The United States and Iran have a long history of tensions, but the latest escalation started when American officials blamed Iran for attacking two oil tankers on 13 June 19 in or near the Strait of Hormuz, a major thoroughfare for transporting much of the world’s oil.
Relations between the Iran and the United States have been contentious and often confrontational, dating back to Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution. Since the 2016 election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, they have taken a sharp turn for the worse.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—the Iran nuclear deal—was agreed in July 2015 by the United States (under then President Obama), Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the European Union (see boxes). Under its terms, Iran agreed to forever forgo the development of nuclear weapons. It has also accepted extensive restrictions on, and inspections of, its civilian nuclear activities, including the degree of permissible nuclear enrichment and size of nuclear stockpiles. In exchange, many sanctions would be lifted and trade and investment links normalized. The International Atomic Energy Agency subsequently certified that Iran was abiding by the agreement. Sanctions were lifted.

In May 2018, however, President Trump announced that the US would withdraw from the JCPOA, calling it "a horrible one-sided deal". Washington also declared renewed and intensified sanctions against Tehran. These sought not only to bar US companies from doing business there, but to deter European, Chinese, and Russian businesses as well. Washington put growing pressure on third countries not to purchase Iranian oil, the export of which is a key component of the Iranian economy—a policy of so-called “maximum pressure.” In April 2019, the US also announced that it was formally designating Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps a terrorist organization.

American, Israeli, and Arab Gulf critics of the JCPOA had complained that it only addressed the nuclear issue and not other aspects of Iranian policy, such as Tehran’s support for regional allies and proxies. Thus, when US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo set out a dozen “conditions” for Iran to meet they included not only even stricter restrictions on Iranian nuclear activities, but also an end to its ballistic missile programme, an end to support for various Middle East groups (such as Hamas in Gaza, Hizbullah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen), and the withdrawal of its military support for the Syrian government. In essence, Iran was being asked to entirely reorient its foreign policy.

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**Iran’s Nuclear Programme**

Iran's nuclear program was launched in the 1950s with the help of the United States as part of the Atoms for Peace program. The participation of the United States and Western European governments in Iran's nuclear program continued until the 1979 Iranian Revolution that toppled the last Shah of Iran. Following the 1979 Revolution, most of the international nuclear cooperation with Iran was cut off. In 1981, Iranian officials concluded that the country's nuclear development should continue. Negotiations took place with France in the late 1980s and with Argentina in the early 1990s, and agreements were reached. In the 1990s, Russia formed a joint research organization with Iran, providing Iran with Russian nuclear experts and technical information.

In the 2000s, the revelation of Iran's clandestine uranium enrichment program raised concerns that it might be intended for non-peaceful uses. The IAEA launched an investigation in 2003 after an Iranian dissident group revealed undeclared nuclear activities carried out by Iran. In 2006, because of Iran's noncompliance with its NPT obligations, the United Nations Security Council demanded that Iran suspend its enrichment programs. In 2007, the United States National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) stated that Iran halted an alleged active nuclear weapons program in fall 2003. In November 2011, the IAEA reported credible evidence that Iran had been conducting experiments aimed at designing a nuclear bomb until 2003, and that research may have continued on a smaller scale after that time. On 1 May 2018 the IAEA reiterated its 2015 report, saying it had found no credible evidence of nuclear weapons activity in Iran after 2009.
At times, some US officials seem to go further. Before assuming their current positions, both Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton had called for the use of military force against Iran, which they view as a major threat to US interests. In Tehran, many saw Washington as not seeking changes in Iranian policy, but rather the overthrow of the Iranian regime through “economic warfare”.

Certainly, the impact of US “maximum pressure” has been severe. President Hassan Rouhani has declared that the country faces its most serious economic challenges since the 1979 Revolution. Iran’s currency, the Rial, lost around two thirds of its value in 2018. Food prices have increased by 60%, unemployment is up, and there been sporadic economic protests in parts of the country. Iranian oil exports have fallen from 2.5 million barrels per day in April 2018 to around 300,000 barrels per day by June 2019.

The hawkish position of the Trump Administration has received encouragement from Israel and several Arab Gulf countries, notably Saudi Arabia. These countries see Iran as a primary national security threat. Under the influence of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Saudi policy has been especially assertive and unpredictable, evidenced by Saudi-led intervention (2015-) in the Yemeni civil war, as well as a major diplomatic crisis with neighbouring Qatar (2017-).

Russia, China, and the Europeans have all criticized the US decision to abandon the JCPOA, as have Democrats in the US Congress. Many European companies that had expressed interest in investing in Iran withdrew when faced with the threat of secondary American sanctions. Iran has pressed the remaining signatories to find a mechanism that would offset US restrictions. In response, the EU has recently established a special trade mechanism (INSTEX) that could partially circumvent American financial restrictions—but in Tehran’s view it has been too little, too late.

The Iran Nuclear Deal

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal, is an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program reached in Vienna on July 14, 2015, between Iran, the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States—plus Germany), and the European Union.

Formal negotiations toward JCPOA began with the adoption of the Joint Plan of Action, an interim agreement signed between Iran and the P5+1 countries in November 2013. Iran and the P5+1 countries engaged in negotiations for the next 20 months and in April 2015 agreed on a framework for the final agreement. In July 2015 Iran and the P5+1 confirmed agreement on the plan along with the "Roadmap Agreement" between Iran and the IAEA.

Under JCPOA, Iran agreed to eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98%, and reduce by about two-thirds the number of its gas centrifuges for 13 years. For the next 15 years Iran will only enrich uranium up to 3.67%. Iran also agreed not to build any new heavy-water facilities for the same period of time. Uranium-enrichment activities will be limited to a single facility using first-generation centrifuges for 10 years. Other facilities will be converted to avoid proliferation risks.

To monitor and verify Iran’s compliance with the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will have regular access to all Iranian nuclear facilities. The agreement provides that in return for verifiably abiding by its commitments, Iran will receive relief from U.S., European Union, and United Nations Security Council nuclear-related sanctions.

On 13 October 2017 U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the United States would not make the certification provided for under U.S. domestic law, but stopped short of terminating the deal. IAEA inspectors spend 3,000 calendar days per year in Iran, installing tamper-proof seals and collecting surveillance camera photos, measurement data and documents for further analysis. IAEA Director Yukiya Amano stated (in March 2018) that the organization has verified that Iran is implementing its nuclear-related commitments. On 30 April 2018 the United States and Israel said that Iran had not disclosed a past covert nuclear weapons program to the IAEA, as required by the 2015 deal.

On 8 May 2018 President Trump announced United States withdrawal from JCPOA. Following the U.S.’s withdrawal, the EU enacted an updated blocking statute on 7 August 2018 to nullify US sanctions on countries trading with Iran. In November 2018 U.S. sanctions came back into effect intended to force Iran to dramatically alter its policies, including its support for militant groups in the region and its development of ballistic missiles.

In May 2019 the IAEA certified that Iran was abiding by the main terms of the deal, though questions were raised about how many advanced centrifuges Iran was allowed to have, as that was only loosely defined in the deal.
Escalation

In May 2019, four small explosions damaged ships moored off the United Arab Emirates port of Fujairah. A subsequent inquiry by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Norway suggested that a state actor was responsible, but fell short of explicitly blaming Iran.

In June 2019, two oil tankers—one Japanese, one Norwegian—were more severely damaged in the Gulf of Oman. The Kokura Courageous and Front Altair were attacked in international waters, raising fears of further confrontation in one of the world’s most strategic shipping lanes (through which around 20 million barrels per day pass, representing around one fifth of the world’s oil supply). American and Iranian military personnel responded and rescued crew members. The attack took place on the same day the Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe in Iran. Abe was seeking to act as an intermediary between President Trump and Khamenei.

The damage in these attacks was consistent with limpet mines attached to the ships by divers or small boats. The United States blamed Iran, releasing video that appeared to show an Iranian patrol boat removing an unexploded mine from one of the vessels' hulls. Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom supported the United States’ accusation. Germany stated that there is "strong evidence" that Iran was responsible for the attacks, while Japan has asked for more proof of Iran's culpability. Iran denied the accusation, blaming the United States for spreading disinformation and warmongering. In response to the incident, the United States announced the deployment of 1,000 additional troops to the Middle East.

A few days later, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) shot down a United States Navy BAM-S-D (RQ-4A Global Hawk) surveillance drone with a Khordad-3 surface-to-air missile over the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian officials claimed that the drone violated their territory, while U.S. officials claimed that the $130 million drone was in international airspace.

The U.S. subsequently conducted cyber-attacks on the IRGC’s missile systems and requested a closed-door U.N. Security Council meeting to address the regional tensions. President Trump also ordered a military strike against some IRGC military sites, but later called them off, saying that the anticipated loss of Iranian life would be disproportionate retaliation for the loss of an uncrewed drone. Instead, Washington announced intensified sanctions against Iran, including against Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif.

US signals have been inconsistent, however. President Trump has, at times, been highly bellicose, threatening “obliteration” should Iran attack US forces.

At other times he has suggested a willingness to talk to Tehran, and even indicated gratitude that Iran did not shoot down a (crewed) P-8A maritime surveillance aircraft that had been flying near the drone at the time of the incident. He has also expressed dismay that the US should be expected to safeguard Gulf shipping routes—a responsibility, he has suggested, that should be undertaken by states that export and import oil through the Straits of Hormuz. He has also expressed concern that some of his more hawkish advisors are pushing him towards war.

Source: New York Times

Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

....Iran’s very ignorant and insulting statement, put out today, only shows that they do not understand reality. Any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force. In some areas, overwhelming will mean obliteration. No more John Kerry & Obama!

9:42 AM - 25 Jun 2019

24,413 Retweets 86,008 Likes
In June 2019, Tehran indicated that it would begin to enrich uranium beyond the JCPOA limits unless steps effective were taken to offset US pressure. The State Department responded by demanding that Iran adhere to the JCPOA—ironically, the very agreement that the US had withdrawn from.

For his part, Iranian President Rouhani labelled the White House as “stricken with mental disability.” Many views the attacks in the Gulf, as well as threats to exceed JCPOA limits, as part of an Iranian campaign to force the US to reconsider the “maximum pressure” campaign.

**The Game**

This game is about looking at the current crisis between the USA and Iran.

**Game Turn Length**

The length represented by a game turn may be variable during the game based on the events taking place but are intended to be over a period of about a week.

**Actors in the Game and Order of Play**

- Iranian Government
- USA
- The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- European Union
- Russia

**Proxies**

A proxy war is an armed conflict between two states or non-state actors which act on the instigation or on behalf of other parties that are not directly involved in the hostilities. In order for a conflict to be considered a proxy war, there must be a direct, long-term relationship between external actors and the belligerents involved. The aforementioned relationship usually takes the form of funding, military training, arms, or other forms of material assistance which assist a belligerent party in sustaining its war effort.

A significant disparity in the belligerents' conventional military strength may motivate the weaker party to begin or continue a conflict through allied nations or non-state actors. Such a situation arose during the Arab–Israeli conflict, which continued as a series of proxy wars following Israel's decisive defeat of the Arab coalitions in the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War. The coalition members, upon failing to achieve military dominance via direct conventional warfare, have since resorted to funding armed insurgent and paramilitary organizations, such as Hezbollah, to engage in irregular combat against Israel.

Additionally, the governments of some nations, particularly liberal democracies, may choose to engage in proxy warfare (despite military superiority) when a majority of their citizens oppose declaring or entering a conventional war. This featured prominently in US strategy following the Vietnam War, due to the so-called "Vietnam Syndrome" of extreme war weariness among the American population. This was also a significant factor in motivating the US to enter conflicts such as the Syrian Civil War via proxy actors, after a series of costly, drawn-out direct engagements in the Middle East spurred a recurrence of war weariness, a so-called "War on Terror syndrome".

Nations may also resort to proxy warfare to avoid potential negative international reactions from allied nations, profitable trading partners, or intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations. This is especially
significant when standing peace treaties, acts of alliance, or other international agreements ostensibly forbid direct warfare: breaking such agreements could lead to a variety of negative consequences due to either negative international reaction (see above), punitive provisions listed in the prior agreement, or retaliatory action by the other parties and their allies.

In some cases, nations may be motivated to engage in proxy warfare due to financial concerns: supporting irregular troops, insurgents, non-state actors, or less-advanced allied militaries (often with obsolete or surplus equipment) can be significantly cheaper than deploying national armed forces, and the proxies usually bear the brunt of casualties and economic damage resulting from prolonged conflict.

The term “proxies” can be misleading to the extent that it might imply strong control by the patron over its ally or client. Most proxies, however, are also pursing their own interest—they may ignore requests from their patron, or conversely seek to use their patron to achieve their own goals.

**The Use of Proxies in this Game**

There are only 5 Actors in this matrix game instead of the traditional 6, but most of the Actors have considerable influence over their proxies in the region. In order to represent this, the Actors can attempt additional actions via their Proxies, as listed below:

- **Houthis x 2 (playable by Iran)**
  - The Houthis are engaged in an ongoing civil war against loyalists of the former Yemen government. The latter are backed by a Saudi-led coalition of Arab forces. The Houthis receive advising and support from Iran but are not under Iranian control. They have conducted periodic drone and missile attacks against Saudi Arabia in an attempt to increase the costs of Saudi intervention.

- **Iraq/Syria/Lebanon x 2 (playable by Iran)**
  - Iran has trained and equipped a variety of Shi’ite militias in Iraq, some of which would be highly responsive to Tehran’s wishes. Iran has deployed advisors, personnel, and mercenary militias to Syria in support of the Syrian regime. The presence of Iranian personnel in Syria has been viewed with alarm by Israel. In Lebanon, Hizbullah is both a major Shi’ite political party (and part of the current Lebanese cabinet) and a well-trained and equipped militia (with several thousand active and reserve personnel, and an arsenal of up to 150,000 short, medium, and long-range rockets). Its relations with Iran are close and fundamental. However, it would not wish to provoke a major confrontation with Israel in this time or undermine its political position in Lebanon.

- **Israel x 1 (playable by KSA or USA)**
  - Israel views Iran as its major national security threat. It is a close ally of the United States, and shares many security concerns with Saudi Arabia.

- **Oman x 1 (playable by KSA or EU)**
  - Oman is the member of the Gulf Cooperation Council with perhaps the best relations with Iran. It has often acted as a mediator or sought to calm tensions.

- **UAE/Bahrain x 1 (playable by KSA)**
  - The UAE and Bahrain are GCC countries that closely share Saudi Arabia’s views on Iran. The UAE has a small but well-equipped and competent armed force.

The number listed shows the total number of times the proxy may act during the game—thus there may be up to (x2) Houthi actions, but only one by Oman (x1). Iran cannot make more than 1 “Proxy Action” per turn.

If there are 2 Actors with influence (such as the KSA and USA regarding Israel), they both have to agree to the argument for it to be allowed to take place. This is intended to reflect the relative foreign policy orientation of the proxy, not that it necessary is being influenced by both Actors.

Please note that the additional "Proxy Arguments" do not in any way preclude the Actors making arguments for those proxies, or any other third parties (such as China or Japan) in the normal way.
IRGC naval personnel remove alleged limpet mine from tanker.

**Oil Prices**

Instability in the Gulf has a direct effect on world oil prices. A display is included to mark these and should be adjusted as a consequence of actions undertaken by the Actors. Prices may go considerably higher than the display permits in the event of major war, of course.

High prices have a negative effect on the global economy, in industrialized and developing countries alike. Among the Actors in the game, the European Union (as well as China and Japan) should be especially sensitive to this, the US only a little less so. Russia might stand to gain from higher prices. Iran and Saudi Arabia only gain from higher prices if they are increase or maintain exports—and will suffer significantly if their exports are blocked.
The Matrix Game Construction Kit

The ultimate matrix game design kit

In a “matrix game” there are few pre-set rules limiting what players can do. Instead, each is free to undertake any plausible action during their turn. The chances of success or failure, as well as the effects of the action, are largely determined through structured argument and discussion. This process allows for imaginative game dynamics that are lively and open-ended, and yet also grounded in reality.

Matrix games are particularly well-suited for complex conflicts and issues involving multiple actors and stakeholders, varying interests and agendas, and a broad range of (diplomatic/political, military, social, and economic) dimensions. The game system crowdsources ideas and insight from participants, thereby fostering greater analytical insight.

First developed by Chris Engle, matrix games have been played by hobbyists for years. They have also been used as serious games for training at the US Army War College, National Defense University, the Central Intelligence Agency, and elsewhere; for defence planning, capability assessment, and acquisitions in Australia, Canada, the UK, and US; for security planning for the Vancouver Olympics; as a research and analytical support tool at the UK Foreign Office; and as an educational method in various universities. They are particularly well-suited for multi-sided conflicts or other issues that involve a broad range of capabilities and interaction.

MaGCK contains everything that is required to play two different matrix games, or to design your own matrix games addressing almost any aspect of modern conflict:

- A core set of matrix game rules.
- Player briefings and supplementary rules for ISIS CRISIS, a matrix game that explores the rise and decline of the so-called “Islamic State” insurgency in Iraq. Two scenarios are included: "The Caliphate Reborn?" (set in September 2014) and “Road to Mosul” (starting January 2016).
- Player briefings, map tiles, and supplementary rules for A RECKONING OF VULTURES, a game that explores coup plotting and political skulduggery in a fictional dictatorship.
- 255 large blank game tokens in eight colours, together with over 700 stickers depicting various unit types, other assets, capabilities, and effects. The stickers are used to customize the game tokens, offering enormous flexibility for matrix game designers.
- 80 smaller discs in the same colours as above, which can be used to indicate damage, supplies and resources, political influence, or other characteristics.
- 10 two-sided tracking mats, with various scales (+/-3, 1-3, 1-10, days, months, and so forth)
- Assorted dice.

In addition, purchasers of MaGCK gain access to templates so they can print additional stickers using readily-available sticker sheets and any laser printer—thus making it possible to produce an unlimited number of games and scenarios. See: https://www.thegamecrafter.com/games/magck-matrix-game-construction-kit
Abbreviated Matrix Game Rules

How to Play a Matrix Game

In a Matrix Game, actions are resolved by a structured sequence of logical "arguments". Each player takes turns to make an argument, with successful arguments advancing the game, and the player’s position. There are a number of ways you can do this, depending on the size of the game and the purpose (each has their own strengths and weaknesses), but the one recommended for this game is:

The "Pros and Cons" System

In this system, each argument is broken down into:

- The active Players states: Something That Happens and a Number of Reasons Why it Might Happen (Pros).
- The other Players state: A Number of Reasons Why it Might NOT Happen (if they can think of any) (Cons).

The game needs a Facilitator to adjudicate on the arguments, but if you have a limited number of players, you can take it in turns to be the Facilitator – this works out much better than you might imagine and helps reinforce the idea that your role in the game might be in conflict with others, but you are all working together to generate a credible narrative.

The advantage of this system is that you formalise the Pros and Cons of an argument and the role of the Facilitator becomes that of ensuring that the Pros and Cons carry equal weight - perhaps making compelling reasons worth two Pros and two or three weaker reasons against only worth one Con. You need to ensure you don't end up with a laundry list of trivial reasons, or the player restating a reason already accepted in a slightly different way in a desperate attempt to gain points.

One very useful benefit of the "Pros and Cons" system is that it provides reasons for failure should the dice roll not succeed. You can also more easily run the game with very knowledgeable players.

Notes about arguments

The important thing to remember in a Matrix game is that arguments can be made about anything that is relevant to the scenario. You can argue about your own troops or about the enemy, the existence of people, places, things or events, the weather, plague, disease or public opinion. The actions and consequences of arguments are reflected in the placement of the generic counters on a map (examples are enclosed below), forming narrative markers for the game; or by writing the results on a whiteboard or flipchart so the players can keep track of what is going on.

Some things can seem a little odd to new players – "how can he argue about my troops?" – It is true, he can't give them orders, but he could argue that their morale and motivation are low because they haven't been paid in months. The only criteria for judgement is the likelihood of the event taking place. With a bit of imagination, common sense and rational thinking, it is possible to present persuasive arguments as to what should happen in any scenario - from traditional military campaigns to the strange world of defence procurement.

A common error in Matrix games is for a player to argue about another player being influenced by something or them agreeing to a course of action. The player is present and can simply be asked – so that a little time between turns to allow the players to negotiate with each other (in secret if necessary) makes for a better game. It might be that a player wants to argue that all parties come to negotiations – in which case let them state their case, then ask the other players if they want to come along. If they agree then the argument is an automatic success. Arguments are for measurable actions – if the players want to negotiate with each other, they can do that in between turns.

Sometimes players get carried away with their arguments and try to do several different things. This isn't allowed in a Matrix game – you only get to do one action a turn because part of the insight comes from deciding what the highest priority is. The action itself could be large (like a general mobilisation of the Militia), but it must be a single action, so mobilising the Militia and providing the Police with heavy weapons would be two separate actions – which one do you want to do first?

If two arguments are in direct opposition ("This happens" - "No it doesn't") they represent a Logical Inconsistency since they cannot both be true. The earlier argument has already happened, so it is impossible for it not to have happened. The later player may argue that the event is reversed, but this tends to make for a poor narrative in the game and should be discouraged.
Reasonable Assumptions and Established Facts

It is important that the Facilitator understands the difference between "reasonable assumptions" in the game, such as the proposition that well trained and equipped Special Forces soldiers are going to be much more effective in combat than untrained protestors; and "established facts" which are facts that have been specifically mentioned in the game briefings or have become established during play as the result of successful arguments.

The former can be deployed as supporting reasons (Pros and Cons), but the latter need to have been argued successfully in order for them to be included. Many inexperienced players will make vast all-encompassing arguments full of assumptions that are not reasonable. For example: It is not a reasonable assumption that an unarmed Protestor counter could fight off trained Police. It is reasonable to assume that the Police are trained, armed, equipped and quite capable of dealing with a group of protestors (after all, that is their job). It would be necessary to argue for large number of Protestors, argue that they had weapons of some sort or argue that they were especially devoted or fanatical about their cause, for them to have a reasonable chance of beating the Police.

Of course, you might argue that your Protesters undergo special training, get access to firearms, or are simply fired up with enthusiasm by the powerful and impassioned speech from their leader, so they get a bonus. In this case, you should mark the counter with a +1 or something similar (depending on the strength of the argument) to show their improved status.

Game Length and Turn Length

The game should last a minimum of 6 turns as it is essential that sufficient turns are allowed to develop the narrative and force the players to have to live with the consequences of their actions from earlier in the game. Each turn represents a deliberately vague period defined by the game Facilitator and the arguments are the "headline events" that took place in the period.

End of Turn "Consequence Management"

At the end of each game turn (a cycle of player arguments) the Facilitator should go over those successful and failed arguments that have generate new "established facts" in the game. They should also review situations that are on-going, such as the generation of refugees from fighting or the arrival of new recruits to a popular cause. If these have not been countered during the turn by a successful argument, the Facilitator should make them continue until someone does make an argument to stop them.

It might also be that some of the arguments, when considered as a whole, will have additional or even unintended consequences that are reasonable to expect to arise. It is therefore worth taking time to consider the consequences of the players’ arguments beyond their immediate results. Invite the players to consider the events of the turn, suggest possible consequences and then agree on the most likely that should be taken forward to the next turn.

In some games, it is worthwhile having an individual (if you have one to spare) who is particularly experienced about the sort of subject that the Matrix Game is focussed on, make “the law of unintended consequences” arguments at the end of a turn. This can help to formalise the process and provide good examples to widen the players’ understanding of the consequences of their actions.

Inter-Turn Negotiations

As we have already said, the actual “arguments” of the Matrix Game are about actions that take place in the course of the game. In most cases, the actors represented by the players may well want to engage in face to face negotiation with each other in an effort to strike a deal. Players attempting to make Arguments saying that they want to “influence the Prime Minister” are essentially pointless if the Prime Minister is represented by another player. If they want to strike a deal, then they had better head off to a quiet corner of the room and try a little influence in real life. Of course, if a player wants to make an argument about a position or group not represented by another player, they are welcome to do so in the normal way.

In analytical games, it is important to record the essential elements of these discussions. What was suggested? Was agreement reached and why? If no agreement was reached what were the private and public reasons why the negotiations were unsuccessful? Analysis of these “off-table” negotiations and the reasons the players felt why they were successful or failures can provide important insights.
Secret arguments

There will be some cases where you want to hide from the other players the thing you want to argue about. It could be that you have booby trapped a piece of equipment you think your opponent will use, or that you have swapped the vital blueprints for a set of fake ones in case the safe is broken into. In this case, you simply write down your argument on a piece of paper and present it to the Facilitator announcing to the other players that you are making a secret argument. The Facilitator will make a judgment and you will roll the dice normally, but the other players have no idea what it is about.

You should be careful, however, that the players don’t make too many secret arguments. This can ruin the game’s atmosphere and reduce the focus, so that the game drags on unnecessarily. They also depend on the judgement of the Facilitator as to their success of failure, rather than being decided on a consensual basis from the participants. They must only be permitted when they refer to quite specific things or events. An argument about gathering information from a spy, in most games, will be quite a generic argument and should be argued openly. Similarly Arguing about the placement of an IED to catch forces moving down a route should be made openly as the results will take effect the same turn. It is only really for secret things you need to establish several turns in advance.

Measures of Success

In many arguments success or failure may not be a simple “Yes” or “No” proposition. There might well be a sliding scale of success or failure in terms of numbers or the quality of the outcome, which is usually represented by the score on the dice. If you needed a 7+ to succeed and rolled a double-six (12), this can indicate an especially notable success. Conversely, a roll of a double-one, it could represent a disastrous failure.

More information

There has been quite a lot of discussion about Matrix games, including links to example games on the “PAXsims” Blog that are worth reading: https://paxsims.wordpress.com/?s=Matrix+Game

Professor Rex Brynen was also interviewed by the GrogHeads “GrogCast” Podcast, a copy of what he said about Matrix Games is here: http://grogheads.com/?podcast=grogcast-season-2-episode-12 with the discussion about Matrix Games starting at the 31-minute mark.

Conduct of the Game:

The players should be formed into teams around the Actors in the game. They should be provided with the introductory background (above) and their Actor brief; and provided with a short period in which to study the brief. They should then write down a few (3 or 4) short, pithy, objectives they would wish to achieve in the game in accordance with their briefs. One of these should be a longer-term objective, with a reach of at least 10 years in order to ensure that the players address something other than short-term goals and reactions to other player’s actions in the game. Play should then commence in the normal way. The final turn should be followed by a discussion of the objectives, and comparison made with the Actor’s achievements during the game.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran today faces a grave threat: encouraged by Israel and reactionary Arab regimes, the Trump Administration has embarked on a campaign of destabilization against the Islamic Republic. This policy of “maximum pressure” is intended to force Tehran to abandon its key foreign policy principles—and perhaps even seeks to overthrow the Islamic Republic itself.

American hostility is not new. Iran has long been the victim of foreign intrigues and intervention. Following the 1979 Revolution, which Washington viewed as a threat to American and Israeli hegemony in the region, unilateral sanctions were imposed on Iran. Washington also supported Iraq’s Saddam Hussein in his bloody eight-year war of aggression that cost up to one million Iranian lives.

Although Iran has a perfect right to develop civilian nuclear technologies, in 2015 it agreed to restrictions under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—in exchange for the lifting of sanctions and economic normalization. The nuclear issue, however, has proven to be a pretext. President Donald Trump has broken the agreement and imposed new, even more draconian sanctions. This has led to a sharp fall in the value of the Iranian Riyal, increased prices, and an almost 90% decline in oil exports. Deteriorating economic conditions have in turn sparked some political protests, although these do not represent a significant threat to domestic stability. On the contrary, most Iranians support the regime in confronting American arrogance.

Iran is prepared for dialogue. Persia has been a regional great power for millennia, and ought to be regarded as a key element of Middle East security. Iran played a key role in supporting the governments of both Iraq and Syria in fighting Sunni extremism, most notably Daesh (ISIS). The true troublemakers in the region are Israel (which continues to occupy the territories of Palestine, as well as parts of Syria and Lebanon) and Saudi Arabia. The latter, under Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, has supported radicalism, covertly allied with Israel, and intervened in Yemen.

Internal Divisions

Iran has a complex political structure, which lends itself to political factionalism. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei wields ultimate power in the system, and it is to him that the armed forces, judiciary, and religious institutions of the state report. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC) has grown in size and influence over the years, with perhaps 150,000 active duty personnel (including naval, air, and missile forces), separate from the half-million strong regular armed forces (Artesh) and its army, air force and naval branches. The IRGC Quds Force also plays the leading role in supporting allied and proxy forces outside the country.

The Iranian system also includes a semi-elected component, comprising the Majlis (parliament) and Presidency. President Hasan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif are both considered relative moderates. While political dissent is strictly controlled, political competition is lively and intense. Rouhani was severely criticized by some radical and conservative elements for the JCPOA, which they viewed as involving far too many Iranian concessions.

Recent Events

In December 2018, President Rouhani warned America that “If one day they want to prevent the export of Iran’s oil, then no oil will be exported from the Persian Gulf.” Tehran has disavowed responsibility for recent attacks on oil tankers. However, the country has the ability to severely impede oil shipments through shore-based missiles, mines, naval and small boat attacks, and covert operations. Iranian ballistic missiles could also cause considerable damage to oil facilities in Arab Gulf countries. Finally, Iran has the ability to strike at US or other assets elsewhere in the region or around the world (notably in the Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan), either directly or through proxies.
US Government

Iran is a major threat to US interests in the Middle East and around the world. In addition to its recent sabotage of oil tankers in the Straits of Hormuz, it supports terrorist groups like Hizbullah and Hamas; backs the Houthi movement in Yemen (which seized much of the country from legitimate Yemeni government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in 2014-15); funnels arms and cash to radical Shi’ite militias in Iraq; and supports Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his brutal campaign against the Syrian opposition. Over the decades, Iranian-backed groups have conducted attacks on US personnel in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and elsewhere. Iran and its proxies have also plotted attacks or other activities within the US itself.

In the view of the present Administration, the Obama-era Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) was fundamentally flawed—a “horrible, one-sided deal.” First and foremost, it failed to provide full and permanent restrictions on Iran’s nuclear programme. An Iranian nuclear weapon would be an existential threat to Israel and to other US allies, as well as a direct threat to the United States itself. The deal did not prevent Iran’s further development of ballistic missiles, nor did it address Iran’s dangerous and destabilizing activities across the Middle East. On the contrary, it gave Tehran a free hand to continue in these, bolstered by unfrozen assets, expanded trade, and investment.

This is why President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, and why the United States has applied a series of stiff new sanctions against Iran as part of a policy of “maximum pressure.” Such sanctions are intended to weaken the regime and force it to change its behaviour.

The US move drew criticism from France, the UK, and European Union. However, it was welcomed by Saudi Arabia and Israel, with which the Trump Administration has particularly warm relations.

Internal Divisions

Some senior US officials (notably National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo), as well as some Republican members of Congress, support the use of force against Iran and have spoken favourably of bringing about regime change in Tehran. This is not official US policy, although few in the Administration would be unhappy to see the regime toppled.

US military officials have been much more cautious. While the US is able to bring overwhelming force to bear on Iran, the latter would retain some capacity to hamper regional oil exports. Iran is also capable of causing mischief for the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Anything much beyond air strikes and naval action would require a major, and possibly extended, commitment of US forces.

President Trump wishes to signal US toughness, to show Iran and the world that American power should not be challenged. On the other hand, the President also campaigned against costly military commitments abroad, and believes that Gulf allies and Middle East oil importers should assume more of the burden of keeping the sea lanes open. He is also concerned that a messy war in the Middle East could hamper his chances of winning reelection in 2020. He has thus combined threats with indications he is prepared to deescalate the situation—while all the time maintaining sanctions, undermining the “horrible deal,” and other aspects of the “maximum pressure” policy.

Democrats (and some Republicans) in Congress have expressed misgivings about a possible military confrontation with Iran. There is also considerable bipartisan criticism of Saudi Arabia for the 2018 murder of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi as well as the Kingdom’s intervention in Yemen.

Recent Events

The United States is confident that Iran is responsible for recent attacks on tankers and has recovered components from the scene that are consistent with Iranian limpet mines. It also believes that Iran was responsible for a May 2019 attack on a Saudi oil pumping station. The US strenuously insists that the US Navy drone shot down by Iran was in international airspace at the time. In response to this latter attack, the US applied additional sanctions to the Iranian leadership and conducted cyber-attacks against Iranian cyber and C3I capabilities.

The US opposes any effort by Europe or China to weaken US sanctions on Iran.
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Iran is the major source of terrorism and instability in the Middle East. It has trained, equipped and financed terrorist groups, such as Hizbullah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and opposition groups in Bahrain and elsewhere. Its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes are a direct threat to the entire region.

While geopolitical rivalry in the primary source of tension between Riyadh and Tehran, religion plays a role too. Saudi Arabia views itself as a guardian of (Sunni) Islam and many in the country regard the Shi’ite branch of the religion as illegitimate. Iran and Saudi Arabia have no diplomatic relations following an attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran in January 2016, which occurred in reaction to Saudi Arabia’s decision to execute a Shi’ite religious cleric, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

Saudi Arabia is critical of the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). It therefore welcomed the Trump Administration’s decision to withdraw from the agreement, with the Saudi Foreign Ministry noting that “Iran used economic gains from the lifting of sanctions to continue its activities to destabilize the region, particularly by developing ballistic missiles and supporting terrorist groups in the region.” It went on to stress “the need to deal with the danger that Iran’s policies pose to international peace and security through a comprehensive view that is not limited to its nuclear program but also includes all hostile activities.” Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman is especially close to the Trump Administration.

Within the broader Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain share Saudi views on Iran. Kuwait supported the JCPOA, although it has been careful not to disagree too publicly with its powerful Saudi neighbour. Relations Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been highly antagonistic since Riyadh imposed a quasi-blockade against the latter in 2017— Doha is often critical of whatever Riyadh does, and vice versa. Oman has cordial relations with Iran and in the past has used these connections to mediate conflicts or reduce tensions. Riyadh has uneven diplomatic relations with Iraq (which it views as too close to Tehran), good relations with Egypt, and a degree of (largely covert) security dialogue with Israel.

While Saudi Arabia supports the US policy of “maximum pressure” on Tehran, neither it nor other Arab Gulf countries would like to see widespread military conflict, which could severely affect their ability to export oil through the Straits of Hormuz. The UAE has a major oil port on the eastern side of the Straits, at Fujairah, which slightly reduces their vulnerability, while Saudi Arabia has an oil pipeline extending southwest to the Red Sea port of Yanbu. It may be no coincidence that Fujairah was targeted by the mysterious oil tanker explosions in May 2019, while that same month a drone (launched either by the Houthis in Yemen or by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq) damaged a Saudi oil pumping station at al-Duwadimi. In the view of some analysts, these targets were selected to underscore Iran’s ability to target even non-Gulf oil exports. Saudi oil and other infrastructures in the Gulf are also vulnerable to Iranian missile attacks or sabotage. While Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in military equipment over the years, it is currently overstretched by its intervention in Yemen, and likely lacks the expertise and resources to simultaneously engage in a major conflict with Iran.
The European Union

The “E3”—France, Germany, the United Kingdom, together with the European Union—were all signatories to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). The lifting of European sanctions, and the subsequent growth of trade and investment, was a major incentive for Iran to agree to restrictions on its nuclear activities. The E3 was critical of the Trump Administration’s 2018 decision to withdraw from the agreement and apply renewed sanctions against Tehran. European leaders generally share Washington’s view that Iranian foreign policy poses a challenge to their interests and Middle East security. However, they believe that the JCPOA neutralizes the most serious threat, namely an Iranian nuclear weapons programme. They also do not believe it to be realistic to expect Iran to fully reorient its foreign policy in accordance with Western wishes, however desirable that might be. They therefore oppose Washington’s policy of “maximum pressure,” and have sought of offset its effects and reduce tensions.

Saving the JCPOA

The E3 do not regard the JCPOA as a “horrible deal,” but rather as the best that could be achieved.

Renewed US sanctions affected not only Iranian entities, but also European and other companies that might try to do business in Iran. As a result, several major European investments have been cancelled. US influence over the global banking system makes it difficult for banks to process payments to Iran without running afoul of US law.

Tehran pressed European countries to develop a solution that would preserve their benefits under the JCPOA. The EU thus introduced a blocking statute in May 2018 to try to protect European entities doing business with Iran. This, however, did little to reassure commercial enterprises. In 2019 it also established a trade facilitation mechanism, INSTEX. This acts as a sort of barter system to circumvent dependence on the US dollar and financial system. It is unclear, however, whether this will make much difference—especially with regard to dwindling Iranian exports. In the meantime, Iran threatened in June 2019 to enrich uranium beyond JCPOA limits unless effective countermeasures to US sanctions, or other incentives, were forthcoming.

All of this has occurred against a backdrop of growing gap between the Trump Administration and many European countries on a range of issues, including trade, NATO, Russia, climate change, international law, Middle East policy, and human rights. President Trump is seen as an erratic and highly transactional leader, with little regard for historic relationships. Polls also show that European public confidence in Washington is at an all-time low.

Recent Events

European countries have condemned recent attacks on oil tankers around the Straits of Hormuz, and most have accepted the US view that Iran is responsible for these. At the same time, they have no desire to see tensions escalate to open conflict. The European Union imports about 20% of its oil supplies from the Middle East, the majority of this coming from Arab Gulf countries.

The UK and France maintain a small naval presence in the Gulf and Indian Ocean, and station some aircraft in the UAE.

*The EU Actor may either act collectively as the European Union, or individually as France, Germany, and/or Britain*
Past and present contact between Russia and Iran have long been complicatedly multi-faced, often wavering between collaboration and rivalry. The two nations have a long history of geographic, economic, and socio-political interaction. Since then, mutual relations have often been turbulent, and dormant at other times. Currently Russia acts as an economic partner to Iran, a country under severe sanctions by much of the Western world.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the two neighboring nations have generally enjoyed very close cordial relations. Iran and Russia are strategic allies and form an axis in the Caucasus alongside Armenia. Moscow and Tehran are also military allies in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and partners in Afghanistan and post-Soviet Central Asia. Due to Western economic sanctions on Iran, Russia has become a key trading partner, especially in regard to the former’s excess oil reserves. Militarily, Iran is the only country in Western Asia that has been invited to join the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Russia’s own international treaty organization in response to NATO.

While much of the Iranian military uses Iranian-manufactured weapons and domestic hardware, Iran still purchases some weapons systems from Russia. In turn, Iran has helped Russia with its drone technology and other military technology. Iran has its embassy in Moscow and consulates in the cities of Astrakhan and Kazan. Russia has its President Vladimir Putin has strongly warned the United States against using force on Iran, saying “It would be a catastrophe for the region as a minimum,” and warned the U.S. that an attack on Iran would have enormous consequences, adding it would trigger an escalation of hostilities across the region.

Tensions have been mounting recently over last week’s attacks on tankers near the Strait of Hormuz, assaults that Washington has blamed on Iran. Iran has denied the accusations. Putin noted that Iran has abided by the terms of a landmark nuclear deal despite the U.S. withdrawal from the accord, adding that he considers U.S. sanctions against Iran unfounded. Asked if Russia could be willing to negotiate a “grand bargain” with the U.S. on Syria and other issues, Putin responded by saying that “we aren’t trading in our allies, our interests and our principles.” He added, however, that it’s necessary to discuss regional issues with various players, including the United States.

Following the JCPOA agreement, President Vladimir Putin lifted the ban in 2015 and the delivery of the S-300 missile defence system to Iran was agreed to. The delivery was completed in November 2016 and was to be followed by a $10 billion deal that included helicopters, planes and artillery systems.

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2 Wikipedia
Iran’s Revolutionary Guards

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is Iran’s most powerful security, military, political and economic organization, responsible for the protection and survival of the regime.

Mohammad Ali Jafari
Commander of IRGC

- 1979: IRGC created after revolution that swept away Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and installed Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as leader
- 1980-88: Invasion by Iraq’s President Saddam Hussein bolsters IRGC as Iran’s premier military force during 8-year war
- 1982: IRGC Quds Force provides military training to Lebanese Hezbollah fighters
- Apr 1983: Hezbollah suicide attack on U.S. embassy in Beirut kills 63, wounds 120
- Oct: Suicide truck bombing of U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut (above) kills 241 U.S. service personnel – Hezbollah is blamed
- 1989: Khatam al-Anbia (KAA) created. KAA is construction arm of IRGC, employing some 40,000 people in oil and gas industry, and nuclear programme
- Jun 1996: Truck bomb blows up Saudi Arabia’s Khobar Towers (above) – housing complex for U.S. Air Force pilots and staff – killing 19 Americans and wounding 372. FBI investigation finds Iran responsible for attack
- Mar 1992: Hezbollah and IRGC accused of suicide attack at Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, which kills 29 and wounds 242
- Jul 1994: Truck bombing of Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires kills 85 and wounds 300. IRGC is later named in indictment
- Mar 2015: During battle to retake Iraqi city of Tikrit from IS, President Barack Obama orders U.S. Air Force to support offensives by Quds Force, and Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Units (below) – under Suleimani’s command
- 2005: U.S. Congress funds covert operations from Iraq into Iran to combat Quds Force
- 2007: U.S. designates Quds Force as terror organization
- 2012: IRGC and Quds Force metamorphose into expeditionary force, entering Syrian conflict, training Venezuela’s National Guard, Colombia’s FARC rebels and Taliban forces in Afghanistan
- 2014: Quds Force’s General Suleimani personally oversees fight against so-called Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, and aids Houthi rebels to take over Yemen’s capital city, Sanaa
- 2017: Iran’s parliament approves budget of $7.4 billion for IRGC
- Apr 2019: President Donald Trump designates IRGC as Foreign Terrorist Organization
- May: U.S. deploys USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group and B-52 bombers to Middle East in response to “clear indications” that Iran and Iranian proxies are planning to attack U.S. forces

Sources: Al Jazeera, Counter Extremism Project, U.S. Institute for Peace
Pictures: Associated Press, Getty Images

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**IRANIAN OIL**

**Top Iranian Crude Oil Export Destinations** ( Thousand barrels)

- Netherlands 293
- France 131
- Italy 197
- Spain 79
- Greece 113
- Japan 523
- China 411
- South Korea 258
- India 374
- S. Africa 128
- Other 151

**Total Exports** 2,458

**Top Proven World Oil Reserves** (billion barrels)

- Saudi Arabia 264.2
- Canada 178.1
- Iran 136.2
- Iraq 115
- Kuwait 101.5

**About 10% of the world’s total proven petroleum**

**OPEC Crude Oil Production** (million barrels per day)

- Saudi Arabia 9.3
- Iran 3.8
- UAE 2.6
- Kuwait 2.6
- Venezuela 2.4

**Source:** www.esadae.gov

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Net oil export revenues amounted to approximately **$57bn**

Subsidies for crude oil and its derivatives cost approximately **11%** of its GDP

The National Iranian Tanker Company holds **29** including **4.5%** of the largest oil tanker fleet in the Middle East.
US Carrier Strike Group:

Carrier Strike Group
A Carrier Strike Group (CSG) is a principal element of U.S. power projection, conducting missions such as sea control, offensive strike, and air warfare.

**Aircraft Carrier (CVN)**
Capable of supporting combat operations for a carrier air wing of at least 70 aircraft, providing sea-based air combat and power projection capabilities that can be deployed anywhere in international waters.

**Guided Missile Destroyer (DDG)**
Surface combatant capable of conducting integrated IAMD, AAW, ASuW, and ASW.

**Guided Missile Cruiser (CG)**
Large surface combatant (LSC) capable of conducting integrated air and missile defense (IAMD), anti-air warfare (AAW), anti-surface warfare (ASuW), and anti-submarine warfare (ASW). CGs are the preferred platform for serving as the Air and Missile Defense Commander.

**Guided-Missile Frigate FFG(x)**
Multi-mission small surface combatant (SSC) designed to complement the ASuW and ASW capabilities of the CSG as well as serve as a force multiplier for air defense capable DDGs.

**Attack Submarine (SSN)**
Multi-mission capable submarines capable of performing ASW and ASuW in defense of the CSG.

**Logistics Ship**
Provides fuel, dry-stores, and ammunition in support of CSG operations.
Setup Map:
Example Counters: