

War Game 2 Reflection: USA

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When I first saw my name in the USA group, I felt a little bit disheartened and extremely nervous. As one of the world's greatest economies, democracies and self entitled "World Police", The US is always one of the key players in major political negotiations. Because of this, I knew that our team would be playing a big role during the negotiations especially as we were the only developed country represented in the conference. As the war game progressed however, my teammates and I kept making a fundamental mistake that we were not really prepared for and only fully processed after the war games: we were not being **American** enough. As representatives of the USA, we were not meant to instill our personal views but recommend policies that would please the various stakeholders in the country. As a resident of a developing country and a firm believer in climate change, I had difficulty making policies I was strongly opposed to (carbon cap for total emissions or for GDP) and it took time for me to understand how to separate my personal inclinations from our political agenda. The problem of misrepresentation however has led me to one of my first lessons in political representation: *Your idea is a good idea but only if it aligns within the nation's self-interest.* A corollary to this lesson, looking back at it now would be: *Self-interest can always be disguised as selflessness.* Although we had to act according to our stakeholders' interest, we also had to maintain a public image of benevolence which prioritized the well-being of smaller nations such as those in SAARC. The constant balancing act between trying to save ourselves and trying to save the world is probably

one of the biggest contradictions I have discovered while playing the role of USA. It was made more difficult when we realized that although our intentions as negotiators were pure, there were many barriers that barred us from committing the country to concrete change.

One of the barriers I identified was history. During negotiations for a standard carbon emission cap for all countries, I recognized the importance and role of history in the political arena. One of the main arguments against carbon caps for developing countries is because developing countries feel (if countries could feel) that it would be unjust for them to curb their emissions and further industrial development when the same standards in the past were not applied to countries like the USA when it was still developing. In the beginning, I found it difficult to imagine that countries could not simply forget the past and focus on the future as higher levels of carbon emission posed such imminent danger. Why couldn't countries simply forgive, forget and let bygones be bygones? Why did countries seem more focused on passing the blame and responsibility rather than developing concrete solutions to satisfy the two-degree requirement? When I first thought about it, bringing back history seemed like a childish tactic. However, it was during the negotiations that I realized forgetting the past was too simple. There is a sense of political injustice in allowing developed countries to emit more carbon when their manufacturing sectors have already been moved to developing countries. The issue of carbon emissions did not only need to take account of present emissions but also a consideration of past carbon emissions and its role in creating the world's super powers of today. This is the reason why conferences always ended with empty and vague statements with no

consensus to a solution. I think that only after this injustice is acknowledged and the past be accepted can concrete steps be taken and followed.

After I fully processed the events of the negotiations, I identified the essence of what the war game truly was: A dialogue. Although it involved a lot of psychological games and political blackmail, it was a sharing of challenges, ideas and solutions to try to combat the impending consequences of climate change. Through the war games, however, I also learned that dialogues are not perfect models for attaining the truth. Communication can be lost, ideas can be interpreted wrongly, people can be misrepresented and these issues simply magnify when you have hundreds of countries sitting in one room from different backgrounds, speaking different languages, each with their own solutions to the present problem. I understand now however that although dialogues can be problematic, they are still vessels of knowledge in a way that participants learn from each other more the same way they learn from themselves. I think the concept of the war games as a dialogue ties back not only to what this class actually is but also to the idea that it is defined by the different perspectives that contribute to it. To win the war of climate change, we need to focus on an interdisciplinary sharing of ideas. As an engineer, I now fully understand that solely technological research and development cannot save the earth -it never has and it never will. Although, there are thousands of data and groundbreaking technology that can enact positive change, the political arena has always been the medium and setting of the biggest social influence and change; the biggest battles to combat climate change must and will be made in this space and I would be more than to contribute in any way I can.