

# **GAMES, EXERCISES AND SIMULATIONS**

## **FIRE AT SEA: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS SITUATIONS SCENARIO**

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### **Purpose:**

The purpose of the Fire at Sea scenario is to provide a starting point for a discussion on the various aspects of strategic communication in a crisis situation. The exercise focuses on the following: problem analysis, information analysis, crisis communication and decision-makers' actions in a complex political environment.

### **Format, role and assignment:**

The participants are divided into groups of approximately 5 persons. Each group will act as a high-level, interinstitutional advisory committee in a country called Merania. The committee has been formed to counsel the prime-minister and the cabinet. The assignment is to monitor the developing situation and to provide analyses and recommendations. During the first hours of the crisis, information is scarce. The most important tasks of the committee are:

- To suggest to the government ways to clarify the current situation, to inform the public without causing a panic;
- To anticipate possible complications and to evaluate potential costs and benefits for alternative courses of action.

All groups will receive the same information. New information will be gradually distributed to each group. After a series of reports and messages regarding the situation, each group has to prepare recommendations for the prime minister, on the basis of the questions

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they will be given. The groups will have approximately 30 minutes for each round of discussions. After each round, each group will make a short presentation of the recommendations. The presentation will be delivered by a member of the group, who is designated as a spokesperson. After the presentation, the other groups can ask questions or make comments.

Bear in mind that, as members of the advisory committee, you are responsible to maintain a strategic national perspective as you develop your answers. You do not have specific functions and you can use your own expertise to contribute to the discussions. Remember, you are acting in an advisory, not in a decision-making capacity.

Good luck!

### **The context**

The situation takes place in a fictitious country called Merania. Merania is a medium-sized, quite prosperous country. It is a member of the Defence Allegiance, an international alliance whose goal is to protect member states from foreign aggressions and interferences. The Prime Minister belongs to the centre party Peace and Progress and has made a name for himself in politics by:

- Trying to promote Merania's strategic interests internationally;
- Promoting the country's neutrality in the context in which one of the countries in the area, Urbaen, is a former global power, led by a totalitarian regime which wants to regain its former glory;
- Taking measures meant to ensure the country's energy independence from its neighbours.

Merania is also close to Algesia. Algesia was part of the former Gornian Empire together with Urbaen, but it declared its independence at the beginning of the 1990s and it has been trying ever since to leave Urbaen's sphere of influence and to consolidate a democratic regime. Merania, Algesia and Urbaen have access to the Kutian Sea and military fleets stationed in national harbours.

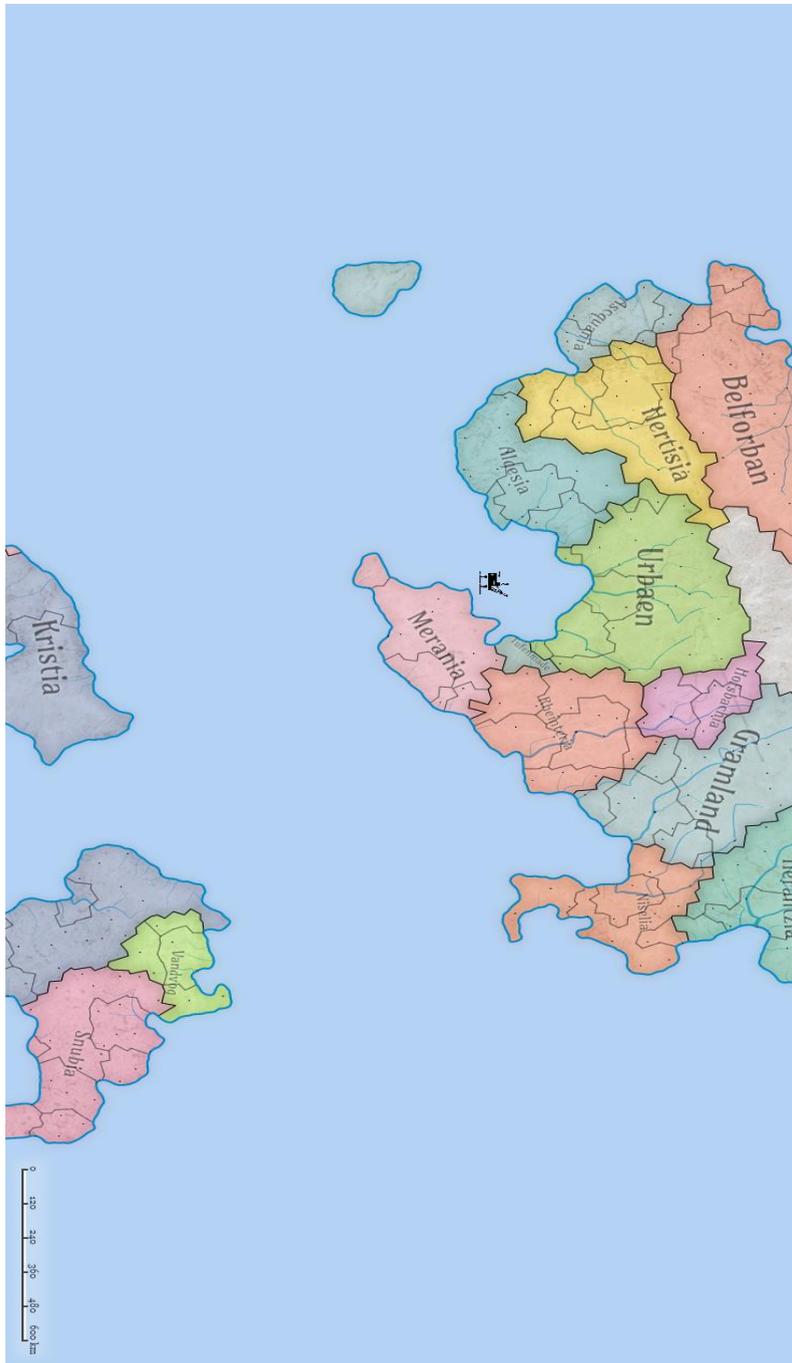
At the beginning of 2022, the totalitarian regime in Urbaen started a military invasion against Algesia to reconstitute the former Gornian

Empire. The Algesian military forces are fighting against the invading military mostly on the ground and in the air, but there are unconfirmed reports that the two countries' military fleets are also engaged in confrontations in the Kutian Sea. As Algesia is not a member of the Defence Allegiance, neither Merania, nor the other members of the Allegiance can send military forces on the ground in Algesia, but they have supported it with military equipment and supplies, including medical supplies.

In an attempt to ensure Merania's energy independence, which, until the current government came to power in 2018, relied for 50% of its energy resources on imports from Urbaen, the Prime Minister initiated the exploitation of the oil reserves in the country's marine belt in the Kutian Sea. In 2020 was opened the first deep-water drilling platform, Razac, which is two nautical miles inside the Meranian marine belt.

On the 25 June 2022 a fire breaks out at the Razac platform. You are the members of the high-level, interinstitutional advisory committee which support the Meranian government. The group has been tasked with counselling the Prime Minister and the cabinet. Therefore, you have to monitor the evolution of the situation and to offer analyses and recommendations, using the questions you will be given during the exercise as a starting point. Each group will select a spokesperson who will periodically present the recommendations of the advisory group.

**Maps 1 and 2:** The two maps have been developed using the app Azgaar Fantasy Map Generator and they show the geographical position of the main three actors in the exercise: Algesia, Urbaen and Merania around the Kutian Sea, as well as the location of the Razac deep-water drilling platform. The two maps are at two different scales which are indicated in the bottom right corner.





**ADVISORY OCCASION 1****Confidential briefing****From: Merania Coast Guard****To: Prime Minister****Time: 03:55**

We report that at 03:45 local time there was an explosion at the deep-water drilling platform Razac. The fire and the smoke released are visible from the coastline. A patrol ship left for the platform at 03:50 and will send us information as soon as it becomes available. At the moment, it is unclear what caused the explosion and whether there are victims among the personnel on the platform. Attempts to contact the personnel by radio have failed.

We will relay more information as it becomes available.

	<p><b>Breaking News</b> Time 04:00</p> <p>A massive fire broke out at the deep-water drilling platform Razac, off the coast of the Kutian Sea. The flames are over 20 meters high and are visible from Sprad Harbor.</p> <p>At present, the cause of the fire is unknown, but an anonymous source declares that the platform may have been hit by a supersonic anti-ship missile launched by a ship belonging to either Algesia or Urbaen.</p> <p>As you are aware, military specialists have declared that the two warring states' naval forces could also become directly engaged in the conflict at any time. It appears that this has already happened.</p>
	<p>User273: Did u hear?!?! The Urbaens dropped a bomb, did u see!!! What are we gonna do now? They blew up our platform!!!! The ones</p>

	<p>in charge tell us we are energy independent, but look what that got us when we upset the Urbaens ... we're back where we left from, and if they attack us as well ...              300k likes              100k shares</p> <p>User 898: yeah, yeah, they say the Allegiance will protect us. Suuuuure they give a damn about us. We can see how much they are helping the Algesians, as in not at all. And our leaders don't wanna admit they've got it all wrong              250k likes              4000 shares</p> <p>User 456: Take it easy, we don't know what's happened. Maybe they didn't bomb the platform. We build things so well, that the platform may've broken down by itself              200k likes              1500 shares</p>
	<p><b>News</b>              Time 04:15              Half an hour ago there was a massive explosion at the deep-water drilling platform Razac, located approximately 10 nautical miles off the coast of Merania. The causes of the explosion are still unknown, but there seem to be victims among the crew on the platform. We will present updates as soon as they become available.</p>
	<p>User 1075: We don't know what happened to our husbands!!! Does anyone know? They working on Razac platform and we hear there</p>

	<p>was an accident, but we can't reach anyone. Can somebody tell us?!?! 500k likes 100k shares</p>
	<p><b>Breaking news</b> Time 04:20</p> <p>Desperate messages from the platform crew's family members are appearing on social media. They are trying to find out what happened to the workers on the platform. We have tried to contact the Oil Company Spartak, but as of yet nobody has replied to our enquiries.</p>

### Confidential Briefing

**From: Merania Coast Guard**

**To: Prime Minister**

**Time: 04:15**

The patrol reached the drilling platform and reports that a massive fire has broken out. 10 workers have been saved from a lifeboat near the platform and they report that at least 5 crew members died in the explosion, and nothing is known about another 5. The patrol also reports that an oil spill is starting to extend around the platform, and the fire is fuelled by the gas released from the deep-water drill. We cannot say for sure what caused the fire. It seems that during the night, a fire exchange was visible between the ships belonging to the Algesian and Urbaen navies, but it is unclear if the explosion at the platform was caused by a missile fired by one of the ships.

### Confidential Briefing

**From: The National Intelligence Agency**

**To: Prime Minister**

**Time: 04:15**

Sources report that tonight there was a battle at sea between the two Urbaen ships and an Algesian one. The confrontation took place a few nautical miles off Meranian coastal waters and supersonic anti-ship long-range missiles were fired<sup>1</sup>.

**Summary of the phone conversation between the Secretary General of the Defence Allegiance and the Prime Minister of Merania**

**Time: 04:20**

The Secretary General informed the Prime Minister of Merania that there are satellite recordings of a battle at sea between Algesian and Urbaen ships and it is visible that supersonic anti-ship missiles were fired. It is unclear from the recordings if such a missile went off course and hit the drilling platform.

	<p><b>Internal confidential report of Spartak Company which operates the deep-water drilling platform Razac</b></p> <p>Time: 04:30</p> <p>As a result of an inspection last week, it became apparent that the blowout preventer (safety valve) which ensured the ventilation of the gas in the shaft was not working properly, and its immediate replacement was required. But it would take two weeks for a new one to be ordered, delivered and installed.</p> <p>The report indicates that the repairs must be conducted immediately because, if the preventer blows, an explosion can occur on the platform which can endanger the integrity of the platform and the lives of the workers.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> Similar to P-1000 Vulkan.

	It is unclear what, if any, measures were taken by the oil company as a result of this report, and the company representative declined to comment.
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### **Advisory occasion 1**

#### **Day 1**

**Time: 04:45**

The Prime Minister is concerned about the situation and requests the high-level, interinstitutional advisory committee to present an evaluation of the situation. In approximately 30 minutes, you will present your opinions and recommendations to the prime minister. More precisely, the Prime Minister wants answers to the following questions:

- What should the Prime Minister take into account with respect to possible short-term (hours, days, weeks) and long-term (months, years) developments of the situation?
- If the platform was hit by a supersonic anti-ship long-range missile launched by Urbaen, what would be the consequences and what measures should the cabinet take?
- If the platform was hit by a supersonic anti-ship long-range missile launched by Algesia, what would be the consequences and what measures should the cabinet take?
- If the platform exploded because of an equipment malfunction, what measures should the cabinet take?
- What measures are required as a result of the loss of human lives?
- What measures are required from the perspective of an ecological disaster?
- What public statements should the government make? Who should make the statements?

In 30 minutes, the Prime Minister and representatives of the cabinet are expecting the advisory committee recommendations, delivered by the spokesperson.

## ADVISORY OCCASION II

	<p><b>Exclusive statement</b> Time: 06:00</p> <p>Daily News reporters have spoken to a former engineer with the Oil Company Spartak, who, under the protection of anonymity, declared that the company manager had known about the problems with the blowout preventer from the moment it was installed a year ago. But he chose to ignore the problems because the temporary shutdown of the platform to replace the preventer would have cost a lot, and the losses in revenue from the extracted oil would have led to a decrease in the share prices for the company that was at the beginning of its activity.</p> <p>Moreover, several engineers had told the manager that there were only 30% chances for the preventer to break down within the next two years. Therefore, the manager chose to postpone replacing the blowout preventer for two years, during which time the company could prove it is lucrative so that they could afford shutting production down for the period needed to replace the valve (approximately two weeks).</p>
	<p><b>Emergency Services Report</b> Time: 06:20</p> <p>The coast guard sent a fire extinguishing ship to the area. They are battling the flames that are currently rising 20m into the air and are visible from the coast town Sprad. Search and rescue teams (including divers) have also</p>

	<p>been sent looking for the 5 missing workers. They haven't been found yet.</p> <p>The crews on the ships present in the area report that the oil spill is extending rapidly towards the Meranian shore which it will reach in less than 24 hours unless protective measures are put into place.</p>
	<p><b>Press release Oil Company Spartak</b> Time: 06:30</p> <p>On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2022, at 03:45, there was an explosion at the deep-water drilling platform Razac, in the Meranian marine belt. As a result of the explosion, 5 workers have lost their lives and 5 are still missing. 10 workers were rescued by the coast guard and are in hospital in Sprad. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased workers and we will continue to support the search and rescue operations for the missing workers.</p> <p>At this moment, the platform is no longer operational, and we are evaluating the oil spill situation in the area. To the extent that the fire is kept under control, we will send a team of engineers to the site to investigate the causes of the fire and to determine the best measures to clean the polluted waters.</p>
	<p><b>The Independent Ecologists Forum (IEF)</b> Time: 07:30</p> <p>The ecologists warn that the effects of the explosion on Razac platform could have devastating effects on the environment. Firstly, the fire releases large quantities of carbon monoxide into the atmosphere, which</p>

	<p>could adversely affect the flora and fauna on the Meranian coastline. Secondly, the oil spill in the Kutian Sea will reach the coastline in less than 24 hours and will affect the beaches along the shoreline. Fishing must be banned until the water is cleaned so as not to endanger the health of the population.</p>
	<p>User 231: They've done us in, we have nothing left, we were barely recovering from the pandemic and now?!?!?! The tourist season is dead, who's gonna come get covered in oil?!?!? These bastards from the government don't do anything for us!!! They let the oil goons work as they want, do what they want and ofc everything turn out bad and we are the ones who suffer!!!! 200k likes 1500 shares</p> <p>User 8767: Where are the authorities when you need them??? They want to ban fishing?!?!? What are we gonna eat? What are we gonna feed our children?!?!? They're taking measures at our expense, again!!!! And we can do nothing about it!!! 250k likes 1000 shares</p> <p>User 09089: I can file for bankruptcy, that's it, I'm done!!! All the corrupt \ in one place... the government, the company, you'll see, they'll pass the blame around and leave us to starve 100k likes 2500 shares</p> <p>User 748: Who does what?!?! Nobody does nothing!!!! They dangle measures in front of</p>

	<p>our eyes, how they're gonna fix everything, and it will be great again, but let's be serious. We can barely breathe here, the smoke is everywhere.</p> <p>50k likes 100 shares</p>
	<p><b>Weather report</b> Time: 07:45</p> <p>The weather station informs that in the coastal area the wind isn't blowing at present, but it will pick up speed tomorrow, from the west, which means that both the spilled oil and the smoke from the fire will move towards the shore.</p>
	<p><b>News</b> Time: 08:00</p> <p>Ecologists explain the dangers to the human population, the flora, the fauna and the difficulties to clean the waters.</p> <p>The coastal area will be affected by the oil spill. How quickly the oil spill cleanup operation will start will determine how much of the coastline will be affected and how badly. At this moment, it can be anticipated that the oil spill will extend to Sprad and will affect the surrounding beaches. The population will suffer because fishing has to be forbidden and tourism will be restricted on the affected beaches. The local flora and fauna will also suffer as a result of the oil spill.</p> <p>The cleanup operation needs to be started immediately along the coastline to prevent a massive ecological disaster.</p> <p>Not lastly, the oil spill is extending along the entire coastline, including the south tip of the</p>

	<p>Meranian peninsula where there is a nature reserve, which protects many endangered flora and fauna species. The cleanup operations will be more difficult in this area due to the swampy terrain.</p>
	<p><b>Emergency Services Report</b> Time: 08:10</p> <p>The coast guard has the fire at the oil platform under control and anticipates that it will be put out within the next hour.</p>

### Confidential Briefing

**From: The National Intelligence Agency**

**To: Prime Minister**

**Time: 09:00**

The oil spill is extending outside the Meranian marine belt. This could pose a great danger due to the conflict in the international waters between Algesia and Urbaen which could ignite the oil. The emergency services cannot enter the international waters to search for the survivors because they could become targets in the conflict. Satellite images indicate the presence of two Urbaen ships approximately 5 nautical miles from the Meranian marine belt. The Algesian ship is not visible, which could mean that it was sunk during the night.

Information received from the coast guard ships in the area indicates that a lifeboat is floating adrift 2 nautical miles outside the Meranian marine belt. It could be the lifeboat with the 5 missing platform workers or an Algesian lifeboat from the missing ship. It is difficult to identify it precisely from a distance. We recommend sending drones for a clear identification before determining a course of action in case it is the workers that need to be saved.

## **Summary of the phone conversation between the Secretary General of the Defence Allegiance and the Prime Minister of Merania**

**Time: 09:10**

The Secretary General has informed the Prime Minister of Merania that his country will be given aid through the Mutual Assistance fund in order to clean the oil spill in its territorial waters. Chemical solutions and ships that could assist in the controlled burning process will be delivered to Merania.

The problem remains with the international waters. Military ships cannot enter the area without raising suspicions from Urbaen that they are joining the conflict which could lead to its escalation. Therefore, a civilian company should be in charge of the clean-up process in international waters, if one could be found willing to enter a conflict area.

### **Ministry of the Environment**

**Time: 09:15**



**Ministry of the Environment**

The oil spill is monitored constantly. Several private companies and NGOs have been contacted and efforts are being made to obtain the means necessary for the clean-up operation. Spartak Company will be responsible for the clean-up expenses.

The controlled burning procedure should be initiated as soon as possible at sea so that as little oil as possible makes it to the shore. It could be eliminated using chemicals and manual labour. Experts in neighbouring countries have been contacted and they have promised to send logistics and personnel as soon as possible.

### **Confidential briefing**

**From: Defence minister**

**To: Prime Minister**

**Time: 09:20**

We have official confirmation both from the Defence Allegiance and from Urbaen and Algesia that the fire was not caused by a missile gone off course. But we must stress that if the conflict at sea continues, a missile could ignite the oil spill which is spreading in international waters at present. This could lead to uncontrolled burning and an ecological disaster. We will undertake the rescue operation of the persons in the lifeboat adrift in international waters, in accordance with international legislation regarding search and rescue missions at sea.

We emphasize the fact that the clean-up attempts in international waters undertaken by a private company could be affected by the ongoing conflict. The appeal to our partners in the Defence Allegiance and their ships entering the Kutian Sea could be considered a declaration of war, signalling the Allegiance's intentions to join the war on the Algesian side, even if they were only clean-up ships with no military capabilities.

**Institute for Medicine****Long, medium- and short-term consequences for people****Time: 10:00**

Doctors warn that the pollution levels registered as a result of the initial fire, but also of the controlled burns to eliminate the oil spill will release massive amounts of carbon monoxide into the atmosphere which will affect people suffering from respiratory conditions and allergies. Doctors recommend avoiding the coastline areas for a period of a few months until the carbon monoxide clears.

As far as food is concerned, it is not recommended to consume fish products because they may contain substances harmful to the human body. A ban on fishing in the area is recommended until the waters are

cleaned to prevent the marketing and consumption of fish products with oil residues or other harmful chemicals. This could take 2-3 months, depending on the efficiency of the cleaning.

### **Advisory occasion II**

The Prime Minister has followed the evolution of events and asks the advisory committee for an estimate of the situation created. In about 30 minutes, you will present the prime minister's views and recommendations. More specifically, the Prime Minister of Merania wants answers to the following questions:

- What courses of action should the government consider?
- How does the government communicate with the public about these courses of action? Who ensures communication for each course? How messages are kept consistent?
- What messages can be sent to the population about each course of action? Write these messages. Pay close attention to the fact that the population will be directly affected, so clear, encouraging and constructive messages are needed.

In 30 minutes, the Prime Minister and representatives of the cabinet are waiting for the councillors' recommendations, through the spokesperson.