Gaming in Support of the (late) Middle East Peace Process

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Games and conflict

- as a form of cultural production, games (of all sorts) have a complex relationship with societal conflict
- games as a reflection
- games as an agent of socialization
- games as a deliberate motivator
  - to promote particular perspectives and mobilize supporters
  - to educate
  - to promote social reconciliation
Rocket Pride (2014)
Bomb Gaza (2014)
Gaza Assault: Code Red (2014)
Gaza Man (2015)
PeaceMaker (2007)
Special Force 2 (2007, Hizbullah)
games and peace processes

- games can also be used as a technical method of policy analysis in support of peace processes
- elicitation of expert opinion/crowd-sourcing of ideas
- “second track” dialogue
- encourage particular type of interaction and engagement by participants
- HOWEVER, this is a niche application
  - serious games may not look very “serious” to participants
  - opportunity costs
“Ottawa process”
(1992-2014)

- Canada assigned gavel of the multilateral Refugee Working Group in 1992, as part of broader Middle East peace process
- very little serious discussion or policy analysis of the refugee issue to that point
- sensitive issue + consensus requirements made it difficult to move forward with the RWG
- multilateral track disrupted by other developments, formal activities suspended by 1997
- this led to an emphasis on policy analysis and “track two” activities, rather than formal diplomatic process
- UK, EU, US also supported core group of organizers

“track two” diplomacy

- non-official meetings between experts, former officials, and officials participating in private capacities
- goals: greater understanding, idea-generation, network-building, pre-testing and possible pre-negotiation
- differ from both “track one” formal negotiations and “backchannels”
games-based policy seminars

Chatham House, Regional dimensions of the Palestinian refugee issue (2008)  
Negotiation simulation designed to identify challenges in implementing a possible peace deal.

University of Exeter, UNRWA policy simulation (2013)  
Team-based policy recommendations supported by simulated stakeholders.

Chatham House, Refugee compensation mechanisms (2013)  
Competitive design and stress-testing of different refugee compensation mechanisms.

Chatham House, Normative dimensions of the Palestinian refugee issue (2014)  
Use of “gamey” technique to elicit approaches and language addressing the parties’ normative concerns.

“regional dimensions” simulation

**Purpose:** to highlight the need for further technical work on key aspects of a potential refugee deal

**Participants and format:** 40+ technical experts and former officials, simulated refugee negotiations over 2.5 days

**Outcome:** highlighted a number of technical gaps, resulting in follow-up meetings supported by UK and EU

Points of interest:
- Hamas, or not to Hamas?
- Syrian player response
- checking with Ramallah
- negotiation bubbles
- engaging/ignoring the refugees
- official and unofficial debriefs
- “things said here today I hadn’t thought of before”

UNRWA policy simulation

- **Purpose:** to identify possible UNRWA responses to regional and financial pressures
- **Participants and format:** UNRWA senior staff + c20 technical experts and former officials organized into 3 competing teams; other SMEs roleplaying key stakeholders; 2 days
- **Outcome:** presented a menu of policy options for UNRWA to considers

https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2013/04/30/reflections-on-a-humanitarian-policy-simulation/
UNRWA policy simulation

- Points of interest:
  - motivating participants
  - social engineering of teams

Purpose:

to identify and assess possible mechanisms for (Palestinian) refugee compensation

Participants and format:
15+ technical experts and former officials organized into 3 competing teams; group assessment of proposed mechanisms

Outcome:
insights fed back to US State Department, in support of Kerry initiative

https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2014/01/27/compensation-for-palestinian-refugees-a-gaming-influenced-workshop/
refugee compensation mechanisms

Points of interest:

- exercise highlighted technical complexity of issue, and forced participants to grapple with this to a much higher degree than usual seminar or conference discussions
- challenge of inadequate financing
- importance of normative dimensions (apology/acknowledgement/etc.)

https://prrnblog.wordpress.com/2013/12/23/compensation-complications/

normative dimensions

- **Purpose**: to identify approach and formulations to address normative issues
- **Participants and format**: 15+ technical experts and former officials organized into small, randomly-assigned 3 person “speed dating” groups and asked to develop language and approaches
- **Outcome**: insights fed back to US State Department, in support of Kerry initiative

https://prrnblog.wordpress.com/2014/02/19/normative-dimensions-of-the-palestinian-refugee-issue/
规范维度

要点：
- 学术语言的挑战
- 偶然组合的惊人价值

一些与其他ME相关的游戏

PAXsims, ISIS Crisis (2014-present)
- 政策和教育模拟。探索政治、军事等动态如何影响伊拉克的ISIS叛乱。也用于展示“矩阵游戏”方法论。

- 教育模拟。

Atlantic Council. US Engagement in the Middle East (2016)
- 政策分析。评估美国在中东的更多/更少参与效果。
ISIS Crisis

- narrative-based “matrix game”
- matrix game approach originally developed by Chris Engle
- ISIS Crisis developed by myself and Major Tom Mouat (British Army)
- ideal approach for exploring creative approaches to multi-stakeholder issues
- relatively easy to design and implement

https://paxsims.wordpress.com/tag/isis-crisis/
Syrian refugees in Lebanon

- two linked games, involving c25 students:
  1. policy simulation (Lebanese government, UN, NGOs, donors)
     - asked to develop comprehensive refugee plan
  2. refugee survival and adaptation simulation
     - make life choices every hour
     - need to earn in-game resources to eat (!)
- designed to highlight linkages and disconnects
- sessions held at both University of Exeter and McGill University
US engagement in the Middle East

- Game developed for the Atlantic Council to explore the implications of a “more engaged” and “less engaged” US policy.
- Backdrop: debate over Obama Administration policy, as well as possible future policies of current Presidential candidates.
- 50 participants (former senior/cabinet officials, former or current mid-rank officials, diplomats, SMEs).
- Innovative methodology of two simultaneous games with overlapping participants.


The important issue is "what," not "how much."

US role irreplaceable—but not all-powerful.

The dangers of (American) hubris.

Importance of asymmetric and "gray zone" conflict.

Dynamics of Iranian-KSA competition.

(...and more)
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)

Kurdish Regional Government

LIMITED HORIZONS. Kurdish politicians are largely focused on Kurdistan.

Ongoing effect: Any actions outside Kurdish-majority areas suffer a -1 penalty.

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

SUNNI SYMPATHIES. You enjoy a "home court" advantage in Sunni-majority areas.

Ongoing effect: All actions taking place in Sunni-majority areas gain a +1 bonus. Actions taking place in Shia or Kurdish-majority areas suffer a -1 penalty, however.

Iran

HEGEMONIC NEIGHBOUR? Iranian involvement in Iraq only deepens Sunni suspicions.

Ongoing effect: Any unsuccessful direct actions by Iran against Sunni opposition or ISIL provide that actor with a +1 bonus on their next action.

Iraqi Government

PATRONAGE AND CORRUPTION. Government actions are hampered by corruption, political infighting, patronage, and weak institutions.

Ongoing effect: All actions suffer a -1 penalty.
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