

CIVE 4778

June 25, 2015

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War game 2 Reflection

For the second war game, I was on team SAARC, representing all of the countries in the South Asian Alliance for Regional Cooperation except India. Initially, this assignment was exciting as I thought the research process would be particularly rewarding. The SAARC countries are extremely diverse and have completely different agendas. Even their relationship to the main regional power, India, varies dramatically from the completely dependent Bhutan to the openly antagonistic Pakistan. We quickly learned that it is sometimes unclear what a single SAARC country wants, much less the organization as a whole. Thus, our stance during the war game was to negotiate with both India and China in a manner most consistent with the attitudes of our nations.

During the research and planning process, we had two main strategies. From the beginning, we decided that the roles that we had been designed from the onset weren't as directly relevant to the war game as we would have liked. As a result, we decided to supplement this research with some focus on specific countries. I focused on Afghanistan and Bhutan and I learned some interesting facts about each country. Overall though this was somewhat ineffective as we had no distinct categories in which to focus our efforts. As a result, we decided to refocus our efforts into several categories that would be important for the war game. I studied natural resources and determined that water and energy were the most important resources for the

SAARC countries. I saw their conservation and allocation as essential and therefore advocated for water and energy sharing agreements with India and China that would see both as a shared resource, especially water. This would be extremely beneficial for the SAARC countries as their resources are already strained. Unfortunately, my team didn't see this as a priority which was rather disappointing. I tend to advocate very strongly for things that I have researched extensively, even if they may not align with my personal views. This is probably also more apparent in diplomatic processes where some of the participants may be stakeholders themselves, and not be as disconnected as we were during this process. Additionally, several members of our team either actively disagreed or understood certain goals differently, which did occasionally muddle the negotiation process.

Another main observation was the difficulty of modeling the behavior of our countries. Team China, for example, made a number of mistakes including announcing that they would negotiate about Tibet and having a number of goals that, although reasonable to us, did not align with the priorities of the Chinese government. To a large extent we tried to avoid this problem by focusing on a worldwide per-capita emissions cap. This would result in the SAARC countries appearing to compromise but actually being able to release just as many or more emissions, while also being able to sell their carbon credits to developed nations. After the negotiation phase, it seemed as if this measure would pass, but unfortunately, several teams reneged on their agreements which was very disheartening. In some ways this also seems realistic as countries may even sign treaties but be unable to ratify them at home. China acted quite realistically in that regard, initially offering to excuse a portion of their debt if the United States agreed to pay it off. They then revoked the offer but still maintained the same expectations of the US. Although that

situation is rather unrealistic, this type of posturing seems to be common in negotiations where parties don't want to seem interested in actually signing an agreement.

One aspect of the war games that really struck me was how little we actually knew about the issues that we were discussing. One of the main things that we discussed was an international cap and trade agreement. What was clear was that many of us didn't really understand the implications of a per-capita or per-gdp method of allocation. As a result, countries may have adopted stances that were contrary to their interests. Additionally, for our group, there was the added problem of different countries having different policies within SAARC which was never really acknowledged. It was also clear that many people, myself included, didn't comprehend the economic implications of an American repayment of debt to China. To a certain extent I understood that this would never happen because the debt is somehow beneficial to the Chinese economy, but I didn't really understand the concepts involved. This meant that some of our decisions may have been dramatically misinformed and gross oversimplifications of the actual processes. In that sense, it is easy to see the scope of such negotiations in the face of actual countries with massive resources and substantial representation.

On a personal level, I thought I did a good job supporting my group and leading the second session. I felt that because we had a very limited amount of time to research in the days leading up to the war game, I was a little more knowledgeable than many of my peers, as I had done research in the weeks leading up to the war game to satisfy my own curiosity. The different levels of knowledge that individuals had about the topics really showed during the war games where some decisions were questionable. At one point a member of the Indian team expressed concerns about building a railroad between India and Pakistan exclaiming "Aren't those two countries not friends or something?" Similarly, some individuals didn't speak at all during the

war game. I thought this was rather sad as it meant that certain personalities tended to dominate the conversations and so we didn't get as full of a perspective on many issues as we could have.

I did enjoy this war game more than the first because of the amount of clash there was between the policies proposed by each team. The obvious one was the conflict between SAARC and the United States over a cap and trade policy. Additionally, India and China argued about the implication of dams on the regional power balance, in addition to impacts on water flow. Both sides tried to court SAARC which placed us in an opportune position to wring concessions. Unfortunately, this didn't exactly happen, but the rest of our agenda was supported regardless. SAAR did get many of the things that we wanted, but the entire conference failed to achieve anything of note on a global scale, instead descending into gridlock over the main points of contention. As a result, funding was promised for research and humanitarian aid along with other vague treaties on water and energy cooperation, but the results are fairly small. This did seem to reflect actual negotiations where much is discussed and promised but very little is actually accomplished.