

# 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?

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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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- Card games
- Board games
- Online games
  - Many games have versions on Steam
  - Some games have free knockoffs
    - Catan ! [colonists.io](http://colonists.io)
    - Diplomacy ! [backstabbr.com](http://backstabbr.com)

## Learning the Rules

Learning the rules:

- ^ With the same game, teach the rules.
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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!

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- ^ Models are easier to understand played than as equations

## How To Play Simple Models

- ^ Visualize game trees or game dynamics in lecture slides
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- ^ Have students bargain (with pennies, candy, poker chips)
- ^ For small class/e-learning, try playing online:
  - ^ [ncase.me/trust](http://ncase.me/trust)
  - ^ [economics-games.com](http://economics-games.com)
  - ^ [moblab.com](http://moblab.com)
  - ^ [gametheory.net](http://gametheory.net)

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  - ^ Create a list of terms and concepts



## Simple Games as Study Tools

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

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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)
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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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Not-Quite-COTS Games

Simple IPE Concepts

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Complex Immersive Learning

Conclusion

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- ^ Asymmetric game design means players advance at different rates

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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

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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

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- ^ 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

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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

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- ^ Balancing: Vagabond must choose between band-wagging 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

War must be fought according to...

- ^ Principle of Distinction

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- ^ Principle of Limitation
  - ^ "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)

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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?

## Key Takeaways Today

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- ^ 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](http://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. S ri. \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?

