

Conflict Negotiation Simulation: Facilitator's Instructions

Guide

Simulation Overview

This simulation is designed to teach students key concepts in International Relations (IR), such as anarchy in the international system, the security dilemma, and strategic decision-making. Students will role-play as states in an anarchic international system, making decisions about resource allocation (armaments vs. enjoyment) and foreign policy (peace vs. war). The decisions students make, the outcomes they experience, and the frustration or elation they feel together become a touchstone you can return to when introducing new concepts or cases, connecting theory to something students have already experienced in the miniature. This shared experience prompts students to think deeply about their own decisions and those of others, and how those decisions mirror those of states in the international system more broadly.

Learning Objectives

- Understand how states prioritize survival and self-interest in an anarchic system.
- Explore the role of institutions, norms, and diplomacy in shaping state behavior.
- Analyze the causes of war and peace in a multipolar system.
- Apply IR theories to explain state decisions and outcomes.

Rules for States

1. Resource Allocation:

- Each state must allocate its \$10 budget between **armaments** (military spending) and **enjoyment** (domestic spending).
- All funds must be allocated each round (e.g, 7 armament, 3 enjoyment)
- Armament funds **DON'T accumulate** between rounds
- Enjoyment funds **DO accumulate** between rounds

2. Foreign Policy:

- States choose **peace** or **war**.
- If all states choose peace, they keep their enjoyment funds.
- If a state declares war, it must specify the target(s). The state with higher armaments wins, taking the loser's enjoyment funds.
- In case of a tie in armaments, the war is inconclusive, and all states keep their enjoyment funds.

3. Diplomacy:

- States may form alliances or negotiate treaties, but agreements are not enforceable. If the conditions of an agreement are met, the facilitator should prompt the states to decide whether to uphold it.
 - i. Ex. “State B, you have a defense pact with State C, who has been attacked. Will you uphold your defense pact?”

Setup

1. **Divide the Class:** Create four or more groups of students; these are your “states”. Allow for time before or at the beginning of the simulation for state groups to discuss their internal decision-making process and choose a representative who will report state decisions of allocation and policy to the facilitator.
 - a. **Assign Roles:** Assign each group a hypothetical state profile (see **Extensions**).
2. **Distribute Budgets:** Each state starts with \$10 per round.
3. **Domestic Discussion:** Students discuss allocation and foreign policy within their groups for at least 5 minutes.
4. **International Forum:** Students will discuss across groups for at least 5 minutes. This is the time for groups to make alliances or other agreements between states.
5. **Report and Resolve:** A representative of each group will secretly report their allocation and foreign policy decision to the facilitator. The facilitator will resolve any wars declared and report the results to the class.
 - a. Example: “State A declared war on State B. State A allocated \$7 to their armaments, while State B has only allocated \$5 for their armaments. Thus, State A is victorious and claims State B’s \$5 of enjoyment funds for themselves.” Since States C and D were neither initiator nor target of conflict, their allocations remain secret.
6. **Repeat** steps 2-5 for as many rounds as desired.
7. **Conclusion and Discussion:** At the end of the last round, add up each state’s enjoyment funds and declare the “winner.” Transition into whole-class discussion.

Example Scenario

- **Round 1:** State A declares war on State B and wins, gaining \$8 for enjoyment.
- **Round 2:** State C proposes a non-aggression pact, but State A rejects it. States B and C enter a defense Pact. No war is declared.
- **Round 3:** State A attacks State C but loses due to the combined armaments of States B and C. States B and C divide State A’s enjoyment funds, each taking \$7.

- **Final Round:** States A, B, and C negotiate a peace treaty, but State B betrays State C by declaring war to gain all of State C's enjoyment funds.
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Debriefing and Discussion

A key aspect of this simulation is that students share an experience that serves as a foundation for a broader discussion of core concepts in international relations, so debriefing and discussion are essential. General reflection and application questions are included in the **Conflict Negotiation Simulation: Student Activity & Reflection Sheet**, below. But I encourage facilitators to pay close attention to the simulation's dynamics as it progresses and to make their own notes and observations to return to when facilitating discussion, allowing the discussion to be more tailored to what actually occurred.

Extensions

Many aspects of this simulation are malleable and can be changed to best suit your students, classroom environment, and concepts you'd like to emphasize. The most basic form, described above, creates an environment in which all states have equal resources, no private information, no formal international institutions, and a fixed time horizon (5 rounds). While this creates a symmetrical and limited strategic environment, the "real world" is, of course, much more complicated. Below are some ways to complicate the simulation to better approximate these dynamics.

Great Powers

If you'd like to emphasize power asymmetry as an aspect of the international environment, divide the class into at least 5 state groups and assign two of these groups as "Great Powers". These "Great Power" states will receive \$15 per round to allocate, while all other states receive \$10. Great Powers are not allowed to ally with each other.

Private Information

If you'd like to emphasize how states have private information about their own capabilities, or would like to vary underlying incentives to promote more varied behavior among the groups, you can assign each state group a "secret incentive." This gives each state group its own rule or goal to achieve, which gives them bonus enjoyment funds if met, applied at the end of the simulation. Below are some examples, but feel free to get creative!

Examples

The Pact Keeper: If you make an agreement (e.g., a treaty or alliance) and uphold it for 3 rounds, gain +5 enjoyment at the end of the simulation.

The Fortress: Gain +1 enjoyment for each round you allocate more to armament than any other state, applied at the end of the simulation.

The Survivor: If your state is never targeted for war across the entire simulation, you gain a one-time +5 bonus applied at the end of the simulation.

The Arms Producer: If you ever spend \$9 or more on armaments in a single round, you gain a one-time +5 bonus applied at the end of the simulation.

International Institutions

If you'd like to emphasize the role of international institutions and how they can intervene in conflicts, select a small group of students to serve as "Mediators."

Mediators have a more limited budget of \$5 and can use that budget in two ways.

Mediators can intervene in conflicts directly by using their funds to support a state's armaments if a conflict has been declared against the state. For example, if State B is attacked, the Mediators could contribute \$3 to State B's armaments. Mediators can also use some of their funds to impose sanctions on states, and the amount of mediator funds spent on sanctions is taken from the sanctioned state's enjoyment funds. For example, if the Mediators imposed \$2 in sanctions on State A, State A would have \$2 removed from its enjoyment funds.

Conflict Negotiation Simulation: Student Activity & Reflection Sheet

Name: _____

State: _____

Date: _____

Rules: Share your allocation with the Facilitator

1. Budget Allocation:

- Each round, your state receives \$10.
- Allocate funds between **armaments** (military) and **enjoyment** (domestic spending).
 - i. Armament spending does NOT accumulate between rounds
 - ii. Enjoyment spending DOES accumulate between rounds
- Example:
 - i. Round 1: 6 armaments, 4 enjoyment.
 - ii. Round 2: 5 armaments, 9 enjoyment (5 from this round, 4 from round 1)

2. Foreign Policy:

- Choose **peace** or **war**.
- If you declare war, specify the target(s).
- The state with higher armaments wins, taking the loser's enjoyment funds.
- In case of a tie, all states keep their enjoyment funds.

3. Diplomacy:

- Negotiate with other states, but agreements are not binding.
 - i. Ex. State A & State B form a defense pact; if either state is attacked, the other state can uphold the pact and combine their arms spending for the round. * If you are still defeated, the supporting state loses 50% of their enjoyment funds.

4. Win Conditions:

- Have the most enjoyment funds at the end of 5 rounds. The winning group will receive a bonus point to their overall grade.

Part I: Simulation Tracking Sheet

Round-by-Round Log

Fill out the chart below during or immediately after each round.

Round	Budget Allocation (Armaments / Enjoyment)	War or Peace?	Target(s) or Allies	Treaties or Deals Made	Outcome	Notes on Other States' Behavior
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						

Part II: Post-Simulation Reflection

1. Strategic Choices and Outcomes

- What was your initial strategy going into the simulation? Did it change over time? Why?

- Which round was the most difficult to make decisions in, and what made it so?

2. Game Theory Connections

- Did you witness or participate in a commitment problem? What was the strategic risk, and how was it handled?

- Were there moments when asymmetric information or lack of trust shaped decision-making? How did this affect negotiation or foreign policy choice?

3. Negotiation and Conflict Resolution

- How did your group approach diplomacy? What tactics did you use in negotiations (e.g., incentives, threats, alliances, reputation)?

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- Was there an agreement or treaty you relied on that was later broken? How did that influence your trust in the system?

4. Theoretical Takeaways

- Reflecting on the simulation, which theory of international relations, realism, liberalism, or constructivism, best explains your behavior and the overall outcome? Why?

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- Were there other concepts from the class you saw as relevant to your behavior in the simulation? What were they?

- If you were to replay this simulation, what would you do differently based on what you now understand about strategic interaction and international cooperation?