Confrontation Analysis: The Card Game
Onside report by Michael J. Young

This game featured in a chapter in the book "The Confrontation Analysis Handbook" that John Curry and I co-authored. I had never played this, so looked forward to it with great anticipation. What unfolded was, as I had suspected, quite different from the "pure" Confrontation Analysis I had had used in Brexit: The wargame. It was three quarters of the way between that and a matrix game. In many ways the rules were very loose, for example, John was quite willing, even keen, for people to change their game objectives as they saw fit. This was intended as a way of taking on board expert knowledge, so if people came knowing more than the game designer, their input was encouraged.

Much of the game consisted of making "Cards" (actually A5 slips of paper) saying what the players would do, and the effect that it would have on each of the participants. This was expressed in terms of a number, quantifying the relative effect of the thing happening, ranging from +5 (very good) to -5 (very bad).

Players could either play a card, keep it as a threat (saying it will be played if something happens) or keep it in their hand. In practice most cards were played. The players would argue as to the relative strengths of the different cards, and the umpire would arbitrate. Thus, the fortunes of the players would ebb and flow.

It would have been nice to have had a bit more time to play the game, as sometimes things seemed a bit rushed. John often said what should happen if we were doing the game properly, but then didn't actually do it. I suppose this was unavoidable given the length of the session, but was a real pity, as I would have liked to have seen the game operate in all its fullness.

Thank you, John, for putting this on, and especially thank for allowing me to play the game that featured in the book we wrote. I now understand it a lot better and can now talk about it with a bit more confidence!

Onside report by John Curry

For years I have been experimenting with using Confrontation Analysis to create game outputs that maximised the utility of post-game analysis. My current answer is Confrontation Analysis, the Card Game. While described in the *Confrontation Analysis Handbook*, chapter 8, I have continued to develop the method. The following is an outline of my ideas on the South China Sea 2020 game run at the Conference of Wargamers in July 2020.

1. Player teams are given their stakeholder briefing, but are then asked if they wish to revise any of the aims and objectives. Any changes are discussed, permitted only if they keep the game within the bounds set by the sponsor. Post-game analysis showed that players were well informed about PRC and the USA, but their understanding of the smaller nations was less good. Their understanding of the

challenges of Vietnam in this situation was largely wrong. Vietnam wants to stand up for its rights, but not at the peril of being invaded; no-one would come to help them.

2. Teams were told to generate capability cards for. Each card had action that they could take, the chance of success, and a rating -5 to + 5 of success on the other stakeholders.

   E.g. China imposes an economic blockade on the Philippines (ROP). This could be done with 100% of success (until contested), + 3 for China (this would demonstrate power to the people of China), - 3 for the USA (impact on shipping, ally being blockaded) and -5 on the ROP (it would crash their economy).

3. Starting with the team with the initiative, they play a card and the game world changes to a new point. The scores of each card can be challenged, briefly, by other teams, and the umpire arbitrates.

4. Cards can be concealed in the hand until played, openly displayed as a threat (if you upset me, I will do this) or played. One can put them on a central table if a small group, or stuck to the walls if a large game.

5. After a turn, the teams, then generate new cards. Then another turn is played. The synergy of the game inspires players to be creative in their endeavours to win.

6. When the game world has reached a relatively static position, the game ends.

7. There is a hotwash up, then a cold washup several weeks later and the later often generates more insights.

After the game ends, the real work begins. Looking at the cards and seeking black swans i.e. viable strategies that were not currently considered. Players perceptions are also interesting e.g. their undiagnosed biases in understanding can be crucial in a real situation. The key cards played by the opposition can also be examined in terms of producing a list of counter measures as proposed by the Confrontation Analysis dilemmas response table.

I have used the method a number of times 'in anger' and each time I leave with a deeper understanding of the situation.

Offside report by Stephen Aguilar-Millan

In my line of work, games involving confrontation analysis are a useful technique to generate alternative narratives about an unfolding future event. One of the subject areas that has generated growing levels of interest is the South China Sea. There has been much gaming about this area and it is likely to be of interest for some years to come. I was quite pleased to have the opportunity to play a confrontation analysis game about the South China Sea.

I naturally gravitated towards playing China in the game. China, along with the associated Belt and Road Initiative, has been a research focus for the past two years and will be a full blown research line next year. Not many in the west have an understanding of that the BRI is about, and how the South China Sea is of central importance to it. This is what I wanted to explore in the game.

The players were part of five teams - China, the US, the Philippines, an assortment of other nations, and a group of hacktivists. I couldn't quite see why the hacktivists were being played. From my perspective, it would have made sense for a non-nation state NGO, such as Greenpeace, to have been played. Within the game, the hacktivists seemed to struggle a

bit to find a purpose. The two players of the assorted other nations chose to represent two nations each, which enhanced the game somewhat. Two players represented the Philippines, which allowed one to converse with the China team whilst the other dealt with the US team.

The game mechanism would be for each side to undertake, or threaten to undertake, a certain action. Each action would be assessed for impact on all of the players on a scale of +5 (very good for us) to -5 (very bad for us). The aim being to score as many plusses as possible whilst incurring as few minuses as possible. We were all given a strategic framework, to which we were invited to add.

In the first turn, we felt that to would be important to establish as a fact of the game the development and extension of the BRI, and to pre-position the necessary resources to achieve this. Interestingly enough, the US responded by re-opening the Clark Airforce Base in Luzon. We were very happy with this because it fitted the narrative of China developing commercial opportunities whilst the US was engaged in the pursuit of war objectives. We event developed a political slogan for this: 'America plays Monopoly, China

plays Go'. This is very much in keeping with the spirit of the BRI.

Things became a bit spicier in turn two. The Chinese team financed and built a commercial port, fishery, and food processing centre in the Philippines. This was consistent with the development of the BRI. Our attempt was to bind the government of the Philippines to Chinese commercial interests and to create a degree of dependency of the one to the other. The US responded by threatening to undertake, or undertaking, a full trade war with China.

In many respects, that didn't concern us too much. America is currently losing the trade conflict with China and is rather oblivious of that fact. We felt that a trade war would suit China nicely. It would help to re-balance the economy away from exports to domestic consumption and provide a commercial focus westwards rather than eastwards, which is a key element to the BRI. In this respect, America was playing our game for us.

We decided to up the ante in turn three by prohibiting the export of Rare Earth Elements and Cobalt to the US, or to allow them to be embedded in any product destined for the US. China controls 70% of the global supply of Rare Earth Elements and 90% of the global Cobalt processing capacity. Without either of these, the Information Age comes to a halt. In real life, the hint of this action in June 2019 was enough to bring the US back to the negotiating table with China.

The US responded by threatening to freeze, or actually freezing, the US Treasuries owned by China. This was an interesting move, not entirely unanticipated. There was some disagreement over the likely impact of this. We felt that China could afford to have these assets frozen unilaterally by the US. We also felt that the US markets would struggle to contain the loss of confidence resulting from this unilateral action. This is definitely a research point for further review.

At that point we ran out of time. This was just a little sampler game, but I felt that it did generate some useful insights. It was interesting how the Philippines and the other nations were so soon lost from the narrative. I think that was a consequence of playing a regional issue as part of a global game. From the perspective of China, we could afford to set aside considerations for all players other than the US. I could quite happily have gone on to play the game for much longer. I felt that we had just reached our stride when the clock defeated us, which has to be a sign of a good game.

From a wider perspective, I was able to take away the research point of reputational damage to the US from unilateral actions of the US. This is quite a golden nugget for me. It also demonstrates the usefulness of this type of gaming to explore the future. The game provided a framework for us to explore the assumptions that we brought to the game and gave us a vehicle to assess the gaps in our knowledge. That was quite a lot to pack into a short game on a Saturday afternoon.

Offside report by Jim Roche

John Curry's high-level simulation represented the diplomatic and real conflicts between the governments of the various countries around the South China Sea. I represented two of the minor players, Vietnam and Malaysia.

All player/teams decided what actions they would take to increase their own nations' position. First, we wrote a single 'capability' on a card and estimated a probability of success.

Then we estimated the likely impact of this action, if implemented, on the other countries

(from +5, Excellent/secure prosperity, to -5, Terrible/collapse of government).

These were them discussed, with each nation agreeing impacts and their resulting decisions.

One of my initiatives was to hold a Vietnamese 'Liberation Day' parade and celebration to mark our defeat of the Chinese in 1979 to undermine support for the PRC. Another was to offer the USA basing rights in Malaysia – but this was superseded by the Philippine government's decision to agree to the American expansion

of Subic Bay and Clark Air Base, rather than going with the Chinese option of a deep-water port with food-processing facilities.

Each had different +/- scores on the individual nations.

John's well-run game allowed for a lot of individual creativity and gave us the opportunity to consider geo-political issues in a new way. His system could be used for any planned negotiation from business to local politics.

Offside report by Matthew Hartley

This session from John Curry introduced the operational analysis tool he has worked on in partnership with Michael Young.

The core of the mechanism involved different stakeholders identify actions they could undertake, the probability of that action's success and the consequences of that action on themselves and other stakeholders. These actions can then be analysed collectively to identify optimum win-win paths (or at least loss minimising paths). I'm not sufficiently well versed in operational analysis to comment on the cunningness of John and Michael's work, but it all seemed very clever to me.

The game itself involved a (seemingly inevitable) confrontation in the South China Sea between China and apparently everyone else. Since this has been well covered in *The Economist* over the previous few years I felt I actually knew something about the issues at stake. I assumed the role of The Philippines. Taking a break from the extra-judicial killings of recreational drug industry operatives, I opened a sparkly new port and fish processing facility funded by the Chinese; reopened Subic Bay and Clarke airfield for extensive US soft loans, used for an ambitious infrastructure program (lots of concrete to bury the dopers under); and ran a state-sponsored smuggling operation to overcome the Chinese embargo on rare earth metal sales to the US. All in all pretty successful…

Scary Space Spider Strike
Onside report by Tim Gow

In all fairness, the credit or indeed blame for this game should rightly go to John Armatys. He it was who found this game on the internet last year and ran it at Sheffield Wargames Society using 15mm toys. Aside from being silly and fun, I thought at the time that it would work rather well with my 54mm toys. Rather than sensibly keeping my mouth shut I made the mistake of saying so. "What a good idea" said my colleagues, "it would make a good COW session." So you see, it wasn't really my fault.

Anyway, back to the game. The situation, ripped off from a number of 1950s and 1960s sci-fi movies, is that a meteorite lands on Earth and turns out to be the egg of a giant space spider. The players represent Army units sent to contain the threat - obviously by killing the spider.

For the game at COW I assembled some old Britains Deetail WW2 US infantry, a trio of tatty Jeeps and an ancient - but freshly repainted for the game - M-41 tank. The £1.99 budget I'd allowed was blown on a big (c6 inches across) silly toy spider from eBay.

At COW the game ran twice during the Friday night 'short sessions' slot and I'm pleased to report that all players approached it with the requisite level of decorum. My most memorable player was Nigel Drury who initially wanted to open a dialogue with the spider. After one of the soldiers was 'webbed' (represented by some plastic netting) there came the unforgettable words "the bastard, he's using single-use plastic!"

There then followed a full-on assault, using the full panoply of low rent 1950s technology. Sadly this didn't go entirely according to plan.