Gaming Foreign Policy

Serious Games in Support of Analysis and Training

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about me

Professor, Department of Political Science, McGill University
  Middle East politics and security
  humanitarian, peace, and stabilization operations
  intelligence analysis
  serious (political-military) gaming

Policy Staff, Department of Foreign Affairs; Intelligence Assessment Secretariat, Privy Council Office; Senior Nonresident Fellow, Atlantic Council; consultant to World Bank, UN agencies, others

Senior editor, PAXsims (http://www.paxsims.org)
why game?

Games can be effective educational and training tools.
- Engagement and learning
- Help bridge theory and practice

Games can offer analytical insight.
- Empathy/alternative views.
- Crowdsourcing (generating collective insight).
- Adversary responses.
- Second and third order effects.
- Explore alternatives.
- Adjunct to other methods.

Networking and team-building.

"Mid-term wargaming will focus on the development of new capabilities as well as operational and organizational concepts... with an eye to incorporating innovative approaches or technologies into the future force and identifying potential portfolio offsets."

"When done right, wargames spur innovation and provide a mechanism for addressing emerging challenges, exploiting new technologies, and shaping the further security environment. They can potentially make the difference between wise and unwise investment trajectories and make our forces more successful in future conflicts."

In order to "effectively pursue an innovative... strategy avoid operational and technological surprise, and make the best of limited resources, we need to reinvigorate, institutionalize, and systematize wargaming..."
some of my games

Brynania
large (100+) week long simulation of complex peace operation for university students

AFTERSHOCK: A Humanitarian Crisis Game
educational boardgame for university and professional audiences on multilateral humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations

some of my games

Fall of Tripoli
scenario-based examination of post-Qaddafi governance challenges prepared for Libyan NTC (Benghazi, July 2011)
some of my games

- Palestinian refugee negotiation simulation (2009)
  - FCO-supported Chatham House project
- UNRWA policy simulation (2013)
  - Policy recommendation for UNRWA CG
- Palestinian refugee workshops (2014)
  - US DoS/FCO-supported Chatham House project in support of Kerry negotiations
- Syrian Refugees in Lebanon simulation (2014-15)
  - Educational simulation for Exeter University, McGill University

some of my games

- US Engagement in the Middle East (2016)
  - Asked by Atlantic Council Middle East to develop game exploring the impact of greater US engagement/disengagement on Middle East
  - Focus on crisis stability: can US effectively deter challengers, support (and restrain) allies, build coalitions, mediate and resolve disputes?
  - Two simultaneous, semi-linked games
some of my games

ISIS Crisis
- multi-sided pol-mil matrix game
- examines counter-ISIS challenges, with emphasis on Iraq
- developed with Major Tom Mouat (Defence Academy of the UK), based on matrix game approach first developed by Chris Engle

Dstl trip report:
https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2016/08/02/dstl-wargaming-trip-report-or-i-visited-portsdown-west-and-all-i-got-was-this-lousy-mug/
matrix games

matrix games* are narrative-based game with no rigid rules

in turn, each player declares:
1. an action
2. the outcome/effect of that action (if successful)
3. reasons why they will be successful

other players (+SME) identify other arguments for/against success

outcome is then determined
- umpire adjudication
- balance of arguments
- adjusted stochastic determination (dice + modifiers)

game is adjusted, and next player takes turn

*which involve no actual matrix

matrix games

strengths
- cheap, fast, and easy
- flexible
- multisided
- full spectrum of diplomatic/information/military/economic actions and effects
- role-playing

weaknesses
- skilled facilitator?
- don’t look complicated (or expensive) enough
- sequential one-action-at-a-time
- language skills
- lack sophisticated modeling
ISIS Crisis (Iraq edition)

Six players/teams + optional SME
1. ISIS
2. Kurds
3. Iraqi government
4. Sunni opposition
5. Iran
6. United States
7. SME (unrepresented players and effects)
matrix game variations

- multi-level game
  - larger teams (4-6), with players assigned roles and individual goals
  - group decision-making rules
  - individual interaction limits
- multiple COAs, select one
  - generates larger number of possible action
  - enables analysis of roads-not-taken
- multiple actions per team in different (diplomatic, military, economic, other) domains
  - all-of-government
  - reduce kinetic bias
matrix game variations

- distributed and asynchronous games
  - play by email, skype, messaging, etc
- linked games
  - for example, simultaneous Syria and Iraq games
- matrix games embedded in more conventional wargames
  - RCAT