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STRATEGIES AND STRAITS

Facilitators Guide

OUR TEAM

Our team is a group of enthusiastic college students, keen to learn more about global trading practices and the ways in which they can impact different people's lives and education. We have been dedicated to learning about this complex issue through a board game and hope you enjoy playing it while simultaneously learning about the issue.

GLOBAL CHALLENGE

The problem we are addressing is the exploitation of power dynamics and regional dependencies as it manifests in (maritime) strategic passages. More specifically, we are interested in the geopolitical implications of blocking passage points as a strategy of political domination. The reliance on (natural) resources of specific actors, such as low-income countries is regularly exploited in international conflict, e.g. as focus points for threats or entrenchment. The game will focus on the establishment of strategic passages, linked to global power and financial dynamics and the postcolonial order and the importance of political relations and dialogue between them, especially in the form of negotiations. It aims to bridge the gap between the global and the local level, portraying how geopolitical behaviour translated to individual experiences.

After playing this game, players should be able to

- trade and negotiate for group and individual advantages,
- relate the importance of strategic passages and geopolitics
- grow increasingly aware of the consequences geopolitics have on individuals and grasp the human costs that tensions bear
- feel frustration and a will to change and challenge the current imbalances of the global order
- synthesize the trajectory of how dependencies and chokepoints are created
- compare the strategic significance of different maritime choke points depending on where they are situated in global trade.

To arrive at these learning objectives, the game starts with a linear story approach that, after the in-game establishment of a strategic passage, shifts towards a branching structure, where multiple outcomes are possible, depending on the players, the characters they embody and their approach to the challenges. All players have their own playing objectives that partially contrast and clash with those of other players to mimic real-world political and economic structures. As the game aims to promote negotiations and peaceful solutions, it also considers trajectories in which all actor's objectives can be partially met - however, this will not be the most likely trajectory of the story.

METHODOLOGY

We chose to study this topic because it is extremely contemporary and relevant. The night before we needed to choose our game topic, American president Donald Trump threatened to launch 'a rain of bombs' over Iran. The reason for this heightened geopolitical tension was because Iran had put a blockade on the Strait of Hormuz, a vital area for hydrocarbon exports from the world's leading producers, with over 20 million barrels per day in 2018. Saudi Arabia is the region's leading exporter, followed by Iran, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

We learnt more about this issue through newspaper articles, social media but also through observing the world around us and seeing its direct impact on the rise of oil prices even here in the Netherlands. This led us to carry out further research on the issue. Our ideas developed due to the consistent questions we asked each other and through trial and error. We slowly developed many different parts of the game, and were able to adapt and piece them together, to create a clear and coherent game. Through repeated rigorous feedback sessions with other students and consultation with instructors, we developed the details of our game and improved upon aspects of storyworld, power structures, and learning objectives.

DESIGN CHALLENGES

One difficulty we faced was the fear of complexity and ensuring that the game stays simple enough to play and follow without extensive instruction, but also complex enough to reflect the complexities of the issue at hand. This proved difficult, due to our game being based on real-world situations that are still ongoing, meaning we had a long time to figure out an achievable but also realistic and goal oriented ending. We chose to approach the issue of representation through being inspired by real-world nations and trading passages, however not having players play a specific country at hand. Doing this made sure that players only had to act according to their objectives, and not be consistently updated to current world events, which might change throughout the long-term play of the game. Making it timeless, but also relevant.



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Cognitive:

Synthesize the trajectory of how dependencies and chokepoints are created.

Reference : Högselius, Per, and Arne Kaijser. "Energy Dependence in Historical Perspective: The Geopolitics of Smaller Nations."

Energy Policy 127 (April 2019): 438–44. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2018.12.025>.

Khan, Akash. "GEOPOLITICS of ENERGY: HOW RESOURCE DEPENDENCY SHAPES GLOBAL POWER DYNAMICS."

Contemporary Journal of Social Science Review 3, no. 4 (2025).

They should be able to compare the strategic significance of different maritime choke points depending on where they are situated in global trade.

Reference : Wang, X.; Du, D.; Peng, Y. Assessing the Importance of the Marine Chokepoint: Evidence from Tracking the Global Marine Traffic. Sustainability 2024, 16, 384. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16010384>

They should also relate the importance of strategic passages and geopolitics.

Reference : Wang, X.; Du, D.; Peng, Y. Assessing the Importance of the Marine Chokepoint: Evidence from Tracking the Global Marine Traffic. Sustainability 2024, 16, 384. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16010384>

Affective:

Players should care more about the consequences geopolitics have on individual civilians, and grasp the human costs global tensions bear.

Players should feel frustration and a will for changing the current imbalances of the global order.

Reference :Chua, Charmaine, and Kai Bosworth. "Beyond the chokepoint: Blockades as social struggles." Antipode 55, no. 5 (2023): 1301-1320.

Behavioral:

Players should be able to trade and negotiate resources for group and individual advantages.

Reference: Lebedeva M.M.. "Humanitarian and Social Components of International Security." RUDN Journal of Political Science 24, no. 2 (2022): 187-199. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2022-24-2-187-199>.

TARGETED PLAYERS

This game is for a more mature audience, leaning towards older teenagers. This is because they may already have some ideas about the topic as they might've heard about it in the news and in class, but we aim to emphasize the importance of maritime routes, not just as a factor influencing geopolitical relations but as a central factor in our daily lives. We feel that the older audience also can understand the dynamic between play and real-life more distinctly, which is important when it comes to a current and historical issue which impacts lives daily. We have decided that the official age range of our game is 14+. We believe introducing this game to a younger audience could risk hindering a complete understanding of the topic, therefore wouldn't be as pertinent.

FOR THE TEACHERS

To implement this in the classroom, teachers are able to explain the issue at hand through the introduction of the passages, however limited intervention is required. After reading through the rulebook and the contextualizing facts on the bottom of the map pieces, teachers will be able to guide the students towards the gameplay while simultaneously helping them understand the educational aspects of the game. To ensure a clear and straightforward unfolding of the game, it is important for the teacher to also familiarize themselves with the rules of our game. This way, when players are confronted with complex rules and concepts of our game (eg: investments/tariffs), the teacher could possibly step in as the gamemaster and clarify.



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