Persian Predicament

A Matrix Game on a potential Iranian future

Post Game Report

March 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Persian Predicament was a multi-week geopolitical simulation exploring internal factional struggles, regime survival, and foreign influence in an unstable Iran. Over five turns, players representing the Iranian Regime, IRGC, Artesh (Regular Military), Civil Protest Movement (CPM), Ethnic Insurgents, and Foreign Powers engaged in diplomatic manoeuvring, military actions, and strategic decision-making.

At the game's conclusion:

- The Iranian Regime survived but was severely weakened, relying on emergency economic measures to maintain stability.
- The IRGC lost credibility, struggling with corruption scandals and an erosion of public trust.
- The Artesh positioned itself as a stabilizing force, gaining influence as a neutral power broker.
- The Civil Protest Movement expanded unrest but failed to topple the government.
- The Ethnic Insurgents failed to achieve autonomy, unable to capitalize on foreign support.
- Foreign Powers destabilized Iran through economic pressure and cyber warfare but failed to enact regime change.

The game demonstrated the power of factional coordination and deception, with diplomacy playing a critical role in shaping outcomes. However, internal misalignment within regime-aligned forces (IRGC, Artesh, and the civilian government) led to a fractured response to unrest, allowing opposition groups to sustain momentum.

Key Findings:

1. **Faction Coordination Determines Success:** The most successful factions (Artesh, CPM) **leveraged alliances**, while disjointed ones (Regime, IRGC) struggled.
2. **Inter-factional Violence was rare:** Challenging the Iranian regime militarily did not feature heavily. Instead Economic Disruption and Information Operations dominated as the main methods employed.
3. **Foreign Influence was disruptive but Inconclusive.** Whilst the Foreign Powers **sustained Regime instability** they did not secure decisive control.
4. **Turn Order Impacted Strategy:** The **lack of predictability in faction sequencing** led to **difficulties in planning long-term moves**.
5. **The LLM AI Facilitator improved adjudication, but required human oversight:** AI-supported gameplay reduced the effort to run the game but required strict human guidance to prevent inconsistencies.

Persian Predicament provided a compelling demonstration of political instability, power struggles, and strategic decision-making in a high-stakes environment. By refining adjudication mechanics, faction coordination, and turn sequencing, future Matrix Games can improve the level engagement and provide even more robust strategic experiences.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MATRIX GAME REPORT

Purpose of This Report

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the Matrix Game, *Persian Predicament,* conducted over multiple turns, assessing the key events, faction strategies, adjudication processes, and overall game outcomes. The objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of player decision-making, the shifting balance of power, and the broader geopolitical and social ramifications within the game world. Additionally, this report will examine how an AI language model (LLM) was utilized as an adjudication and facilitation tool, identifying best practices and challenges in integrating AI into the game process.

What is a Matrix Game?

A Matrix Game is a **structured but open-ended role-playing game** that simulates complex geopolitical, social, and military conflicts. Unlike traditional wargames with rigid rules, Matrix Games rely on player-driven arguments, which are evaluated for plausibility and assigned a probability of success or failure. Dice rolls then determine outcomes, creating a dynamic and emergent narrative.

Each player represents a different faction, making arguments about actions they wish to take and providing supporting reasons for why their actions should succeed. Other players can present counterarguments, and the adjudication process weighs the strengths of both before resolving the action.

Methodology

Persian Predicament was conducted as a structured, turn-based simulation with multiple players assigned to each faction, communicating through dedicated Discord channels for internal coordination and inter-faction diplomacy. The game facilitator established a turn order, with each turn lasting 4-6 weeks. During their turn, a faction would collaboratively develop and submit an argument, structured as an action and its intended effect, supported by up to three pro reasons explaining why it should succeed. Once posted, other factions had 24 hours to respond by seeking clarifications, challenging the argument, or proposing con reasons for why it might fail. The facilitator adjudicated by evaluating the strength of the pros and cons, assigning a chance of failure, and rolling two six-sided dice to determine the outcome. Possible results ranged from catastrophic failure to significant success, with the adjudicated result shaping the new game state before the next faction took its turn. This iterative process allowed for dynamic narrative development, with players adapting their strategies based on evolving in-game conditions.

How This Matrix Game Differs from Traditional Matrix Games

Persian Predicament introduced several innovations that set it apart from traditional Matrix Games, enhancing strategic depth, data capture, and facilitation. Unlike many Matrix Games where players operate individually, each faction in this game had multiple players, allowing for collaborative idea generation, internal debate, and better evaluation of arguments from other factions. This encouraged factions to refine their strategies and present stronger, more cohesive arguments. The extended time for player turns enabled the opportunity to conduct in-depth research, explore multiple argument options, engage in extended inter-faction diplomacy, and carefully construct counterarguments. This slower pace allowed for more thoughtful decision-making and realistic negotiation dynamics, replicating real-world strategic planning.

The game was hosted on Discord, which provided a passive yet comprehensive data capture mechanism. Since most discussions occurred in written form, all internal faction conversations, inter-faction negotiations, and open discussions were automatically recorded in

real time. This eliminated the need for separate data capture software and ensured that every decision, debate, and shift in strategy was fully documented. A large language model (LLM) AI, in the form of Chat GPT 4o, was integrated to assist the game facilitator, enhancing adjudication speed, summarizing game turns, and ensuring consistency in argument evaluation. The AI supported structured argument filtering and creating the outcome narratives for the players much faster than a human author.

Overview of the Game Scenario

Persian Predicament was set in a contemporary geopolitical context, focusing on Iran's domestic and regional challenges. The game scenario simulates a rapidly escalating crisis in Iran, set in the early months of 2025. The nation is on the brink of collapse, caught between domestic unrest, economic devastation, and the demise of its regional influence via proxies in the Middle East and an aggrieved Israel. Against this backdrop, six key factions each with unique objectives and resources compete to secure their vision for Iran's future. Players take on the roles of the Iranian Regime, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Artesh (Regular Military), the Civil Protest Movement (CPM), Ethnic Minorities & Regional Insurgents, and Foreign Powers (U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, EU). Through strategic actions, alliances, and opposition, each faction navigates the political, military, and economic landscape towards achieving their goals or just to survive the chaos. A Fate Player introduces unpredictable events, mirroring real-world complexity and ensuring a dynamic and evolving game environment.

Background to the Crisis (more detail in the [game briefing pack](#))
Over the past several years, Iran has faced a **series of crises** that have weakened the central government and emboldened opposition forces:
- **Economic Collapse:** U.S. "maximum pressure" sanctions, combined with internal mismanagement, have led to hyperinflation, fuel shortages, and mass unemployment.
- **Protest Movement & Crackdowns:** The 2022 Mahsa Amini protests evolved into a **sustained opposition movement**. While initial crackdowns temporarily suppressed dissent, economic hardship and government repression have rekindled mass demonstrations.
- **Ethnic & Regional Insurgencies:** Kurdish, Baluchi, and Ahwazi insurgents have **stepped up their activities**, sensing an opportunity to secure autonomy or even independence.
- **Regime Infighting:** The **death of President Raisi in May 2024** exacerbated tensions within Iran's leadership, with hardliners, reformists, and military factions vying for dominance.
- **Military Confrontation with Israel:** Iranian missile attacks on Israel in October 2024 triggered **retaliatory Israeli airstrikes** on Iranian military infrastructure, further destabilizing the country.
- **Strategic Oil Disruptions:** The destruction of the **Kharg Island oil terminal** has crippled Iran's ability to export crude, deepening its financial crisis and fuelling internal conflict.

As 2025 begins, **Iran stands at a breaking point**—whether it will survive intact or collapse into chaos depends on the actions of each faction.

Faction Roles & Objectives

Iranian Regime: Struggling to maintain control amid mass protests, economic ruin, and international isolation, the government seeks to stabilize Iran while fending off insurgents and internal rivals.

Game Objectives:
1. Remain in Power:
2. Protect the Territorial Integrity of Iran
3. Reduce Foreign Influence

Initial Advantage: Ruthless Internal Security. +1 to any action that involves the limited use of state security in Tehran.

Initial Disadvantage: Financial Sanctions. -1 to any action that require significant economic resources, such as deploying large military forces or repairing critical infrastructure.

Civil Protest Movement (CPM): Fighting for democratic reform, the CPM aims to remove the regime, but must choose between **nonviolent resistance or armed struggle**.

Game Objectives:
1. Remove the current Regime
2. Hold Free and Fair Elections for a New Government
3. Avoid Bloodshed

Initial Advantage: Social Media Savvy. +1 to any action when attempting to organize actions covertly or when they need to spread their message quickly across different cities. This also makes it harder for the regime to intercept and disrupt their communications.

Initial Disadvantage: Non Violent. -1 when defending against violent crackdowns. They cannot engage in direct armed conflict, and their only recourse is to avoid, disperse, or de-escalate confrontations with security forces. Failure to do so could lead to arrests and reduced momentum.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC): The IRGC must ensure the survival of a fundamentalist regime, but also expand its power—potentially at the expense of the civilian government.
Game Objectives:
1. Ensure a Fundamentalist Regime Governs Iran:
2. Secure Pre-Eminent Position Politically, Militarily, and Financially within Iran
3. Defend Against Foreign Interference

Initial Advantage : Elite, fanatic military forces. The IRGC gains a +1 bonus when engaging in military actions, both externally and internally. Their elite status provides them with an edge in combat situations, counterinsurgency operations, and suppressing civil unrest.

Initial Disadvantage: Tensions with Civilian Government and Regular Military. The IRGC suffers -1 penalty when attempting to coordinate with the civilian government or regular military forces. These internal tensions may lead to delays, inefficiencies, or outright refusal to cooperate in critical situations, especially if the IRGC appears to be consolidating too much power.

Ethnic Minorities & Regional Insurgents: Kurdish, Baluchi, and Ahwazi separatists see this as their chance to **break away from Tehran's control**, but need international backing to succeed.

Game Objectives:
1. Gain Greater Autonomy or Independence**:**
2. Have a Friendly Regime in Tehran

3. Secure International Support for Ethnically Independent Statelets

Initial Advantage: Geographical Strongholds. The insurgents gain a +1 bonus when defending their territories or engaging in guerrilla tactics. Their familiarity with the terrain gives them an edge in hit-and-run attacks and sabotage operations against better-equipped but less mobile government forces.

Initial Disadvantage: Internal Divisions. The insurgents suffer a -1 penalty when attempting to coordinate large-scale or joint operations between the different ethnic groups. Internal disagreements may cause delays or weaken the effectiveness of their actions.

Artesh (Regular Military): Tasked with defending Iran's borders, the Artesh faces a difficult choice: support the regime, align with the people, or challenge IRGC dominance.

Game OBJECTIVES:
1. Preserve National stability and sovereignty:
2. Prevent Foreign Intervention
3. Increase power relative to the IRGC

Initial Advantage: Public Perception as Defenders of the Nation. The Artesh gains a +1 bonus when attempting to rally public support or influence other factions, particularly when defending against foreign intervention. This legitimacy may help them attract moderate political forces and factions dissatisfied with the IRGC's dominance

Initial Disadvantage: Divided Loyalties. The Artesh suffers a -1 penalty when attempting to coordinate large-scale operations or act cohesively as a single force. Internal divisions can lead to delays, defections, or failures to execute plans effectively, especially in moments of crisis.

Foreign Powers (U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, EU): External actors seek to shape Iran's future—either by **supporting opposition groups, weakening the regime, or preventing full-scale collapse**.

Game Objectives:
1. Avoid destabilising the region
2. Prevent Nuclear Proliferation and Direct Military Conflict
3. Foster a Friendly or Neutral Government in Iran

Initial Advantage: Economic and Diplomatic Leverage. Foreign powers receive a +1 bonus when implementing sanctions, freezing assets, or engaging in diplomatic isolation efforts. These economic tactics help destabilize the regime, leading to resource shortages and reduced capacity for military and internal security operations.

Initial Disadvantage: Risk of Escalation. Foreign powers suffer -1 penalty when they engage in actions that carry a high risk of escalation, such as direct military strikes or aggressive covert operations. Missteps can lead to unintended consequences, such as regional conflicts or diplomatic fallout.

Faction Alignment

At the start of the game there are 3 Pro Status Quo Factions (Regime, IRGC, Artesh) and 3 Anti Status Quo Factions (Ethnic Insurgents, CPM and Foreign Powers). The Artesh and Ethnic Insurgents are natural opponents based on the competing desires for territorial separation vs maintaining the integrity of Iran. The CPM is most obviously opposed to the Regime and vice versa, the latter hoping to quell the spar of public discontent without needing to send in the IRGC. The IRGC sits in the middle with an obvious external threat of the Foreign Powers to orientate towards but can also be the Regime's strong arm against the CPM or the Ethnic Insurgents should the Artesh be seen to be lacking. The Foreign Powers are natural bed fellows with the other two Anti Status Quo factions and opponents of the IRGC but whether they target the Regime and Artesh directly remains unclear. If they do they risk uniting the Pro Status Quo factions against an external threat. Indeed, the bonds between the Artesh, IRGC and Regime are a lot weaker than one might image from the other side of the table.

This balanced scenario design allows for both natural alignment and opposition of 3 vs 3 factions but also the exciting potential for shifting alliances based on secret dealings. Whilst a seventh faction, such as a combination of Russia/China/Proxies could have been added it was felt this would tip the scales in favour of Regime stability. Instead, the Fate Player was able to act as Russia/China/Proxies, or any other nation or non-state actor or event as required.

Inherent Factional Alignment
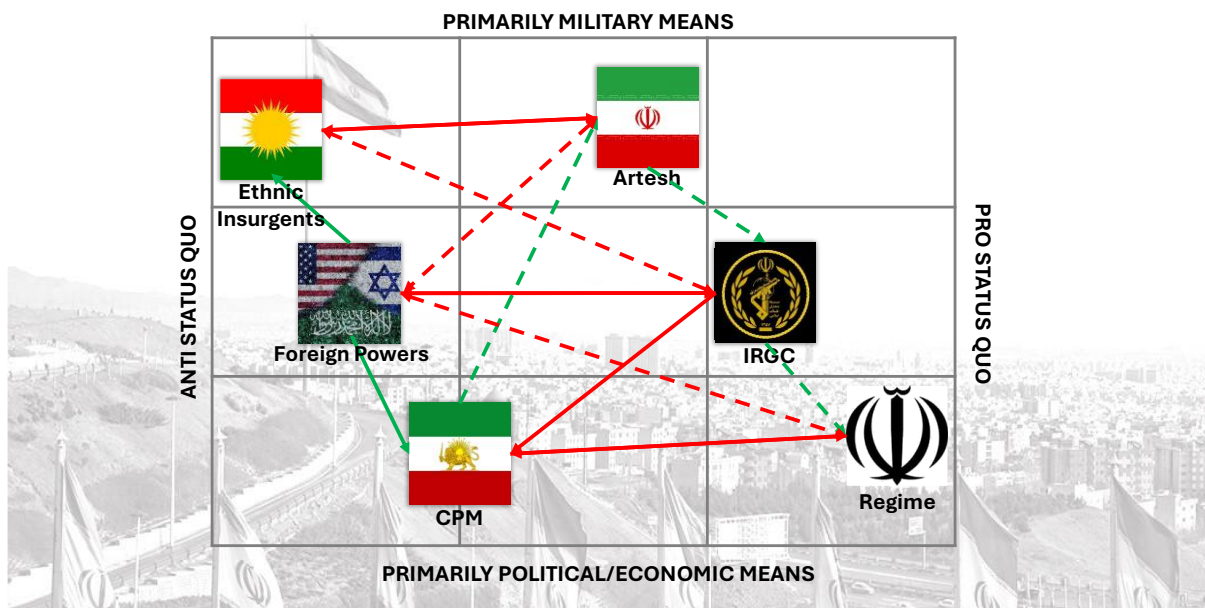
Over the course of the game, Iran found itself increasingly fractured as economic hardship, political dissent, and foreign interference pushed the country toward instability. What began as a nation struggling with external pressures soon became a battleground of competing factions, each vying for control over Iran's uncertain future.

From the outset, the Iranian Regime sought to maintain stability through economic and political manoeuvring. Early efforts to reinforce the economy and suppress dissent met with mixed results, but as sanctions tightened and protests spread, the government found itself on the defensive. By Turn 5, the regime had turned to an emergency fuel subsidy program, leveraging domestic oil production to provide relief and restore faith in its leadership. While this move temporarily alleviated public frustration, it failed to fully counteract the growing influence of opposition forces.

The IRGC, long considered the regime's strongest pillar, faced mounting difficulties. While it remained a powerful force in internal security, its attempts to expand influence faltered. An ambitious nationwide infrastructure project collapsed under the weight of corruption, eroding public trust and emboldening protest movements. Even its intelligence network struggled, overburdened by the sheer scale of unrest. While still formidable, the IRGC ended the game weaker than it had started, struggling to contain the chaos it once controlled with ease.

Meanwhile, the Civil Protest Movement (CPM) capitalized on the regime's failings. Over the course of five turns, it evolved from a scattered opposition force into a nationwide protest movement capable of paralyzing major cities. By Turn 5, the CPM organized massive demonstrations, targeting infrastructure and economic centres to apply maximum pressure. While it failed to topple the regime outright, its success in mobilizing large swaths of the population placed it at the forefront of Iran's political opposition.

The Ethnic Insurgents, on the other hand, struggled to achieve the same level of momentum. Despite securing external support and preparing for broader uprisings, their attempted protests in Turn 5 failed to materialize into a serious threat. Artesh's security efforts and logistical setbacks prevented them from expanding their influence, leaving them as a persistent but contained force rather than a game-changing actor.

The Regular Military (Artesh) emerged as a key stabilizer in the conflict, balancing security operations with efforts to maintain public order. Throughout the game, Artesh carefully distanced itself from the regime's failures, positioning itself as a professional force focused on protecting Iranian sovereignty rather than upholding an unpopular government. In Turn 5, it intensified border security and urban patrols, successfully preventing a total security collapse while avoiding excessive provocation. As other factions faltered, Artesh quietly solidified its role as a central power broker in the nation's future.

Foreign actors also played a significant role in shaping events. The fall of Assad in Syria during Turn 4 dealt a severe blow to Iran's regional position, isolating the regime further. By Turn 5, Foreign Powers had shifted strategies—while the U.S. and its allies continued to pressure the regime economically, the EU led a major humanitarian aid effort, permitted by the Regime, distributing resources through [Islamic] charities and NGOs. This move simultaneously provided relief to the Iranian people and undermined the regime's claims of self-sufficiency, further weakening its credibility.

The game ended with Iran at a breaking point. The regime remained in power but was weaker than ever, relying on emergency measures to maintain control. The IRGC, once an unshakable force, now faced internal fractures and public distrust. The CPM had mobilized unprecedented protests but lacked the final push to bring the government down. The insurgents had failed to

break through, while Artesh stood as a calm but powerful presence, poised to act if the country continued its downward spiral.

As the dust settled on Turn 5, the question remained: Was this a nation in recovery or one in waiting for its final collapse? By the end of the game, Iran stood on the brink of a major societal rupture. The regime retained only a narrow base of unwavering support among religious conservatives, but even within this group, there were signs of passive disengagement rather than active loyalty. The middle ground had all but disappeared—few still clung to the hope that gradual reform could improve governance, leaving most of the population either simmering with discontent or actively rebelling.

Frustration had spread widely among the merchant class, rural communities, and the urban poor. Though not yet fully committed to revolt, these groups had grown increasingly vocal, engaging in strikes, demonstrations, and small-scale protests. Meanwhile, the most radicalized segments of society—ethnic minorities, students, and educators—had reached a boiling point. These groups were no longer merely discontented; they had moved into open defiance, driving protests, riots, and acts of organized resistance.

With the country teetering on the edge of deeper unrest, the game's conclusion suggested an imminent tipping point. Either the regime would escalate repression in a last-ditch effort to maintain control, or the opposition, fuelled by mass mobilization and societal fractures, would push for a decisive break from the existing order.

Supportive	Hopeful	Neutral	Unhappy	Angry
General satisfaction with leadership, religious unity.	Signs of improvement, faith in better governance.	Mixed sentiment; not actively engaged.	Frustration, small-scale demonstrations.	Protests, riots, and growing resistance.
		RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES	BAZAARI CLASS, RURAL COMMUNITIES	URBAN POOR, ETHNIC MINORITIES, STUDENTS & EDUCATORS

The end of game National Map shows that protests and discontent is on the rise in major cities, especially Tehran, although the territorial integrity of Iran remains intact. Inside Tehran the protest movement has set up encampments and the Artesh is 'garrisoning' strategic locations whilst the Basij militia look on unable to clear the protests without risking a confrontation with the Army.
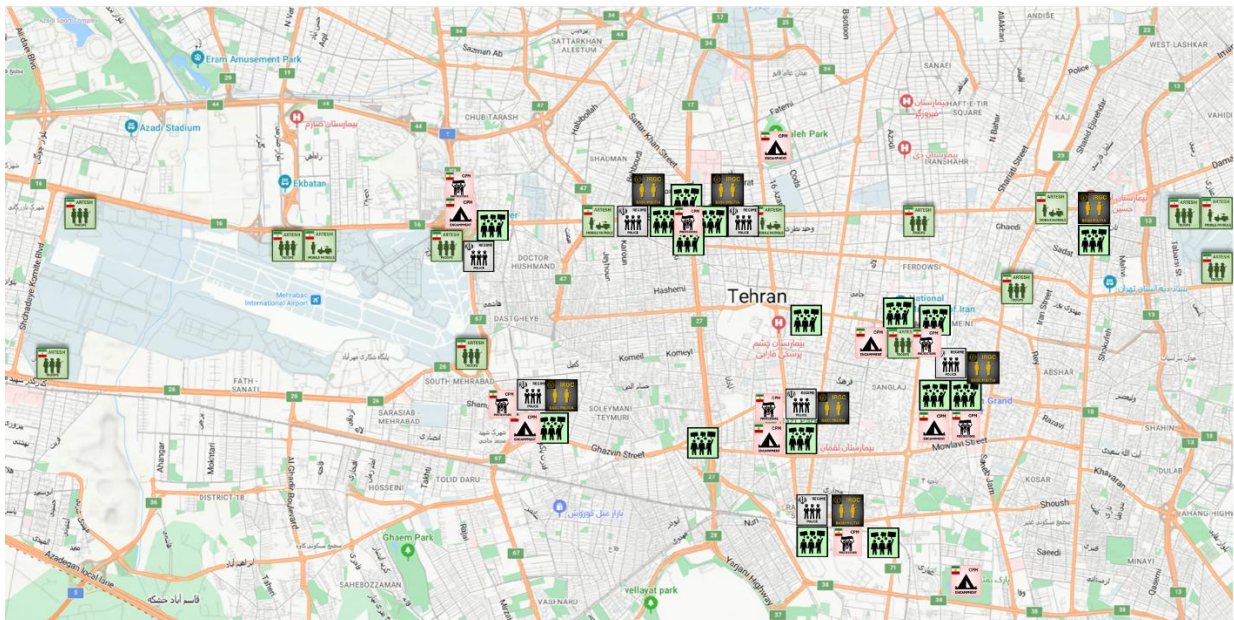
In terms of the 'Decisive Turn or Action' there was no universal consensus with many players stating that there appeared to be no decisive point in the game. However, the most commonly mentioned actions/events were:

Civil Protest Movement's Transition into an Organized Insurgency – This happened in **Turn 1**, when the **Civil Protest Movement (CPM) established a clandestine cell system** with a hierarchical structure. This made them more resilient and harder for the regime to dismantle and probably gave the faction the confidence to launch the national protests in Turn 5.

TURN 1 CIVIL PROTEST MOVEMENT

ARGUMENT (made by the faction)
"Something happens and why"

ACTION	+	EFFECT	+	REASONS (Pros)	−	COUNTER ARGUMENTS (Cons)	=	Chance of Failure
The CPM creates a clandestine cell system		Increase organization efficiency whilst reducing the risk of exposure.		Local protest leaders see the need to organise		Traditional spontaneous movement may hamper ability to create a unified structure		2-5 on 2D6 / 27%
				With a clandestine cell system, the secrecy and hierarchy of the movement will be more resilient				
				Social Media Savvy +1 Initial Advantage				

Game Die Roll: 6

NOTHING TO SEE HERE...
SAVVY CITIZENS TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT THEIR MARCH FOR CHANGE

The Civil Protest Movement's reorganization into a clandestine cell structure is highly successful. The CPM effectively establishes a network of small, compartmentalized cells, each with its own local leadership and secure communication channels. This new structure enhances the movement's **resilience and secrecy**, making it much harder for the regime to infiltrate or dismantle it in one blow. Local leaders are motivated under the new system, and the CPM's social media skills help them communicate discreetly without attracting the regime's attention. **However,** the decentralized, compartmentalized structure also has a drawback: **coordina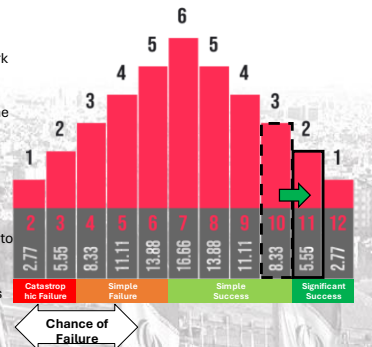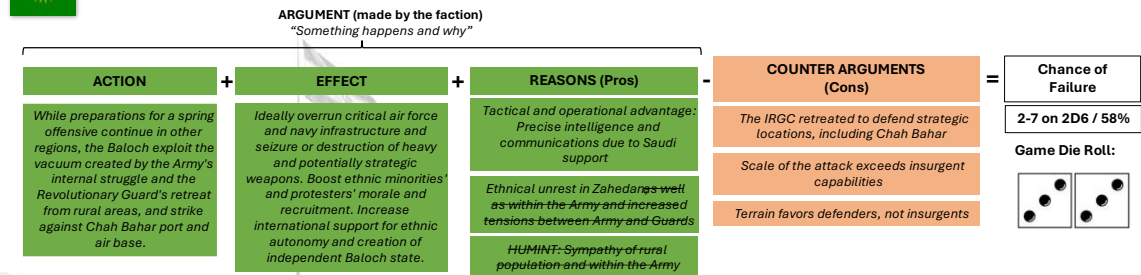ting rapid responses to fast-developing events is now more challenging.** With communication and orders moving through layers of hierarchy, the CPM may struggle to mobilize quickly in response to sudden opportunities or threats. This trade-off will impact their flexibility, even as it strengthens their security. This reorganization nonetheless provides a strong foundation for future coordinated protests and activities across the country, significantly strengthening the CPM's position while presenting some operational limitations.

Chart values: 2.77 | 5.55 | 8.33 | 11.11 | 13.88 | 16.66 | 13.88 | 11.11 | 8.33 | 5.55 | 2.77
Labels: Catastrophic Failure | Simple Failure | Simple Success | Significant Success
Chance of Failure

Insurgents' Failed Attack on a Military Base – This occurred in **Turn 3**, when the Baloch insurgents launched an unsuccessful attack on **Chah Bahar port and airbase**. The IRGC was prepared, and the insurgents suffered heavy losses while failing to inflict significant damage. This set back put the faction into a recovery phase which they were still in when the game ended.

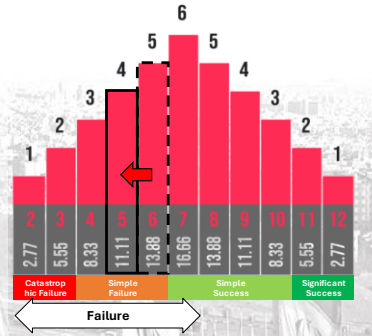# TURN 3 ETHNIC MINORITIES AND REGIONAL INSURGENTS

ARGUMENT (made by the faction)
"Something happens and why"

ACTION	+	EFFECT	+	REASONS (Pros)	−	COUNTER ARGUMENTS (Cons)	=	Chance of Failure
While preparations for a spring offensive continue in other regions, the Baloch exploit the vacuum created by the Army's internal struggle and the Revolutionary Guard's retreat from rural areas, and strike against Chah Bahar port and air base.		Ideally overrun critical air force and navy infrastructure and seizure or destruction of heavy and potentially strategic weapons. Boost ethnic minorities' and protesters' morale and recruitment. Increase international support for ethnic autonomy and creation of independent Baloch state.		Tactical and operational advantage: Precise intelligence and communications due to Saudi support		The IRGC retreated to defend strategic locations, including Chah Bahar		2-7 on 2D6 / 58%
				Ethnical unrest in Zahedan as well as within the Army and increased tensions between Army and Guards		Scale of the attack exceeds insurgent capabilities		
				HUMINT: Sympathy of rural population and within the Army		Terrain favors defenders, not insurgents		

Game Die Roll

BALUCHI BLUNDER AT CHAH BAHAR
Insurgents blow comes at a high cost

The Baloch insurgents, leveraging Saudi-provided intelligence, launched a precision assault on what they identified as weak points at Chah Bahar port and airbase. Using coordinated strikes with rockets and mortars, their attacks caused minor damage to military facilities and light disruption to the port's operations. Unfortunately civilian casualties, unintended yet visible, became a propaganda tool for state media, which condemned the insurgents as reckless and harmful to their own people.
The assault faltered when the insurgents were exposed in open terrain as they massed for the final assault. The lack of cover, combined with the IRGC's prepared defensive positions, led to sufficient losses amongst the attackers to initiate a withdrawal. IRGC follow up sweeps were somewhat successful picking up stragglers but Saudi intel enabled most of the survivors to slip away. Some insurgent units crossed the border into the rugged terrain of Balochistan to lick their wounds.
The failed raid has left the Baloch insurgents severely weakened. While they retain the ability to conduct small-scale guerrilla operations and sabotage actions, the boldness of their assault at Chah Bahar has cost them dearly in manpower and resources. Their leadership may be forced to reconsider future high-profile offensives, opting instead to focus on rebuilding their strength and leveraging their remaining Saudi support for less risky operations. The attack demonstrated their intent to challenge the regime, but it also revealed critical operational vulnerabilities that will take time to address.
However, the evident damage to Chah Bahar, a key communications hub on the sea lanes, has left a lingering sense of unease, with both foreign powers and local communities questioning the regime's ability to ensure long-term stability in its southeastern regions. Meanwhile, ethnic grievances among the Baloch population remain high, threatening to sustain the insurgency despite this setback.

Chart values: 2.77 | 5.55 | 8.33 | 11.11 | 13.88 | 16.66 | 13.88 | 11.11 | 8.33 | 5.55 | 2.77
Labels: Catastrophic Failure | Simple Failure | Simple Success | Significant Success
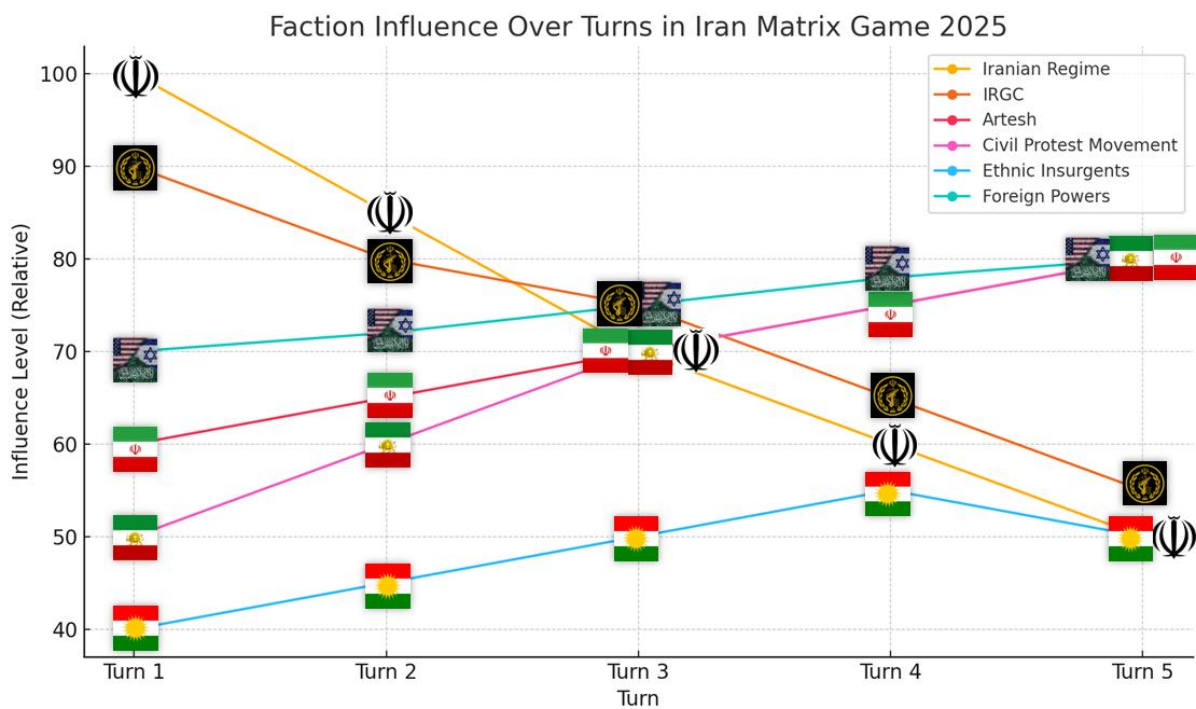**Failure**

SUMMARY

Argument failed from bad die roll due to insufficient Pros

Argument succeeded despite bad die roll due to sufficient Pros

Argument involved violence

TURN 1 — Early Jan to Mid Feb

A COLD WIND FROM THE EAST!
Tehran's pleas for rebuilding aid rebuffed by Beijing

NOTHING TO SEE HERE...
Savvy citizens take steps to protect their march for change

THE GREAT SATAN IS TO BLAME...
IRGC leadership makes concerted effort to implicate USA in Kharg Island explosion

REBELS STRIKE INEFFECTUAL BLOW AT REGIME'S LIFEBLOOD
Reports state militant attacks caused minimal disruption to oil and gas flow

ARTESH SHOWS ITS COMPASSIONATE SIDE IN WINTER AID CAMPAIGN
Military units greeted as saviors by hard hit provinces

ETHNIC BACKLASH OVER STATE AID DELIVERIES
Small protests mar humanitarian efforts in ethnic minority regions

TURN 2 — Mid Feb to Late Mar

UNCLE SAM PICKS UP THE TAB FOR IRANIAN DISSIDENTS
United States uses back channels to fund civil protest movement

PROTEST MOVEMENT GATHERS STEAM
Propaganda efforts target oil workers and soldiers in bid to grow membership

REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS GO ON THE OFFENSIVE
IRGC operations in NW Iran damages ethnic insurgent networks

MUTE RESPONSE FROM WEST ON TERHAN'S LATEST REPRESSION TACTICS
Ethnic minority diaspora protests and human rights groups fail to sway distracted premiers

SAUDI INTELLIGENCE BOLSTERS ETHNIC INSURGENTS
The Kingdom provides support to rebels still reeling from IRGC attacks

ZAKAT TO THE RESCUE
Iranian charity begins at home

TURN 3 — Late Mar to Late Apr

INSURGENTS MAKE PREAPARTIONS FOR SPRING OFFENSIVE
Recruitment and training underway in the fringes of Iran indicate something is brewing ...

ARMY PURGE SOWS DIVISION AND CONFUSION
Troops uncertain about chain of command priorities as officers are removed, transferred or gapped entirely

REGIME'S PRAETORIANS CIRCLE THE WAGONS
IRGC abandon rural sweeps and concentrate on key cities and communication hubs

BALUCHI BLUNDER AT CHAH BAHAR
Insurgents blow comes at a high cost

KHARG CONSTRUCTION COMMENCES
Work begins on lengthy repairs to Kharg island

PROTESTS HELD IN URBAN FRINGES
Modest demonstrations signal step change in counter regime momentum

REGIME'S READINESS UNDER SCRUTINY
Artesh Drills Yield Mixed Results as Challenges Persist

EUROPE WEIGHS IN ON TEHRAN'S RECOVERY
EU Sanctions Chip Away at Iran's Petrochemical Sector

ASSAD SWEPT FROM POWER IN SURPRISING TURN OF EVENTS
Motley collection of rebel groups now face uphill task of rebuilding a country that has warred for over a decade.

TURN 4 — Late Apr to Late May

ATTEMPTS TO SET IRAN'S ARMED FORCES AGAINST ONE ANOTHER
Social Media Campaign Amplifies Divisions Within Iran

REGIME FLOUNDERS POST ASSAD COLLAPSE
Citizens remain unconvinced by promises of 're -investment'

TEL AVIV'S ATTEMPTS TO PRIME INSURGENTS COME TO NOUGHT
Ethnic rebels disorganized and unable to capitalize on Mossad intelligence feeds

ARMY STRIKES FROM THE SKY
Artesh Drones Scour Borderlands for Insurgent Hideouts

Weapons seep past Artesh's Iron Grasp to eager hands
Insurgents high risk strategy pays off against the odds

REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CIVIC STIMULUS FAILS
Widespread dissatisfaction at the Regime's terror troops as promise help doesn't materialize

ETHNIC PROTESTS FAIL TO LAUNCH
Regime forces remain in control as minorities fall short of critical mass in fringe protests

TURN 5 — Late May to Early Jul

ARMY STANDS READY TO SERVE!
Artesh Steps Up Security in an Uncertain Iran

THE PEOPLE TAKE TO THE STREETS
Large and Peaceful Protests Swarm Major Cities and Tehran

REVOLUTIONARY GUARD ATTEMTPS TO CLEAN HOUSE
IRGC's Anti-Corruption Initiative: Limited Success Amid Structural Challenges

A BLIGHTED LAND
Misery for millions as drought hits Iran's parched plains

EUROPE PROVIDES SUCCOUR TO BLIGHTED IRAN
EU organizes a rapid aid delivery drive into Tehran and major cities.

FUELING HOPE, BUT FANNING DOUBTS
Regime's Subsidy Plan Provides Relief Amid Ongoing Unrest

TURN 6 — Early Jul to Mid Aug

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Assessment of relative influence by faction over the course of the game:

Faction Influence Over Turns in Iran Matrix Game 2025

End-of-Game Objective Achievement Assessment by Faction

Iranian Regime

1. **Remain in Power – Partially Achieved.** The regime still exists but has lost significant authority. Protests and economic hardships have eroded its legitimacy, and the Artesh's increasing role in security suggests a shift in power dynamics.

2. **Protect the Territorial Integrity of Iran – Partially Achieved**. Ethnic insurgents did not gain autonomy, but unrest remains widespread, and security forces struggled to maintain full control. Some regions are unstable but not fully lost.

3. **Reduce Foreign Influence – Not Achieved.** EU humanitarian aid was openly distributed in Iran, and foreign powers have supported ethnic insurgents and protesters on multiple turns. The regime failed to prevent foreign actors from influencing internal affairs.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

1. **Ensure a Fundamentalist Regime Governs Iran – Partially Achieved.** While the Islamic Republic still exists, the IRGC's reputation suffered after corruption scandals, and their anti-corruption drive had mixed results. They no longer hold the same ideological dominance.

2. **Secure Pre-Eminent Position Politically, Militarily, and Financially – Not Achieved**. The Artesh grew stronger relative to the IRGC, and public perception of the IRGC declined due to its failures. The IRGC's economic and political influence has been weakened.

3. **Defend Against Foreign Interference – Not Achieved.** Foreign aid, external media influence, and opposition support from outside Iran all continued. The IRGC was unable to counteract these forces effectively.

Artesh (Regular Military)

1. **Preserve National Stability and Sovereignty – Partially Achieved**. The Artesh played a stabilizing role, preventing outright chaos but failing to restore full order. Protests continue, and internal dissent remains a challenge.

2. **Prevent Foreign Intervention – Partially Achieved.** No foreign military intervention occurred, but humanitarian aid and external influence were deeply embedded. The Artesh prevented a total foreign takeover but couldn't fully block outside forces.

3. **Increase Power Relative to the IRGC – Fully Achieved.** The Artesh emerged as a more trusted force than the IRGC. It played a key role in maintaining security and is increasingly positioned as Iran's primary military authority.

Civil Protest Movement (CPM)

1. **Remove the Current Regime – Not Achieved.** Despite mass protests, the regime was not overthrown. However, it is significantly weakened, and unrest remains widespread.

2. **Hold Free and Fair Elections for a New Government – Not Achieved**. No transition to democracy occurred, and no elections were held.

3. **Avoid Bloodshed – Partially Achieved.** The CPM remained nonviolent, but crackdowns and state violence continued. While large-scale massacres were avoided, repression persisted.

Ethnic Minorities & Insurgents

1. **Gain Greater Autonomy or Independence – Not Achieved.** Insurgent groups did not achieve autonomy, and their movements struggled to gain enough momentum.

2. **Have a Friendly Regime in Tehran – Not Achieved.** The central government remained in power, with no major policy shifts in favour of minority groups.

3. **Secure International Support for Ethnically Independent Statelets – Not Achieved.** Foreign support was limited to covert aid; no major diplomatic recognition or backing was achieved.

Foreign Powers (U.S., Israel, EU, Saudi Arabia)

1. **Avoid Destabilizing the Region – Fully Achieved.** Whilst Iran remained unstable, with ongoing protests, military tensions, and economic turmoil, there has been no wider collapse in regional stability as a result of Foreign Power actions.

2. **Prevent Nuclear Proliferation & Direct Military Conflict – Partially Achieved**. There was no nuclear escalation or direct military intervention, but Iran's internal crisis could still lead to future risks.

3. **Foster a Friendly or Neutral Government in Iran – Not Achieved.** The regime survived, and no clear path toward a Western-friendly government emerged.

Summary of Faction Performance

- Biggest Winner (who gained the most influence during the game): Artesh – Gained significant influence, positioning itself as Iran's stabilizing force.
- Biggest Loser (who lost the most influence during the game): IRGC – Lost credibility, political influence, and control over Iran's future.
- The Regime is weakened but still in power.
- Protests continue but failed to topple the government.

- Foreign actors influenced events but did not achieve regime change.
- Ethnic insurgents failed to gain autonomy.

End-of-Game Objective Assessment (Visual Breakdown)

Faction	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
Iranian Regime	🟡 Remain in Power (Partially Achieved)	🟡 Protect Territorial Integrity (Partially Achieved)	🔴 Reduce Foreign Influence (Not Achieved)
IRGC	🟡 Ensure Fundamentalist Rule (Partially Achieved)	🔴 Maintain Political & Economic Dominance (Not Achieved)	🔴 Defend Against Foreign Interference (Not Achieved)
Artesh (Regular Military)	🟡 Preserve National Stability (Partially Achieved)	🟡 Prevent Foreign Intervention (Partially Achieved)	🟢 Increase Power Over IRGC (Fully Achieved)
Civil Protest Movement	🔴 Overthrow the Regime (Not Achieved)	🔴 Hold Free Elections (Not Achieved)	🟡 Avoid Bloodshed (Partially Achieved)
Ethnic Insurgents	🔴 Gain Autonomy (Not Achieved)	🔴 Install Friendly Government in Tehran (Not Achieved)	🔴 Secure International Support (Not Achieved)
Foreign Powers	🟢 Avoid Regional Destabilization (Fully Achieved)	🟡 Prevent Nuclear & Military Escalation (Partially Achieved)	🔴 Foster Friendly Government in Iran (Not Achieved)

Key Updates & Observations:
- Foreign Powers successfully avoided regional war and kept Iran from engaging in open conflict with its neighbours.
- The IRGC suffered major losses, failing to hold onto its influence and facing corruption scandals.
- The Iranian Regime barely survived, maintaining power but failing to reduce foreign interference.
- Artesh remains the strongest internal faction, consolidating power at the expense of the IRGC.
- The Civil Protest Movement grew in influence, but ultimately failed to topple the regime.
- Ethnic Insurgents failed on all fronts, unable to secure autonomy or meaningful foreign backing.

Faction Performance Ranking according to the players

At the end of Turn 5 the players were asked to summarise the factions performance based on their objectives and rank them in order. Their aggregated summary in order of best to worst was:

1. **Artesh (Regular Military)**
   - Achieved significant objectives and maintained a strong position.
   - Effectively managed internal challenges despite initial setbacks.
   - Benefited from the failure of insurgent attacks, which left them in a dominant role.

2. **IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps)**
   - Maintained influence despite internal corruption and factionalism.
   - Had control over propaganda and security but faced growing fragility post-Khamenei.

- Successfully prevented insurgents from making major gains.

3. **Foreign Powers (U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, EU)**
   - Managed to exert significant pressure on Iran without direct military intervention.
   - Played a key role in destabilizing Iran through economic measures and cyber warfare.
   - Did not fully achieve regime change but weakened the government.

4. **Iranian Regime**
   - Survived despite immense pressure but had to rely on shifting between repression and concessions.
   - Struggled with maintaining control amidst internal divisions between the Artesh and IRGC.
   - Unable to decisively suppress opposition movements.

5. **Civil Protest Movement (CPM)**
   - Transitioned into a more organized insurgency, increasing late-game effectiveness.
   - Failed to negotiate a political compromise but remained a persistent challenge to the regime.
   - Struggled with mobilization under martial law but maintained relevance.

6. **Ethnic Minorities & Regional Insurgents**
   - The weakest-performing faction, largely due to failed military actions early on.
   - The premature attack on military bases depleted their ability to act effectively.
   - Unable to capitalize on regime weakness or forge strong alliances.

Inter-Faction Diplomacy, Coordination, and Deception in *Persian Predicament*

By running the game in discord the Inter-faction diplomacy and coordination were captured passively and subsequently interrogated by the game LLM. These negotiations were essential to how the game evolved, but mistrust, hidden agendas, and double-dealing shaped the relationships between factions just as much as cooperation did. The game demonstrated that no faction could succeed alone, but many were willing to say one thing publicly while acting differently behind closed doors. Below is a summary of how inter-factional diplomacy, coordination, and deception played out across the factions.

1. Iranian Regime: Isolated and Ineffective at Diplomacy
- The Regime struggled to unify its own security forces, particularly between the IRGC and Artesh, leading to mixed messaging and uncoordinated responses.
- Attempts to negotiate with the Civil Protest Movement (CPM) were weak, with no credible offers of reform, making diplomacy more of a stalling tactic than a genuine engagement.
- The Regime and IRGC publicly aligned, but behind closed doors, the IRGC was positioning itself to gain more influence, and the two entities rarely acted in concert.
- **Example of Deception**: The Regime signalled openness to foreign aid discussions but then used legal technicalities and logistical excuses to block deliveries and claim plausible deniability.

2. IRGC: Manipulative and Duplicitous
- The IRGC played multiple factions against each other, attempting to gain leverage over both the regime and opposition groups.
- Negotiated with the CPM in secret, offering to hold off on crackdowns in exchange for funding from the US, but was rejected due to a lack of trust.

- Pretended to align with the Regime publicly while undermining it privately, ensuring that if the regime collapsed, the IRGC would remain strong.
- Example of Deception: The IRGC publicly backed a crackdown on protesters but privately suggested to the CPM that they might be able to cooperate if the regime weakened further.

3. Artesh: Hesitant, Divided, and Outmanoeuvred
- The Artesh was caught between loyalty to the regime and skepticism about the IRGC, leading to hesitant and noncommittal diplomacy.
- Avoided direct engagement with the Civil Protest Movement, preferring a neutral posture where possible.
- Communicated with the IRGC about internal security but never fully committed, which weakened both groups' ability to suppress dissent.
- **Example of Deception**: The Artesh assured the regime of loyalty but did little to suppress protests, acting more as a stabilizer than an enforcer.

4. Civil Protest Movement (CPM): Seeking Allies but Distrustful
- The CPM was the most outwardly cooperative faction, engaging both the Ethnic Insurgents and Foreign Powers in discussions about support.
- However, they did not trust the IRGC or Artesh, refusing secret negotiations when the IRGC offered to delay crackdowns in exchange for US funding.
- Attempted to coordinate with Ethnic Insurgents, but strategic differences (violent vs. nonviolent resistance) created friction.
- Example of Deception: The CPM assured foreign powers of their ability to mobilize protests, but failed to deliver on promised mass uprisings in Mashhad and Shiraz.

5. Ethnic Insurgents: Opportunistic but Lacking Cohesion
- The Ethnic Insurgents coordinated with foreign powers and the CPM, but their long-term goals differed (independence vs. reform).
- Accepted covert military aid from Saudi Arabia while discussing potential collaboration with the CPM.
- Discussed stoking tensions with the Afghan Taliban as a distraction for the regime, a risky but creative play.
- **Example of Deception**: The Insurgents claimed to the CPM that they only wanted autonomy, but privately discussed pushing for full independence if the situation worsened.

6. Foreign Powers: Divided, Hesitant, and Uncommitted
- The US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia had different priorities, leading to delayed or limited support.
- The US avoided direct intervention, preferring covert funding that was sometimes blocked by factional infighting.
- Israel considered covert operations but did not fully commit to military action.
- Saudi Arabia funnelled weapons to Ethnic Insurgents while publicly downplaying involvement.
- **Example of Deception:** The US claimed their funding was strictly non-violent, but some money still found its way to insurgents.

Final Takeaways on Diplomacy & Deception

Every faction engaged in some level of deception, either misrepresenting intentions or making promises they didn't fully keep. The IRGC was the most manipulative, attempting to play all sides but failing to secure lasting trust. The CPM and Insurgents had opportunities to work

together more closely but hesitated, limiting their overall effectiveness. The Foreign Powers ensured prolonged instability but failed to coordinate a decisive shift. The result was a fragmented struggle with no outright victors, ensuring continued unrest in Iran.

CRITICAL FACTORS IN IRANIAN STABILITY & INSTABILITY: Policy Implications for Western Think Tanks

Persian Predicament highlighted key dynamics that influence Iranian stability and instability, offering valuable insights into how Western policymakers should approach Iran's internal power struggles, economic vulnerabilities, and geopolitical positioning. Below is an analysis of the critical factors shaping Iran's future and how Western strategies should adapt to them.

Observation 1: Factionalism is a Structural Weakness of the Iranian State

One of the most critical insights for Western policymakers and think tanks emerging from *Persian Predicament* is that Iran's internal factionalism is not just a political reality but a fundamental structural weakness. The Iranian state is not a monolithic entity; it is deeply fractured along ideological, institutional, and economic lines. These internal divisions—particularly between the Iranian Regime, the IRGC, the Artesh, and the broader society—create persistent vulnerabilities that can be leveraged in strategic planning.

One of the defining power struggles in the game was the ongoing tension between the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Artesh (Regular Military). The IRGC operates as a parallel military structure, with its own command chain, economic interests, and political influence. It is deeply embedded in Iran's power structure but prioritizes ideological loyalty over professionalism. The Artesh, in contrast, is a conventional military force tasked with border defense but has historically been marginalized in decision-making. While some factions within the Artesh remain loyal to the Supreme Leader, others are more sympathetic to popular grievances. The game highlighted how these divisions create command-and-control issues, particularly in moments of crisis. The two forces compete rather than cooperate, weakening Iran's ability to respond to internal and external threats cohesively.

The Iranian government relies on a delicate balance between repression and strategic concessions to maintain control. However, this balancing act is inherently unstable. When the regime applies brute force (e.g., the 2022 crackdown on protests), it alienates segments of the population and strengthens opposition groups. When it offers concessions (e.g., economic relief, limited political reforms), it emboldens opposition movements, which see compromise as a sign of weakness. This cycle, reflected in the game's dynamics, suggests that Iran's leadership is reactive rather than proactive, making governance crisis-driven rather than strategic.

Iran's ethnic minorities and regional insurgents represent another persistent weakness in the state's cohesion. The Kurdish, Baluchi, and Ahwazi separatists have long-standing grievances against Tehran and have demonstrated resilience despite heavy crackdowns. While insurgents in the game struggled militarily, their success in securing a key oil facility highlighted the strategic vulnerabilities of Iran's resource infrastructure. The regime's inability to fully suppress these movements in the game reflects real-world limitations on Iran's military reach and counterinsurgency effectiveness, particularly in border regions.

Another key takeaway is that factionalism extends beyond politics and security—it permeates Iran's economic structure. The IRGC controls vast economic networks, including oil revenues, smuggling routes, and key industries. This allows it to operate independently of the civilian government, creating financial distortions and limiting the regime's ability to implement national economic policies. The civilian government and Artesh have far less economic autonomy, making them vulnerable to financial crises, as seen in the game's economic collapse following cyberattacks and oil infrastructure disruptions. This dynamic suggests that economic sanctions and cyber operations targeting IRGC-controlled assets may be more effective than

blanket sanctions, as the regime itself often struggles to access and distribute resources equitably.

Key Factors Driving Instability
- Competing power centres (Regime, IRGC, Artesh) lead to disjointed security policies and internal power struggles.
- The IRGC and Artesh are rivals rather than allies, with tensions increasing during national crises.
- The Regime relies on security forces for survival, but neither fully trusts nor controls them.

Western Policy Considerations

- **Exploit factional divides:** Policies should widen existing gaps between the Regime, IRGC, and Artesh, reducing their ability to act as a unified front.
- **Engagement with Artesh:** The Artesh is more institutionally stable than the IRGC and may be a long-term engagement target if regime shifts occur.
- **Avoid forcing unity through external pressure:** Overt military or economic pressure can drive security forces to unite, making Iran more resilient rather than weaker.

Observation 2: Iran's Stability is Highly Dependent on Economic Resilience

Persian Predicament demonstrated that Iran's long-term stability is intrinsically tied to its economic resilience. While the regime has survived multiple crises, ranging from domestic protests to foreign military confrontations, it is the economy, rather than political ideology or military strength, that ultimately determines Iran's ability to govern effectively.

The game demonstrated that economic crises serve as accelerants for political instability, exacerbating factionalism, fuelling opposition movements, and eroding state legitimacy. Without a stable economy, Iran struggles to maintain public support, finance its military apparatus, and project power regionally.

The game reinforced that widespread economic instability is the most effective catalyst for mass protests and opposition movements. The failure of the Iranian Regime to secure Chinese financial support early in the game left the government unable to stabilize oil exports, worsening public sentiment. The Civil Protest Movement gained momentum primarily in response to economic hardship, rather than ideological opposition to the theocratic state. The Artesh hesitated to support the regime fully, fearing that prolonged economic suffering would erode their own influence and legitimacy. Ethnic insurgencies took advantage of economic distress by targeting critical energy infrastructure, further straining government resources.

This mirrors real-world patterns: Iran's largest uprisings (1999, 2009, 2017, 2019, 2022) have been driven by economic grievances rather than purely political demands. Economic deterioration forces factions within Iran to take sides, making it a crucial factor in shaping both stability and potential regime change.

Despite overwhelming economic challenges, the Iranian Regime demonstrated adaptability, alternating between repression and strategic concessions to defuse dissent. When economic pressure peaked, the regime offered small-scale economic relief measures, maintaining enough loyalty to prevent total collapse. The regime's ability to shift blame—whether toward foreign sanctions or internal scapegoats—helped maintain some level of control. The IRGC's control over black-market trade routes allowed them to withstand economic hardship better than other factions, ensuring their continued dominance.

This highlights a key takeaway; whilst economic collapse fuels instability, the regime has developed survival mechanisms, including financial patronage, repression, and propaganda, to weather crises. Western policymakers should not assume that economic hardship alone will lead to regime overthrow, it must be paired with other forms of pressure.

Key Factors Driving Instability

- Sanctions and economic mismanagement are the most effective drivers of public dissatisfaction.

- The IRGC's control of key industries leads to inefficiencies and corruption, harming national economic stability.

- Middle-class urban populations are most sensitive to economic decline, making them likely drivers of protest movements.

Western Policy Considerations

- **Sanctions should target economic chokepoints:** Specifically, those uniquely controlled by the IRGC rather than broad-based restrictions that could be offset by China or Russia.

- **Amplify the economic grievances narrative:** Western information campaigns should highlight regime mismanagement and corruption, reinforcing internal dissatisfaction.

- **Sanctions must be paired with humanitarian outreach:** To prevent backlash against the West, targeted economic pressure should be balanced with visible humanitarian aid initiatives.

Observation 3: Civil Unrest is Sustained but Lacks a Cohesive Opposition Movement

Persian Predicament highlighted that while civil unrest in Iran can persist over long periods, it often fails to achieve meaningful political change due to the absence of a cohesive and unified opposition movement. The fragmentation of opposition groups—whether along ideological, ethnic, or regional lines—severely limits their ability to challenge the regime effectively. This structural weakness of Iran's opposition underscores the regime's ability to survive prolonged dissent, provided it can exploit divisions and suppress collective action.

The Civil Protest Movement (CPM), while widespread, suffered from disorganization and competing priorities, making it difficult to mount a unified challenge to the regime. Decentralized Leadership: While decentralization helped the CPM evade crackdowns, it also hindered its ability to coordinate nationwide actions. Conflicting Strategies: The movement was torn between nonviolent resistance and calls for more aggressive action, creating rifts within its ranks. This indecision limited the effectiveness of their protests and sit-ins. Limited Connection to Other Groups: Despite shared grievances, the CPM struggled to build strong alliances with ethnic insurgents or elements of the Artesh, both of whom could have bolstered their position. This reflects a broader issue in Iran's opposition landscape: a lack of strategic unity prevents movements from transitioning from protest to meaningful reform or revolution.

The Ethnic Minorities and Regional Insurgents represented a key source of opposition to the regime but operated in isolation from the broader civil unrest. Kurdish, Baluchi, and Ahwazi groups focused primarily on regional autonomy or independence, rather than aligning with national opposition movements like the CPM. Their regional focus limited their ability to threaten the regime's control over urban centers, which remain the political and economic hubs of Iran. In the game, the insurgents' failed coordination with the CPM and other opposition groups weakened their ability to sustain momentum, despite successes like capturing an oil

facility. This highlights a persistent dynamic in Iran: ethnic insurgencies often act as localized movements, lacking the national scope or alliances necessary to drive systemic change.

The Artesh (Regular Military), while more sympathetic to public grievances than the IRGC, played a passive role throughout much of the game. Despite internal tensions with the IRGC, the Artesh avoided direct intervention, prioritizing national stability over public dissent. This neutrality created a stalemate, where neither the regime nor the opposition could decisively tip the balance of power. The Artesh's hesitation to align with opposition movements reflected fears of instability and a lack of trust in the CPM's ability to govern effectively. This suggests that unless the Artesh sees a viable alternative leadership, it is unlikely to actively support regime change. Opposition groups must work to win the trust of the military if they hope to create a united front.

Another critical weakness in the opposition movement was the absence of a shared vision for Iran's future. The CPM's focus on removing the regime failed to address what would replace it, leaving many Iranians uncertain about the consequences of supporting the protests. Ethnic insurgents, meanwhile, prioritized autonomy over national unity, further alienating them from urban protestors. In the game, foreign powers hesitated to provide significant support, fearing that the fragmented opposition would lead to chaos rather than a stable transition. This lack of coherence prevented the opposition from presenting itself as a credible alternative, allowing the regime to maintain the loyalty of key constituencies, including the Artesh and rural communities.

Key Factors Driving Instability

- Mass protests alone have been insufficient to cause regime collapse due to a lack of central leadership.

- Reformists and insurgents lack coordination, leading to fragmented resistance efforts.

- Security forces remain loyal to the state unless personal or institutional survival is threatened.

Western Policy Considerations

- **Encourage opposition unity:** Support must go toward building cohesion among civil protest groups, labour unions, and ethnic insurgents to create a stronger opposition front.
- **Invest in digital communications infrastructure:** Providing secure communication tools to opposition groups can increase strategic coordination despite regime censorship.
- **Support defections among security forces:** If unrest intensifies, Western intelligence efforts should identify Artesh and IRGC figures who may be open to defection under the right conditions.

Observation 4: The Regime is Weak but Adaptive to Crises

One of the clearest insights from *Persian Predicament* is that the Iranian regime is structurally weak but highly adaptive in the face of crises. While economic collapse, civil unrest, and military confrontations all threatened its survival, the regime consistently found ways to mitigate threats, shift tactics, and maintain control, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Rather than relying solely on brute force, the regime strategically alternated between repression and concessions, exploited factionalism among its rivals, and leveraged propaganda to maintain legitimacy. While Western policymakers often assume that escalating crises will lead to regime collapse, the game demonstrated that Iran's leadership has developed survival mechanisms that allow it to weather instability and remain in power.

A major theme in the game was how the regime constantly adjusted its response to different crises, balancing force with calculated leniency. Instead of a full-scale purge of the opposition, the regime allowed controlled dissent in certain areas while targeting key organizers and militants. When economic turmoil worsened due to sanctions and world events, the regime redirected limited resources to provide selective relief, preventing full-scale economic revolt. This mirrors real-world Iranian strategies. The government has repeatedly shown that when faced with significant unrest (e.g., the 2019 fuel protests, the 2022 Mahsa Amini protests), it does not always escalate repression indefinitely. Instead, it makes tactical adjustments—alternating between crackdowns and negotiations—to outlast its opponents.

Despite internal divisions, the regime maintained cohesion because of the Supreme Leader's central role in balancing factions. Khamenei avoided picking clear winners between the IRGC and Artesh, ensuring that both forces remained dependent on his authority rather than turning against him. The game highlighted that as long as the Supreme Leader remains in control, the system can adapt, even if individual factions struggle. However, players recognized that Khamenei's death could trigger a major succession crisis, as there is no clear replacement with the same unifying power. This insight reinforces that Iran's political system is inherently unstable in the long run, but in the short term, the Supreme Leader acts as a stabilizing force, keeping rival factions in check and preventing an outright power struggle.

Another key tactic the regime used in the game was its ability to divide and weaken opposition movements, preventing them from uniting against the state. The Civil Protest Movement struggled to expand beyond major cities, largely because the regime used a mix of targeted repression and limited economic incentives to split moderates from radicals. Ethnic minorities and insurgents remained isolated, as the regime's propaganda successfully painted them as separatists rather than allies of the broader opposition. The Artesh's neutrality was preserved because the regime did not push it into a direct confrontation with protestors, preventing the military from shifting its loyalty. This demonstrates that while Iran's internal opposition is persistent, the regime has mastered the art of ensuring that no single movement gains enough strength to overthrow it.

The game revealed that while the IRGC is the regime's strongest pillar of support, it is also its greatest internal threat. The IRGC's growing autonomy and independent financial networks mean it could, in theory, function without the civilian government. Tensions between the IRGC and the Artesh created friction within the regime's security apparatus, forcing the Supreme Leader to act as a mediator. The game reinforced the idea that in a future crisis, the IRGC could potentially seize power, either by sidelining the civilian government or by controlling the succession process after Khamenei's death. This presents both a risk and an opportunity for Western policymakers. A weaker civilian regime with a dominant IRGC may be even more aggressive regionally, prioritizing military expansion and proxy conflicts over governance. However, exploiting divisions between the IRGC and civilian leadership could be a strategic way to destabilize the regime from within.

Key Factors Driving Stability

- **The government has mastered crisis survival tactics, including fuel subsidies, controlled media, and political purges.**

- **Despite economic struggles, regime elites maintain wealth through black-market operations and trade with non-Western states.**

- **Iran has survived multiple waves of protests without systemic collapse.**

Western Policy Considerations

- **Prepare for prolonged attrition rather than sudden collapse:** Western policies should be structured for long-term pressure, rather than expecting quick change.
- **Target illicit revenue streams:** Secondary sanctions should focus on black-market oil exports and IRGC-linked smuggling networks that sustain regime elites.
- **Highlight regime adaptability in strategic planning:** Policymakers should not assume Iran is at a breaking point—the state has repeatedly demonstrated an ability to recalibrate under stress.

Prospects for Violent Overthrow, Sponsored Coups, and Democratic Transition: A Summary of Potential Outcomes

Based on the insights in the game the following scenarios are proposed regarding transition from the current regime to a new order.

1. Violent Overthrow of the Regime

This is an unlikely outcome without significant Military or Security Force defections. Mass protests alone were insufficient to cause a collapse; despite widespread unrest, the regime maintained control through targeted crackdowns. The Civil Protest Movement (CPM) lacked centralized leadership, limiting its ability to sustain mass mobilization beyond urban centres. Security forces (IRGC, Artesh, and police) remained intact, preventing mass uprisings from achieving decisive momentum.

2. Military Coup Scenarios: Artesh as the Kingmaker?
- **Soft Coup (Probable):** The Artesh increases its autonomy, secures infrastructure, and distances itself from the regime, essentially governing without a formal overthrow.
- **Hard Coup (Possible):** If the regime collapses internally, the Artesh could move to take direct control, pushing the IRGC out.
- **Foreign-backed coup (Highly unlikely):** Iranian nationalism and security force cohesion make overt or attributable external sponsorship highly risky.

3. Democratic Transition: Long-Term but Unstable

Even in collapse scenarios, democratic transition is unlikely to be immediate. Iran's security state would resist full democratization, instead transitioning to a controlled political shift. Reformist movements require sustained institutional backing, without it, any transition could lead to a military or technocratic government rather than a liberal democracy.
Western policymakers should support gradual democratization by strengthening civil institutions, opposition networks, and alternative governance structures.

Strategic Recommendations for Western Policy

- **Exploit Factional Divisions:** Widen gaps between the IRGC, Artesh, and civilian government while promoting the Artesh as a stabilizing force.
- **Strengthen Opposition Coordination:** Encourage unity between urban reformists and rural insurgents to form a more viable opposition.
- **Target Economic Weaknesses:** Amplify sanctions and highlight regime corruption while providing humanitarian aid to build trust with the Iranian populace.
- **Coordinate International Actions:** Avoid fragmented foreign policies and ensure that pressure strategies align across allied nations.
- **Plan for Post-Regime Scenarios:** A military-led transition or controlled political shift is more likely than full democratic transition—policy should account for these realities.

Designing Future Matrix Games on Iran & Regional Stability

To explore the critical factors influencing Iranian stability and Western policy responses, future Matrix Games on Iran and the region should be structured to test power dynamics, economic resilience, civil unrest, and foreign influence. Below are key design recommendations for structuring these games effectively.

Faction Structure: Refining Playable Actors

To better simulate Iran's internal and external tensions, the following **core factions** should be included:

Internal Factions:

1. **Iranian Regime** – Represents the **supreme leadership, clerics, and civilian bureaucracy**.

2. **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)** – Controls paramilitary forces, economic sectors, and external proxy forces.

3. **Artesh (Regular Military)** – The conventional military with growing autonomy from the regime and IRGC.

4. **Civil Protest Movement (CPM)** – Reformists, opposition groups, and political activists seeking systemic change.

5. **Ethnic Insurgents** – Baluch, Kurdish, Ahvazi, and Azeri movements seeking regional autonomy.

External Factions:

6. **Foreign Powers (US/EU/Allies)** – Western actors influencing Iran via economic, diplomatic, and covert actions.

7. **China & Russia** – Strategic partners with vested interests in Iran's economic and military survival.

8. **Saudi Arabia & Gulf Allies** – Regional adversaries influencing Iranian opposition and insurgents.

9. **Non-State Proxies (Hezbollah, Iraqi Militias, Houthis)** – Iran's external tools for projecting influence and countering regional opponents.

Each faction should have distinct objectives, resources, and limitations, ensuring realistic decision-making constraints.

Game Objectives: Key Themes to Explore

Future games should be goal-oriented, testing different pathways to Iranian stability or transformation. Key objectives include:

- **Regime Survival vs. Transition:** Can the **Iranian leadership maintain control**, or will political and economic crises lead to internal fractures?
- **Military Power Struggles:** How do **tensions between the Artesh and IRGC** shape the country's trajectory?
- **Economic Resilience vs. Sanctions Impact:** Can the Iranian economy **withstand long-term sanctions**, or does foreign pressure accelerate internal dissent?
- **Foreign Influence & Regional Escalation:** How do **external actors balance supporting regime change vs. maintaining stability?**

- **Democratic Transition vs. Controlled Political Shift:** If the regime weakens, does Iran **transition to democracy, or does the military step in to stabilize?**

Each game scenario should force **players to navigate crises, make trade-offs, and deal with unintended consequences.**

Turn Structure & Crisis Triggers

- **Longer Turn Timeline**: Each turn represents a longer period of time, perhaps 3-6 months, allowing for long-term planning & strategic adjustments.
- **Crisis Phases**: Using a panel of experts in the region generate event triggers (economic shock, foreign intervention, major protest waves) to force reactive decision-making in addition to the factional manoeuvring.
- **Negotiation Windows**: Encourage structured negotiations between factions before finalizing moves. Consider standardising this process for data capture purposes to get to the heart of the proposition, negotiation, compromise and exchange.
- **Consider variations on the starting scenario**: Playing on the idea of potential crisis events to begin the tipping of the country into destabilisation. More examples below.

Scenario Variations: Exploring Different Futures

Scenario 1: Slow Regime Decline – The **economy continues to deteriorate**, leading to **civil unrest and factional infighting**. This is what *Persian Predicament* covered.

Scenario 2: Coup and Military Takeover: In this scenario the Artesh are given the secret objective of seizing power to stabilize the country. This will help explore how they position themselves to do this, which factions they solicit for support and how they proceed without announcing their intentions to the IRGC or the Regime.

Scenario 3: Proxy War Escalation: In this scenario Iran's regional militias increase attacks, leading to Western and Gulf State intervention in the region. This will challenge Iran externally at the same time as it deals with its internal problems.

Scenario 4: Western-Coordinated Pressure: In this scenario the West takes a more robust approach to dealing with the Regime and has the objectives to use methods sanctions, cyber warfare, and opposition funding to significantly weaken the regime. This may set the stage for internal factions to revolt, or it could explore them banding together and moving more into Russia/China's orbit. .

Scenario 5: Sudden Leadership Collapse: In this scenario the game starts with the death of the Supreme Leader's and a natural power vacuum. This will explore how factions move rapidly to stake their claim for increased influence or prioritise stability and order rather than advancement.

Each scenario should test different stress points in Iranian stability and force players to consider plausible responses.

Conclusion: Future Game Refinements

By refining faction interactions, economic stress models, and internal security dynamics, future Matrix Games can provide deeper insights into Iran's stability and regional influence. Scenarios should force players to explore realistic tensions, strategic trade-offs, and unintended consequences, making the game a valuable tool for policymakers and analysts

UTILIZING A LARGE LANGUAGE MODEL AS A FACILITATOR'S ASSISTANT

Running a Matrix Game can be a daunting proposition for an inexperienced facilitator. The unstructured nature of matrix games means that reference to a written ruleset is not possible and the facilitator has significant latitude in directing how the game progresses. Generative AI provides the opportunity to support a human facilitator by taking on some of the simpler, procedural aspects of Matrix Game design and facilitation. The integration of AI language models (LLMs) can enhance game facilitation, streamline argument resolution, and provide detailed analysis of game events from a large data set. However, the experience of using an LLM in a live, evolving game also reveals challenges that must be addressed for optimal performance. This chapter examines best practices for utilizing an LLM in a Matrix Game, drawing from real gameplay experience, including instances where the AI encountered difficulties and required human guidance to improve.

Persian Predicament used [ChatGPT - Matrix Game Master](#)*,* a dedicated bot built to specifically facilitate Matrix Gaming. As part of the pre-build before the game started the LLM was provided with Matrix Game instructions and the game briefing documents. The chat history from the *Persian Predicament* contained a total of 270,381 words exchanged between the user and the LLM. Of this, the LLM contributed approximately 162,228 words (60%), while the user contributed 108,153 words (40%). This reflects the LLM's role in adjudication, facilitation, and structured responses, while the user's contributions primarily shaped the game's direction, arguments, and strategic decisions. The high level of interaction demonstrates a deeply engaged dialogue, with the LLM assisting in game mechanics, narrative development, and post-game analysis.

The Role of an LLM in a Matrix Game

An LLM can serve multiple functions within a Matrix Game, including:

- Pre and post-game material production such as faction and scenario narratives and drafting reports.

- Tracking faction Actions and Arguments by keeping a structured record of all moves, pros, cons, and outcomes to ensure logical continuity.

- Providing real-time adjudication support by evaluating the plausibility of arguments and weighing pros and cons fairly.

- Generating narrative summaries by producing imitation media reports, public perception updates, and game-world developments in a consistent manner.

- Analyzing trends and influence shifts by mapping out faction power changes, population sentiment, and geopolitical shifts based on turn outcomes.

- Generating potential arguments for the fate player for the facilitator to consider.

- Facilitating debate by offering a structured presentation of competing claims while allowing human facilitators to make the final judgment.

However, while an LLM can automate much of the facilitation workload, it requires proper oversight and guidance to function effectively. Throughout *Persian Predicament* the human facilitator encountered issues using the LLM despite the specific build for a Matrix Game.

Challenges Encountered and Lessons Learned

1. Maintaining Consistency Across Turns. One of the most critical issues observed was inconsistency in tracking faction influence and population sentiment across multiple turns. For example, early assessments of faction influence were sometimes misaligned with later conclusions, requiring manual correction after reviewing previous records.

Lesson: Always reference past turns before making new judgments. The <u>LLM must be prompted to</u> explicitly check prior assessments before producing updates.

2. Fact-Checking Against Game Records. There were instances where the LLM generated conclusions that did not fully align with established game events, particularly when it misremembered details or extrapolated too far from prior discussions. This issue was exacerbated when adjudicating regime actions, such as economic policies and oil production.

Lesson: Before finalizing any narrative, the <u>LLM must be prompted to</u> cross-check its summary with all recorded faction actions and dice outcomes to ensure accuracy. The facilitator should prompt the LLM to explicitly reference uploaded files containing turn summaries.

3. Handling Complex Multi-Factor Arguments. Matrix Games often feature arguments that involve multiple interrelated effects, such as economic crises influencing military decisions or civil unrest affecting diplomatic relations. The LLM sometimes struggled to properly break down multi-layered arguments and required human intervention to clarify key points.

Lesson: Arguments should be parsed into distinct components, action, effect, and reasoning, to ensure each element is adjudicated fairly. The <u>LLM should be trained</u> to flag any overly complex arguments for facilitator review.

4. LLM Agreeableness Issue
The AI-assisted facilitation occasionally defaulted to human adjudication when deeper Socratic questioning was needed, leading to a less rigorous challenge for players. In some cases, arguments were accepted without sufficient scrutiny, reducing the depth of strategic discourse.

Lesson: <u>The LLM should be prompted</u> to critically engage with player arguments, challenging assumptions and requiring more detailed justifications. Facilitators should encourage the AI to probe inconsistencies and push for stronger reasoning to enhance the experience.

5. LLM Recency Bias. Players noted that the AI facilitator displayed tendencies toward recency bias, where newer arguments were sometimes given disproportionate weight over established game facts.

Lesson: <u>The LLM should be prompted</u> to review the entire game history of "established facts" before coming to an adjudication and make explicit reference to established facts when making

6. Adapting to Changing Player Strategies. Players in a Matrix Game continuously adapt their strategies based on outcomes, meaning the AI must track shifting priorities. There were cases where faction strategies evolved in response to failed actions, yet the LLM did not always factor in these changes when generating influence assessments.

Lesson: The <u>LLM should be prompted</u> to assess how each turn's results influence faction behaviour moving forward. Facilitators should ask the AI to explicitly reference past failures and successes when predicting next moves.

7. Ensuring Logical Argument Adjudication. When weighing the strength of arguments, the LLM initially struggled to rank pros and cons effectively. It sometimes introduced its own reasoning rather than strictly adhering to what players had provided. After human correction,

the process improved significantly by ensuring only player-provided arguments were considered.

Lesson: The LLM should not invent or modify arguments. It should only rank and evaluate arguments provided by players. Facilitators should instruct it to strictly adhere to the recorded argument structure.

8. Maintaining Narrative Coherence. The AI-generated media reports were a useful feature but occasionally failed to fully reflect all major events in a turn. For example, an early draft of a turn summary omitted the effects of a severe drought, requiring manual revision.

Lesson: The LLM should be explicitly tasked with cross-referencing all major faction actions before finalizing a summary. A checklist approach can ensure no key events are overlooked.

Best Practices for Using an LLM in a Matrix Game

1. Structured Turn Processing

Facilitators should ensure the LLM follows a structured workflow for each turn:

- Retrieve all previous turns data.

- Review all current turn actions, arguments, and adjudications.

- Process faction influence changes and population sentiment shifts.

- Generate media narratives and analysis.

- Cross-check against prior records before finalizing outputs.

2. Fact-Checking and Human Oversight

- The LLM should not be relied upon as an infallible record-keeper. Facilitators must verify its summaries against primary game records.

- Players should be encouraged to challenge AI-generated conclusions if discrepancies arise.

3. Handling Argument Complexity

- The LLM should be prompted to break down complex arguments into separate components to ensure fair adjudication.

- If an argument is too multi-layered, the facilitator should intervene to ensure clarity before the LLM processes it.

4. Tracking Influence and Sentiment with Precision

- Influence and sentiment should not be adjusted arbitrarily. The AI should be required to justify changes explicitly by referencing game events.

- Facilitators should maintain a structured influence/sentiment tracker that the LLM updates based on objective criteria.

5. Improving Narrative Generation

- The LLM should be given a structured format for news reports, ensuring it covers all major developments from a turn.

- A checklist should be used to confirm that all key faction actions are reflected in the final narrative.

Conclusion: The LLM as a Matrix Game Tool

An LLM can be an invaluable tool for novice Matrix Game facilitation, **but it is not a substitute for human judgment**. Its strengths lie in organization, structured reasoning, and rapid processing of game data, while its weaknesses include occasional factual inconsistencies and difficulty adapting to evolving game states without explicit prompting. By following best practices—ensuring strict adherence to game records, structuring adjudication logically, and maintaining human oversight—facilitators can harness the full potential of an LLM while avoiding its pitfalls. Used correctly, AI assistance can greatly enhance the flow and depth of a Matrix Game, providing richer narratives and a more immersive experience for players.

ADVANTAGES OF RUNNING A MATRIX GAME ON DISCORD ASYNCHRONOUSLY

Persian Predicament ran for a total of 49 active days, excluding a 9-day break for Christmas. Over the course of five turns, the average time taken per turn was approximately 9.8 days.

DISCORD SET UP
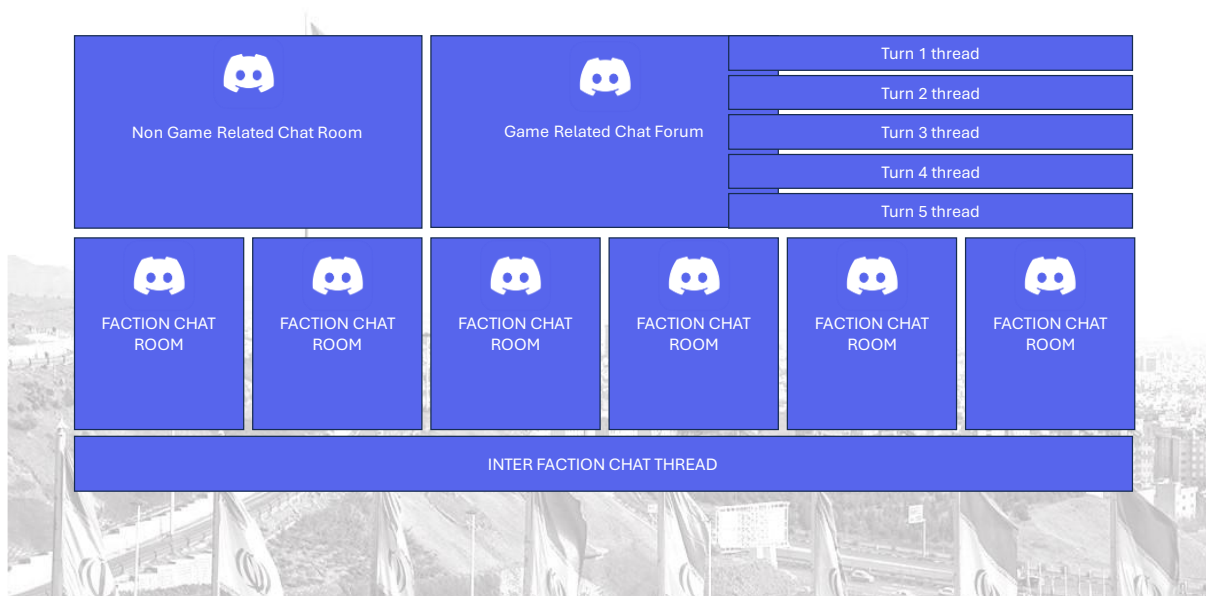
1. Asynchronous Play Enables Deep Strategy. Players can take their time to think through actions, arguments, and counterarguments before submitting them. Encourages more detailed and well-reasoned arguments rather than rushed decision-making. Facilitates complex geopolitical or strategic scenarios where long-term planning is necessary.

2. Accessibility and Global Participation. Players from different time zones can participate without needing to coordinate a single session. Allows a diverse range of players, including experts, to engage without travel constraints.

3. Detailed Documentation and Record-Keeping. Discord automatically logs all game discussions, actions, arguments, adjudications, and dice rolls. This makes it much easier for players and the facilitator to reference previous turns and decisions and enables post-game analysis (especially by AI) and learning. During *Persian Predicament* a total of **328,310 words** were recorded in the chats. However, in some cases players conducted virtual verbal meetings to decide their strategy for the turn which was therefore not captured and could create a hole in the subsequent analysis.

4. AI and Automation Support. Digital systems enable integration with AI or bots for adjudication, dice rolling, and sentiment tracking. LLMs can assist facilitators in drafting narratives, tracking faction influence, and resolving disputes.

5. More Time for Facilitators to Handle Adjudication. The facilitator (or a team) has more time to evaluate arguments, collect input from other players, and ensure fair adjudication. This reduces the pressure of on-the-spot decisions compared to a live session.

6. Encourages Rich Roleplaying and Thematic Engagement. Players have time to craft in-depth roleplaying responses, media narratives, and factional propaganda. Can lead to more immersive and engaging storytelling.

Disadvantages of Running a Matrix Game on Discord Over Several Weeks

1. Slow Pace Can Reduce Engagement. Some players may lose interest over time, especially if their faction has a passive or weakened role. Long gaps between turns may cause players to forget details, requiring constant re-engagement. Momentum can slow down if key players delay their actions or responses.

2. Increased Administrative Burden on Facilitators. The facilitator must track arguments, dice rolls, influence changes, and player activity over an extended period. Requires careful management to avoid delays, misunderstandings, or inconsistencies.

3. Risk of Player Dropout. Some players may lose motivation or become inactive, especially if real-life commitments interfere. Replacement players may struggle to catch up with the game's complex history.

4. Complexity in Managing Discord Channels and Threads. If not well-organized, discussions can become cluttered and difficult to navigate. Important arguments or counterarguments might get lost in general discussions. Requires structured channels for each faction, adjudication, media, and general discussion.

5. Harder to Generate Immediate Discussion and Debate. Unlike live sessions, players don't engage in real-time discussions, which can reduce the dynamic flow of debate. Discussions might feel more like posting statements rather than active back-and-forth exchanges.

6. Dependence on Digital Communication Tools. Requires stable internet access and familiarity with Discord. Some players may struggle with written communication, leading to misunderstandings.

Conclusion: Is a Discord-Based Matrix Game Worth It?

A Discord-based, long-term Matrix Game is an excellent format for deep strategic play, accessibility, and immersive storytelling but requires careful management to maintain engagement and pace. The facilitator's role becomes even more critical in ensuring smooth gameplay, handling delays, and keeping discussions structured.

This format is ideal for highly strategic geopolitical or military simulations where players benefit from extended time to craft thoughtful arguments. However, it may not be suitable for high-energy, fast-paced scenarios where real-time discussion and quick decision-making are essential.

LESSONS FOR FIGHT CLUB INTERNATIONAL (FCI) FOR FUTURE MATRIX GAMES

Based on the 'Game Over Summary' and player feedback, here are the key recommendations for improving future Matrix Games, both in game mechanics and facilitation:

1. **Maintain multiple players per team**. Having multiple players on each faction reduced the pressure to contribute, allowed for asynchronous time zones and allowed a back and forth discussion prior to argument submission. For many players this was their first Matrix Game and the presence of at least one other person on their team helped make the game less daunting and more manageable.

2. **Simultaneous Planning and Locked Arguments.** Players suggested that simultaneous planning (all factions submit their action in advance rather than sequentially) should be introduced from the start. The mechanism for this is for each faction should lock in their arguments in a dedicated channel before submission. Once all factions have locked in, the arguments can be posted in sequence, 24 hours apart for structured adjudication.

3. **Public Dice Rolls for Transparency.** Some players felt there was an issue with dice roll transparency. The dice were rolled by using the free 'Bing Roll Dice' browser tool as it was found the LLM would favour mid range dice rolls when asked to generate results. A public dice rolling bot (e.g., Discord bot or a simple online roller) could be used in the main channel to ensure impartiality.

4. **Limit on Argument Contributors.** Some factions dominated argumentation while others were quieter. It was also observed that two of the three factions on the same 'status quo' alignment would rarely challenge the third faction's argument reducing the pool of potential insights. A potential fix is to insist that each faction contributes at least one pro or con per turn, ensuring balanced participation and broadens the crowd sourcing.

5. **Make the Map More Interactive or Remove It.** The game map was visually well-designed but was underutilized in actual gameplay. Most of the time the map was largely static or had a bunch of counters stacked up in a few key cities. The Tehran Map was only used in the final stage of the game once protests happened. Players had access to the map at all times via Google slides.

6. **Set a fixed time for counter-arguments**. Providing players with a window to critique arguments allows them to schedule their time accordingly. In *Persian Predicament* the players voted that 24hrs was the optimal time which would generally encompass a period of a few hours where everyone was able to review the argument and comment if desired.

7. **Maintain Narrative Bias.** Narrative bias (success occurring on a 2D6 roll of 7 or more) was identified as useful in guiding game flow because whilst a faction could propose 3 pros there were, in theory, an unlimited number of cons that could be generated by the rest of the group. The facilitator only ever permitted 3 cons to be taken into adjudication but the perception from some players was that there was more scope to take forward cons than pros. Throughout the game, most actions proposed by players were successfully carried out (74% of the time an action succeeded), reinforcing that the game was about strategically linking actions in sequence and collaborating with other factions.

8. **Weighting Pros and Cons.** The equal weighting of all arguments sometimes led to moderate reasons being combined into an overly strong case, while a more structured system (e.g., +2, +1, 0, -1, -2) would have better reflected the strength of reasoning. Future

refinements to the argument adjudication process should consider such a system to ensure that well-supported arguments carry more weight

9. **Success/Failure Chits Perception.** The adjudication system using success/failure chits was seen as overly "gamey" and sometimes disconnected from the broader insights the game was designed to generate. These were discarded mid game after the majority of players voted against continuing with them.

CHITS MECHANICS

FAILURE CHIT
- Represents an **unsuccessful argument** in a previous round
- Can be traded in to White Cell to reroll your 2d6 **once**
- You will be told of the 2D6 roll in private and asked if you want to apply your chit. The rest of the game players will only see the **final** roll either way.
- This can be indicative of 'failure being the best teacher' and 'learning from your mistakes'

SUCCESS CHIT
- Represents a **successful argument** in a previous round, in essence momentum for your faction
- Can be traded in to White Cell to add a +1 to your die roll **once**
- This takes the form of 'an unchallengeable pro' but cannot be in addition to 3 other pros. **You will need to use it in lieu of a written pro**. Just state 'momentum – success chit' in your 3rd pro line.

MONEY CHIT
- Represents **additional** money **not present** when we started the game **(aka discretionary spending)**
- You can use this in support of an argument as a **reason**
- The application of money must **make sense** relative to the rest of the argument
- You can apply **more than one money chit** to an argument but each money chit can only be used once.
- The absence of a money chit does not mean you do not have money – if you can justify it based on **reasonable assumption** or **established fact – for example the USA has significant fiscal resources**

10. **Utilise a dedicated combat system when appropriate.** Although very little direct combat occurred there was an insurgent raid on a site guarded by the IRGC which could have been resolved using the Simple Combat Resolution Using Dice (SCRUD) as shown below.

SCRUD Combat System

Each unit has been categorized based on its effectiveness, role, and strategic function in the game. The SCRUD system assigns a dice bonus or penalty based on troop quality with an associated coloured dice. After being thrown the dice face are changed to reflect the modified result. Dice cannot be modified higher than a 6 or lower than a 1. Here is an assessment of the relative troop quality of the faction's main 'units' in play. Note that Foreign Powers are not shown because their qualitive advantage is likely much superior and probably require a separate table vs the IRGC/ Artesh.

Choose the dice colour to reflect troop quality. Roll all your dice together and rotate the dice score to reflect the bonuses (max 6, min 1). Line them up, highest to lowest, in a line against the enemy dice.
- Additional low scoring dice are ignored.
- Additional high scoring dice are counted.
High score beats lower score and reduces the quality of the lower dice by 1 step.
For each 3 successes in a round, remove the opposing lowest scoring dice in the line. 3 rounds of rolls = 1 turn.

	Bonus
+3 Bonus	Black
+2 Bonus	Blue
+1 Bonus	Green
No Bonus	Grey
-1 Penalty	Yellow
-2 Penalty	Red

Example: 3 Kurdish Insurgent units attack 1 IRGC and 1 Artesh Troop units. The coloured dice are rolled and adjusted accordingly. The IRGC's 5 beats the Insurgent 4 but the second unit's 3 beats the IRGC's 2. The last insurgent die does not have any effect. The second round of combat would see the first Insurgent unit roll a Red die as it has been hit, likewise the Artesh unit would now roll a Grey die as it was hit. Some rules allow for 1 hit per unit, others allow hits up to the bottom of the modifier scalar.

11. **Population Sentiment Tracking.** In a game focused on internal divisions the sentiments of the wider population, not under direct control of the factions, is important. It became

obvious early on that the factions were largely basing their actions on positional advantage vis-à-vis each other rather than trying to influence the population to support/oppose regime change. The white cell devised a visual representation of the key demographics of the general population's sentiment towards the Regime. This was updated it at the end of every game turn based on all the actions within that turn.

POPULATION SENTIMENT TRACKER

The **Sentiment Tracker** is a tool designed to monitor and visualize the mood of key population groups within Iran during the course of the game. It represents how each group perceives the current government, the state of the economy, and broader societal events.

Population Groups

The tracker monitors **six key population groups** in Iran, representing diverse socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic interests:

1. Religious Conservatives:
- Loyal to the regime due to religious unity and ideology.
- Includes clergy, clerical students, and devout followers of the Islamic Republic's principles.

2. Bazaaris (Merchant Class):
- Comprised of the merchants and traders of Iran's traditional bazaars.
- They are economically influential and serve as a barometer of economic stability.

3. Rural Communities:
- Predominantly farmers and small-town residents.
- Often more insulated from urban unrest but vulnerable to food shortages and economic pressures

4. Urban Poor:
- Low-income populations in cities, often living in informal settlements.
- Highly affected by inflation, unemployment, and lack of basic services, making them prone to unrest.

5. Students & Educators:
- University students and teachers, often critical of the regime.
- Historically active in protests and progressive movements, representing a mobilized intellectual class.

6. Ethnic Minorities:
- Kurds, Baluchis, Ahwazi Arabs, Azeris, and others who often face systemic discrimination.
- Their sentiment is shaped by oppression, lack of representation, and targeted actions by the state.

THIS IS DESIGNED TO HELP FACTIONS KEEP THE GENERAL POPULATION IN MIND WHEN CRAFTING ARGUMENTS.

Supportive	Hopeful	Neutral	Unhappy	Angry
General satisfaction with leadership, religious unity.	Signs of improvement, faith in better governance.	Mixed sentiment; not actively engaged.	Frustration, small-scale demonstrations.	Protests, riots, and growing resistance.

12. **Ending the Game Early.** The game was concluded one turn early to prevent "last-turn madness," a phenomenon where players take extreme or unrealistic actions with no concern for long-term consequences. This approach helped maintain narrative integrity and ensured that the game's resolution reflected sustained strategic planning rather than abrupt escalations.