

## WARGAME FIRST REVIEW

<b>Ukrainian Crisis</b>	★★★★★
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<b>Period</b>	Modern	<b>Publisher</b>	Hollandspiele
<b>Conflict</b>	Russia/Ukraine 2014	<b>Designer</b>	Brian Train
<b>Force Size</b>	Army vs Army	<b>Date</b>	2015
<b>Mvr Units</b>	~Bde?	<b>Grid Size</b>	Area. ~100km
<b>Turn Dur.</b>	~ week/~month (variable), 9 turns	<b>Map Size</b>	c. 1000km x 500km ~20 areas
<b>Players</b>	2 (Ukraine, Russia)		

### Introduction

<b>Subject of the game</b>	The Grey Zone war in the build up to the Donbas war in 2014, and any resulting kinetic engagement (not limited to Donbas)
<b>Scope</b>	Whole conflict, on Diplomatic, Information and Military domains (so ¾ of DIME)
<b>Presentation</b>	Print and play available ( <a href="https://brtrain.wordpress.com/2014/03/16/a-new-pnp-game-ukrainian-crisis/">https://brtrain.wordpress.com/2014/03/16/a-new-pnp-game-ukrainian-crisis/</a> ) or box set from Hollandspiele \$45. Good quality graphics. Clear rules
<b>Components</b>	A3 map, one counter sheet, 132 counters, QRS, 9pp rules. Good designer notes.
<b>Designer's focus/objectives</b>	Designed over a weekend Mar 2014, mid crisis. "Conduct journalism in the form of a wargame" VPs emphasised in E Ukraine so as to focus effort there. Combat turn options could be used to clear insurgents out. SF very generic – ie Grey Zone.
<b>Overall system description</b>	Each turn players decide Minor, Moderate, Maximum effort in each of Diplomatic, Information and Military – which through D6 give RPs. Military is about mobilisation and deployment, Diplomatic is shifting other country support, Information is shifting prestige. 2 random events cards each turn. A player can declare a combat turn, which is a variable number of combat turns, based on allocated RPs for the turn/effort.
<b>Real Battle Notes</b>	Russian backed forces took part of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, and then with ceasefire and Minsk agreement became a frozen/low intensity conflict until the war of 2022.

## The Game System

<b>Principal areas of reality represented in the game</b>	The Grey Zone model of trying to manage/effect Prestige and shift support from other countries. Ability to potentially win purely by non-kinetic wins.
<b>Important abstractions</b>	Everything? Especially the Information actions.
<b>Intricacy of the system, and the mechanical ease of play</b>	Pretty simple mechanics. All D6 based. Prestige links Military and Information actions. Diplomatic gives some more scope for actions in any field.
<b>Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals and representing the real situation</b>	Wargaming as journalism may be a good description. Its very much an education type of game, but possibly even lighter than that. A bit more like a short "explainer" piece, giving you a sense of the geography, players, options and interplay of these things called Diplomatic, Military and Information – but none to a level to give you anything but the broadest appreciation.
<b>Contributions to the wargaming state of the art</b>	The use of the DIM(E) model is novel. Prestige acting as a counterbalance – in similar way to DEFCON but more refined. The choice in combat mode between Kinetic, Prestige/Symbolic and Asymmetric combat. The ability to switch between Strategic and Combat turns – with different play options for both. Overkill as collateral damage
<b>Improvements?</b>	Doesn't really need any. Probably pretty easy to break/distort. Adding an Economy track would be the obvious to make full DIME. DIMEFIL a bit too much of a stretch. Something a bit more from the Diplomatic track. Too easy to demote countries in comparison to effort to promote – so seemed spend there was wasted.

## The Game in Play

<b>Play time</b>	~60-90 mins if really understand it.
<b>Player roles</b>	Ukraine and Russia
<b>Types of decisions required</b>	Which of DIM to emphasis, 1,2 or all 3. How to assign limited effort chits per turn across DIM, and whether to have enough Maximum for later in the game (if that's the strategy) How much to risk a low Prestige (0 = game over, but not necessarily losing) Where/when to deploy troops How to group troops for battles/when to fight Which battle mode to use
<b>Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making</b>	Limited chit pool, need to plan ahead Once in combat turn can't deploy troops, so need to be deployed before that happens Almost all combat actions have Prestige risk
<b>Evaluation of the player's experience</b>	Good game, could be pretty slick after multiple plays. Almost chess like in terms of trying to experiment with different approaches/emphasis to DIM and to early/flat/late strategies. But with some appreciation of Donbas and DIME already don't think I learnt more, but did generate an appreciation for how to design Grey Zone games.

## Overall Evaluation

<b>Does the game work? (Veracity)</b>	Yes, very slick
<b>Does it have real world validity?/Insights?</b>	At a "journalism" level and introducing people to the terrain in all its aspects, and the concept of DIME. No real insights beyond that.
<b>Is it a good game?</b>	Yes, 4/5
<b>Who would be most interested in the game?</b>	Anyone wanting an appreciation of Ukraine situation in 2014 (now changed of course) or of DIM(E).
<b>Repeatability</b>	Lots, in terms of trying different strategies
<b>Is the game good value?</b>	Yep, especially the £0 print-and-play

## MECHANICS (Combat Turn only, NOT urban focussed test)

Aspect	Mechanic
<b>Activation/C&amp;C</b>	RP based on Effort Level and D6, one RP per move. Combat free.
<b>Movement</b>	1 zone only
<b>Direct Fire</b>	Single combat mechanic, 5+ to hit,
<b>Damage</b>	2 damage levels – neutralised and KO
<b>Assault</b>	In DF
<b>Indirect Fire</b>	In DF
<b>Air Support</b>	Not represented. Does have airborne to place anywhere.

<b>Engineers</b>	n/a
<b>CEMA</b>	n/a
<b>Morale</b>	n/a
<b>Civilians</b>	Any overkill reduces Prestige to reflect collateral damage
<b>Subterranean</b>	n/a
<b>Urban Specifics</b>	n/a
<b>Other Notable</b>	n/a

[Per scenario/run through]

<b>Date</b>	16 & 23 Mar	<b>Scenario</b>	Default
<b>Players</b>	DB	<b>Constraints</b>	None

## SET-UP

As per standard scenario

## HOW IT PLAYED

Rolled Détente on first turn which in theory meant the game was over! Ignored and carried on. In early turns Russia played hard on Information and rapidly brought Ukraine down into single figures. Ukraine had to spend on Diplomatic to recover. Ukraine tried best to promote countries to supporters, but very hard (esp to get to Intervention), and a lot easier for Russia to bat them back down again, so tended to switch away from diplomacy. Molodva then came out to support Russia, and Ukraine then drew the Fuck the EU card! Finally managed to get GB to top. Decided that I'd play the last 3 turns as combat turns, so both sides had deployed enough to play with. Combats were focussed in eastern Ukraine most with 1-2 regular units and 1-2 irregulars. Mix of each style of combat, but several KO's and Symbolic wins meant that both sides prestige plummeted and ended the first combat phase with Russia on 0. The 2<sup>nd</sup> combat phase then got last-turn syndrome with Ukraine moving irregulars into adjoining areas to claim the VPs, but again Prestige too a hit, with Ukraine also falling to 0 (despite getting plusses for further Russia kills), and in the end Russia actually ended up on +1 and Ukraine on 0. That meant game over at end of Turn 7.

## RESULTS

Despite last-turn effect Ukraine won by 8 VP to 0, same as it was at end of Combat Turn 1. Counts as Draw – so possibly realistic!

## THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN)

I backed off the Prestige strategy but suspect that Russia could have got a Prestige kill early on, but would have needed the Irregulars on the map to get the VPs to win. Belarussia declared for Russia. Dice rolls seemed to be very low, so often on a maximum effort action I'd get less than on Moderate – seemed unbalanced. Otherwise as mentioned above gave some good ideas about how to design Grey Zone games, and would reward replay to test out different DIME and time strategies, but not sure how much more I actually learnt.

IMAGES



Turn 1



Turn 2



Turn 3



Turn 4



Turn 5



Turn 6



Turn 7 Combat Turn 1



Turn 7 Combat Turn 2