

Waging peace, NPS students develop peace gaming model

The Naval Postgraduate School

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MONTEREY, Calif. - Students working in conjunction with the Naval Postgraduate School, at the U.S. Partnership for Peace Training Education Center, recently presented a computer driven “peace gaming model” at the annual International Association of Peace Training Centers Conference in Helsinki.

The theme of this year’s conference was, “Effective Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding: Challenges for the Training Community.” Senior international military officers, diplomats and non-government organization representatives attended the conference.

German Army Capt. Danny Heerlein of Wiedersbach, Germany, and U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Matt Powers of Philadelphia presented the Abyei Peace Gaming Model on behalf of their development team. The model is a tool that developers hope will improve the capabilities of civilian, military and nonprofit agencies to respond to mass atrocities.

Kofi Anan International Peace Keeping Center representative, German Army Col. Leo Hirschmann, and NATO Allied Command Transformation representative, German Army Col. Josef Taubeneder, expressed interest in the model, as did other conference attendees.

The model was built in response to a request from U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Ryan Klaahsen of the U.S. Marine Corps’ Combat Developments Command in Quantico, Va. Klaahsen approached NPS’ operations research department looking for a “wargame” to explore mass atrocity prevention and response options.

“Usually we focus on kinetic operations, army vs. army, but the work we are doing with NPS is helping us to plan for mass atrocities,” said Klaahsen. “We are trying to teach our planners to successfully conduct conflict resolution and peacekeeping operations.”

Klaahsen hopes that the Abyei model will help planners to examine complicated regional problems through unfamiliar lenses.

“It forces planners to become players (through the lens of different actors) and sparks

conversation,” said Klaahsen.

It is these conversations that senior lecturer Dr. Jeffrey Appleget, a retired U.S. Army colonel of Colchester, Vt., believe will ultimately lead to more successful peacekeeping operations.

“This model will allow planners to approach the peace keeping process, in the same manner that military planners prepare for combat operations,” said Appleget.

The model was developed in Appleget’s war gaming class at NPS. He teaches his students to understand the war-gaming process and then works with them to develop models in response to his sponsors planning needs.

“Think of the game Risk on a much larger scale and with much greater complexity,” said Appleget.

But unlike the game of Risk, the Abyei models deal with real people facing unthinkable violence and hardship. If successful, it will help planners to understand the myriad factors that lead to conflict so that they can be addressed by government, military and nonprofit organizations around the world.

“We are looking at the human element, we are not trying to predict behavior, but we are helping planners to see the possible impact of their decisions and to begin to understand what second and third order effects might occur,” said Appleget.

Heerlein wrote the code that makes the model work. It uses Sudan’s Abyei region as a starting point. The region is divided into sub-regions into which planners can enter area specific information. Planners play the game in a series of rounds designed to test the affect of their decisions in response to regional actors and atmospherics.

Heerlein thinks the Abyei model has the potential to change the way that planners think about civilian and military peacekeeping operations, and is excited about the potential of further developing his work at NPS.

“This model demonstrates the value of sending international officers to NPS,” said Heerlein.

“We (German students) will be able to use the training we received here to affect real change in our operations. ... This model will go home with me and be used to train German officers.”