

Wargaming as a historical research method

Case studies from Brunel's MA
Intelligence and security studies

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Wargaming at University



MY
BACKGROUND



MA LEARNING
OUTCOMES



A RESEARCH
METHOD
EMERGES

Wargaming changed my mind about historical debates

Draft Paper -

- Historical method & counterfactuals
- The Palestine 1929 riots
- Counterfactual analysis is helpful and all historians do it.
- Wargaming structures counterfactual analysis.



Historical methods

I'm not saying that these counterfactuals represent scientific fact.

Wargaming is a more **rigorous** and more **collaborative** way to engage with counterfactuals.

Better than using intuition, alone.

Especially helpful on a topic where an **entrenched debate** already exists.



Since 2023-24:

Able Archer 1983

Acknowledgements: Kristian Gustafson, Evan D'Alessandro, and Tom Mouat.
(and a few friends who did this for real)



Able Archer '83 - how close were we to Armageddon?



Double blind - uncertainty



More intelligence-intensive



Orange v. Blue: both sides have mil, intel, and policy teams within.

Intel Requirement	Asset Assigned	Priority Level	Expected Time of Report	Actual Time of Report	Outcome / Findings

design

- Debate in research
- Declassified documents

First two iterations read these before exercise. This year's two will not.

NIC# 8640-83
30 November 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Herbert E. Meyer
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

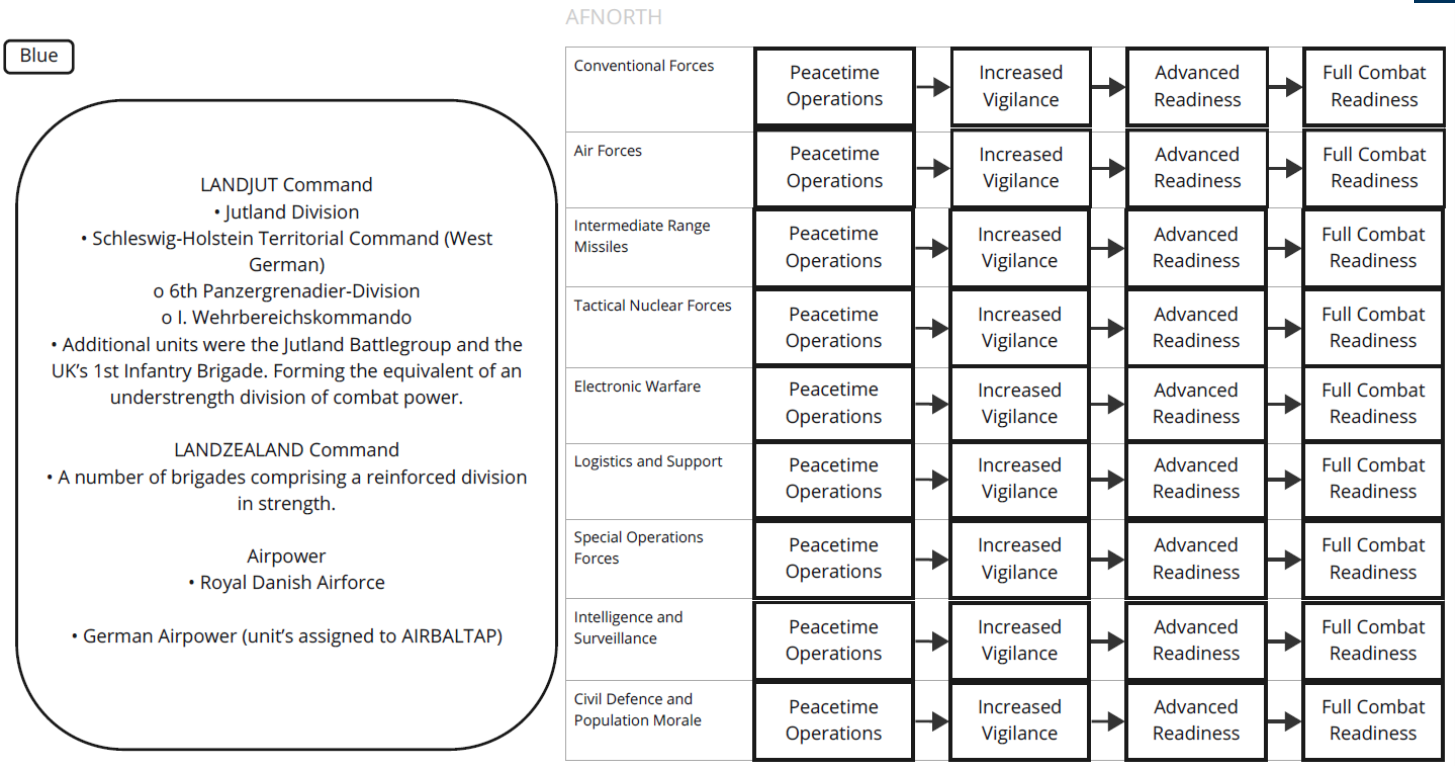
SUBJECT : Why Is the World So Dangerous?

1. The level of global violence has risen as sharply and as suddenly as a child's temperature. In just the last several months we have seen the shoot-down of KAL Flight 007, the assassination of Benigno Aquino, the murderous decapitation of South Korea's leadership in Rangoon, the terrorist bombings of US, French, and Israeli soldiers in Lebanon, the Libyan invasion of Chad, and the anti-Bishop coup in Grenada that ultimately triggered our own successful action on that island. What makes these acts of violence so especially disturbing is their common denominator: each has hurt the citizens, governments, or interests of the Free World.

2. Clearly, the world has become a much more dangerous place. We need to know why. Are these acts of violence somehow linked, or traceable to the same malevolent source? Or should we dismiss the present trend as a series of frightening, tragic, but unconnected events whose one-after-another timing is mere coincidence?

Able Archer 1983 mega-game.

- Now I'll have access to all data from each iteration
- Data capture: more ahead
- Students don't realise until after, but: The real game is the final turn (which they don't know is final). Will ORANGE launch or not? Everything else is to set up the conditions, procedures, immersion, etc.
- Detailed orbats (cred. Evan D'Alessandro)
- Simplified readiness indicator cards. Blue and Orange set their own, and have blanks to populate about the other side.



Able Archer 1983 mega-game.

Data capture:

Logs:

- Document pre-game preparation
- Turn-by-turn individual perspectives on groupwork
- Team logs including reportage and narratives.
- After Action Reports include
 - *Students look at each others logs now*
 - Group Self-Assessment
 - Reflective analyses about bias and varied perspective
 - Long form responses:



Long form (1000 words):

Present an analytic reflection on the result of the game as compared to real events. Answer **any** of the following questions as part of your reflection. You may also seek my approval in writing for another question of your choosing:

- Explain the result of the game as it compares to true events. If they diverged, why? If they were similar, why? In other words, what were the important historical variables which determined peace, or Armageddon during the 1983 war scare?
- What were the key variables to intelligence success or failure?
- Did intelligence success/failure lead to policy success/failure?
- How does this exercise help us understand the forces of historical agency versus structural forces in shaping events? What power did individuals have to rewrite the narrative? Does this reflect a realistic understanding of how events unfold?
- Scholars and professionals have debated whether or not the world was truly in danger of destruction during Able Archer 83. Argue for either side, adding what insight the game has provided to this counter-factual problem?

Able Archer 1983 mega-game.

- Initial results
- So far, no war: risk is low.
- New hypothesis: Soviet KGB project RyAN was actually a good model. (No reserve movement in CONUS was reassuring enough to our distance learners)

BUT

- Difficult to recreate 1980s atmosphere, attitudes, intentions.
- Difficult to recreate high stakes
- Open question about whether briefings and prep help or hurt these issues

The Warsaw Pact orbat intel update (max 200 words). Assess the NATO threat and your preparations to confront it.

Start of round: The impending arrival of Pershing-IIs in Europe represents a significant threat to Soviet security. Action must be taken to either prevent their arrival or anticipate airstrikes on WP/Soviet territory.

Subsequent developments: Intelligence confirming US deployment of strategic bombers and raising of alertness to Defcon 2 indicates a new wave of escalation. WP military units must prepare for conflict by launching interceptors towards US bombers and preparing air defences for the eventuality of US aircraft entering Soviet airspace. In recognition of NATO First Strike policy, however, the enormous human/economic/ethical costs of launching a Soviet nuclear strike far outweigh the national security benefits of countering the NATO threat, so we will be taking no nuclear action.

Actions:

- Launch MIGs interceptors to escort US strategic bombers - launched into international airspace with instructions to warn bombers to US bombers they will be shot down the moment they cross Soviet airspace
- Do not raise readiness of home district air defences in order to avoid revealing location
- Move to DEFCON 2 and NP to ready

From game: Soviet Indicators and Warning 6/7 Nov 1983



I&W Table	Colour
High level of encrypted traffic between Washington & London	AMBER
High levels of NATO Air Force & Naval Activity in Europe	AMBER
Readiness of (almost full) division of US SF in continental US	AMBER
Forward deployment of Air Defence	AMBER
NATO Naval Forces and air forces at full combat readiness	AMBER
Illicit Wireless traffic using new encryption	AMBER
Refusal to engage diplomatically	AMBER
Deployment of specialist units	AMBER
False flag	AMBER
Increased readiness of units	AMBER
NATO increased DEFCON level to 1	RED
Strategic bombers heading to USSR	RED



Thank you

Questions?