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Roselle, Laura

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Strategic Narratives and Alliances: The Cases of Intervention in Libya (2011) and Economic Sanctions against Russia (2014)

Laura Roselle

Department of Political Science, Elon University, Elon, NC 27249, USA; E-Mail: lroselle@elon.edu

Abstract
Scholars of international communication recognize that strategic narratives are important for policymaking (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013) and scholars studying alliances suggest that communication is central to the formation and maintenance of alliances (Weitsman, 2010). This essay addresses how strategic narratives affect US alliance behavior— and hence international order—in two specific ways. First, alliance behavior can be affected by other allies' narratives as demonstrated in the case of military intervention in Libya in 2011. Here the evidence suggests that the UK and France were able to use strategic narratives to influence the decision of the US to agree to military intervention in Libya by using narratives that could evoke a fear of abandonment. Second, alliance cohesion can be affected by narrative contestation by non-allies as demonstrated in the case of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. Russia has used strategic narratives in a new media environment in an attempt to elicit a fear of entrapment to counter the US attempts to coordinate alliance support for economic sanctions. In both cases, distinguishing between system, identity, and policy narratives give us a deeper understanding of narrative contestation today. This analysis adds to our understanding of the factors that affect alliances set within a new media environment characterized by a proliferation of sources and outlets and thus a more horizontal structure of information exchange.

Issue
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1. Introduction

The study of alliances is central to international order as alliances speak to the ability of states to cooperate, particularly during conflict (Snyder, 1997; Weitsman, 2004, 2010). Much of the literature on alliances in international relations concentrates on alliance formation and utilizes a realist lens that emphasizes the distribution of power within the system and resulting behavior such as balance, tethering, and bandwagoning (Walt, 2011). Research has also been done on variability in the reliability of alliance agreements (Kegley & Raymond, 1990). The literature does suggest that communication is central to the formation and maintenance of alliances, and this essay seeks to address how strategic narratives function in alliance relationships today. This analysis, then, focuses on the (re)construction of alliances, and speaks to Weitsman's point that in regard to research on alliances "constructivist and identity-based arguments are becoming more prevalent and will likely continue to be an important research focus in the coming years" (Weitsman, 2010).

This paper uses two case studies to illustrate the importance of different types of strategic narratives and their projection via the media in shaping alliance behavior and international order. Specifically, a strategic narrative analysis that distinguishes international system, identity, and policy narratives is used to assess whether and how these types of narratives accord with fears of abandonment and entrapment within the alliance itself (Snyder, 1997). The first case is the March 2011 US de-

cision to support the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 that established a no-fly zone in Libya. In this case France and the UK were successful in projecting a strategic narrative that suggested that the US would be isolated, if not abandoned, if the Obama administration opposed the resolution. The second case considers Russian attempts to challenge European support for economic sanctions against Russia in light of events in Ukraine in 2014. This case highlights how Russia's strategic narrative sought to foster a fear of entrapment by Western allies, especially among specific countries, primarily in Eastern Europe.

2. Alliances and Communication

Alliances during conflict by definition are relationships that facilitate coordinated efforts to respond, so perhaps most important to the alliance relationship during conflict is alliance cohesion. Alliances and/or coalitions complicate crisis policymaking because "there must be interoperability—in terms of language, communications, doctrine, and the exchange of information" (Weitsman, 2010). Snyder (1997, p. 180) discusses the management of alliances at length in his seminal work and elaborates on the alliance security dilemma. Arguing that over the longer term alliance partners' "attention centers less on particular interests and conflicts with an adversary and more on the manipulation of apparent commitment to the alliance to offset shifts in dependence relationships between the allies themselves" (Snyder, 1997, p. 180), Snyder (1997, pp. 180–181) highlights the importance of understanding what he calls the security–autonomy trade-off and the tension between the fear of abandonment and the fear of entrapment. Especially over the long-term, so certainly in prolonged or protracted conflict situations, Snyder claims that on the one hand states may fear that their allies will abandon the alliance for any number of reasons. On the other hand, as time goes on, states may fear that they are becoming entrapped by the alliance itself. Domestic political considerations may change in states and/or external events may shift conditions related to the conflict and contribute to changes in the dynamics of alliance relationships over time.

Snyder (1997, p. 181) suggests that fear of abandonment can be addressed by increasing one's commitment to the partner, but this may also increase the possibility of entrapment—hence the dilemma. The literature on fears of entrapment and abandonment suggest that states react in patterned ways to alleviate these fears. Snyder (1997, p. 313), for example, asserts that fear of abandonment leads to "movement toward the ally". Specifically, this includes making or reiterating explicit alliance pledges, alliance revisions, and appeasing or moving closer to an ally's position. States that fear entrapment[1] "will either loosen their general alliance commitment or withhold support from their allies" (Snyder, 1997, p. 315). Snyder does make the caveat that states

that fear entrapment will give firm commitments when the ally is unrestrainable. The case studies presented below test these assumptions in regard to leadership strategic narratives.

The severity of the alliance security dilemma is determined by three factors, according to Snyder—interests, dependence, and commitment. Kegley and Raymond (1990, p. 254), for their part, also focus on interests, arguing that changes in alliances are related directly to changes in conditions related to interest diversion and that "uncertainty will increase the longer the alliance remains in force" (Kegley & Raymond, 1990, p. 61). The focus on bargaining and interests sidesteps the important question of how interests (and dependence and commitment) are understood and this squarely highlights the importance of the (re)construction of alliance relationships and the importance of communication. Constructivists would point out that if interests are constructed, then interest diversion is constructed as well, for example. In other words similar changes in conditions may or may not lead to the identification of interest diversion. Likewise, Snyder (1997, p. 182) suggests that risk of entrapment, for example, is "sensitive to the degree of commonality or disjunction between allies' interests", and so fears of entrapment and abandonment are constructed as well. In other words, the same situation or event will not necessarily lead to fears of entrapment or abandonment. It is important to understand how these fears are constructed and this essay seeks to address this gap in the literature.

That said, while not explaining fully how interests are constructed, Snyder and others who study alliance relationships certainly recognize the importance of communication to alliance maintenance. So even within his conceptual framework focusing on bargaining he suggests that:

Between allies, bargaining power will turn on perceptions of their comparative dependence, commitments, and intensity of interests in whatever they are bargaining about….The principal function of actual bargaining communications is to modify others' perceptions of these relationships and of one's own behavior, so as to enhance one's own bargaining power. (Snyder, 1997, p. 37)

Snyder is not alone. Other international relations scholars note the importance of communication to alliance relationships:

"Bargaining power accrues not necessarily to the party possessing superior resources generally, but the party which possesses issue-specific resources, is able to communicate its resolve clearly and convincingly, and is able to exploit asymmetries in its relation. (Jonsson, 1981, as cited in Kegley & Raymond, 1990, p. 55)

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[1] Fear of entrapment and abandonment can exist simultaneously. Snyder's (1997) discussion pertains to the relative strength of each.

Kegley and Raymond (1990, p. 56) suggest that the most common technique to maintain coalition solidarity is persuasion. Thus, without understanding communication processes we cannot understand alliance management and policymaking. The literature on strategic narratives focuses squarely on the communication processes of foreign policy behavior.

3. Narratives and International Relations

The narrative turn in international relations and foreign policy is marked by a range of different approaches to understanding how narratives or stories affect international relations. Similar ideas have been studied across the IR and Foreign Policy Analysis that show a need for increased cross-fertilization across sub-fields. For example, some of Subotić's (2016) ideas about the manipulation of narratives for political purposes are similar to the ideas of Miskimmon et al. (2013) on strategic narratives. Analyses of "autobiographical identity narratives" found in Innes and Steele (2013) and Berenskoetter (2012) address issues of identity and ontological security. Much of the foreign policy literature in this area has focused on narratives about particular policies or military actions, as one might expect. This includes work on military operations and strategic communication, including in Afghanistan (Betz, 2011; De Graaf, Dimitriu, & Ringsmose, 2015; Jakobsen, 2017; Ringsmose & Børgesen, 2011). For an important critique of strategic communication literature see Holmqvist (2013).

This essay uses the strategic narrative framework set out by Miskimmon et al. (2013), Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle (2017), and Roselle, O'Loughlin and Miskimmon (2014) which links international relations questions related to international order for example, with foreign policy analyses that focus on specific policy decisions. Decisions taken within an alliance fall squarely at the nexus of IR and Foreign Policy Analysis and the strategic narrative analysis introduced by Miskimmon et al. (2013) gets at exactly this. Strategic narratives are here defined as narratives "forged by a state with the express purpose of influencing the foreign policy behavior of other actors" (Miskimmon et al., 2013) and are frameworks constructed to allow people to make sense of the world, policies, events, and interactions (Antoniades, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin, 2010; Freedman, 2006; Kaldor, Martin, & Selchow, 2007). Miskimmon et al. (2013) set out three types of narratives: International System Narratives, National Narratives, and Issue (or Policy) Narratives. This work builds on Bially Mattern's (2005, p. 5) observation that, "neither power politics nor common interests can create stable, shared expectations and behaviors among states". We must understand narratives to understand international order because these help shape perceptions of power and interests. In terms of alliances, Kegley and Raymond (1990) suggest that the most common technique to maintain coalition solidarity is persuasion. Thus, without understanding communication processes we cannot understand alliance maintenance and (re)construction. Two significant areas are important to understand. First, how do those inside of an alliance attempt to shape an alliance's preferred policies? Second, how do those outside of the alliance attempt to disrupt alliance narratives and undermine the alliance itself? The strategic narrative analysis here asserts that this goes well beyond rallying support or undermining a specific policy to include how narratives about identity and international order scaffold these more specific policy narratives.

4. A Strategic Narrative Analysis

Specifically, the analysis undertaken here is a strategic narrative analysis designed to assess to what degree and how political actors attempt to use narratives to raise fears of abandonment and fears of entrapment designed to change the behavior of other actors. Strategic narratives fall into three categories. *International System Narratives* describe how the world is structured, who the players are, and how it works. Examples would include narratives such as the Cold War, the War on Terror, and the Liberal International Order. Especially in a post-bipolar international system, International System Narratives are contested. International System Narratives include narratives about alliances, which structure international cooperation. *Identity Narratives* set out the story of a political actor, what values it has, and what goals it has. Examples of identity narratives include the US as peace-loving and committed to freedom and democracy (in the US), and the US as world bully (in other parts of the world) (Berenskoetter, 2012).[2] Alliances are made coherent and/or cohesive, in part by narratives about alliance values that fit with individual member states' identity narratives (Flockhart, 2012). Issue Narratives set out why a policy is needed and (normatively) desirable, and how it will be successfully implemented or accomplished. *Issue Narratives* set policies or actions in a context, with an explanation of who the important actors are, what the conflict or issue is, and how a particular course of action will resolve the underlying issue.[3] Strategic narratives at one level will be strengthened by resonance with narratives at other levels. Importantly, Flockhart (2012, pp. 83–84) argues that identity construction and narrative construction can reinforce or undermine alliances through rhetorical *and* functional action. That is, both rhetorical action (what political actors say) and functional action (what political actors do) contribute to, or undermine, alliance narratives. Policy choices are an example of an action that can bolster or undermine al-

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[2] Berenskoetter (2012) identifies a biographical narrative of the state that delineates "an experience space (giving meaning to the past) intertwined with an envisioned space (giving meaning to the future) and delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility, respectively".

[3] This is related to Alexander George's (1989) work on policy legitimacy in which he argues that policies must be explained to political elites and the public, at home and abroad, and that this explanation should communicate that the policy is right or good, and can be achieved.

liance cohesion, but these are also embedded in broader strategic narratives.

Snyder's (1997) observation about the security dilemma in alliances raises important theoretical questions about how strategic narratives might be employed to affect state behavior within an alliance. One might expect, for example, that *within* alliances, if one or more states want to gain the support of another for a policy decision, a strategic narrative that raises a fear of abandonment—or being left behind—may be effective. The implication is that if an ally does not go along with a desired policy, that ally will be left out, if not abandoned. Theoretically, a system narrative that emphasizes the need to bolster international order and an identity narrative that claims that central common values are on the line would be expected in this case. On the other hand, if an *outside* state wants to disrupt an alliance, one strategy would be to use narratives that suggest a fear of entrapment, highlighting the "interests" that may be ignored or restrained within the alliance. In this case one would expect a system narrative that suggests how the alliance is outdated or insufficient for the current international system. See Figure 1 below.

The case studies below assess whether and how this process works, and how specific types of strategic narratives bolster overarching fear narratives.

5. Methodology—Cases and Texts

The two cases presented here—UN Resolution 1973 (Libya) in March 2011 and the crisis in Ukraine 2014—

were chosen for a number of reasons. First, in both cases alliance cohesion is threatened. In the case of UNSCR1973, alliance members in Europe and the US did not agree on how to handle the situation in Libya. In the case of Ukraine, the allies do not agree on the specifics of economic sanctions. Second, in both cases US behavior is constrained and the US is not able to get its preferred policy implemented. In the case of Libya, the US is reluctant to intervene but agrees to do so. In the case of Ukraine, the US preferred more stringent economic sanctions and a united European counter to Russian actions in Ukraine. The cases were also chosen because Snyder's (1997) theory about the alliance security dilemma suggests that in the case of Libya, one would expect to find UK and French strategic narratives that foster a fear of abandonment among US policymakers, and that in the case of Ukraine, one would expect Russian strategic narratives that support a fear of entrapment among EU member states.

These cases were chosen as heuristic cases to highlight how strategic narratives affect alliance behavior (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 75).[4] Each case is used to explore important conceptual issues associated with the role of strategic narratives in alliance maintenance, and specifically to understand more about the use of system and identity narratives in attempts to affect policy behavior. In the case of UNSCR1973, the focus is on how France and the UK used strategic narratives to secure US support for the resolution. The time period is relatively short here, and while media does play a role, the focus is on elite diplomatic strategic narratives. The Ukrainian case examines whether and how adversaries, in this case Rus-
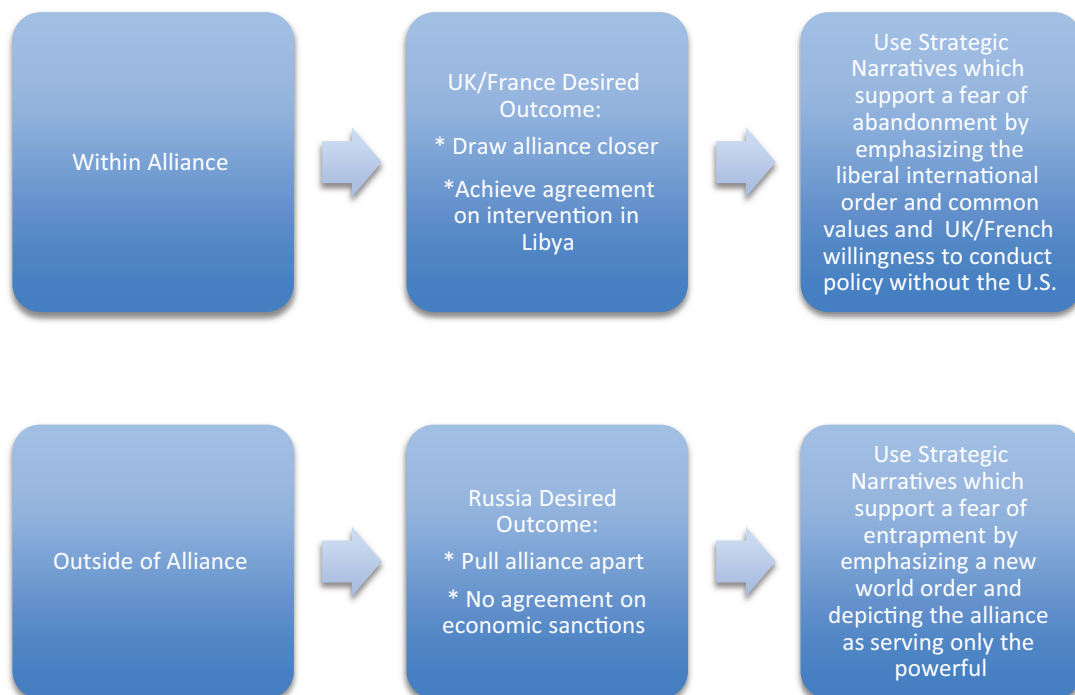

Figure 1. Alliances, the security dilemma, and strategic narratives.

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[4] George and Bennett (2005, p. 75) say that heuristic cases "identify new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, and causal paths".

sia, use strategic narratives in an attempt to undermine the Western alliance.

To understand strategic narratives, they must be traced. This involves identifying and analyzing the formation, projection, and reception of strategic narratives, "guarding against viewing this as a linear process" (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 184.) The case studies on Libya and Ukraine focus on identifying strategic narratives (in particular system and identity narratives) and understanding how their content affects support for particular policies. In the Libya case, careful analysis of the content and timing of French and British strategic narratives in leadership statements is undertaken. All French and UK leadership statements found on their respective foreign ministry website were included in the analysis. In addition, details associated with the dissemination of French and British strategic narratives are found in memoirs (including those of Clinton and Gates, for example) and media interviews, which also suggest how US leaders understood the narratives and how they affected US policy behavior on Libya. This is a particularly interesting case because there is significant detail about President Obama's decision-making process on this issue because of *Vanity Fair* journalist Michael Lewis's access to the White House during this period. In the Ukraine case, the focus is on how Russian strategic narratives found in the speeches of President Putin and other Russian leaders. These were found by searching the Russian government website and through a Google news search looking for full text documents. In addition, media coverage of European states' reactions to proposed sanctions was gathered (via Google news archive searches) to determine whether specific political actors responded to these Russian narratives.

The speeches and interviews were analyzed to identify international system, identity, and policy strategic narratives as detailed above by looking for narratives about the structure and functioning of the international system, narratives that speak to why and how alliances and states should react based on perceived values, and narratives that focus more directly on the specific policies. Then, these narratives were assessed to see whether or not they supported a fear of abandonment or entrapment.

6. Libya: UNSCR1973, March 2011[5]

The debate over United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 in March 2011 was a challenge for the US. The Obama administration was not eager to commit forces in Iraq as it was focused on ending US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, many, if not most, of President Obama's advisors opposed involvement in Libya (Clinton, 2014, p. 370; Gates, 2014, pp. 517–522; Lewis, 2012). France and the UK were successful in their efforts to have UNSCR1973 accepted, despite publically stated reservations of President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton.

In fact, France and the UK coordinated early on in the crisis and thus the timing and content of their narratives were broadly similar. The UK and French strategic narratives underscored a broader narrative of a liberal order in which states have responsibilities to individuals faced with authoritarian machinations. The implication here was that if the US did not go along, it would be outside of the liberal order. The brief case study below was developed by analyzing diplomatic activity and major speeches by French, British, and US leaders on the situation in Libya in March 2011. It begins with consideration of the French and British use of strategic narratives and concludes with an assessment of the US response. French and British strategic narratives pushed the US to approve of the no fly zone and there is evidence that this tipped the balance for President Obama on a decision that was "one of those 51–49 decisions" (Lewis, 2012). UNSCR1973 was adopted on 17 March 2011. France, the UK and the US voted in the affirmative, while Russia, China, and Germany abstained.

France was a co-sponsor of UNSCR1973 and took the initiative in diplomacy around its passage (The Economist, 2011). France did attempt to use its presidency of the G8 to mobilize support within the UN, but was not able to get support for a no fly zone at the G8 meeting in Paris on 13–14 March 2011. As Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Alain Juppé noted on 15 March 2011, "some of our partners, chief among them my German counterpart, opposed any use of force. As for Russia, she was hardly enthusiastic, and the US took a long time to define her position" (Embassy of France in Washington, 2011b).

French efforts continued through the effort of President Sarkozy and French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy in calling for action as Gaddafi's forces threatened to attack Benghazi (Clinton, 2014, p. 368; Lévy, 2011). Sarkozy had spoken forcefully about Libya in February, saying "the continuing brutal and bloody repression against the Libyan civilian population is revolting", and "the international community cannot remain a spectator to these massive violations of human rights" (Watt, 2011). The French narrative stressed the violations of human rights and the suffering of the Libyan people, the lack of legitimacy of Gaddafi as leader, and the responsibility of the international community to respond. This is also set within the broader context of the Middle East "Arab Spring". Sarkozy met with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and pushed his case on 14 March 2011. Clinton also met with rebel leader Mahmoud Jibril, who was accompanied by Levy (Clinton, 2012, p. 369).

When Alain Juppé, Ministre d'Etat, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs spoke to UNSCR1973, he set out the French narrative:

> The world is experiencing one of the great revolutions that change the course of history. From North Africa to the Persian Gulf, the Arab people clamor to

[5] This section is adapted in part from Miskimmon et al. (2013).

breather the air of liberty and democracy. From the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and the events of 25 January in Egypt, great hope arose and democratic transition was launched in a spirit of maturity and responsibility….The new Arab spring is good news, I am certain, for all of us. Our duty and interest require us to support these developments with confidence and availability. We must not give free rein to warmongers; we must not abandon civilian populations, the victims of brutal repression, to their fate; we must not allow the rule of law and international morality to be trampled underfoot. (UN Security Council Resolution 1973)

This sets out an International System Narrative that stresses significant changes in the system as authoritarian rulers are overthrown. It also directly addresses France's own revolutionary Identity Narrative and calls for support for those fighting their own revolutions in 2011. France's narrative, defining a perception of order that approximates liberal interventionism, is clearly outlined in Sarkozy's speech on 19 March after UNSCR1973 has been adopted (Embassy of France in Washington, 2011a). As military force is used, Sarkozy says: "Today, we are intervening in Libya, under a mandate of the United Nations Security Council, with our partners and in particular our Arab partners. We are doing so to protect civilians from the murderous madness of a regime which, in killing its own people, has lost all legitimacy" (Embassy of France in Washington, 2011a). As Engelbrekt (2014) notes, this ties into R2P, the Responsibility to Protect which calls for the international community "to prevent and halt mass atrocity crimes perpetrated against civilians".

The context for the UK narrative about Libya included public skepticism towards military intervention after the protracted military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, *and* the UK commitment to working closely with the French since the British–French agreement of November 2010. When the French called for a no fly zone, the UK was first cautious. Some reports speculated that this was due to the fact that there were efforts underway to repatriate UK citizens (Watt, 2011). Soon, however, Prime Minister Cameron and the UK government would stand with the French in supporting a no fly zone in Libya. After an EU emergency summit on 11 March, where German opposition forestalled a united call for a no fly zone, Prime Minister Cameron said:

The truth is this: Gaddafi is still on the rampage, waging war on his own people, hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and right now there is no sign of this ending. Round the region people continue to campaign for change and their aspirations have not yet been met. Britain should be a relentless advocate for greater political openness, support for human rights and non-violence. (Watt, 2011)

Cameron's International System narrative focused on change in the region and the UK's responsibility to support this changes with fit with an Identity Narrative that stressed UK support for human rights. Gaddafi was depicted as an illegitimate leader.

The UK's Permanent Representative to the UN Mark Lyall Grant outlined the UK's rationale for supporting UNSCR1973, reaffirming the UK narrative (Grant, 2011). After the vote, he said:

The situation in Libya is clear. A violent, discredited regime which has lost all legitimacy is using weapons of war against civilians….The international community has come together in deploring the actions of the Qadhafi regime and demanding that the regime end this violence against the Libyan people. International opinion has looked to the Security Council to act. The Arab League has been particularly clear in its demands, including for the imposition of a No-Fly Zone. That is why the UK, in close cooperation with Lebanon and France has pressed for the early adoption of this resolution. My government welcomes the fact that the Council has acted swiftly and comprehensively in response to the appalling situation in Libya and to the appeal of the Arab League. (Smith, 2011)

The UK narrative, like the French, emphasized the responsibility of the international community to stand firm against tyrants, especially when countries within the region (The Arab League) support the actions. It suggested that the world was calling for action.

Turning to the US, the Libya crisis presented the Obama administration with a number of challenges. President Obama's foreign policy narrative stressed the end of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the need for the US to avoid unilateral actions, bolstering instead partnerships in the world. Obama's strategic narrative emphasized a more "respectful" US state seeking to work with others in the international system. Throughout his presidency Obama "demonstrated a foreign policy position caught between a narrative of American military withdrawal and a narrative of American leadership and responsibility that reflected US great power identity. Pressure to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan clashed with the potential implications of involvement in Libya, with no clear sense of the scope of the military operation. The scaling back of US military operations coupled with the desire to have other states share in maintaining international order soon became the key pillars of Obama's foreign policy doctrine" (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 79).

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with President Sarkozy on 14 March 2011 and her memoir argues that the President and Bernard-Henri Levy were "genuinely moved by the plight of the Libyan people suffering at the hands of a brutal dictator, and they made a persuasive case that something had to be done" (Clinton, 2014, p. 368). Clinton also met with British Foreign Secretary William Hague, who agreed with Sarkozy that action was necessary, and she noted that "that counted for a lot" (Clinton, 2014, p. 368). Finally, she met with Mahmoud

Jibril, a Libyan political scientist representing the rebels, who was accompanied by Levy (Clinton, 2014, p. 369). All made the same argument—that there was a responsibility to defend the people of Libya against the violence of Qaddafi.

On 15 March 2011, Obama and advisors in Washington, DC discussed the issue of a no fly zone in Libya (Lewis, 2012). First it was established that a no fly zone alone would not stop Qaddafi. Military intervention of some sort would be needed. According to Lewis's (2012) account of the meeting, most advisors opposed any intervention in Libya, and Obama characterized this position as follows:

> We were engaged in Afghanistan. We still had equity in Iraq. Our assets are strained. The participants are asking a question: Is there a core national-security issue at stake? As opposed to calibrating our national-security interests in some new way.

Specifically, Secretary of Defense Gates, Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, Vice President Biden, and White House chief of staff William Daley were opposed to action. "'How are we going to explain to the American people why we're in Libya', asked William Daley, according to one of those present. 'And Daley had a point: who gives a shit about Libya?'" (Lewis, 2012). However, UN ambassador Susan Rice and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton along with a few others among the junior staff supported US intervention. They made the case that the US should take responsibility. Lewis (2012) says that Ben "Rhodes [who] would have to write the speech explaining the decision…said in the meeting that he preferred to explain why the US had prevented a massacre over why it hadn't". For those who supported intervention, the French and British narrative was resonant.

The argument for support for intervention went beyond a call to US values and the liberal international order. Clinton also suggested that for US allies vital interests were at stake:

> You know, we asked our allies, our NATO allies, to go into Afghanistan with us 10 years ago. They have been there, and a lot of them have been there despite the fact they were not attacked. The attack came on us, as we all tragically remember. They stuck with us. When it comes to Libya, we started hearing from the UK, France, Italy, other of our NATO allies. This was in *their* vital national interest. (Clinton, as cited in Saletan, 2011)

Dennis Ross, then Middle East expert at the National Security Council, said that Clinton also argued in "a fairly clever way" (Becker & Shane, 2016). As quoted by Becker and Shane, Ross recalls Clinton saying: "You don't see what the mood is here, and how this has a kind of momentum of its own. And we will be left behind, and we'll be less capable of shaping this". The argument was that

the policy was extremely important to France and the UK, it fit within the international liberal order and identity narratives espoused by the US and its allies, *and* the US would be left out if it did not agree to the intervention in this case.

Obama, according to Lewis, wanted to make sure that allies were ready to engage: "He wanted to say to the Europeans and to other Arab countries: We'll do most of the actual bombing because only we can do it quickly, but you have to clean up the mess afterward". And while there are number of other issues that Obama suggested affected his decision, including weighing the potential risk to military personnel, and the ability to get the UN resolution passed, he also considered the fact that "Sarkozy and Cameron were far enough out there to follow through". Finally, he made the decision to push for the UN resolution. Lewis (2012) notes: "Of the choice not to intervene he [Obama] says, 'That's not who we are'".

Once a decision was made, Obama used a strategic narrative to justify that decisions and the military action that followed that emphasized the alliance involved. Speaking at the National Defense University on 28 March, he emphasized US leadership within a coalition, and stressed the responsibility to maintain international order (Obama, 2011): "To summarize, then: In just one month, the US has worked with our international partners to mobilize a broad coalition, secure an international mandate to protect civilians, stop an advancing army, prevent a massacre, and establish a no-fly zone with our allies and partners". Ultimately, despite Obama's hesitancy to become embroiled in an overseas military operation, the US would not be left behind and would not argue against the French and British narrative that was consistent with US Identity Narratives.

This case study highlights how system and identity narratives can be used within alliances to affect the behavior of an individual member of the alliance. By emphasizing common identity narratives, alliance members may push the uncertain member of the alliance to fall on one side of the issue. Specifically, the system and identity narratives set the stage for the implication that the US would be left out of decision-making on Libya if it did not go along with the French and UK desire for intervention. Obama was able to shape the mission because of the agreement on intervention and participation.

7. Ukraine: Crisis in 2014

The second case study focuses on how strategic narrative contestation can affect alliances. In this case the Russian government, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, used strategic narratives to counter US explanations about events on the ground in the Ukraine, to challenge US authority in the international system, and to undermine US sanctions efforts. In so doing, Western alliance cohesion was threatened. For example, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic opposed EU sanctions

(Luhn, 2014).[6] This case study focuses on events from February 2014 when then President Yanukovych left office and sought refuge in Russia after massive demonstrations in Ukraine until 31 October 2014. Russian strategic narratives are derived from speeches of President Putin and other Russian leaders. Specific attention is paid to Russian narratives via mass media, and to a lesser degree, US and European responses to those narratives. This case examines how the Russian narrative about the annexation of Crimea was developed to promote domestic support and to challenge NATO alliance identity narratives by attempting, in part, to arouse fears of entrapment.

Putin's 18 March speech on the referendum in Crimea set out the Russian strategic narrative about the crisis in Ukraine (Prague Post Magazine, 2014).[7] Putin first said that 84% of the population had voted and 96% wanted Crimean unification with Russia. And then he explained the outcome this way: "To understand the reason behind such a choice it is enough to know the history of Crimea and what Russia and Crimea have always meant for each other". This history, Putin explained, tied Ukraine, Belarus and Russia together and glorified Russian valor and was inherently connected to Identity Narratives:

> Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol—a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valor. (Prague Post Magazine, 2014)

Note the importance of Orthodoxy as part of an Identity Narrative. This is tied together with Russian identity.

Putin blamed former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev for disrupting the history by annexing Crimea to Ukraine, and when the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, "millions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in different ones, overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union republics, while the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders" (Prague Post Magazine, 2014). All would have been fine, according to Putin's narrative, but "time and time again attempts were made to deprive Russians of their historical memory, even of their language and to subject them to forced assimila-

tion" (Prague Post Magazine, 2014). After the change in government, Putin said that the people of Crimea turned to Russia for support and help. This historical narrative explained and justified Russian behavior in 2014 to a domestic Russian population.

Putin also addressed a televised "Meeting in support of Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation, 'We Are Together'" on 18 March (Presidential Executive Office, 2014a). The graphic on the stage depicted a heart in white, blue, and red—the colors of the Russian flag—and said "Crimea in my heart!" Putin's strategic narrative fit squarely into an attempt to bolster domestic support, particularly in light of protests in Moscow in 2011–2013. Dougherty (2014, pp. 2–3) writes that "for Moscow, the conflict in Ukraine is accelerating profound changes already under way in the Russian media: the centralization and mobilization of information resources in the hands of the state, providing the Kremlin—and President Vladimir Putin—the means to galvanize public opinion domestically and in the region, as well as forcefully assert Russia's policies, views and—increasingly—values internationally". Putin had solidified control over domestic media in a number of ways (Birnbaum, 2014; Mickiewicz, 2014, p. 56).

Many Western countries directly challenged the Russian narrative, and identified it by name as a narrative. British Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant called Russia's stance "A new fantasy narrative" while French Ambassador Gerard Araud said it was "virtual reality" (Anna, 2014). The US, for its part, consistently challenged the Russian narrative. The US State Department, for example, set up online blogs, one of which covered a United Nations speech by US Ambassador Samantha Powers, who said in June 2014:

> Russia has attempted, erroneously, to characterize the events unfolding in eastern Ukraine as a humanitarian crisis. They falsely have cast themselves as the defender of rights and vindicator of the vulnerable; and the Russian army and its operatives as a humanitarian aid agency. But this Russian "aid" operation sends soldiers, not doctors; it mans armored personnel carriers, not relief tents; it provides surface-to-air missiles, not meals-ready-to-eat. (US Department of State, 2014)

There were also other groups using social media and website online to counter Russian narratives. See for example, StopFake.org, which sets out the "struggle against fake information about events in Ukraine" (www.stopfake.org/en) or the work done by NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

Beyond a focus on Ukraine itself and on Russia's history with Crimea, Putin used the Ukrainian case to present an International System Narrative, describing

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[6] Geographic proximity to Russia and reliance on Russian gas do not determine support or opposition to economic sanctions. Poland and the Baltic states strongly support sanctions.

[7] The referendum was not recognized by Ukraine or the West.

how changes in the international system led to other situations comparable to Ukraine, and implying that the US and Western Europe are hypocritical in their condemnation of Russia. Included among these comparable cases was Kosovo, which Putin directly compared to Crimea: "For some reason, things that Kosovo Albanians (and we have full respect for them) were permitted to do, Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in Crimea are not allowed" (Prague Post Magazine, 2014). Putin continued by setting out an International System narrative that emphasized US hegemony and hypocrisy:

> After the dissolution of bipolarity on the planet, we no longer have stability. Key international institutions are not getting any stronger; on the contrary, in many cases, they are sadly degrading. Our western partners, led by the US, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right. They act as they please: here and there, they use force against sovereign states, building coalitions based on the principle "If you are not with us, you are against us". To make this aggression look legitimate, they force the necessary resolutions from international organisations, and if for some reason this does not work, they simply ignore the UN Security Council and the UN overall. (Prague Post Magazine, 2014)

Putin complained that the US and NATO did what they wanted, expanding NATO toward the east,[8] bombing Belgrade, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and deploying a missile defense system in Europe asserting power over Russia. Putin developed this International System Narrative throughout 2014, decrying US hegemony in the system:

> This period of unipolar domination has convincingly demonstrated that having only one power centre does not make global processes more manageable. On the contrary, this kind of unstable construction has shown its inability to fight the real threats such as regional conflicts, terrorism, drug trafficking, religious fanaticism, chauvinism and neo-Nazism. At the same time, it has opened the road wide for inflated national pride, manipulating public opinion and letting the strong bully and suppress the weak. Essentially, the unipolar world is simply a means of justifying dictatorship over people and countries. The unipolar world turned out too uncomfortable, heavy and unmanageable a burden even for the self-proclaimed leader. (Presidential Executive Office, 2014b)

For those in world who have been critical of US unilateral action in Iraq, for example, Putin's narrative could find resonance. It also spoke to many in Eastern Europe

that might feel as if membership in the European Union and/or NATO required national interests to be subsumed until the broader organization's interests or demands. In other words, perhaps states could become entrapped by an alliance which asked them to sacrifice for membership in a broader alliance. This then could bolster support for Issue Narratives in a number of areas, including Ukraine.

Russia's International System Narrative during this time was projected within a broader Russian initiative to develop international communication outlets to counter Western, and particularly US, strategic narratives. Dimitri Kiselov, whom Putin appointed to head a newly organized media structure in Russia in 2013 said that his job was "Restoring a fair attitude towards Russia as an important country in the world with good intentions—it is the mission of the new structure, which will lead me" (Lenta, 2013). Putin himself said that soft power—which is inherently linked to strategic narratives (Roselle et al., 2014)—is a central concern for Russian foreign policy:

> Soft power, a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy, is becoming an indispensable component of modern international relations. At the same time, increasing global competition and the growing crisis potential sometimes creates a risk of destructive and unlawful use of "soft power" and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation, manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad. (Putin, 2013)

Russia spent money on international broadcasting, including development of RT (formerly Russia Today) (Dougherty, 2014). The contestation of strategic narratives was (and is) front and center for the Russian leader.

Turning more directly to how Russian narratives were used to try to undermine or weaken alliances, particularly in Europe, there are component parts of the Russian narrative that found resonance in Eastern Europe, and with certain audiences in Western Europe and the US. The idea that the US and NATO take advantage of those who are weaker and calls for the support of Christian values can be found in some (but not all) of the speeches of political elites in Eastern Europe, for example. In the countries that have not supported sanctions—Slovakia, Hungary, and increasingly during this period some in the Czech Republic—one can see overlapping narratives. For example, Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico asserted, in explaining opposition to economic sanctions, that, "Europe hasn't learned from the past 'and we still continue seeking enemies'" (The Slovak Spectator, 2014). This ties into comments by him that compared increased NATO

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[8] NATO admitted the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999. In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined. Albania and Croatia joined in 2009.

troop deployments in Central and Eastern Europe to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact (The Economist, 2014). Russia's depiction of NATO's expansion of power fits into this narrative.[9] Hungary's president, meanwhile, found resonant Putin's narrative about "Christian" values and domestic politics supported this (Luhn, 2014). In Hungary the Russian narrative fit with a "nationalist rhetoric aimed at foreign energy corporations and the EU" (Verseck, 2014). Finally in the Czech Republic, President Milos Zeman characterized the conflict in Ukraine as a civil war rather than as Russian aggression (EUbusiness.com, 2014). Thus Russian system narratives that emphasized US overreach or entrapment found resonance in some circles, as did identity narratives about "Christian" values. These narratives could be used to support domestic political ambitions of political actors, even as they threatened European cohesion.

8. Analysis and Conclusions

The cases presented above examine the role of strategic narratives within alliances. If we are to understand the (re)construction of alliances over time, it is important to understand how strategic narratives work within alliances and as outside challenges to alliances. First, strategic narratives can shape how alliance interests, values and identity are understood by members—as illustrated in the case of Libya. In this case, French and British narratives shaped the way the material conditions on the ground were presented, and suggested that the identity of the member states within the alliance demanded military action. This can, in part, explain why states agree to go along with allies' preferred policies under certain circumstances, speaking to the literature on representational force (Bially Mattern, 2005). Bially Mattern argues that shared identity can create order and structure expectations about behavior. Identity narratives may be used by allies to influence policy decisions arguing that the alliance "must" pursue a certain policy because "that is who we are". This adds insight into why states with similar regime types are more likely to align—they share Identity Narratives (Lai & Reiter, 2000). In addition, there is some evidence that these narratives were used to raise a broader fear of abandonment. If the US did not go along with France and the UK, especially after they had gone along with the US in Afghanistan, the US would be outside of policymaking on Libya.

Second, the Ukrainian case illustrates how those outside of an alliance may attempt to use strategic narratives to undermine alliance cohesion by raising fears of entrapment. Here, both system and identity narratives of NATO were challenged or contested by Russian narratives. Russia's narrative that, in a post-bipolar world, the West, led by the US, acted selfishly, hypocritically,

and without regard for international law challenged the Western alliance narrative. It suggested that countries within the alliance should fear a "dictator" US telling them what to do. Parts of Russia's strategic narrative questioning Western behavior and promoting "Christian values" were (and are) resonant among some, but not all, political actors in the NATO alliance. It is important to understand how these strategic narratives that threaten alliance cohesion may serve domestic political purposes within alliance member states. These Russian narratives developed in part to serve Russian domestic political needs as well—in this case to bolster support for the annexation of Crimea and for Putin himself.[10]

These two cases show how important understanding narrative (re)construction is to understanding international order and policy behavior. They also illustrate how important domestic political considerations can be. Clearly more work needs to be done on the conditions under which strategic narratives affect alliance cohesion and decision making. Under what conditions do strategic narratives shape alliance policy decisions and the international order more broadly? Under what conditions are outside narrative challenges to alliances successful? How does this work in a new communication environment? What role does fear of entrapment and fear of abandonment play in alliance relations, and how are narratives linked to these fears. The cases do suggest that understanding strategic narrative communication should be an important component of the study of alliances and international order.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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[9] Although it is important to note President Kiska contests this narrative, saying that Ukraine should be supported because the Czech Republic remembers what it was like when no one helped Czechoslovakia in 1968. Here the same historical event is used to support different narratives.

[10] It is also important to recognize that Russia and Putin struggle with credibility issues in many of the countries that opposed economic sanctions. The history of the Soviet Union in the region has not been forgotten.

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About the Author

Laura Roselle is Professor of Political Science and Policy Studies at Elon University. She is the author of *Media and the Politics of Failure* (Palgrave, 2006 and 2011), and with co-authors Alister Miskimmon and Ben O'Loughlin, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (Routledge, 2013) and *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives & International Relations* (University of Michigan Press, 2017). Roselle is co-editor of the journal *Media, War and Conflict*, and co-editor of the book series, Routledge Studies in Global Information, Politics and Society.