CONNECTIONS UK 2017 Megagame ANALYST REPORT

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I The Mega game

Game Objectives

Simulating a real, near-future situation. The game should *accurately reflect reality, and cannot play around with that reality solely to create more interesting game dynamics.*[1]

Practical requirements

The practical requirements of the event[2]*:*

- *There would be more than 100 participants, and so the game had to accommodate this many roles and sub-roles. Everyone needed to be engaged and involved.*
- *Related to this, we wanted people to enjoy themselves. Quite apart from whatever insight the game might offer into wargaming and its subject matter, it also served as a conference ice-breaker and networking opportunity.*
- *Participants would have a wide range of subject matter expertise and wargaming experience.*
- *The game would take up much of the first day, involving around 6 hours of game play (including briefing and lunch).*
- *Physical space was rather limited: one large room, and two smaller rooms.*
- *There would be no time for pre-reading. The game briefings had to be sufficiently straight-forward to enable everyone to assume their roles with minimal preparation.*

Central question:

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[1] https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2017/09/09/dissecting-dire-straits/

[2] https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2017/09/09/dissecting-dire-straits/

The central question that the game would address: <u>how would the unpredictability of US policy under the Trump Administration, and the growing strategic power of China, affect crisis stability in East and Southeast Asia?</u>

Design

A game system with relatively simple rules, with a very general combat model. With one week turns, large aggregate forces, and large areas of the region depicted. Focus on posture (how prepared and mobilized military forces were) and on commitment (willingness to use force in a confrontation).

Teams were typically subdivided into a national leader, a foreign minister, a senior military commander, an intelligence chief, and one or more ambassadors. Each team would issue military orders (movement of forces, as well as changes in posture and commitment) using a *Military Operations Form*. Other major decisions (including options presented in the team briefing) were recorded using a *Major Decision Form*. In order to provide greater insight into goals and perspectives, we also had each national leader complete a *Strategic Assessment* each turn, while each intelligence chief completed an *Intelligence Assessment* to identify threats and likely future developments.

Two subgames:

The White House subgame recreating the uncertainties and internal power struggles of the Trump Administration. Members of cabinet and the White House staff each had different policy preferences (anti-globalism, defeating the Republican challenger, confronting China, encouraging diplomacy, projecting American military strength, promoting the Trump brand, achieving a well-run White House, or "Making America Great Again"), and sought to influence the policy by moving various ideas up a snakes-and-ladders -type game board using *White House Politics* cards.

The North Korea subgame had a more improvised character. At the DPRK table various displays indicating the various key power centers of the regime, onto which the players placed pawns indicating their loyal cadres. Not surprisingly, the Supreme Leader had the most cadres, and controlled the key positions. However, in the event that an assassination attempt succeeded, we envisaged using matrix-game adjudication to determine the success and outcome of any internal actions. *Party Politics* cards added some additional richness to this. It was important that lesser players retain support in the Central Committee lest they be purged. Kim Jong-un was also given a number of *Obsequious Loyalty Forms*. With these he could set his minions a task each turn, with rewards and punishments for those who exhibited impressive or disappointing revolutionary enthusiasm.

Participants

The Connections Community incorporates many experienced wargamers, yet the conference happily grows and the number of people that indicated that they were first-timers was substantial. So Dire Straits hosted a fair number people relatively new to (Pol-Mil) wargaming.

Also, we noted that many participants did not an have extensive background knowledge on the current situation in (South) East Asia. E.g. in Europe, the geopolitical focus is predominantly on the Russian hybrid threat on the Baltics/fringes of Europe and somewhat on MENA rather than on (South) East Asia.

II Issues for analysis

We were asked to look at two distinct aspects of the game:

<u>I Wargame methodology</u>

Identify its strengths, weaknesses, and its ability to offer substantive insight into the subject matter of the wargame. In order to aid comparability across the reports, we would ask for you to be clear on what your top five methodological take-aways are (although you are free to discuss more than five).

II Substantive findings of the game

Substantive findings of the game (if any) as they relate to issues of near-future crisis stability, geopolitics, and strategy in East and South East Asia. Rank order the top five findings (although you are, again, free to discuss more than five). Discuss the apparent validity of the findings in light of your methodological assessment. How plausible was the game outcome? How confident are you that these findings offer some, or any, insight?

Analytical framework

We were not given an analytical framework prior to the game. We felt that it was important to have such a framework to use as a standard by which we could measure both the game process and the game results. We spent a little time thinking about this at the start of the game. Stephen introduced the following framework he used before to assess futures projects. The framework consists of five propositions:

- A 'game' represents a 'system'. In the case of Dire Straits, the system being represented is the web of international relations in East Asia and beyond. This compels us to think systemically about international relations.
- If we have a system, then we will need actors to operate the system. This compels us to identify the key actors within the system and their motivations in acting within the system.
- The system consists of a series of relationships between the various actors. The game compels us to define the relationships between the various actors and examine the modes by which they interact with each other.
- The interactions between the actors permits us to examine the strategies they adopt in their interactions. The game compels us to adopt a strategy to play the game and to monitor the outcomes of the strategies adopted.
- From a systemic perspective, this then opens the possibility of wind-tunnelling various potential strategies from within the game framework. This can be used to identify, consider, and experiment with various policy options.

There is a value judgement behind each of those propositions, and we accept that none of this is without criticism. However, our focus was on reviewing the game rather than designing an ideal analytical framework, so we decided to use this framework, even though it might not be perfect.

The framework guided us on how we viewed the actions of the players during the game and helped us to structure our questions and discussions when talking to the players. We acknowledged that the group of players would be quite diverse, would have differing levels of experience in terms of gaming, and would represent a spectrum of opinion. Central to this would be the pre-game briefings which the players received, and we were particularly interested in the degree to which the briefings guided the players towards expected or unexpected results.

<u>Focus: Insights on specific conflicts</u>

We had a team of three analysts on site and one available remotely. We couldn't cover everything, so we had to focus on what we felt, *a priori*, what would be important.

As a technique of focus, we mapped out what we felt would be the important conflict points as the game developed. We identified three areas of potential conflict:

- The Korean DMZ – a question of unfinished business.
- The South China Sea – a question of resource grabbing.
- Resurgent nationalism – a question of a series of frozen and potential conflicts between:
- Russia and Japan (Kurile Islands)
- Japan and South Korea (Liancourt Rocks)
- China and Japan (Diaoyu/ Senkaku Islands)
- China and Taiwan (who represents 'China')
- China and the ASEAN nations (South China Sea)
- China and India (the Himalayas)

We felt that the common denominator in all of these conflict flashpoints was the rise of China as a power in the twenty-first century, and how the United States, as the established power, would accommodate the rising power. As this is a classic description of the Thucydides Trap[3], we felt justified in taking the view that the game was about the Thucydides Trap in the Far East in the first part of the twenty-first century. This helped us to decide how to allocate our resources throughout the game.

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[3] "Today, an irresistible rising China is on course to collide with an immovable America. The likely result of this competition was identified by the great historian Thucydides, who wrote: "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable." From: http://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/overview-thucydides-trap

III Observations

A. Wargame methodology

All in all, we think that the game played very well. As it is basically quite impossible to actually test a megagame of this magnitude, it went amazingly well. We received few criticisms of the game mechanism, and those we did receive could well be dealt with by tightening the briefings a little and to insert a moment where a news update could be given. Also, although we have several observation on the realism of the outcomes, the overall course of action seemed to stay within reasonable bounds of what can be expected in the multitude of conflicts in the area. Overall, we would like to express our views that we are impressed with the operation of the game.

Below the aspects we analysed with regard to game methodology, as we couldn't help ourselves- a few more than 5 points, but we nicely aggregated them:

Realism

One of our focus points was that of realism. We tried to observe whether the resulting narrative could be sufficiently realistic. The mega game basically allows for free play end consequently for interventions that may be totally creative yet not very realistic. So we tried to observe whether players tried to be as realistic as possible or inserted a lot of/too much creativity in the narrative, or resort to e.g. a 'last turn madness'. The first aspect we looked at was the extent to which players brought a sufficient cultural awareness to the game and in which it affected play to the extent that the gameplay might be unconvincing. Stephen Aguilar was our judge of this- hence the below is in the I-form as written by Stephen.

1.   Cultural awareness   One of the areas in which we were interested was the degree to which cultural bias was brought to the game, I believe that we did see some of this. For example, I felt that the China team was played according to an American and European agenda, and didn't adequately reflect Chinese game play. As an example, I felt that the China team were too ready accept the DPRK as a problem only to be solved rather than as a diplomatic asset to be utilised. Equally, I felt that the various teams didn't fully engage with the racial, cultural, and historical dissonance in the East Asia Sea. I felt that China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia were too ready to work together to resolve the question of the DPRK, which was seen too readily as a collective problem. Perhaps a more tightly drafted initial briefing could have avoided this issue? I found that a similar view may be applied to the gameplay around the South China Sea, Taiwan Straits, and Himalayan maps. This lack of cultural awareness led the players to do things that I find quite unconvincing. For example, the ASEAN players quite readily moved the organisation towards one of military cooperation. Given the various historical backgrounds of the nations involved, given the differing experience of colonialism, and given their disparate nature, this seemed a fairly long stretch. Equally, I found the Taiwanese gameplay to be rather adventurous. Perhaps this was due to a less focussed China? Either way, over a period of eight or nine weeks (the time represented in the game), Taiwan had become sufficiently emboldened to tug the tail of the tiger. I found that to be unconvincing. I did, however, find convincing the gameplay between India and China. As long as the border remains stable, there is a familiar ring to India being far more concerned with events in Pakistan rather than on the border with China. There was scope for China to strengthen its position with Pakistan, but I saw no evidence of this.

Suggestions for cultural awareness   After giving some thought to the cultural aspects of the game, and after discussing it with both my fellow analysts and with the players, I came to the view that this area could be addressed through the initial player briefings. If the briefings were to contain greater guidance about national objectives, and to contain rudimentary guidance on which players the actors would work with – as well as those who they couldn't work with – then the gameplay could have been steered to encompass some of the complex cultural issues in the region. It is possible to take the view that much of the potential conflict in the region is the result of a cultural legacy, and we felt that the game structure wasn't sufficiently sensitive to this.

We discussed in our analysis team the issuing of relevant material before the game and hence we spoke a number of players who told us that they would have been more happy if they had been able to study background material on the actor they would play to get a much better grip on what was going on, to understand the other actors actions and to better be able to play actions that would be meaningful given the cultural context. We are aware of the practical consideration not to send briefings in advance, yet to obtain realistic outcomes that are valuable for analysis of the actual situation and the course of conflicts, in our view the players should be able to actually study their role. We are of opinion that it would be impossible to sufficiently understand e.g. the actor China from a briefing (say max 15 minutes), its cultural sensitivities and the nature of its relations to all its near and far neighbors and the history of the conflicts surrounding it. For a wargame on an actual situation to be sufficiently realistic- players must know their roles in advance and be able to read into that role.

2.   Validity of Subgames   There was not only one overarching megagame, but it included several sub-games played simultaneously. The headline sub-games were the White House Game and the DPRK Game. There were also sub-games focussed on ASEAN and the UN, which I found to be quite interesting. The White House and DPRK sub-games operated on a level that was different to the main game. All three of us spent at least one turn observing each of these games.

The White House game appeared to be a modelling of access to the President and the factional fight between senior white house personnel who represent quite different political views. The President was programmed to act in a relatively chaotic and uncoordinated manner. It is too early to say whether or not we found this modelling accurate, but it did reflect the cartoon impression that we have of how the current White House operates. Whether it will continue to do so by 2020 is another matter. The White House game was linked into a US team in the main game by means of a number of liaison roles. We found these to be very competent. The chaotic White House wasn't at all reflected in chaotic game play on the map tables. In many ways that is reassuring – a chaotic leadership is filtered through competent implementation. However, we do wonder how things might have been had a very inexperienced player taken on this liaison role. If the game were to have future iterations, then this might be a feature to explore.

ASEAN and UN sub games Technically they were not sub-games in that they were an extension of the main game and had no specific rules of their own. However, they did provide a framework for collective action, which took the game out of the purely national framework. We felt that this aspect of the game was relatively under-developed and might provide a better game in future iterations. In particular, I felt that the opportunity to explore the possibility of resolving the disputes in the South China Sea through the forum of the UN might warrant further attention.

The DPRK Game also focussed on internal politics. A number of factions within the DPRK were represented by the players, and the game appeared to be about the allocation of resources within the country and the survival of the various factions played. I was convinced by this game. There were a number of players who acted to link the DPRK Game to the main game. The players didn't want to spend too much time at the map tables because they feared being purged on their return to the DPRK table. This had the effect of isolating the DPRK from the main game. Whether or not this was intended is unknown to me. Aspects of this feature are appealing, but other aspects are not. I would have expected greater contact and coordinated actions between the DPRK and China. We asked a number of players from the DRPK how they managed their foreign affairs and appreciated that they were well absorbed in their minigame, but felt that they still had sufficient time to act towards the other parties that were relevant to their policies.

3. Spectrum of force The players were given only one policy tool – military action – which was binary in that they either used it or didn't use it. A more nuanced game could have been had if the players were encouraged to use the tools of soft power in addition to those of hard power. A fairly important issue, trade (economics) could be part of negotiation, but wasn't otherwise represented in the game.

Control

The control was formed by experienced wargamers and they helped tremendously when people were lost.

1. Allowing for incidents In our team there were some questions about the degree to which they were to influence the outcome of the game. One example sticks in my mind. Very few people could read the handwriting of the link person responsible for informing the map control about the DPRK troop movements. One written command was presented to map control which, on the face of it, ordered the South Korean forces to invade North Korea. Map control clarified the situation and asked the player if that is what was intended. It wasn't, the order was made more legible, and play continued.

We see this as a missed opportunity. A better game might have been had if an accidental war had come about. The Korean DMZ is one of those flash points where there is a danger of accidental war, and this scenario ought not to be discounted. We don't wish to single out this one example, but, speaking to the South Korean players, they would have relished this scenario. It would certainly have introduced a complicating factor into the DPRK game as well. Talking to the map controls, I think that they wanted to allow the game to run smoothly and acted to keep the gameplay moving along. Perhaps there is scope to make the control briefings a bit more specific? To specifically allow or disallow the possibility of accidental war?

2. Strategic objectives There were no clarified strategic objectives given to the actors. For SME's this might be beneficial, yet the number of participants that had limited background knowledge was substantial and we observed that several of the syndicates actually worked without overarching strategic goals.

Suggestion With lack of SME's let the players decide what *operational objectives* to pursue by *actions*, in accordance to clarified *strategic objectives*. Also, exchange the pre-game narratives for strategic objectives. If the game had taken place "one week from now" this would have lessened the need for speculative pre-game narratives.

2. Free flow or more deterministic We understand that a balance has to be struck between a purely deterministic game where the outcome is pre-ordained and a free-flow game where the players are encouraged to wander wherever the story takes them. One improvement one might like to consider would be to make the game a hint more deterministic through more structured briefings.

Player experience

1. Engagement   We also observed player engagement.   Some roles have more immersion that others, e.g. last year in War in Bini the people in the UN found '*day long meetings and not getting anywhere*' kind of realistic, but also not very engaging. Compared to the megagame of last year this aspect improved significantly. The UN was still played, but now for just limited periods of time – they still didn't get anywhere- which is realistic but the UN members still had a significant role to play.

Al in all, the players were active till the very end and mostly quite engaged.

2. Situational awareness   The next aspect of the player experience on which we would like to comment is the use of the media in the game and the resulting situational awareness. Here we looked at the issue whether the players were sufficiently aware of crucial developments. Previous megagames have shown that it is fairly hard to gain a sufficient situational awareness. So much is going on at such speed at different locations that people may not be aware of crucial developments.

The central map was helpful and we found the media team to be extremely well run and well briefed and as a whole it functioned substantially better than the news team of last years game. The media team were experienced gamers and it showed in what they did. We appreciated that modern conflict is less about the war fighting and more about the narrative it creates in the domestic politics of the combatant nations.

We do doubt the impact of the news feed though on the players situational awareness. Only one or two teams recognised that they needed someone to monitor and liaise with the media. We found that the players were so focussed on the game and writing their order sheets that the media wasn't monitored as closely as it might have been. A number of players commented on the speed at which tweets were added to the large screen, making it difficult to keep up with the flow of messaging. In many respects, it does add to the game the chaos of the fog of war. However, many of the players we interviewed found the volume of tweets overwhelming, which led them to give up monitoring them. It is hard to find the right balance between enough engaging news and not overwhelming the players. In particular we heard that novices would have appreciated a better situational awareness.

Suggestions   Perhaps the newsfeed could be a bit more tailored to influence the gameplay but without creating an information overload? I see this as a relatively important point because part of the impact of the White House Game was to be felt on the media screen, but an unmonitored media screen deprives the players of that part of the game.

Also, a collective news-briefing might help. Last year in War in Bini, in each round a moment in time was taken to update all players on what had happened in that round. With a news team of the

quality of the one of this year, It might be beneficial in a megagame to have such collective moment to summarize the main developments in the game.

Attaining objectives

1. Seasoned wargamers   We had the impression that for seasoned wargamers the game was a truly enjoyable and valuable experience. Over the day, indeed, the players remained extremely active and seemed engaged. Some teams, right from the start, adopted a very organised approach. They teased out the organisational chart that was implicit in the role allocation, they identified the issues that they felt were key to their national success (as they defined it), and they devised a strategy to achieve those national objectives. We are of opinion that for experienced players Dire Straits was a thoroughly enjoyable experience that also might have given them more insights in the situation in (south) east Asia.

2. Novice wargamers   Teams predominantly with relatively inexperienced players were observed to fare less well. Several players didn't seem to understand the gaming process at the start. We observed members of the control teams providing practical assistance with matters such as completing the forms that were needed, but we did detect during the day players who were lost. Several of the novice players commented that they were overwhelmed by the *pace* of the rounds, the *amount of things going on simultaneously and the noise in the main hall* that made it hard to hear what other people were saying. *Being lost* was one of the features identified in our interviews on Days 2 and 3 of the conference. Some players were quite happy with the level of briefings given and needed little guidance, others were less happy and would have liked greater structure within the briefings and the game as a whole. Our estimation is that the latter outnumbered the former by a non-negligible margin. We assume it is something of a priority for fewer players to feel lost during the game.

Suggestions   We appreciate that it is difficult to pitch a game like this at the right level with a widely diverse audience. We, however, doubt whether it is wise to include those totally new to wargaming in such an overwhelming experience. We saw frustrations as some really didn't understand what was going on and felt inadequate to actually take any decisions. In our perception, novices need *less complexity, less fog of war, more explanation, and more time to thinks things over and to discuss with their team members.*

Besides, we heard indications that novices might have benefitted from some more support with understanding the game mechanics and setup. How those turns and phases are supposed to go? Who is sitting where? What table is where? Who is doing what? Also, they might have appreciated help with interpreting all that was going on. Also, we think that novices would have benefitted from an AAR on site within their syndicate, preferable having a seasoned gamer available that could provide an overview of the overall course of actions and discussing what decisions they made and the validity of those decisions within the context of the overall course.

B Substantive findings of the game

In addition to considering the game as a process, we were asked to comment on the degree to which the actual outcome of the game could be convincing. Most comments are by Stephen who was most knowledgeable on the situation in south east Asia (hence the I form).

Future forward gaming

The game placed us in January 2020, a future state which was very much like today, only coming after the investigation of President Trump for possible ties with Russia. This was the only noticeable aspect of the future that was represented during the game. Part of this is due to the future state being very close to the present, but part of it is also due to the players not quite accepting the futures element in the game.

Admittedly, January 2020 is likely to be very much like today, but there was an opportunity to experiment with something different, which the game didn't capture and which wasn't evident in the gameplay. I found that the game resulted in play that was fairly myopic and this does limit, in my view, the validity of the results.

I felt that the players came to the game and played out the most pressing news headline of the morning. On the day, that was North Korea. And that resulted in a game with a focus on North Korea. I spoke to the map controls about how busy they had been during the day, and they tended to confirm that the Korea map was fairly busy whilst the other maps were fairly quiet. My view is that the game focussed on a contemporary news story and pushed around a few issues, but largely resulted in the current situation. Still, this exercise could be of use if it were to be treated as a baseline scenario against which other scenarios could be measured.

The outcomes

1. Korean peninsula One obvious result of the game is that no war resulted. Laying aside the issue of the accidental war mentioned above, this is quite a comforting result. In fact, the actual game play lended some support to the model of international relations that has conflicting actors winding up to the jump line and then pulling back at the last moment. There is good evidence to suggest that this is how events are playing out in the Korean peninsula. This is a good representation of reality.

It is, however, telling us what we already know. It would have been interesting to change a variable to see what would have happened. The South Korea players were keen for war to break out, but were unwilling to cause it. I feel that the results of the exercise would have been more interesting in the case of the accidental war that didn't happen, simply because it would have forced the other actors to move away from their strategy of business as usual. A business as usual strategy has some merit in a futures exercise because it does only define the baseline scenario. Even greater benefits could be derived from varying the operating assumptions.

2. China - Taiwan In the game, the Taiwanese were willing to relax the operating assumptions by adopting a very risky strategy of moving along the track to becoming an independent state. I found this to be an accurate reflection of one aspect of Taiwanese politics. I found the response of China to be unconvincing. One uncertainty faced by the Taiwanese government is the extremity of a Chinese response to such moves. At the more lenient end of responses is a form of economic blockade, whilst at the most extreme end is a military occupation. The game didn't capture this uncertainty.

This may have reflected the players only being given one policy tool – military action – which was binary in that they either used it or didn't use it. A more nuanced game could have been had if the players were encouraged to use the tools of soft power in addition to those of hard power.

On reflection, I feel that the uncertainty of the Taiwanese government wasn't captured because the China team was very tightly focussed on the Korean peninsula. Perhaps the China team could have been larger to allow a focus on all of the current issues? Perhaps the China briefing could have been more specific about how China feels about Taiwan? Either way, I found the part of the game centred on the Straits of Taiwan to be unrealistic and a poor base on which to found policy.

3. South China Sea   *A priori* I would have expected a greater degree of concern over the South China Sea than evolved during the game. As each year passes, the tensions within the sea increase. I found that game reflected the tensions of 2017 rather than the tensions we can anticipate for 2020. The players in this aspect of the game collaborated a bit more than I would have expected them to, and I found the progress towards a military dimension to ASEAN to be a lot more than I would have expected. As explained above, I ascribe this to the players playing a 'western' game that was relatively unsympathetic to the cultural aspects of the region.

The lack of military cooperation amongst the ASEAN nations is one factor that creates a space into which the expansionism of China can reach. The game resulted in a lack of conflict in the South China Sea. I found this unconvincing. A dysfunctional ASEAN, in conjunction with a chaotic United States, ought to encourage greater adventurism on the part of China. This is one area where I would have found the strategy of business as usual on the part of the ASEAN nations to be relatively convincing. There is great scope to model the possibilities in this area over the next five years, especially if it has the potential to spring the Thucydides Trap.

4. Cooperation of China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia   As mentioned above, I found the willingness of China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia to cooperate over the Korean peninsula to be unconvincing. The resumption of the Six Party Talks would have to be predicated by a number of measures of reassurance that were generally lacking in the game. It was not clear to me what pathway to their resumption had been followed, other than all sides agreeing that war was a bad thing and that something ought to be done to prevent it. What that something was is unclear.

I found the result that war does not occur to be quite convincing, but this was despite the actions of China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia rather than because of them. I did find that China was rather willing to surrender a key ally in the DPRK without a great deal in return. A more nuanced strategy might have been to be willing to undermine the DPRK in return for a freer hand in the South China Sea, or the military occupation of Taiwan. What I felt lacking was the *quid pro quo* that I would have expected in a diplomatic interchange.

Overall   Looking at the results overall, I feel that the outcome of the session was a creditable first start. A better set of results might have been obtained by tweaking the ruleset and briefings to obtain a more realistic set of results, although this would have been achieved at the cost of a slightly more deterministic game.

Considering the stated objective of the game "*how would the unpredictability of US policy under the Trump Administration, and the growing strategic power of China, affect crisis stability in East and Southeast Asia?*"

This assumes a *strategic* unpredictability of the USA and does not take into account that the US strategic objective is actually clear, i.e. **America First**. Besides, the July/Aug edition of Foreign Affairs includes an OpEd clarifying that the Trump administration foreign policies are remarkably unremarkable and actually are quite traditional republican. Despite many tweets that may have suggested otherwise, Trump has not deviated much from conventions. In Febr. Trump e.g. affirmed the 'one China' policy and abandoned his plan to label China a currency manipulator.

Conclusions

Wargame methodology (top 5)

1) **Purposes** Too many purposes increases risk of design failure. Was the wargame's primary purpose
    a. to introduce (a complex form) of 'wargaming' to 'non-wargamers', or was it
    b. to investigate potential conflicts in Asia?
Both purposes could be used, but one should arguable be the primary. See 2 and 3.

2) **Purpose a:** Introducing (a complex form) of 'wargaming' to 'non-wargamers'.

Most of the Non-wargamers we interviewed commented that they were overwhelmed by the *pace* of the rounds and hence *lack of time to think things through*, the *amount of things going on simultaneously and the noise in the main hall* that made it hard to understand what was going on. Many felt lost. We think that a smaller – slightly more controlled setting with more time for consideration, in game- explanation and AAR by experienced wargamers could be more beneficial for newcomers.

3) **Purpose b:** Investigating potential conflicts in Asia. In general we had the perception that many players brought (too) little background to the table about the current situation in Asia as well as about the history of the conflicts. This may partly be solved with a more elaborate briefing per actor, which would, however, consume a lot of the time available.

We spoke a number of players who told us that they would have been happy to study background material on the actor they would play to get a much better grip on what was going on, to understand the other actors actions and to better be able to play actions that would be meaningful given the cultural context. We are aware of the practical consideration not to send briefings in advance, yet to obtain realistic outcomes that are valuable for analysis of the actual situation and the course of conflicts, in our view the players should be able to actually study their role. Hence in our view- if the purpose is to generate substantive findings- it could be essential to inform players about the actor they would be playing beforehand and to stimulate players to study the actor and its immediate surroundings and the conflicts it is involved in. This might also reduce the cultural bias of the players somewhat and possibly players would be better able to actually come up with strategic objectives at the beginning of the game.

4) **Dynamics** Essential part of the design of the games were the subgames, these increases complexity while arguable contribute to more realism. E.g. in the US game the president was programmed to act in a relatively chaotic and uncoordinated manner. It is too early to say

whether or not we found this modelling accurate, but it did reflect the cartoon impression that we have of how the current White House operates. However, it is quite risky to replace a decisive decision maker with a card-driven system – which would arguable not have worked if other teams had found out before game.

More in general for a Mega game to provide suitable dynamics. As the game- due to its magnitude could not really be tested in advance, a mega game in is in itself an increased risk.

5. Pivotal role in the game of China   The China team was arguably quite hard to play if one has to focus on four different areas at once within the very limited time span for game turns. We observed the China team to be quite tightly focused on the Korean peninsula conflict and consequently addressing the other conflicts less. With such a pivotal actor in a game and so many simultaneous conflicts, such a team would have e.g. needed more players (i.e. equal in size to the US).

Substantive findings (top 5)

We are impressed by the dynamics of Dire Straits and found it fairly hard to judge whether and which outcomes have value in the sense that they might be realistic in a near future. Also, although we have several observation on the realism of the outcomes, the overall course of action seemed to stay within reasonable bounds of what can be expected in the multitude of conflicts in the area.

Factors that might have affected the realism of outcomes:

1) **Objectives:** It is valuable to allow syndicates to define their own strategic objectives as it makes them think about them and not take them for granted. Yet we observed in several syndicates a lack of (a shared awareness) of strategic objectives.
2) **Presumption of erratic US behavior** may be somewhat misleading since the US strategic objective is quite clear. This assumption of erratic US policy and its possible effects on potential conflict(s) in Asia seems to have been the main purpose of the game, which arguably lessens the importance of the two purposes of introducing 'wargaming' and exploring future conflicts in Asia.
3) **Full spectrum of force/hybrid** Although it was essentially possible to use the full DIMEFIL spectrum, we observed a relative strong focus on military action and far less on e.g. trade/economics.
4) **Cultural awareness** We observed a lack of cultural awareness as countries cooperated too easily, or ignored 'red lines' (ASEAN mil co-op, China-Taiwan, China-NK).
5) **Future forward** Lack of potential in the fictional future scenario – could just as well have been "next week"

Substantive findings

1. Korean peninsula   One obvious result of the game is that no war resulted. Laying aside the issue of the accidental war mentioned above, this is quite a comforting result. In fact, the actual game play lended some support to the model of international relations that has conflicting actors winding up to the jump line and then pulling back at the last moment. There is good evidence to suggest that this is

how events are playing out in the Korean peninsula. We think that this could be a representation of reality.

2. China - Taiwan   The Taiwanese were willing to relax the operating assumptions by adopting a very risky strategy of moving along the track to becoming an independent state. We found this to be an accurate reflection of one aspect of Taiwanese politics. However, we found the response of China to be unconvincing.

3. South China Sea We would have expected a greater degree of concern over the South China Sea than evolved during the game. As each year passes, the tensions within the sea increase. The players in this aspect of the game collaborated a bit more than we would have expected them to, and we found the progress towards a military dimension to ASEAN to be a lot more than we would have expected.

4. Six party Talks We found the willingness of China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia to cooperate over the Korean peninsula to be unconvincing. The resumption of the Six Party Talks would have to be predicated by a number of measures of reassurance that were generally lacking in the game.

5. White House behaviour modelled access to the President and the factional fight between senior white house personnel who represent quite different political views. The President was programmed to act in a relatively chaotic and uncoordinated manner. For 2017 we found this modelling fairly accurate, as it did reflect the cartoon impression that we have of how the current White House operates. We observed that unpredictable signals from the white house were nuanced, and moderated by cabinet officials and ambassadors in the field. For now this seems to be a fairly realistic representation of reality.