STANCE

CHAPTER A5

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Introduction

The previous chapter explored research methods, how to begin your research, and how to keep a record of everything. However, there is more critical thinking required in your research process that calls for the creation of an entire chapter just for it - and that is understanding your country's stance. Before reading this chapter, it is crucial to have read Chapter A4 to understand the research process.

Foreign Policy

The unique term in this case is foreign policy. Foreign policy can be explained as the decisions a sovereign state takes in regards to its international affairs. On the surface level, it seems simple to determine the foreign policy of a state - just google it. That is true to only a certain extent.

The problem with identifying foreign policy is the broadness of the topic. Just because a country supports the combat of climate change does not mean they support transitioning to a carbon neutral state, or whether they would be in favour of an international carbon tax. There will be policies that cannot be googled and have to be inferred.

The question therefore stands to - how do we infer our country's foreign policies? Truth is, even at the highest level of academia, people are still trying to research and understand the nuances of nation behaviour of foreign policy decisions. However, this chapter will introduce you to the basic skills required to do so.

Principles

The first concept is principles. Aristotle claims that human thought and decisions arise from what are known as first principles. First principles act as fundamental truths, axioms that cannot be rejected in society. We then utilise these principles to create our own decisions.

Principle Prioritisation

A method that is valued is how a nation weighs conflicting principles. For example, some nations place a high value onto principles like human rights, whereas some others put higher value to principles such as national security. The ability to understand your nation's valuation of these principles are crucial. But how do you look up for these things?

The best method is to understand what the main goals of the nation are outside of the council topic. For example, China's focus on their Belt and Road Initiative indicates a high priority on international economic development; France being the leading nation of the Paris Climate Accord indicates a high priority on climate conservation programs. Knowing your nation's main goals, you

can better infer how you want to position yourself in certain topics. For example, under the topic of reconstruction of a post-conflict nation, China will be favourable to such an act, and that China can utilise their BRI to provide funds to the reconstruction process. France might only provide funds under the condition that we utilise the opportunity to create green energy solutions in post conflict nations.

This will be linked closely to the country profile you would make in the A4 Chapter.

The Left and The Right

A fundamental understanding of the left and the right ideology will be explained here. It's not particularly fair to generalise the complexity of political theories and ideologies into two simple directions, but the concept of the left and right would serve as a sufficient introduction.

At its core, the left and the right is a debate about how society should be run. The left believes in cooperative social order and the removal of the concept of "social hierarchy". It seeks to attain social equality. The right believes that social hierarchy is inevitable, and that there will be social differences. Therefore, it also promotes a competitive environment of economics, in which private ownership is supported.

But all of this seems rather extreme - perhaps you fit the description of a stereotypical 21st century liberal human, in which you believe in certain left wing ideologies like social equality, where all races are treated equally. But at the same time, you believe in the market economy, that competition is good for innovation and human improvement. Are you the left or the right?

Principles are therefore categorised on a spectrum. There is the far left and the far right, the "extremes", and everything else falls in between. Someone could be left-leaning, indicating that they have more left wing ideologies than right, but still believe in certain right-wing ideas.

Having a concept of the left and the right is not as important as understanding the concept of a spectrum. That for any principle clash, there is a level of acceptance. For example - although we might value human rights over national security, we still conduct airport security checks that violate the privacy of individuals. There are certain instances where the call for national security triumphs over human rights.

The Overton Window

At a more advanced level, we explore the concept of the Overton window. The Overton window is an extension of the idea of a spectrum of ideas. It explains a society's level of acceptance.

Think of it this way, a country's stance does not exist on a singular point of a spectrum where we must have carbon taxation policies and solar panel farms and eco-friendly public transportation systems. There are certain policies that we can find compromise on.

Having a fundamental concept of the Overton window is beneficial in terms of understanding how to compromise in certain situations. One of the struggles of intermediate delegates tends to be - is it okay if I do not support this? For example - although you might be a nation that supports the advancement of women's rights, it might be perfectly reasonable for you to remove a clause that mandates paid maternity leave. This is because not having that policy is still within the acceptability of the Overton window.

Principle Deal (Reso) Breakers

A deal breaker (or a reso breaker) is something that is principally damaging to your nation's foreign policy, that disallows your nation from supporting such a resolution. This is especially prevalent in the United Nations Security Council amongst the P5 nations. However, what are deal breakers?

There are certain principles that cannot be infringed upon or challenged. These might be ideas such as - gay people should not have legal rights, or we do not accept refugees. Any slight clause that infer support towards these principles can be considered as deal breakers for certain nations.

It is therefore important to identify the main deal breakers of your nation, specifically towards a topic. This allows you to easily flag the clauses that threaten your foreign policy, and you can challenge them accordingly.

Past Precedences

It is difficult to perhaps find specific journal articles relating to a country's stance on a topic. However, it is very unlikely that your country has withdrawn from any conversation about it, it is just that no journalism networks have chosen to publish anything pertaining to it. However, you can deal with this by searching for specific past precedences. This has been explained previously in Chapter A4.

Resolutions

Aside from reading the resolution content during your research, it is important to look at the voting record for that specific resolution. How your country voted for that resolution is an excellent indicator on the stance that they have.

Some resolutions might also state the council debate session, which might have records of the speeches given during the discussion. Knowing the speech your country gave can also provide insight into their stance.

Conventions and Treaties

Similar to resolutions, it might be worth looking up conventions and treaties that relate to your country regarding that topic. These treaties might not necessarily be limited to the documents of the United Nation - but extend further towards other regional treaties that exist. For example, ASEAN has agreements on anti terrorism mechanisms and strategies, which can serve as an indicator to the stances of Southeast Asian nations in regards to their stances on counter-terrorism measures.

Government Press Releases

This might be slightly more challenging to research, specifically due to the language barrier that would exist. However, being able to find relevant press releases that your nation's government has published can be used as an indicator of how your government views a specific topic.

Domestic Policies

Especially in social councils, it is almost certain that countries will advocate for the policies that they themselves have implemented in their own nations. For example, countries that have legalised abortion are more likely to advocate for the legalisation of abortion internationally. This is linked towards the previous concept of principles.

Allies and Enemies

Countries' relationships are much more complex than we'd like to think. We make allies to trade and support, in hopes of having mutual assistance and alliances in times of trouble. This means - our foreign policy might not be merely affected by what we want, but what our friends want. For example, the US is likely to back Saudi Arabia up in Saudi's international foreign policy on oil pricings due to their close relations and trade. Regional bodies like the European Union might also opt to present a more united front on certain issues like cybersecurity, despite certain nations having slightly differing opinions.

There are a few ways to identify how influenced you are based on the issue.

Regional Bodies

Nations are part of various regional organisations that determine their stances. One of the reasons for establishing such regional organisations is to ensure smaller nations are able to have

power in the international sphere through collectivisation. Hence, nations in regional bodies tend to present a united front on their stances. Therefore, using the stances of the regional body can be useful in these situations.

Main Stakeholders
This one varies between topics, but certain topics have specific stakeholders that are relevant to the discussion. For example, the issue of the South China Sea directly affects nations like China, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam etc.

In topics like this, it is important to understand your country's relationship with the main stakeholders to understand which nations you are more likely to side with. For a country like Kenya, the territorial claims of the South China Sea has little to no influence on the Kenyan domestic affairs. However, since Kenya has a strong relationship with China due to their economic trade, Kenya has an incentive to side with China in the South China Sea dispute.

Global Superpowers
To say that there is a cold war between the West and the East would be a slight stretch, but to say there is no tension would be generous. Most nations fall into categories where they are more US-aligned or China-aligned, with some exceptions. The foreign policy of these nations can be related to their relationships with superpowers. For example, Israel is more comfortable going against China's policies in support of American policies, whereas countries like Malaysia might think twice before going against China.

In-Council Relations
This brings us to the odd part of Model UN - blocs. Understanding of foreign policy and relations means that you know which allies you have to side with based on your stance. If your stance is heavily influenced by a regional body, it might be strategic to work alongside the nations that are part of the regional body in your council. They have likely done research on policies that your nation would support, which would allow a smoother process of resolution drafting.

Position Papers

In HMUN councils, you might have to write a position paper for your council. The purpose of a position paper is to state your country's stance on the topics. But from a more meta standpoint, it is because the Chairs need to be able to evaluate your knowledge on the topic, especially if one of the topics does not get discussed in the conference. More often than not, position papers are the first impressions you give to chairs. Hence, it is more than important to write it properly.

Structure
At the most fundamental level, a position paper should seek to answer three questions.

1. What is your country's stance?
2. What has your country done?
3. What would your country like to do?

The best way to view a position paper is to consider it from the perspective of trying to sell your country to someone else. Whenever you make a claim about your country's stance, it is good to back it up with evidence, either statistics of the problem you have faced, or the actions that you have done. The mistake that delegates often make in writing position papers is that they add information that is generic to the topic, rather than country specific.

What is your country's stance?
More often than not, we tend to generalise policy issues into blanket statements. There is little to no differentiation between countries when it comes to certain issues. Recent years, organisations have started to realise that and began tailoring more specific policies towards regions, especially in the field of economic development. The introductory paragraph, therefore, has to clearly specify the unique issues that your country faces in regards to the agenda, rather than putting general blanket statements.

What does this mean? For example, take the issue of illegal animal poaching. Not all causes or solutions towards animal poaching are the same. For example, in Zimbabwe, villagers were killing lions not for their mane, but because these lions have been attacking their livestocks. But in South Africa, animal poachers are actively killing rhinos to sell their horns. Different countries face different problems although it is categorised as the same issue. It is therefore your responsibility to specify the unique circumstances that occur in your country. This can be illustrated with the help of data and statistics, but news articles can also provide you with some idea on how the world works.

Remember, this is Model UN. Although in the proper UN, it would be more strategic to not mention certain things, Chairs can better credit your knowledge if you made it aware that you are not supposed to talk about certain things. For example - if you are Israel in the Israel-Palestine conflict, you don't want to admit to building settlements in Palestine. Hence, it would be good to make aware of things that your country doesn't support or believe in at the beginning.

What has your country done?
This looks at specifically the past actions that your country has taken. This is what delegates tend to love writing about most, but is not actually the most important thing in this position paper. You should be looking for two to three notable examples. Usually, I would look for three types of examples
1. Local/domestic policies
2. International policies

3. International agreements

The mistake that most delegates make is that after they list the lengthy grocery list of things their country has done, they do not explain the significance of these actions. Why should I care that your country has done this? Does your country think this is enough?

The reason why this isn't important is because it only shows that you are capable of doing a simple google search, rather than the critical thinking skills that reflect that you have understood your country.

What would your country like to do?
This is where it gets slightly challenging, especially if you are writing your position paper in a vacuum. You should do some basic level of research on the issue before you even start researching. This helps you in formulating the possible actions that you would want to take.

When explaining the policies you want to take, it is best to think - why? Why is this a good policy? Why is it important? How does it build on the existing policies in the world? By answering these questions, you can strengthen the level of your argument.

Formatting
Especially in Malaysian Model UN contexts, Chairs have strict formatting on how your position paper is written. We'll go through some of the concepts of formatting here to help you gain a better understanding on how you can write better documents. It doesn't matter if you use Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or even Pages. The concepts are the same.

And before you ask - why? Why is the formatting so oddly specific? It comes down to the purpose of a position paper. It shouldn't be a lengthy report that details your country and its entire history, it just wants a single page of content. However, different formatting means that you can have more/less things on a piece of paper. Hence, there is a standardised format to ensure that your position paper is formatted correctly.

Font
Some Chairs will specify the font they want you to use. At the top of your toolbar, you should be able to find these things. The most frequently requested fonts are Times New Roman (this font) and Arial. The difference in these fonts comes down to readability preference between serif and san serif. Some chairs might also request for specific font sizes. Don't make the mistake of choosing font size 11 when they want font size 12.

Justifying Text

A lot of delegates get confused when they are told to 'justify' their text on a design level. As much as it is important to justify what you are saying, it is also crucial to ensure that the formatting is justified. Take a look at these following boxes to see the difference between a justified text and an unjustified text.

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Each line of text in a justified text is the same length. The way to do this is to use the four lines option on top of your toolbar.

Figure 5.1: Justifying Text

This will ensure that your text is justified.

Line Spacing

Line spacing is a more foreign concept to most people, especially if they have never been exposed to academic writing before. Line spacing is the gap between the line on top and the line on the bottom. Usually, the requested line spacing is 1.15 (which would be the standard setting on your documents for most applications), but some chairs might request a 1.5 line spacing.