

SIMULATION ON THE MIDDLE EAST

by

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Introduction

Since 1971, the Social Studies Department at Washington High School has used the simulation described below as part of its unit on American Foreign Policy in its American Government course. Such a simulation could also be used in a course in World History, Contemporary Affairs, or International Relations. Essentially, it involves dividing a class into eight groups, seven of which represent countries in the Mideast region or that have close associations with the countries of the region. The seven countries are the United States, the Soviet Union, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. The eighth group represents the Palestine Liberation Organization. Each group consists of about two to four students, depending on the size of the class. Conceivably, additional groups could be added to represent Western European countries and Japan, or additional regional countries such as Iraq, Iran, Lybia, or factions within Lebanon or within the PLO, or perhaps, even the United Nations Organization. That, of course, would depend on the numbers and the strengths of the students within the class. However, increasing the number of groups might necessarily decrease the number of students in each group.

Getting Started: Roles and Research

Before the simulation begins, students are assigned to groups and to roles within their group. For example, in the United States group, one student would be designated to be President George Bush, another would be Secretary of State James Baker, a third student would be Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, and a fourth student, if needed would be the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Thomas Pickering. Similar roles would be assigned in the other countries as well. A teacher would have to find out the names

of the current Presidents, Prime Ministers, and Kings as well as the foreign ministers, defense ministers, and UN ambassadors for each country used. Information as to the persons holding these offices can be found in such publications as Clement's Encyclopedia of World Governments, the Statesmen's Yearbook, Facts on File, the various almanacs, and magazine articles indexed in the Reader's Guide to Periodicals.

Included with the general instructions regarding the simulation are sets of background information for each country or group. The background information contains a brief history of the troubles of the region as seen from that country's or group's point of view. Students can find additional information on the problems of the region by researching through periodicals, books, and booklets dealing with the Mideast region and its problems. Greenhaven Press offers two paperback books in its Opposing Viewpoints series: Israel and The Middle East. Social Studies News Service in Culver City, California has a variety of books, booklets, and audio-visual materials available on the Mideast region. Other audio-visual programs available which could also be used, are Arabs vs. Israelis: The Quest for Peace, from Random House Educational Enrichment Materials, 1979, and Israel at 40, from NBC News, 1988, available from Films Incorporated Video.

The simulation begins with the current Middle East situation. Each country must consider how its interests are affected by this situation, and what it or the other countries could do to change it. The countries are expected to act in the simulation the way that their real counterparts would act in the real situation. In order to do this, students are expected to know as much information as possible about their country's views regarding the Mideast situation as well as their country's relations with the United States. Student's grades are partially determined by how well they know and present their country's position.

Along with the background information described above, students also receive a list of conditions that each country would like to see come about, and a second list of conditions that each country would want to avoid. For instance, the PLO and some of the Arab countries would like to see an independent Palestinian state established. This, of course, is something that Israel would want to avoid.

The United States want to have continued access to oil from the Persian Gulf countries. The more radical Arab nations would like to see oil used as a weapon to pressure the United States in its support of Israel. In their negotiating students should attempt to reach agreements to achieve those things their instructions say they should achieve, and they should do everything possible to avoid agreeing to those things that their instructions say to avoid. How well they do this will have a bearing on their grade.

Developing the Simulation: Negotiations

After students have become familiar with the Mideast situation and their country's role in it, they will, in each of their groups, discuss and decide upon a strategy that will help them to accomplish those things that their country would want to see happen and avoid those things that their country should avoid. It is to each country's interest to negotiate with other countries those items that will give them the best advantage. It is important that all members of each country understand their overall strategy before they begin negotiating with other groups.

Each nation can schedule negotiations with other nations informally. Generally, five or six days should be allowed for students to negotiate. Our experience has shown this to be an adequate amount of time. Having a deadline creates pressure for results, for if there are not agreements, then the present situation in any area is the final outcome. What this means is that results can be token, however, it does not mean that these results are necessarily favorable or desirable to all countries. But, that is how foreign policy works out in the real world. The only difference is that the pressure of time may not be as great in the real world.

The chairs in the classroom are clustered into eight (or more) sets around the room. Each cluster should be designated to a specific country, and it should be identified by a sign. Students may want to watch that the subject of their negotiations does not find its way to unfriendly ears, so they should note carefully who might be standing around them when they negotiate. If students would want to meet in a United Nations or Geneva Conference type of setting, then the chairs could be arranged in a circle, with the teacher acting as the presiding officer.

At any time, students can make "announcements to the world" either in the form of news bulletins or speeches. News bulletins can be read either by one of their country's representatives or by the teacher. Speeches, however, must be made by the appropriate representative of a country's government. All news bulletins and speeches ought to be cleared through the teacher before they are given so that they can be given one at a time, and ensure that all students will be listening. A major function of these speeches is to influence other nations to support a country's point of view. In their speech, students may pressure, threaten, needle, inform on, or do anything else that they feel will help their side. Students should submit a copy of all speeches or news bulletins to their teacher with their name on it. In this way the teacher has a written record of what was said and can use these in evaluating the final outcome.

The provisions of any treaties that are concluded should state clearly and specifically the obligations of each party to the treaty and shall be signed by the heads of state of all parties to the treaty in order to become effective. Unless otherwise stated, all treaties become effective upon signing by all parties. Informal "understandings" can be reached between ministers of various nations but these cannot be considered as binding agreements.

Nations can only talk to nations with whom they have formal diplomatic relations according to the following pattern:

- a. The United States may talk with all nations and the PLO.
- b. The Soviet Union may talk with all nations except Israel and Saudi Arabia.
- c. Egypt may talk with all nations.
- d. Syria may talk with all nations except Israel.
- e. Saudi Arabia may talk with all nations except Israel and the Soviet Union.
- f. Israel may talk with the United States and Egypt only.
- g. The PLO may talk with all the nations except Israel.
- h. Jordan may talk with all nations except Israel.

If any nation wants to speak to another that it does not recognize, it may do so only in the United Nations or other similar international conference or only when arrangements are made through a third

country acting as a go-between who has diplomatic relations with both countries. Of course, during the course of negotiations, it is possible for nations that do not have diplomatic relations to establish them by treaty using a third country as the mediator. However, there should not be any direct face-to-face contact between the two countries until the treaty is signed.

Student Evaluation

At the end of each day of negotiations, each country will submit a very brief summary of what they accomplished and what they tried to accomplish. A form is provided for this on a half-sheet of paper, and it is made available to students at the end of the class period. The students within a country can designate which student shall fill out the form. This will help give the teacher an idea of what was accomplished by all the groups during the negotiations on a daily basis, as well as serve as part of the written record.

At the end of the simulation, each student is to submit a paper describing what happened during the simulation, how his or her country fared, what might have been done differently, and what he or she learned about human nature and the negotiating process. He or she will also hand in all notes taken in researching information along with a bibliography of sources.

In grading students on this simulation, we divide the grade into three parts. One part is based on their written paper and notes that they submitted. The paper allows students to analyze what happened within the classroom situation, why certain courses of action succeeded, and why others did not. It also allows them the opportunity to state what they tried to accomplish but were unsuccessful in bringing about. It also gives them the opportunity to observe and analyze the classroom dynamics and determine which individuals or groups had the most influence in the final outcome of the simulation.

A second part of their grade is based on students' involvement in the negotiating process. Some students, of course, will participate very actively and will initiate the discussions in negotiating. Others will feel less competent and comfortable in this kind of role. However, we have found many of our less verbal students to be very active

listeners during negotiating, and they seem to learn much from the experience. We have also found that many of these students, when pushed into a role that gives them major responsibility, will rise to the occasion and carry out their assigned duties quite well.

The third part of the grade is based on how well each nation achieved the goals that they were supposed to achieve and avoid those things they were supposed to avoid. There are a lot of conflicts built into this simulation. If one nation succeeds in achieving many of those things that it was supposed to achieve, it would probably mean that another nation was unable to avoid many of those things that it was supposed to avoid. Nations in this simulation, just as those in the real situation, do not make concessions unless they are pressured to do so, or they find it to be in their self-interest to do so. It is easy to generalize that the strongest personalities will prevail in this simulation. But, our experience has shown that it is not so easy to determine in advance who these personalities are most likely to be. We have seen this simulation break in all sorts of different directions. During the nearly twenty years that we have run it, practically every one of the eight groups has been the "winner", i.e., has succeeded in accomplishing the greatest percentage of its goals.

By averaging the grade over the three categories, it is possible for a student whose group suffered a foreign policy disaster in negotiating to still come out OK if they handed in a good paper and were reasonably active in negotiating. However, it might also be possible for students who take no notes and submit no paper to come out with a reasonably good grade if they participated in the negotiations and just happened to be in a group that succeeded very well in its goals. Some teacher discretion can be exercised if it appears that the grade average does not accurately reflect the amount of work and effort particular students have done because of their group's unfortunate outcomes.

Conclusion

This simulation does give the ownership of the problem to the students, and they appear to internalize what they have studied and

learned more effectively. Our students have told us that they learned much about the Mideast situation and the process of negotiation through this method of instruction. Many of them have commented in their papers that they hadn't realized how stubborn some of their peers can be, particularly when there is a major point at issue, and a group's grade might be negatively affected if they give in on that point. Students often tend to look for some sort of compromise or quid pro quo. However, in the Mideast situation, nations stake out positions from which there can be no retreat, and students find this frustrating.

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