Green Workshop Paper: Understanding Green through the Lens of Culture

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Introduction

Our understanding of he global environment ("Green") can be opened up through a cultural lens — focusing on how actual societies and communities live together and interrelate — from the United States ("Blue") and its constellation of associates, to a growing cluster of resistant, armed communities ("Red"). To do requires defining, and if possible, bounding the web of world relationships, and how and why resistant communities have pursued courses inimical to U.S. interests. This view is also concerned with how Blue actors (especially U.S. security forces) operate within the Green ecosystem.

Thinking in terms of cultural systems requires a new framework for analyzing the U.S. Government and its CT community. Cultural systems — like the study of groups within a single society— demands focus on the relationships among sub-cultures, movements and communities, although in a bigger and wider international context.

> ➢ **We want to understand better how relations between nations and non-state communities create conflict and tensions that can spread across, and promote changes across the entire system — and how these influence both Red and Blue.**

We must try to capture the sources and impetus for change among the multitude of communities in our world system. Change and resistance to change, among peoples worldwide, is one of strongest of many dynamics driving the ongoing challenge we call "terrorism."

Why does Green matter?

If we think of Green as a human, cultural system that has come to be interconnected globally, then the United States needs to understand better the subtle ways in which the very relational dynamics of this system endow us — and our adversaries — strategic advantage. We need to see better how the cultural dynamics between and among human groups drives armed resistance — especially to the American enterprise. Specifically, we want to better understand why the mosaic of communities we call Green can become resistant, and even take up arms, against Blue and its interests.

Driving Questions for the Cultural Systems Lens

1. Who are the key players?

Green is conceived as a world-spanning human ecosystem in which a dense and highly complex mosaic of communities, movements, and other human groups live together and endlessly interact. We can think more precisely about some Green groups in the more formal terms of institutions, nations, religious sects, NGOs, etc.

2. <u>What is the character of the strategic environment?</u>

It is difficult to wholly visualize our world system of a million parts — and how relationships, group needs, oppression, injustice, as well as visions of hope and collective realization inspire armed resistance to established authority — including our own (and Blue clients). Understanding the dynamics of humanity indeed can benefit from metaphors from nature — like the idea of social evolution or even the framing of people as a complex adaptive system — as long as we remember that our world is ultimately shaped by culture: And that culture is our human form of "nature."

3. <u>What are Green's internal dynamics?</u>

By deciding to approach Green as a cultural "ecosystem," we must also apply human frameworks of complexity and adaptation — for which there is a strong body of scientific literature in Anthropology and Sociology. Indeed, our understanding of a global human system must rest on such frameworks guiding human social organization and group functioning since the end of the Pleistocene.

Thus, potential questions embedded in the wider dynamics of Green will inform how we can better understand the complex relationship between Blue and Red:

➢ How do the essential forces — both for continuity and change — in the larger world system affect the combative and codependent relationship between Blue and Red?

➢ To what degree can Blue and Red bend relationships to their advantage, or at least mitigate an erosion of authority in parts of Green?

➢ What are the deeper dynamics across Green creating and sustaining active resistance to U.S. (Blue) interests?

➢ To what extent do these dynamics favor Red, and to what extent do they favor Blue, and are these dynamics themselves shifting?

➢ Like the very use of the word, "terrorism," does the very way we think about Red limit our ability to understand what is actually happening in other societies, or tend to blind us to emerging trends, phenomena, and ideas in the world's human ecosystem?

<u>Characterizing the Cultural Ecosystem</u>

<u>*Caveat*</u>: *We can (and do) define the human environment any way we choose, but what others see as "reality" truly matters if we wish to understand them at all. Moreover, if we are to see how societies actually work, then we must observe them in operation, and how they have been operating for the last 10,000 years.*

Arguably, we can only understand the elements of the human system of strongest impact on both Blue and Red *<u>if we can bring ourselves to see how societies actually work on their own terms</u>*, and not simply project onto them those metaphorical frameworks that most appeal to us. Hence, we are thinking about Green as a cultural "ecosystem," meaning, we must examine how world cultures work in terms of their own belief systems, organization, customs, norms, and rituals — and above all, their establishment of identity.

Human groups — from extended families to entire nations — operate together as groups according to the overriding needs and demands of meaning and belonging. Hence, human culture cannot be compared to the physical workings of a machine without consciousness. Therefore, the workings of societies — any kind of society — cannot be understood through the metaphor of positive and negative feedback loops. If we persist in believing that we can moderate or control other societies through such mechanical calibration, we will surely fail.

In this crucial sense, net assessment seeks to understand complex interactions — including those between people and phenomena — in ways that correctly balance cultural and material agency (things that humans decide to do, and things that happen outside of us). In other words, when we refer to "complex system" we are trying to take the measure of human cultural complexity as it relates to complexities in the physically structured world. Equally, "adaptive" means we are taking the measure of an essential human cultural trait.

> Framing relationships simply in terms of competition may be deeply misplaced, especially when goals are more existential.

> Words like "control" imply only agency and not objective: That communities or movements may seek a state of control but that their goals are deeper (relating more to the basic, existential human needs of belonging and meaning - identity).

> Understanding the terms and parameters of what societies will accept is the best way to persuade or influence groups and communities within them. There are for example no hydraulic mechanisms like feedback loops to bend others to our will.

> Conflict and resistance is not due to simple erosion of state authority, but rather to a deeper loss of legitimacy by failed elites and ideas.

> Finally, the U.S. is hopelessly doomed in its world enterprises if it believes that dealing with Red requires *shaping* Green. Americans like to use "shaping" in juxtaposition with softer, feel-good words like influence, persuasion, and collaboration, rather than command and control — but shaping is all about command and control.

Globalization
The strategic environment is characterized, shaped, and defined in large part by the results of an historical phenomenon we call "globalization." But what is globalization? Globalization is a material force outside of us — hence, that globalization on a metatheoretical plane is, simply put, the compression of space and time — the fusion of the tangible and intangible. We present evidence of this phenomenon by emphasizing the speed of transactions where information technology has flattened the interface between physical and virtual reality, and compressed time.

But from a human cultural perspective, globalization is something much more than physically disruptive. It tears apart the way of life of people everywhere. Such discontinuity presages a loss of the very thing people value above all else: meaning and belonging. People will resist being

stripped of all they have and all they believe in — they will literally take up arms against a sea of troubles.

Fragility of world systems
For Global Business, the environment exists for them, and is structured to advantage them first and foremost. It is a globally interconnected milieu of social, economic, and political factors that impact the interdependent, complex, and systemic nature of the institutions undergirding stability (adapted from *World Economic Forum*).[1] Thus, the Global Business view of an interdependent, global system is one of a system that puts the needs of markets above any other needs. Hence, when this enterprise worries about risks that are "systemic in nature, causing breakdowns of entire systems and not only their component parts" (p. 11) — they are not expressing a concern for the health of society, but only for the health of markets. They understand completely that the more complex a system is, the greater the impact of instability on it. The elites that "run" the system (those who maintain its authority and control) define the system's identity as themselves — meaning super individuals, states, corporations, and world economic institutions.

Elite forces have dominated the definition of the world system, and to some extent, what is legitimate among Green. A world system built around elite economic interests has tended to reinforce, and will continue to reinforce, a U.S. Government approach to the defense of the system that is distinctly skewed toward elites rather than societies. Thus, the reigning system of nation states is designed, in system terms, to pursue and preserve a *world economic order* above all. This shared approach among national elites aligns nicely with the interests of these elites — and continues because it has been successfully marketed to voting electorates as beneficial to their interests as well. Yet it is the tendency of such elites to seek stability over change, and to use government military force to resist accommodating change, even when it becomes clear that accepting change creates less strategic risk than trying to suppress it.

However, the discontinuities of globalization has created many displaced groups and communities, and compromised the social welfare of many others, including many in Japan, the United States, and the European Community. Discontents have been growing, along with a pervasive loss of trust in established institutions, and a deep anxiety about the future. People are not simply moving to alternative communities or getting behind more aggressive political movements because they are by nature *rebels*, but because they are deeply troubled by the absence of elites equally considering societal interests beyond their own.

In contrast, the discontinuities of globalization are creating unsustainable and insupportable life conditions for hundreds of millions. At a deeper level, the structures ruling the world system, including American military and economic authority, have not accommodated to the demand for change from across humanity. There has been plenty of change in terms of discontinuity and disruption, and a vast increase in global wealth. But who has benefitted, and who is being ground down, are central issues at the core of world change.

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[1] The World Economic Forum's *Global Risks 2014* is derived from inputs of 700 leaders across the globe, and includes contributions from major firms such as March, Swiss Re, Zurich Insurance Group, National University of Singapore, Oxford University, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Conclusion
The Green Workshop will seek to explore these topics, by eliciting unique, new, and "adjacent space" thinking from you. The framings offered in this paper are but guideposts along the way, a "color commentary" for us better to see and characterize Green. Our hope is to be surprised by the orthogonal and alternative approaches to counterterrorism that only such a creative group as you can provide.