

# American "Foreign Policy" in Film

## Post-World War II Identity Creation<sup>1</sup>

*George Hays II*

This article continues the author's previous examination of sub-elite identification through popular film from 'Three Incarnations of The Quiet American: Applying Campbell's "foreign policy" to Sub-Elite Identifiers.' Departing from the argument made in that work, this article examines five films ranging in content from the Korean War to Terrorism in the 1990's. By applying the same theory and methodology to a wider range of conflicts, representations of those conflicts, and time periods of production of those representations, the validity and value of the original argument is tested more thoroughly. The result of the expanded analysis is confirmation of the original findings: applying differential-identification to a sub-elite level (legitimacy makers/policy takers) in the context of an international conflict does not produce the same resultant identity as that anticipated by Campbell's application of differential-identification to the level of the political-elite (legitimacy takers/policy makers); to the contrary, the resultant differential-identity of the sub-elite level places the enemy actors as well as hero actors both within structure-America. In addition, these two component parts are not the same across time: making some structure-actors in some conflicts the enemy, while in other conflicts the same structure-actors are the hero.



*Keywords: US foreign policy after World War II, international conflict cultural identity, film*

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### Introduction

Imagine you are watching a film, an American blockbuster, about Islamic fundamentalist terrorists attacking New York City. Several inde-

pendent cells terrorize the city, blowing up busses and a theatre, taking school children hostage, and driving a car-bomb into the federal building housing the FBI. In this film, who is the enemy?

Imagine that you are watching a film, an American blockbuster, about the Vietnam War. Throughout the film, horrific scenes are displayed, all the while American soldiers wander through dense jungles and along interminable rivers, being shot at and blown up and killed throughout. In this film, who is the enemy?

Imagine that you are watching a film, an American blockbuster, about nuclear war. The best prepared protocols go wrong, a terrible mistake is made, and a single nuclear weapon is unintentionally delivered to Soviet territory. The result is Soviet retaliation, ending all life on Earth. In this film, who is the enemy?

The answer to the first two examples would seem to be simple: the terrorists and the Vietnamese, respectively. The last example may be more difficult. Perhaps the enemy is the Soviet Union. Perhaps it is nuclear weapons in general. The truth is, in all three American films,<sup>2</sup> the enemy is American. How can this be? and why? The key to the puzzle lies in the understanding and use of the identificational term “American.”

Common sense (whatever that might be), Rationalist theories of International Relations, and specifically David Campbell’s attempt to challenge such theories,<sup>3</sup> all make the same mistake; the mistake which would have us incorrectly determine the enemy in the above examples based on simple conflict descriptions. The mistake is an association of, and indeed an equation between, the identity aspect “nation” with the political aspect “state.” While this is perhaps excusable, for lack of a better term, when it comes to Rationalist theories, it is more troublesome a charge to be levied against a work determined to expose such same failures as is Campbell’s *Writing Security*.

Rationalist theories, by default if not by design, concern themselves with the black-box of the state, pushing identity to the background in favour of the simpler-to-determine political structure. Campbell attempts the reverse in his analysis, concentrating on the development/practice of national and American identity throughout the evolution of the political state in both form and essence. The problem Campbell comes into is an almost necessary conflation of national identification with political state leadership, joining his “foreign policy” and Foreign Policy. This leaves him, the challenger, open to challenge.

*George Hays II*

With advancements in education, communications technology, and the subsequent horizontalisation of information sharing, the political leadership no longer monopolises the discussion, creation, and practice of national identification.<sup>4</sup> With the loss of that position, identity and political structures, the nation and the state, “foreign policy” and Foreign Policy, can be and are separated. The manner of separation is the propagation by sub-elite actors of their own understanding of national identity, the acceptance of these counter-identities by other sub-elite actors, and the consequence that, more often than not, the sub-elite identities are in conflict with the elite identities.

In the first section of this article, the development of Campbell’s “foreign policy” as applied to non-elite actors will be made. Also, the guiding questions which are used for the analysis of the identification-al films will be presented and explained. In the second section, five identificational films depicting forms of international conflict from the Korean War to Terrorism in the 1990’s will be presented and analysed. The final section will present the conclusion of the analysis and its implications both for national identity and for further research.

### “Foreign Policy” and Guiding Questions

Campbell, in *Writing Security*, develops and applies “foreign policy” as a differential-identificational-concept. Uniting this concept with the practice of traditional Foreign Policy, Campbell seeks to investigate and understand the creation and evolution of American identity.<sup>5</sup> In ‘Three Incarnations of *The Quiet American*,’ the “foreign policy”/Foreign Policy construct is disunited and the differential-identificational-concept of “foreign policy” as practiced by sub-elite identifiers in the form of popular mass released film is examined. By looking at “foreign policy” as practiced by this different level of identifier, several important points emerge concerning Campbell’s “foreign policy”/Foreign Policy nexus as well as concerning American identity.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most important point that emerges is that the “us” contained within the identificational construct “us”/“them” is as relative as the “them.” While Campbell rightfully problematizes and demonstrates the latter, he ignores the former. By problematizing the former, it is demonstrated that the identificational “other” of the identity-“America”<sup>7</sup> is actually part of the structure-America.<sup>8</sup> This means that both of

the identificational components of the differential-identity-construct (“self”/“other,” “us”/“them,” “inside”/“outside,” “good”/“bad”) are contained within Campbell’s concept of “America.” In short, the enemy is “within,” yet this cannot be the case. The resolution is to abandon Campbell’s use of the structural metaphor of “inside”/“outside” for the less objective and fixed metaphor of “here”/“there.”<sup>9</sup>

*American  
“Foreign  
Policy” in  
Film*

The concept of “here” is both spatial and temporal. It is perfectly subjective, as it is always only knowable based on the contextuality of the speaker; yet it is never limited by any other objective or “objective” borders of any kind. It can move from a position within the self (forgive the “inside” metaphor, but language is limiting), to within the body, to within any area outside of the body and across time based on the event-scenario, the discourse, and the speaker. What this does in terms of conflict and differential-identification is that it allows for the almost infinite fracturing of context regarding the seemingly obvious conflict between two opposing structure-states. The conflict or war between these two structures no longer defines “us” and “them,” rather it provides the canvas for the true identificational conflict.

This subjective identificational concept of “here” is most closely touched upon in the literature by the discussion of *Heimat*.<sup>10</sup> The concept of *Heimat*, its depiction, and the study of it are also highly connected to film and film analysis.<sup>11</sup> *Heimat* is a form of conceptual-territorial-space which, at one and the same time, represents and transcends the local, to the regional, and ultimately to the national.<sup>12</sup> Not only is *Heimat* fluid and subjective like “here” is; but *Heimat* also forms the basis for the nation, rather than the nation determining *Heimat*.<sup>13</sup> At first blush, the concept of *Heimat* sounds a lot like the popular American notion of “any-town USA.” This is another form of conceptual-territorial-space, yet it does not transcend in the manner of *Heimat*. In fact, “any-town USA” (the agricultural inland) is quite exclusionary to other regions (the coasts, cities, workers in services in general, non-Christians, minorities to a varying degree, etc). A unique examination of this can be found in Dittmer’s work on Captain America and 9/11.<sup>14</sup> While the imagery and visual metaphors Dittmer cites are often replete with “any-town USA” (or “Centerville,” as it is presented in the work<sup>15</sup>), there is a problem because the central conflict, the attack, happened in not-just-any-towns: New York City and Washington, DC. Dittmer does not come out to recognise this point, and yet

he makes it all the same by analysing how Captain America himself goes to both Ground Zero and Centerville. But Captain America is not just a superhero; he is a true embodiment of identity-“America” and the “here”-ness of the moral-identificational-space. He is the linchpin holding the disparate territories together, making “any-town USA” and New York City one-and-the-same.

It is this issue of the moral-identificational-space actually being the defining point holding together the conceptual-territorial-space that is missing in *Heimat*. There is a “somethingness” about the land itself that is unifying, however not unique. The same is true for “any-town USA.” Yet, what makes it unifying is not the territory, not the objective or “objective” markings, not even the people.<sup>16</sup> Rather, what unifies is the moral-identificational-space existing before/during/after the determination of the conceptual-territorial-space and making it meaningful. This moral-identificational-space, this “here”-ness, is prior to and independent of any bordering. What this also means is that the moral-identificational-space can (and does) change independently of the “objective” structures. One of the best ways to demonstrate this divergence is through an analysis of conflict representation; the resultant identity from the differential-identificational conflict clearly displaying the separation of the subjective moral-identificational-space (identity-“state”) from the “objective” conceptual-territorial-space (structure-state).

The complexity of the contextuality of the differential-identificational conflict is demonstrated in ‘Three Incarnations’ by analysing two film incarnations of the same Vietnam War story, *The Quiet American*.<sup>17</sup> This single story, set in the French-Vietnam War, with largely the same characters, has diametrically opposed resultant identities emerging from the identificational conflicts. The forty-plus years between the two versions were enough to transform the American character from innocent do-gooder and victim<sup>18</sup> to monstrous evil-doer of the highest order rightfully and necessarily assassinated, if only too late.<sup>19</sup> The same structure-state America, in the same conflict and story, has opposing resultant identities based on the contextuality of “here” as expressed and understood by the sub-elite, in this case the film producers and American audiences. That means that the audience, who are both structure-Americans (American citizens) and identity-“Amer-

icans” (identifiers of “America” is “here”/“good”), are participating in a discourse which declares that there is something “inside” structure-America which is “bad” and therefore not belonging to identity-“America.” The “enemy” is “inside,” but is not “here.”<sup>20</sup>

This article aims to continue the argument begun in ‘Three Incarnations of *The Quiet American*.’ Departing from the same theoretical and methodological points, this article will expand the universe of discourse beyond *The Quiet American* in order to demonstrate that the arguments and conclusions in “Three Incarnations” are not limited to either the particular story or the particular conflict portrayed in the two films. Before entering on the analysis, however, an introduction and explanation of the methodology is in order.

*George Hays II*

### *Guiding Questions*

In ‘Three Incarnations,’ a method of guiding questions through which to analyse the differential-identificational conflict presented in a war/conflict story is introduced and used. Those guiding questions and sub-questions are:

1. What is the conflict?
  - a. What is the setting conflict? (What is the war/event happening surrounding the story?)
  - b. What is the real conflict? (What is the engine of the story, what issue separates “the good guy” from “the bad guy”?)
  - c. Are the two conflicts the same?
  
2. Who are the participants?
  - a. Who is “the good guy”? (Not to be confused with the protagonist.)
  - b. Who is “the bad guy”? (Not to be confused with the antagonist.)
  - c. Who is a catalyst? (Who acts, but without significant impact on the real conflict?)
  
3. What is the message? (Who and/or what is “America”?)
4. What is the argument delivering the message? (What occurs to situate an identity of “America”?)<sup>21</sup>

The question now turns to, why this method, why is it important?

In 'Three Incarnations,' three conceptual points were problematised: identity, identification, and identifier. The above methodology shifts the role of identifier from the political elite of the structure-America to a sub-elite of the structure-America, Hollywood. After reading the literature on the study of national identity as a whole, one would think that this should not matter. But it does.

The dominant discourses concerning the study of national identity as a whole seem to state that a nation juxtaposed with an enemy should result with the creation/reinforcement of the identity of the nation. Invariably, the discourse also will, at some point, either explicitly or implicitly connect/equate/merge the concept of "nation" with that of "state." This connection similarly implicitly merges the role of political-state-leadership with identificational-national-leadership. The result of the discourse, then, is that the state enemy should/does become the national enemy, leading to the state identity becoming the national identity. This effect should/does apply to all levels within the structure, meaning that the resultant constitutive identity should/does apply to all levels as well. If we were to change our identifier, then, we should find the same constitutive identity as that discovered by analysing the political elite. This, however, is not the case. With the same goal of national identity, with the same identification process of "foreign policy" centred around 'experiencing'<sup>22</sup> a war between one's own structure and that of another, but with a non-elite/non-state identifier, the resultant constitutive identity is much different. In fact, it would appear that in almost every case studied, the five included in this work and the many not included,<sup>23</sup> the constitutive identity is entirely contained within the structure-America.

The guiding questions help us find the 'true' conflict that the story is concerned with, and through that conflict, they help us to discover the components and positioning of the identity-"America." If, when presented with a war film, the guiding questions are applied and the resulting "true" conflict that is at the centre of the story, driving it forward, is that of the structure-enemy being a ruthless evil attempting to destroy "us" in every way, then we can see the justification of the dominant discourses on identity and all is well and good. If, however, the 'true' conflict driving the story is deeper than the bombs and bullets and blood; if the enemy of "us" is not the same entity trying to kill us; if that enemy belongs to our same structure, then there is an

identity different and deeper than that of state borders and perceived order within them. This is the case.

## American “Foreign Policy” in Film

*American  
“Foreign  
Policy” in  
Film*

The five films analysed here are *M.A.S.H.*, *Thirteen Days*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Charlie Wilson’s War*, and *The Siege*. These films cover five different conflicts across different time periods. They range from the heavily factual *Thirteen Days* to the heavily fictional *The Siege*.

*M.A.S.H.*<sup>24</sup>

### *1. What is the conflict?*

Setting: Korean War (US/UN vs Communist Korea/Communist China/USSR)

Actual: Civilian/Draft Doctors “Do No Harm!” vs Regular Army “Harm!”

### *2. Who are the participants?*

Good: Hawkeye, Trapper, Duke, Radar, Draftees in general (the unin-  
troduced “we” in ‘You’re what we call a Regular Army Clown.’)

Bad: Burns, O’Houlihan (initially), Henry, Padre, Commander of Japan  
hospital, Regular Army in general (the other half of the above state-  
ment)

Catalyst: The local civilian population, the unseen Communist forces,  
the patients

### *3. What is the message?*

It makes no sense to recklessly destroy life (military operations) and at  
the same time try so hard to save life (the doctors). The only “good” re-  
sult of this tension is to not destroy life in the first place, but rather re-  
spect and protect all life. “America” is a saviour of any who need saving.

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#### 4. *What is the argument delivering the message?*

There are many scenes which depict the righteous distinction between the civilian doctors and the military doctors/structures. In addition to the 'regular army clowns' there is the double confusion between morale and morals. It is a double confusion because, as O'Houlihan and Burns are writing their letter of distress to Army command, they confuse both the meaning of morale with morality as well as the degree to which both qualities exist in the camp. Somehow, high spirits are/should be equated with piety, while low spirits are/should be equated with debauchery: instead of being two separate things (which they are) if not comprising the opposite correlation (the debauched do seem happier in that same scene). In addition, by the end of the scene, O'Houlihan and Burns are acting immoral together and improving their personal morale at the same time. The hypocrisy is distilled in that the true issue between them and the draftees is one of honesty. The draftees know what they are doing is wrong, but they also understand why they are doing it and accept the situation. O'Houlihan and Burns are repressing these things, claiming the moral high ground, committing the same immoral acts, and suffering because of the repression.

There is a similar conflict of morality between Burns and Hawkeye, Trapper, and Duke regarding the Korean boy Ho-Jon. Burns initially tries to 'save' him by teaching him English via the Bible. The colonialist overtones are obvious. Hawkeye, Trapper, and Duke, however, attempt to save Ho-Jon from having to serve in the war spawned by the "Western" colonising forces of International Communism and Capitalism.

A moral conflict more directly connected to the issue of "saving lives" in the M.A.S.H. unit comes when Burns blames Boone (a young private) for killing a patient. The patient is severely injured, he goes into cardiac arrest, Burns barks an order for a particular drug and syringe. Boone is unclear what exactly he wants, brings the wrong kind of syringe, and in the course of this the patient dies. Burns blames the young draftee for killing the soldier, rather than recognising it was the war that killed the soldier. Trapper, furious with Burns, punches him. In the scene, there is pictured the futility of the effort of killing and saving at the same time. The decision to do so was made by the Regular Army, and the representative of the Regular Army in the scene (just as the metaphorical Regular Army he symbolizes), does not see that the war is what is killing its soldiers, not the inexperienced young privates charged with saving them.

A scene which ties together many of the above points (neo-colonialism, moral relativism, and the charge of the Medical Corps to save lives) is Hawkeye's and Trapper's trip to Japan. In Japan, they are presented with two sons. The first (and the reason for the trip) is the son of an important American politician. He is a wounded soldier, though the wound is not severe at all. The two skilled doctors were pulled out of their unit, where they are of far more use, because the life of this politician's son is considered more valuable than the lives of other soldiers. While in Japan, Hawkeye and Trapper come across the bastard baby of an American soldier and a Japanese woman. The baby has a serious medical condition and will die without an operation from the two doctors. The Regular Army officer in charge of the hospital will not allow the military's resources to be used on the bastard son, again exemplifying moral relativism and neo-colonialism. Hawkeye and Trapper perform the operation anyways, kidnap the officer when he protests, and make compromising photos of the officer with a prostitute in order to blackmail him into silence.

Perhaps most artistically metaphorical of all is the Last Supper scene dripping with military rhetoric. The gathering is to 'send off' the dentist, who wants to commit suicide because he experienced impotence. Beyond the metaphors and connections of manliness surrounding the character and situation and its relation to militarism, the scene combines the 'holy sacrifice' of the Last Supper with the 'suicide' of a perfectly healthy man while lauding his action with military clichés. 'No one asked him to go on this mission.' 'He knew it meant certain death.' 'This is what we reserve our highest medals and honours for.' The result is an exemplification of the sheer ludicrousness of military sacrifice, all tied back to the size and performance of a man's penis.

### *Thirteen Days*<sup>25</sup>

#### *1. What is the conflict?*

Setting: Cuban Missile Crisis (US vs USSR/Cuba)

Actual: Own Judgment/Conflict Resolution vs Strategic Standard Operating Procedures/Conflict Evolution

## 2. *Who are the participants?*

Good: “Civilians”/independent thinkers (both US and USSR)

Bad: “Military”/rigid strategy thinkers (both US and USSR)

Catalysts: Humanity (everyone waiting for the final outcome and preparing for it, including Cuba)

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## 3. *What is the message?*

Strategic Rationality, which is at the core of Standard Operating Procedures, is inherently Irrational when it comes to surviving potential nuclear conflict. ‘There is something immoral about abandoning your own judgment.’ “America” is “moral” because it will work tirelessly to find a solution to bring peace.

## 4. *What is the argument delivering the message?*

The argument is best demonstrated by clarifying the participants above. The Good and the Bad are not separated purely in terms of Civilian Leadership and Military Leadership, though by and large these groups are so separated. It seems to be part of each group that Civilians think more independently than Military members. There are, however, several Civilians who would be classified as Bad. They are “bad”, though, because they do not use their own thought applied to the specific situation. They think in terms of rigid preconceived strategies (like the Military does). Similarly, some Military members are “good,” precisely because they step outside of their rigid structures to think for themselves at how best to do the most good in the situation (and thereby run the risk of being removed from their place in the Military, thus officially being Civilianised). This split exists in both the US and the USSR.

The three key Civilians are J. Kennedy, R. Kennedy, and O’Donnell. They spend the entire film resisting (and justifying their resistance to) the prepared strategies of the Military, which call for airstrikes and/or the invasion of Cuba. Two historical points are mentioned among the three Civilians in private which work as a single analogy. The first is the distant, though poignant, case of the beginning of World War I. J. Kennedy recalls the danger and damage caused by the Military’s Standard Operating Procedures. He points out that they were designed for the previous war, not the current war, and once those plans were com-

mitted to, they could not be rescinded. The result is the Great War. The more personal historical case is The Bay of Pigs, in which J. Kennedy did not exercise his own judgment and authorised invasion as the Military suggested. The result was a tremendous fiasco, a public defeat, and an increase in the insecurity of the region that contributed to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Taken together, the analogy is that if the Civilians follow the Military plans again, the plans will be wrong and lead to nuclear war with the USSR. Here, J. Kennedy states the Message: 'There is something immoral about abandoning your own judgment.'

*American  
"Foreign  
Policy" in  
Film*

The key Military members are the collective Joint Chiefs of Staff. Together, they outline the plans of airstrikes and invasion that the Civilians are resisting implementing, and ultimately refuse. They repeatedly provide probability estimates, strategic statements, and follow their operating procedures without question. In one scene, this dependence on procedure leads the Admiral of the Navy to authorise (counter the President's orders) to fire warning flares at a Soviet ship. His thinking process was contained by a list of predetermined steps, none of which considered that firing anything towards a Soviet ship could result in confusion, retaliation, destruction, and ultimately nuclear war. The Admiral's action was immediately rebuked by the Civilian, Secretary of Defense McNamara, explaining that the embargo line was not a theatre of war, but a form of communication between the two countries completely unique from anything ever seen/done before (and thus outside the realm of pre-planned procedures).

A Bad Civilian would be Acheson, who recommends forceful action against the missiles in Cuba, and then calmly walks the President through the consequences of that action as seen by strategic thought. Acheson stops short of admitting the scenario he is outlining will result in the use of nuclear weapons, but J. Kennedy fills in the blank for him. The response is 'Hopefully, cooler heads will prevail.' This response is ironic because the entire point of having strategic standard operating procedures is to have a cool-headed rational plan to follow. That plan predicts and (eventually) demands the use of nuclear weapons, thereby ending all life. The cool-headed strategists are proposing suicide in the hope/belief that someone will act *irrationally* at some point to prevent the consequence of the irrational-rational policy of brinkmanship.

A Good Military member is Commander Ecker. He flies a low-level reconnaissance mission over Cuba after the Joint Chiefs secure a procedural imperative from the President. If an American plane is at-

tacked, the Military has the authorisation to respond. This is a loophole the Military manages to create to enact their plan of airstrikes and invasion. The Civilians recognise this, and they recognise that the pilots are bound to be shot at. The only option is to convince the pilots to lie. O'Donnell calls Ecker, explaining that breaking with his Military training to obey orders and answer truthfully will save humanity. After the mission, during which Ecker and his wingman are fired upon, Ecker lies to his ground crew, convinces his wingman to lie as well, and then travels to D.C. and lies about the attack to the Joint Chiefs directly. By thinking for himself in the situation, Ecker denies the Joint Chiefs their loophole to go to war.

Finally, this divide between Civilian/independent thinkers and Military/rigid strategy thinkers crosses the US/USSR divide. The clearest and best example of this comes in the scene of R. Kennedy secretly negotiating with the Soviet Ambassador Dobrynyn. First, while waiting outside the office, O'Donnell is asked by a Soviet, who is also waiting, 'Who are you?' After thinking for a moment, O'Donnell responds, 'A friend.' He never clarifies whose friend he is, but immediate exchange of relaxed smiles between he and the Soviet would seem to imply that they, as Civilians, are on the same side: resolving the conflict. This scene transitions to inside the office where the negotiation is taking place. In response to R. Kennedy's statement that the US will not allow the weapons to become operational, the Ambassador states, 'Then I fear our two nations will go to war. And I fear where war will lead us.' The delivery of this statement is not a threat. It is more a personal thought and personal fear of the Ambassador, identifying him as being part of the Civilian group. This is solidified when, at the end of the negotiation, the Ambassador states,

We have heard stories that some of your military men wish for war. You are a good man. Your brother is a good man. I assure you, there are other good men. Let us hope that the will of good men is enough to counter the terrible strength of this thing that was put in motion.

Through this statement, the Ambassador similarly identifies himself as a "good man," identifies "good men" within the USSR, and excludes "military men" in large part from this group.

## *Apocalypse Now*<sup>26</sup>

### *1. What is the conflict?*

Setting: Vietnam War post-1968 (US vs Communist Vietnam)

*George Hays II*

Actual: Civilisation vs Barbarism (both traditional and counter, i.e. Civilisation/order vs Barbarism/anarchy and Barbarism/Eden vs Civilisation/Gomorrah; as well as the individual Rational vs Primal).

### *2. Who are the participants?*

Good: Willard (ultimately), Vietnamese (if not purely Catalyst)

Bad: Military, Kurtz

Catalysts: Vietnamese (if not purely Good)

### *3. What is the message?*

To be “civilised” is to ask whether or not to exercise power, before asking how to exercise power. Right makes might. “America” is “civilised”, and is only mighty because of siding with “right.”

### *4. What is the argument delivering the message?*

It is quite difficult to place the framework of “good” vs “bad” in this instance. The majority of the film is played out between degrees of “bad.” This is not to say that there is a lack of innocents; that there is no victim. Quite the contrary, the Vietnamese are shown repeatedly to be innocent throughout the film, always on the defensive, always having serene, perhaps sublime, lives disturbed. This state almost helps feed into the conflict of the film; almost creating it entirely: the conflict between Civilisation and Barbarism. This conflict (along with the fight to determine how to classify the one from the other) exists in multiple facets at multiple levels strung throughout the film.

Several specific forms of the general conflict would seem to be obvious. The Americans vs the Vietnamese, the Army vs Kurtz, Willard vs Kurtz, the Boat vs the Jungle. None of these are clear-cut, however, nor

is the list complete. Which is “civilised” and which is “barbaric”? Which of the two is “good”? It becomes clear that the Vietnamese, if considered “barbaric” (as indeed they are outright labelled in the film as well as being so inferred) are portrayed as “noble savages.” As innocents and victims, they are in a way the “good.” It is the cold amoral “civilisation” which is “bad.” As regards the Army and Kurtz, it is revealed that both are actually in the same position, ‘balancing on the razor’s edge’ between “barbarism” and “civilisation.” Kurtz is willing to recognise his dangerous tightrope walk and embrace it, and so he is labelled insane. The Army does not recognise it, and so infer, wrongly, that they are sane and truly, fully, purely “civilised.” Each of the non-Vietnamese participants is a dangerous combination of both “barbarism” and “civilisation:” Kurtz seeing his actions and rationalising them, the Army draping themselves in faux-rationality and the tropes of civilization so as to hide from themselves their true nature – the excruciating, damaging falsehood of the unified duality; a doublespeak of the identity of the soul.

This conflict of the fusion of the best and worst parts of both “civilisation” and “barbarism” exists within the Army and Kurtz, as stated above, but also within the other group actors (the Air Cavalry, the Boat, the USO) and, most importantly, within Willard. The internal conflict concerning Willard is taking place throughout the entire film, meshing thoughts of the jungle battles and Saigon, conflicts of being home, and drunken martial arts at the beginning; and his developing affinity with Kurtz and final choice concerning whether or not to assume Kurtz’s place after he kills him. It is this final decision, within the last few minutes of the film, which ultimately places Willard in the position of “good.”

Before reaching this final scene and final decision, it will be instrumental to provide a few more scenes. One of the first and most famous is the scene of the Air Cavalry attack on a village. The helicopters swoop in to the sound of Wagner’s *Valkyrie* blasting from attached speakers. The terrified villagers run in panicked escape, while the Communist fighters provide defensive and covering fire, evacuate the children from school, and try to help the elderly. The village is laid to waste. The stated reason for the attack is to allow Willard and his boat to proceed on their mission. The true reason, though, is that the Air Cavalry’s commanding officer, Kilgore, wants to surf.

Later on, Willard and the boat crew come to the point of no return. It is a bridge marking the edge of where American forces are to operate.

They come to the bridge at night, during a hellish battle which we find out happens every night. While trying to get some information and supplies, Willard finds out that every day the Military takes/rebuilds/opens the bridge, and every night the Vietnamese take/damage/close the bridge. This nightly battle happens continually so that the Military can state: 'The road is open.' The soldiers engaged in this constantly repeating action (the definition of insanity), are quite understandably disturbed. There is no order, no command, and no sense. There is only constant (and constantly repeated) violence and death for no gain.

*American  
"Foreign  
Policy" in  
Film*

The first of these two scenes challenges the moral position of the declared "civilisation." The second challenges its rational position. Throughout the film, Willard is trapped in the organisation of the Military, his mission, and himself; all of which is morally and rationally questionable. Willard saves himself, and returns to true Civilisation, by breaking the cycle of immoral irrationality when given the chance to become a 'god.'

After Willard kills Kurtz, whose only difference from the Military proper was his recognition of the rational recognition of the immorality of his actions, Willard is presented with the option of taking his place. When Willard walks out of Kurtz's temple, all of the members of the tribe bow to him as the new leader. Willard, however, refuses the 'honour' by walking back to the boat and leaving the group. He is not only leaving the tribe, however, as he has already declared himself separated from the Military as well. He refuses his past and present association with the Military as well as his potential future as Kurtz. This break is both rational and moral. It is moral for the obvious reasons of ending his role in the violence of declared "civilisation." It is rational in that, if he became a neo-Kurtz, there would undoubtedly be another assassin sent after him. By breaking the cycle, by refusing to use power that he can quite easily use, he saves himself in both body and soul and returns to true Civilisation.

### *Charlie Wilson's War*<sup>27</sup>

#### *1. What is the conflict?*

Setting: Soviet-Afghan War

Actual: Help Afghanistan (and implicitly, by consequence, "ourselves")  
vs Hurt Soviets (and implicitly, by consequence, "ourselves")

## 2. *Who are the participants?*

Good: Charlie, Gust, partly Joanne (she gives the goal/demand of 'Afghanistan for the Afghans' but then seems to stop with defeat of the Soviet Union)

CEJISS  
2/2014

Bad: Other members of the subcommittees, CIA in general  
Catalysts: Pakistanis, Saudis, Israelis, Soviets, Afghans, partly Joanne

## 3. *What is the message?*

Merely defeating an enemy does not necessarily bring about peace and security. Helping those in need should. "America" is/should be a force for good and aid, not just a force *against* evil.

## 4. *What is the argument delivering the message?*

Just about the entire film devotes itself to delivering the message, including the title and its relation to the opening and closing scenes. Though the movie centres on the Soviet war in Afghanistan and the subsequent American involvement, the conflict, message, and title is concerned with Charlie Wilson's personal war. His war, we are shown, was not one *against* the Soviets, but rather one *supporting* the Afghans. The revelation of this being *his* war makes the ceremony of recognition split between the beginning and end of the film tragic, as it also transforms the seeming humility of the opening scene with thinly veiled disappointment in the closing scene. Charlie succeeded in aiding the defeat of the Soviet Union, but failed in his war to aid the Afghans.

Charlie's war was given to him by Joanne when she charged him with the three tasks related to the Soviet-Afghanistan War. The first and foremost was to 'save Afghanistan for the Afghans.' The means and consequence of this would be to defeat the Soviet Union, and thereby end the Cold War. Again, though he managed the means and consequence of his goal, he failed to achieve his ultimate goal. We see this becoming Charlie's goal more than just Joanne's mission when he visits the refugee camps and sees and hears first hand of the horrors the people are enduring. Yes he has always wanted to defeat the Soviets, and yes he thought that the Afghans deserved help since they were the only ones actually fighting the Soviets, but his visible transformation in the refugee camps clearly makes helping the Afghans his ultimate goal.

A final contrast between the beginning and end of the film demonstrates the true tragedy of this failure. At the beginning of the film, Charlie is in a hot tub with several strippers in Las Vegas. He wants to hear a report from Dan Rather in Afghanistan. The people around him (drunk, high, debauched) do not know where Afghanistan is, what is going on there, or why it is important. This situation is repeated in a meeting of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense. After a multi-year long successful campaign of aiding the Afghans in their war with the Soviets, Charlie is unable to secure minor funding for the building of a school there. He is ridiculed by the few other members of the Subcommittee present, culminating with one Representative saying, 'Charlie, nobody gives a shit about a school in Pakistan.' To which, Charlie, depressed and dejected, replies, 'Afghanistan.' After all the time, publicity, money, and effort, not only has the central concern of *his* war been lost, but the people have been forgotten.

We, the audience, are dramatically informed why this is important in the immediately preceding scene. Charlie's friend and CIA ally Gust finally delivers his long-awaited story of the Zen-Master and the little boy at the party celebrating the Soviet defeat. In telling the story, Gust tries to convey to Charlie the importance of not merely seeing the defeat of the Soviets as the end of the story. He tells Charlie that they are not finished, and must work to rebuild the country and provide the Afghans jobs and hope. Charlie says that he is trying, but Gust takes his demeanour as being a brush-off. He hands Charlie a classified intelligence report as he says, 'the crazies have started rolling into Kandahar like it's a fucking bathtub drain.' Gust tears Charlie's whiskey out of his hand, dumps it in a potted plant (actually and metaphorically trying to 'sober-him-up' by replacing alcohol with intel), and snaps, 'Listen to what I'm telling you!' As he says these words, the sound of airplane engines comes closer and louder from somewhere in the darkness. This scene, and its message, connects the Soviet-Afghan War with the American-Afghan War. It states clearly that our uncompleted efforts, our unwillingness or inability to help the Afghans after wartime, contributed to 9/11. History is connected, and guilt is transferred.

## *The Siege*<sup>28</sup>

### *1. What is the conflict?*

CEJISS Setting: Terrorism in New York City  
2/2014 Actual: Protecting American Ideals vs Protecting American Lives

### *2. Who are the participants?*

Good: FBI (Hubbard)

Bad: Military (Devereaux), administration, CIA (Bridger) (to a limited extent)

Catalyst: the terrorists, CIA (Bridger) (to a limited extent)

### *3. What is the message?*

To attack America means to attack its ideals, not its lives. Therefore, to protect America means to protect its ideals over protecting lives. Therefore, to sacrifice American ideals to protect American lives is to attack America. "America" is its ideals.

### *4. What is the argument delivering the message?*

At the centre of the film is whether fundamental American ideals (rule of law, due process, protection from torture, etc.) can and/or should be abandoned 'temporarily' in order to save American lives. Throughout the movie, we see that not only is such a sacrifice unacceptable, but it is also counter-intuitive. As the film opens, we see a Muslim Sheik suspected of terrorism kidnapped under Devereaux's orders and held without recognition or trial. This opening scene, this 'initial' sacrifice of ideals, is later shown to be the main reason the terrorist cells attack New York City.

Trying to fight the cells while also protecting the system is Hubbard and the FBI. In scenes with both of the other two main structure-America participants, he stresses the need (both practical and moral) to act within the system of ideals and laws in order to preserve the ideals. This moves from a procedural discussion with Bridger that he cannot spy on the suspected terrorists without the proper warrant,

to a speech on ethics in the midst of a joint Military-CIA torture session of a suspected terrorist. It is during this second speech that the message and argument are clearly made by Hubbard.

The speech comes after the FBI offices are bombed, resulting in the deaths of Hubbard's friends and co-workers; and after his Arab partner's son is detained in a mass prison camp despite his position as an FBI agent. Hubbard tries to arrest the suspected terrorist, but the Military knows about him too thanks to their spying on Hubbard. The Military attacks the building that the suspect and Hubbard are in, and takes the suspect. Hubbard later finds the suspect, Devereaux, and Bridger in a basement bathroom of the make-shift prison camp. He sees that the two are torturing the suspect, and launches into his defence of the ideals they are breaking. The climax of Hubbard's speech is, if you do this, if you torture, if you abandon the ideals on which America is based, then the terrorists win. This charge is later translated into the point that by violating America's ideals and its laws, by ultimately summarily executing this assured terrorist, Devereaux has done more damage to America than the terrorists with all of their bombs.

*George Hays II*

This transition comes about in the final scenes where Hubbard and the FBI actively distract, evade, and conflict with the Military culminating in Hubbard arresting Devereaux. The charge is murder of an American, the tortured terrorist. Hubbard walks into the command centre 'armed' with the law. He presents Devereaux with a Federal Writ removing him from power as a consequence of the murder charge. Furious, Devereaux maintains, 'I am the Law! Right here, right now, I am the Law!' In response, Hubbard reads Devereaux his Rights, altering them slightly. He says,

You have the right to remain silent, General. You have the right to a fair trial. You have the right not to be tortured, not to be murdered. Rights you took away from Tarik Hussein. You have those rights because of the men who came before you who wore that uniform.

Devereaux's sense of immediate presence of moral power is shared by Bridger. In an earlier scene, Bridger admits how she is related to the whole situation. When the us was allied with the Sheik and his followers (the current terrorists), she taught them how to make bombs. When it was no longer policy to be allied with this group, they were abandoned by the us and by her. At that time, and ever since, she is

constantly reacting to situations trying to make things 'right.' She is using whatever power she has in the moment to try and 'fix' things. The problem is, she is willing to do *whatever* is necessary to try and 'fix' things; and 'things' are always changing. By succumbing to moral relativism, by abandoning the ideals she and the others are supposed to protect, she helps make the situation worse.

In the end, Bridger 'fixes' things one last time by sacrificing herself to stop the last terrorist; her personal creation. Devereaux is arrested and removed by Hubbard. Martial Law ends, and the Military leaves New York City.

## Conclusion

In each of the five films analysed, the identificational enemy was not the actor/actors trying to kill Americans (at least not in the largest numbers). The identificational enemy was, in each instance, from within the structure-America. Often times, it was the Military, though Politicians did occasionally factor in too. This is not meant to suggest a trend that sub-elite identifications are solely against the elite, but it does clearly demonstrate that sub-elite identifications "otherwise" different actors than the elite identifications. This has several implications to previous research, future research, and our general understanding of "American" identity.

In terms of previous research, the application of the theoretical and methodological components of 'Three Incarnations of *The Quiet American*' to a wider range of conflicts and films should strengthen the conclusions made in that article. The resultant identity of sub-elite identifications did not simply disagree with the dominant discourse due to that particular conflict or that particular story. It was not a fluke.

In terms of future research, the question would now seem to be strong enough to be opened to other national identities, if not also other media of identification. Is this an "American" phenomenon? Is this a Hollywood phenomenon? The answers to both questions would almost have to be "no," but investigation is needed. Perhaps most importantly, what does this mean for our understanding of "America?" As argued in 'Three Incarnations of *The Quiet American*,' if there are multiple claimants to the singular identity "America," then there is logically no "America." If our social reality is the only reality of con-

sequence, and if that reality is based on language, and if our language is steeped with logic, “America” does not exist. Everyone is “America”, and, so, no one is.



*American  
“Foreign  
Policy” in  
Film*

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## Notes

- 1 This work originated within the project for specific university research at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University # svv 265 502: Problems with the Legitimacy of Political Decision Making at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- 2 The films are, in order: Edward Zwick (1998), *The Siege* (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), Francis F. Coppola (1979), *Apocalypse Now* (Zoetrope Studios, United Artists), Stanley Kubrick (1964), *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Columbia Pictures, Columbia Pictures). The first two are analysed in this work. While *Dr. Strangelove* is not discussed, *Thirteen Days* is analysed; and the analysis closely (and to a degree, surprisingly) mirrors that of *Dr. Strangelove*.
- 3 David Campbell (1998), *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity: Revised Edition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 4 George Hays II (2012), ‘Three Incarnations of *The Quiet American*: Applying Campbell’s “foreign policy” to Sub-Elite Identifiers,’ *Perspectives* 20; and Mary Kaldor (2005), ‘New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Globalised Era,’ in *War*, ed. P. F. Diehl, London: Sage Publications.
- 5 Campbell (1998).
- 6 Hays (2012).
- 7 The terms identity-“America” and “America” refer to the subjective identificational qualities of the nation belonging to the country The United States of America. In this work, the key qualities are the “here”-ness of the moral-identificational-space (discussed below). In short, they refer to the essence of American-ness; something like Plato’s forms.
- 8 The terms structure-America and America refer to the objective qualities of the country The United States of America. This means, for example, concepts such as citizenship, political organisations, political decision-making structures and actors, laws, formal institutions, etc.
- 9 Hays (2012).
- 10 Julian Young (2011), ‘Heidegger’s Heimat,’ *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19; Guntram H. Herb (2004), ‘Double Vision: Territorial State-

- gies in the Construction of National Identities in Germany, 1949-1979,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94. See also from discussion in Herb: Alon Confino (1997), *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Wurttemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; Alon Confino and Ajay Skaria (2002), 'The Local Life of Nationhood,' *National Identities* 4; and Anssi Paasi (1996), *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*, Chichester: Wiley and Son.
- 11 Alexandra Ludewig (2008), "'Heimat, Heimat, uber alles:' Heimat in two contemporary German Films,' *Studies in European Cinema* 5; and Uta Larkey (2008), 'New Places, New Identities: The (Ever) Changing Concept of Heimat,' *German Politics and Society* 26.
  - 12 Herb (2004), pp. 142-143.
  - 13 Ibid, p. 143.
  - 14 Jason Dittmer (2005), "Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95. See also, Confino and Skaria (2002); and Paasi (1996).
  - 15 Dittmer (2005), p. 639.
  - 16 This point is extremely important as it steps away from the *Heimat* related concept of primordialism. While Captain America is an Anglo-American white male, he is far more an anthropomorphisation of the moral-identificational-space of 'his people' than any kind of ethno-differential model. See Alan Bairner (2009), 'National Sports and National Landscapes: In Defence of Primordialism,' *National Identities* 11; Murat Bayar (2009), 'Reconsidering Primordialism: An Alternative Approach to the Study of Ethnicity,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32; and Joseph R. Gusfield (1996), 'Primordialism and Nationality,' *Society* 33.
  - 17 Graham Greene (2004 edition), *The Quiet American*, New York: Penguin Books.
  - 18 J. L. Mankiewicz (1958), *The Quiet American*, Figaro, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
  - 19 Phillip Noyce (2002 version), *The Quiet American*, IMF, Miramax.
  - 20 Hays (2012).
  - 21 Ibid, pp. 18-20. Questions 3 and 4 are inspired by, and loosely based on, the methodology developed in Petr Drulak (ed) (2008), 'Identifying and Assessing Metaphors: Discourse on EU Reform,' in *Political Language and Metaphor: Interpreting and Changing the World*, in Carver (et al) (2008), New York: Routledge, pp. 107-108. Question 3 takes the place of 'conceptual metaphors' while Question 4 takes the place of 'metaphorical expressions.'
  - 22 The term 'experience' is obviously used loosely here. What is being stressed is that the context of events between the two levels is being equated as much as is possible. A war with a foreign enemy, rather as a historical event or as a portrayal of a historical event, is being used. This eliminates counter-contextual instances of a historical event (Vietnam War) being compared to a portrayal of a historical event (*All the President's Men*, portraying Watergate), which would obviously skew the identification. The reasoning

of the dominant discourses implies that whether we are considering a political speech act about a historical war-event or a cultural portrayal of that same event, there should be the same resultant constitutive identity based on the same 'experience' of conflict between "us" and "them."

- 23 This work is a representative piece of on-going research involving 70-some war/conflict films covering events from the beginning of the Cold War up to today. Out of that universe of discourse, 2 films *could* have strong arguments made for them that the structure-America and identity-"America" overlap entirely and are not in conflict. Those two films are *Rambo III* and *The Peacemaker*.
- 24 Robert Altman (1970), *M.A.S.H.*, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.
- 25 Roger Donaldson (2000), *Thirteen Days*, New Line Cinema.
- 26 Coppola (1979), *Apocalypse Now*.
- 27 Mike Nichols (2007), *Charlie Wilson's War*, Universal Pictures.
- 28 Zwick (1998), *The Siege*.

*George Hays II*