



Gaming Gray Zone Tactics

Design Considerations for a Structured Strategic Game

Becca Wasser, Jenny Oberholtzer, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, and William Mackenzie

www.rand.org/t/RR2915

The authors of this report developed a strategic-level structured card game examining a gray zone competition between Russia and the West in the Balkans. They detail the development of this game, including key design decisions, elements of the game, how the game is played, and the undergirding research approach. They conclude with a discussion of recommendations for future applications of the game design.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Can a game model gray zone competition in an empirically grounded yet playable way?
- What is the game design process for developing a structured strategic game for a complex political-military issue that simultaneously operates in two different time horizons?
- How can structured strategic gaming help researchers gain an understanding of adversary gray zone tactics and tools?



KEY FINDINGS

The Balkans gray zone game demonstrated that structured strategy games are useful exploratory tools and this model could be adapted for other contexts and adversaries.

- While the gray zone remains a murky topic, this game demonstrated that it was feasible to break the gray zone down into concrete parts, to conduct research on each of these parts, and to link these components to create a playable strategic game that yielded useful insights.
- The scoped and structured approach to this game allowed for enough structure to keep discussions on track and provided links between inputs and outputs while still allowing for creativity, flexibility, and transparency.
- This gray zone game can be adapted to focus on different regions or adversaries, could include additional allies, or could be made into a three-way competition.



ARROYO CENTER

RAND Arroyo Center is the Army's federally funded research and development center for studies and analyses. Its mission is to help Army leaders make decisions that are informed by objective, high-quality analysis. For more information visit Arroyo's website at www.rand.org/ard.