

**LtCol Vincent Ciuccoli, US Marines
Personal Reflections on the Simulation
MABAL 43rd Class
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Strategy is a funny thing. I'm not sure anyone really knows they have it right until it is too late. Takeaways from the exercising of key principles we learned in the strategy course and the operationalization of theories are similarly elusive. However, rather than the outcome of our work it was the research and strategy development phases as well as the exercise process that provide the best grounds for reflection. From these reflections I draw three main points, the first of which is my view on the administrative conduct of the simulation; the second is my perspective on the team learning process; and my third and final point is my personal thoughts on the overall strategy course. All points will be accompanied by a recommendation for next year's class.

Regarding the administering of the simulation, I believe the MABAL staff made a great effort to provide the best platform for our practical application of the learned principles from the strategy course. The 3-day exercise forced all teams to come out of their comfort zones and expand their thinking beyond the military domain. The use of the Cabernet System, negotiation-based meetings and other computer generated injects, i.e. media reports, really challenged the students to think and act from the position they assumed. The main limitation was the system itself because our lack of familiarity and inefficiency in using the system caused some stress that didn't contribute to the learning process. Reading the wide scope of messages as well as typing reports in between a busy schedule of meetings had a tendency to distract team members from carrying out their strategy-building/implementation duties. The only way to alleviate this pressure is to attach a knowledgeable soldier to each team that can act as the administrative and coordination expert, which will increase the situational awareness of the team. In addition, it should be made clear to the teams that

anything that takes place on the campus (or in WhatsApp) is in the context of the game. All actions should of course be registered in the Cabernet but chance public encounters between players that create an effect, which significantly alters the course of the simulation, should be somehow capture and shared within the system. This can be done using a daily recap of the situation.

The next point has to do with my take away from the learning process within the team. There is no doubt that keeping the international fellows together is good thing for communication reasons, if for no other. Moreover, assigning the internationals to a state/organization that is not familiar to them, i.e. Russia, is an even better idea. The amount of learning that went on in the planning and briefing process was immeasurable and I don't think you can replace the knowledge development that occurs when you truly decide to *become* a key member of another country's national security apparatus. In my case, a deep dive into Russian foreign policy and role playing as the Russian Ambassador and Special Envoy caused me to rethink my American paradigms and completely change my strategic thinking as well as my behavior at the negotiating table. I do believe my team members also did a great job getting into their roles and this made the learning process even better. My only recommendation for next year is that if the Russian team doesn't figure it out on their own during their preparation period, it is important for them to know their place as a major training aid in the simulation. It is quite obvious that Russia can very realistically play the spoiler role better than anyone, including 'Control', and in that regard they can act as the 'x-factor' or 'red cell'. The Russian team doesn't need to know what's going on in, or act on behalf of, 'Control'. However, it would be extremely beneficial for them to have several options on the table from which they can cause major blows or impacts to the system. This would come in very handy in case other players' actions stall or the simulation goes down a road that isn't helpful in meeting the goals of the course.

My final point has to do with the overall strategy course. It is clearer to me now more than ever this is where we need to spend the majority of our time during the MABAL school year. This course along with the simulation and any tours/trips which fortify our critical thinking of how Israel, as well as our nations, develop and implement their national security strategy should be the cornerstone of the curriculum. I hope it continues to challenge students beyond the limits of their traditional thought. The only recommendation I would make is to either extend and expand the current scenario to draw the teams out of the region, more on to the international stage, or to completely reshape the scenario to force the students to study more organizations or countries outside of the region, i.e. NATO. I also think finding a way to exercise what they learned during the strategy course alongside a counterpart from the United States' NDU or any other North/South American, European or Asian power would be extremely valuable. This could be done in a table top format as a portion of a visit to or from a sister top-level professional national security institution. All in all, it was a well-produced, -managed and -executed event, the lessons from which I will take back to my homeland.