



Is understanding ‘strategic culture’ important in wargame design and play?

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“Throughout military history , the greatest challenge to the strategist has been to understand the enemy as he understands himself, so as to be able to anticipate him [sic].”
(Klein, 1991:14)

Klein, Yitzhak. 1991. 'A theory of strategic culture' *Contemporary Strategy*, 10(1) pp. 3-23.

Jack Snyder

“It is enlightening to think of Soviet leaders not just as generic strategists who happen to be playing for the Red team, but as politicians and bureaucrats who have developed and been socialized into strategic culture that is in many ways unique and who have exhibited distinctive stylistic predispositions in their past crisis behavior.” (Snyder, 1977:4)

“Despite the energy expended in studying Soviet doctrine, however, many strategists place little confidence in such analysis. They feel that there is no way to know what Soviet doctrine for the employment of strategic forces ‘really is’” (Snyder, 1977:5)

Jack Snyder. 1977. ‘Soviet strategic culture : implications for limited nuclear operations’ A project AIR FORCE report for the US Air force R-2154-AF available to download <https://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R2154.html> [last accessed 4 Sept. 2023]

Jack Synder (2)

“The most successful Western interpreters of Soviet strategic thought have tried to place their raw data – doctrinal statements, negotiating positions, and evidence on force posture, deployment, and manoeuvres – into a coherent political, historical, and organizational context.” (Snyder, 1977:8)

Jack Synder. 1977. ‘Soviet strategic culture : implications for limited nuclear operations’ A project AIR FORCE report for the US Air force R-2154-AF available to download <https://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R2154.html> [last accessed 4 Sept. 2023]

How well do wargames respond to Synder's critique?

- Wargames – perhaps more than any other strategic planning tool have the potential to bring to life the importance and implications of strategic culture.
- How well do they do this?
 - When in the game lifecycle can this knowledge be captured, tested, and disseminated?
 - How much 'confidence' can be placed on analysis or framing derived from strategic culture?

What is strategic culture?

“Strategic culture can be defined as the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy. [...] In particular, it will discuss the body of attitudes and beliefs that guides and circumscribes thought on strategic questions, influences the way strategic issues are formulated, and sets the vocabulary and conceptual parameters of strategic debate.” [...]

“We assume that strategic cultures, like cultures in general, change as objective conditions change. But we also assume a large residual degree of continuity. Individuals are socialized into a mode of strategic discourse and acquire a fund of strategic concepts that evolve only marginally over time.” ” Snyder, 1977:8-9

What is strategic culture (2)

Ken Booth “a nation’s traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, habits, symbols, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat and use of force” (emphasis added 1990:121).

Jeannie Johnson defined strategic culture as “those inherited conceptions and shared beliefs that shape a nation’s collective identity, the values that color how a country evaluates its interests, and the norms that influence a state’s understanding of the means by which it can best realize its destiny in a competitive international system.” (emphasis added 2006:5)

Ashley Tellis, building on Ann Swindler, pointed out that “strategic culture shapes outcomes both by ‘providing the ultimate values toward which action is orientated’ and by ‘shaping a repertoire or tool kit of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies of action.’” (emphasis added, 2006:7)

What is strategic culture (3)

“The strategic culture of any nation state comprises competing narratives. Strategic culture, then, is best understood as a bundle of narratives, some held at the national level and some cultivated within particular organizations. Which of these is dominant at any point in time and for any particular issue is driven by a number of impacting factors including the nation’s most recent formative events, the sway of particularly charismatic political figures, popular perceptions of the nation’s future security, and a national sense of status and role on the world stage.”

(Johnson and Maines: “Cultural Topography Analytic Framework”, p.32.)

<https://www.surprisedstaregames.co.uk/single-post/amateurs-talk-strategy-professionals-talk-game-design>

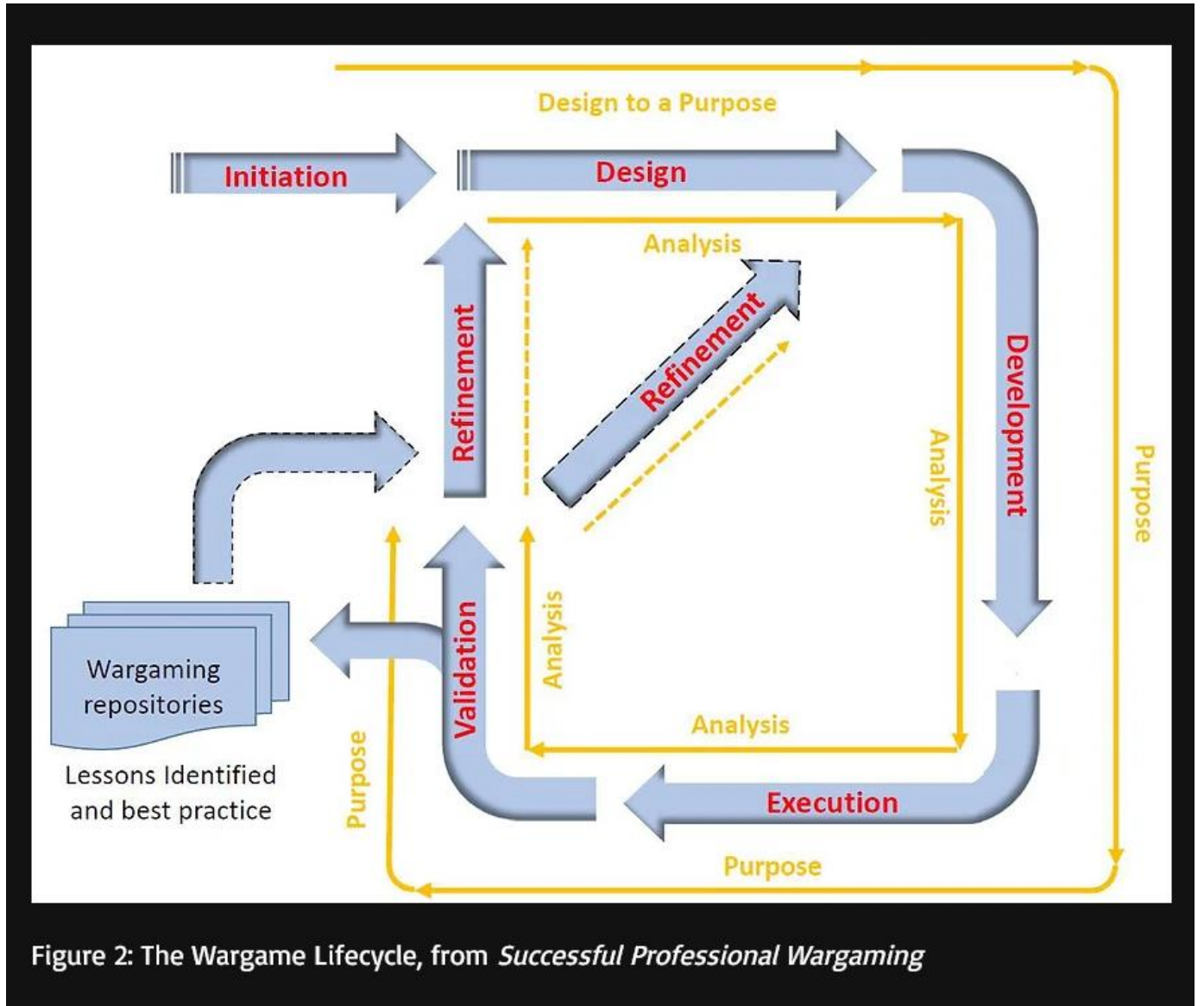
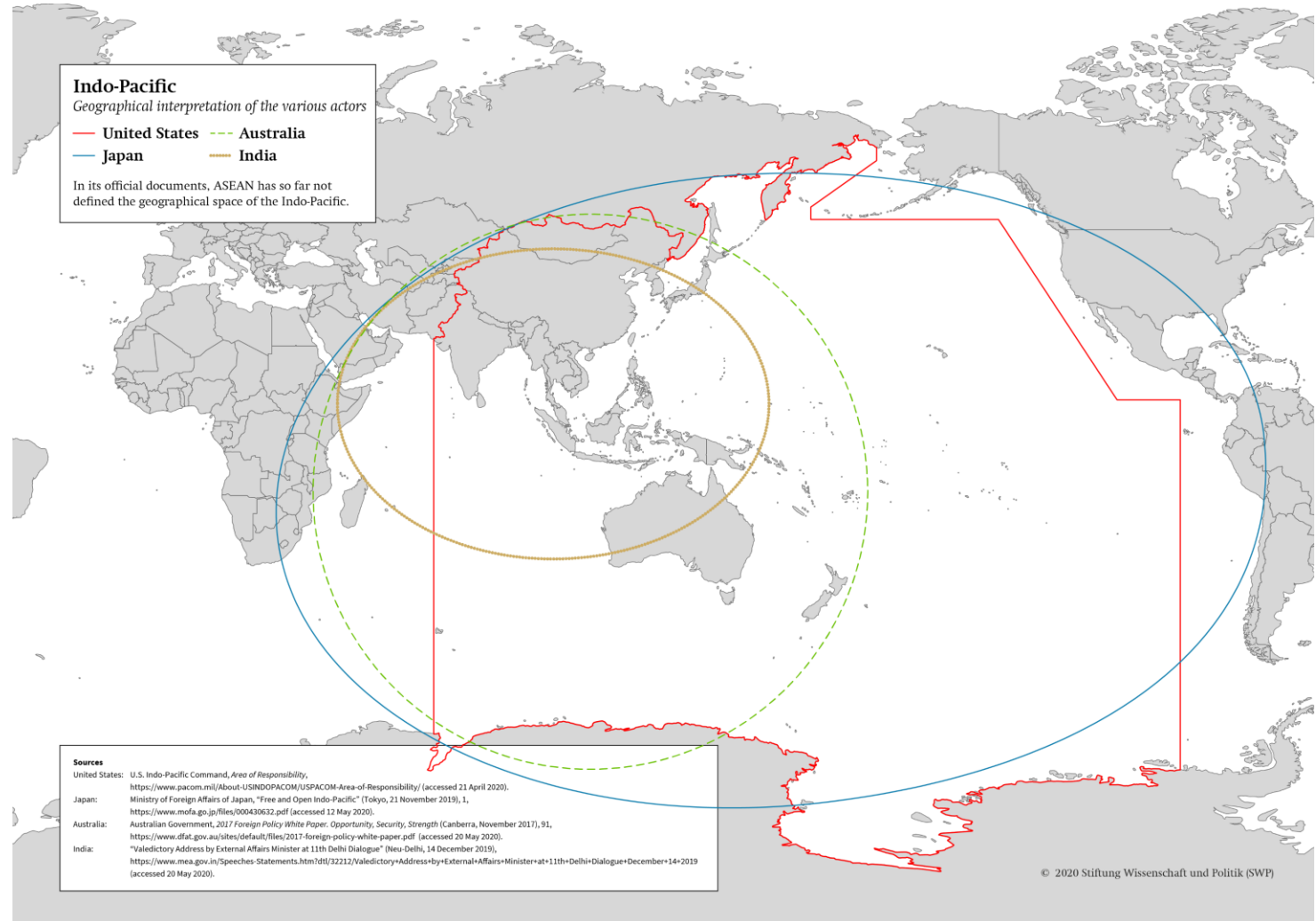


Figure 2: The Wargame Lifecycle, from *Successful Professional Wargaming*

What about the Indo-Pacific?
 (SWP -
https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/assets/Research_Paper/2020RP09/images/2020RP09_IndoPacific_001.png)



Tipping the Balance – Report 2017 – Blaxland and Raymond

Social media “meme” with Thai mythical figure telling the Statue of Liberty not to interfere.

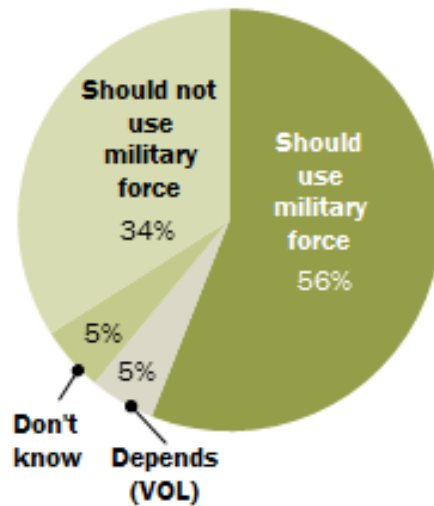
- **“Our respondents saw the military threat from the United States as greater than any other Great Power, including China.”**



Pew Research,
2015,
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/06/23/global-publics-back-u-s-on-fighting-isis-but-are-critical-of-post-911-torture/bop-report-02/>

U.S. Views on Defending Asian Allies

If one of our allies in Asia, such as Japan, South Korea or the Philippines, got into a serious military conflict with China, do you think we ___ to defend them?

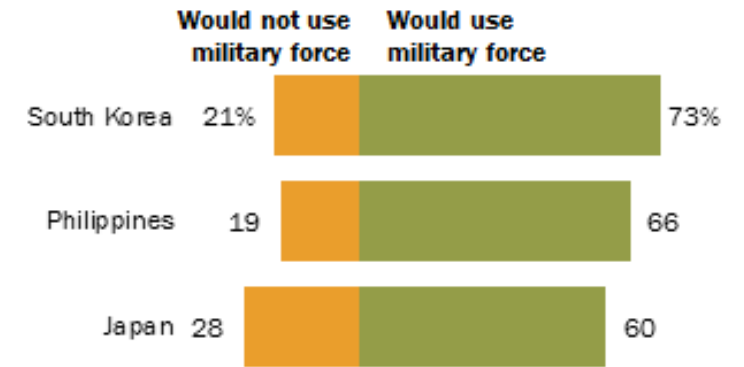


Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. Q38.

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America's Asian Allies Believe U.S. Would Come to Their Defense

If your country and China got into a serious military conflict, do you think the U.S. ___ to defend your country?



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. Q137.

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A collection of colorful wooden blocks in various shapes (L, T, and I) scattered on a wooden surface. The blocks are in shades of purple, blue, orange, green, red, pink, yellow, light blue, grey, brown, and light green. The text "Decision Units approaches to Strategic culture?" is overlaid on the image.

Decision Units
approaches to
Strategic culture?

Thank You

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