INTRODUCTION

Many Americans are deeply troubled by the often tepid reactions from the Muslim world to the September 11 attacks, and by the images of street protests they saw in Muslim countries against U.S. military actions in Afghanistan. These reactions have led to a spate of stories in the popular press and television asking, “Why do they hate us?” and for some these stories demonstrate the existence of a clearly defined enemy who, because they have not signaled that they were with us, must be against us. Is this the clash of civilizations that Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington described almost a decade ago, pitting Islam against the West? Huntington’s scenario, I argue, leads us to overemphasize objective cultural differences as a cause of conflict between people from different cultures. Instead, this chapter argues that it is more useful to focus on the social and psychological processes by which subjective differences between cultures produce clashing frameworks for action that are at the core of the current conflict.

As a political psychologist I have been particularly interested in how people make sense of complex, emotionally powerful events and why different, seemingly contradictory, accounts of what seems to be the same event so frequently coexist. These different accounts are often referred to as narratives. In focusing on narratives I am not dismissing the importance of the structural features of the contemporary international system or of the competing interests of different actors. Rather, they are not my focus in this article. Narratives matter for at least three different reasons. First, a narrative’s metaphors and images can tell us a great deal about how individuals and groups understand the social and political worlds in which they live, and explain the conflicts in which they are involved. Second, they can reveal deep fears, perceived threats, and past grievances that drive a conflict. Third, narratives are important because they privilege certain actions over others. For example, defining the September 11 attacks as an act of war, which was central to the Bush administration’s narrative, provided support for different kinds of responses than defining them as a criminal act would have done. Similarly, the United States first announced that captured Taliban and Al
Qaeda are "unlawful combatants," and not prisoners of war entitled to be treated in accord with the Geneva Conventions, although as of early February 2002, this issue was still being debated within and outside the Bush administration.

Narratives can be analyzed in several ways. Of great significance to an analysis is what a narrative includes and excludes. Often opposing parties' narratives do not directly contradict each other. Rather, opponents draw on distinct metaphors, emphasize different actions, cite clashing motivations, and communicate opposing affect to such an extent that it is sometimes hard for a naive observer to recognize that the narratives protagonists offer are describing the same conflict. On the surface level, narratives are stories about the unfolding of events. At a deeper level, they reveal something about the motivations and reactions of the parties, sometimes explicitly and sometimes indirectly. In addition, narratives make emotionally significant connections across time periods through the culturally significant images and metaphors they invoke. Analysis of narratives from these various perspectives helps us understand what is driving parties in a conflict; furthermore, we can use this understanding as part of the process of developing constructive solutions.

This article has four sections. In the first I discuss the key features of psychocultural narratives and their origin in deeply rooted cultural worldviews and group identity. Second, I discuss narratives concerning September 11 and its aftermath, arguing that alternative narratives exist not only between the U.S. and Muslim worlds, but within each of these as well. Third, I explore the multiple, but not mutually exclusive, roles narratives play in intense conflicts: as causes, reflectors, and exacerbators of conflict and its escalation. As causes, narratives serve as gatekeepers ruling in or out options for groups, decision-makers, and politicians. As reflectors, narratives reveal how protagonists understand a conflict and their own underlying motivations, as well as those of their opponents. As exacerbators, narratives provide in-group support and solidarity that promote negative images of an enemy, escalatory actions, and offer little room for accommodation. In this section I also examine how narratives can be significant in developing constructive solutions that move a conflict toward settlement. Finally, I consider implications from the analysis for U.S. relations with the Muslim world. I emphasize not only that good settlements must meet the real interests of the protagonists, but also that they must be framed to address the emotional fears and threats that drove the conflict in the first place. Central to this process is the development of new narratives, ones which do not directly challenge older ones, but which reframe them in more inclusive terms that deemphasize the emotional significance of differences between groups and identify shared goals and experiences.

PSYCHOCULTURAL NARRATIVES

First let me say something about what a psychocultural narrative is and how concept can help us understand and manage conflict. Narratives are explanations for events—large and small—in the form of short, commonsense accounts that often seem simple. However, the powerful images they contain a judgments they make about the motivations and actions of one's own group, opponents, are emotionally powerful. Narratives are not always internally consistent. For example, group narratives often alternate between portraying one's own group as especially strong and as especially vulnerable—and the same for the portrayal of the opponent. Narratives meet a number of needs and are especially relevant for groups and individuals caught in situations of high anxiety and high stress. When people are most disoriented, such as during the period following September 11, they struggle to make sense of events; narratives that are reinforced within groups help them find reassurance and with high anxiety. Opposing groups with divergent beliefs and experiences develop and maintain different narratives of the same event. All cultural traditions have access to multiple preexisting narratives that provide support for diverse orientations in times of apprehension, as we can see in the many citations from the Quran and the Bible used to justify responses to September 11. Narratives, therefore, are not made from whole cloth, but are grounded in selective membered and interpreted experiences and projections from them that are with a large number of people.

Narratives are rooted in shared culture and worldviews. Culture is understood as "an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by which men [sic] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life." This definition of culture emphasizes public, cultural meanings. Behaviors, institutions, and social structure are understood not as features themselves but as culturally constituted phenomena. Culture from this perspective is a worldview that includes both cognitive and affective beliefs about reality and assumptions about what is true and how people in one's culture and those in other cultures are likely to act in particular circumstances. It is particularly relevant that these shared understandings occur among people who have a common (and almost invariably named) identity that signals distinctiveness between the group and outsiders. In sum, culture is a framework for interpreting the world that marks "a distinctive way of life" characterized in the subject we-feelings among group members, and expressed though specific behaviors including customs and rituals—both sacred and profane—that mark the
yearly, and life cycle rhythms connecting people across time and space. Cultures and cultural differences do not themselves cause conflict. People are the cause; and it is important to understand how leaders and groups use culture and the deep feelings it evokes in mobilization.

Shared worldviews provide the deeply emotive images and references that are the building blocks of psychocultural narratives, and in recent years, scholars have analyzed the dynamics of narrative development from a variety of theoretical perspectives. A key point these scholars make is that narratives invoke the past in response to contemporary needs for meaning and control over ambiguous and stressful situations. Narratives are normative accounts with heroes and villains and lessons about how life should be lived. They offer in-group versions of the past, including the origin and development of the group, and they invoke past threats, conflicts with enemies, and laud group survival. In some cases, there is a conscious effort to develop a narrative with an eye toward future political goals, as was the case in Israel during the Zionist period, and in South Africa among Afrikaners following the Boer War. In most situations, however, world views and the narratives to which they give rise look much more like patchwork quilts sewn together over a long time period.

In bitter conflicts, among the strongest feelings people have are fears about attacks on their identity. Usually these fears result from perceived denigration and humiliation, evoked from past losses and linked to present dangers. In violent conflicts, the fears also include concern for physical security and fears of extinction of the self, family, and the group and its culture, including its sacred icons and sites. All groups exert conformity pressures on their members, and these are greatest in high-stress conflict situations. In times of uncertainty, narratives connect individual and group identity, heightening in-group solidarity and a sense of linked fate that inhibits social and political dissent. As part of this dynamic, disagreement quickly becomes disloyalty, and often those holding dissenting views are careful not to express them publicly, and sometimes even in private.

Within communities, high conformity pressures increase acceptance of the dominant elements in a narrative. Political leaders intuitively know that building consensus using the key elements in a narrative can be crucial to mustering support for their actions, which are presented as "naturally" following from shared understandings. In short, we can view securing active consensus on narratives as public opinion formation that is both an effort by individuals to reduce their own anxiety, and a strategy on the part of leaders to mobilize public support. A good indicator of this is greater homogeneity of publically expressed opinions and public acceptance of key parts of the dominant narrative for whatever conflict is current. For example, prior to the outbreak of the Gulf War in January 1991, American public opinion as expressed in surveys, newspaper editorials, and in Congress was quite divided on the question of the war with Iraq. Once the fighting began, however, public support for military action increased dramatically in a very short period of time. Few surveys, however, clearly answer the question of the degree to which people actually change their attitudes toward what they perceive as the dominant view in their society, versus the extent to which they engage in what Timur Kuran calls preference falsification to avoid ostracism or even persecution.

There are times when group consensus around a narrative increases, but there are many others when within-group differences are highly significant. Often our language implies that opposing parties in a conflict are internally unified, while in most long-term significant conflicts, we should recognize that there is considerable diversity within each community that reflects significant debates and disagreements. In Northern Ireland and the Middle East, for example, for a long time there have been strikingly different narratives within both the majority and minority communities over the use of violence and the conditions under which peace is possible. These disagreements reflect deep differences in the fears the conflict evokes and contrasting motives attributed to the other side. On the one hand, there is a view of the other community as capable of living in relative peace and harmony with one's own group, while on the other, any move toward peace is viewed with suspicion, heightens insecurity, and is viewed as a potential first step toward even greater demands. These competing interpretations sometimes reflect in-group differences in interests, but the emphasis here is on their very divergent emotional messages.

Narratives exist at different levels of specificity. Some focus on general questions such as the origin of the group, while others are built around particular events such as a single battle or the fate of a past leader. Narratives rely on timeless images and metaphors. This "time collapse" evokes the emotional rather than the chronological immediacy of the past. For example, Zerubavel shows how early-twentieth century Zionists stressed parallels between ancient Israel of the first and second temple periods while variously ignoring or denigrating the almost 2,000 years of Jewish exile. Resistance and revolt were emphasized in school texts and new holidays, and the myths and rituals surrounding them were developed and widely celebrated. Battles such as Masada became enshrined as celebrating revolt although they ended in mass death. Celebrations of Chanukah emphasized the Macabee revolt against Syrian rule and downplayed the "miracle" of one day's oil burning for eight days, the central lesson of the story during the Exile period. Zerubavel argues that following the Nazi Holocaust, the lesson
of "Never Again" further reinforced the meaning of ancient revolts of Bar Kokhba and Masada for contemporary Zionists.

Narratives are central to understanding "who is a people" and to articulating what in their "imagined past" is shared. These narratives articulate an ethnic conception of the nation that emphasizes one's community of birth and shared culture. Harkening back to historical events, such as battles, is one common way in which a shared community of experiences is communicated. Serbs emphasize the defeat of Prince Lazar in Kosovo in 1389, Quebequois continue to mark the English victory over the Trench on the Plains of Abraham in 1759, and some French still recount that it was the English who burned Joan of Arc. All of these references presume a people and identity with a direct link to the present that, in fact, is built more to meet contemporary needs than a reflection of historical reality.

The Israeli case is especially interesting since Zionism's call to bring together Jews from all parts of the world meant that people arrived in Israel with little in common other than their religious identity, which itself has been hotly debated and fought about at times. The development of a common language, shared institutions, and a national narrative became a central part of the task of acquiring "a land without people for a people without a land." Note that this phrase reflected and reinforced a narrative which presumed that Palestine had been empty for 2,000 years, and that the Arabs living there were mere visitors. In no way am I suggesting that the "imagined community" is transformed into a real community making claims to a state only through cultural dynamics and their narratives. I am arguing, however, that they are an integral, and often ignored, part of this political process.

There is no simple relationship between culture and narratives. The very generality of culture means that it can give rise to multiple narratives to cope with the same event or series of events. Edward Linenthal illustrates this idea particularly well in his examination of how Oklahoma City residents, in particular, and Americans more generally, came to understand the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, which killed 168 people. He describes three different, but not necessarily incompatible, narratives to explain the attack and responses to it. The progressive narrative emphasizes renewal and recovery as people struggled to rebuild the city and their lives. The redemptive narrative put the horrific events in a religious context, emphasizing the struggle between good and evil and ultimate redemption. The toxic narrative stresses the ongoing disruption and insecurity in many lives after the bombing and the losses that cannot be restored. Linenthal's analysis shows how each of these narratives is deeply rooted in American culture. They exist side by side, he argues, and many survivors and family members of victims could readily identify how all three reflected their own experiences and emotions at different times.

While a key feature of narratives is to explain the past, we must always recognize that the meaning of the past is also contested and periodically redefined. In recent years, American historians and educators have had bitter disagreements over what should be taught in social studies and history courses. Conflicts over the control of historical narratives are fought out in decisions about museum presentations and battlefields and other memorials. Contemporary conflict over the past is intense because it has implications for group identity in the present. Sometimes this conflict is played out in dramatic fashion, as it has been at the Little Bighorn battlefield site in Montana. Linenthal argues that the issue was not only the presentation of the battle between General George Custer's cavalry forces and the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors in June 1876, but the larger question of the relationship between expanding American society and the native peoples living in the west. For many years, veneration of Custer and his troops as martyrs emphasized the American civilizing mission, in contrast to the degrading, colonizing experience central to the Native American narrative. For whites, the massacre was a testimony to the need for conquest and control over native peoples, and Linenthal describes it as "a model for the transformation of... defeats into moral victories," not unlike Israeli interpretations of Masada. For Native Americans, in contrast, the battle signifies effective resistance against white oppression. The 1970s saw bitter conflict over the presentations at the battlefield site—including its name—and irreconcilable demands of the Custerphiles and the Custerphobes. Efforts by the National Park Service to recognize the accounts of both sides satisfied few in either camp. For example, the proposal to include a quote from Sioux medicine man Black Elk in the visitors center was seen by hardliner Custerphiles "as a form of pollution of the sacred ground," while Native Americans demanded more explicit acknowledgment of Custer as the symbol of their mistreatment by the U.S. government.

Powerful narratives are more than verbal accounts filled with richly evocative images. They invariably invoke sacred objects, sites, and rituals that reinforce the emotional connections among members of a group. Physical objects and sites are linked to narratives and group identity through rituals that enhance a narrative's emotional significance and explain its persistence over time. Many examples of this connection abound in group holidays and rituals that assert relationships between the present and past through sacred objects, holy sites, special foods, and prayers. Zerubavel describes the development of Masada in the Zionist period as a pilgrimage site for Israeli youth, and the powerful emotional role it came to play for them. The creation of, and visits to, the Vietnam War Memorial in
Washington helped Americans to move past their pro- and antiwar positions of the 1960s and 1970s and to develop a new, more inclusive account of the period. It is not so much that past disagreements over the war changed, but that they became less salient in comparison with the recognition of the large-scale loss and suffering for families and communities that resulted from bringing people together at the site where they shared common emotions.

Flags, memorial sites, inaugural ceremonies, sacred holidays, and state funerals are ritual objects and events that reinforce in-group identity and the emotional power of the group's narratives; they can also be sources of intense conflict. In recent years in the American South there has been bitter disagreement over whether the Confederate battle flag should be hung over state capitals or appear as part of state flags and how, where, and whether Confederate memorials should be presented. In New York, a few months after September 11, there was deep disagreement in reactions to a statute produced to memorialize firefighters' efforts at the WTC site because it included a white, Hispanic, and black firefighter even though the men in the photo on which it was based were all white. Despite the sincere intentions of the funder and artist, the competing needs were so intense that an alternative memorial will be designed.

ALTERNATIVE/COMPETING NARRATIVES AND SEPTEMBER 11

Hostile narratives did not directly cause the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center; nor are they the simple cause of the U.S. military responses in Afghanistan and elsewhere. They did, however, contribute to the dynamics in which both of these actions took place. Narratives, therefore, are important in understanding the roots of the conflict, the reactions of many of the protagonists, U.S. and other responses to the attacks, and the future actions that are, or are not, contemplated. In brief synopsis, Al Qaeda framed the U.S. as a mortal enemy, and the conflict with it as jihad in which civilians and governmental officials are not distinguished, thus justifying the dramatic and brutal attacks and ruling out any kind of dialogue or political accommodation with either the U.S. or American allies in the region. Similarly, the American declaration of a "war on terrorism" produced an emphasis on military and diplomatic action and significant symbolic efforts to distinguish between the vast majority of Muslims and Al Qaeda's brand of fundamentalism and use of religion for political purposes.

In thinking about the major protagonists' narratives, consider how they offer an explanation for events and prioritize possible responses. Furthermore, consider how the legitimation of one narrative over another provides support for those who cite key parts of the narrative as a justification for their own actions. For example, American and British insistence that rooting out terrorism meant a "zero-tolerance" policy allowed other states, such as Israel and India, to engage in actions against targets that would not have been as likely six months earlier. In the U.S., the widespread public support for strong actions against terrorists led the government to (1) initially define captured Taliban and Al Qaeda as unlawful combatants not falling under the Geneva Conventions' regulations for treatment of prisoners of war, (2) carry out long-term domestic detention of suspected terrorists and those who might have some knowledge of them or their activities, and (3) decide to use military tribunals to try non-American terrorists.

There are many different narratives we can identify involving September 11. To further explore the significance of narratives, consider the following two accounts, the first of which resonates for most of the American public and the second of which baffles many Americans:

Two huge commercial jetliners smash into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Soon after, the buildings collapse. Fires rage for weeks; eyewitnesses tell of the horrors they saw or experienced. Thousands die as the public learns that terrorists willing to commit suicide hijacked four planes and turned them into weapons of mass destruction in the name of their political/religious beliefs. This is an evil act and an act of war—a sneak attack like Pearl Harbor. It is perhaps a new kind of war, but a war nonetheless and the only response to being attacked is to attack back, both to punish those responsible for the carnage and to prevent future attacks. Defending civilization against terrorism requires hunting down the supporters and perpetrators of terror and the regimes that support them.

For many the truth of this narrative is self-evident. Anyone denying or even questioning it is either an enemy or delusional (or both). The link between the events themselves and the conclusions is seamless to those who accept it. But a different narrative also exists:

Two huge commercial jetliners smash into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Soon after, the buildings collapse. Fires rage for weeks; eyewitnesses tell of the horrors they saw or experienced. Thousands die as the public learns that terrorists willing to commit suicide hijacked four planes and turned them into weapons of mass destruction in the name of their political/religious beliefs. This may have been an evil act, but now the suffering Americans know what it is like to live in physical terror. It is an experience Palestinians and Iraqis and others in the Middle East have known for years. This will lead, once again, to attacks on Muslims—this time in Afghanistan, and perhaps in other countries. Once again, innocent civilians will bear the brunt of the suffering from the attacks from the Western powers while corrupt regimes give tacit support to the U.S. As bombs fall from 30,000 feet and civilians die, new refugees will be created in a land that has already suffered from more than 20 years of ongoing war.

These two narratives start in the same place, but then head in different directions that evoke different images. Where the first emphasizes the reassurance
that a strong, military response can offer, the second expresses fears that this strong response will quickly become a vengeful attack on a vulnerable religious community. Whereas the first invokes images of justice, the second predicts uncontrolled revenge and more of the injustice that has characterized the relationship between the West and Islam at least since the First Crusade. The second narrative asks, if Americans claim that justice is so important, why have Palestinians been neglected for so long and subjected to frequent attacks using American-made sophisticated weapons? Why are Iraqi children unable to meet their basic nutritional needs while its leaders live in palaces? In short, the second narrative expresses the deepest vulnerabilities, humiliation, rage at both the West and the leaders of Muslim countries, and fears of annihilation.

The second narrative is connected to the anger and resentment against the U.S. in many parts of the Islamic world, but it doesn't mean that all Muslims agree with it or hate the U.S. The power of the narrative is its plausibility, meaning that it resonates with how many Muslims understand historical conflicts with the Christian world as well as more recent events in their own lifetimes. At least four events are especially relevant here: (1) American support for the Shah of Iran and opposition to the Iranian revolution; (2) unconditional support for Israel despite its government's refusal to take significant steps towards the achievement of a Palestinian state; (3) the Gulf War, which was justified in the West in terms of turning back Iraqi aggression but which was widely understood by Muslims as propping up autocratic, unpopular, and corrupt regimes upon whom American oil supplies depended; and (4) threats to Islamic holy sites in Saudi Arabia and Jerusalem resulting from not only American presence in the region but the more diffuse forces of modernization and globalization which threaten Muslim cultures. A psychocultural analysis of these particular events focuses on the emotional intensity and the deep fears and humiliations they invoke through their connections to past experiences. Emotional intensity is not explained simply in terms of the substantive issues at stake in each of these situations, but also by the deeper existential experiences that are involved.

One could view the two narratives as further evidence that the world can be neatly dichotomized—those who are for us and those who are against us—and deduce therefore that escalating conflict is inevitable, as Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis would suggest. It is also possible to attribute the attitudes and behaviors of those involved solely to their culture and religion. However, to do either would be a serious oversimplification, with policy consequences that are likely to exacerbate, rather than ease, future problems. Instead, the complexity and ambiguity of the narratives themselves, as well as the experiences underlying them, offer insights for future American policy and for bridging what might appear to be two completely incompatible worldviews.

It is interesting to examine the attribution of responsibility in the two narratives. They both reflect the idea that states are not the only relevant international actors today. However, the two narratives understand this shift in somewhat different ways: the first one in its identification of multinational terrorist networks and the second in its invoking of forces such as globalization, capitalist, and secularism. However, there is also significant ambivalence about this new reality and almost a yearning for a system in which states are the dominant actors, since they are much easier to blame when things go wrong than abstract forces such as globalization, or vague entities such as terrorist networks. As a result, despite all the talk about global networks in the aftermath of September 11 and references to "the street" as opposed to the state, Neil Smith is probably correct when he argues that post-September 11 discourse quickly returned to a national one, emphasizing state actors. Within the U.S., the focus on homeland security and the policy focus on attacking those "states who harbor terrorists" are consistent with this state-centric emphasis.

By setting different action priorities, the two narratives reveal important between-group differences. However, there are within-group differences as well, some of which reflect underlying competing interests. Narratives in Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt differentiated between their long-term wariness of Western treatment of Islam and their condemnation of the attacks. More generally, many Muslims are struggling with the question of how to balance, on the one hand, their disgust at the attacks and, on the other hand, their equally strong rejection of American policies which support corrupt, authoritarian regimes in the region, and their opposition to high-tech military action which threatens Muslim civilian populations. Likewise many Americans found themselves searching to articulate a narrative of September 11 that recognizes the horrific and inexcusable nature of the WTC attacks, but also acknowledges the injustices of previous Western actions against Islamic peoples and the risks of emphasizing only a military response, of permitting a loss of civil liberties, and of turning attention away from domestic issues and social priorities. Listening to politicians and reading the American press clearly shows that even five months after September 11, there is more consensus on some parts of the narrative than others, just as Linenthal found in Oklahoma City. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the two narratives have important points of agreement (the horror of the WTC attacks) and other areas where there are differences of focus (past injustices) but not explicit disagreements. Recognizing the diversity of opinions and
complexity of feelings within each side can sometimes be a step toward identifying common concerns or to articulating areas for possible future cooperation.

NARRATIVES AS CAUSES, REFLECTORS, AND EXACERBATORS OF CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Narratives play a causal role in the conflict process when they frame cognitions and emotions that structure and limit the actions individuals and groups consider as plausible. In this process, narratives shape what constitutes evidence and how it is to be used. When narratives portray no possible common ground between opponents, there will be no search for alternatives to fighting. Thus there will be political pressures for leaders to pursue certain kinds of action, while other options will have already been eliminated. From this perspective, narratives do not force parties to take a particular action, if for example they lack the capabilities or support, but narratives may be crucial in limiting the range of choices that are considered. A good example of this is found in Finley, Holsti, and Fager's analysis of U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's interpretation of the behavior of the Soviet Union leadership and their motivation in the 1950s. They argue that even when Khruschev provided signals of a major shift in Soviet policy after Stalin's death, Dulles continued to read these only as signs of weakness, and not as possible evidence of a change of motivations and behaviors from the new leadership. In analyzing September 11 and responses to it, the narratives dominating each party's thinking shaped the actions they considered and eventually undertook.

Narratives are also reflectors of deeper worldviews and assumptions the parties make about each other. These reflections of "the real world" provide significant cues to ingroup members and can make it clear that dissenting from a societal consensus is risky. For example, following September 11, Americans quickly moved to a strong consensus that Osama bin Laden and his supporters were responsible for the terrorist attacks. Those trying to articulate other possibilities were likely to find themselves labeled as "naive," "in denial," or "conspiracy theorists." Elsewhere in the world, other accounts emerged and received support, and evidence the United States and Britain presented was either questioned or seen as inadequate. In many Muslim countries the story circulated for months in the press and streets that Israel had orchestrated the attacks to turn the U.S. against Islamic states and had managed to secretly notify all Jews working in and around the WTC to stay home that morning. Within the U.S., the consensus rapidly developed for a strong military response in Afghanistan, even if no Afghans had been directly involved in the attacks. Others, including those who condemned the attacks, were skeptical that military action would be effective in rooting out terrorism even if it weakened or destroyed the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan.

Narratives as reflectors are important for those trying to make sense of a conflict and for those who make decisions about how to move a conflict toward a constructive outcome. Political psychologist Vamik Volkan writes about "emotional hot spots" that are part of all intense conflicts. When narratives bring them to the surface, this not only promotes understanding of the deeper roots of complex conflicts, but it also identifies barriers to change and points toward opportunities for strategic intervention. This argument emphasizes that unless the central fears and concerns of each party are addressed, settlement efforts are not likely to be successful. In many situations, one side in a conflict has an incomplete, or even inaccurate, understanding of what opponents need and how they frame the situation, as was the case with Dulles mentioned above. Herbert Kelman argues that one of the significant benefits of the Israeli-Palestinian problem-solving workshops he has organized for 30 years is that key people on each side acquired a more realistic sense of what the other side was thinking and what they needed. As a result, new understandings developed, new language and metaphors came into use, and each understood much more fully and realistically what a peace process and eventual settlement might look like. The narratives provided in his workshops often surprised those on the other side, reflecting deep fears central to each group that needed to be understood for movement toward peace talks to occur. Sparks and others describe a similar learning experience in the peace process involving the African National Congress (ANC) and white South African government in the 1980s, prior to Nelson Mandela's release from prison and the legalization of the ANC in 1990. Meeting in a variety of places, often outside South Africa, each side developed a clearer picture of the other's positions and needs and concluded that negotiations could be fruitful.

As exacerabeters of conflict, narratives emphasize differences among the parties and support continuing hostility and escalating responses. The dominant American narrative of the war on terrorism against Al Qaeda and the Taliban left no room for negotiation. In fact, at times this led to significant tension with some Afghan factions for whom negotiations, allegiances, and amnesty were strategic, not moral, decisions. Other countries used the American narrative to serve their own goals. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared that Yasar Arafat was the Israeli bin Laden and launched intense military raids in the West Bank and Gaza (including an increase in targeted assassinations), saying he was responding appropriately to the terrorist threats. Likewise, following an attack on the Indian
parliament in December 2001, India fully mobilized its armed forces and demanded strong Pakistani action against Islamic groups and leaders it labeled terrorist. Other countries, such as Uzbekistan and the Philippines, also sought U.S. support against opposition groups in the name of the war on terrorism, an appeal the U.S. has a hard time refusing given its own post-September 11 rhetoric. Finally, some like Russia and China endorsed the American position and then used it to move against internal opponents.

As causes, reflectors, and exacerbators of conflict, narratives play an active role in the dynamics of escalation. We can examine tipping points in conflicts, asking when previously rejected beliefs and behaviors come to be viewed as acceptable and even desirable. In his analysis of such tipping points, Laitin focuses on language adoption, but his analysis is framed more generally and is thus relevant to understanding public opinion and the actions conflicting parties consider. Public opinion is both a constraint on, and promoter of, the actions leaders consider, and can shift quickly in support of actions taken if they are perceived likely to be effective. In the period following September 11, there was a rapid movement toward public consensus on the attribution of responsibility and the appropriateness of military and diplomatic actions. That this consensus was formed across many divergent groups, ranging from small ethnic communities to large countries, shows how quickly opinions can shift when tipping points are reached.

The preceding analysis emphasizes the role narratives can play in the escalation of conflict. However, it is important to recognize their potential in de-escalation as well. This role is illustrated dramatically in the period following World War II, as new relationships among former enemies were built in Europe and between the U.S. and Japan. But narratives are also at play in more slowly changing relationships, such as the U.S. and China since 1972, or the U.S.-Russian relations in the second half of the 1980s. Evolving narratives also play a role in peace processes in long-term conflicts, such as South Africa, Northern Ireland, and the Middle East, as groups on all sides come to believe that movement toward a settlement is possible, even with those who were previously viewed as "beyond the pale." In these situations, there is a significant shift in how each side describes the other (sometimes including the name by which they are called) and the gradual emergence of images of the benefits peaceful coexistence could bring. When the narratives begin to include more nuanced views of the other side, people can envision a future apart from the intense conflicts, and political leaders have newly opened space to move the peace process forward. This occurred most dramatically in South Africa, but in Northern Ireland and the Middle East (prior to September 2000) the same shifts of public opinion and discourse have also been present.

Narratives that promote peace processes arise when there are explicit connections made between culturally available references and events on the ground. These connections are seen in changes in language—for example, when Israelis began to talk about the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and met publicly with the PLO leaders, or when white South Africa foresaw the inevitability of majority rule and began to facilitate its implementation. Changing the narrative frame can also facilitate de-escalation when it helps people caught in conflict to envision alternatives to ongoing confrontation. To do this, each side must take on the perspective of the other, and learn that there is someone to talk to on the other side and something to talk about.

Because narratives are about images and emotions, not just cognitions, we must examine the symbols and rituals associated with them. Some of these are very dramatic gestures, such as the example of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's 1977 trip to Jerusalem and his address to the Israeli Knesset, or Nelson Mandela donning a Springboks jersey. Powerful narratives often involve behaviors such as ritual reenactments of historical events, the construction of memorials, or the development of sacred holidays when the narratives are retold and passed to succeeding generations. When rituals are opened to include previously disputing groups, they can serve to support new narratives of coexistence and even reconciliation. In Northern Ireland, for example, a Protestant cultural organization in Derry (the region's second-largest city) recently reenact its annual celebratory parade in the context of a more inclusive city festival, which is open to Catholics as well as Protestants. One strategy Volkov has adopted is visiting "hotspots"—actual locations where deep differences are evoked. In Estonia, for example, Estonians and Russians met at the site of a former Soviet nuclear submarine base, and the Estonians expressed how the Russian use of the base was humiliating to them.

NARRATIVES AND U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE MUSLIM WORLD IN THE AFTERMATH OF SEPTEMBER 11

Narratives can and do change, but not necessarily when they are confronted directly. Simply telling people that their story of events is wrong is rarely successful, because there is often great emotional attachment to an account, which is defended from such frontal assaults. It is the images and organization of narratives that give them their power, not the facts. A strategy to develop more inclusive
narratives in the West (especially in the U.S.) and the Muslim world needs to be part of an effort to address the causes of the terrorist attacks and the support they received. To do this, new experiences and emotional connections need to be introduced that alter the salience of elements in the existing exclusive narratives, and invite new and/or revised linkages among their key elements. Developing these narratives could have significant implications for future American policy toward the Muslim world in general and the Arab world in particular. Given the hypothesis that narratives are produced interactively, and that change in one group's perceptions of the opponent can alter its own narrative, there are constructive steps that can be taken to help resolve the current conflict.

Here I focus on what the U.S. can do differently in its interaction with the Muslim world. This emphasis does not mean that it is only the U.S. that needs to rethink the situation and alter its behaviors. There is a more complex system at work here, in which many state and non-state actors have coalesced to create and maintain the current situation. Muslim regimes have been reluctant at best, and often completely unwilling, to address expanding participation and political voice, the distribution of social benefits, severe inequality, and sustainable local development. How these issues are best addressed is not easy for an outsider to say and certainly will need to reflect the different realities in individual states. The same kinds of issues I raise here concerning American behavior can usefully be raised about the Arab world, and a vigorous discussion along these lines is needed if the current situation is to change.

- Better listening and learning. The U.S. needs to better understand the roots of anger, and even rage, directed toward it from parts of the Muslim world. It is easy to point the finger at demagogic figures, such as Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, or the Talibin, but the question should focus not on the hate and propaganda they are spreading but also on why their audience seems so receptive. It is far easier to understand the motives of sellers than buyers. However, it is necessary to understand the deeply rooted vulnerabilities, fears, and humiliations so many Muslims feel in regard to the West in general—and the U.S. in particular—and to recognize the importance of past experiences and perceptions in current reactions. The goal is not to challenge the specific beliefs people hold, but to understand much more fully why they feel as they do. What is it in their experiences that lead to strong feelings around past events, and what connects them to the present?

- Acknowledgment. There is a long and bitter history of relations between the Christian and Muslim worlds, and the Muslims still have vivid, bitter cultural memories of the massacres and desecration of their holy sites during the Crusades, the expulsions from Spain and Portugal in the late fifteenth century, and European colonization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Pope John Paul II's visit to a mosque in Damascus in 2001 (the first ever by a pope) was a small effort to acknowledge this past. It might easily be contrasted with President Bush's reference to the war against terrorism as a Crusade in the first days after September 11. Acknowledgment can be both verbal and symbolic. It involves empathy without necessarily communicating apology or agreement. What are acknowledged are the deep feelings and threats a group feels. This can be painful for all sides, but it can result in a lowered intensity of feelings or even, when accompanied by meaningful actions, the rearrangement of connection among elements in a narrative.

- New policies, actions and labels. The U.S. administration has worked hard to define its response as an attack on terrorists and their supporters, not one against the Muslim world. It is not yet clear how successful this definition has been in countries such as Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Iran, given the deep distrust of the U.S. Actions are needed which communicate this message more fully. It is also important that the U.S. make a major effort toward a just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and change its policy toward Iraq, which is ineffective in achieving its key goals, and also puts the U.S. in a completely untenable humanitarian position. Probably the most difficult challenge will be to stop turning a blind eye to oppressive, corrupt regimes just because they happen to be aligned with the U.S. or supply needed resources. Making social justice and democratization in the region a high priority is long overdue, and the U.S. has to recognize that some of the strongest voices for democratization and egalitarian development are sometimes Islamic. If the U.S. continues to support regimes throughout the region which suppress all dissent, especially when that dissent speaks with an Islamic voice, the U.S. will continue to be the target of increased anger that arises from hopelessness and gives rise to extremist and terrorist groups.

A single common narrative that is widely accepted by both Muslims and Americans will not emerge from, nor be the goal of, such a process. It would be naive to think that differences in culture, historical experiences, and political disagreement could be bridged so easily. It ignores the reality that on both sides significant change will have to focus on behaviors and not just what is said. In addition, when there are strong differences in how two parties see the world, it is important that these differences be acknowledged and explored and not just swept under the rug. Since September 11, the American media and many groups in American society have made a sincere effort to better understand the contro-
versal role the U.S. has played in the Muslim world in recent decades. Many Americans better understand the complexity and diversity of Islam, the frustrations many Muslims feel, and the absence of democratic institutions and practices in some of the strongest U.S. allies in the Muslim world.

Rather than one joint narrative, the goal should be that the several narratives become less polarized, hostile, and distrustful. Perhaps they should have more common elements, but more importantly, they should have a more nuanced language and one that suggests, or at least permits, strategies for interaction and mutual adjustment. It may be that these can be built only through the participation of additional voices, such as those in Central Asia, Muslims in the U.S., and others who have been relatively unheard to date. First steps from the U.S., as the strongest power, surely are needed as part of this process.

When asked at a press conference on October 11, 2001 why people in the Muslim world hate the U.S., George Bush expressed amazement and replied, "That's because they don't know us." Some might respond that "they know us all too well." The answer I have offered here does not deny that knowing, and communicating with, an opponent can sometimes improve a relationship, but says that often this is not enough. Rather, this analysis draws attention to the role that structural relationships, specific policies, and deep emotions play in complicated, deep conflicts. In no way is it a justification for the horrible acts perpetrated on innocent people on September 11; my effort at explanation is aimed at understanding some of the underlying dynamics at work to make such future actions less likely. The U.S. military action may well achieve a number of its immediate goals. However, only when the deepest fears of each side are diminished, and the narratives of all parties become more complex and nuanced, will events such as September 11 become less likely. Where the clash of civilizations argument (offered by both Huntington and bin Laden) presents the conflict between Islam and the West as inevitable and enduring, the perspective here suggests that despite the deeply rooted historical nature of this conflict, there is much that can be done in the coming years to transform the conflict in more constructive directions and to lower its salience and intensity.
3. My interests here are solely in the narratives of the parties in a conflict recount, not those that academic or other analysts develop to explain the unfolding of events.


5. I use the term psychocultural because I am interested in interpretations of the world which are widely shared among people in a culture and which are transmitted through psychological processes. For further elaboration of this concept see Marc Howard Ross, The Culture of Conflict: Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993); Marc Howard Ross, "Psychocultural Interpretation Theory and Peacemaking in Ethnic Conflicts," Political Psychology, 16, pp. 523-544; and Marc Howard Ross, "Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis," in Mark I. Liberman and Alan S. Zackerman, eds., Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 42-48.

6. The general argument is found in Robert A. LeVine and Donald T. Campbell, Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes and Group Behavior (New York: John Wiley, 1972). A specific recent example is that although the U.S. is by far the world’s strongest military power, a recently published book on the U.S. military is titled “America the Vulnerable.” John F. Lehman and Harvey Sicherman, America the Vulnerable: Our Military Problems and How to Fix Them (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2002).

7. All religious traditions also have images of peacemaking as well as war. They can have a particularly important role in conflict termination and peacebuilding. See Marc Gopin, Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).


11. I eschew the term construction here as it implies a more self-conscious process than is often the case.


14. This does not mean that once a narrative emerges, it is unchanging. Quite the opposite; as new events unfold, there can be questioning and conflict around, and change in, a narrative. When stress is very high, sometimes there are multiple narratives which arise along with the disintegration of social cohesion.

15. This is seen at the level of political elites as well. Just a few days before the outbreak of fighting, the Senate narrowly voted in favor of action. Within a few days, however, few Senators publicly offered significant criticism of the war effort.

16. Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann describes a different dynamic as "the spiral of silence" arguing that for many people the fear of social isolation is more important than holding an unpopular belief. Consequently, people are quite attuned to public opinion in their society and not only are less likely to speak out when they perceive themselves in a minority but also change their opinions as well. See Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion, Our Social Skin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

17. Vamik D. Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). Significant dates in a group's emotional history are often centuries old. For Protestants in Northern Ireland it is William of Orange's victory in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, for Serbs it is Prince Lazar's defeat at Kosovo in 1389, while for Jews, the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD. Their significance, however, is the relevance of these events as lessons and warnings about the present. Volkan uses the terms "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories" to describe past events whose contemporary emotional significance is transmitted across generations.


20. Weber's masterful analysis of the transformation of identity in nineteenth-century France is very relevant here. He argues that in the countryside there was only a weak identification with the state and French culture as late as the middle of the century and that elites in Paris saw their mission as one of bringing civilization to the primitive peasants. His detailed account documents how peasants are transformed into patriotic Frenchmen and -women between 1870 and 1914 through improved transportation networks, universal primary education in French, and military service. The development of a strong shared identity in France, and elsewhere, produced a population ready to sacrifice in World War I. See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

21. For many the most dramatic conflict occurred over the status of Ethiopian immigrants. Although there was widespread agreement that they were Jews and thereby eligible to migrate to Israel under its law of return, some orthodox religious authorities insisted that differences in their ritual practices required that they undergo conversion in Israel (including ritual male circumcision) before they could be fully accepted as Jewish citizens.

22. This is not an uncommon pattern. Europeans coming to North America saw it as empty and ready for settlement and "taming." The Russians had the same view of central Asia and continued to settle in the region under various "virgin lands" programs. The British arriving in the highlands in Kenya and the Boers moving to the interior of South Africa had no trouble seeing the land as unused and ripe for settlement either.


26. Another narrative Linenthal discusses focuses on the role of trauma in the aftermath of the bombing. This account, he argues, dominated the response of health professionals and some government agencies and had the consequence of medicalizing and individualizing responses to the events, and providing health-care professionals with a standard, acceptable formula for treating those touched by them, (see Linenthal, op. cit., pp. 81—108). The issue of how government and other authorities define problems in ways that are consistent with their worldviews that then render them amenable to a particular course of action is an important issue but one I will not treat here. See for example David A. Rothfort and Roger Cobb, *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994).


31. It is interesting how often disastrous defeats are heroic (and traumatic) events for many groups. In addition to Masada and Little Big Horn, we could identify the Battle of Blood River in South Africa, the Serb defeat at Kosovo, and Crusaders' massacres of Muslims. Volkan's psycho-analytically informed analysis explains this in terms of trauma and the inability to mourn enormous loss—feelings that are transmitted from generation to generation as a group is unable to reverse narcissistic injury and humiliation. See Vamik D. Volkan, *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships* (New York: Jason Arenson, 1988); and Volkan, 1997, op. cit.


33. Although this is not my major focus here, it is worth pointing out that asking an administrative agency to mediate, and resolve, large cultural and identity conflicts is often problematic. These are political issues that political leaders often prefer to ignore, but handing them off to administrative officials is rarely adequate. This problem is seen in the management of disputes involving Local Order parades in Northern Ireland since 1995 (see Marc Howard Ross, "Psycho-cultural Interpretations and Dramas: Identity Dynamics in Ethnic Conflict," *Political Psychology,* 22, pp. 157-78).


35. "These concepts—autonomy, identity, national genius, authenticity, unity, and fraternity—form an interrelated language or discourse that has its expressive ceremonials and symbols. These symbols and ceremonies are so much part of the world we live in that we take them for the most part, for granted. They include the obvious attributes of nations—flags, anthems, parades, coinage, capital cities, oathes, folk costumes, museums of folklore, war memorials, ceremonies of remembrance for the national dead, passports, frontiers—as well as more hidden aspects, such as national recreations, the countryside, popular heroes and heroines, fairy tales, forms of etiquette, styles of architecture, arts and crafts, modes of town planning, legal procedures, educa-
tional practices and military does—all those distinctive customs, mores styles and ways of acting and feeling that are shared by members of a community of historical cultures” (Smith, 1991, op. cit., p. 77).

36. For a consideration of the American flag, see Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Their analysis ought to provide a context to help understand the veneration of the tapered flag recovered from the World Trade Center site following the attacks.


39. An important issue here is the total absence of public participation in the process of discussing and designing the memorial. Linenthal’s analysis of Oklahoma City makes it clear how important a public process is following a traumatic event.

40. Although it is easiest to describe conflicts as involving two sides, complex conflicts like the current one include many more parties each with their own distinct interests and interpretations of the situation. Howard Raiffa’s discussion of multiparty, multi-issue conflicts is very useful here. Howard Raiffa, The Art and Science of Negotiation (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1982).


43. Linenthal, The Unfinished Bombing, op. cit.


51. We have little good data on public opinion and its dynamics in conflict zones. However, surveys from Northern Ireland and the Middle East in recent years suggest that people are often “inconsistent” in that many express strong distrust of the other side and its leaders while supporting a peaceful settlement of the conflict. There is also some evidence that opinion is very volatile and