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Seeing Other Sides: Nongame Simulations and Alternative Perspectives of Middle East Conflict

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Simple role-play simulations can not only demonstrate the dynamics of a conflict but also create awareness of multiple perspectives even among populations relatively set in their opinions. To teach my student population of military officers, I utilize simple, nongame simulations of multisided Middle East conflicts that not only facilitate learning the complex sides but also generate insight and new perspectives. Understanding the motivations of all sides is a prerequisite to analyzing conflicts fully and creating effective policies, necessary skills for military students. The nongame character of these simulations allowed inclusion of the average person; a role generating alternative perspectives, creative thinking, and understanding of the motivations and grievances of disliked groups. Students stated that they now appreciated different claims and the causes of even terrorist group stances, having seen the conflict from the players' points of view. Most students stated that they had not considered the effect on the average person previously, viewing the conflict and potential solutions purely in terms of superpower diplomacy, military actors, terrorist groups, and governmental actions. By not narrowly focusing on diplomatic negotiations, these role-plays spurred insights into the situation on the ground and empathy for the common people.

Keywords Middle East, military, role-play, simulation

Putting yourself in the shoes of players is important for future regional specialists.

—Student comment in simulation evaluation

Educators know that active learning, role-plays, and simulations benefit students, but the advantages have been hard to quantify and measure. Most attempt to measure knowledge gains and retention, yet these benefits only scratch the surface of the contributions of active learning. Beyond the facts of the case or student enjoyment, educators have identified skill development, confidence, civic engagement, identification, critical thinking, and deeper understanding as results of active learning (Smith and Boyer 1996; Bernstein 2008). Such nonfactual benefits are central to the purpose of higher education. As Bernstein declares, active citizens are as important as knowledge of facts and perhaps more so (Bernstein 2008). Changes in attitudes and other affective outcomes (Garris, Ahlers, and

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Driskell 2002) can be the main learning objectives particularly when cross-cultural understanding and insight into motivations are integral to success in the student's future career.

To teach my student population of military officers, I utilize simple, nongame simulations of multisided Middle East conflicts that not only facilitate learning the complex sides but also generate insight and new perspectives. Since the future of my students—military officers—often involves policy-making and intelligence analysis, my overarching learning outcome is to provide the tools for full analysis of the groups involved. Only then can they formulate effective policies or inform their superiors. This cannot be done without significant understanding of the motivations, grievances, and interests of groups and states; even those deemed enemies of the United States. Student minds are often closed to what drives these groups, the historical confrontations that form their worldview, and the grievances of their constituencies.

Many educators recognize the need for deep knowledge and insight into other cultures. As Stover observes, limited ethnocentric perspectives can be pervasive (Stover 2005). Empathy, in his view, is required in order to understand international relations. Empathy entails understanding how others feel, their values, and their perceptions of the other.¹ Indeed, predications of future behavior are built upon assumptions of how groups perceive their world, its challenges, history, and threats. Simulations can provide this new perspective. Stepping into a person's shoes and persona can increase identification while also adding depth to textbook facts (Williams 2006). Students of ethnic conflict are often unable to assimilate historical knowledge of ethnic groups and their worldview absent the pedagogical benefits of simulations (Ambrosio 2004). Simulations can facilitate creative thinking and solutions outside textbooks. Shellman and Turan explain the centrality of creative thinking in their simulations by reference to the intelligence failures reported by the 9/11 commission. A dearth of "imagination" was identified by the commission as critical (Shellman and Turan 2006).

The design of simulations differs with the learning objectives of the educator (Smith and Boyer 1996; Asal and Blake 2006). I created simulations to both teach the intricacies of Middle East conflicts and to generate critical thinking and alternative perspectives. Teaching Middle East politics is challenging not only due to the complexity of the issues and numerous sides involved but also due to ingrained attitudes of students. Students have difficulty mastering the conflicts and drown in the details of the players, their actions, and multiple alliances. Further, the essence of the differing grievances and interests making up the conflicts eludes the students' grasp. I utilize simulated role-plays that differ from many other simulations in order to achieve two main educational goals. First, students learn multifaceted, complex conflicts by playing it out or hearing their fellow students voice the actors' positions. This aids in visualizing the various sides and changing alliances. Second, students are exposed to alternative points of view of the conflict from the perspective of the actors, which promotes identification and creative thinking about the conflict and groups.

For these goals I created low-tech simulations that are not games or negotiations, but role-plays of the differing positions with real-time interaction. No resolution or agreement is sought. Since players are in a negotiation, I can include actors not diplomatically represented such as the "ordinary person." This average person character demonstrates the effect of abstract wars and decisions of politicians. Both personalizing the conflict through this additional player and removing the game competition

aspects of the simulation resulted in coverage of actors' social history that increased the ability of students to envision the conflict through the eyes of an unfamiliar group. The success of the simulations in generating alternative perspectives was most evident in the large number of students declaring groups listed as a terrorist by the United States to have the best moral case. Students often stated the most striking aspect of the simulation was their own changed opinion to the different groups.

In this paper I present the findings of student evaluations of simulations run over four years using content analysis (Neuendorf 2002). I begin by introducing the challenges of my military-student population and the value of low-tech, nongame simulations. I then describe the simulation procedure itself. I follow this with evaluations of insights and alternative perspectives generated through the simulations. I explain the attitudes of students to the various groups prior to the simulation and their self-reported changes in attitude and views of the groups. Since a large number of students reversed their opinions, picking groups as having the best case they were hostile toward at the beginning of the class period, this measure is a proxy for altered perceptions and the new ability to look past inherited labels and hostility to the United States. I then describe the other benefits of the simulations as reported by the students, communicating the details of complicated conflicts in a time-efficient and fun manner and generating enthusiasm, creativity, and interest in the subject.

Nongame Simulations of the Middle East and the Military

Middle East politics represents one of comparative politics' most challenging tasks. Students have difficulty viewing the conflict from the actors' point of view. They commonly place actors in a black box of irrationality or lack of intelligence, investigating their motivations no further. Students fail to comprehend why the parties do not just compromise and get on with the business of living and developing economically. The problem of identification with the actors is particularly acute in my student population. I teach graduate courses in Arab politics to officers from all branches of the military. They are mainly American and mostly male (about 85%). A few are international students (overwhelmingly male). My student population is both more and less challenging than average college students. Their varied educational backgrounds are a challenge. Some majored in political science as undergraduates; others were engineers. Many need to learn the basics of social scientific analysis, the value of theory and history—the why—as opposed to merely understanding the skeletal facts—who did what. The graduate program is designed to provide them background in order to operate in the countries of their area specialty or serve as analysts.

However, unlike the apathy encountered in other student bodies, my students are enthusiastic and interested. As graduate students paid to return to school after some years of work experience, they approach education eagerly and with appreciation. They genuinely desire answers for the problems they have encountered, a way to aid people and to achieve American policy goals. Most acknowledge that the military does not currently have the answers and policies have not achieved the desired effects. Like students elsewhere, these officers are inundated in news of the region and come to the class with preconceived ideas and emotions. They have definite views of who is right and wrong in the conflicts and are exasperated at Middle East conflicts that seem to never end.

Using simulations in the classroom can seem overwhelming. Highly coordinated, technology-driven games are well publicized and attractive but beyond the scope of the average professor. They demand planning, time, coordination, technical resources, and contacts most of us do not possess. Simulations need not be complex, intensive or time consuming to be effective. Single-class-period simulations can be effective (Baranowski 2006; Ellington, Gordon, and Fowlie 1998). Beyond imparting facts, simple role-plays can expose students to alternative perspectives and can generate deeper understanding of the background to the conflict. While still retaining the benefits of more elaborate simulations, I designed role-plays that demand little preparation and resources. Further, the learning objectives of these simulations differ from the usual ones. These are not negotiations or games, but demonstrations of the positions, motivations, and grievances of the players. Due to this difference, I can include actors not party to negotiations who give depth to the conflict, making it more real, individual, and personalized. The simulations resulted in changed attitudes, particularly an appreciation for the grievances of groups disliked by the students and the situation of people squeezed between hostile groups. In other words, these simulations taught more than facts; they imparted insight and spurred new ideas.

I utilize role-plays in my course on Politics and Security in the Levant (course name set institutionally, not personally). The course covers Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine/Israel, concentrating on the Palestinian territories. The emphasis is on the Arab countries in this course; since other courses are devoted to the politics of Israel, we focus on the Arab side of the equation.² I have run between two and four simulations annually for the past four years. In addition to two basic simulations, I tailor and alter the subjects to address recent and developing conflicts in the Middle East. My simulations included the Lebanese civil war, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in general, water conflicts in the Levant, the Israeli-Lebanon war of 2006, the Hamas-Fatah conflict, and tailored Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.³ After each simulation, participants, who make up only a portion of the class, and their classmates in the audience fill out an evaluation questionnaire on their opinion of the simulation, specific questions on various aspects of the simulation, and student opinion of the actor holding the best case. Participants also rate their own performance (see appendix).

Once I know the class size, I set the simulations, the actors, and the number of students involved in each. Students participate in one simulation in the class; the rest constitute the audience. I divided the class into audience and participants for two reasons. First, the smaller number of simulation participants provides more opportunity for each to speak during a simulation; the entire class participating in a simulation would drown out quieter voices (and in my experience, most women and foreigners). Second, the students in the audience ask questions and interact with the simulation participants in their roles as group representatives. This generates new and varied questions, and the students respond in character for their fellow students. Student questions were lively and provocative. The student-audience generates questions and scenarios I had not considered, reflecting their concerns and the questions they desire answered.⁴

Students sign up for a particular simulation, but not the position they will play in it. One or two weeks before the simulation, the students involved in the upcoming simulation draw their positions randomly from a box. This is to maximize the possibility that students will play a position they do not sympathize with or know,

which is the usual result. Students have a limited time to prepare their position, usually a week or two. I limited the time for research in order to force students to get into character quickly and not to overresearch and intellectualize their group's position, missing the essence of the position for the details. These are dangers for my students. For undergraduates or heavier class loads, two- to three-week prep time may be appropriate. I suggest general sources of information for the different actors but avoid giving specifics since this research is part of the student's assignment and grade.

The students are given the name of the player they chose randomly and are told that they are that player and need to prepare a statement and defense for the player's actions and positions during the conflict. I tell the students what time period the simulation takes place, as I do not always use the present day. The students must research their player and know what it did and why, then learn either what the player has said in its defense against opposing views or what the player would say if confronted by opposing groups in the conflict. Students must also prepare their position regarding the other players in the simulation, and I give them a list of all the other groups involved. For example, Hizbullah must not only know its stance regarding Israel but also toward Amal and Syria, sometime allies, along with other players such as the Druze and Christian militias in the Lebanon simulation. In what ways do they disagree and where could they agree? Since these students are graduate students, I give them minimal direction at this phase. For undergraduates, a list of questions could be provided using specific events and the positions of other players in the conflict as triggers for the student to justify the group's actions.

A few days before the simulation, I meet with the students in order to discuss their findings and the questions they have on their position. This allows time for the student to do additional research, if necessary. I ask them about their group, its actions and motivations. During this meeting, I review potential challenges the student will hear from other players regarding his/her actions, going through the list of players, and make sure the student can answer sufficiently. This meeting can be used as a quiz. After the meeting I direct the students to additional references if needed.

On the day of the simulation, players arrive with a written five- to seven-page position paper detailing their group's stance, who they are, what they care about, and what they want. The paper can be written in the first or third person, and is done individually even if more than one player represents the group. Expressing their positions in an organized and coherent paper aids in fleshing out the logic of their group. In this paper, they first state the group's position and its rationale then present the group's stance against other players in the simulation. To increase creativity, I do not provide a set outline. Some students have been very innovative in this paper, writing insightfully in the first person.

Students also make a sign for their group to post at the simulation. (I have found that the degree of effort into the sign often curiously corresponds closely to the group the students play; students playing well-organized groups come in with computer-mastered signs. Those playing less organized and less financially well-heeled groups have come in with a crayon-drawn sign on the back of a paper bag.) Students are free to bring other props, with the exception of weapons. Students have come dressed as their players and one came in handcuffs (he played a character in jail whose most prominent picture was holding his handcuffed hands in the air). Others came in with maps or pictures.

The students also prepare a short two-minute brief to be presented to the class of their group, its position and desires. Forcing the position to be clear in a few minutes promotes clarity and distills the main points. However many people play the group, only one brief is presented. I list the order for the initial reading of group briefs. This order follows the major players, alternating opposing sides. In the Lebanese civil war simulation, I begin with the protagonists to the initial fighting, the Lebanese Phalange (later turned the Lebanese Forces), and then the Palestinians. The time limit on these briefs must be strict, as they can drag on and bore the audience. Rebuttals of the same length are then presented in the same order. These are extemporaneous, as students respond to the allegations against them presented by other players in their briefs.

Following these ordered presentations, players are free to address each other at will, asking questions and presenting their sides. Half way through the (two-hour) class I stop and allow the audience—the rest of the class—to question the players. Students in the audience addressed players in their roles, and participants often had to extrapolate from what they knew to predict new positions or future actions. One year I asked students in the audience to come in with prepared questions, but I found these became irrelevant after the first half of the class. New questions arose and old questions were usually answered in the course of the class. Spontaneous questions worked best. I only intervened to correct an egregiously incorrect position that would skew the entire simulation. After the simulation, the class discussed the topic and I answered questions and filled in gaps.

Students fill out an evaluation with open-ended questions after the simulation (see appendix). The purpose of this evaluation was for students to think about the simulation and for me to gauge the points of interest and needs for clarification in the follow-up class. I asked the students about the best, worst, and most striking part of the simulation. I also asked what else they wanted to learn about this subject. Additionally, I asked students if they felt there was a winner in the moral sense of having the best case. The last question asked participants to rate their performance. Due to the wording and open-ended nature of the questions, students responded by discussing their ideas of the conflict itself, the topic, and new questions they wanted to explore. In the best, worst, and most striking questions students commented on their learning experience.

Measuring New Perspectives

My intent for the simulations was to teach the specifics of the conflicts—particularly the numerous players and changing alliances—in a fun and effective way. The Lebanese Civil War, for example, confuses even academic specialists. At one time or another, some 100 militias (American Task Force for Lebanon, 1991 #1331@37) and a dozen foreign countries were militarily involved.⁵ Most allied or took aid from their ideological opponents during the conflict. Yet after reading the evaluations I realized the simulations were doing more than imparting the players of a multifaceted civil war. It had in fact made the students more open minded about the groups presented. I noticed common themes, particularly when I added a player called variously the common person, “the middle class,” or the “average person.” This player provoked new questions and insights from students.

To analyze the benefit of the students from the simulations I used content analysis, letting the statements of students in the evaluations drive the categories

for quantification. The evaluations used over the four years of simulations consisted of open-ended questions; students had to volunteer their answers. This made quantitative assessment difficult but provided substantive information on what students felt was their main takeaway or gain from the exercise. The evaluation served as a second debrief for the simulation, where students could share their thoughts openly. It provided the maximum possibility for students to say the first thing that came to mind. Importantly, I did not tell students before the simulation that my goal was their altered attitudes or sympathy; this would have skewed the results. For them the purpose was to understand the conflict and the players.

Since my purpose was not the measurement of the simulation's effect, I did not conduct pretests to identify attitudes prior to the simulation. Fortunately, I had effective substitutes for such a pretest.⁶ The simulations take place after the middle of the course, and by this time I have gotten to know my students and their attitudes (classes are around 25 students). I did not teach on the subject before the simulation. Students were exposed to a historical background of the countries only, prior to the simulation. Further, I am able to generalize the attitudes of my student population with some confidence. With few exceptions, my students do not view enemies of the United States or groups labeled terrorist sympathetically. Their profession is focused on fighting these groups. Some are empathetic to these groups, and the attitude of those individuals is generally clear to me prior to the simulation. At most, I judged that a small minority of the students, which I estimate at far less than one-quarter, could be classified as open to such groups as Hamas or Hizbullah.⁷ For example, it is safe to declare the Marines in general as anti-Hizbullah, which is the organization responsible for the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, killing over 200 U.S. Marines. This institutional history is well known to them. In addition, most students are somewhat religious and favorably disposed to Christian groups or allies of the United States. In general, the students believe overwhelmingly in power creating facts on the ground. The spoils of war should be recognized, as one stated, and the most powerful rules the day. They do not often consider the plight either of the underdog or the common person. The training and background of the students has led them to believe that international law and the United Nations do not represent effective solutions to conflict.

I measured changed attitudes and insight into the different sides of a conflict in three ways analyzing the content of student evaluations of the simulations.⁸ First, I measured the group students picked as having the best moral argument. I utilized my knowledge of their attitudes to analyze new insights or open mindedness. Identification of the winner shows if students are open to new perspectives when they pick a player they disagree with, is listed as an "enemy" of the United States, or uses terrorism. In some cases, viewpoints favoring Christian groups or other allies of the United States were new perspectives for those students. This was the situation 3% of cases I can pinpoint. Since I was unable to code "change of perspective" itself for all the students, I utilized the group students picked with the best moral case as a close proxy.

Second, I identified the number of students writing new insights or changes in their prior perspective in their evaluations. I did not include increases in factual knowledge in this category of insight. Insights in this category include sketching outlines of a peace settlement on the evaluation form or calling for international and UN involvement, or statements that the student felt opposing sides had valid arguments. These would be innovative and new ideas respectively for my students.

I verified the new character of the comment through statements in the rest of the evaluation and knowledge of the individuals—where questionable, I placed the evaluation in the “no insight” category. In this category I was able to include those whose change ran opposite to the bulk of the class. This form of content analysis for these simulations has definite limitations but also tells much. Not only did they change their attitude but they also needed to be aware of that change, to put it into words, and to volunteer it as a primary outcome of the simulation. The open-ended nature of the evaluation questions adds weight to student comments.

Third, I noted particular recurring comments in the simulations, including how many wrote about the average person character or actors excluded from negotiations. Attention to this character demonstrates a new way of viewing the conflict and insight into the conflict’s everyday effects. This measure differs from the number of insights, as it includes comments on points of fact or observations regarding this player. I excluded those who merely picked the common person or minor, excluded party as the one with the best moral case. Students had to write on the player to be counted in this measure.

I separated these measures by male and female, and participant in the simulation or audience member to identify any differences among these students. The pool of women was too small for statistical significance, but their results were interesting. Women tended to pick the ordinary person or refugees as having the best moral case. They did not pick violent groups, except for one woman playing that group, even when much of the class chose such an actor. Almost all women picked the underdog or less advantaged group, provided it was not terrorist. However, many of these women in fact constituted much of the 15% I classify as sympathetic to the downtrodden or enemies of the state before the simulation. The participants wrote more in their evaluations and explained their statements. The breakdown of the population in these simulations, a total of 98 students, was the following for the four years combined: 16% female, 6% foreign, and 3% civilian. The breakdown of the military branches was 33% Air Force, 22% Navy, 19% Marines, and 16% Army.

The Best Moral Case

Reflecting the changed perception of the conflict and the parties involved, the question on picking a winner yielded surprising results. I counted only the primary winner picked by the students, as they often picked also a second and third. A number chose two simultaneously, which is reflected in the list of winners below. Opinions were divided, but a large number in each simulation picked a previously disliked group, demonstrating that the simulations spurred thought into the situation of unpopular actors. Very few chose the one who holds the power, for example due to the spoils of war, which is surprising given the student population. Others stated that no one had the moral high ground. Generally, the winners were those deemed to have a solution to the conflict, be least violent absent provocation, or the most victimized.

New perspectives were particularly apparent when a student voiced sympathy for a group she did not like before. For the Lebanese Civil War (Table 1), 62% picked Hizbullah or the Shi’a, current enemies of the United States, or the socialist, pro-Palestinian Lebanese national Movement. The next largest number picked “no winner,” followed by 5% who chose the Christians or Israel

Table 1. Responses to the Lebanese Civil War simulation (%)

	Best moral case	Of whom participants	Of whom women
Shi'a/Hizbullah	37	15	1
Lebanese National Movement ^a	25	13	4
No winner	21	5	1
Christians (Lebanese Forces) or Israel	5	3	0
Contradictory responses	5	1	1
Druze/Progressive Socialist Party	3	1	0
PLO	1	1	0
Syria	1	0	0

Note. This is derived from a total of 75 evaluations; 30 were participants in the simulations, and six were women.

^aThe group was socialist, pro-Palestinian, and secular.

(U.S. allies). One stated that the most striking thing of the simulation was his/her sympathy for groups previously thought of in wholly negative terms. “[The most striking thing was] that the Shi’a may have actually had the best argument and that I may be empathetic to their cause as it related to Lebanon in the 70s and 80s.” One Marine turned red when he drew his position as Hizbullah, due to that group’s role against the Marines, but ended understanding the group and picking them as the best moral case.

Similarly, in the Hamas-Fatah simulation (Table 2), 44% picked Hamas, likewise and enemy of the United States. One student who wrote he wanted to pick Hamas as the moral winner, but his profession did not allow “encampment with the stated enemy of the state.” His second choice was Marwan Barghouti, a Palestinian in jail for terrorism against Israel: “His case appears to promise finality to the peace process by preserving the dignity of both sides.” In the Hizbullah-Israel war simulation (Table 3), 28% picked Hizbullah as the best case against the American administration’s stance on the conflict.

The simulations promoted identification with the average person or the underdog. The Hizbullah-Israel war simulation resulted in 56% voting for the

Table 2. Responses to the Hamas-Fatah conflict simulation (%)

	Best moral case	Of whom participants
Hamas	44	25
None	31	6
Palestinian Authority	13	6
Marwan Barghouti	12	5

Note. Derived from 16 evaluations; six were participants. Women did not self-identify in the evaluations and did not play roles in this simulation. There was no “ordinary Palestinian” represented in this simulation due to student numbers.

Table 3. Responses to the Hizbullah-Israel War of 2006 simulation (%)

	Best moral case	Of whom participants
Lebanese people	56	6
Hizbullah	28	11
None	11	0
Israel	6	6

Note. Derived from 18 evaluations; four were participants. Women did not self-identify in the evaluations and did not play roles in this simulation.

Lebanese people. Ordinary Palestinians were chosen by 34% in the Israel-Palestine scenario (Table 4) and a further 16% picked the Palestinians in general without specifying. The water conflict simulation (Table 5) resulted in 42% voting for the downstream countries, those on the receiving end of water allocation. As stated previously, the students believe that those with the resources can determine its allocation—ownership furnishes unilateral discretion. Students commented on how much they learned from the inclusion of ordinary citizens and minor players not part of negotiations.

While these results are striking, the new perspectives were usually not consistent. Students voiced opposing points of view in their evaluations. I interpret such contradictory points of view as a positive indicator of new perspectives, that the students are viewing multiple sides. Further, each simulation was discrete in its effects. No general increase in sympathy for the underdog as a category resulted as the class progressed, as is shown in later simulations. If the students were not exposed to the arguments, their view did not change to sympathy. This result could differ with other populations of students.

Table 4. Responses to the Israel-Palestine conflict simulation (%)

	Best moral case	Of whom participants	Of whom women
Ordinary Palestinians & refugees	34	21	4
Palestinians in general	16	6	0
Marwan Barghouti ^a	7	1	0
Hamas	6	4	0
Kadima party	4	3	0
Israel	4	0	0
Jordan	3	3	0
Israeli settlers	3	1	1
United States	1	0	0

Note. Derived from 72 evaluations; 35 were participants in the simulations, and five were women.

^aA leader of al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigades. Currently imprisoned by Israel.

Table 5. Responses to the water conflict simulation (%)

	Best moral case	Of whom participants	Of whom women
Downstream countries	42	23	12
Upstream countries	23	15	0
No winner	23	4	0
Both up and downstream	12	12	0

Note. Total evaluations: 26; total participants: 14; total women: 3.

New Insights and Excluded Groups

As another indicator of new perspectives and creative thinking, I identified the number of comments in the evaluations that run contrary to students' prior preconceptions. Many new insights run counter to U.S. policy. These comments were volunteered due to the open-ended structure of the evaluation. These are separate from questions the students brought up in the evaluations or factual observations. Overall, 65% wrote their thoughts in the evaluations and, of those, 78% wrote new insights or alternative viewpoints (see Table 6). Such insights include the new perspective that no one truth or correct view exists. Some stated that there is no single "bad" or "good" guy, that no single case was correct; all sides had good points and elements of blame. One stated that moderation or realism depend on the interpretation. Another stated that each side had "rational ideas that were not rational to the other sides." Others wrote that a person could argue any viewpoint depending on what she valued. One student wrote, "[I] found myself sympathizing with some part of what every participant said."

Other insights included the observation that opposing players had common interests but were unable to identify and act upon those commonalities. Others began to imagine frameworks for a solution to the conflict. Thirty-one percent of students in the water simulations stated that the conflict could be a method to achieve regional peace. "[The water simulation] gave ample opportunity to see the

Table 6. Percent of new insights in the evaluations

	Percent writing insights	New/alternative insights as a percent of all evaluations	New insights as a percent of those writing
Hizbullah-Israeli War 2006	61	39	64
Hamas-Fatah Split	44	31	71
Water	73	50	68
Lebanon civil war	64	51	80
Israel-Palestine	70	57	82
Total	65	50	78

Note. Total number of evaluations was 209. Almost all participants wrote insights.

myriad of opportunities for cooperation that exist between all sides.” Another stated, “[I was most struck] that water was a factor for peace. [It’s] not sexy, but it plays large role here.” A surprising number of students (almost 20% in the water simulation) advocated a role for an international or United Nations agreement. This is striking since the students are overwhelmingly opposed to international law as a solution to conflicts. Students also referenced international law in the Hizbullah-Israel simulation.

They began to look beyond typical depictions of groups and to ask questions about policy solutions. Some comments noted facets of the organizations that use terrorism other than the much-discussed terrorism. “[The most striking thing was] how much the focus of rhetoric is on terrorism, and nothing else about a group,” a student said. Hamas was declared by some to be legitimate due to being elected democratically. Students also perceived military and diplomatic policy in new ways, stating that a policy of “punishing” people backfires or that countries “have unrealistic expectations for bombing campaigns.” “The United States,” one student wrote, “is missing the domestic dimension of Lebanon’s interaction with Israel.” Students were surprised at how much of the conflict was domestically generated, not due to regional or superpower dictates. The pragmatism of actors, contrary to their rhetoric, was a surprise to many.

Identification and new perspectives came from the inclusion of actors outside diplomacy. The minor players and average person actors left a lasting impact on the students. In addition to declaring these players the moral winners, 58% of students wrote about these minor players in those simulations where these players were included, who included the average Palestinian, the Palestinian refugees, the Lebanese, and the Israeli settlers. Students wrote, “[I was struck by the] moving appeals of excluded refugees from negotiations.” “[I was most struck by] the plight of the people in the conflict—no one [is] standing up for them. “Although I strongly disagree, they [the Israeli settlers] have many points to debate and must be included to come to a lasting peace.” Students stated that they learned a lot from these players. “It was good to have those ‘other’ classes (i.e., refugees, Palestinian middle class) voicing their concerns.” The simulations presented the view from the actors themselves, not how others view their situation. “[The best part was that the] different Israeli and Palestinian perceptions of the conflict were emphasized.” “I see the position of the other groups.” “No one reflects or defends the . . . people.” “I didn’t realize that settlers have a point.” “[It] brought new appreciation to different claims.”

Role-plays force students to “personalize” their role through identification, and to some extent empathize, in order to answer questions and to engage other groups. Students had to place themselves in the group’s position and to come up with what the justification or issue position would be, thinking in character on the spot. “Role-playing forced us to dig up support for our viewpoints, even if we didn’t personally agree with them. I wonder if political leaders today do the same as their situations and circumstances evolve.” “You begin to see the civil war from the character’s viewpoint . . . one walks away with a changed viewpoint of the civil war.” “I enjoyed that this was a learning experience that was an alternate method to lecture or discussion. The first person participation forced me to know the issue from all facets and place myself in the position of my party.” “Being able to field questions from the class and debate with the participants put me in the position of having to empathize with the Shi’a. I would have liked to spend much more time on this, as there was so

much more nuance to the history of the Shi'a position than I was able to articulate. Thinking in that frame of mind sure took some getting used to."

Learning the Conflict and Creativity

As in other simulations, students enjoyed the experience and felt it was educational. Students reported in the evaluations that they learned more, and that the simulations spurred more questions and investigation into the topic. Students referred to the experience and knowledge learned from these classes in future classes. Students appreciated and enjoyed the intensity and learning environment of the simulation. It clarified the conflicts for the students. One student wrote, "The interaction among the participants brought about an exciting and fun way of learning about the civil war." Another said, "It was good to see all sides at the same table, this made the true battleground fog clearer to detect. The simulation was instructive. Good learning tool."

The debate and questions from the audience were the aspects of the simulations students stated they liked the most. The debate illustrated divides between parties and revealed contradictions in the positions of the groups and the polarization that debate and confrontation themselves create. A student wrote, "[T]he actual debates themselves bring out the learning points especially when they become heated." According to another, the best part was "after the break when the players debated back and forth and took questions. Some of the questions were very poignant. Simulators had excellent responses."

Students thought the simulation reflected the reality on the ground and were struck by the real feel to the grievances expressed. A student wrote, "This brought more than just a discussion, it brought in real emotion to the debate." Another stated "The best part of the simulation was when the parties argued amongst themselves without outside (non-actor) involvement. I think that best illustrated the true difficulties that have thus far, prevented any real resolution of these troubled issues." "Most of the participants added in enough emotion into their responses that it became easier to see how the real actors got caught up in and behaved in this mess."

Students demonstrated creativity in the researching and preparing for the simulations; a notable achievement especially in this student population, since their profession does not often provide space for creativity. A representative of the Palestinians for the water conflict simulation brought in a bottle of brown water and asked the Israeli representative if he would himself drink it. Others dressed the part. One playing Marwan Barghouti came handcuffed, as the Web site shows him. The Palestinian checkpoints in particular struck the students. The representative of the average Palestinian came in late one year (waiting in the hallway), saying she was held up at a checkpoint. Another year a student playing the same group asked for permission to leave early in order to get across the checkpoint before it closed. This student portrayed the average Palestinian by bringing life to dull statistics: As "Joe Palestinian," he embodied the statistics by stating, "I have X education, Y number of children, have been arrested Z number of times." The representative of the Lebanese people in the 2006 war did likewise, putting in the first person the effects of that war.

Students began to picture the conflict in terms of the simulation even after the class period ended. They often substituted the name of the student for the name

of the group he/she represented when discussing it in future classes. Students overcame their hesitancy to view the conflict from the perspective of the local actors and argued from the standpoint of groups many of whom are deemed terrorist. The simulations provided for increased freedom of expression. Students could voice severe positions without fear of repercussions, and the quiet students became opposite in these simulations.

Difficulties, Challenges and Logistics

One problem that often arises in the simulations is that some students take too much time and go beyond their time limit. The professor here needs to keep the students on track and facilitate equal time among players. Many wanted the simulation to last longer. Participants often cited the worst part as the difficulty of fulfilling the requirements of the role-play itself, such as the research and summarizing the position of the group quickly. Students were unsure what they were supposed to do, as they are used to trying to “win” or to play a specific game. The military is accustomed to simulations (Gredler 2003), but such simulations are games to develop specific skills and with a definite outcome. This is partly an aspect of the simulation but can be alleviated somewhat by the professor alerting them in advance that the goal is to demonstrate the positions and to represent the grievances, not reach a solution. While some did not like the opening statements, they seem to be a necessary evil, introducing the platform of the group, and were foundational for many, cited as their favorite part.

Conflicts that are more current or ongoing can be more difficult for role-plays, as there is less information on the groups' positions. It was harder to get debate going and responses from participants were shorter. In addition, less conflictual simulations were not as enjoyable for the students, since they lacked heated debates; although they could communicate much information and students learned a good deal. The simulation on water falls into this category. Students stated it was more boring than others, but most cited many new facts they learned about water and its pivotal role in regional peace.

Deciding the players in the simulation can be difficult. The choice of players varies by the goal for the class and the simulation. I both simplify the conflicts and expand them. This sacrifices accuracy to achieve a more comprehensive view of the conflict and a modicum of simplicity at the same time. This is done to make the conflict manageable but still include the average people in a conflict. For one simulation, the Lebanese civil war, I set the time period as the middle of the war but still include a group that has basically disappeared. As conflicts progress, some players popular and important at an earlier stage do not survive, as is the case with the Lebanese National Movement. The group in this case represented a secular solution for the country and was a major player in the first few years of the war. Including it provides students a more complete picture of the conflict than would arise from only the groups present later in the war. The professor also needs to set the order of presentations.

Larger simulations utilizing teams—two people representing a group—works well. One or multiple persons can represent groups. While students in larger simulations (nine players) complained that there were too many people, the number added a degree of lively debate that smaller ones did not have. Indeed, the complaint reflected the fact that many voices were trying to be heard. Smaller simulations

lacked that level of enthusiasm and “chomping at the bit” to state their side. Four players are too little; seven appear about right. Teams function well for some of the more unpopular groups. The individuals are emboldened to state their positions when working in pairs, while alone they are much quieter. For undergraduates, teams may be useful for all players. The danger with teams is that one student can dominate. For grading, I take this into account and have additional barometers to judge the student, through the written papers (done individually while the two-minute positions are joint) and the individual meetings. Some intervention from the facilitator can help the quieter students speak more.

Conclusion: Advantages of Nongame Simulations

Simulations need not be all-consuming or high-tech teaching tools in order to generate critical thinking. If such work-intensive simulations were the only option, few would be able to utilize this valuable teaching tool. I designed simulations that secure the education benefits without long planning, resources, and technology. Professors who lack teaching assistants or aids can run them. The form can be adapted easily to new conflicts and differing numbers of players and inserted into most classes without overhauling the class schedule. My model of role-plays demonstrates that the pedagogical benefits of active learning can be obtained through simple simulations entailing little of the educator’s time. This version of role-play is low tech, facilitating ease of implementation with little capital, preparation time, or coordination. The model can be expanded to incorporate technology, increased time, and coordination, if desired.

Simple role-play simulations can not only demonstrate the dynamics of a conflict but also create awareness of multiple perspectives even among populations relatively set in their opinions. Understanding the motivations of all sides is a prerequisite to analyzing conflicts fully and creating effective policies, necessary skills for my students at the front of the U.S. military. The nongame character of these simulations allowed inclusion of the average person; a role generating alternative perspectives, creative thinking, and understanding of the motivations and grievances of disliked groups. The simulations taught students that right and wrong, truth and falseness, were not always easy to determine, if possible at all. Students stated that they now appreciated different claims and the causes of even terrorist-group stances, having seen the conflict from the players’ points of view. Students came up with outlines of which groups could potentially form a solution and which ones had common goals. They questioned current policies and drew theoretical lessons. Most students stated that they had not considered the effect on the average person previously, viewing the conflict and potential solutions purely in terms of superpower diplomacy, military actors, terrorist groups, and governmental actions. By not narrowly focusing on diplomatic negotiations, these role-plays spurred insights into the situation on the ground and empathy for the common people.

Notes

1. Empathy can also skew individual opinions favorably toward the subject of empathy. Still, I contend that there is a better probability of constructive policies if the decision makers have a thorough understanding of the reality on the ground that includes the sentiments of the

population. With the students in my classes, there is minimal danger of overidentification due to the general negative attitude toward the Arab groups; an attitude I describe below. The students do not lose the perspective that these groups are opposed to U.S. policy but gain an appreciation for the worldview of that group.

2. The students have had many personal interactions with Israelis. Due in part to these relationships and often their religious backgrounds, they identify with the Israelis. Given the need for a manageable number of simulation participants and a desire to communicate alternative perspectives, I did not include an Israeli average citizen. I may do so in the future.

3. I ran simulations in 2003, 2005, 2006, and 2007. In 2003, I ran two simulations, on the Lebanese civil war and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In 2005 and 2006, I added a third on water conflicts, expanding the countries to include Turkey. In 2007 in response to developments, I ran four role-plays, the Lebanese civil war, a pared-down Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, the 2006 Hizbullah-Israeli war, and the Fatah-Hamas split.

4. For example, in one Palestine-Israel simulation a student asked the United States representative what the effect of Iran was on U.S. policy toward the Palestinians. The student answered he felt the conflict with Iran was being transposed onto the American view toward Hamas.

5. Five foreign militaries were involved in the fighting, excluding United Nations peacekeepers, one of which was a multinational regional force, the Arab Deterrent Force. Syria was the main participant of this force, but Sudan, Libya, and some Gulf states took part. Major military funding and sponsorship came from Iran, Iraq, the Soviet Union, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Libya.

6. This is of course not equivalent to a pretest, which I can run in future classes. My evaluation of student views comes from personal one-on-one conversations and class discussions during the prior weeks. Other professors verified my anecdotal conclusions of the students' opinions. Those with dissenting views generally spoke with me privately or after class on their views.

7. While not a quantitative determination, students accept the U.S. administration's view that a group deemed terrorist is so. Additionally, these two groups have killed or threatened members of the U.S. military, or people the students sympathize with—the Israelis. They therefore come to class hostile to these groups.

8. I am the only Middle East professor to utilize simulations, simplifying the evaluation of their effect.

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Appendix A

Positions in the Simulations

Lebanese Civil War—Meeting Takes Place in 1985–1988

1. Lebanese Forces
2. Lebanese National Movement (assume still exists)
3. Druze/Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)
4. Shiites (Amal and Hizballah)—or separately
5. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
6. Syria
7. Israel

Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

1. Israeli government
2. Israeli settlers
3. Palestinian Authority
4. Jordan
5. Palestinian refugees in exile
6. Average Palestinian in the occupied territories
7. Hamas
8. Kadima

Palestinian Authority-Israeli Conflict (Pared down Version)

1. Hamas
2. Palestinian Authority president
3. Current Israeli government
4. Israeli settlers
5. U.S. government

Water Conflict

1. Turkey
2. Israel
3. Palestinians
4. Jordan
5. Lebanon
6. Syria

Israel-Hizballah War 2006

1. Lebanon government
2. Hizballah
3. United States
4. Israel
5. Average Lebanese

Fatah-Hamas Split: Present Day

1. PA President/Fatah in power
2. Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and Marwan Barghouti (two people)
3. Hamas and Islamic groups (two people)

Appendix B

Simulation Evaluation Questions

1. How do you feel the different sides expressed their positions? Be specific.
2. What do you feel was the best part of the simulation?
3. What was the worst part?
4. Was there, in your opinion, a clear “winner”—*not in the debating sense of who had the best rhetoric*, but of having the best case (morally)?
5. What was the most striking thing you learned from the simulation?
6. What did you want or expect to learn but did not?
7. PARTICIPANTS: How would you rate your own presentation and participation in this simulation, on a scale of 1 to 7 (7 being the highest) and why?

Name: (only necessary if a participant) _____

Appendix C

Simulation Instructions Professor Baylouny NS 3361: Levant Politics

1. Make a sign for your group or state.
2. Prepare a 2-minute (maximum) position statement. This will be handed to me. It does not have to be sentences – bullet points are fine.

Speak in the “we” or I voice: assume the identity of the people you represent. Even if there are multiple factions within that group. For example, “part of us lean toward the . . . party because . . . others reject this. . . . Our over-riding rationale is. . . .”

Summarize, don’t read your position. Make this brief! Hit the highlights. Concentrate on your positions and demands, not history.

If the position changed over time, lay out the timeline of your decisions and actions. “At first we put our hopes in . . . then, we split off and . . .”

Hit the key points in your talk. Lay them out so everyone understands what your main positions and demands were.

Make sure you provide a sound-bite synopsis of: who you are (bit background/history), what your grievances are and what your vision of a solution is; What you are upset with and what you want to happen.
3. Search for sources – particularly articles and some groups have web sites. Journal of Palestine Studies is helpful, also Middle East Report, ICG, and Carnegie. Look through the electronic sources in the bookmark file from the class CD, and the country folders on it for articles.
4. Be prepared to defend your position against others: know how you differ and what you want of them. Highlight these in our simulation discussion, after the positions have been laid out.

It may help to prepare some questions for the other participants relevant to your grievances and goals.
5. During the simulation, highlight differences or similarities with other people’s positions, no matter how strange the alliance may seem. Jump in to agree or disagree.
6. Make an appointment for my office hours to discuss your position, or help with sources. We need to review the essence of your position before the simulation in class.

7. Write a 5–7 page synopsis of your group’s position. Make sure this is analytical and utilizes the third person voice speaking about your group. Keep the rhetoric to a minimum, please. You are deciphering their position from within – providing background and substance to the position statement (first person voice in the simulation). Use references as needed. Provide details – not just generalities.
8. Work together as a team for the presentation if there is more than one. But each write your own separate papers.
9. Feel free to bring maps, flags, or other paraphernalia demonstrating your position (within reason – no guns please).