



10 Guiding Questions on the Potential of Games at the Interface with Foreign Policy

This catalogue of guiding questions is dedicated to the interface between digital games and foreign policy. It invites all interested parties from development, education, and research as well as (gaming) practice to use it as an impulse for reflection and exchange about the topic of digital games and foreign policy. The guiding questions are structured according to the focal points “Underlying Understanding of Foreign Policy”, “Narratives & Representation”, “Rule Systems & Values” as well as “Mediative Function”. Furthermore, each guiding question has been complemented with exemplary discussion questions.

The guiding questionnaire was developed by a panel of interdisciplinary experts as part of the pilot project “Auswärtsspiel” of the Foundation for Digital Games Culture, funded by the Federal Foreign Office. It is intended as a means of orientation to examine digital games and their potential to mediate foreign policy. Simultaneously, it seeks to sensitise for foreign policy narratives and themes in digital games.

Underlying Understanding of Foreign Policy in Digital Games

1) What potential links does the game offer for foreign policy content and structures?

- Are there (fictitious) states, non-state actors, kingdoms or different social groups in the game and how is their respective exchange shaped?
- Do various actors exist that differ regarding their culture and values, (historical) self-identity, state affiliation as well as their respective interests?
- Does the game represent intergovernmental institutions such as the UN, the EU, the African Union or even a “Fantasy Assembly of Nations“?

2) What are the interrelations between foreign policy references, formats, and actors in the game?

- Are the references to foreign policy placed in the game with an educative intention (as a “serious game“) or as part of the narrated game world, designed to entertain (as a “flow game“)?
- Are possible contradictions between the game system and foreign policy events revealed, moderated, or ignored?
- Does the game make the complexity of foreign policy visible, and does it sensitise the players to possible populist or propagandistic narratives?



Narratives & Representation of Foreign Policy in Digital Games

3) Which foreign policy themes and narratives are represented in the game?

- What historical and current, economic, or social conditions motivate the game characters (player-controlled and system-controlled) in their actions?
- What underlying conflict, e.g., expansion vs. preservation, prosperity vs. exploitation, is played out?

4) Does the game offer collaborative, confrontative, and/or multi-perspective elements in its rule-based representation?

- Does the game allow for changing perspectives and positions of (inter-)action?
- Does the game address e.g., trade, war, diplomatic conflict resolution and/or the balancing of such different motives?

5) What are the origins of the aesthetic elements of the game world and what emotional worlds do they transport?

- From which historical or cultural contexts do visual elements, sound, and music originate?
- What emotional perspective of experience is created for the players (e.g., adventure, learning, experience of power, etc.)?
- Are the acting figures complex characters whose motives are comprehensible and who can be treated with empathy and respect?

Rule Systems & Values of Foreign Policy in Digital Games

6) Can the players shape the story, game world and game mechanics in a self-effective way?

- To what extent can the players act as subjects or objects in the story?
- What actions and options of foreign policy decision making does the game offer the players?

7) According to which ethical principles does the game function?

- Are the players' actions ethically categorized through mechanical or narrative valuations?
- Does the game set a binding framework, or does it allow moments of rupture for playful experimentation?
- Does the game offer moderating or sanctioning structures that correspond to real-world foreign policy institutions (such as UN-Charta and international law), e.g., when rules are violated?



Mediative Function of Digital Games for Foreign Policy

8) What foreign policy scenarios does the game setting convey?

- How are foreign policy scenarios expressed in the game world (through game design, aesthetics, and narration)?
- What rules govern player actions in the game and how are their consequences communicated to the players?

9) Do the reward and sanction systems of the game mechanics reflect basic structures of foreign policy?

- Does the game contain situations of justification or moderation, e.g. analogous to the UN Security Council, the European Court of Justice or the UN Human Rights Council?
- How does the game evaluate actions when justification mechanisms are implemented or ignored?
- Does the game offer material to further study foreign policy?

10) Is the game itself subject to foreign policy discourses?

- Does the game offer spaces of experience and dialogue to discuss foreign policy topics and mechanisms – in the game as well as between players beyond the game?
- Can a discourse on value-based, interest-driven and/or power-political interaction derive from the game experience?
- Can the players themselves create content in the game and/or its ecosystem with foreign policy significance?

