



NOT JUST WAR GAMES: SIMULATING CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS

By Ed Zukowski and Ken Gilliam April 27, 2021
<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/wargaming-room/iscne/>

Welcome to **WAR ROOM** the official podcast of the U.S. Army War College Online Journal. Graciously supported by the Army War College Foundation, please join the conversation at warroom.armywarcollege.edu. We hope you enjoy the program.

The views expressed in this presentation are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Army War College, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

Ken Gilliam: Hi, I'm **Colonel Ken Gilliam**, and today on A Better Peace, we will once again venture into the Wargaming Room, a series dedicated to war games and other innovative methods used at the U.S. Army War College and other institutions for education, research and experience. I'm glad you could join us today. Today my guest is **Mr. Ed Zukowski**, call sign "Cliffy," a retired Navy Commander who at the end of his active military career taught at the Army War College. Cliffy is now a Department of the Army civilian and part of his role is the Director of the International Strategic Crisis Negotiation Exercise Program, which we will be talking about today. Cliffy, welcome to the Wargaming Room.

Ed Zukowski: Hey, thanks for having me.

KG: Cliffy, I really thought about asking about the origins of your call sign, but I decided that often those are veiled in secrecy due to some unwritten rule, or they may have some questionable or unsavory origins. So to save you from any embarrassment, I'll ask our traditional opening question for first time guests: what was your favorite game or play activity as a kid, and do you still play it?

EZ: Surprisingly, my first and favorite game was Legos. I still have my original bag from when I was a child. My mom saved them for all those years. Do still play them? Not as much as I used to. When my children were little, we broke them out all the time and played, but now that they're grown up, I basically haven't played in probably two years.

KG: Well, I think the Army War College has an opening for you with all those mountains of Lego bricks that are in there just waiting for somebody to use them.

EZ: Yeah, that would be fun.

KG: Cliffy, while most of the institutional energy of the Army War College is focused on the resident and non-resident senior service college students, there are some programs that reach

beyond the walls of the school and may not be as well known around campus. One of those programs is the International Strategic Crisis Negotiations Exercise, which is coordinated by the Department of Strategic Wargaming. Cliffy, you're now the lead planner for those exercises and you will play a significant lead role in them as well. Can you give us an overview of the program and maybe some of the history behind it?

EZ: Certainly. The exercise is set up as a two-day strategic negotiation event. We do this at master's degree programs at prominent universities throughout the country. We divide the students that participate into anywhere from 7 to 9 teams based on the scenario that we're using, and we bring them together under the auspices of a United Nations peace conference. With that, we bring in a retired ambassador who plays a United Nations Special Representative to that region for the scenario and the students will conduct an opening and closing plenary with the Ambassador, and then we end up doing a series of team meetings and then negotiation sessions and we alternate back and forth over the two days. A little bit of history on ISCNEs: It started back in 2003 when an Army War College fellow working at Georgetown was given the responsibility of conducting an exercise. So he contacted CSL and was trying to get some help on what he could do and the International Fellows Program at the time was doing a negotiation type exercise, so they modified it for him to use at Georgetown. This was initially thought of as just being a temporary fix, a one-off type event, and Georgetown ended up continuing it as an annual event because they had such success with it. Later in 2007, an ambassador was stopping through the War College en route to Princeton, and he was talking to the lead director at CSL, and he asked whether they had any type of exercises that could be used with his graduate students that he was going to have up at Princeton. And when they described what the ISCNE was to him, he really loved it, and so began the expansion of the ISCNE program. At that time we had Georgetown and Princeton, and we continued that relationship with those schools for a number of years.

KG: Cliffy, I hear you telling me a lot of advantages for the other schools. How does the program itself connect back to the Army War College mission and what are you trying to accomplish with the program for the Army War College?

EZ: Well, it actually fits in with one of the lines of effort that the Army War College has, which is that of outreach and external service. Through the engagements that we have in the ISCNE program with the various schools, we first of all promote the Army War College in the education that we do and then we also are exposing those future diplomats or policymakers to somebody in the military because we usually bring a colonel and a major along with us for the exercise so they get exposure to those military folks that are actually working at the Army War College. And surprisingly a lot of them actually have never met someone in the military. They don't have family members or friends that serve, so that allows us to again show them a different side of the military than they might have seen in a movie or TV's or on the news. Our biggest thing is

outreach, to show a side of the military that these students have never seen, but also when they get into those positions of working in an embassy or maybe an NGO, the first time that they come in contact with the United States military, we don't want that to be in a hostile situation or a situation where the military is being used. So in this peacetime situation, we can actually introduce them to the U.S. military in a small fashion and expose them to what we do.

KG: Cliffy, what are some of the scenarios that you work with?

EZ: Currently we have eight scenarios. The prominent ones are Nagorno-Karabakh, which is the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We also do Sudan and South Sudan, Jammu and Kashmir in the northern regions of Pakistan and India, which actually has been pretty hot lately and the South China Sea is our predominant one that we do lately, and it gets over all of the land conflicts and claims in the South China Sea.

KG: What about some of the schools?

EZ: Well, currently we exercise at 13 different universities, some examples: The Ford School up at the University of Michigan, Patterson School at the University of Kentucky, the LBJ School at University of Texas at Austin, and the Korbel School at University of Denver. We do have one law school that participates in this every year and that is the Carey Law School at the University of Pennsylvania.

KG: You didn't talk about Georgetown there. They were one of your original participants. How's that going now?

EZ: We stopped exercising at Georgetown a few years ago. They wanted to take their course and program into a different region. They do an exercise similar to the ISCNE, but they do it as an entire course and it's spread out over an entire semester, so it really couldn't fit into what we do in the two days and we couldn't support as best as we would like to.

KG: Do you count that as a win or a loss for the Army War College?

EZ: Well I guess it could be a win and a loss. I mean it's a loss because we don't get that exposure to those students that are coming through. But I think it's a win because they've taken the program that was developed at the Army War College and now, they've expanded to an entire course. It's actually a prerequisite for their master's program in foreign policy and foreign relations. So something that we put out 18 years ago has now blossomed into an actual course for a graduation requirement.

KG: So instead of me asking the standard question about what were some of the student reactions and we get into this circle of mutual admiration, I will grant you that the students generally appreciate and are enthusiastic about what you're doing. But I want you, if you can, to provide me some examples of some negative student reactions when you run these exercises.

EZ: Well, when we get the student feedback, so I'll start off with that first, they really don't show anything negative towards the exercise per say. The things they comment on are that they wish that they had more time with their team to develop their strategy. They wish that they had more time in team meetings again to review what has happened during the negotiations and they wish that they had more time to negotiate. But we purposefully compress the schedule to add that level of pressure to them, and so getting that feedback is actually a good thing. Some other negative things that we find is that there is too much material. We try to provide a very in-depth scenario with not only current and relevant events, but the history behind them. And some of our packets of material can be upwards of 60 or 70 or even up to 90 pages. We don't expect them to read all of it, but it's there for their reference so that they can be more armed and prepared. So we find that students get overwhelmed by the amount of information we try to put into their toolkit.

KG: Is the overwhelming part of the information, is that helpful for the exercise from your standpoint when you're running the exercise? Does that help simulate the environment those students are going to be in if they were a diplomat trying to do something similar in the real world?

EZ: I think it is because most of the students are United States citizens, U.S. born, and they're not used to understanding history as the rest of the world sees it. Take the Nagorno-Karabakh exercise that we do. There are things in this scenario that are literally hundreds if not 1000 years old that people in those regions still draw from and they still reference in their interactions with each other, whether it was the time under Ottoman control or the time under Russian control or whatever. And so for the students to see that this is a historical thing that is building and is still relevant today, I think allows them to get better into the role and to understand the team that they're playing or the team that they're going against, and they quickly learn once the exercise kicks off that the other person sitting across the table has a different story, has a different background based on the scenario and materials that they get. And so now they have to realize, oh my gosh, I remember reading that on page 60 and now it's relevant because it's in a conversation that I'm having in this negotiation.

KG: Can you give me an idea of how they interact with each other inside of the exercises and how you structure it and how you force them to have those conversations and come to the table?

EZ: Yeah, so we start off with an exercise overview like most exercises do, and then we jump them into a role. At the initial plenary session, the United Nations Ambassador is there, and we

use real retired ambassadors to do this. They have each of the nations or delegations give an opening statement and this kind of sets the tone for the whole exercise because you're not sure what a nation or a head of delegation is going to say. Then we have the delegations go back to a team meeting room so it's just their team and they work on their strategy and then how we kind of kick start the exercise for the negotiations is the first negotiation period, we set up bilateral negotiations so we kind of force feed the students who they're going to meet with. And this kind of takes the cobwebs off. It kind of breaks the rust off because they're not sure exactly how they're going to approach this game. But then after that, they go back to a team meeting and now they can review what they learned in these various negotiations. And part of the structure of this is that we don't allow the teams to just go to one negotiation. They might have two or three or potentially four negotiations to go to at the same time, and then they'll have a follow-on, again three or four negotiations in the next 15 minutes after, and so when they get back to the team meeting, they might have as much as six or eight different conversations that they now have to piece together and see how it fits in their strategy and where they need to make adjustments. And then we allow the students themselves to actually, as teams, invite other delegations to future meetings. But of course you can invite, but the other team does not necessarily have to accept. And what we see sometimes is the students will react differently to a team that declines an invitation or a team that ignores an invitation and sometimes they take that as a negative and that drives their viewpoint towards that other delegation and it might take them down a rabbit hole that they might already have a hostile relationship with somebody that they haven't met with yet. And so there's a lot of those dynamics in the game that once they get through those first initial negotiations, it's on to them, and then those dynamic things start to play.

KG: A little bit earlier you talked about schools using this for their purposes, and some might actually use them as a graduate requirement for their programs. Can you talk through some of the things that those professors are trying to achieve inside of their program using your exercise?

EZ: Yes, for the University of Pennsylvania at the Carey Law School, it is a two-credit course and they're required to take an experiential learning elective in order to graduate. So their team of faculty that brought the ISCNE to them through us, they are looking to teach on international law when it comes to the South China Sea. So they look at the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and so they have lecture series set up and guest speakers that come in and discuss this topic with the students and then we get into the two-day exercise and they have to write an impact paper. So there, the professors use the exercise as kind of an expression of, here's the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and how these nations are all at odds with it in their own day-to-day interactions. Up at the University of Washington, they have a whole course on negotiations and diplomacy, and so we fit into the tail end of their courses, kind of their capstone exercise. So there, they've been in class the entire semester learning negotiation techniques, learning about the diplomatic world and how it operates, and then we come in with our exercise at the end and basically dovetail into whatever topic they're discussing based on one of our scenarios and now

they get a chance to actually use the techniques and the systems that they've learned in their class.

KG: Sounds a little bit complicated. How big of a team does the Army War College bring in to help a school run one of these things?

EZ: It's a lot smaller than you think. We usually bring three people. There is usually an Army Colonel who is the exercise director and his or her responsibility is to oversee the exercise as a whole, make sure that it's moving along as we've designed it. I play the senior controller. In my role I am the Foreign Minister or Secretary of State of every country there, and so I get to interact with the students and hopefully from the internal side of it, keep them marching towards a common goal of trying to solve this issue. And then we usually have a major or potentially a captain that is what we call the UN control group. It's a communications group and that person monitors an application that we have that helps the students schedule ad hoc negotiation periods and also, he monitors an email in case they want to send any type of communications between delegations so that we can monitor those. We rely a lot on the universities themselves to provide the ambassador, to provide mentors for each of the teams. Most of the schools, actually almost all but I think one, provide at least one mentor and a lot of them two mentors per team and so it ends up being a larger organization that executes it, but from the Army War College, it's an army of three that go on and do these.

KG: Anything coming up this year or new scenarios, new schools or how are you branching out trying to get bigger or trying to get better?

EZ: Well, on the new scenario front, in the fall I wrote one on the Arctic. We've been having some interest in that from a variety of sources, whether it's universities or internal to the Army War College. So I've developed an Arctic scenario. And then this summer we're looking at developing a Western Sahara scenario, which we think could bring in quite a dynamic and it little different tinge to things where we don't necessarily have the United States always there or some big power player. So we'll see how that plays out. For this year coming up, we are slated to do the 13 schools that we did last year. That is pretty much all we can do, maybe 15 if we were lucky, but the schedule fills up and we're basically on the road constantly and this year obviously we've had zoom for most of our stuff, but we're hoping for academic year 2022 that will be back on the road. And when you're traveling 6 to 7 weekends out of a semester, it starts to weigh on you, but we'll see how the schools, the ones that we have, we're very proud of and proud to be affiliated with if they want to continue to exercise with us, we'll do that. And if we can potentially get new schools, then we'll work those in as the manpower and time permits.

KG: So how did the virtual delivery go this year? You said you did some of them by remote means.

EZ: Yeah, it's a different animal. As everyone knows in the current environment, virtual is not as personable as being in person, but what we have found is the students use backchannel communications a lot more because, while they're facing a camera, they can be on their Google Docs or on their WhatsApp, or texting somebody from their team. So we see that teams will now have a notes taker and a speaker in these negotiations. And then there's somebody that's real-time talking to another delegation and they're getting notes about what was said in another meeting, and then they can use that for armament. So those kinds of things we never were privy to, or actually didn't happen when it was in person because you're in a closed room. Nothing gets in, nothing gets out until you walk out of the room, and so that aspect of it has really in some ways sharpened the students, because now they can call each other out if one of the delegation members says one thing and another one says something else, they can call them out real time. But also, it's amazing to see the students multitasking. They're literally communicating on 3, 4, 5 different either applications or devices, and some people might think that's a distraction, but when you see the product and how they're actually engaging with the other students, they're coming in with a lot more knowledge. They are coming in armed and ready to negotiate and not having to feel their way through it. They already know what they want to get from this negotiation. Of course, they meet with another delegate from another team, and it might not go as well, but they seem to be really well prepared. We've worked out some of the kinks that we had the first couple of times we did it, but right now I think it's a very viable way to execute this type of an exercise.

KG: Excellent. How do you decide which schools are going to be in the portfolio and which aren't and if a school wants to join and wants to partner with the Army War College to do this? What's their entry point? How do they get into the in crowd?

EZ: Well, I'll start with the first part. The schools that we are trying to get with or that we desire to exercise with are in the top 25 rated in Foreign Policy or the US News college rankings for graduate programs in foreign relations and public policy. So we try to target those schools first off. If a school would like us, they can contact the Center for Strategic Leadership. They can get my phone number and contact me or my email which we can put maybe in the notes of the podcast and then we can go off of an initial contact and maybe exploring what potential there is out there for going to that school. We do have one undergraduate program that I didn't mention earlier, but Texas A&M University, the Student Council on National Affairs, we go down and we support their annual conference. I think this year was their 66th consecutive conference and they invited us a number of years ago to participate as kind of a precursor to their conference, and we've had a great relationship with them. They bring in students from all over the nation to participate in the ISCNE and their SCONA conference, but other than that, all of the other schools we really try to shoot for that top 25 foreign policy and international relations programs.

KG: So what about those Army War College Colonels that are listening in and they think, hey, that's pretty cool, how do I get to do that? Are they able to participate or do you go to one or two people to be your exercise director?

EZ: If there are active duty at the Army War College, they can participate in this. Again, we have 13 a year, so we'll always looking to fill in for the home team. So with that they can again contact me, and we'd be happy to give them a brief. Since we're on zoom currently, if they'd like to watch one and see what we do, that would be fine. When we go back to in person, it'll all just depend on TDY dollars and whether we need to bring that new colonel along with another colonel. But we have had success with folks doing it the first time because as an exercise director, you don't necessarily have to know the scenario insides and out, you just have to recognize when things are kind of going off the rails or if some guidance needs to be driven in one way or another and then one of the primary things that our colonels do is they conduct an after action review. And just like exercises and training opportunities that they've done their whole career, they just have to take what they witnessed and observed and then try to glean some learning points from it and then get those inputs from the students. If someone is not an active-duty colonel or someone that is on active duty at the Army War College, they just have to contact us and we can again try to find a way. We'd be more than happy to have you. Another way that they can serve is some of the schools are always looking for mentors. And again, like I said earlier about getting the face of the military in front of these students, having a military member as a mentor can bring a wealth of personal knowledge. You've probably been deployed around the world, so you've seen other places outside of America and understand how people think and think differently than we do, and so we can use as a mentor at one of the schools if you desire to do that.

KG: Cliffy, thanks for your time. I have done a couple of these myself, both from the mentor and the exercise director, and it's a personally rewarding professionally developmental exercise to me as an officer and helped me really appreciate the up and coming diplomats that are out there and gave me an opportunity, I think to affect them and to learn quite a bit. Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you think we should cover that the audience might need to be aware of.

EZ: I don't know whether they need to be aware of this, but you mentioned that you've done a couple of these. My own story on this: when I exercised the ISCNEs back six, seven years ago, I was so impressed by the exercise and the students and the interactions and I was working a contract job when I saw that this Department of the Army civilian job came available and it was doing the ISCNE program and I jumped on it as quickly as possible because I remember how rewarding it was and then to be involved in it as now the director is actually, I say, a dream come true when it comes to doing a job for the Army War College. I love doing it and I think that

when people experience it, they have a great appreciation for what we're doing for these students, and they're also very impressed by the students, which is what drove me to want to do this job.

KG: It's a blessing to have a job that you're passionate about and you see some value being delivered on the day to day. Cliffy, I think we're about out of time for today. Thanks for talking and best of luck as you continue to grow and deliver quality exercises all across the nation. And thanks to all of you for joining us in the Wargaming Room. Please send us your comments on this and all the programs, including ideas for future programs. If you want to hear more, subscribe to A Better Peace. After you've subscribed, please rate and review this podcast on your podcatcher of choice, because that helps others find us as well. We're also seeking articles for publication in the Wargaming Room series, so send us your pitch for innovative and provocative wargaming content intended for a broad audience of well-informed leaders and listeners, including other governmental, business and education audiences. We'll see you here next time, but until then, from the Wargaming Room, I'm Ken Gilliam. Play to win.