

## Peace by piece

**Abstract.** Since early 1990s when the new generation of peace operations took off, international peace building missions aiming to stabilize areas affected by violent conflicts have been invariably unsuccessful. It is mainly for two reasons: repetitive academic research focusing on a closed list of topics and the lack of connection between academic world and practitioners planning and conducting peace missions. 'Peace by piece' is a simulation game of stabilizing Mali – for many decades a hard case for peace-builders. The game is based on interdisciplinary academic research in fields of security studies, political science, anthropology, economics and sociology which allows testing old schemes and offers new solutions. A sandbox construction of the game leaves an open end with no predefined results and makes the game useful to university students, academics keen to verify their hypotheses as well as practitioners anxious to test their plans before deployment.

**Keywords:** Mali, Africa, Sahara, Tuareg, Third World Countries, conflict, war, stabilization, peacemaking, peace building, government, international forces, education.

## 1 Game's concept

*Mali - one of the largest countries in West Africa is plunging into chaos.*

*The Berber Tuareg people, who have ruled the Sahara for thousands of years, are falling apart into two opposing groups. Some want their own secular state (Azawad), others want to maintain their own Islamic domination of the desert.*

*At the same time, the Malian Army is making a coup in the capital and taking over power. A corrupt president is fleeing the country.*

*The international jihadist forces are pulling their weight into a conflict-ridden region. They want to monopolize a weak state - introduce caliphate and Sharia law.*

*Under the desert there are huge reserves of oil, uranium, gold and rare metal ores. The desert is crossed with trade routes: arms, drugs, diamonds, metal ores, slaves, refugees... Most of them lead to Europe.*

*Genocide, destruction, kidnapping. Everyone fights everyone. Nothing is certain. Nothing is predictable. The game's at stake.*

'Peace by piece' – a simulation game of war, peace and everything in between – is a result of a thorough academic research and seasoned board game designing. It simulates conflicts in Mali – a state considered one of the hardest to stabilize because of the complexity and multilevel character of affinities between the factions. It combines the complex characteristics of the groups involved in fights in northern Mali determined through their religions, identities, history and traditions with their mixed motivations, resources, power and leanings. It allows the users to step in the shoes of six parties:

1. two Tuareg groups (predominantly nomadic) – Muslim, aristocratic and haughty businessmen of Ansar Dine, and
2. secular and largely equipped and trained in combat by colonel Quadafi MNLA,
3. two jihad factions: one Arab-dominated – AQIM – and
4. an often opposed to it black-lead MUJAO,
5. as well as the Malian army (capable of running a successful coupe against a democratic but totally corrupted government) supported by
6. international forces (torn between the liberal ideals they want to be faithful to and a necessity to get the stabilization done – with no easy way to reconcile the both).

The game reflects the interests of these six parties, pushes them to fight, choose alliances, cooperate and betray just as in real life. It also provides a set of tools for the international forces to act and try to resolve the conflict and build peace and state. In every round there is a new possibility of a potentially profitable challenge presented to the players, which is a way of testing a combination of solutions that can be offered to the parties in real life. A feedback from the game, next to being enthusiastic, provides a broad raw material for an academic study. Nothing is predefined – a sandbox construction of the game lets the players create a new realm and provide international decision-makers with new solutions to be tested in reality. Questions asked the players include:

- Is peace in Mali possible?

- How to reconcile fighting factions?
- How to manage jihad?
- How to make Arabic and Tuareg population of the north agreeable to cooperation with the black population of the south?
- Are general elections feasible and welcome?
- Will a constitution stabilize the country?

It is a game. It is a research tool. It is an educational aid for students of an academic course on ‘Strategic gaming in post-conflict peace-building’. While students receive a thorough theoretical framework before entering the game, ‘Peace by piece’ can be played as a solo practice as well – with some or even none introduction about the Malian case. The game always remains a through exercise in strategic planning, crisis management, team work, negotiations and finding ways to a consensus. Practicing in these areas through experience controlled within the form of a game leads to the acquisition of skills useful in most work environments as well as life as lived.

‘Peace by piece’ is run in rounds, on a board featuring a map of a large part of Mali divided into six key areas. It can be played by between 6 and 30 players at a time and it is designed to be navigated by a moderator. Workshop prepared on the basis of the game can last between half and a full day while a standard version for university students within an academic course is 4,5 hours.

### **1.1 Innovations**

The innovation is in the conjunction of multidisciplinary academic research and game designing that proved in tests and results to be valuable and successful both in terms of the behaviour of the game users and results that the team managed to get representative for Mali and for conflicts occurring there. Players’ behaviour reflects real groups’ decisions, actions and coalitions and while the gameplays differ from case to case, the final results are close to the predictions of the academic team. This representativeness is the greatest benefit as it turns a pleasurable and grabbing game into a literal research and simulation tool. It is justified to say that in the world of very scarce supply of peace building simulators and great need to find new ways to handle conflicts, a fruitful attempt at providing a training ground that can be used in laboratory conditions with no lives risked is bliss.

The provisional study allows to hope that ‘Peace by piece’ can with time be developed into a more universal tool serving peace in a larger number of cases (e.g. from a provisional study Iraq and Yemen can be targeted with mechanisms devised for Mali).

## 1.2 Target audience

1. 'Peace by piece' is created to fit as Experiential Learning Method (ELM) element of an academic course on post-conflict stabilization of a state emerging from a violent conflict. The course combines classic academic methods, e-learning and ELM 'Peace by piece' gameplay that concludes theoretical part of the course and lets the students put knowledge into practice. The initial and still primary target group are university students of all areas of studies.
2. However, since the game is a reliably representative simulator of a real situation, the game is a research tool for academics, who are the second target group. Hypotheses can be verified through this game and it can serve as a brain stimulator to break through theoretical framework.
3. Since the game can be moved out of the context of an academic course, the third target group are decision-makers and peace mission planners who intend to verify their assumptions and policies.
4. The fourth target group is general public interested in learning about Mali, Africa, contemporary conflicts and ways to stabilize them as well as peace missions and policies of international organizations. For this last group 'Peace by piece' is an educational tool.

## 2 Research project

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

For several decades now, it has been a concern of academics that spawning literature on post-conflict peace-building does not influence the change in the attitude of international decision-makers. Since early 1990s there has been no successful peace-building mission accomplished in the world and neither doing research in the classic way nor repeating the same practices over and over again can change the result. In itself, academic research becomes more and more repetitive. In order to find a way to stabilize fragile states and areas in conflict there need to be new approaches designed to investigate and implement. Strategic gaming is a groundbreaker – a combination theory, experience and exercise in simulation.

The overall structure for the interdisciplinary cooperative research is within peace studies, and especially in peace making and peace building where the works of J. Galtung (e.g. 1975), 'An Agenda for Peace' (B. Boutros-Ghali, 1992) and its subsequent supplement are the core of the UN practice and academic research alike. There is a large field of literature in post-conflict peace building and in preparation for making the game, the team concentrated on the summary of the peace building activities that can be found in Miall et al. (1999). The authors summarize the tasks to be achieved in short-, long- and medium term in these areas: military/security, political/constitutional, economic/social, psycho/social, international. Starting from here, a team composed of an anthropologist, economist, sociologist, political scientist and an expert in security studies split and worked individually within their field of expertise in order to develop a comprehensive and exhaustive PMESII (Political, Military, Eco-

conomic, Social, Information, Infrastructure) analysis of a model of a post-conflict reconstruction and a mind-map. Later on the sectorial mind maps were combined across disciplines and a comprehensive mind map incorporating several research areas was built, representing the model of peace building in relation to the summary of peace building activities identified by Miall et al. When this had been accomplished, a real situation in Mali was researched thoroughly and matched with the multidisciplinary model. Here of particular relevance were the works of B. Lecocq, G. Mann, B. Whitehouse, C. Badi, L. Pelcmans, N. Belalimat, B. Hall, W. Lacher (2013) and ACAS Bulletin (2010).

This stage allowed to identify key factors influencing changes in relations between groups and a way to manage their motivations and hence brought about new tools to be tested as a resource for the international forces and conflict stabilizers.

## 2.2 Research questions

How to stop a conflict? What model of a state is possible to achieve in a post-conflict area? Is building a durable and indivisible post-conflict state possible? Would collaborative projects encourage fighting parties to cooperate with each other and with international peace-builders?

## 2.3 Implementation and results

The extensive theoretical model was translated into a board game with help from a game designer and within several rounds of consultations.

The simulation combines a number of game mechanics that recreate the real life logic of interactions between the conflicted parties. Each party has access to a particular set of resources including money, weapons, food and people. The core mechanic is *area majority* that let the dominant faction control a specific region on the map of Mali. Each faction has access to a specific action cards ranging from 'growth' (increases the productivity within the region), through 'confrontation' (challenging the presence of a specific group within a region), to 'terrorist attack' or 'kidnapping'. Players do not know what kind of action other groups are going to use in each region and what are the exact goals of each party involved. That makes the gameplay (and potential alliances) unpredictable and ever changing. The fact that the elements of the game and behaviors of the players are partially open and partially hidden, makes the game strategic, but not deterministic. Additionally, the game consists of a few interchangeable modules that open a new set of possibilities of building strategies and interactions (previously unavailable). To mention some of them: *infrastructure projects* (create opportunities for cooperation), *constitution* (provides alternative way of sharing power) or *elections* (regulate the influence of each faction). The scoring of the game includes both control over the strategic regions of Mali and completion of goals that are important for a specific factions.

The results can be divided into these for the game users and those for the game-making team of academics and game designers. The users received a powerful educational tool that brings out experience close to a real situation. It trains players both in soft skills and hard competencies: makes them assess their resources, power and their position among other players, draw policy of their group, negotiate, examine ways of acting that seems most optimal for their development and prosperity at the same time as providing a training ground to verify user's knowledge of conflicts, teach them about Mali and the policies of international forces. They reflect on the complexity of a post-conflict stabilization and try to draw their conclusions e.g. as to the rationality in conflict, methods to manage conflicts, cooperation and competition, a pool of strings available to pull in making factions comply with an international road map. Here the game bridges theory and experience as the users contemplate the choices of their group and other factions in relation to knowledge previously acquired:

- have they reached a 'hurting stalemate' (Zartman, 1989),
- do they have a 'core of moderates' (Harris and Reilly, 1998)?
- are the moderates strong enough to get group's support?
- will they be a 'spoiler' (Stedman, 1997)?
- will they use state institutions or would they rather operate outside of the state structures – like mafia or crime groups (Kritz, 1996)?

Those students who took part in the game as part of their university course are compelled to present an essay matching a selected piece of theoretical framework with their game experience. The same bridging is done by the academics – a number of academic articles were inspired by a gameplay as was a laborious attempt at matching the framework of 'Peace by piece' with the case of Iraq by a Ph.D. candidate within his preparatory research.

As has been stressed before, the greatest advantage of the game is in its matching real circumstances so well. A hard work of a team of academics in a multidisciplinary approach paid off. One lesson that can be drawn from preparing and playing the game is that no peace operation can be successful without a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary design. The effect of a close to perfect match to reality is to a large extent achieved also through game designing – a perfect composition of knowledge and skills.

The game proved that theoretical framework that fed the construction of the game is again powered by conclusions from the gameplays. Both the initial PMESII model, the summary of tasks presented by Miall et al. and mind-maps prepared by the project team can now be supplemented and detailed. Moreover, the mechanics of the game can be relatively easily adjusted to some of other cases of conflicts.

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