Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice

Volume 3 May 2015 http://journals.gmu.edu/NandC

How to Start a War: Eight Cases of Strategic Provocation

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Abstract

Strategic provocation has been a consistent prelude to war. A leader intent on starting a war must develop a compelling narrative for their domestic constituency and the international community. For some, strategic provocation – defined here as *the use of deceptive tactics to instigate violence against one's own state* – has been a reliable means of initiating war under the guise of self-defense. Eight cases of strategic provocation reveal a basic pattern of its use, and some possibly unwelcome truths about state leaders' methods. As international institutions increasingly scrutinize states' interventionist agendas, the use of deceptive narratives is likely to continue. Despite known indicators of strategic provocation operations, warning of such operations has not typically prevented warfare.

Key Words

media; narrative; strategic narrative, propaganda; messaging; war; provocation; strategic communication; media

Recommended Citation

Maddox, J.D. (2016). How to Start a War: Eight Cases of Strategic Provocation. *Narrative and Conflict: Explorations in Theory and Practice, 3*(1), p. 66-109. Retrieved from http://journals.gmu.edu/NandC/issue/view/195

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Introduction: The tragedy of strategic provocation

Americans have long been witness to, and participant in, strategic provocation. One case in particular took place close to George Mason University's campus in the Northern Neck of Virginia and illustrates many principles of the concept:

In the late 1690s, the planters of Colonial Maryland and Virginia along the Potomac River had established a treaty with the friendly Piscataway Native Americans that enabled the Colonists to conduct steady trade along the coast. The profitable peace, though, threatened the livelihood of the Iroquois Native Americans to the north – a nation that had long fought their neighboring Piscataway enemies for territory and goods (Charles County Bicentennial Commission, 2013).

A contentious history between colonists and Native Americans had fostered a climate of mutual distrust and apprehension. Colonists based their fears on previous clashes, including massacres of Colonists by Native Americans in 1620 and 1640 (Charles County Bicentennial Commission, 2013) and by the 1690s they had little faith in their neighbors (Maryland Colonial Court Proceedings, 1697). The Native Americans also had cause for concern as they saw their land access contract with the western expansion of the Colonies. In official testimony to Colonial sheriffs, old men described new incidents of Indian aggression, such as Native Americans' unexplained renewed use of warpaint, the theft of weapons and alcohol, and increasing numbers of hunting parties, which they feared were a sign of imminent violence (Maryland Colonial Court Proceedings, 1697, p. 188-191).

It was amid this narrative of distrust – on 8 July 1697 – that a Native American named Esquire Tom and his companion Choptico Robin, along with some other men, attacked an Englishwoman and her three children in the town of Acquia, Virginia, while the woman and children were doing chores at a spring. Esquire Tom and his accomplices knocked the woman unconscious, scalped her completely, drove a knife deep into her breast ("the wind puft out like a pair of Bellowes," wrote a witness after the fact), and beat her children nearly to death (Maryland Colonial Court Proceedings, 1697, p. 182).

Initial reports by a shocked Maryland court indicated a murder had taken place. The attackers were assumed to be Piscataway "assassins" (Maryland Colonial Court Proceedings, 1697, p. 182). Governor Nicholson demanded quick justice: an investigation and prosecution of those responsible, and counsel with the Piscataway Emperor. The Stafford County sheriff, Captain George Mason II, within days arrested a group of eight Piscataway who, under threat of immediate death by hanging, admitted their collaboration with Esquire Tom and Choptico Robin. In an examination at the Stafford County Courthouse, attended by the Piscataway

Emperor, the court learned that something much more profound than a simple killing had been attempted. (Maryland Colonial Court Proceedings, 1697).

The presence of the Piscataway Emperor elicited tears from the defendants. They quickly admitted that Esquire Tom – a Pomunkey tribesman from Charles County, Maryland – was in league with the Iroquois leadership. He had met with the Iroquois months before at Great Falls, Virginia. There, an Iroquois *agent provocateur* baited Esquire Tom with stories of English transgressions. He offered Tom a reward to avenge the Native American nations. By having Esquire Tom kill a Colonist and then blame it on the Piscataway, the Iroquois aimed to ignite a war between the English and the Piscataway, thus weakening both parties. The Iroquois would then seize on their weakness to eventually drive the English out and retake formerly held Piscataway territory (Maryland Colonial Court Proceedings, 1697).

Captain Mason would curse the baffling situation in a letter to the Governor: "…our County is so Dam'd full of lyes that I know not how allmost to Act but God direct for the Best that I may Act both for Good of King & Countrey" (Maryland Colonial Court Proceedings, 1697, p. 183).

The Governor opted against the knee-jerk violent reaction that might have triggered just the kind of violence that Esquire Tom's puppeteer intended. Governor Nicholson chose to investigate further and deal with the individuals involved rather than proudly punish his Native American neighbors as a whole, despite his colony's reputation for strong control. He ordered increased patrols by his Rangers, inquired into the more general nature of Native American relations, and communicated with his nervous Virginia counterparts on the issue. Eventually, Esquire Tom was brought to justice. The incident would disappear into the inky camouflage of a hundred other tales in Maryland's court records, seemingly never to reemerge until this examination. (Maryland Colonial Court Proceedings, 1697)

Over three hundred years later, the basic principles of the "Iroquois Deception" are unchanged in international application, as we will discover in eight case studies, below. As recently as 2008, the Russians were able to provoke an attack by the Georgians using similar tactics, but on a broader scale, and before that in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and in Afghanistan in 1979 (Sonne and Cullison, 2014; Herbig and Daniel, 1981). The same has been documented in Poland, Finland and elsewhere, as we will see below. And strategic provocation perhaps was the rule, rather than the exception, in early US wars. This under-appreciated narrative technique deserves a closer look in the context of conflict resolution, especially as stakes escalate.

The Iroquois Deception – besides being a curious interlude in American Colonial history – illustrates some of the fundamentals of this concept. At their most basic, these narrative operations are premised upon enduring brinkmanship between two opposing forces that are usually intent on securing sovereignty or land, often despite popular distaste for violence. Provocation occurs because an aggressor sees the need to develop a narrative justifying his own unpalatable, violent intentions. And while a zeitgeist of animosity may haunt both parties of an argument, provocation operations are deliberately planned to trigger a climax of violence that would not occur without some devilry. And – in the most devilish cases – a leader sacrifices some of his own people, as in the examples of Germany and Finland, below.

The conflict resolution implications of strategic provocation operations beg our close attention: these operations are classic tragedies whose results are deadly and often resonate beyond control. Their secrecy during planning ensures that citizens are unaware of the reality behind leaders' fiery narratives leading up to violence, and their leaders' narratives compel hapless citizens toward violence that may otherwise be avoided. The voices of those who might restrain themselves or caution against violence are muffled by their leaders' dominant narrative. As nations attain global influence through increasingly centralized media and through increasingly important international organizations, the implications grow. Similarly, as the normative influence of international organizations increases, so (ironically) grows the use of strategic provocation.

I. Attack Me… Please!

Provocation is one of the most basic, but confounding, aspects of warfare. Despite its sometimes obvious use, it has succeeded consistently against audiences around the world, for millennia, to compel war. A well-constructed provocation narrative mutes even the most vocal opposition. It seems we are ever welcoming of a just reason to fight.

Proponents of the *jus ad bellum* (just war) discipline have argued since Roman times in favor of the strict validation of martial intentions. As Saint Augustine witnessed the slow destruction of his beloved Roman Empire by invading Visigoths and Vandals in the 5th Century, he developed what would become the West's framework for justifying warfare, building on the foundations of Cicero's earlier studies. Beholden to both the morality of the Christian scriptures and to the pragmatism of the Empire, he bemoaned the necessity of warfare, but forgave the Romans their defensive violence against invaders:

> "The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars, when they find themselves in such a position as regards the conduct of human affairs, that right conduct requires them to act, or to make others act in this way." (Mattox, 2006, p. 47)

Augustine's sentiment – and that of his scholarly successors – has endured a thousand wars. He is frequently paraphrased in the rhetorical preparations for violence. But kings and commanders have more often bent Augustine's methodology to their own benefit than adhered to his moral intention, especially as they plan invasions. The Bush administration's 2006 doctrine of preemption, "recasting the right of anticipatory self-defense," according to the United States Judge Advocate General, (Judge Advocate General, 2009, p. 6) is a recent example – excoriated by the left (as in *The Myth of American Exceptionalism*) and equally championed by the right (as in *Presidential Power*). It is not unreasonable for critics to say that the just war discipline is more often used to justify one's own plans or condemn an enemy's intentions, than to passionlessly prevent an undignified war.

Augustine expounded nine basic principles of just war: comparative justice, right intention, competent authority, last resort, reasonable probability of success, proportionality, peace as the ultimate objective, and public declaration (Mattox, p. 47). Of those principles, public declaration would limit the use of provocation. Warning prior to initiation of hostilities is a foremost and enduring *scholarly* criterion of fairness in warfare. But its application to martial reality has been wishful at best. Evidence of the abuse of our own peace-loving principles abounds. In a useful, but obscure book called *Hostilities Without Declaration of War*, detailing the conditions of 107 wars fought between 1700 and 1870, an officer of the British Royal Artillery found – to his surprise – that fewer than ten of the wars were declared before the initiation of violence (Maurice, 1883).

Australian scholar Geoffrey Blainey reemphasized, in a well-regarded study of all wars between 1700 and 1973, that declarations of war are exceptional. He goes as far as nearly justifying the deadly Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor – an attack roundly declared immoral by other Western scholars – as a logical and traditional method of warfare. Blainey dismisses modern charges of immorality as a fantastical construct with no basis in historical reality. (Blainey, 1988, pp. 169-173)

American scholars have been peculiarly outspoken in favor of declaration and openness in the run-up to war (Fiala, 2008, p. 59-75). Possibly as a symptom of the United States (US) rebellion against the British monarchy, the US has demanded increased awareness of its presidents' martial intentions. Whereas US presidents shortly after the American Revolution mostly maintained a king-like command of the military – best illustrated in the expansionist Manifest Destiny of Jacksonian politics – the eventual democratization of the presidency required increased transparency of presidential war-making decisions , and increased public deliberation before application of force. The United States' recent adventures in Iraq and Vietnam have resulted in yet deeper scrutiny of the process, weakly threatening the president's power to declare war under Article II of the US Constitution.

To rein in the violent proclivities of despots and democrats alike, Western leaders in 1907 signed The Hague Peace Treaty, which calls upon signatories to declare hostile intentions before the onset of actual violence. This desire for the justification of war plans was in part a response to the increased intensity, speed and impact of war: deadlier weapons and faster communications had begun to transform the battlefield into a more dynamic, less predictable environment, with greater risk of international and commercial fallout (Johnson, 1981, p. 281-326).

The Hague Treaty's "Third Convention Relative to the Opening of Hostilities" very clearly demands, "The Contracting Powers recognize that hostilities between themselves must not commence without previous and explicit warning, in the form of either a reasoned declaration of war or an ultimatum with conditional declaration of war" (Yale Law School). Forty states initially signed onto the Treaty on 18 October 1908. A total of 41 have ratified it, out of 196 states.

If The Hague Peace Treaty responded to the emerging dynamics of warfare, it also heralded greater political internationalism. States were increasingly beholden to the opinions and potential military reactions of distant associates, despite the low number of signatories to this particular Treaty. Shortly after the Treaty's enactment, the outbreak of World War I very clearly demonstrated the increasing political connectivity of geographically disconnected states, with British subjects from as far afield as India, for example, fighting in the European theater of war.

World War I could be perceived as a singular moment in the *jus ad bellum* tradition, when almost all aggressors adhered to the responsibility to declare their bellicose intentions (Corey and Charles, 2012; Walzer, 1977). The apparent moralism of World War I's

progenitors seems to have influenced later scriptwriters and novelists, who popularized a tragic chivalry among warriors. However, an indirect outcome of the supposedly chivalric war was the sheer brutality of World War II, in which the former World War I soldier Adolf Hitler – avenging Germany's losses – seems to have regularly depended on the chivalric diplomacy of other European leaders to beat them to the punch. Hitler falsely explained to the German Reichstag—just before invading Poland – that he was awaiting terms from a Polish plenipotentiary.

In the wake of these wars, participation in mid-20th century international institutions like the United Nations (UN) became a critical factor in the legitimization of states' martial policies and the mutual enforcement of sovereignty and trade. These institutions would become a check on the immoral martial inclinations of member-states – as far as immorality can be judged by Saint Augustine's nine principles of just war. Economic and social success has come to require good standing within these organizations, and the most successful states generally are those that adhere most strongly to institutional norms. Thus, it would become more important to irreproachably justify acts of violence that could otherwise run contrary to international norms.

Observers of international organizations generally conclude that the desire for good standing in these organizations is skin-deep, and that international adherence to UN norms, for example, are not based on a genuine and universal respect for the humanitarianism that nominally defines the organization (Coleman, 2007; Franck, 1990). Instead, states seek the approval of the United Nations Security Council, for example, because it serves these states well to be seen in compliance with its norms. In her far-reaching assessment of international organizations' behavior, scholar Katharina Coleman wrote:

> "...states accept the norm not because they are convinced of its intrinsic moral value, but because they wish to appear legitimate to other states, demonstrate belonging to the international system through conformity, and secure the esteem of other states." (Coleman, 2007, p. 33)

To a great degree, then, participation in international organizations like the UN is pragmatic, and probably not guided by the moralism of the UN's founding principles. The scholar Thomas Franck similarly argues:

> "The rules of the international system obligate ... primarily because they are like the house rules of a club. Membership in the club confers a desirable status, with socially recognized privileges and duties and it is the desire to be a member of the club, to

benefit from the status of membership, that is the ultimate motivator of conformist behavior: that and the clarity with which the rules communicate, the integrity of the process by which these rules were made and are applied, their venerable pedigree and conceptual coherence." (Franck, 1990, p. 38)

Ironically, the pragmatic desire for international acceptance seems to encourage deception among image-conscious and intervention-wary member-states. In a terse explanation of international leaders' use of deception, the renowned realist John Mearsheimer concludes that, "leaders tell liberal lies to gain legitimacy abroad," and that their domestic constituencies are normally eager to accept a narrative that supports their norm-abiding national self-image (Mearsheimer, 2011, p. 80-81). Mearsheimer provides dozens of examples of these conditions. His examples range from the banal concealment of threatening military advantages (such as the Soviet development of a biological warfare capability in secret to avoid condemnation after signing the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention), to the tactically understandable concealment of aggressive intentions (such as Vice President Nixon's concealment of plans against Cuba during the 1960 presidential campaign to avoid domestic and UN wrath), and on to a category of deception that peculiarly enables leaders to circumnavigate international organizations ' *jus ad bellum* norms: the case of a leader giving another country a cause to attack his own state.

Mearsheimer (2011) uses the case of the run-up to the 1870 Franco-Prussian War as an example of a leader deceptively provoking another state into attacking his own. In this case, the Prussian Chancellor sought the unification of Germany, and decided that provoking French aggression against Germany would do the trick. The Chancellor attempted to have a Prussian prince take the throne in Spain, causing great anxiety in France. The coronation did not happen, but the French demanded that Prussia would never again try such a threatening tactic. The Chancellor then doctored a letter from Kaiser Wilhelm I to Napoleon III, in which the Kaiser originally agreed to negotiations on the topic, to instead read as a complete and final rejection of French demands. Napoleon III declared war against Prussia soon after reading the letter.

Strategic provocation is a useful term for describing the machinations leading to the Franco-Prussian War, and the similar preludes to many wars before and after. Strategic provocation can be reductively defined as ***the use of deceptive tactics to instigate violence against one's own state***.[i] As the cases in this study will demonstrate, strategic provocation is almost always used to justify planned violence that would have been unpalatable to domestic

and international audiences without the seemingly aggressive actions of the (deceptively provoked) enemy. Its frequent use throughout history by resolute leaders invites a realist's interpretation of the means of warfare. Furthermore, rare cases of leaders who seek justification to initiate offensive actions in the hopes of preventing or limiting war have also required deception. Leaders use strategic provocation when they know their violent interests do not conform to domestic constituencies' or international organizations ' norms, but want to initiate violence anyway.

Strategic provocation enables a state leader to claim the right of self-defense, a basic conceit of the United Nations Charter. The Charter's Article 51 states, "Nothing in the present Chapter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a member of the UN." The moral high ground of self-defense has historically encouraged forgiveness for even the most violent counterattack, and clears the way for the expansion of warfare. While the deception of strategic provocation typically does not outlast the first days of its ensuing warfare, it is normally enough to reconfirm the beliefs of those who were already in favor of violence – that is, the very people who would participate in the violence.

A leader's personal rationalization of strategic provocation – entailing the deceit of a leader's own nation and often the sacrifice of its soldiers and civilians – is not obvious (who knows what they're *really* thinking?), but may be anecdotally explained by the strong self-determinism expected of, or self-imposed in, some positions of power. In defending the unpopular war with Vietnam (a war justified in part by misconstrued reports of an attack on the *USS Maddox* in the Gulf of Tonkin (Morris, 2003)), President Richard Nixon was resistant to popular protests, explaining in a letter to a Georgetown University student that "To listen to public opinion is one thing; to be swayed by public demonstration is another" (Free, 1996, p. 105-106).

Normally though, in instigating a war, a leader is manifesting the existing "war fantasy" of his constituency. To generate a popular war, there must exist a "perception of internal unity" against the enemy. There must also be a genuine feeling of victimization among the leadership. For example, on the eve of war, leaders, like their people, acutely complain of victimization by their enemies (Blainey, 1988, pp. 130-132). In his thoughtful study of how we construct our political enemies, the scholar Murray Edelman tersely summed up this human condition:

> "The belief that others are evil, even if it seems unwarranted to historians, is not to be understood as arbitrary, as accidental, or as a sign of inherent irrationality or

> immorality. In conducive social situations anyone can be defined as an enemy or categorize others that way for reasons that have nothing to do with the actions of the people who are labeled. Evil is banal because human beings are placed in situations in which many will predictably yield to the temptation to justify themselves by blaming others, and, sometimes, to hunt, torture or kill them." (Edelman, 1988, p. 89)

To some degree, a leader must believe in what he is telling his people, and to a great degree what he is saying is a reflection of what he assumes his audience will absorb and act upon. The two sides mutually develop a narrative against the enemy. In successful narratives of this kind, the leader exhumes the fears and anxieties of his constituency, and the constituency echoes and boosts the leader's rhetorical devices. The leader refines existing stereotypes, creating enemy caricatures, and the constituency then uses those caricatures among themselves as a common reductive vocabulary to express their fears, and increasingly condemn the enemy. (Lippmann, 1922, p. 155-158; Le Bon, 1896, p. 72-81)

II. Ten Steps to Provoke the Enemy

For the theory and practice of conflict resolution, the phenomenon of strategic provocation presents an opportunity to apply frameworks such as critical narrative theory and narrative mediation in the international political context (Cobb, 2013; Winslade & Monk, 2008). Strategic provocation is foremost an effort to develop strong narratives that compel us to war, and conflict resolution practitioners may be able to clearly identify an emerging provocation narrative and intervene against its most compelling narrative aspects, thereby preventing conflict.

Ten major tactics appear to have contributed to known provocation operations, based on a review of eight cases (see sections IV and V, below). While each of the 10 tactics is not uniformly applied, the suite's consistent use in many operations provides a pattern that can be used by observers to discover impending or past operations.

Popular narrative development underlies and impels all national movements. Narratives in this context are "a communicative tool through which political actors – usually elites – attempt to give determined meaning to past, present and future in order to achieve political objectives" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Rosell, 2012). The culmination of a strategic provocation operation invariably reflects a narrative of victimhood: *we are the victims of the enemy's unforgivable atrocities*. Probably the most popularly known of these is Adolf Hitler's complaints about the terms of the Versailles Treaty, which stripped Germany

of significant land rights. Hitler would portray Germany as a victim, and eventually invade a previously German-occupied area of Poland, for example, on the pretense of self-defense. Hitler's narrative efforts are illustrative of the important point that although a state leader may play into the narrative for his own benefit, the state leader typically genuinely believes in some level of the narrative (Edelman, 1988, p. 57-60; Farwell, 2012, p. 107-114). As Blainey explains in *The Causes of War*, on the eve of war all parties have an acute sense of victimhood (1988, p. 130-132). The narrative of victimhood is historically important, since such narratives have often served as intractable arguments for purported victims' violent actions in self-declared defense. A self-proclaimed victim can gain an unquestionable moral standing. (Enns, 2012) Nonetheless, leaders do consciously attempt to develop determinative narratives from scratch, of which the development of a reformative "National Strategic Narrative" in 2011 is a recent example (Porter & Mykleby, 2011).

Impossible demands are universal among known strategic provocation operations. These demands, when unmet, provide the fodder an aggressor needs to further develop his self-victimizing narrative domestically, and to develop his official *casus belli* among the international community. For example, when the US-sympathetic residents of West Florida formed a delegation in 1810 and then demanded the right to "act in all cases of national concern which relate to this province" from the Spanish, the residents were guided by an agent of US President James Madison, who was attempting to instigate a violent reaction from the Spanish (Cox, 1918, p. 346). Russia's 2014 activities in Crimea closely repeat this pattern.

Military/political "noise" provides cover for potentially lethal operations in support of strategic provocation. This can take the form of cross-border air sorties, close littoral naval patrols, near-border foot patrols, ineffectual and random artillery fire, and more. Persistent and unattributable artillery fire along a border lulls and confuses observers, providing an opportunity for an aggressor to conduct a provocative artillery attack and then blame it on the enemy. This was the case in November 1939 along the Finnish border with the Soviet Union before the Soviets bombed their own border patrol station in Mainila, Finland, and then blamed the Finns.

Narrative escalation is identifiable as a departure from the chronic villainization of an enemy in support of the popular narrative, to more acute warnings of the enemy's attack plans or explanations of the death-worthiness of the enemy (Hedges, 2002). The trajectory of the Hutu atrocities against Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994 is illustrative of narrative escalation. In this case, the Hutu villainization of the Tutsis simmered for years, over time even inuring

some Tutsis to the drubbing. As the situation progressed, the anti-Tutsi media increasingly expounded on the expendability of the Tutsis, with magazines like *La Medaille Nyiramcibiri* publishing titles as incendiary as “By the way, the Tutsi race could be extinguished” in February 1994 (Prunier, 1997, p. 222).

Intentional personnel sacrifice is a frequent component of strategic provocation. Whereas a classic show of force between two states could result in accidental deaths, in the case of strategic provocation the deaths of an aggressor’s own personnel are a core tactic of the provocation. The original aggressor either attacks his own personnel, as in the case of the Soviets shelling their own border station in Finland in 1939, or ensures that his own personnel are attacked by the enemy. The latter case is exemplified by the initiation of the War with Mexico, when US General Zachary Taylor moved his troops from Corpus Christi into the contested Nueces Strip border area, with the intent of drawing an attack by the Mexicans. The attack would be used by the expansionist president James Polk to justify the war.

Cross-border lures are used in the context of strategic provocation and work especially well in conditions of border uncertainty. An aggressor may reveal an apparent imminent threat to the enemy to trigger an attack on himself. This was the case in Georgia in 2008, when the Ossetians, under Russian control, used a massive troop build-up and artillery fire to provoke the Georgians into crossing into Ossetia.

Atrocity allegation is often used in the eight cases in this study as a culminating component of a narrative escalation – the final immoral straw that breaks the camel’s back – to justify an attack. This is perfectly exemplified by the assassination of Rwanda’s President Habyarimana in 1994. Hutus had been prepared by a strong anti-Tutsi narrative (and actual Tutsi violence against Hutus) that would make Tutsi culpability completely believable to the Hutus. When Habyarimana’s plane was shot down – reportedly by Hutus within Habyarimana’s own inner circle – Tutsi blame followed almost immediately, triggering their mass murder.

Rapid condemnation is used by leaders immediately after a strategic provocation operation to ensure their narrative dominates the news of the day. The leader attempts to rhetorically overwhelm the enemy’s version of events and to establish moral superiority. The day after Adolf Hitler successfully staged a Polish attack on a German radio tower in Gleiwitz, and staged a separate Polish attack on his own troops nearby, he used the incidents in his 1 September 1939 declaration of war against Poland as proof of treaty-invalidating, reprehensible Polish provocations along the border.

Pre-positioned response force presence is a good indication of the intent and plans of the aggressor. While the presence of troops that would be used in concert with strategic provocation operations may be indiscernible from troops that would be "naturally" present for defensive operations, when other signs of strategic provocation are evident, the presence of overwhelming force is useful confirmation of an aggressor's actual plans. The Russian pre-positioning of 40,000 troops in Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008 – far outnumbering Georgia's forces – might have been a clear indication in the context of provocative Russian statements, that they meant business.

Rapid post-condemnation violence is used to avoid thorough scrutiny of events preceding the violence, and is used for the usual military goals of surprise and overwhelming violence. In 1801, President Thomas Jefferson issued secret orders (against the wishes of the Congress) encouraging an engagement and fully committing the US Navy against the Barbary pirates if the Navy should be attacked. This was in part to ensure their success against a notorious enemy, but also to ensure the compliance of the US Congress after the fact.

These ten tactics are useful predictive indicators of an impending strategic provocation operation, but an observer would be forgiven for failing to raise the alarm, even after putting the pieces together. "Evidence-based scientism" may be more mythical than scientists would have us believe, resulting in unreliable systems of prediction (Silber, Zahn and Jones, 2012). *Overcoming disbelief* in the violent proclivities of their fellow man is a common weakness among observers. A 1981 assessment of 93 uses of strategic deception in 20th century wars revealed that 78 percent included some form of warning, yet surprise was still achieved in 93 percent of the wars (Sherman & Whaley, 1981). While many observers may see a war coming, they are hesitant to call an aggressor's bluff, and perhaps reticent to wade into the domestic political swamp that such a warning would entail.

III. Four Key Enablers of Provocation Operations

The eight cases of strategic provocation in this study indicate that beneath the tactical dynamics of strategic provocation lie at least four key "organic" enablers. These enablers may not be absolutely necessary for the success of provocation operations, but their presence seems universal among historic cases. The enablers typically predicate the intentions and plans of a state leader, and have "naturally" resonated among a constituency for some time – they are the uncontrolled zeitgeist of the masses. While the enablers exist independently of a

leader's intentions and will, each enabler traditionally has served as a key focus of leaders' provocation narratives, and the enablers and the narrative mutually reinforce one another.

Expansionism, **high ethnic tension**, **border or sovereignty ambiguity**, and **media accord** are the four enablers of strategic provocation. They act in unison or independently. Constituencies may be conscious of their effects, and may even resist their insidious charms, but as the crescendo toward war escalates, the enablers are inescapable topics of news reports, social media, advertisement and art – and their effects are multiplied by social conversation, whether positive or negative. As Chris Hedges eloquently put it in *War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning*, in its run-up, war "…is peddled by mythmakers, historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state – all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life, and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty" (2002, p. 162).

The 1898 Spanish-American War provides a fairly straightforward example of these enablers at play.[ii] US sentiment against imperialism was strong in the late 19th century, as was US fear of Spanish control of nearby land – and ironically, so was the United States' own desire for geographic expansion. As Spain suppressed guerilla insurrection in Cuba in the 1890s, the US people were strongly predisposed in favor of the Cuban guerillas. The yellow journalism of newspaper men Pulitzer and Hearst reinforced and strengthened the US predisposition (Manning and Wyatt, 2011, p. 386-387). When the *USS Maine* exploded in the Havana harbor (either by sabotage or by accident – the jury is still out, but it does not matter for our purposes) on 15 February 1898, the US people were highly susceptible to stories in Pulitzer's and Hearst's newspapers that described the explosion as a Spanish attack. The US Senate, led in part by the rhetoric of Senator Redfield Proctor, declared war against Spain in April 1898.

The concept of underlying enablers of strategic provocation reflects the findings of the social philosopher Jacques Ellul, who in 1965 formed an outline of the conditions for initiating mass movements. Ellul (1965) called such underlying enablers "sociological propaganda," and explained that "existing economic, political and sociological factors progressively allow an ideology to penetrate individuals or masses" (Ellul, 1965, p. 63). He built upon the foundation set by his scholarly predecessor Gustave Le Bon, who described generally analogous "remote" factors of mass opinion (Le Bon, 2002, p. 43-60). Both of whom described systems of diffuse and spontaneous factors that are self-inculcated by the masses through their normal communication and interaction.

A state leader would invariably fail by attempting to counter the current sociological propaganda of his countrymen; instead, successful propagandists identify the focus of current sociological propaganda and then train their ideological efforts on very slightly steering that focus, usually by offering a solution to an acute psychological or economic need (Lippmann, 1922, p. 150-158). Such efforts should be indistinguishable from the existing milieu. Ellul (1965) highlights the practical use of "vertical" and "horizontal" propaganda toward that end. Vertical propaganda is conducted from the top down, by leaders broadcasting and integrating their ideology. Horizontal propaganda is conducted within groups and societies, where low-level leaders present an ideology and the group members then reinforce the leaders' messages to each other, willfully or subconsciously (Ellul, 1965, p. 71-84).

IV. Three US Uses of Strategic Provocation

The newly independent Americans used strategic provocation to their own benefit consistently over the country's first few centuries. It would take considerable staging to goad the isolationists of post-Revolution America into renewed warfare, but the expansionist resolve of US presidents was strong. The following three cases demonstrate US use of strategic provocation, revealing many of its basic principles and contributing to our understanding of its narrative indicators and other indicators.

Florida, 1810

Emerging from its Revolution, the US popularly felt it should shake off the British, French and Spanish presence to the west and south. President James Madison was among the most ardent American expansionists. His abiding interest in taking Florida was aided by popular belief that its unguarded borders encouraged uncertainty and insecurity that benefited troublesome Spain and France.

His efforts to take West Florida in 1810 included a well-orchestrated, yet little known, provocation of Florida's Spanish administrators. West Florida's residents included a strong contingent of slaveholders sympathetic with America. They often stood in opposition to their negligent Spanish lords, whose governance and institutions were underfunded and logistically weak. Recognizing an opportunity, Madison sent an agent – Colonel William Wykoff of the New Orleans Territory militia – to initiate a narrative that would be sold as a justified rebellion to most onlookers.

The plan was laid out in a letter from the Governor of the New Orleans Territory to Colonel Wykoff on 14 June 1810. Wykoff was to form a "convention of delegates" among

the American sympathizers in Baton Rouge. This peacefully elected convention would lend legitimacy to American sympathizers' demands of the Spanish – demands that would be purposefully gauged to inflame tensions. Wykoff succeeded in establishing the convention, even receiving the permission of the local Spanish authority, and it immediately began making impossible demands such as increased protection from invasive French neighbors. More provocatively, the convention claimed it was "legally constituted to act in all cases of national concern which relate to this province," essentially usurping the local Spanish government's authority(Cox, 1918, p. 348).

When eventually the convention's demands became too great, the local Spanish authority appealed for troops in a letter to the Governor, but the convention intercepted the letter. Now ostensibly justified by the Spanish authority's threat of violence, eighty rebels stormed the dilapidated Spanish fortress in Baton Rouge on 23 September 1810, killing two Spaniards and establishing a permanent presence. Soon afterward, they issued an Act of Independence that was transmitted to Washington on 3 October 1810. President Madison then issued a proclamation for seizure of West Florida and covered his tracks by withholding his related correspondence from publication in *Niles's Weekly Register,* the publication of record at the time (Smith, 1983, pp. 58-67).

Two years later, Madison would continue the effort, this time in East Florida. With the personal authority of a secret act of Congress, Madison's agent and former governor of Georgia, General George Mathews, worked quietly to establish a ragtag "patriot army" and attempted to establish political legitimacy around Saint Augustine (Smith, p. 114-117; 157-158). When Mathews received news in March 1812 that the British would imminently arrive to reinforce the Spanish garrison there, he deemed it an act of conquest by a foreign power, justifying his "patriot army's" action against the Spanish. He quickly claimed "local authority" based on the nine landowners in his little army and published an impromptu manifesto declaring the East Florida Republic and offering its territory to the US (Smith, p. 176-181).

Mathews then began his rebellion. His army, aided by gunboats from Georgia, approached the Spanish fort at Fernandina where Mathews claimed US legitimacy in *defending* Fernandina. However, neither side would fire first. Mathews had to maintain the legitimacy of his defensive narrative. Realizing their numerical disadvantage, the nine Spanish soldiers manning the Fernandina fort eventually gave up without a fight. Mathews made plans to take Saint Augustine, to concretize his victory. While some newspapers hailed the legitimate accession of Florida, other anti-Administration papers described confusing or

illegal circumstances of the events (Smith, pp. 221-223). In reaction to the poor press and pressure from Britain and France, the Administration quickly disavowed Mathews, but also quietly reinforced East Florida's US troop presence. The US claim to East Florida was upheld, at least for a while, by the passivity of its enemies and its legitimizing public statements.

Mexico, 1845

The most storied of all early American provocations is the prelude to the 1846 War with Mexico. By the 1840s, most citizens had embraced the concept of expansionism under the banner of Manifest Destiny and the nation was hotly debating the morality and economics of slavery (Price, 1967; Greenberg, 2012). Democrats like President James K. Polk saw strategic opportunity in the annexation of Texas and California as a gain against restive Mexico; more widely, Texans' tragic defeat at the Alamo was eating at US pride. Friends in Polk’s own party, and opponents in the Whig Party, saw Texas as a balance against the strengthening anti-slavery movement. War with Mexico was potentially a benefit to both parties.

Polk's effort to annex Texas in 1845 – often referred to as the Stockton Affair – is unusually well documented, partly because the press was used extraordinarily well to foment a narrative of fear among Texans of the potential for a Mexican invasion, and to convince them that they should join the United States. Notably, the *New Orleans Republican* newspaper published an anonymous letter in June 1845 – most likely initiated by Commodore Robert Stockton, who was actively attempting to manufacture a war with Mexico in collusion with Polk and General Sherman – bluntly claiming that unnamed Texas officials said Mexico planned to invade the territory east of the Rio Grande (Merry, 2009, pp. 155-156). Stockton and Sherman controlled a force of 3,000 men and a small naval presence, which maneuvered in the sweltering and thorny area to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation to the Texans, and to potentially enforce their will against the Mexicans. Newspapers were littered with updates on the progress of the force, and both sides of the border took note. Stockton used the stories of Mexican aggression – that *he* had planted or amplified – to justify his own buildup of troops along the border (Price, 1967, p. 124-125). He was instigating a Mexican attack. However, by 16 June 1845, Mexico acquiesced to the United States’ show of force and Texas voted for annexation.

President Polk then made three attempts between 1845-1846 to provoke Mexico into attacking the US with the goal of eventually forcing them to cede their own land and give up

California (Greenberg, 2012, p. 76-79). The first attempt was a march of 4,000 soldiers under General Zachary Taylor to Corpus Christi, where it was expected that Mexico would try to repel their seemingly imminent invasion, but the Mexicans did not take the bait. The second attempt was Polk's appointment of Congressman John Slidell to a diplomatic mission in Mexico, where he was to present an impossible demand for the sale of California to the US – a demand that Polk felt was sure to incense the Mexicans. However, the Mexicans rejected the appointment of Slidell on the grounds that his presence in Mexico would have signaled an end to diplomatic disfavor between the two countries. The third and successful attempt was General Taylor's March 1846 incursion from Corpus Christi into the Nueces Strip – an area considered Mexican territory by everyone concerned, except those in Polk's expansionist party.

General Taylor's march into the Nueces Strip halted at the port town of Matamoros below the Rio Grande, where he placed cannons and men in visible defensive positions, and awaited a Mexican attack (Winders, 1997). Within two weeks, on 24 April 1846, a Mexican cavalry detachment approached the town and Taylor sent a squadron to meet them. Eleven Americans were killed in the short engagement. Polk then had ample pretense for his war, and upon receiving news a few weeks later, lambasted Mexico for its attack on US sovereign territory, and declared war. Kentucky Congressman Garrett Davis publicly chastised Polk for his false claim of the Nueces Strip, and newspapers openly recognized the scam that had been perpetrated by the President, but Polk's dogged commitment and the greater public's fervor against Mexico ultimately impelled the US into a vicious war (Greenberg, p. 76-79).

The Barbary Coast, 1801

It would be difficult to find an enemy more ghastly to Europeans and Americans than the North African "Barbary" pirates of the 17th – 19th centuries. By one estimate the pirates managed to capture more than a million Christians during seaborne raids throughout the Mediterranean, but also as far away as Iceland and South America (Davis, 2011). The "white slaves" were put to work throughout North Africa or used as commodities for trade. Sailors and coast dwellers told frightful stories of enslavement by the pirates, and for centuries accounts from escaped slaves were turned into best-selling books in Europe and abroad. The most colorful reading came from Englishman Thomas Pellow, who lived as a slave among the pirates in Morocco for 23 years, and returned with a harrowing description of the conditions:

> "…many a poor fellow worked under the stimulus of the stick until he fell down, and was carried off to die. They were beaten on the slightest provocation or out of mere wantonness, and the most insulting epithets hurled at the poor wretches, in any language of which the drivers happened to have picked up a few words. The daily toil over, they were housed in damp underground cellars, or "Matamoras," or in open sheds exposed to the rain or snow. […] To sustain a life of such unending toil the captives were fed very sparingly on the worst of food. (Pellow, 1739, p. 19; 21) […] [The Moroccan sultan] had many despatched, by having their heads cut off, or by being strangled, others by tossing [tossing a man far into the air so he would break his neck upon landing], for which he had several very dexterous executioners always ready at hand...". (Pellow, p. 62-64)

By 1798, a book on the treatment of American prisoners was popularized for the American audience by former slave John Foss, under the auspices of the US Congress (Foss, 1798). The well-read Thomas Jefferson no doubt knew of Foss's accounts, but beyond the stories there lay the more pressing fact that America's coffers were being depleted by the pirates' frequent demands for ransom and regular tribute. In his time as America's representative to France, Jefferson had already made up his mind to solve the problem by force. In 1784, he had asked James Monroe, "Would it not be better to offer them an equal treaty. If they refuse, why not go to war with them?" (Jefferson, 1784). By the time of Jefferson's presidency, the pirates forced his hand.

In considering a violent and lasting response to the pirates, Jefferson had the sympathy of the American people. The focus of his persuasion, instead, would be on the US Congress, who – just after the US revolution against the autocracy of the British crown – demanded the right to approve the President's war powers. Jefferson's goal was to overcome hesitation to use US naval forces in a foreign fight when the main focus of the nation was on westward expansion. He had long-held the belief that the pirates should be defeated through warfare, and that the habit of tributes (payoffs to the pirates) should come to an end. He also conveyed some trepidation about a cultural chasm between the pirates and the Americans, after a 1785 meeting with the Tripolian envoy, who explained the pirates' justification:

> "It was written in their Koran, that all nations which had not acknowledged the Prophet were sinners, whom it was the right and duty of the faithful to plunder and enslave; and that every mussulman who was slain in this warfare was sure to go to paradise." (Jefferson Papers, 1786)

In 1801 he sent the US Navy to the Mediterranean to attract an attack and thereby enable a justified counterattack. He claimed to Congress that his actions were entirely defensive in nature (and he could have cited the recent Barbary declaration of war as justification for any act) by explaining to them that offensive operations were "unauthorized by the Constitution, without the sanction of Congress, to go beyond the line of defense," but his actual orders to the Navy were entirely offensive in nature. The Secretary of the Navy ordered Commodore Richard Dale to provide a target for the pirates and then to "chastise their insolence," by "sinking, burning or destroying their ships and vessels wherever you shall find them" (Allen, 1905, p. 92-93).

Jefferson's intrigue worked. On 1 August 1801, the Tripolitan warship *Tripoli* attacked the *USS Enterprise* while the *Enterprise* was on a resupply mission in the Mediterranean. The *Tripoli* was soundly defeated by the Americans and the pirates drifted back to port under a single torn sail. The captain was stripped, covered in sheep entrails and paraded through town before having his feet *bastinadoed* (beaten with a stick – a favorite Barbary torture). Gleeful tales of the victory were propagated in Washington in plays and newspaper stories, and the American public emotionally committed itself to the effort. Jefferson thus initiated four years of war with the pirates.

V. Five Foreign Uses of Strategic Provocation

Provocative Russian operations in Ukraine in early 2014 are a reminder of the concept's consistent role in international politics and warfare, and the universal appeal of certain underlying rhetorical devices. In this case, Russia made an ethnic claim to an area, publicly inflated threats to its countrymen abroad, encroached upon a sovereign territory under the banner of liberation, boosted a non-representative minority in positions of power, and demanded a referendum for secession. It also feigned attacks on various Ukrainian military posts, presumably to provoke a Ukrainian counterattack that would forgive greater Russian violence (Sonne and Cullison, 2014**;** Miller et al, 2015, p. 6-8).

Russian actions in Ukraine in 2014 closely resemble those of the US in Florida in 1810. It would seem as if Vladimir Putin read James Madison's secret journals before sending orders to his own generals. Comparing US and foreign uses of strategic provocation is not unfair. There are common elements – especially expansionism – among all the cases. The US used strategic provocation to expand geographically to its western shore, but its intentional use of provocation basically ends there. In contrast, foreign use of strategic provocation has routinely been impelled by an underlying inter-ethnic dissonance that

superimposes geography, as indicated in the five cases below. Closely tracking the progression of each case will contribute to an understanding of the narrative dimensions of strategic provocation.

Poland, 1939

As a Major under the Nazi Sicherheitsdienst (chief security officer), Alfred Naujocks spied on his own people and took advantage of bureaucratic authority beyond his grade. In Gunter Peis's mealy-mouthed post-war book capitalizing on Naujocks' "adventures," Peis could muster only obtuse characterizations like, "The plan for the extermination of the European Jews [...] was not one that greatly appealed to him, though not through any moral objection" and the biographer described him as thuggish and dumb (Peis, 1962, p. vii, 94). But those were the characteristics that made him suitable for the operation the Nazi leadership had in mind in 1939 (Peis, 1962).

As Adolf Hitler planned his blitzkrieg against Poland, his senior leaders conceived a plan to publicly justify the Nazi invasion to their German constituency. Called Operation Himmler, the idea was for Naujocks to lead a team of seven Nazis, dressed in Polish Army uniforms, to temporarily take over a radio station in the German border town of Gleiwitz, where they would broadcast a proclamation of Polish possession of the town and call for resistance against the Nazis. The message would be rebroadcast across Germany's radio network. A separate team would leave behind one bullet-pocked body – the body of an actual Polish resistance fighter from a Jewish prison – as irrefutable physical evidence of the Poles' culpability (this sub-plan was called Operation Konserve, a macabre reference to keeping the body pliant until its use).

The strongest message of the broadcast would be that the Poles had invaded Nazi land. It would amplify Hitler's consistent rhetoric against the humiliating terms of the Versailles Treaty, which according to him had robbed the German people of their rightful land holdings, especially the port city of Danzig. The contested Polish Corridor was already the site of frequent skirmishes – a context that would make the Gleiwitz operation seem militarily realistic. In a separate but related operation in the Corridor, around the same time as the Gleiwitz operation, the Nazis would stage an invasion by a fake company-sized Polish unit against one of their own units, and litter the scene with similarly bullet-pocked Polish corpses (Nuremberg Trials Exhibit USA-482, 1945).

Naujocks pulled off his operation, mostly. He launched the attack at dusk on 31 August 1939, easily making his way into the radio studio with his men. Shortly after 7:30

p.m. his team broadcasted their message, but failed to link their radio to the landline that would have enabled Berlin to rebroadcast the message to all of Germany. Only the inhabitants of Gleiwitz heard the actual message, and its text seems to have been lost in the smoke of World War II. Nonetheless, the Germans capitalized on the event by immediately publishing a report in the Nazi Party's *Volkischer Beobachter* newspaper, titled "Raiders Attack Radio Gleiwitz," writing that "[the Poles] stated that the town and the radio station were in Polish hands, and concluded with disgraceful abuse of Germany and spoke of a 'Polish Breslau' and a 'Polish Danzig'" (Peis, p. 101-110; Nuremberg Trials Exhibit USA-482).

Hitler himself referred to the incident in his furious ultimatum on 1 September 1939, condemning the Poles for their "provocations" of Germany within their shared Corridor. It is likely impossible to measure the impact of the Gleiwitz operation with the German audience amid the other rhetorical noise before the invasion, but Hitler's inclusion of it in his ultimatum is a good indication of his audience's susceptibility to the narrative. The Nazis' well-prepared blitzkrieg commenced with this speech.

Finland, 1939

In his reaction to Germany's 1939 expansion, Soviet Premier Josef Stalin would use tactics similar to his enemy Hitler's provocation at Gleiwitz to justify his own state's land acquisitions. As Germany boldly acquired *Lebensraum* (living space) in Poland in September 1939, Russia sought Finland as an ally against Germany, and Finland's land as a buffer before Leningrad. The Finns however, showed no love for the Soviet Union – knowing that alliance would actually mean complete obsequiousness to Stalin. In late September the Soviets seized nearby Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as a buffer zone against Germany, and then in October Stalin offered to trade a scrap of northern tundra for Finland's important Karelian Isthmus and other land. The Finns refused.

By November both sides had dug in. The Finns literally dug fighting trenches along the Mannerheim line, and the Soviets prepared an enormous invasion force. The tense dynamics of a seemingly impending border war provided ample confusion to obscure the operation that Stalin would enact. It should not be especially surprising that Stalin planned to kill some of his own troops to justify an invasion – in 1939 Stalin was at the tail end of purging the ranks of his own army, executing around 50 percent of his officers after some demonstrated unwillingness to fight in his declared war.

On 26 November, after the Soviets had amassed ample troops for their invasion of Finland, an explosion occurred in the border town of Mainila. Radio Moscow reports soon claimed that four Soviet border station troops were killed in an artillery shelling, and that the Finns had initiated hostilities. The Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov quickly responded to the incident by demanding an apology from the Finns, describing the event as a "provocation" just as Hitler had described the Gleiwitz incident in his own ultimatum, and later tabling well-prepared terms – terms that the Finns rejected (Kirja, 1940). The Finns further protested the Soviet claim of the attack at Mainila. The Soviets quickly ended the talks without follow-on options, and used the Finns' rejection as an excuse to release themselves from the terms of an existing non-aggression pact. Four days later, the Winter War began, initially resulting in heroic victories for the outnumbered Finns, but eventually destroying the Finnish army.

The British War Cabinet issued the following statement:

> "Interest has centred on the Soviet-Finnish dispute, which flared up afresh as the result of an alleged incident on 26th November, when seven Finnish shells were said to have fallen among a party of Soviet troops; a charge which the Finnish authorities deny as they say that no Finnish artillery was within 20 km of the frontier. The Soviet Government alleges that the incident took place at 3:45 pm on Sunday, but they had their official protest ready to hand to the Finnish ambassador at 8:30 pm on the same night, and it seems highly probable that the incident had been foreseen. The subsequent breaking off of the diplomatic relations shows that the Soviet is determined to force the pace and at least to subject Finland to the maximum degree of intimidation which she can exert" (British War Cabinet, 1939).

The League of Nations also found the Soviets to blame for the attack, eventually rejecting the Soviets from the League, but it would be decades before the Soviets would fess up. Putin eventually admitted Soviet culpability in a 2013 statement to historians in Moscow (Associated Press, 2013).

Kosovo, 1987

Yugoslavia's 1974 constitution granting greater independence to ethnic republics, and the end of Josip Broz Tito's central control in 1980, weakened the Communist Party's power over Yugoslavia. This resulted in a political vacuum that would be filled by President Slobodan Milosevic's late-1980s platform of Serbian victimhood and result in atrocities against non-Serbs. Milosevic would use existing Serbian nationalist narratives – and a supportive and centralized Serbian press – to build a case that the Serbs must take back

breakaway areas like Kosovo and assert their righteous will on other ethnicities. His goal was to reconsolidate power. Some of Milosevic's provocations against the Albanian Kosovars were preplanned, while others were opportunistic; in all cases he leveraged Serbian sentiment expertly toward his goal of retaking Kosovo (Malcolm, 1999, p. 314-320; 337-340).

Similar to Hitler's pre-1939 complaints about the Versailles Treaty's land restrictions, Milosevic in the late 1980s persistently complained that Albanian Kosovars had usurped his Serbian people's rightful land and possessions in Kosovo. This Serbian victimhood narrative set the stage for additional media efforts to prompt violence or justify retribution. Central to his rhetoric, Milosevic consistently echoed a September 1986 Memorandum by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU), which was initially leaked to the Belgrade newspaper *Vecernje Novosti* and then spread like wildfire. The Memorandum decried Albanian Kosovar repression of Serbs in Kosovo and called for Serbian empowerment there. In particular, during a dramatic 25 April 1987 public protest – whose organizers provided a truck full of stones to Serbian participants – in ethnically charged Kosovo Polje, Milosevic echoed the sentiment of the Memorandum when he famously exclaimed to the protestors, "They will never beat us again!" This exclamation seems to have sealed Milosevic's role as "protector of the Serbian nation." The Memorandum carried particular weight based on its academic authorship; however, two of its authors later revealed that the Communist Committee had approved 30 pages of it (Mertus, 1999, p. 140-143).

With sporadic Serb-versus-Albanian violence flaring in Kosovo by mid-1987, both audiences were susceptible to ethnic blamegaming (Judah, 2000). Each side maintained strong prejudices against the other, going back hundreds of years. These prejudices were frequently manipulated by the Communist party, which was expert at organizing mass protests - sometimes paying or coercing participants (Judah, 2000). On 3 September 1987, when an Albanian soldier of the Yugoslav Army killed a Serb, two Bosnian Muslims, and a Croat in their barracks in Paracin, the Communist media – especially the Belgrade newspapers *Borba* and *Politika* – immediately reported a broader, purposeful Albanian Kosovar conspiracy against the unity of Yugoslavia. The killings resulted in anti-Albanian mob scenes in Kosovo, and just seven days later a Secretariat for National Defense report characterized the shooter as an Albanian nationalist. Later press stories warned of the potential for increased Albanian nationalism and crimes against Serbs. The event, and ensuing anti-Albanian sentiment, enabled Milosevic to remove unfavorable politicians at the national level, and numerous Albanian police, judges and other authorities from their local positions – a first purge of inconvenient opposition elements (Mertus, 1999, p. 155-157).

These purges continued through 1989, with the goal of diluting Kosovar power in the Yugoslav Federation. The seminal escalating event for Kosovo was Milosevic's ouster of proud Albanian Kosovar politicians Kaqusha Jashari, Sinan Hasani and Azem Vllasi in January 1989. Their replacement with Milosevic loyalists was a slap in the face for Albanian Kosovars. Almost certainly expected to provoke a reaction from Kosovo, the effort worked. More than a thousand miners from Trepca famously went on strike in February, resulting in supportive work stoppages and demonstrations throughout the region. The largest demonstration was in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and included a speech by the Slovene Communist Party leader, who announced his people's alliance with the Albanian Kosovars – an announcement that was interpreted by Milosevic's adherents and Serbian media as threatening collusion against Serbia. The announcement provided the justification Milosevic needed to act on his acquisitive plans for Kosovo, under the guise of stabilization operations. The next day, he responded, "...we are going to get all honest people in Yugoslavia to fight for peace and unity. Nothing can stop the Serb people and leadership from doing what we want. Together we will fight for unity and freedom in Kosovo" (Mertus,1999, p. 179-182).

The federal government reacted in kind, initiating "emergency measures" in Kosovo, including riot police, federal troops, curfews and administrative detention. Twenty-five Kosovar demonstrators were killed by the Serbs. Milosevic had essentially taken Kosovo (Malcolm, 1999, p. 340-345).

At least one researcher has assessed that Milosevic soon thereafter directed atrocities within Kosovo with the goal of provoking wider armed resistance by the Albanian Kosovars. Shkelzen Maliqi wrote in the *Journal of Area Studies* in 1993 that the Serbs attempted to provoke the Albanians in a number of unidentified villages (Mertus, 1999, p. 198). Milosevic might have been able to use Albanian attacks as justification for stronger military operations against Albanian ethnics. Unconfirmed reports indicate that this kind of provocation operation also occurred in the run-up to Milosevic's operations against the Croatians and Bosnians – notably at the 2 May 1991 Battle of Borovo Selo, when some Croatian policemen were allegedly mutilated to provoke ethnic retribution, and at the March 1992 so-called Sijekovac Killings of 57 Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the alleged purpose of provoking anti-Bosnian violence (Donia & Van Antwerp Fine, 1994; Cushman & Mestrovic, 1996, p. 98).

Rwanda, 1994

While most of these cases of false provocation were developed to result in near-term violent reactions by the planners' adherents, the "trigger event" assassination of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana on 6 April 1994 is unique for the immediacy and startling intensity of the inter-ethnic violence that resulted. The assassination touched off military operations, but also a civilian-against-civilian killing spree. Using the assassination as an excuse for vengeance, Habyarimana's Hutu ethnic clan killed over 800,000 Tutsis, often at close range and with the crudest of weapons (typically machetes), between 1994-1996. The personal inurement required to conduct such gruesome killings was likely the result of persistent and uninhibited anti-Tutsi narratives for years before the incident (Prunier, 1997; Hatzfield, 2003; Gourevicth, 1998).

The tension between the Hutu and Tutsi clans of Rwanda had existed long before the violence from 1994-1996. During Belgian colonial oversight from 1931 to 1994, both clans carried ethnic identity cards, which were considered necessary as a check against each side's animosity for the other. With the death of the last Tutsi king in 1959, the country fell into the hands of the Hutu majority. In 1963 the first massacre of Tutsis was carried out by the Hutus, with virtually no consequences for the Hutu attackers – a factor that would amorally liberate attackers in 1994 (Hatzfeld, 2003). In 1973, then Major Habyarimana, seized power in a coup. His dictatorship freed the Hutus to carry out intermittent attacks on Tutsis, but over the decades the Tutsis also conducted increasingly organized counterattacks, and leaders within Habyarimana's own clan were clamoring for a more absolute, violent resolution.

Anti-Tutsi rhetoric in the lead-up to Habyarimana's assassination was notoriously pervasive and apparently very effective. Anti-Tutsi rhetoric was personally ingrained in the Hutu community, but also nationally systemic (Prunier, 1997). At the national university in Butare, professors wrote "historical screeds" against the Tutsis. Magazines such as *La Medaille Nyiramcibiri* published titles like, "By the way, the Tutsi race could be extinguished" (Prunier, 1997, p. 222), National-level Radio Rwanda and the Habyarimana-owned Radio Mille Colline's infamous shock jocks, Simon Bikindi and Kantano Habimana, openly called the Tutsis "cockroaches" and demanded their destruction. Over time even some Tutsis considered the comically toned radio broadcasts to be humorous (Hatzfeld, 2003, p. 55).

While the identity of Habyarimana's assassin remains unknown, and conflicting assessments abound, three prominent researchers generally agree that the intent of the assassination was to trigger the massacre of Tutsis, and that the Hutus were well-prepared to

use their leader’s death for a moral justification of the massacre (Prunier, 1997; Hatzfield, 2003; Gourevicth, 1998). The most commonly accepted assessment is ascribed to Gerard Prunier (1997), author of *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, who chronicled the events of 1994 during the Rwandan turmoil. He claimed that the Hutus purposefully shot down their own president’s jet to instigate the interethnic fighting. Among the evidence is the Hutu leadership’s *fecit qui prodest* (the culprit is the beneficiary) motive for increased violence against the Tutsis, but also their quick reaction to the event: the plane was shot down by two missiles as it approached Kigali International Airport around 8:30 p.m. and the Hutu *Interahamwe* had set up road blocks by 9:15 p.m.; the Presidential Guard began organized killings of Tutsis the same day; and well-prepared lists of intended Tutsi victims were soon distributed (Prunier,1997, p. 222-229). If this had *not* been a well-devised operation it would have represented nothing short of a miracle in efficiency for the Rwandan military.

For the civilians who would conduct killings, narratives over the radio played a crucial influencing role. Radio Mille Colline, in particular, wasted no time in condemning the Tutsis for its owner’s death and calling on the Hutus to eradicate the Tutsi race (Montreal Institute, 1994). The broadcasts were no longer passed off as comical, but instead were “direct incitements to deliberately murder ‘to avenge the death of our President’” (Prunier,1997, p. 224). As the killings continued, the radio was used to direct killers to their specified target (Gourevitch, 1998). As one of the killers described it, “When you have been prepared the right way by the radios and the official advice, you obey more easily, even if the order is to kill your neighbors” (Hatzfeld, 2003, p. 71).

Georgia, 2008

The Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 was justified internationally by Moscow as an analogy to NATO's peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was decried as another Slobodan Milosevic, hungry to swallow up the territories of Ossetia and Abkhazia. Ossetia and Abkhazia were pitied as underdogs against a Saakashvili dictatorship. Moscow did everything it could to victimize the Ossetians and Abkhazians before its constituency and the international community, and to provoke Georgian violence against them, all the while amassing a Russian force along the border for an eventual land-grab.

At stake for Russia was geopolitical balance. In early 2008, the US supported Kosovo's declaration of independence, to Russia's chagrin. Around the same time, Georgia and the Ukraine were floating their intentions to join NATO. Both moves had the potential to

upset Russia's influence in the Caucasus, which Russia feared was being lslamicized. Russian President Vladimir Putin promised retribution: in a private discussion with Saakashvili on 17 February 2008, he reportedly said, "You know we are going to answer the West on Kosovo. And we are very sorry but you are going to be part of that answer" (Asmus, 2010, p. 105). In public, he said that the United States' recognition of Kosovo would "come back to knock them on the head" (Asmus, 2010, p. 107). There was little question about Putin's interests – just his methods.

By 2008, Georgia's tiny breakaway territories of Ossetia and Abkhazia had been conducting small-scale military operations against Georgia for years, with Russia's help, mostly in the form of ineffectual artillery fire and border skirmishes. For the Ossetians and Abkhazians, their minority Muslim ethnicity was cause for separatism; for the Russians, support for the separatists meant *control* of the separatists, with the hopes of eventual control over all of Georgia. With Kosovo's declaration of independence and news of Georgia's NATO interests, on 21 March 2008 Russia escalated by adopting a resolution to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and Ossetia, and to protect its citizens there, enabling a potential defensive *casus belli* should a cross-border war begin. On 16 April Putin formally established diplomatic ties with the two states.

Russia decided in April 2008 that it would go to war against Georgia in August, according to the independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta's* reporter Pavel Felgenhauer (Asmus, 2010, p. 169-170). In a 3 April letter to the newly liberated territories, Putin pledged his support "via means that are 'not declarative but practical'" – signaling his military support. Russia's efforts to victimize Ossetia and Abkhazia, and to justify its own war plans, also began in earnest in April. On 18 April the Ossetians falsely claimed that the Georgians were amassing troops along their border. On 20 April the Russians shot down a Georgian drone over the Abkhazia border area, and (accurately) called out the Georgians for violating UN rules against such operations. In early May the Russian defense chief claimed to NATO that he had intelligence information that Saakashvili was planning an attack. In mid-May, Russian media broadcasted claims that the Georgians were planning to attack Abkhazia. The Russians also conducted an online narrative campaign against the Georgians. Standing out as a provocation amid Russia's victimhood narrative, by August the Russians moved 40,000 troops to Ossetia and Abkhazia – far outnumbering Georgia's forces and signaling Russia's intent to conduct much larger operations than simply peacekeeping (Asmus, pp. 146-149; 165-168).

The provocative Russian troop build-up proved to the Georgians that a Russian attack was imminent. When sustained Ossetian artillery began raining down on Georgian villages and troops on 29 July 2008, the Georgian army took it as a signal of the beginning of a Russian invasion. The Georgians entered Ossetia on 7 August. Russian media leveraged the Georgian move as an attack justifying Russian peacekeeping operations. The Russians then swept the battlefield, defeating the Georgian military.

VI. More to Come from the US?

The US use of strategic provocation seems to have dropped off as its acquisitions decreased in the 19th century – when it ejected the last of its colonizers and expanded to the Pacific. Its use of strategic provocation, as an emerging and disadvantaged state, might have been due to limited strategic options – for example, the young country might have been unable to leverage economic strength to its advantage, and instead turned to less legitimate means. But the record of unfulfilled strategic provocation efforts goes on, suggesting sporadic interest in its use.

The most frequently ballyhooed example of its near-use in recent history was in 1962 during preparations for the Bay of Pigs operations by the Kennedy administration.[iii] Operation Northwoods—which was rejected by President Kennedy—among other tactics, called for the staged invasion of Florida and Washington, DC, by Cuban Communist attackers, with the intent to kill residents and thereby "...place the United States in the position of suffering justifiable grievances..." to attack Cuba (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962).

Much more recently, a year after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the US, the Defense Science Board conducted a "Summer Study on Special Operations and Joint Forces in Support of Countering Terrorism" in which it considered the utility of setting up a unit whose purpose would have been to "develop an entirely new capability to proactively, preemptively evoke responses from adversary/terrorist groups," according to the Board's own slide presentation. The project ended shortly after it received media attention. (Isenberg, 2002; Defense Science Board, 2002)

The persistent use of strategic provocation over centuries – and its apparent importance to war planners – begs the question of its likely use by the US and other states in the near term. As the US folds its tents (unhinges its connexes) in Iraq and Afghanistan, the strengthening international perception of the US as an unwelcome imperialist force places the current and future US Governments in a defensive narrative position. The US is challenged to boost its flagging relationships abroad, while pragmatically enforcing its stand on difficult

security issues that often require some level of military intervention (such as counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations). The US must convincingly demonstrate the universal righteousness of its international moves, perhaps more so than in previous generations. Strategic provocation offers an (unpalatable) opportunity for policymakers to establish the righteousness of their interventionist policies for their domestic constituencies and international critics.

This article has mostly avoided the effort by the George W. Bush administration to justify its "war of choice" against Iraq in 2003 (Haass, 2009), since it does not strictly conform to the conditions of strategic provocation. That is, the Bush administration did not trigger an attack on its own people to initiate a broader war – it simply developed an anti-Iraq victimhood narrative that compelled a generally receptive or complacent domestic US audience to war (Gellman and Pincus, 2003; Pincus, 2003; Harris Interactive, 2004). This narrative peaked with claims of an alliance between Iraq's then-leader Saddam Hussain and al-Qa'ida, which had just struck the US (Mylroie, 2001; Wall Street Journal, 2005). The Bush administration's effort illustrates the susceptibility of the US audience to such victimhood narratives. This basic susceptibility probably has not changed.

The Bush administration's Iraq effort also demonstrates the independence enjoyed by the Executive Branch – not just in recent administrations, but since President George Washington took office. As much as the president's war powers were debated before and after 2003, there was little hesitation to use them for a war whose actual dynamics were generally incomprehensible to the voting American public (Harris Interactive, 2004). John Yoo, perhaps the strongest proponent of Bush's independent use of "executive power," and a deputy assistant attorney general for the Bush administration, would later compare Bush's decision-making to that of the United States' Founding Fathers. Yoo (2009) explained that Bush was entirely justified in his generation of a war, since he was popularly elected to office and therefore expected to act upon his own principles. This view of democracy as "a collaboration of ignorant people and experts" is reflected in realist thought pieces that support a permissive environment for the use of presidential power (Schattschneider, 1975, p. xvii).

The Obama administration was elected through a "contrast marketing" narrative. The complications of President Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were an easy target for the Democratic Party, whose narrative of change implied relief from the duplicity of war. The Obama administration has generally acted on its campaign of military withdrawal, and has gone a step further by attempting to reorient its US constituency and the international audience to a new brand of America. The Obama administration has inspired a National

Strategic Narrative (Porter and Mykleby, 2011) for use at home and abroad. This strategic narrative, written largely by academics associated with the US military, attempts to reframe America's image in the world away from its interventionist legacy and toward a new image as a collaborative profit center (Porter and Mykleby, 2011). Yet, aspects of Bush-era military policies remain in place or have grown in importance during the Obama administration (Rosenberg and Shear, 2015). While it has been politically tempting for President Obama's detractors to interpret such policies as opportunistic or hypocritical, the consistent tendency of Obama's policies has been one of escape from the interventionist briar patch.

President Obama's policies appear to be in reaction to overwhelming national and international exhaustion with war. However, while the administration may normally aim to please its constituency by demonstrating its liberal responsiveness, it may also find itself confronted by surprises that necessitate preventive action (such as the rapid intensification of violent religious polarization overseas). In these hypothetical circumstances – featuring a war-weary constituency, a publicly incomprehensible strategic threat, public awareness of budget shortfalls, and ineffectual non-kinetic options – any administration would ironically be most likely to use strategic provocation to justify its unpopular intentions, despite its impulses toward peacekeeping.

VII. US Susceptibility to Future Strategic Provocation Operations

Americans often prefer to think they are immune to their leaders' political rhetoric, and to think otherwise would undermine a definitive pride of self-determinism (Boorstin, 1992). To take it a step further, to think otherwise could also undermine the popular American belief in direct democracy (actual republicanism notwithstanding) (Boorstin, 1992).

Americans loathe the effects of the media, who are routinely described as biased and suspected of having ulterior motives (Pew Research Center, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2009). But despite their skepticism of the press, Americans – like almost all other citizenries – are strongly dependent on their elites, journalists included, for the development of their political opinions (Lippmann, 1922, p. 208-213; Pew Research Center, 2011). Americans complain about the caricature and simplification of topics by journalists, but as it turns out, Americans rely heavily on those simplified concepts for the formation of their own opinions, spoken or otherwise, and when they are given the option of deeper and more specific news stories, they typically reject the option (Zaller, 2011, p. 7). Pew Center statistics indicate that the percentage of viewers of Fox, CNN and MSNBC who rated the outlets as three or four on

a four-point scale of credibility steadily dropped from 2006 to 2012, yet those same outlets' program ratings increased (Pew Research Center, 2014). Perhaps there is no social advantage for most people to gather alternative or deeper viewpoints.

It also seems that Americans' claims of political savvy are not supported by their actual knowledge of politics. The researcher George Bishop revealed the limits of American political knowledge in a noted 1984 study. In a survey he asked, "Is there any legislative bill that has come up in the House of Representatives, on which you remember how your congressman has voted in the last couple of years?" Only 12 percent could remember. When they were then asked to describe their interest in politics, 45 percent said they follow politics "only now and then" or "hardly at all." More telling, though, is that when Bishop asked a separate group the same question about their level of interest in politics *without* first asking about their congressman's voting record, just 22 percent claimed low interest in politics. (as cited in Zaller, 2011, p. 76).

In fact, a large segment of the American public appears to have no political opinions of their own at all (Zaller, 2011). A national-level study by the University of Michigan's 1956-58-60 NES Panel, in which a broad swath of Americans were asked their opinions on common political issues, revealed such instability among respondents that one researcher concluded that "large segments of the electorate […] often simply had no attitude to report" (Zaller, 2011, p. 94).

Since 1964, Pew Research Center polls have recorded consistent US public disinterest – even rejection – of foreign involvement in favor of domestic concerns: 2013 survey results show that 80 percent of Americans believe the US should concentrate on its own national problems – international affairs be damned (Pew Research Center, 2014). The public's whim, though, is betrayed by its strong desire (56 percent positive) to retain its international military superpower status, and is more remarkably demonstrated by its eagerness to confront Iran over its potential possession of nuclear weapons (64 percent would favor US military intervention if Iran gained nuclear weapons) (Pew Research Center, 2014). These conflicting opinions bode poorly for thoughtful public reactions to complicated international events, such as strategic provocation.

Many such statistical studies appear to be a continuation of studies conducted by thought leaders such as Edward Bernays in support of early 20th century efforts by US practitioners to drive the public's opinion before and during World War I. Edward Bernays was part of the effort to turn a wary US public into a pliant pro-war surge, by the authority of the president's Creel Committee. The narrative effort worked very well, by means of radio,

newspapers, posters, telegraphs and live speeches. And for the first time, he studied and categorized the vital organs of effective strategic communications (previously called propaganda) in *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (Bernays, 1923). A vocal critic, Walter Lippmann, was especially concerned by the philosophical implications for democracy of the Committee's actions, since they could potentially undermine the ability of the individual to think and vote by his or her own wits. Since Lippmann's follow-on book, *Public Opinion* (1922), researchers have been seized by the conundrum.

Lippmann in part focused his own research on rhetorical devices like the generalizations and caricatures used so frequently in strategic provocation operations to capture the imagination of "the masses," and to Lippmann, the masses were helpless against the intellectual machinations of the elite class (Lippmann, 1922). On the question of how to unite the masses against an enemy, for example, he wrote poetically, "The original pictures and words which aroused [the feeling of enmity] have not anything like the force of the feeling itself. The account of what has happened out of sight and hearing in a place where we have never been, has not and never can have, except briefly in a dream or fantasy, all the dimensions of reality. But it can arouse all, and sometimes even more emotion than the reality" (Lippmann, 1922, p. 131). To Lippmann, the people were putty in the elites' hands, and the following century's academic studies and political polls seem to confirm it.

It is comforting to imagine that "the masses" have progressed beyond Lippmann's era of strong central controls on media, and that as a result a dark veil has been lifted from their eyes. The Internet has been described as a solution to the problem, since writers' and readers' accesses and opinions should be free of state propaganda efforts (Free Press, 2016). Social media use during the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions in particular has been hailed as an example of the democratization of communications (Wolman, 2013). But while the Arab Spring was unmistakably facilitated by online communications, the genuine and "organic" social dilemmas in Tunisia and Egypt, especially, were the prime movers (Anderson, 2011). The internet was generally a delivery platform for grievances that likely would have generated strong popular sympathy regardless of the platform for their wider exposure (Public Broadcasting Service, 2011). The people did not overcome the regimes because of an internet-manufactured narrative of victimhood – they overcame the regimes because they were impassioned by genuine and inspiring acts of heroism by fellow citizens (Anderson, 2011). On the other hand, there is some recent evidence that states are taking advantage of new media for these efforts, as in the case of Russia's activities in Crimea (Darczewska, 2015).

Given these factors, it does not appear that technological progress would contribute significantly to a resolution of the problem of strategic provocation; nor does it appear that Americans' political savvy would aid them in identifying and overcoming a strategic provocation narrative. Lippmann's "masses" seem to remain, and probably are just as subject to influential sources as his contemporaries were (Lippmann, 1922).

Conclusion

This study provides a cursory examination of a problem that deserves additional scrutiny from conflict resolution practitioners and scholars, strategic communicators, military strategists, and others. The consistent application, nearly routinized progression, and violent outcomes of strategic provocation are profound, yet remain largely unanalyzed by scholars and apparently difficult to comprehend or accept for passive onlookers.

At least four new research questions emerge from the initial findings of this study:

1. What are the reliable indicators of strategic provocation that could serve as the factors for early warning of its use?
2. How can conflict resolution practitioners successfully intervene against strategic provocation when early warning is available?
3. What counter-narrative tactics or other tactics are useful against strategic provocation narratives?
4. How quickly must conflict resolution practitioners intervene against strategic provocation to be successful?

It is useful to consider these questions in the context of *potential* strategic provocation operations. Some typical conditions supporting the use of strategic provocation can currently be found in the North Korea-South Korea standoff, in the current dispute in the South China Sea and East China Sea, and in the continuing Pakistan-India border dispute. All three situations feature ambiguous geographic claims, continuous low-level military "noise," vilification of the enemy, and strong media accord.

North Korea and South Korea: Since the armistice suspending war hostilities in 1953, North Korea has engaged in varying degrees of harassment of South Korea. North Korea's November 2010 attack on a South Korean island in the Yellow Sea, its February 2013 nuclear test, and fiery rhetoric since the transition to power of young firebrand Kim Jung Un, represent an increased frequency of provocative acts (Gale, 2013). These acts also seem to demonstrate the willingness on the part of the regime to kill innocents to make a statement

(Foster, 2010). However, the track record indicates that the North Korean regime typically yields to offers of talks after their provocations - an indication that the intent of their provocations may not be to instigate a greater war, but to seek redress for perceived wrongs or to prove their righteousness to a domestic constituency. Furthermore, South Korea is apparently inured to North Korea's provocations and has dealt patiently with the North's pattern (Gale, 2013).

But despite the South's inurement, the sense of foreboding has been strong in Seoul during the North's most recent provocations. The unpredictability of the new Premier and the increasingly dire terms used (North Korea threatened to turn the South into a "sea of flames" in December 2012 (The Telegraph, 2012) probably complicate the South's strategic algebra. Just as important, the reported effectiveness of economically isolating the North may also factor in: the South must suppress the temptation to finally rout its enemy in their time of weakness. It is not beyond imagination for the South to give into its marshal impulses during a North Korean strategic provocation operation, and be drawn into to a large-scale attack ... or vice-versa.

The East China Sea and South China Sea: The East China Sea and South China Sea have been the setting for a dispute between China on one hand and primarily Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei and Malaysia on the other, for years. In the past few years China has increasingly tested its claims to islands and shoals - such as the Senkaku Islands, Scarborough Reef, and Spratly Islands - that fall within the others' documented territorial claims, through naval pressure (Dutton, 2011). At stake are territorial sovereignty, disputes over jurisdiction of waters, and proper balance of coastal-state and international rights to use the seas for military purposes (Dutton, 2011).

While scholars and international politicians debate the fine points of territorial boundaries, they may underplay the advantage of the territorial ambiguity to an opportunistic expansionist state. These complex claims, even when illustrated on the simplest map, are likely beyond comprehension for the casual observer, and enable manipulation of the facts. And as in the case of US expansion into Mexico in 1846, the ambiguity of territorial claims in the seas now could provide cover for otherwise illegal operations. China, which has the most to gain from securing the area's shipping lanes and potential resources, could be compared to Washington in the 1840s. And similar to US and Mexican harassment operations along their border, China and its adversaries have engaged in a slow tit-for-tat, with China occasionally escalating its military operations to demonstrate its seriousness - as in the case of its destruction of Philippine territorial markers in 2012 (Amurao, 2012).

The Senkaku Islands above Japan could be considered analogous to the Nueces Strip that the US claimed in Mexico in the 1840s, and their ambiguous sovereignty similarly lends itself to strategic provocation operations. Where the analogy fails is with the existence of stronger enforcement of international rules today. China would have to make a special effort to overcome the scrutiny of international observers. The recently erected Chinese air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the islands could be considered a step in that direction, whether intentional or not. The ADIZ restricts Japanese flights - including commercial flights - in the area and implies a threat to any Japanese incursions into China's territorial claim (Kazianis, 2015). This amounts to the kind of impossible demand seen as prelude to many previous strategic provocation operations. A well-used Japanese incursion - actual or fabricated - could serve as the *jus ad bellum* that China needs to escalate its operations to control the area, or "maintain its sovereignty" as China typically puts it.

India and Pakistan: It requires little creative imagination to consider near-term escalation of violence between Pakistan and India over the long-disputed Jammu and Kashmir territory. Violence in Jammu and Kashmir has been consistent and reliable since the Partition - almost comically erupting at low levels every time the states' leaders meet or come close to an amicable agreement of some sort (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2007). Although the current leaders of both states have made efforts to bridge their mountainous divide, as the Allied presence in Afghanistan abates, the reins on Pakistan's anti-Indian terrorist group Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LT) could be loosened, enabling the group to concentrate once again on claiming Jammu and Kashmir - its original *cause celebre.*

One scenario goes like this: LT has consistently called for war with India over Jammu and Kashmir, and would benefit (in political and divine terms) from instigating an attack by India. An unusually significant attack by LT in Jammu and Kashmir would almost certainly trigger an overwhelming response from India. Given the obviousness of LT's proxy relationship with Pakistan (Bajoria and Kaplan, 2011), India could legitimately blame Pakistan for the attack and reciprocate against Pakistan itself. Pakistan would almost certainly feign ignorance of LT's activities, as it has time and again (Bajoria and Kaplan, 2011), and in turn demand justice against India for any border incursion. In light of the ground forces and nuclear capabilities - and historic emotional reactivity - of both states, this scenario could escalate quickly into a major conflict, as it has in the past. Both the Pakistani and Indian constituencies are highly attuned to their own side's version of events, and highly susceptible to their own leadership's propaganda, providing a permissive environment for both sides to go "all-in."

These three situations could lend themselves well to a scholarly effort to identify indicators of strategic provocation, and to implement preventive strategies. Conflict resolution practitioners would be well positioned to conduct scenario-based strategic conversations (Schwartz, 1996) or perhaps predictive analytics to game the outcomes of these situations, and to develop potential resolutions. With any luck, the community could deaden the effects of the next use of strategic provocation.

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Footnotes:

[i] More narrowly, strategic provocation has also been called "justification of hostilities" by Richard Lebow in his 1981 book, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis*. Criminologists such as Doug Timmer and William Norman in "The Ideology of Victim Precipitation" recognize the concept of strategic provocation as "victim precipitation" or "victim provocation" – two prosecutorial explanations that imply a victim's partial responsibility for a crime.

[ii] The lead-up to the Spanish-American War does not neatly fit into the strategic provocation paradigm, since its execution was probably *opportunistic and in reaction to* the USS Maine explosion. It shares some elements of strategic provocation, though, and is used as an example here merely to illustrate the dynamics of underlying enablers. It is important, though, to confront the difficulty of discerning strategic provocation from "natural" war. The difference is *staging* – a premeditated and purposeful narrative preparation for a fake defensive war.

[iii] Conspiracy theorists unfortunately have polluted the study of strategic provocation. Some websites, such as rense.com and ratical.org claim Operation Northwoods as confirmation of their belief in an ongoing plan for a martial takeover by the US Government, even though the plan was trash-canned by its own authors over 50 years ago. Similarly, theorists consider the unseemly origins of the Vietnam War as evidence of an undefined US Government conspiracy, while its precursor – the attack on the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin – was used *opportunistically* to escalate anti-Communist war sentiment, just as the explosion of the USS Maine in Havana was used opportunistically to incite anger toward the Spanish in 1898.