

?gaming in the FCO

Owen Elliott, Head Africa Research
Group, FCO Research Analysts



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Differences from Wargaming

- Diplomacy is about relationships
- Mechanisms should emphasize player inter-action more than “Effects” (kinetic or otherwise)
- More like a “parlour game” than a traditional wargame?
- Limitations of the Matrix Game?
- What other models are there? *Diplomacy*?

FCO Experience to date

- ISIS Crisis, September 2016
- FSU*
- Africa Presidential Succession Game, May 2017

* *No, not that FSU...*

Lessons learned?

- A plausible Matrix Game is surprisingly easy to set up!
- Self-imposed (?) limits/preconceptions on player actions, e.g. ISIS must be uncompromising (although these are good topics for the “wash-up”) of Succession game.
- How quickly events can get out of control/outside the expected parameters, e.g. the succession game became violent after a several entirely plausible events.
- What *are* the limits of the Matrix Game?
- How to avoid unnecessary complication in attempting to make outcomes more accurate?

Limitations

- Resources – mostly time, but also organisational.
- The FCO doesn't actually *do* anything. The objective of diplomacy is to establish and maintain a relationship.
- Displacement activity. *But* “activity is not action” (National Security Adviser)
- Increasing(?) obsession in government with demonstrable outcomes.
- Aversion to dice (and probabilities). Okay for modelling the uncertainties of physics (or the mood of a body of men) but not the outcome of a meeting or a conference.

What do we need?

- A simple, easy to set up (and easy to grasp) but credible model.
- A means of relating gaming to other planning/analytical techniques used for diplomacy.
- A mechanism for relating diplomacy to the agencies/departments that actually deliver effects (e.g. MOD, DfID, DIT) – Key lesson from FSU game?
- But still keeping it stripped down to the absolute essentials.