

Principles of International Relations in Commercial Board Games

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Today's Goals:

- Understand promises & pitfalls of games
- Explore simple IR concepts in common commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) games
- Examine more niche COTS games for historical learning, complex scenario-building

Why COTS Games?

Games as Examples:

- Build knowledge base of references for instructors
- Students can explore concepts on their own
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Games as Exploration:

- Provide students opportunity to delve into a concept
- Help students visualize and draw connections
- Engage students in immersive learning
- Generate excitement about course material

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- Focus: COTS games simplify and illustrate a few key dynamics; simulations teach real-world skills and test specific knowledge.
- Fun: COTS games are designed for fun!

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Student Feedback on COTS Game Use

- “The activities that I found to be the most helpful and effective were ones in which the students would engage; for instance, the [games] were both entertaining and informative.”
- “Interactive activities help us understand how to put theory into real-world examples.”
- “She really cared about preparing us and gave us encouragement through games.”
- “Interactive activities, such as games, [are] super helpful.”

How To Play COTS Games

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- Board games

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- Board games
- Online games
 - Many games have versions on Steam
 - Some games have free knockoffs
 - Catan → colonists.io
 - Diplomacy → backstabbr.com

Learning the Rules

Learning the rules:

- With the same game, teach the rules.
- With different games, let each group read the rules.
- With at-home games, use tutorials and videos.

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Two Tips:

- Account for rule-learning time!
- Beginners play differently than experts!

Teaching with Games

Not-Quite-COTS Games

Simple IPE Concepts

Simple Security Studies Concepts

Complex Immersive Learning

Conclusion

Teaching game theory:

- Include simple bargaining models as quick partner games
 - Prisoner's dilemma
 - Stag hunt
 - Market for lemons
 - Tragedy of the commons
 - Bargaining model of war
 - ...and more!

Simple Games as Teaching Tools

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- Include simple bargaining models as quick partner games
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 - ...and more!
- Models are easier to understand played than as equations

How To Play Simple Models

- Visualize game trees or game dynamics in lecture slides
- Have students bargain (with pennies, candy, poker chips)

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- Have students bargain (with pennies, candy, poker chips)
- For small class/e-learning, try playing online:
 - ncase.me/trust
 - economics-games.com
 - moblab.com
 - gametheory.net

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- Taboo/Pictionary/Charades: For IDs & more complex concepts; good for auditory/visual/kinesthetic learners
 - Create a list of terms and concepts
- Codenames: For identifying similarities across concepts
 - Create cards with single terms, use regular 'grid' cards

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Catan: Rules and Background



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- Robber: Roll 7 → steal 1 resource, block 1 hex

Catan: Dynamics of Trade

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- Institutions: What types of rules or institutions would make trade easier or more efficient?

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Catan: IR Theories

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- Behavioral Revolution: What biases and assumptions inform players' behavior?

Catan: Robber as Prisoner's Dilemma

Payoffs to Placing Robber on Adversary's 6/8 Resource

	Desert	Steal
Desert	(0, 0)	(-1.6, 1)
Steal	(1, -1.6)	(-0.6,-0.6)

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Modifications? Longer time horizon, more players
Offense-Defense Dilemma? Balance, distinguishability

From Microcosm to Macroscopic Ideas

- What would happen if players could import items that cannot be created domestically?
- What would happen if there were players on the 'other side' of the ports?
- What (if any) governance system would work best?
- How would military forces change the game?

Critical Perspectives: Decolonizing Frameworks

- Who has agency? Who does not?
- In what historical or intellectual tradition is this game?
- What would the game look like from a different perspective?

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Root



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- Each player represents a different society, with different capabilities, leadership styles, and goals
- Asymmetric game design means players advance at different rates

Root: The Cats & Military Policy

Cats start out in power; they earn points from constructing buildings and must hold a lot of territory to win



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- Monarchy: Must protect castle
- Defensive Advantage: Should consolidate warriors into defensible territory
- Superiority: Should attack invading forces only with an advantage, avoid overstretch
- Civil War: Should stop rebellion early if possible

Root: The Birds & Domestic Politics

Birds earn points by holding territory,
destroying buildings



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- Autocracy: Actions are limited by ruler's decree; decree often forces aggression and expansion
- Audience Costs: Leaders are overthrown and replaced if decree is not fulfilled
- Repression: Birds must quickly repress insurgent forces

Root: The Alliance & Insurgency

The Alliance earn points from spreading sympathy



Root: The Alliance & Insurgency



The Alliance earn points from spreading sympathy

- Subversion: Small military effectively enables expansion
- Recruitment: Players that move through sympathetic territory or destroy defenseless sympathizers cause 'outrage,' aid recruitment
- Commitment Problem: Having allies can be advantageous in the short term, but win condition requires board-wide expansion

Root: The Crows & Terrorism

Crows earn points from 'plots,'
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- Local Roots: 'Embedded agents' protect plots
- Asymmetry: Plots can be highly effective even against much larger adversary forces
- Victory Elusive: Easier to antagonize than win; difficult to gather forces, yet generally must fight some battles

Root: The Vagabond & Alliance Politics

The Vagabond earns points from exploring, fulfilling quests, and aiding players to build alliances



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- Balancing: Vagabond must choose between band-wagoning and power-balancing
- Entanglement: Some vagabonds can 'instigate' conflict between other players
- Entrapment: Once vagabond establishes a sufficiently strong alliance, it can move allied warriors

Critical Perspectives: Jus in Bello

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- Principle of Distinction
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 - “Brutal Tactics” card



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 - "Brutal Tactics" card
- Principle of Humane Treatment
 - Injured cats return to castle

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Realism in Military Strategy

- Domains: Armies, Navies must stay on land, in water respectively (unless ships used to convoy armies)
- Transportation: Can only move to or support forces in adjacent territory, moves can be blocked by enemy forces
- Industrialization: Force size depends on number of supply centers controlled
- Resource Constraints: Forces can only serve one goal at a time (e.g., intended support can be disrupted by attacks)

Diplomacy & Alliance Politics

- Players develop strategy in the diplomacy phase
 - In conversations with all players
 - Or in private groups

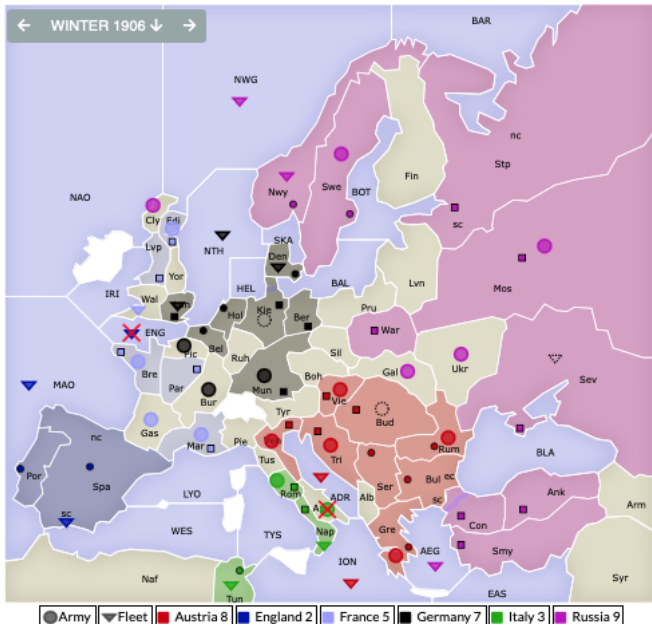
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- Tip: It's important to determine other players' goals

Let's Try!



War must be...

- A military necessity
- A last resort
- A proportional response
- Likely to succeed
- Intended for as short of a time as possible

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- Game play involves deploying troops, applying unique skills of each unit type, navigating terrain

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- Incorporates space race, DEFCON levels, and alliances

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- How does the game misrepresent politics? How could you modify the game to increase accuracy? What would you expect to happen if you made those modifications?
- How can we use simple models of politics? What are the limitations of those models?

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- Games can be effective teaching and study tools
- Simple COTS games can illustrate IR concepts
- Many specialized games build historical knowledge, illustrate more complex military strategy or trade dynamics

Please submit game suggestions and/or guidance for student players here: **<https://forms.gle/PPdae7kn4nY6kn5x7>**.

(The link is also posted in the chat).

We will host a repository of games and resources on:
www.laurensukin.com.

Additional Game Suggestions

- Military Strategy / War Games
 - Stratego, Axis & Allies, Scythe, 7 Wonders, Shogun, The War of the Ring, Risk, 1775 Rebellion, The Shores of Tripoli
- Insurgency / Governance
 - Vietnam 1965-1975, Pax Pamir, Euphoria, Archipelago, Cuba Libre, Labyrinth: War on Terror, Fire in the Lake
- Trade / Economy
 - Wealth of Nations, Oltre Mare, Scythe, Terraforming Mars, Agricola, Container, Imperial Struggle, Polis
- Diplomacy / Negotiation
 - The King is Dead, Oath: Empire & Exile, Twilight Imperium
- Incomplete Information / Bluffing
 - Coup, The Resistance, One Night Ultimate Werewolf, Cosmic Encounter, Secret Hitler
- Cooperation Games
 - Pandemic, CO2, AuZtralia, Spirit Island, Forbidden Island/Forbidden Desert, Eldritch Horror

Further Resources on Gaming & Interactive Learning

- Alridch, C. *Learning by Doing: A Comprehensive Guide to Simulations, Computer Games and Pedagogy in e-Learning and Other Educational Experiences.*
- Coleman, J. "Learning Through Games."
- De Freitas, S. "Learning in Immersive Worlds: A review of game-based learning."
- De Freitas, S., Savil-Smith, C. & J. Attewell. "Educational Games and Simulations: Case Studies from Adult Learning Practice."
- Huang, A. & D. Levinson. "To Game or Not to Game: Teaching transportation planning with board games."
- Kirriemuir, J. & A. McFarlane. "Literature Review in Games and Learning."
- Pivec, M. and A. Sfiru. "How to Implement a Game in an Educational Context."
- Sanford, R. "Teaching with Games."

Small Group Discussions

- What are some of your favorite COTS games?
- How can these games illustrate IR principles?
- How accurately or inaccurately do these games represent real-world phenomena?
- Would you use COTS in your teaching? Why or why not?

Thank You!

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