EXPLOITABLE CONDITIONS FRAMEWORK (ECF)

TRADOC G-2's Global Cultural Knowledge Network (GCKN) identified a set of 12 conditions in the operational environment (OE) that actors could exploit when competing with the United States and its partners. Understanding these OE conditions and how various actors may exploit them is critical for the U.S. Army to plan, organize, train, and equip the force for success in mitigating or countering potential challenges to U.S. interests.

Multiple Sovereignties
Areas not subordinate to the national government

"Technification" of Society
Mass adoption of disruptive technologies and trends.

Environmental Threats
Stress caused by significant changes in the natural environment

Ineffective Government
The inability to provide for a society's essential needs

Cross-Border Encroachment
Spillover effects from proximity to sources of instability

Resource Scarcity
Demand for goods and services is greater than the available supply

Mobilizing Ideologies
Unifying belief systems that threaten the status quo

Demographic Pressures
Stress caused by significant changes within a population

OE EXPLOITABLE CONDITIONS 2028

Economic Inequality
Substantially unequal distribution of income, wealth, and opportunity

Illicit Networks
Transactional systems operating beyond the reach of formal authority

Infrastructure Deficits
Inadequacy of systems and institutions that facilitate basic services

Divided Societies
Communities where competing values or identities create factions

* None of the conditions are inherently more important than the others, although in certain circumstances some conditions may weigh more heavily in a country or region.

EXPLOITABLE CONDITIONS FRAMEWORK (ECF)

Multiple Sovereignties: Areas not subordinate to the national government.

The legitimacy and stability of the state is challenged when a group declares in words or actions that the government no longer holds jurisdiction over them. Sovereignty generally requires a government recognized as the supreme authority by resident populations, recognized borders, and a monopoly on the use of force within those borders. Challenges to sovereignty include supplanting the government, declaring a separate state within the territory of a recognized state, refusing to recognize the rule of law and instead implementing different laws, limiting central governance within a section of the country, or running a shadow or alternative government. Examples include cities or regions forging independent internal and even international policies and trade agreements based on their economic power, drug cartels establishing their own de facto rule over certain areas, and violent extremist groups taking over so-called "ungoverned areas" within the boundaries of states. External actors may easily exploit countries whose sovereignty is challenged by forging agreements with either the government or the challengers to gain advantage.

Environmental Threats: Stress caused by significant changes in the natural environment.

Changes in the natural environment exert pressure on the economic, physical, communal, health, and political security of societies. Socio-political stability is threatened when the natural environment changes significantly and at a rate that exceeds the society's adaptive capabilities. Changes to the natural environment that threaten this stability include the effects of climate change, natural disasters, man-made disasters, and the evolution of pathogens. Man-made disasters such as deforestation, watercourse disruption, and pollution often result from industrial activities. The emergence of dangerous pathogens has been a pervasive condition in underdeveloped countries for centuries, but the COVID-19 pandemic has had an alarming effect on worldwide health, economics, culture, and politics, demonstrating that developed countries are not immune. Actors may point to these changes—particularly those more easily attributed to the actions of governments and industry—for their advantage to include offering their own proprietary solutions, creating demand and potential dependency.

Cross-Border Encroachment: Spillover effects from proximity to sources of instability.

Conflict, illicit activity, and effects on the environment in one country may spill across the border due to proximity, sociocultural and historical ties, or deliberate efforts. Cross-border effects are largely the result of neighboring governments' inability to manage internal dynamics and maintain rule of law. For example, insurgents, violent extremist groups, or other criminal elements may cross borders to avoid authorities and draw the people or government of that area into the conflict or illicit activity. Cross-border encroachment can be exploited to gain advantage over people, groups, or governments through threats, withholding of resources/benefits, or direct interference in sovereign territories.

Mobilizing Ideologies: Unifying belief systems that threaten the status quo.

Ideologies that unify a critical mass of people in defiance of political authority can be a major source of instability in any political system. These unifying belief systems are most potent when they incentivize large segments of a population to act collectively in pursuit of an alternative socio-political configuration. Ideological belief systems that effectively threaten the political status quo may be rooted in religious, communal, historical, or other group-identity forms of solidarity. They often invoke tropes and symbols that harken to an idealized past in which the imagined bonds of communal solidarity were either deeper, more easily understood, or better aligned with the socio-cultural foundations or realities of a given population. Mobilizing ideologies can be exploited by actors in various ways to destabilize a country, particularly by strengthening mobilized movements through misinformation or other information campaigns.

EXPLOITABLE CONDITIONS FRAMEWORK (ECF)

Economic Inequality: Substantially unequal distribution of income, wealth, and opportunity.

Economic inequality exists when there is a skewed distribution of access to money and opportunity within a society relative to global norms. Wide discrepancies in wealth and income have increased in nearly all countries around the globe, though at different speeds. Nations from all six populated continents have massive wealth gaps between the richest and the poorest, a prime example of economic inequality. At their extreme, this inequality includes substantial numbers of people with incomes below the international poverty line of $1.90 per day, as well as pervasive instances of homelessness, hunger, poor health, and low levels of education. Globalization is often considered an important driver of economic inequality. Actors may exploit any real or perceived disparities to their advantage by mobilizing the "have-nots" and portraying the "haves" or other elites as their oppressors.

Infrastructure Deficits: Inadequacy of systems and institutions that facilitate basic services and needs.

Infrastructure deficits exist where the quality and reach of the physical framework of public systems is insufficient for a population. Expectations for physical infrastructure depend on the particularities of a given socio-political environment, but usually include transport infrastructure (e.g., roads, bridges, ports, rail lines, etc.), energy infrastructure (e.g., electricity, natural gas, etc.), information and communication technology (e.g., internet, mobile telephone, etc.), and water and sanitation infrastructure. Infrastructure deficits are unequally distributed at both the international and national levels and are often linked to levels of economic prosperity. However, particular policies, strategies, and application of state resources contribute to the quality and reach of basic services provision. Infrastructure deficits allow actors to intervene by helping to build, upgrade and/ or maintain basic infrastructure, often in ways that create indebtedness or other beholden relationships that are primarily beneficial to the external actor.

Divided Societies: Communities where competing values or identities create factions.

Societies are divided when differences between groups create perceptions of deep, insurmountable divisions. The factions that emerge may be based on politics, culture or ethnicity, and religion. The inability to communicate through a shared language can create division. Pronounced socio-cultural divisions can foster intolerance, competition, friction, and sometimes high levels of violence. Divided societies can be easily exploited with the use of strategic information campaigns to exacerbate divisions. Especially in areas with longstanding historical conflicts, but even in areas with burgeoning conflicts, actors who understand the differences between opposing groups can easily exploit them for their own ends.

Illicit Networks: Transactional systems operating beyond the reach of the state or other formal authority.

Illicit networks are organized systems of transaction operating outside of established norms that emerge when the state or other regulatory authority has limited control or is complicit in sustaining these networks. Both legal and illegal goods and services are exchanged across illicit networks. These systems can eventually develop internal legitimate structures that directly challenge, subvert or otherwise undermine formal authority. The significance of illicit networks depends on the network's scope (e.g., local, national, or global), the types of goods and services exchanged (e.g., weapons, illicit substances, human labor, etc.), and the amount of money and number of people involved. Illicit networks are a pervasive feature of the OE and include drug cartels, radical ideological groups, human trafficking networks, unlicensed resource extraction ventures, and neighborhood gangs. Establishing linkages with illicit networks can enable more freedom of movement for actors to pursue their interests by undermining governmental, economic and law and order systems.

Global Cultural Knowledge Network
https://community.apan.org/wg/gckn

EXPLOITABLE CONDITIONS FRAMEWORK (ECF)

Demographic Pressures: Stress caused by significant changes within a population.

Significant changes to the demographic structure of populations create social and political pressures that often lead to internal competition and conflict. These pressures manifest as stress on the economic, health, environmental, political, and security well-being of populations, with their form depending on existing social structures. Demographic shifts can include substantial imbalances in demographic pyramids (e.g., youth bulges, aging populations, and lost generations), or changes to the distribution of a given population (e.g., urbanization and emigration). Shifts in demographic structures often occur in response to broader changes in the socio-political environment. Migration, for instance, may be rooted in armed conflict, environmental strain, or new economic opportunities; whereas changes to demographic pyramids may occur through improvements in health care, increased prosperity, or government policies limiting population growth. Demographic pressures may strain the environment's ability to support a population and in doing so create social tensions and divisions. Actors may leverage these challenges to their advantage by easing some of the pressures and thus gaining favor with populations and governments.

Resource Scarcity: Demand for goods and services is greater than the available supply.

Resource scarcity occurs when the demand for a resource (or resources) exceeds the available supply. Economic decisions must be made to manage both the availability and the proper distribution of resources in order to meet specific needs. There are three distinctive types of scarcity: demand- induced, wherein demand for a resource increases but the supply stays the same; supply-induced, wherein demand for a resource is consistent but the supply decreases; and structural, wherein the resource is unable to be harvested or distributed for structural reasons. When scarcity occurs, it can lead to competition for resources among different groups. Scarcity of arable land can create competition and/or conflict among groups, labor shortages can force populations to economically migrate, or a fixed supply of transport networks may produce massive congestion. Actors will exploit resource scarcity by either exacerbating the deficit to sew instability or mitigating it to curry favor with the government or population.

Ineffective Government: The inability of a government to provide for a society's essential needs.

A government is considered ineffective when it is unable to sufficiently provide the necessary public goods and services for its people to function in society, typically failing to motivate public trust and participation. Ineffective governments range on a continuum. Examples of ineffective governance include an inability to impartially adjudicate legal cases or maintain public order, a legislature that is incapable of performing its representational duties, or bureaucracies that are not fulfilling basic needs such as functioning hospitals, schools, utilities, and public transportation. Corruption—including nepotism, cronyism, kleptocracy—and other forms of predatory behavior are often symptoms of an ineffective government. Predatory actors may exploit government ineffectiveness by enhancing perceptions of government failure or by filling gaps in governance to advance their own interests.

"Technification" of Society: Mass adoption of disruptive technologies and trends.

Significant technological changes can rapidly upend established socio-cultural norms. Many societies are becoming increasingly reliant on the digitalization of many aspects of life. Widespread access to information and communication via the Internet of Things creates more informed and connected populations. Private encryption technology enables users to bypass institutional systems to conduct business, manage wealth, and communicate. Automation—including artificial intelligence—is replacing human labor and technology, and is increasingly controlling and operating vital systems. This "technification" of society may exacerbate social inequities, creating additional divisions in societies. Access to new technologies will vary globally and be primarily available to those with control over its distribution and use. Technologically controlled systems are at risk of exploitation by actors through actual or threatened intrusion, damage, and destruction, potentially leading to denial of essential services, economic, and risk to public health. Additionally, actors may seek to use perceived failures or shortcomings against a government as leverage or to foment unrest among affected populations.