



WHEN A CHINESE CARRIER GROUP ENTERS THE PERSIAN GULF



INTRODUCTION

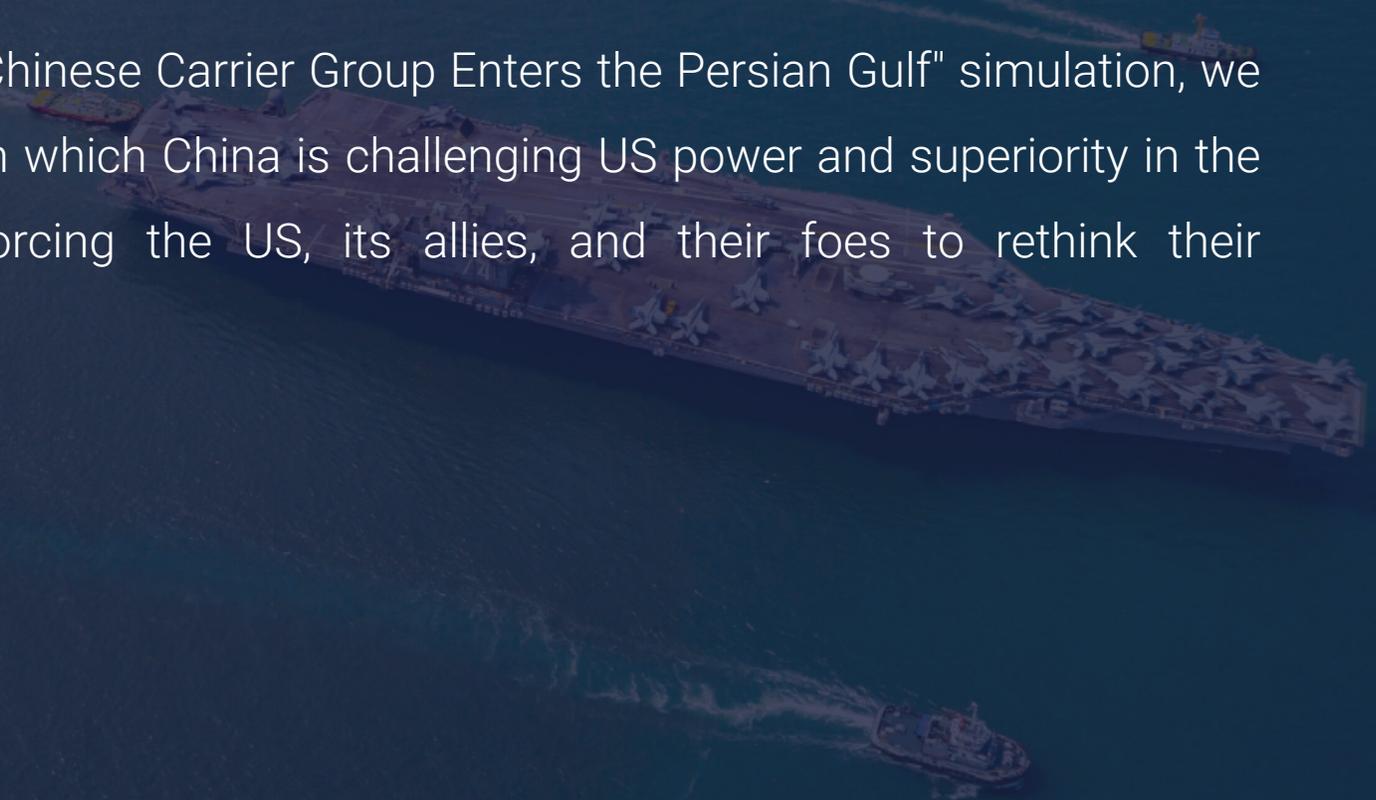
INTRODUCTION



The Persian Gulf has long been of vital importance to the global economy and a region in which the United States has enjoyed naval superiority over the last several decades. This superiority was best-reflected by its carrier battle groups, operating at will and without ever being contested by any regional or global power, serving as launch and support platforms for US military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. These have even been used to deploy special forces teams where needed for surveillance and strikes throughout the region.

INTRODUCTION

In the "When a Chinese Carrier Group Enters the Persian Gulf" simulation, we ran a scenario in which China is challenging US power and superiority in the Persian Gulf, forcing the US, its allies, and their foes to rethink their strategies.



INTRODUCTION

There were three main areas that we wished to explore:

- Firstly, we wanted to learn more about **how the US would react to a situation in which it is forced to share its monopoly of power in a certain region of the world for the first time since the cold war.** Thus, we developed a simulation that looks into a hypothetical situation in which the US hegemony in the Gulf is challenged by an actor who is willing to confront it and is presenting the capability to do so.
- Secondly, we wanted to explore how China would **behave in a situation in which it achieves a technological breakthrough that is so advanced that it provides Beijing with a significant capability it didn't have before.** While we decided to go with a naval technology this time, some of the insights we wished to explore could easily apply to advances in the fields of cyber, AI, air, space, or land capabilities.
- Thirdly, we aim to learn **how China would gain from confronting and challenging the US hegemony, which many experts believe is actually beneficial for China.** Thus, we decided to focus on a region that China has a great interest in remaining calm and stable.

ABOUT THE SIMULATION

- The simulation ran **October 28-30**, over a period of **three days**. During this time period, **100 participants** were divided into four groups: China, US, Iran, and the UAE/KSA.
- During the three days of the simulation, each group was asked to follow the general scenario, which was viewable to all, and track personal developments visible only to their assigned group.
- Each group was responsible for developing strategies for its actors, providing policy options and action plans, and reacting to other teams' actions.

SIMULATION PARTICIPANTS

100
PARTICIPANTS

18
COUNTRIES

DIVISION OF EXPERTS BY: PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE



ACADEMIC
32



FORMER GOVERNMENT
10



THINK TANK
15



JOURNALIST
2



FORMER MILITARY
18



CONSULTANT
3

SIMULATION OVERVIEW

SCENARIO 1 CHINA'S ARRIVAL IN THE GULF



ACTORS:



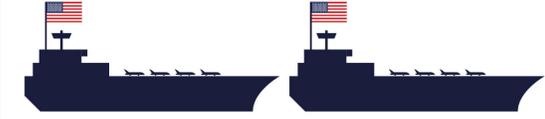
SCENARIO 2 CHINA IS HERE TO STAY



ACTORS:

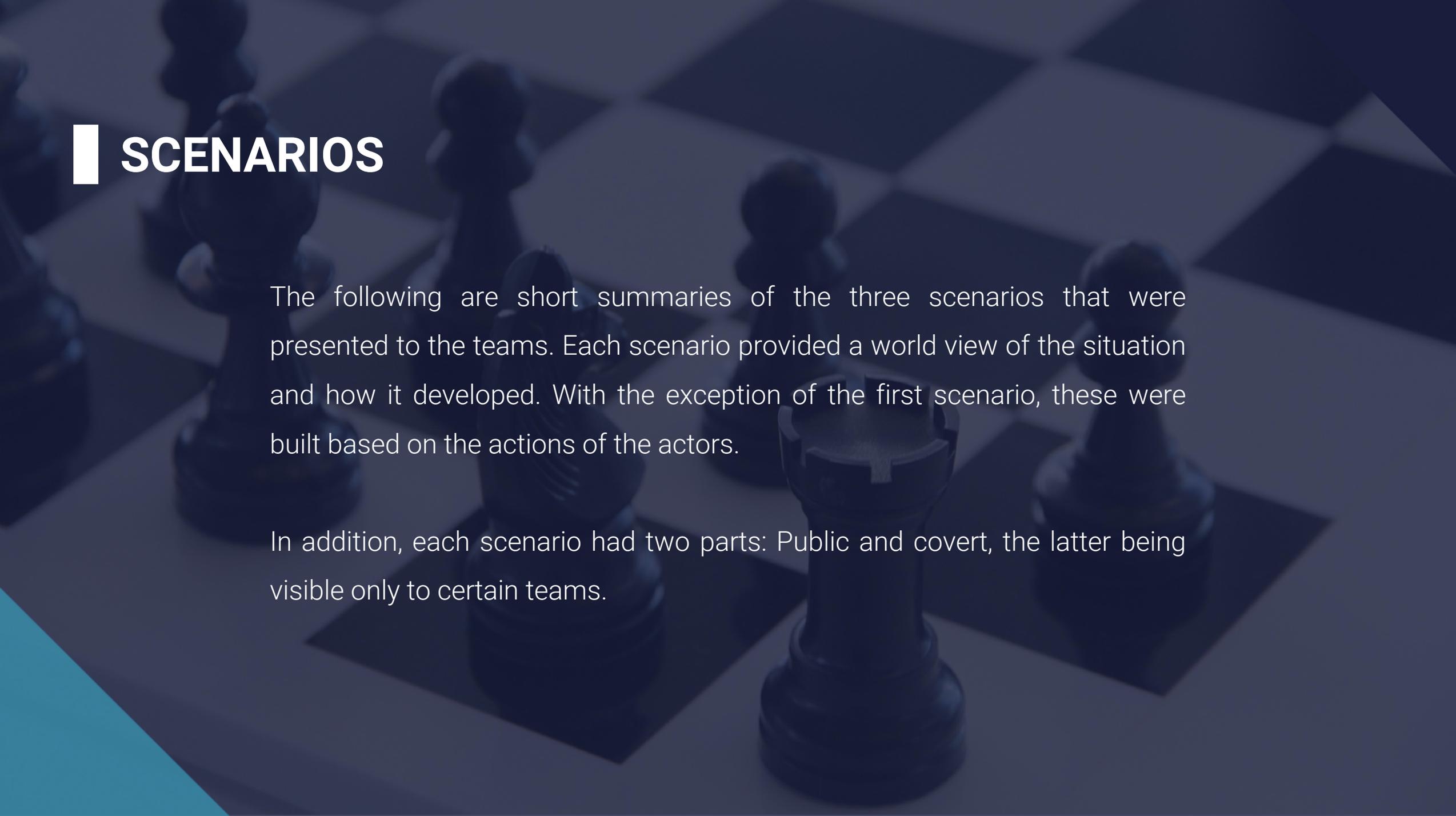


SCENARIO 3 UNDER PRESSURE



ACTORS:





SCENARIOS

The following are short summaries of the three scenarios that were presented to the teams. Each scenario provided a world view of the situation and how it developed. With the exception of the first scenario, these were built based on the actions of the actors.

In addition, each scenario had two parts: Public and covert, the latter being visible only to certain teams.

SCENARIO 1: CHINA'S ARRIVAL IN THE GULF

China Shocks the Intelligence World

In March 2021, China reveals its new aircraft carrier. The carrier, type 003, joins the type 002, both constructed at Jiangnan Shipyard in Shanghai. News of the new carrier, which was formally introduced into the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy shortly after the announcement, surprised many Western analysts who had previously assessed that China was 3-4 years away from its inauguration.

China's Arrival in the Gulf

On October 20th, Iran issues a formal statement through the Islamic Republic News Agency in which it acknowledges that it has invited the Chinese Navy to enter the Persian Gulf in light of the latest Saudi and American moves and in order to secure passage of ships to and from Iran through the Strait of Hormuz against Saudi and American aggression. Less than an hour later, China announces on CGTN that it will send its Navy into the Gulf in order to secure and protect the free movement and passage of Iranian ships. Shortly following this announcement, on November 3rd, China's new aircraft carrier, the type 003, enters the Persian Gulf with a small group of ships and starts to patrol its waters.

SCENARIO 2: CHINA IS HERE TO STAY

The Pressure on Iran Continues, but the Saudis are Feeling the Heat

While China is seeking to benefit from the new situation, the US sends navy reinforcement to the area and the USG issues a new public statement stating that “all parties should refrain from all provocative steps that might destabilize the region”. The press release is not positively welcomed by the public in the US, with polls showing an increasing demand for the US to confront China. This sentiment increases after an article is published by the NYT quoting a group of former CIA China experts stating that “the rationale for deploying an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf was to demonstrate to the US that they have developed a fleet capable of operating on all the seas of the world. They are setting a norm for Chinese aircraft carrier deployments in the future.”

Saudi Arabia, seeking to avoid escalation on the one hand while seeking to deter Iran on the other, is reported to reach out within the GCC in order to ensure the situation is defused while, at the same time, issuing an invitation to the US Navy to "assist China in protecting stability in the region.”

Ports, Trade, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

In the meantime, Reuters reports that multiple sources in Iran indicate that there is a "done deal" to be announced between Iran and China. According to the article, Iran, which had its economy ruined after years of US-led sanctions, will offer China a lease to use portions of the port of Kish. A day later, an official announcement is made by Iran about the new agreement between the countries, with Iranian press adding that Iran is considering joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – a security bloc consisting of China, Pakistan, India, and Central Asian nations that is widely seen as a counterweight to NATO.

SCENARIO 3: UNDER PRESSURE

China the Mediator

China is acting rapidly to secure its accomplishments. Internationally, China's foreign minister responds positively to the USG statement and welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the US and other navies in guaranteeing freedom of navigation in the Gulf. Different reports in the media suggest that China is also promoting a Code of Conduct for the Gulf Region (by way of conflict prevention) that will include all stakeholder countries in the Gulf, including all the Arab states, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, the United States, China, Russia, and other members of the SCO.

In a special interview, Xi Jinping reveals that China encouraged Iran not to raise the stakes with KSA, and reassured KSA and GCC members about its peaceful intentions. "Our special relationship with both Iran and KSA is one that I think could be used to increase stabilization in the region. This is something that all could benefit from, not just politically, but also economically," he notes.

Reaffirming US Superiority

Meanwhile, in the US, a leaked official document is published, showing that the US Navy is considering plans to send an additional battle group to the South China Sea and run a series of "high-end war fighting exercises" in the region together with the Indian and Japanese navies. In the meantime, the US president gives a special message to the nation reassuring that the US has complete superiority in the region so the USG is prepared and vigilant for any eventuality in the Gulf, and that the US will not accept any Iranian or Chinese "tricks" in the area. He also warns that if China supports the Iranians in any special operation against US allies in the region, the US will not remain silent. A day later, the New York Times reveals that the US Treasury is preparing a plan on US trade and sanctions against China in the event of an escalation in the region.



STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

At the conclusion of the simulation, we asked the participating experts to provide us with their strategic insights from the simulation.

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

China's strategy is based on small-scale actions. There seems to be a general consensus that China is aware of the need for controlled, small-scale actions that build its public presence as opposed to anything contesting the dominance of rivals at a broader level.

– Gareth Tan, Policy Research Analyst, Singapore Institute of International Affairs

The rise of China is important for Iran. It provides a range of defensive policy options that simply would not have been available a decade ago. So, relative power between states matters and the rise and fall of great powers matters the most.

– Oz Hassan, Associate Professor in National Security, University of Warwick (UK)

China's increasing role in the Middle East is not a bad thing for the US. Just because China and its Navy will be more active on the global stage does not necessarily mean that the United States will be any less influential or that its allies and other states will bandwagon around Beijing.

– Joel J. Sokolsky, Professor of Political Science, Royal Military College of Canada

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

There is a thin line between escalation and status quo. It is a very fine balancing act by the other actors, particularly the USA, when it comes to Iran, as there is a thin line between escalation and status quo, which should be carefully considered to not be crossed without a serious purpose.

– Velina Tchakarova, Head of Institute at the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy

The US is much more limited than perceived. The US strategy and available actions in the Persian Gulf when facing an increasing Chinese military presence in the region are much more limited than it seems.

– Pavel Luzin, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of History and Political Science, Perm University (Russia)

The US has left a gaping hole where US leadership used to be, and the vacuum is steadily being filled by China. The US's progressively more isolationist (a la Trump) / hands-off (a la Obama) approach has put it at a noticeable disadvantage in the MENA and will have grave ramifications for the future of the US role on the international stage.

– Rebecca Molloy, PhD., Independent Research Analyst, Senior Analyst at Wikistrat

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