

When we were first assigned the war game, I remember being very confused as to what exactly the war game was- what was our objective? Who exactly did we, the agriculture team, represent? Were we fighting for a percentage of government spending? An exact number? And what exactly was critical infrastructure security anyways?

Debate and mock policy making are definitely out of my usual realm; I'm usually found comfortably in my element in my science and math and engineering classes- problem solving, in terms of calculations and assumptions backed up by numbers. I generally like to keep up with world news, but safely at a distance, reading news articles on my phone without taking a particular stance. I'm also pretty conflict avoidant, which means I don't like debates very much. So as our task became clearer and I slowly was familiarizing myself as best I could with the complexities of the agriculture sector in India, I was a bit nervous for the day itself. As a team we came up with our goals together, based on what we had read and what we thought could allow the agricultural sector to grow and help Indian farmers. I was vaguely confident in these goals, in the sense that our team had agreed upon a position, albeit having only scraped out what knowledge we could about farmers and the infrastructure they need. There's so much to be learned, and I guess part of my wariness about debates is I always feel as though I'm not qualified to speak on the subject enough to take a fully informed position. But given the restrictions of this war game and our limited backgrounds, I did feel that we did the best we could do to gather information, think critically, and then take a stance.

The day approached. We pulled together our slides, reviewed our sector's goals, and then met for breakfast the day of. We sat through the presentations, taking notes on the other sectors' information and stances, and then finally after lunch, we began meeting with other teams. We were confident in our infrastructure goals (investment in irrigation, road networks, and storage facilities), as they would for the most part benefit the other sectors as well, and it didn't seem like anyone would

have any opposition. The two points of contention became genetically modified (GM) crops (opposed to by the healthcare sector) and farmer collectives (industry). The GM crops issue was settled fairly easily, as we promised them we would have policies preventing irresponsible implementation of GM crops. To be honest, the promise seemed kind of empty to me- they honestly could have suggested anything and we would have agreed for their support, and it's not like us having some sort of policy requiring long term trials on GM foods would really affect our team's "success" in any way. But, I suppose this is part of it being a war game and not real life. The other debate was with industry over our claim that farmer collectives were the way to go, as supported by the success of the Amul model. At least from my understanding, industry wanted to commercialize farming, by combining small rural farms to be run by bigger companies. We argued during pretty much our entire negotiations meeting, not reaching a conclusion when time was up. Again, as a fairly conflict avoidant person I didn't enjoy that much. But I guess what arguing with them challenged me to do was question the definitions by which we were arguing. What does it really mean for a farm to be commercialized? What are the actual mechanics by which that occurs, and what effect does it actually have on rural farmers? I was unsure, but we proceeded anyway.

Finally we were at the point of the group negotiations. It seemed kind of chaotic and I got the sense that no one really knew where to start. But we started regardless and to me the discussion seemed to quickly veer out of effectiveness. There was this really long discussion about dams, with the water team proposing it and everyone else kind of reacting at random- I think the main issue was that no one really knew enough about the science and research behind the implementation of dams to be able to take a genuine stance on it. Personally I didn't even really say anything because the agriculture team was pretty neutral on the subject, and again, I didn't exactly feel like I had the knowledge to take a personal stance on it anyways. My one contribution was to ask if we could move on, because after at least five minutes I felt like the dam discussion was pretty fruitless. So various issues were brought up

and teased between groups and even the collective/commercialization conflict between our sector and the industry sector was cleared up with a compromise. In retrospect, I enjoyed the discussions more than I thought I would.

I suppose my critique and own personal reflection of how the war game concluded was one of ambivalence. Once our team, agriculture essentially got approval from the other groups of our own goals (infrastructure, the collectives idea), which was pretty early on, we honestly just kind of relaxed. By the time it got to the voting on the various policies at the end, our group pretty much approved every single one because each time we would look at each other and say, “well, it doesn’t really affect our policies, so sure...” and we were so tired by the end of the day we didn’t feel like bringing up any conflict. Obviously not the best attitude, but at the same time it makes me wonder to what extent these attitudes are reflected in actual policy making. Of course this is just speculation, since I don’t have a background in politics at all, but I feel like the war game experience must at least have some parallels in the real world. For example, the fact that many of us were pretty far removed from the actual industries (our lack of background on dams once it was proposed, being unaware of the actual studied effects of commercialization on small farmers, etc.), and thus had difficulty making informed decisions. (This reminds me of the presentation at IIT-Bombay and the 9 week house stays the CTARA students do- perhaps we should have politicians do something similar!) Maybe one person or one team are experts, but it’s far less likely that everyone else is as well. In addition, I talked with Zamir with what I think are called “Christmas Tree bills” (maybe not that exactly, but something about Christmas and bills), where bills are passed right before holiday break and politicians negotiate random initiatives into bills that are about to be passed because no one really wants to argue right before Christmas; people would just like to pass the bill and get to go. Furthermore, in another discussion with Rose, I commented that by the end we were just approving everything because we didn’t feel like it a) affected us and b) were too tired

to argue anymore. Rose said that typically the opposite happens- bills are instead easily ignored and prevented from passing- but for generally the same reasons.

Again, this is all speculation. I don't really know too much about how difficult the process of policy making is in America. However, I enjoyed thinking about and reflecting on my experience and how it might possibly have parallels in real life. Overall I had a positive experience: there was some frustration and confusion, but I think these were part of at least a semi-realistic war game experience.