



MORS special meeting

Engaging the Decision-Maker: The Role of Moderated High-Engagement Games

15 October 2007

ED McGrady

The artist's viewpoint



- It is very easy to design a bad game
- Good games incorporate the designer's point of view
- Games are a package designed to convey a point of view: venue, scenario, mechanics, players, story, materials
- Using a medium to express a strong POV is art, not science

The problem



- Design a game that captured the nature of GWOT from the terrorist's perspective so analysts could develop insights
- Problems with that:
 - GWOT is inherently an individual activity
 - Individuals are religious, and religion plays a major role in the reward system
 - Religio-Magical thinking is important, but is weird to DoD

The approach



- Think outside of the box
 - Modsims, seminar games, board games have been done to death
 - What hasn't been tried?
- High-engagement games
 - There are serious drawbacks
 - But we didn't have much to lose...

Engagement, low and high



- Low engagement media: PPT, modsims, textbooks, etc.
 - You are being told the answer
- High engagement media: RPGs, MMOEs, novels, etc.
 - You are creating the answer based on experiences
- Engagement = work and creativity

What are you trying to do in game design?



- Information can be conveyed lots of different ways
 - Sometimes the method for conveying information determines what type of information can be conveyed
- Information about emotions, intentions, intuition, etc. is difficult to convey with low-engagement media

MHEGs



- Similar to commercial role-playing games
 - But about serious subjects
- Construction is modular
 - Core set of rules, expanded through supplements to rules
- Moderator plays key role in addition to the designer—and the players
 - Allows for exploration of individual concerns, and issues

MHEGs



-
- NOT: MMOGs, MMOEs, WoW, etc.
 - Talking about standard, paper and pencil techniques
 - But they are different from typical DoD games
 - Massively interconnected systems
 - Strong POV
 - Integrated product lines
 - Breaks the designer and controller roles

What is it good for?



- Design and running forces analysts to:
 - Encode complex information in an easily consumed way
 - Pass intelligence, analysis through operationally relevant filters
- Playing MHEGs provides
 - Ability to interact with a complex data set
 - Understand individual perspectives, problems of the enemy

When are they useful?



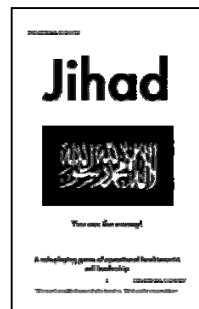
- When the problems are individual, not organizational
 - Terrorism vs. ground combat
- When there is an emotional, irrational component
 - Environment and politics, not rules, are the dominant driver
- Of course this could be anywhere
 - But most organizations won't admit it

When are they not?

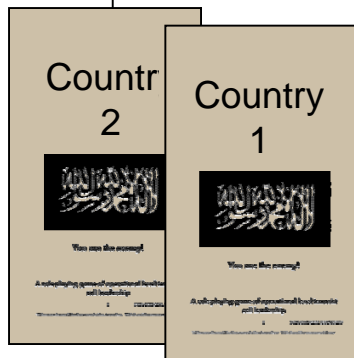


- Not compatible with organizational imperatives
 - Takes too long
 - Too elaborate, complex
- Who would play it?
 - Analysts?
 - Who would then brief decision-makers?

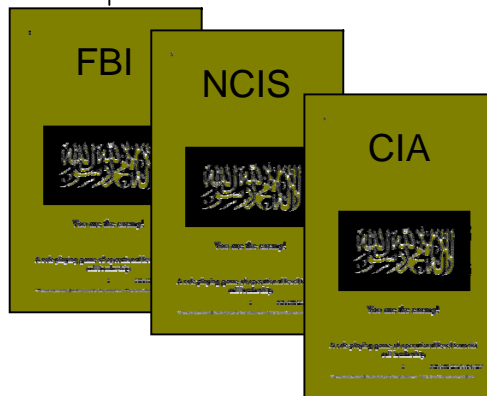
MHEG structure



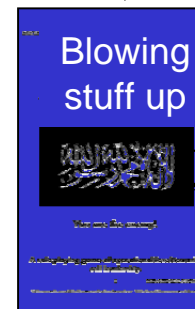
MHEG - Basic rules sets for actions, roles, etc.



Location descriptions



Organization descriptions



Scenarios

Problems



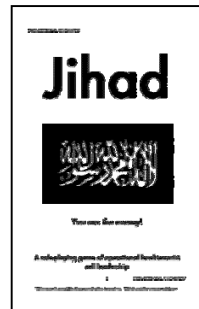
- No one wants to play a game
- Particularly one dealing with emotions, politics, backstabbing, and resource competition
 - Too much like day job
- Much less a game that is demanding, long, complex, and does not have a clear “answer”
 - Just like terrorism

Solution: leverage POV



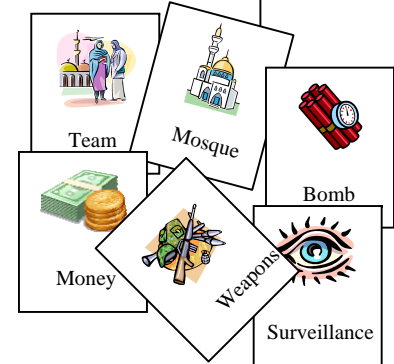
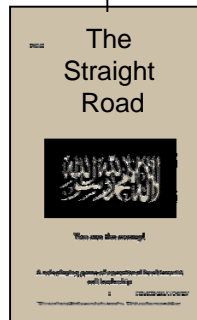
- Creating the MHEG requires
 - Engaging with the data (intel and otherwise)
 - Developing a strong POV (mine: Sopranos go to Oman)
- This can be leveraged into other game formats while retaining much of the MHEGs overall concept

Product-line integration



MHEG - Basic storyline, mechanics
play aids (scenarios, backgrounds)

Caliphate



Board game

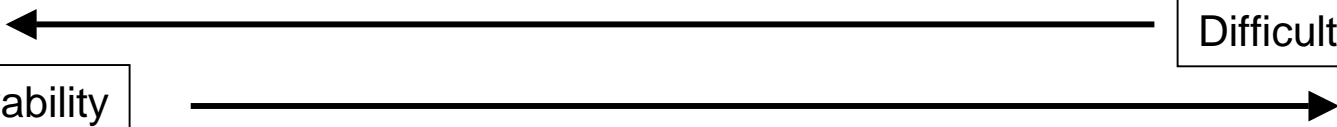
Quick game

Tactical game

Card game

Playability

Difficulty & engagement



Can we do this?



- We already have developed the basic concept
- Need to add intelligence, operational knowledge
- The big advantage: designing an MHEG will allow you to encode the information you need for your simulations
 - At best the MHEG will allow analysts, operators, to understand how the enemy might think and what actions they might take