key factor in the cultural lives and institutionalized relationships of all societies (Malinowski 1941; Zur 1987). The exact form and fit of war into the socio-cultural milieu depends, of course, on the historical and social circumstances of the society (Clausewitz 1984, 707-718), and there are disagreements among scholars about whether the cultural role of war was functional or pathological.

Deleuze and Guattari (1986), for example, observe that nomadic societies are organized as “war machines,” not for the purpose of satisfying some genetic urge to violence or conquest, but as a necessary complement to a life involving the traversing of potential hostile territories and artificial borders. Students of ancient Greece note that a state of war was a pervasive condition reflecting the vulnerability of city states to attack from other city states or empires, leading Max Weber to observe that the ancient polis could best be understood as a “guild of warriors” (Weber 1978, 1359).<sup>3</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith (1971) presented a persuasive argument that the modern industrial state thrived for decades in both the United States and the Soviet Union with a major assist from a Cold War culture that amounted to a state of war condition short of actual hostilities.

Some stress the pathological impact of war cultures on societies. John Keegan (1993), for example, regards war-preoccupied cultures as destructive at worse and anti-progressive at

best.<sup>4</sup> Lewis Mumford regarded war as “negative creativity” that ultimately offset any real or potential gains from major technological advances (Mumford 1970, 221). And as a counter to the Galbraith thesis, Seymour Melman (1974) presented the case against the benefits of a war culture for economic wellbeing.<sup>5</sup>

Whether perceived as functional or pathological, the relationship between war and culture is an acknowledged fact of social life, and it is within that frame of reference that we will address the role of “state of war” narratives.

### **War Narratives and the Shaping of American Culture**

Surprisingly little scholarship has focused on the role of narratives in times of war, and most of what we know of this topic is anecdotal (in the broad historical sense) or atheoretical. There are a number of examinations of how different national cultures – winners as well as losers – handled the memory of past wars. Lundberg (1984) provides an analysis of the literature that emerged from the American Civil War as well as U.S. involvement in World Wars I and II; Moeller (1996) examines the search for a “usable” past in post-Nazi politics and more recent German literature; and Igarashi (2000) focuses on the literature of post-war Japan.

Yet, the American cultural experience with war narratives has received increasing attention in recent years. Historians note that from the outset of colonial life in New England, the spiritual leaders of the Puritan regime used biblical narratives to counsel the colonists on the need to organize themselves to defend against the “heathen tribes” without. Notably, until the 1670s attacks by Native Americans were attributed as much to God’s testing of the spiritual community’s resolve as it was to the perceived barbarity (and satanic nature) of the attackers (Ferling 1981; Slotkin 2000, especially chapter 2). The narrative changed in the mid-1670s, however, as colonists took the offensive and engaged in attacks that brought into question the “Christian” nature of the colonial forces. Behaving more like the so-called

“savages” they were sent to fight, the colonists engaged in a bloody campaign that showed no mercy. They were engaged in a “Holy War” that required more than military victory – it also demanded that the defeated communities be terrorized so that the lesson of war would not be lost on either the survivors or potential future enemies (Ferling 1981, 30-33). Jill Lepore’s study of what has come to be known as “King Philip’s War” (1675-1676) focuses on the role narratives about that particular conflict played in establishing hostile boundaries of cultural differences that would shape colonist-Native American relations for decades (Lepore 1998).

As the threats of colonial life shifted from Native Americans to other colonies, so did the war narratives. During the period of intercolonial strife from the 1690s to the mid-eighteenth century, more secular narratives arose. These stressed both regional interests and the need to defend the English colonies against the Spanish, French and related enemies (i.e., those Indian tribes that allied themselves with the “enemy”) (Ferling 1981, 34ff; Slotkin 2000, 224-241). This was followed by still another shift reflecting the colonists’ growing problems with Britain that would eventually provide the narrative foundations for the American Revolution (Miller 1943/1979, chapter 8; Sieminski 1990; Draper 1996; Phillips 1999, chapter 5).

In short, war narratives have played a central role in American history from the outset of colonization. Today, there is a growing literature documenting the efforts to establish narratives that defined the nation’s enemies and the threats they posed. Some of these studies focus on the mass media helping set the public mood for war (Doherty 1999). Others concentrate on social scientists and other “experts” who create stereotypical images of enemy societies and the threats they posed to the American way of life (Robin 2001) and how these images pervaded American culture and the narratives of the Cold War (Whitfield 1996).

This expansive and expanding literature on the importance of war narratives in American culture would be of little import outside of academe if not for its potential

relevance to issues surrounding the operations of government in the post-September 11 world. The uniqueness of the declared “war on terror” in terms of both its timing and terms of engagement calls for a greater understanding of how state of war narratives impact on the public administration community. This, in turn, requires a better understanding of the role that narratives in general play in administrative life.

### **The Centrality of Narratives in Social and Administrative Life**

Narratives have taken on considerable importance in the social sciences in recent years. Relatively well established in literary studies for several decades (Chatman 1978; Chatman 1990; Bal 1997; Copley 2001b; Copley 2001a), the study of socially-relevant narratives<sup>6</sup> has emerged in several forms. Among sociologists, anthropologists and social psychologists, the use of discourse analysis (Gee 1999; Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton 2001) has drawn greater attention to narratives used in distinct contexts from daily conversations (Ochs and Capps 2001) and interactions in the workplace (Boje 1991; Beech 2000; Wajcman and Martin 2002) to physician-patient interactions (Waitzkin, Britt, and Williams 1994; Loewe et al. 1998) and celebrity interviews (Abell and Stokoe 1999). The new field of narrative psychology<sup>7</sup> has generated a number of studies attempting to deal with the long-standing issues of self identity (Mason-Schrock 1996; Ochs and Capps 1996; Freeman 1999; Ezzy 2000; Hermans 2001; Lindgren and Wåhlin 2001; Nelson 2001; Wahler and Castlebury 2002) and human development (Engel 1995; Jordan and Cowan 1995; Sperry and Sperry 1996; Nelson, Plesa, and Henseler 1998; Grob, Krings, and Bangerter 2001; Masahiko 2001; Scalise Sugiyama 2001; Morganroth Gullette 2003). And legal scholars are paying greater attention to the role that narratives and storytelling play in the dynamics of litigation and legal reasoning (Amsterdam and Bruner 2000; Noonan 2002).

Political scientists have addressed narratives through the study of political culture and rhetoric (in the form of symbols, ideology and myths) and public policymaking. In the early

1970s, Murray Edelman drew attention to several “classic themes or myths” found in American political rhetoric. Years later he discussed narratives as playing a key part in the “political spectacle” designed to generate desired reactions from the American public (Edelman 1971; Edelman 1988). H. Mark Roelofs (1976) posited a distinction between national ideology and national myth, noting that while ideology provides the country with a model of how things operationally are done, myth provided the cohesion and legitimacy for those government operations. For Roelofs, myth was the stuff of great orations, like the Gettysburg Address, which contained fundamental aspects of American political thought. Today these myths would be regarded as narratives that played a key role in the political acquiescence of the American public. James Oliver Robertson (1980) took a similar approach, noting that mythical narratives were part of the political reality, and should be treated as such. Richard Merelman (1989), in a critique of traditional approaches to political culture that stress the “surface elements” of attitudes and values, called for more attention to the fundamental narratives of “mythologized individualism” that underlie the political culture. More recently, Christopher G. Flood (1996) posited the concept of “mythopoeic narrative” to stress the role that stories and storytelling play in all political cultures in support of ideological positions. The common thread of these and related political science perspectives is the view of narratives as the tools – and reflection -- of political power.

Students of public policy have also found the concept of ideological narratives increasingly useful. Some have stressed the important historical role that narratives (in the form of ideologies or “schools of thought”) have played in shaping foreign policymaking.<sup>8</sup> The role of narratives in other policy arenas is implied by those who focused on policy argumentation and policy design (Fischer 1995, part 5; Schneider and Ingram 1997).<sup>9</sup> Emery Roe’s (1994) efforts to apply literary narrative techniques to a range of policy debates in 1994 was the first major effort to focus attention on policy-relevant narratives, and in recent

years studies have been published on the role of narratives in such topics as post-war urban policies in the United Kingdom (Atkinson 2000), telecommunications in New Zealand (Bridgman and Barry 2002), environmental regulation in Canada and the United States (Bridge and McManus 2000), anti-corruption in China (Hsu 2001), criminal justice in Britain (Peelo and Soothill 2000), and race and ethnicity in the U.S. (Yanow 2003).

Work specifically linking narratives with administrative decision making<sup>10</sup> has emerged from the study of “sensemaking” by Karl Weick and his students. Building on his earlier ground-breaking work on the social psychology of organizing, Weick (1995) makes narratives an important part of his examination of how people make sense of their environments. He argues that sensemaking precedes interpretation by isolating and focusing on some events among the flow of experience. By focusing on some specific events, outcomes are explained by assigning them to a plausible story to recount what is going on. Sensemaking needs a good story. Thus stories, or narratives, are an important element of how individuals make sense of their environment and how they see themselves operating in that environment.

The war on terror provides an opportunity to extend Weick’s analysis of sensemaking in organizations to a more general context. The challenges of making sense of administrative life in the post-September 11 world goes beyond understanding the limited and constrained capacity for rational decision making in modern organizations. Nor is it limited to making sense of the bureaupathologies or the distortions and abuses of bureaucratic power. Rather, the challenge is to comprehend *how public administrators contend with the uncertainties generated by a radically altered and threatening environment*. How did public administrators contend with the sudden transformation of their lives from a relatively mundane post-Cold War indifference to a historically distinctive “state of war” condition where the situation remains narratively ambiguous?

## **Making Sense of a State of War**

The perspective applied here relies on narratives as more than merely a literary form, a rhetorical instrument of power, or a methodological tool that treats actions as texts. Narratives are fundamental to analyzing human consciousness and understanding -- and thus to comprehending human thought and action. Human thought and action do not occur in a mental vacuum, but rather are shaped by (and, in turn, shapes) ongoing processes of narration (i.e., sensemaking) that seem implied by the situation (Turner 1996).

We can pursue this perspective in three distinct ways. First, narratives can be approached as causal and controlling factors in social life. Such a position is strongly implied in the political and administrative culture literatures where narratives take on determinative roles by shaping the realities, values and premises that form attitudes, decisions and behaviors. In this view, narratives are assumed to be an autonomous cultural artifact, distinct from any individual and generated by a community within a range of possible options. This is reflected in the cultural theory approach used by Mary Douglas and others (Douglas 1999; Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990), and applied to public administration by Wildavsky (1987, 1988) and, more recently and elaborately, by Hood (1998).

A second approach treats narratives as dependent variables – as the product of bureaucratic behavior and administrative machinations. In this literature, narratives are not merely the vehicle through which bureaucratic control is exercised, but the context created by and manifest in those narrative structures and the norms and assumptions they represent. This is the “lifeworld” of phenomenologists (see Schutz 1945, 1967) that has found expression in analyses of the bureaucratization of administrative, political and social life (e.g., Hummel 1994).

The third – and least developed – approach is to regard narratives as the key intervening variable in social life in general, and administrative life in particular. From this

view, narratives are neither sources of external control nor functionalist drivers of the human lifeworld. Rather, they are the internalized media – the sensemaking mechanisms -- through which human thought and action take shape. In the general literature, this approach has found its most explicit expression in the work of Dennett (1991, 1996). In the study of administrative life, it is the view central to the work of Weick (1995) and his colleagues.

Applying that third approach, a central question and challenge of the war on terror for individual public administrators was to make sense of the radically altered environment and their respective places (and roles) in it. In lieu of an established meta-narrative – or at least efforts to develop and nurture a state-of-war narrative that would identify an enemy, end state, and some expectations regarding roles and obligations – what emerges in the consciousness of administrators are “multiple drafts.” In Dennett’s terms, these drafts represent the continuous revision of narratives through a complex “multitrack” process that occurs in “hundreds of milliseconds” and generates “something *rather like* a narrative stream or sequence” that is subject to “continual editing”:

Contents arise, get revised, contribute to the interpretation of other contents or to the modulation of behavior (verbal and otherwise), and in the process leave their traces in memory, which then eventually decay or get incorporated into or overwritten by later contents, wholly or in part. (Dennett 1991, 135; italics in original)

In Weick’s terms, public administrators are engaged in an ongoing process of “making sense” of the war on terror through state-of-war narratives drawn from past experiences real and perceived. The challenge we face is to understand how – and to what effect – those state-of-war narratives manifest themselves.

### **Contending State of War Narratives**

Of course, it would be absurd to contend that the war on terror occurs in a complete narrative vacuum. State of war narratives are a part of American culture, and public

administrators are no less subject to the historical and popular images and myths of war that permeate American culture than are other citizens. For empirical study, a framework for distinguishing among four common state of war narratives (Dubnick 2002; see Figure 1) was posited based on the transposition of two salient features of such narratives: what they imply about the operational demands and cultural commitments to be expected from American citizens. Operationally, a state of war can call for the full mobilization of our economic and social resources at one extreme or, at the other, a level of mobilization that generates minimal or isolated demands on the nation. In terms of cultural commitment, a state of war can be perceived as requiring a full integration of the war effort's values, norms and priorities in the national culture or, again at the other extreme, a minimal deference to the cultural demands of war. When combined, the two dimensions provide a framework outlining four major options for the "state of war" narratives.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

The substantive form of these narratives on the war on terror were identified by an analysis of speeches and news reports that emanated from politicians and administration officials after the 9/11 tragedy. We want to emphasize the narratives we identified were about the war on terror and the initial response to the terrorist attacks on the United States, not the ensuing war in Iraq that was preceded by a war narrative build up from September 2002 to the invasion the following spring. Four narratives were identified: the garrison state narrative; the temporary state narrative; the glass firewall narrative; and the enemy within narrative.

Briefly, under a garrison state, society is completely and permanently transformed to deal with the present and future threats on national security. Society organizes itself around the constant threat of war -- it becomes a "war machine". This narrative can be viewed in its

most extreme forms in Orwell's 1984, and in real life in contemporary North Korea. The concept is attributed to Harold Laswell, who in 1941 wrote of a future in which “specialists on violence are the most powerful group in society” (455). Someone who “hears” the garrison state narrative would agree with statements that reflect permanent changes in our society.

The temporary state reflects the belief the measures taken during war are necessary but short-term. The temporary state narrative reflects the ancient Roman doctrine *inter arma silent leges*— idiomatically: “in time of war, the laws are silent.” The silence and or violation of civil liberties are accepted because temporary. The belief is that the sooner we eliminate the enemy, the sooner life returns to normal. Someone who “hears” the temporary state narrative would agree that the violation of individual civil liberties is permissible, as long as it is short term (Rehnquist 1998).

The glass-firewall narrative reflects two parallel administrative worlds, one civilian and one military, that operate simultaneously and in full view of each other. These parallel worlds are separated by a legal and organizational firewall that protects each from interference from the other (Stevens 1999). During wartime the military expects to “call the shots” without political interference. This narrative would see an individual agreeing with a statement regarding the expertise of the military and their ability to protect us. As civilians we should go on with our lives, comfortable in the knowledge that the military will protect us.

The final narrative requires a high level of personal and cultural commitment and is labeled the “enemy within” to stress its similarity to the McCarthy-era perspective that dominated the late 1940s through the mid-1950s. This narrative emphasizes that the threat to our security emanates from within our borders, as reflected in the Patriot’s Act, and that as good Americans we should ferret out disloyal and subversive individuals. The enemy in this

war might very well be our own neighbor and therefore we have to keep a watchful eye on one another and report any suspicious activity (Schulhofer 2002).

## **Methodology**

Q-Methodology is used here to explore the way individuals process the war narratives expressed by officials in the Bush administration and captured by the media. Running counter to the usual expectations of large-scale survey research, the technique requires only small numbers. It groups like-thinking individuals together allowing researchers to determine how groups differ in their thinking and examine the differences in characteristics and attributes among the groups (McKeown and Thomas, 1988; Brown, 1980, 1996). Q-methodology requires that individuals sort statements about a specific topic, in this case the war on terror, and indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement, ultimately requiring them to distribute the statements in a bell curve distribution which reflects their position about the war on terrorism (Brown, 1980, 1996).

Q-methodology requires participants to evaluate each statement in relation to the other statements. Do I disagree with this statement more than I disagree with that statement? The ranking of each statement influences the ranking of the other statements and ultimately provides the researchers with a comprehensive view of the respondent's subjective view toward a particular topic.

Q-Methodology was developed by psychologist William Stephenson and has been used widely by various disciplines. Gade et al. (1998) explored journalists' attitudes toward civic journalism, Bussell (1998) examined parental choice of primary schools, and Dell and Korotana (2000) analyzed reactions to domestic violence. In the field of Public Administration this methodology has been used by Brown and Unga (1970) to study reactions to Kent State violence, Yarwood and Nimmo (1976) to study definitions and attitudes about bureaucracy, Cunningham and Olshfski (1986) to describe attitudes of legislators and

administrators toward policy-making and implementation, Selde n, et al. (1999) to explore how public managers view their roles and responsibilities and Brewer, et al., (2000) to examine public service motivation.

Q- Methodology is particularly useful to examine individual views of the war narratives because this methodology is able to clarify subjective constructs using first the quantitative aspect of the method which groups like-thinking individuals together and then the qualitative part of the method that allows the researcher to observe the issues and concerns of those completing the exercise and also ask questions about those concerns.

The respondents in the present study were asked to arrange the statements, derived from the narratives, into a normal distribution. They were informed that the statements they were looking at were selected from the war narratives put forth by the Bush administration, and reported in the media, immediately following the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Each narrative produced six statements (see Table 1) and these statements were placed on cards. The respondents were asked to arrange the cards, first into agree, disagree and neutral categories. Then they were asked to further refine their categories until they had four cards in both the most strongly agree and most strongly disagree categories, five cards in each the somewhat agree-somewhat disagree categories and six cards in the neutral column. This forced distribution requires that the participants compare the statements to each other and choose between them. The researchers were permitted to interact with the participants and note the comments made by the respondents as they struggled with the choices that they were asked to make. Because Q-Sort methodology focuses on an in-depth analysis of a number of individuals, a relatively small sample, or p set, is required to establish groups. Emphasis is placed on the meaningful generalization obtained from a small sample as opposed to the size of the sample. The data were analyzed using PCQ Software, Version 1.41 developed by Michael Stricklin and Ricardo Almeida.

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

### **Person Sample (P-set)**

Our person sample included thirty mid- to upper- level managers from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the Newark District Office of Immigration and Naturalization Services in Newark, New Jersey, and the Township of Montclair, New Jersey. Ten public administrators from each agency/jurisdiction participated in this research.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey is responsible for the tunnels, bridges, terminals, airports and ports in the New York and New Jersey region as well as the PATH (Port Authority Trans Hudson) rail line. The World Trade Center was constructed and operated by the Port Authority. The managers from the Port Authority who participated in this research were responsible for departmental security, public safety and customer relations for the tunnels and bridges. Five participants were at work in the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup> where seventy-five of their colleagues lost their lives. The day we conducted our research (February 13, 2003) Tom Ridge, Secretary of Homeland Security, had just raised the risk of terrorist attack from an elevated (yellow) level to a high (orange) level and as a result there was a heightened sense of anxiety that day. The average American was trying to figure out the appropriate response to an undefined terrorist threat, while these managers were concerned with evacuation plans and strategies to protect the airports, bridges and tunnels.

The Newark District office of INS serves the entire State of New Jersey and is responsible for citizenship and immigration services, immigration and customs enforcement and border protection. The responsibilities of the office are diverse and include service, such as processing visa requests, detention and deportation of illegal aliens, inspections at Newark Liberty Airport and investigations including the identification and prosecution of individuals

involved in criminal activity and alien smuggling. The research participants held a variety of upper level positions at INS, representing both enforcement and service.

Montclair, New Jersey is a municipality of 38,000 economically and racially diverse residents, 12 miles west of Manhattan. Montclair is considered by many to be a rather liberal and progressive community. Many residents of this community work on Wall Street and in lower Manhattan. Nine members of the community perished in the attack of September 11<sup>th</sup> as did countless friends, relatives and colleagues. The people who participated in this research worked for the Township in various mid and upper level positions.

We selected these groups because each was affected by the attack on the World Trade Center, and because they have different job responsibilities with respect to the war on terror. Thus we thought that they might be attuned to different war narratives.

We hypothesized that where one sat would determine where one stood – that the salient narrative among groups of actors would depend on where they were situated relative to the conflict's initial and potential flash points. We thought that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, because they are charged with monitoring the entrances and exits into Manhattan, would be more attuned to the 'garrison state' narrative. Further, we thought that the INS, because of their mission to guard against illegal entry into the country, would be more in tune with the 'enemy within' narrative. Finally, we thought that Montclair officials, their jobs further removed from the active anti-terrorist activities, would be more likely to adhere to the 'glass firewall' narrative. We hypothesized that the 'temporary state' narrative would be distributed among the groups. In short, we expected that the personal narratives of the administrative professionals would be shaped not merely by their individual characteristics, but also by task environment factors such as the nature of their agency, perceived vulnerability to terror attacks and exposure to the consequences of the conflict.

## **Demographics of P-set**

Of the thirty participants in our research, 21 were men and nine were women. On average, they worked in the public sector for twenty years and were in their current position for eleven and a half years. Twenty-six possessed college degrees, nineteen baccalaureates and seven graduate degrees. Eighteen of the participants were over 50 years of age. We asked participants to identify their primary source of news, their political affiliation, if they or family members serve in the armed forces and if they thought their jobs had changed dramatically since September 11<sup>th</sup>. The majority of respondents (11) relied on CNN as their major news source, followed by national newspapers (4), the Internet (4) and radio (3). Their political affiliations ran the gamut from apolitical to strongly partisan. Twelve identified themselves as some form of Republican, nine as some form of Democrat and six as Independent. As far as political philosophy, nine considered themselves moderate, six conservative (from slight to extreme) and nine liberal (from slight to extreme). Ten participants felt that the Democratic Party is better able to keep us out of war, seven thought party did not matter, four were not sure and two thought the Republican Party was better able to keep us out of war. Most of the respondents (15) agreed that their jobs had been dramatically affected by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and 13 agreed that their job was extremely close to the frontline of terror. (see Table 2)

<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>

## **Findings**

We hypothesized that public sector employment and its closeness to the war on terror would strongly influence the individual's own war narrative. However, we did not find clear and distinct state of war narratives among the different groups of administrators. We found the participants clustered in two factors, or groups. The narratives of one group centered on

the concern for the protection of civil liberties. The other group identified with a narrative that reinforced the need to be vigilant and to do what is necessary to prevent future acts of terrorism and reduce the threat of war (see Table 3).

The first group was dominated by public administrators from Montclair (7), but it also included two INS managers and two Port Authority managers. This group strongly disagreed with the necessity for any policy of racial or ethnic profiling and worried about violations of civil liberties as a result of the war on terror. They also felt that just getting rid of Osama Bin Laden would not allow their lives to return to normal. This group agreed that we should not let the enemy disrupt our lives and extensive security measures should be temporary. Those managers in this factor seemed to assume a reactive posture to the war on terror: Do not violate individual rights.

The second factor was comprised largely of Port Authority managers. Four PA administrators populated this group, but it also included one each from the INS and Montclair. This group felt that the war on terror was a disrupting force, and that it would be difficult to get back to a normal life. This group was concerned with being vigilant, reporting suspicious activity and making changes in their way of life in order to fight the war on terror. This group seemed to focus on a proactive response to the war: Be vigilant.

Q-Sort methodology also showed where the two groups agreed and where they disagreed. Both groups agreed that the war on terror was not going to be won in a year or even a decade, it was going to take a generation of being vigilant. And both groups disagreed with the statement that “we should let the military protect us, I don’t want to think about it.”

<INSERT TABLE 3 HERE>

Other characteristics of those who populated the first factor (concern for civil liberties) were identified. Only one of the 11 managers in this factor identified with the

Republican Party and identified themselves as an Independent Republican. The remaining ten members considered themselves Democrats (3), independents (6) or apolitical (1). Philosophically, they all categorized themselves within the ranges of middle of the road to extremely liberal. Eight of the members felt that their jobs had changed to some extent because of the war on terror, and six of them felt that they were working close to the frontline on the war on terror.

Conversely, with one exception, those who identified the second factor (concern for vigilance) identified with the Republican Party. One member identified as a liberal and the rest ranged from middle to extremely conservative (one absent response). Everyone agreed that their job had changed since 9/11 and that they were working close to the front of the war on terror.

The INS managers did not cluster in any significant way. This may be because the INS assumes multiple missions of service and enforcement. INS managers who clustered with the other two factor groups probably did so because of their demographic characteristics, and not the nature of their job.

Administering the test proceeded differently with the three groups. The Montclair administrators complained repeatedly that they could not agree with any of the statements, and they found it difficult to place any of the cards in the agree category. The Port Authority administrators complained repeatedly that they could not disagree with any of the statements and they found it difficult to place any of the cards in the disagree category. The INS managers also found the categorization difficult but, as a group, their complaints were not uniform.

What we discovered is that the public administrators who participated in our study “hear” a narrative, but what they hear seems determined by their political outlooks and ideological leanings. In the absence of a coherent meta-narrative being delivered by an

authoritative public figure, the individuals in this study relied on narratives complementing their existing ideological perspectives, and these in turn seemed associated with the social, political and administrative milieu in which they operate. Not surprisingly, the narratives people hear are filtered through their “frame of reference” or the latent narratives they have internalized.

## **Discussion**

What was absent in the case of the declared “war on terror” was an established or emergent narrative generated from the political center with the intent of signaling a coherent response during a time of war. Although we identified four narratives emerging from top political figures of the Bush administration, none of these narratives captured the hearts and minds of the public officials in this study. Rather, those who participated in our study crafted narratives that grew out of their own values and experiences. They picked those statements about war that seemed to reflect their own interpretation of the role of government in society and the appropriate governmental reaction to a specific external threat. Thus their narratives had a particularly conservative and liberal bent. The conservative narrative targeted vigilance and maintaining security, while the liberal narrative focused on civil liberties and the temporary nature of the disruption.

We argue that human thought and action does not occur in a mental vacuum, but rather is shaped by (and, in turn, shapes) ongoing narratives that are either clearly articulated so as to be almost universally accepted as the truth or in lieu of a clearly posited narrative, human thought is structured by the latent narrative that emerges from the individual’s underlying story about the way the world operates. Any formal policy statement or legal mandate is obviously “filtered” through the “sense” or understanding that public administrators have of what is taking place. An internalized, or standardized, narrative plays a central role in this process.

Before 9/11, the lack of a coherent, relevant and widely articulated "war on terror" narrative created a "narrative vacuum" for the state of war that was "declared" after the attacks. Efforts to articulate a post-9/11 state of war narrative by the Bush Administration generated multiple and ambiguous narratives. In lieu of any clear and coherent state of war narrative for the war on terror, the latent war narratives – those reflecting individual personal ideological and professional situations - filled the void.

Although we were able to examine the absence of clearly articulated war narratives in the narratives adopted by three groups of public administrators, it would have been desirable to include other groups in the analysis who were not as close to the 9/11 devastation. However at the time, we felt that because the situation was in flux, and we ourselves did not know how the story would unfold, that we needed to “capture the moment.” In fact, several participants in our last sample group (March 2003) very briefly raised questions about the honesty and legitimacy of the statements they were asked to reflect on. Questions about honesty and legitimacy did not enter into the discussions of 9/11 that took place a month earlier. And knowing what we know now, we would have continued to monitor our participants to try to capture the dynamic nature of the war narratives development, especially in light of the changing narratives emerging from legitimate governmental sources. Future research could continue to focus on the role narratives play in shaping the actions and decisions of public administrators and how narratives help people make sense of their environment.

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## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Known by various names – initially the National Security Study Group, then the Hart-Rudman Commission (after its co-chairs), and most recently and formally the U.S. Commission on National Security for the 21st Century – it issued its first report in 1999 (Hart, Rudman, et al. 1999) a second in 2000 (Hart, Rudman, and al. 2000), and a lengthy final report less than a year later (Hart, Rudman, et al. 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Of course, there are perspectives that focus on neither nature nor nurture (e.g., the Malthusian and Hegelian models that regard war as the product of forces unleashed by the logic of historical or economic development) and still others that combine the two positions by seeing war as the intentional cultivation of the aggressive qualities of human nature. For an overview of these various positions, see Dawson 1996.

<sup>3</sup> For contrasting views, see (Manicas 1982) and (Connor 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Keegan's analysis is rooted in a critique of Clausewitz's theory of war, but has itself been subject to criticism. See (Herberg-Rothe 2001).

<sup>5</sup> For a personal perspective on the pathological impact of war, see (Hedges 2002).

<sup>6</sup> We are limiting our discussion to the emergence of narratives as a factor in social and administrative life, but its growing role as a methodological tool should also be noted. For example, narratives have been adopted as means for testing policymaking theories (Weingast 1997; Bates et al. 1998; Bates et al. 2000; Levi 2002) and (especially among students of public administration) as basis for identifying a wide range of social actions (in the form of expressed understandings by those involved) which can then be subjected to hermeneutical and other forms of interpretive analysis (Hummel 1991; Bailey 1992; Kelly and Maynard-Moody 1993; Balfour and Mesaros 1994; White 1999; Yanow 2000).

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of narrative psychology and related writings, see <http://web.lemoyne.edu/~hevern/narpsych.html>.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., (Hunt 1987) who stresses the existence of a core ideology throughout U.S. history; and (Mead 2001) who elaborates four basic “schools of thought” that have dominated foreign policymaking.

<sup>9</sup> There was some explicit attention to narratives in the 1980s (Kaplan 1986; Stone 1988, pp. 109-116; Stone 1989), but these efforts were regarded by one observer as “fledgling” in the early 1990s (Zald 1993, pp. 522-523).

<sup>10</sup> More recently, Bevir, Rhodes and colleagues have applied the narratives concept to traditions and beliefs of European governance/administrative cultures (Bevir and Rhodes 2001; Bevir and Rhodes 2003; Bevir, Rhodes, and Weller 2003).