

Climate Change Simulation

RPOS 383: American Foreign Policy

Fall 2019

(I conducted the simulation over two class periods of 1.5 hours each)

On August 5, 2019, Stephen Walt (whom you have read a few things thus far in the course) published an article in *Foreign Policy* that began with a hypothetical scenario in which the U.S. president and a coalition of the willing had given Brazil an ultimatum to cease deforestation of the Amazon rain forest or risk economic sanctions, military action, and/or some combination of the various tools of economic statecraft.

The goal of the simulation is twofold:

- **For any of the coalition members**, the goal is to convince the Brazilian government to cease its development and deforestation in the Amazon by any means possible in the hopes of mitigating damage from climate change. The logic is that development and repair of the rain forests should help to ease the burdens of climate change.
- **For students playing Brazil**, the goal is to avoid the potential military action, economic sanctions, and diplomatic isolation against the United States and other willing coalition members.

Preparatory work:

Students are required to read the following items before the simulation begins. The information below will be helpful in completing the simulation.¹

1. READ Stephen Walt's "**Who Will Save the Amazon (and How)?**":
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/05/who-will-invade-brazil-to-save-the-amazon>
2. Council on Foreign Relations, "How deforestation in the Amazon contributes to climate change?" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVY1kDIIB0>
3. Rochedo et al (2018): "The threat of political bargaining to climate mitigation in Brazil", *Nature* (8): <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-018-0213-y>
4. United Nations (2017): The Unique Challenges of Small Island Developing States:
<https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/stories/the-inconsiderate-intruder-climate-change-and-small-island-developing-states>
5. Pew Research Center (2016): "Politics of Climate":
<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2016/10/04/the-politics-of-climate/>

¹ Since not all of the readings apply to all countries (except for #1), you could assign country specific readings, but I thought all of the readings were helpful so that everyone knew what everyone else was dealing with. There are probably more updated readings since 2019, too. I also do a preparatory lecture on what climate change is and isn't and go over some of the science and past international activities/agreements/treaties, too, the week before. I had planned to do a second preparatory lecture at the start that highlighted Brazil's relations with each of the countries and some things to consider among relations between the coalition members, too; however, I ran out of time.

6. China4C's 2017 National Public Opinion Survey Report:
<https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Press%20Release%20-%20202.pdf> (Full report: <https://www.efchina.org/Attachments/Report/report-comms-20171108/Climate Change in the Chinese Mind 2017.pdf>)

Set-up:

1. The class will be divided into **five groups** of 6-7 students.²
2. One group will play **Brazil** while the remaining groups will be assigned work as foreign policymakers in: **United States, Argentina, China, Maldives**.³
3. Students playing the role of policymakers in their respective countries should **always consider** the interests of stakeholders in their respective countries. *The instructor will correct and nudge groups throughout the simulation as needed but the goal is to do your best and have fun!*
4. The instructor will present "unexpected events" throughout the simulation. These may take the form of natural disasters or other weather events, political events, or other events that may impact negotiations.⁴
5. Coalition members may work together on joint proposals as needed. This may be more imperative for some countries than others. Some countries may not want to join or be associated with others, so keep that in mind, too. Working together is another layer of diplomacy; be careful as working with others adds another level to the game!
6. Each group should have an administrative lead who will have a laptop and access to email as I use email to transmit information throughout the simulation. This should be communicated to the instructor.

Game Play:

Round 1:

1. For groups playing the US, China, Argentina, and Maldives: *come up with a set of demands (no more than three) for the Brazilian government. What is it that your country's stakeholders in government want Brazil to do or stop doing? Keep in mind that each country will be impacted and affected by climate change, so the demands may be different.*

² My class had about 30 students; 25 of them always attended while an additional 5 were less attentive to attendance. If you have a larger class, you could include more countries. You could do fewer countries and more groups. I wanted to choose a country that was a neighbor, the US, China (because of its unique relations with the US at the time in 2019 during the Trump "Trade War"), and country with little power but hugely affected by climate change.

³ I chose the countries I did because the US is leading hegemon; Argentina is a regional neighbor; China has growing economic interdependence with Brazil that is beginning to rival the US; the Maldives are a small island developing state (SIDS) with a particular set of interests and little ostensible power to realize them without help.

⁴ I introduced unexpected events throughout all the rounds except the last, such as hurricanes, protests, tornadoes and severe weather, droughts, food shortages, business responses to certain policies "leaked" to the media during negotiations, and so on.

2. For the group playing Brazil: *Come up with a set of domestic and international policies (no more than three) the government is willing to implement. Think about the issue from the perspective of Brazilian policy makers who have a vastly different set of constituents and stakeholders than the other countries in the simulation.*

Break: During the break, the instructor will evaluate the responses and provide feedback to the groups via the game. This feedback will help keep groups within their respective roles throughout the simulation.

After evaluation of the demands and Brazil's domestic and international policies, do the following:

- **For the coalition members:** provide feedback; if the demands made are outside the character of the country being played, devise and develop some form of response. In some countries, like the US, climate change denialism is rampant in US political institutions; this may impact the viability of some of the demands (especially if the demands made are too harsh, for example).
- **For Brazil:** Provide feedback on domestic and international policies. This is the time to stress to the Brazil group the viability of some of their policy ideas and the dangers and difficulties of proceeding with them and how different stakeholders in the country would respond.

Round 2:

This round is a chance for groups to make changes to their initial attempts at policymaking. Some groups in my experience were better than others and were more able to stay within their defined roles. If groups need time to fix their responses, round 2 is the chance to do that.

- Students in coalition countries should revise their demands for Brazil but not transmit them until reviewed by the instructor.
- Students in the Brazil group should evaluate the list of demands and respond. Brazil can respond:⁵
 - Individually to each group
 - Individually to some groups
 - or overall response to the coalition members

Break: At the end of Round 2, provide Brazil group with the demands of the other countries. Provide the coalition countries with steps Brazil plans to take on the climate crisis for evaluation.

Round 3:

- **Students in coalition countries** should work in their respective "polities" to determine how to respond to Brazil after reviewing its initial proposals. Coalition members can talk

⁵ There is likely to be overlap in the proposals so a collective response may work best than four individual responses. Game play and students participating will influence this.

with each other about courses of action as necessary. Each group should come up with responses. **Remember that the goal of all coalition members is to get Brazil to stop deforestation and development of the rain forests.** These responses can be threats of military action/sanctions/diplomatic isolation or be actual acts of military action/sanctions/diplomatic isolation. *KEEP IN MIND that actions have consequences, and that these actions will be communicated with Brazil at the end of the round.*

- **Students in Brazil** should develop contingencies on how they will respond if military action, sanctions, or other diplomatic punishments are imposed. Remember that good policymaking is about being proactive as well as reactive. Anticipate what you think each country will do and what you – as Brazil – can and would do to respond.

Round 4:

- Coalition members deliver their “moves” to Brazil. While Brazil studies the moves each coalition member delivered, coalition members should do the following:

Before the next round, coalition members (US, China, Argentina, Maldives) must devise a unilateral policy that their country will execute should negotiations fail in the next round. This policy should consider “worst case scenarios” and other motivating factors should Brazil fail to stop developing the rain forests and stop deforestation. The nature of the unilateral policy will differ from country to country and should be reflective of that country’s potential on the world stage.^{6,7}

This policy would be one that the country’s executive would implement automatically if the agreement failed to be ratified in each coalition country. *Students should keep in mind their country’s military, economic, and diplomatic potential* as well as keep possible actions in line with political, social, and economic realities (in other words, how likely will nuclear bombs be dropped on Brazilian capitals?). Negotiators in each group will be aware of this fall-back policy and may use knowledge of this policy in any way they see fit to help with negotiations either by sharing, keeping it a secret, or alluding to it (China: “You know, we might not buy as many soybeans from you all if you don’t change tact!” = economic sanctions on a key sector).

- Brazil group must evaluate the moves conducted by the coalition members and decide on an appropriate course of action based on the actions of the groups. This group should consider the domestic and international limitations to choices that they make.

Round 5 (final):

- Each group will nominate a negotiator. All five negotiators (one from each country) will meet “in secret” for a final compromise that will iron out a set of agreements that are meant to stave off war/sanctions/diplomatic isolation where (hopefully) everyone

⁶ Maldives is unlikely to invade or wage war against Brazil, for example.

⁷ It might be more prudent to do this at the beginning, as I found that doing it at the end didn’t have as much impact on students. If I did this again, I’d do this step at the start.

benefits. The negotiations will happen in the classroom, but non-negotiator members are not permitted to interfere or influence negotiations.

- After a compromise has been reached with Brazil by the negotiators, negotiators will return to their respective groups to vote on the agreed upon compromise. Negotiators are free to negotiate with other negotiators as they see fit within the limits of their country.⁸ Negotiators should base their decisions on discussions that groups have had, however negotiators are free to be inventive and to compromise.
- Once agreement(s) have been reached with each member, negotiators will return to their respective governments (i.e. their groups) to vote on the agreement. For the agreement to be successful, 3/5 members of each group (or the majority if groups are more than 5) must accept the final agreement.
- If no majority is reached for a given country, the agreement fails with that country only, and the country's executive in the US, China, Argentina, and Maldives will execute the course of action. This will be communicated at the end of this round.

Debriefing:

I did this an in-class assignment/discussion, as class discussion was quite robust in the course although it could function as a paper or a discussion board, too.

1. Do you think that military action is the proper course of action for getting a country to reverse climate change policies? Sanctions? Diplomatic isolation? Why might countries opt for a military/sanctions response instead of UN action or other bilateral or multilateral diplomacy?
2. Given the power differential between the coalition members and Brazil with the US, what option(s) would those countries have to compel the US to deal with its own climate change problems (air pollution, too many cars, coal burning energy production, etc.)?
3. What strategies beyond political ones could countries/governments/stakeholders use to convince stakeholders in countries where climate change progress is slow or nonexistent to take more action?
4. Do you think the game reflected the complexity of policymaking? What challenges did you see in the game? How might you improve it? What would you change/keep?
5. How likely do you think that a coalition of environmental advocates would take military action and/or impose diplomatic sanctions on Brazil? Explain your reasoning.
6. *If any executive agreements are triggered:* Ask the Brazil group (other students can also chime in) how they think Brazil would respond to this action.

⁸ Maldives can't promise what it can't deliver, for example! Argentina, being a neighbor and big trade partner, might be unwilling to upset the apple cart!

7. *From the perspective of the US:* Would the US public support military action? How might the Brazilian diaspora in the US respond to such an action? How might military action impact the US' own efforts at combating climate change?