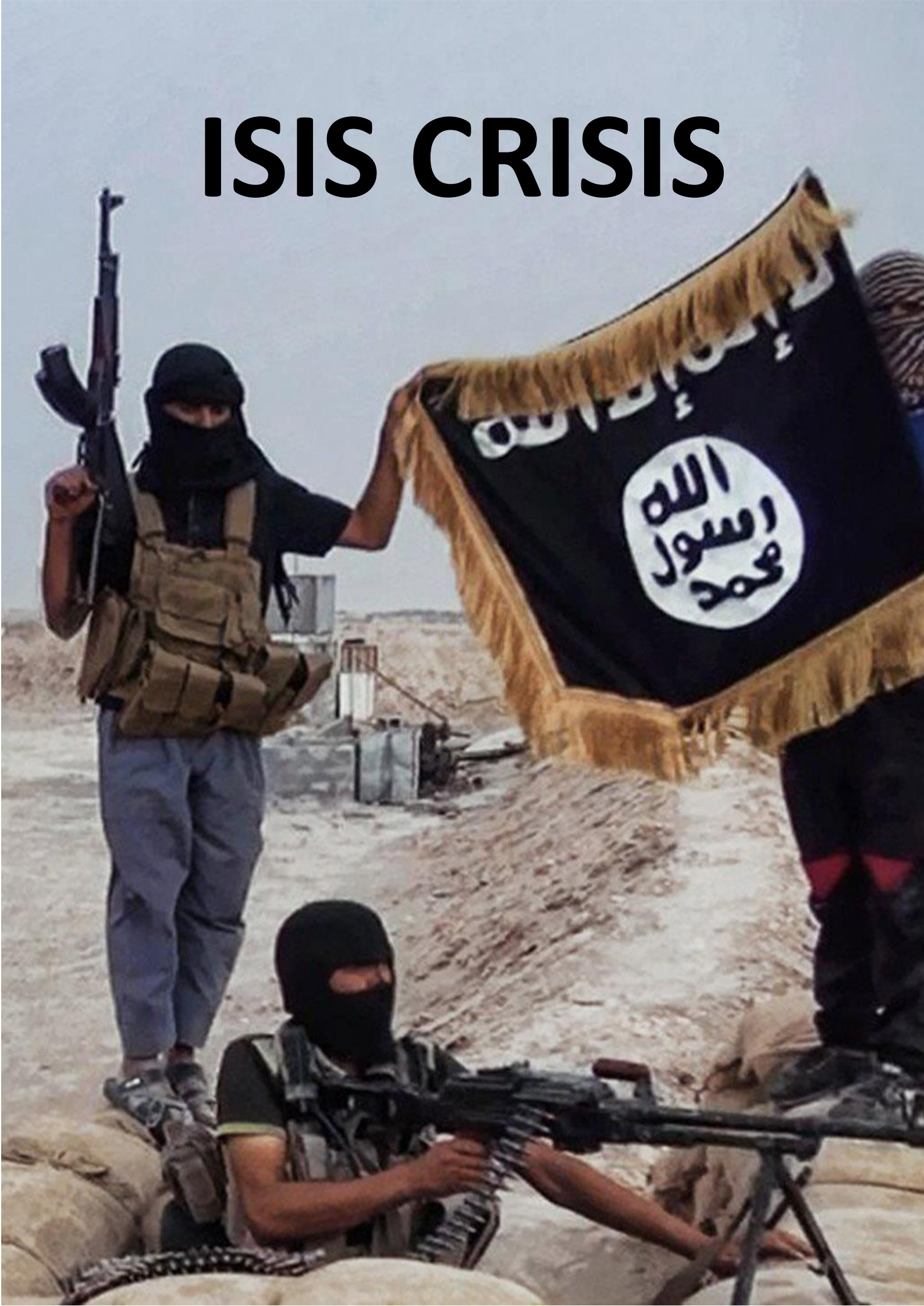
ISIS CRISIS



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Background.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a Sunni jihadist group in the Middle East. In its self-proclaimed status as a caliphate it claims religious authority over all Muslims across the world and aspires to bring much of the Muslim-inhabited regions of the world under its political control, beginning with Iraq, Syria and territory in the Levant region, which includes Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Cyprus and an area in southern Turkey that includes Hatay.

It has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia, and has been labelled by the United Nations and Western and Middle Eastern media as a terrorist organization. The United Nations has accused the Islamic State of committing "mass atrocities" and war crimes.

ISIS is the successor to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)—formed by Abu Musab Al Zarqawi in 2004, which took part in the Iraqi insurgency against American-led forces and their Iraqi allies following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. During the 2003–2011 Iraq War it combined with other Sunni insurgent groups to form the Mujahideen Shura Council and consolidated further into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). At its height it enjoyed a significant presence in the Iraqi governorates of Al Anbar, Nineveh, Kirkuk, most of Salah ad Din, parts of Babil, Diyala and Baghdad, and claimed Baqubah as a capital city. However, the Islamic State of Iraq's violent attempts to govern its territory led to a backlash from Sunni Iraqis and other insurgent groups, which helped to propel the Awakening movement and a decline in the group.

Under its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS has grown significantly, gaining support in Iraq due to alleged economic and political discrimination against Arab Iraqi Sunnis, and establishing a large presence in the Syrian governorates of Ar-Raqqah, Idlib, Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo after entering the Syrian Civil War.

ISIS had close links to al-Qaeda until February 2014, when after an eight-month power struggle, al-Qaeda cut all ties with the group, reportedly for its brutality and "notorious intractability."

In June 2014, ISIS had at least 4,000 fighters in its ranks in Iraq, who, in addition to attacks on government and military targets, have claimed responsibility for attacks that have killed thousands of civilians. In August 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed that the group had increased its strength to 50,000 fighters in Syria and 30,000 in Iraq.

ISIS's original aim was to establish a caliphate in the Sunni-majority regions of Iraq. Following its involvement in the Syrian Civil War, this expanded to include controlling Sunni-majority areas of Syria. A caliphate was proclaimed on 29 June 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi—now known as Amir al-Mu'minin Caliph Ibrahim—was named as its caliph, and the group was renamed the Islamic State.

ISIS is now marching on Baghdad and this is the setting for this Matrix Game.

Matrix Games

What are Matrix Games?

Matrix games are different to normal Wargames. In most of those games you compare lists of statistics and peer at complicated books of rules containing someone else's idea about what things are important, before rolling a dice. It takes a long time and can be very difficult to explain to a newcomer. Instead, in a Matrix Game you simply use words to describe why something should happen, the Umpire or the players (or both) decide how likely it is and you roll a dice. If you can say "This happens, for the following reasons..." you can play a Matrix Game.

Where did they come from?

The Chris Engle Matrix Game was created in the USA by Chris Engle, and published in 1992. Chris wanted to create a system by which it was possible for a player to "role-play" anything from a single person to an entire country. Chris felt that previous numbers-ridden game designs essentially missed the point (and anyway were too complicated and boring). What he wanted was a system that could take into account anything the players though was relevant, including intangible elements such as culture, beliefs, and perceptions of themselves.

Taking as his starting point the work of the philosopher Emmanuel Kant, Chris began to develop a "matrix" of cue words that would form the framework for his "model". To this he added George Hegel's idea that argument and counter-argument (thesis and antithesis) lead to a synthesis or consensus of ideas.

Thus the basic idea of the Matrix Game was formulated. Over the years the actual "matrix" of cue words has been dropped, but the name has stuck. Like all good ideas, the Matrix Game is very simple in concept, but has huge potential in that it can be adapted to fit any game setting. Matrix Games have been used by the UK MOD with the Unmanned Underwater Vehicle capability, education of Consultants in UK MOD Procurement systems and in the preparation by HQ ARRC for the deployment into Bosnia. They have even been used by the US DOD.

Game arguments

In a Matrix Game, actions are resolved by a structured sequence of logical "arguments". Each player takes turns to make an argument, with successful arguments advancing the game, and the player's position. There are a number of ways you can do this and each has their own strengths and weaknesses, some of the most popular are:

- The "Three Reasons" system.
- The "Pros and Cons" system.
- The "simple narrative" system.

You just need to experiment to find which system best suites your circumstances, player audience and style of play.

The "Three Reasons" System

In this system each argument is broken down into:

- Something That Happens.
- Three Reasons Why or How.

For Example:

In a Peninsular War campaign, Wellington might argue:

I shall fortify the town, and I am able to do this because:
- I have a ready source of trained manpower.
- I have an experienced Engineer in command.
- The British Government has recently sent me the money with which to pay for the work.

The arguments themselves are judged by the Umpire based on inherent likelihood, historical precedence, personal experience, and his own judgement (and quite often the other player's judgement), and a chance of success arrived at (percentage dice normally being thrown to see if the result was achieved, but you could use any combination of dice or random number generator that you like – or the Umpire decides based on military judgement and the justice of the circumstances).

The advantage of this system is that it works well where there are a number of teams of players and you have a strong central Umpire. You have to be careful, however, that other players don't interrupt or heckle with a reason why these arguments might not work - that is the role of the Umpire. Of course, if it turns out that one of the players is more knowledgeable about the situation than the Umpire, the Umpire can lose credibility and the game becomes less effective.

The "Pros and Cons" System

In this system each argument is broken down into:

- Something That Happens.
- A Number of Reasons Why it Might Happen.
- A Number of Reasons Why it Might NOT Happen.

For Example:

In a Peninsular War campaign, Wellington might argue:

I shall fortify the town, and I am able to do this because:
- I have a ready source of trained manpower.
- I have an experienced Engineer in command.
- The British Government has recently sent me the money with which to pay for the work .
- The weather is fine so they can work interrupted.

This represents 4 x Pros - so at this point the other players are invited to point out Cons:

- The best source of trained manpower is the British regular troops, but these are on the frontier guarding the approaches. The Portuguese troops are less well trained or led so the first reason is weak.
- The weather is hot and there is little access to fresh water so there is a high chance of disease.

This represents 2 x Cons (or 1 x Con and cancels out 1 x Pro) - so at this point there is a net result of +2 Pros.

The overall argument is then adjudicated by taking 3 x D6 with a base chance of 10+ (this is an exact 50% probability - as, without any evidence for or against the outcome, the chance is even that it may or may not happen). So, in this case, we would roll 3xD6 and add 2 to the result, trying to score more than 10.

The advantage of this system is that you formalise the Pros and Cons of an argument and the role of the Umpire becomes that of ensuring that the Pros and Cons carry equal weight - perhaps making compelling reasons worth two Pros and two or three weaker reasons against only worth one Con. You need to ensure you don't end up with a list of trivial reasons or the player re-stating a reason already accepted in a slightly different way in a desperate attempt to gain points. One very useful product of this system is that it provides reasons for failure should the dice roll not succeed. In this case the two major failure outcomes would be shoddy work by lazy and untrained conscripts or work incomplete due to disease reducing the number of personnel. You can also more easily run the game with very knowledgeable players.

Personally, I like to have a "narrative bias" in the games I run, making the base success chance of 7+ on 2 x D6 (which is a 58% chance). This also has a significant increase / decrease in success probabilities for each point, which I use to encourage players to come up with a few good reasons, rather than a laundry list of lots of trivial ones.

This system is also very good with students when considering tactical problems in a syndicate wargame and I would recommend it as the most preferred way of adjudicating Matrix Games.

The "Simple Narrative" System

In this system an argument simply consists of a narrative that advances the player's position in the game. The players states what happens next in the evolving story that is the current situation. The chances of success or failure and exactly what those results look like are judged by an Umpire or, more usually, by another player taking it in turns.

The advantage of this system is that it is extremely simple and accessible to players of all ages and abilities. The disadvantage is that it lacks structure and, if you get the players to assign the chance of success, you could get inconsistent and arbitrary results.

Notes about arguments

The important thing to remember in a Matrix game is that arguments can be made about anything that is relevant to the scenario. You can argue about your own troops or about the enemy, the existence of people, places, things or events, the political leadership back home, the weather, plague, disease, public opinion, and you can even argue for changes in whatever rules you are using. With a bit of imagination, common sense and rational thinking, it is possible

to present persuasive arguments as to what should happen in any scenario - from traditional military campaigns to the strange world of defence procurement.

When an argument succeeds it remains in effect until another argument stops it. This means that if you are Napoleon and succeed in arguing that you march on Moscow, you will continue to move forward, every turn, until you get there - unless of course someone argues that you don't...

Optional Rule: If your argument fails to succeed, you get a "Fail Chit". This is retained and can be used at a later stage in the game to re-roll your dice (if the score wasn't what you wanted). This helps balance the game and prevent an unlucky player getting placed at a big disadvantage early in the game and being demoralised.

If two arguments are in direct opposition ("This happens" - "No it doesn't") they represent a Logical Inconsistency since they cannot both be true. The earlier argument has already happened, so it is impossible for it not to have happened. The later player may argue that the event is reversed, but this tends to make for a poor narrative in the game and should be discouraged (see Playing Tips below).

Resolving Conflicts

If two sides are placed in direct Conflict, they resolve the outcome by making additional arguments. The players both make arguments as to the outcome of the Conflict situation they are in, and the strength of the arguments is decided upon by the Umpire. I usually allow the player with an advantage to choose who should go first (no Conflict situations are every really equal - but if you felt they were, you could make the players write their arguments down in secret).

They then both roll the dice, together, to see who succeeds. In a Conflict situation, one side must succeed and one side must fail. If both succeed, or both fail, they must both roll again, and again, until one succeeds and the other fails.

For Example:

So if one player makes an argument that he is attacking the town with his troops and the other player makes an argument that he is improving the defences, the arguments are judged normally. If the attack argument fails, the attack does not take place at that time, and there is no conflict. If instead one player argued he was attacking, and the other player argued that the attacker ran away, it would be a Logical Inconsistency (since they both can't be true) and would be resolved in turn order.

If the attack argument succeeds, a Conflict situation will be inevitable, but if the defender's argument about improving the defences succeeds, he might have an advantage in the ensuing battle. Let's say that his argument does not succeed because the Umpire judged that he really didn't have sufficient time to get the work done, made the argument Weak, and it failed.
The attacking player elects to go first and argues that he captures the town. The other player argues that he is repulsed with heavy losses. They then both dice to see who wins, with the likelihood that the defender will have to roll higher, because the town’s defences were not what they could have been.

Comments on Resolving Conflicts

This may seem a little arbitrary and all dependent on a good Umpire but, in practice, it works very well. When a player makes a particularly good argument it is obvious, normally from the rueful grins and grudging nods of the opposition, that he will have a good chance of succeeding.
Playing Tips

Some players get caught in the Logical Inconsistency trap by arguing directly against another player who has already had a successful argument. This puts them at a disadvantage because, not only has their argument got to succeed, but they then have to roll off against the other player. It is far better to be a little more subtle. If he succeeds in arguing that he attacks you, you might argue that the attack does indeed take place, but was ill-timed and badly co-ordinated - which might place you in an advantage in the resulting battle.

It helps the players to insist on an argument always failing if you roll very poorly. Nothing is ever certain, and the player can look on it as not necessarily a total failure, but simply that it didn't happen at that time. It might happen later, if they argue again.

Conversely, you will need to veto stupid or trivial arguments. I simply say that I don't believe the argument is realistic and give them a chance to come up with something else.

Secret arguments

There will be some cases where you want to hide from the other players the thing you want to argue about. It could be that you have booby trapped a piece of equipment you think your opponent will use, or that you have swapped the vital blueprints for a set of fake ones in case the safe is broken into. In this case you simply write down your argument on a piece of paper, and present it to the Umpire announcing to the other players that you are making a secret argument. The Umpire will make a judgment and you will roll the dice normally, but the other players have no idea what it is about.

You should be careful, however, that the players don't make too many secret arguments. This can ruin the game's atmosphere and reduce the focus, so that the game drags on unnecessarily. They must only be permitted when they refer to quite specific things or events. An argument about gathering information from a spy, in most games, will be quite a generic argument and should be argued openly. Similarly Arguing about the placement of an IED to catch forces moving down a route should be made openly as the results will take effect the same turn. It is only really for secret things you need to establish several turn in advance.

You may want to limit the players to only a single secret argument per game.

Big Projects

Depending on the level of the game, some actions and events represent such a large investment in time and effort that they require multiple arguments in order to bring them to fruition. In a Spy Game, recruiting a spy would take a number of arguments in order to make the spy do everything you want them to. You must make the initial contact, followed by persuasion to carry out a minor act (like stealing a copy of the Pentagon telephone directory), and followed by more important spying actions (like photographing secret plans). It would be

unreasonable to argue in a Spy Game that you recruit a girl from the typing pool to assassinate the head of the CIA in a single argument.

The level of the game will determine what sort of arguments are Big Projects, so in a game about Wellington's action in the Peninsular War a single argument about fortifying a town would be perfectly reasonable. In a game about individual Refugees in Bosnia, building a house might take several successful arguments. A Matrix Game can easily be at the Strategic level involving the actions of Governments and Countries; or equally at the Individual level involving the actions of you and your close friends.

As a rule of thumb, a Big Project should take no more than 3 successful arguments; otherwise the game is dominated too much by a single event. You should also remember the principal that once an argument has started an ongoing action, it will continue until another argument stops it.

This means that the 3 stages in, for example, building a house could logically be:

- Acquiring the funds (Can I get a mortgage?).
- Starting to build the house (When will the right builder be available?).
- Completing the building of the house (Are they ever going to finish it?).

Killing arguments

It often arises in Matrix Games where one of the players argues that something happens to kill off one of the other player characters. This is, of course, permitted as you can argue about anything in a Matrix Game, and it will be assessed like any other argument. It may well be less likely to succeed as the player characters in the game are usually chosen from the survivors of a particular historical event, but it is not impossible - nor should it be.

If a character is killed off in a game, however, it does not prevent the player from continuing to make arguments.

Player Roles and the Level of the Game

When you are designing a Matrix Game it is worth thinking about the level at which the player's roles will be operating in the game. In is usually better, and produces a more balanced game, when the level on which the player roles are operating are broadly similar. It would be difficult to get a balanced game if 3 of the players are playing Generals in command of vast Armies, and another player is playing a simple individual soldier.

Levels of Protection and Hidden Things

At the start of a game there are certain things that are not readily accessible to some of the player characters. For example, in a Cyber-Security Game the secret plans for a new submarine would be heavily protected. Equally, in an X-Files game, the location of the secret government base would be carefully concealed.

Things that are hidden or secret require a successful argument merely to find them. Things that are protected will require successful arguments to overcome the different levels of protection.

A secret government base may declared by the Umpire to have 3 levels of protection: Its hidden location, its boundary fence, and the security guards, all of which must be overcome by successful arguments before the base can be penetrated.

Having Battles and Fighting

Many players feel uneasy about the concept of the result of a single argument (and dice roll) deciding the outcome of a battle or a fight. This is natural, but they should remember that the Matrix Game is about the entire campaign and it is the results of many battles or fights, rather than a single one, that is important.

It is up to the umpire to decide exactly what the outcome of the battle or fight was. He will make a judgement, depending on the strength of the arguments and the difference in the score on the two dice rolls, as to how heavy the defeat was or just how narrow was the margin of victory. If the outcome was very close, the loser may have an opportunity to withdraw in his next turn with most of his forces intact.

More information

More information and a book about Matrix Games can be found at:
http://www.wargaming.co/books/innovations/homepage.htm

The original Chris Engle Matrix Game site is here: http://hamsterpress.net/ .

A very good website that has developed the Pros and Cons system: "The Open Ended Machine" is here: http://theopenendedmachine.blogspot.co.uk/.

ISIS CRISIS

Order of Play

The order of play is as follows:

1. The United States of America.
2. Iran.
3. ISIS.
4. Prime Minister Haider al-Abidi.
5. Sunni Opposition.
6. The Kurdish Regional Government.

Map Layout

When setting out the map, make sure that there are 2 regions between ISIS current positions and Baghdad (this will ensure that there is time in the game to ensure narrative development prior to an assault on Baghdad itself (assuming it is appropriate)).

Player Briefings:

Islamic State (of Iraq and the Levant)

1. Crush the apostate Shiites and Kurds.
2. Overthrow the infidel American propped up Government in Baghdad.
3. Establish an Islamic State under Sharia Law in the areas you control.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abidi

1. Form a Government of National Unity (Majority Shiites and Minority Sunnis).
2. Stop the advance of the ISIS fanatics.
3. Prevent the Kurds from getting heavy weapons.
4. Be Prime Minister at the end of the game.

Sunni Opposition

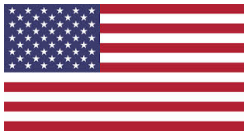
1. Restore the Sunnis to their rightful place in the Government of Iraq.
2. ISIS is a powerful and dangerous ally, look to the long term future for all Sunnis.
3. Obtain specific concessions for Sunnis in Iraq.

Kurdish Regional Government

1. Ensure proper Kurdish representation in the Government of Iraq.
2. Secure heavy weapons with which to defend yourself and your people.
3. Resist the ISIS fanatics, they have carried out mass executions of Kurds.
4. Do something to secure the future of the Kurdish people.

Iran

1. Weaken Sunni jihadist movements, especially the fanatically anti-Shiite ISIL.
2. Protect the Shiite holy places (such as Karbala), as well as the Shiite population.
3. To limit and displace US influence (prevent US ground forces from being deployed).
4. To secure influence over Iraqi politicians.
5. To discourage Kurdish separatism.

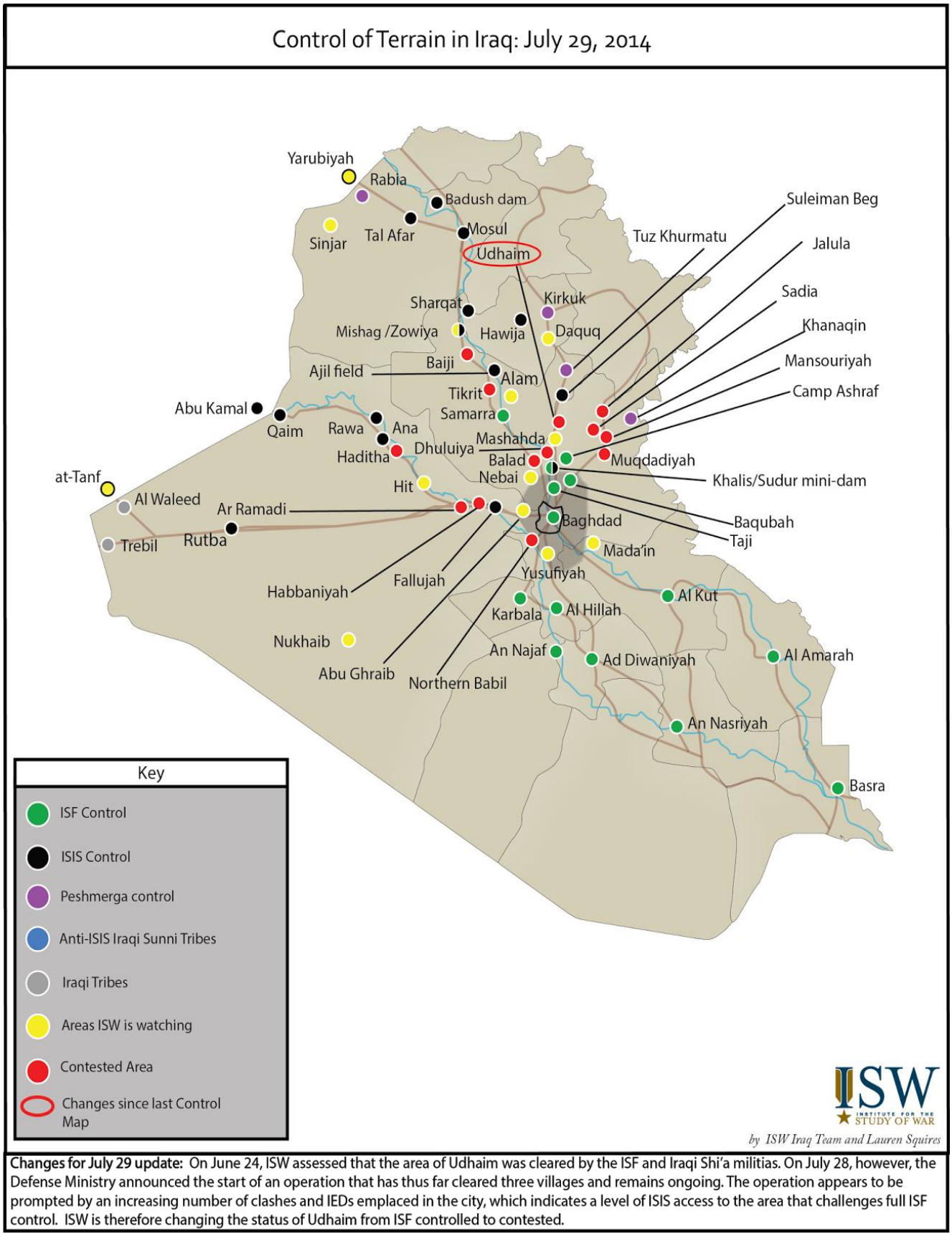


United States

1. To promote political stability.
2. To weaken jihadist groups, especially ISIL.
3. To limit Iranian influence (prevent Iranian ground forces from entering Iraq).
4. Try to avoid US Ground forces from being deployed.

Current Situation Map:

The current situation in the real world (place counters on the game map to approximately match this map):



Changes for July 29 update: On June 24, ISW assessed that the area of Udhaim was cleared by the ISF and Iraqi Shi'a militias. On July 28, however, the Defense Ministry announced the start of an operation that has thus far cleared three villages and remains ongoing. The operation appears to be prompted by an increasing number of clashes and IEDs emplaced in the city, which indicates a level of ISIS access to the area that challenges full ISF control. ISW is therefore changing the status of Udhaim from ISF controlled to contested.

Initial Conditions affecting the Actors:

Kurdish Regional Government

POLITICAL RIVALRIES. *Political rivalry between the KDP and PUK weaken the Kurdish response to the crisis.*

Ongoing effect: All actions suffer -1 penalty.

Iran

HEGEMONIC NEIGHBOUR? *Iranian involvement in Iraq only deepens Sunni suspicions.*

Ongoing effect: An unsuccessful actions against Sunni opposition or ISIL provides them with a +1 bonus on their next action.

United States of America

POLITICAL CONTRAINTS. *No one at home is eager to get sucked back into the Iraqi quagmire.*

Ongoing effect: Suffer -1 penalty to all actions that involve direct use of US military force.

Islamic State (of Iraq and the Levant)

MOMENTUM. *The successes of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq have emboldened your fighters and rallied new recruits around your black banner of jihad.*

Ongoing effect: If your action is successful and your adjusted dice score is 9 or more, immediately take another action. You may do this multiple times.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abidi

POLITICAL INFIGHTING. *Although you have been named as Prime Minister-designate, you have yet to form a broad-based national government.*

Ongoing effect: All actions suffer a -1 penalty.

Sunni opposition

POLITICAL ALIENATION. *Marginalization and repression by the Shiite-dominated central government have made it easier to rally Sunnis to your cause.*

Ongoing effect: All actions against Shiites gain +1 bonus. You may choose to give this bonus to ISIL instead for this turn.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abidi

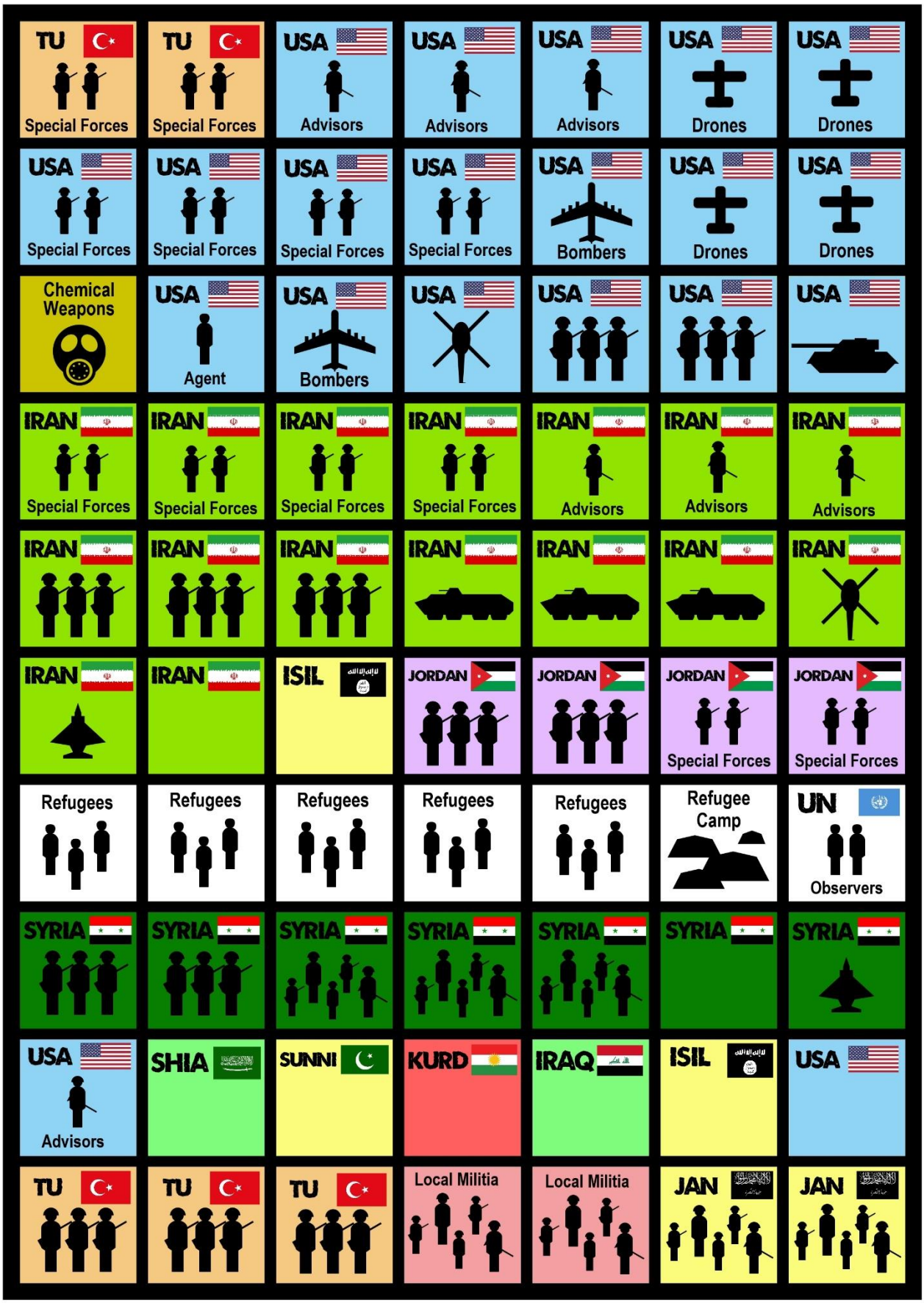
MILITARY SHORTCOMINGS. *Despite billions in weapons and training, the Iraqi armed forces are poorly organized and led, and are riddled with patronage and corruption.*

Ongoing effect: All military actions outside of Baghdad and Shiite areas suffer a -1 penalty.

Islamic State (of Iraq and the Levant)

RECRUITMENT. *The successes of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq have ensured a continuing supply of new recruits to your black banner of jihad.*

Ongoing effect: Each turn you may add a new ISIS militia counter in a Sunni area of Syria (placed randomly).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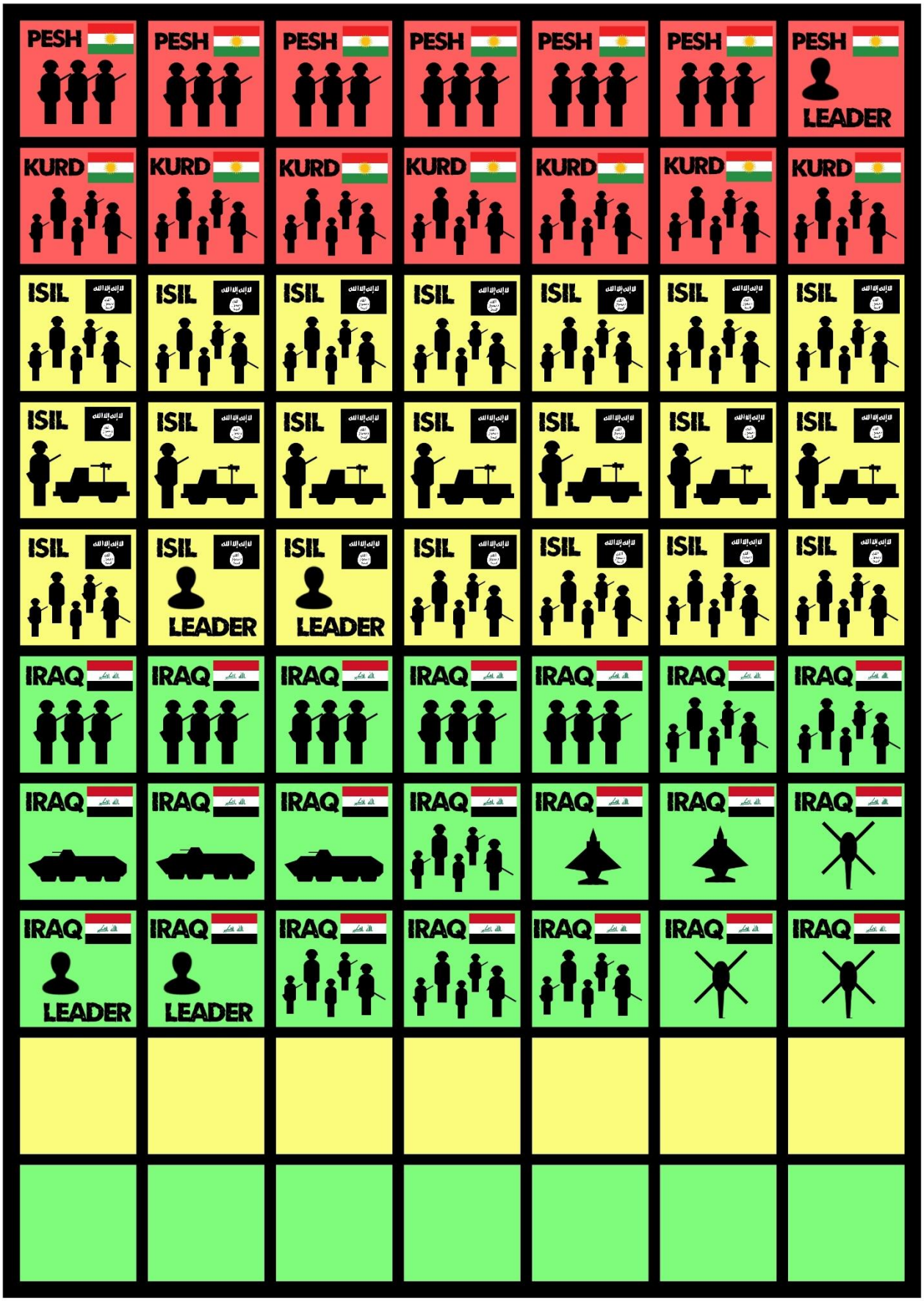
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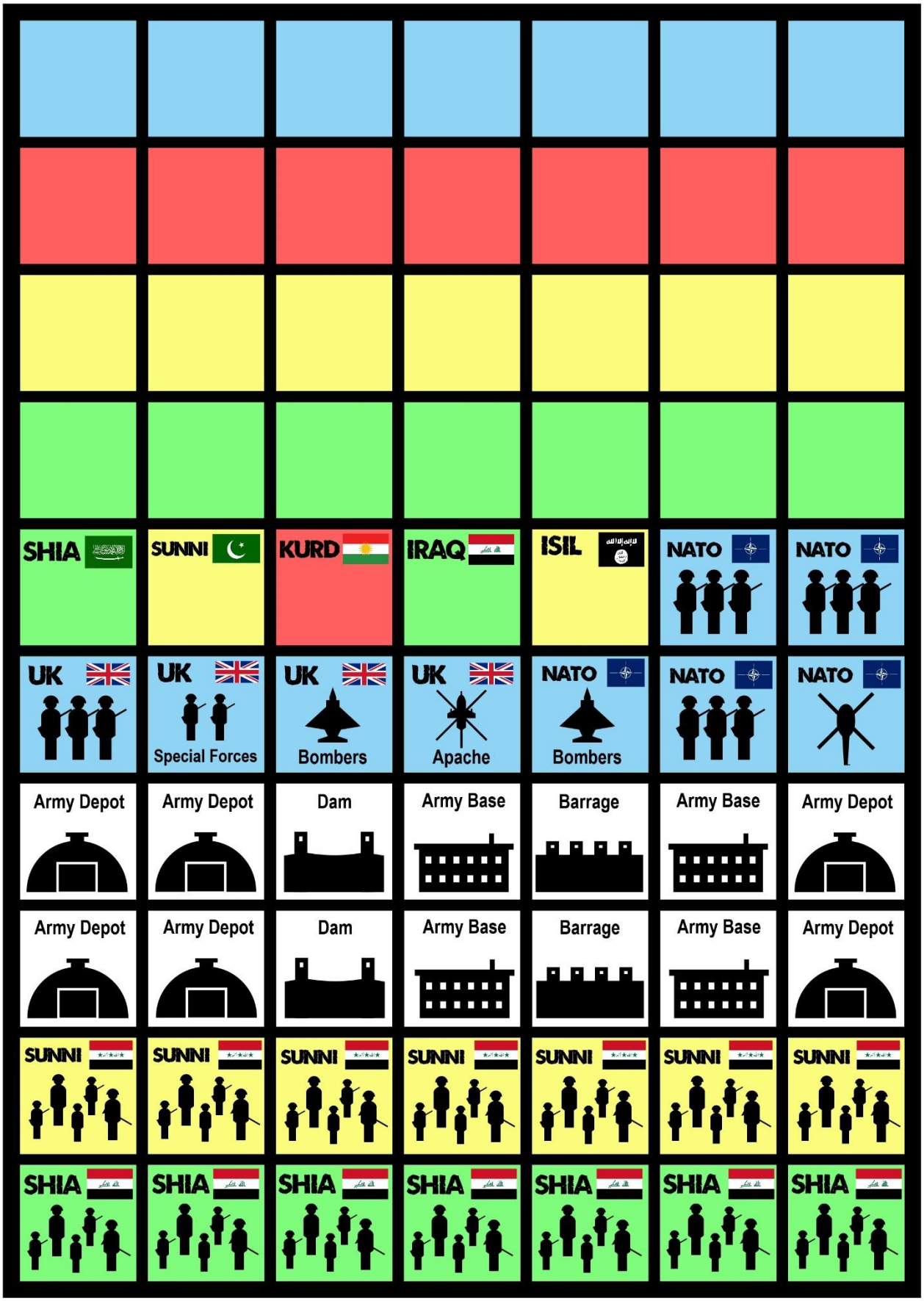
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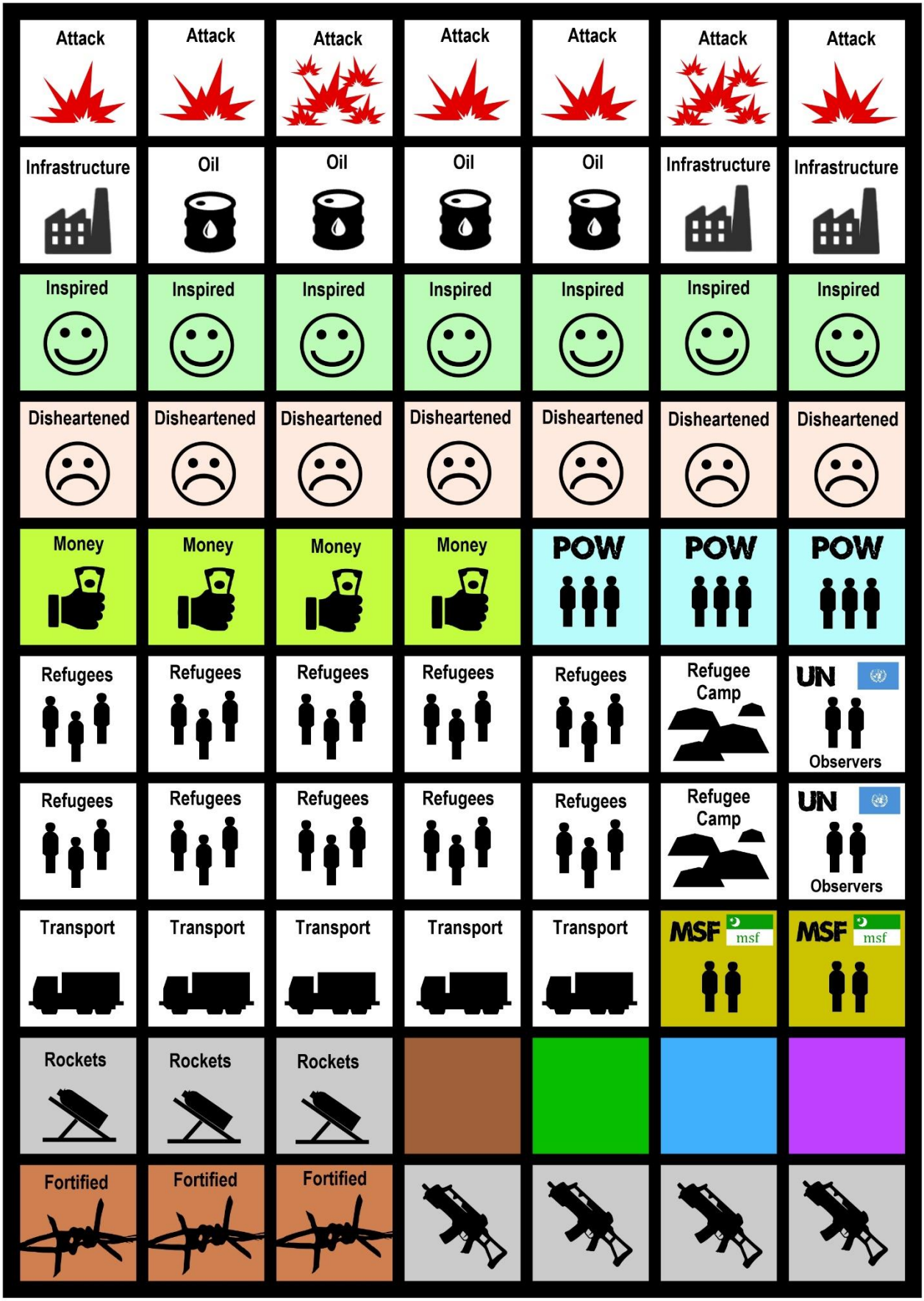
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AMMAN
DAMASCUS
ALEPPO
IDLIB
LATAKIA
TARTUS
HAMA
HOMS
RIF DIMASCHQ
DARA
AS-SUWAIDA
DAHUK
SINJAR
NINAWA
SALAH AL-DIN
DIYALA
ANBAR
WASIT
ERBIL
QADISIYYA
MAYSAN
DHIQAR
AL MUTHANNA
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