

Model Diplomacy in America: Comparisons of the Tunisian Experience

الدبلوماسية النموذجية في أمريكا: مقارنات للتجربة التونسية

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Abstract:

Foreign policy represented in model diplomacy simulations in American universities is a field of statecraft that is lacking substance of the nuances of the foreign policies of individual states, especially for states of the Arab world. This paper discusses how the foreign policies of Arab states are modelled in American universities by examining the procedure and research of diplomacy simulations and addresses how to build emphasis on accurate representation of state foreign policies.

Keywords: Model, Diplomacy, Simulation, Comparison, Tunisia

المخلص:

السياسة الخارجية - كما تتمثل في المحاكاة الدبلوماسية في الجامعات الأمريكية - تفتقر الفروق الدقيقة بين السياسات الخارجية المختلفة للدول الفردية، و بالأخص معالم السياسات الخارجية و الدبلوماسية للدول العربية يناقش هذا البحث كيف تحاك السياسات الخارجية العربية المختلفة في الجامعات الأمريكية، كما يفحص اساليب البحث و تطبيق المحاكاة الدبلوماسية، و يتناول موضوع الحرص علي دقة التمثيل للسياسات الخارجية للدول المعنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نموذج، دبلوماسية، محاكاة، مقارنة، تونس

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Introduction:

Foreign policy, as represented in model diplomacy simulations in American universities, is a field of statecraft and politics that is represented as being both complex and straightforward yet is lacking a substantive essence for the nuances of the foreign policies of individual states. The rationale for this being that model diplomacy simulations in educational institutions in the United States are focused on the procedures of the international organizations of which they model, and thus tend to make the details of the policy goals of individual states secondary to the adherence of parliamentary procedure in their models. This is especially true for states of the Arab world, where connections between universities and institutions representing the states being modelled are minimal in many cases.

This paper discusses the ways in which the foreign policies of Arab states are modelled in American universities by examining the emphasis of procedure and research in model diplomacy simulations at said institutions. This paper will use the participant-observer methodology of research borrowed from anthropological studies and other fields of social science to gather data and present evidence and resulting conclusions from the study of said evidence. The example demonstrated in this paper will be the foreign policy and international relationships of the Republic of Tunisia in the Model League of Arab States— sponsored by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) —and the Model United Nations— sponsored by the Southern Regional Model United Nations (SRMUN) conference — both of which are organized at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, in the United States. This paper draws on the author's experience as a participant observer while serving as a model delegate from the Republic of Tunisia at model diplomacy conferences for both organizations.

This paper begins with a discussion of the rules and procedures of the model diplomacy simulations practiced by the Model League of Arab States and the Model United Nations in their respective conferences. It establishes the main aspects of observed parliamentary procedure and discusses the comparisons between the procedures observed in both organizations. It then introduces the issues discussed at each simulation and how Tunisian foreign policy is represented in them through research on behalf of the author and other participants, as well as how Tunisian foreign policy, as simulated, fits into the issues

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discussed. It discusses shortcomings of the representation of Tunisian foreign policy as constrained by procedural practices within the model simulations and discusses conclusions drawn by the author.

The author would like to note that he is not endorsed by either of the sponsors for either the Model League of Arab States or the Model United Nations, and that his sole affiliation is as a student participant in both organizations and a student at Texas State University.

Section I: Review of Organizational Structure and Parliamentary Procedure

To begin, it is necessary to layout the organizational structures of both organizations and understand the framework in which they operate. As model diplomacy simulations, it should come as no surprise that both the Model League of Arab States and the Model United Nations base their organizational structures on the real-world institutions that they simulate. This section will describe the way both organizations are set up, then continue to discuss the rules of procedure they base themselves on and will conclude with direct comparisons of the organizational and procedural operations of both.

A) Model Arab League Structure

The Model League of Arab States— herein officially referred to as the Model Arab League (MAL) —was established in 1983 by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR)¹. It bases its structure on the Model United Nations (to be described below) and focuses on the twenty-two member states of the League of Arab States². The MAL hosts several regional conferences across the academic year and one national-level conference in Washington, D.C. in March, with fourteen university-level conferences and five secondary education-level conferences being held³. All conferences hosted by the MAL focus on

¹“About the Program.” Model Arab League Youth Leadership Development Program. National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, 2017. <https://ncusar.org/modelarableague/about-model-arab-league/about/>.

² “About the Program.”, 2017.

³“Model Arab League Conferences.” Model Arab League Youth Leadership Development Program. National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, 2017. <https://ncusar.org/modelarableague/conferences/select/>.

nine different “Councils” that roughly correspond to the relevant organs of the League of Arab States, these being¹:

- Joint Defense Council
- Council on Palestinian Affairs
- Council on Political Affairs
- Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers
- Council of Arab Environmental Affairs Ministers
- Council of Arab Economic Affairs Ministers
- Summit of Arab Heads of State
- Special Council on Poverty and Unemployment
- Arab Court of Justice

This is where it is important to note the first set of constraints in representation that is common to both model diplomacy organizations: size and scope. As noted by NCUSAR, not all MAL conferences will have each “Council” represented to account for the number of participants, or the number of educational institutions represented. Furthermore, the governing structure of the League of Arab States is not totally reflected within the model structure as NCUSAR represents the ultimate arbiter of the simulation for all conferences, while committee chairs and Secretariate of the League of Arab States are appointed by NCUSAR based on individual applications for chairships that are separate from the individual national delegations represented by student participants². The only exceptions for this are the Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Rapporteur for each council, which are elected from among the participants in each council at each conference³.

B) Model United Nations Structure

In discussing the organizational setup of the Model United Nations, it should first be noted there is a major difference in the administration of it versus the administration of MAL: while MAL is a centralized model diplomacy organization under the direction of NCUSAR in the United States, there is no central governing structure for Model United

¹ *Model Arab League Handbook*. Washington, D.C.: National Council on U.S.-ArabRelations, 2014. p. 4-5.

<https://ncusar.org/modelarableague/current-participants/handbook/>.

² *Model Arab League Handbook*, 2014. p. 5-6.

³ *Model Arab League Handbook*, 2014. p. 7.

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Nations and that there are several national, regional, and even collegiate and secondary-education level organizations that organize Model United Nations conferences within the academic year¹. For the purposes within this paper, the description will focus on the Southern Regional Model United Nations (SRMUN)—a non-profit educational corporation established in 1990 in the United States that was responsible for organizing the Model United Nations conference in which the author was a participant². Unlike NCUSAR, which acts as an international entity connecting Arab nations to the United States and runs MAL as a program dedicated to expanding Arab American relations, the primary purpose of SRMUN is purely education in nature and thus focuses its efforts on the procedural nature of the conference itself—the consequences of which will be discussed in more detail later.

As a non-profit corporation, SRMUN holds a Board of Directors and an Advisory Board that oversee the administration of the corporation and is responsible for choosing the executive staff of each conference that it oversees—these positions being the Secretary-General, the Director-General, the Deputy Director-General, and the Under Secretary-General³. These positions are responsible for the setup and oversight of the two individual conferences that SRMUN is responsible for holding each year: a conference in Charlotte, North Carolina in March and a second conference in Atlanta, Georgia in October⁴. In turn, SRMUN's conference structure is similar in that committee chairs must apply separately from participating institutions and are appointed by the executive staff for each conference⁵. This of course, represents a disassociation from the structure of the modelled organization where chairs are elected by the participating states, but is

¹ "Model United Nations FAQs." un.org. United Nations. Accessed March 21, 2022. <https://www.un.org/en/mun/faq>.

² *Bylaws of the Southern Regional Model United Nations Inc.* Bronx, New York: Southern Regional Model United Nations, Inc., 2020. p. 1
<http://www.srmun.org/board.php>

³ *Bylaws of the Southern Regional Model United Nations Inc.*, 2020. p. 2.

⁴ "About SRMUN." SRMUN. Southern Regional Model United Nations Inc. Accessed March 21, 2022.
<http://www.srmun.org/history.php>.

⁵ "Get Involved." SRMUN. Southern Regional Model United Nations Inc. Accessed March 21, 2022.
<http://www.srmun.org/join.php>.

not surprising given the expected necessities of administering an educational model diplomacy simulation.

Additionally, there is a similar pattern of presence when it comes to the specific committees being modelled at each conference held by SRMUN just as there is at each MAL conference. However, the main reason—at least observationally—for what organizations they model differs from the simple logistical issues presented in MAL. Namely, SRMUN changes the suborganizations modelled at each conference due to a rotational schedule and their desire to introduce regional organizational simulations into each conference they hold. For example, at the conference held in Charlotte, North Carolina in March of 2022, the “Committees” represented were¹:

- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Plenary committee
- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) executive board
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
- International Law Commission (ILC)
- United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

Whereas, another SRMUN conference held in Atlanta, Georgia in October of 2021 also modelled the UNGA and UNSC, but swapped out the other aforementioned “Committees” for²:

- United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA)
- International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO)
- Group of 77 (G77)
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) executive board
- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) executive board
- International Court of Justice (ICJ)

¹“Committees & Topics.” SRMUN. Southern Regional Model United Nations Inc. Accessed March 21, 2022.

<http://www.srmun.org/charlotte/committees.php>.

²“Archives: Atlanta 2021.” SRMUN. Southern Regional Model United Nations Inc. Accessed March 21, 2022.

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C) Examining Rules of Procedure

Since they are subject to these dramatic changes in the makeup of diplomacy models between each conference, and the logistical and organizational needs of the hosting an educational model diplomacy simulation, both organizations do not copy the governing rules and procedures of the organizations that they emulate but rather rely on variations of “Robert’s Rules of Order”—a system of parliamentary procedure that is ubiquitous among non-governmental organizations in the United States. In fact, this is implicitly stated on the United Nations’ webpage on the rules of procedure for Model United Nations conferences, noting that the UNGA does not use “Robert’s Rules of Order” as it is not a parliamentary organization¹.

Section II: Analysis of Simulation Topics

Just like the real-world United Nations and the real-world League of Arab States, the amount of influence and relevancy that each state in the model diplomacy simulations provided by MAL and the Model United Nations has is greatly influenced by the topics that are being discussed by the organizations on a given agenda. This means that simulation participants need to dedicate specific time to accurately researching the foreign policies of the states that they are representing to attempt to capture the true qualities and stances of the foreign policy of their respective state. In the author’s experiences from both MAL and the Model United Nations, both organizations place emphasis on research through similar, yet varying methods of academic coaxing. This section will discuss how these methods for research are encouraged and then examine some topics presented at each simulation and how they affect the influence of Tunisia in the respective simulation.

A) Examining Incentive for Research

In the case of MAL, NCUSAR has a distinct advantage in providing student participants direct access to the foreign policies of the states they represent by having the ability to directly connect them with the

¹ “Agenda, Workplan, Documents and Rules of Procedure.” un.org. United Nations. Accessed March 23, 2022.
<https://www.un.org/en/model-united-nations/agenda-workplan-documents-and-rules-procedure>.

foreign delegations of the Arab states they represent in the United States¹. This gives the students in the delegations the ability to speak directly with a representative of these states on the topics that are on the agenda for a set conference as well as general outlines of the stances that a specific state has regarding the generalities of foreign policy. Notably however, in the case of most committees, there is no formal review of research that must be presented by delegates to the conference beforehand—at least in the specific simulation attended by the author—except for having the documents for a legal case beforehand prepared and submitted for review by the organizers of the conference for those representing delegations to the Arab Court of Justice. The rest of the impetus for research falls upon the students and the faculty leaders for each educational intuition that participates.

In contrast, the Model United Nations conferences organized by SRMUN do not benefit from the same direct connection to foreign embassies and delegations that NCUSAR does but puts a stronger emphasis on previous research through the requirement of a two-page paper outlining the position of each delegation on each committee that must be submitted for review and grading by the organizers of each conference at least two weeks in advance. The author notes that this is a widely accepted practice for most model diplomacy simulations in the absence of the direct connections to the diplomatic delegations of foreign states that NCUSAR has. However, these papers do leave a lot to be desired in the form of realism as sources accepted can vary widely depending on the preferences of the grader and leaves a lot of room open to interpretation by students— especially for those representing smaller states whose track records regarding certain issues are hard to find record of and whose policy positions may seem counter to the issue being discussed. In addition, the larger number of delegations to SRMUN conferences seemingly lends to certain delegations' opportunities to back resolutions and take stances on topics that do not line up with the real-world stances of the countries they represent or that outright contradict them altogether.

B) Impact of Topic Choices in Model Arab League

Besides the degree of impetus for research, the topics themselves have an impact on the ability for the student-led state delegations to voice

¹ “About the Program.”, 2017.

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their stances and opinions on issues. In the author's case, he was able to observe that certain topics where the Republic of Tunisia had greater political preference and domestic experience in were much easier for the simulated diplomatic delegation to impact resolutions and debates within the simulation that those where Tunisia had little diplomatic interest or found itself in contradiction to its stated policy goals. As the representative for Tunisia on the Council on Political Affairs, the author noted this observation from experience during the Bilateral US-Arab Chamber of Commerce Regional MAL conference hosted in Houston, Texas in February of 2022. The specific topics for consideration in the stated committee at this conference were:

- “Analyzing stimulus policy efforts created during the COVID-19 crisis and their feasibility as models for long term improvement efforts.”¹
- “Exploring possible avenues for including national civic organizations in implementing the commitments of member states.”²
- “Discussing the rights of prisoners with an emphasis on preventing torture, arbitrary detentions, and extrajudicial executions.”³
- “Addressing the role of transparency and political integrity in electoral trust in the region.”⁴

As can be ascertained from the topics listed above, Tunisia's experience in the real-world with these issues impacts the ability of the delegations responsible for representing Tunisia to be able to react to and lead authoring resolutions on these topics. For example, Tunisia's ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic financially was severely restricted by the size of its national financial reserves, leading to an economic stimulus package that was ultimately many times smaller than that of states in Europe, or even some other states

¹ *2021-2022 Provisional Model Arab League Agenda*. Washington, D.C.: Model Arab League Youth Leadership Development Program, 2021. p. 1. <https://ncusar.org/modelarableague/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/MALAgenda-2021-2022.pdf>.

² *2021-2022 Provisional Model Arab League Agenda*, 2021. p. 1.

³ *2021-2022 Provisional Model Arab League Agenda*, 2021. p. 1.

⁴ *2021-2022 Provisional Model Arab League Agenda*, 2021. p. 1.

in the Arab world¹. In addition, the ability of the delegation to offer constraints was also offered by the larger comparative expenditures Tunisia made on quarantine measures by being one of the few countries to enforce mandatory confinement at pre-designated centers for those infected with the COVID-19 virus at state expense.² This, of course constrained Tunisia's ability to offer feasible solutions to the COVID-19 stimulus policy and consigned the delegation to following the lead of other states on the committee for authoring a resolution. In contrast, Tunisia benefits from having an extremely robust civil society in the wake of the 2011 "Jasmine Revolution" and as a result, has active participation from non-governmental civic organizations in its domestic and foreign policy-crafting process³. This seemingly made the author's ability as a participating delegate to represent Tunisia as a leading state in authoring a resolution to address this topic and was very helpful in increasing the realism in the simulating the internal mechanics of the League of Arab States, as other delegations on the committee both sought to work with the author and against the author, based on the respective national interests of the states they represented. This process was similarly reflected in the other topics on the agenda for this MAL conference.⁴

C) Impact of Topic Choices in Model United Nations

This trend was especially true for Tunisia's representation on the International Labour Organization committee in Model United Nations. For the author's part, the committee was tasked with delivering resolutions for the following two issues:

¹"Policy Responses to COVID-19." imf.org. International Monetary Fund. Accessed March 15, 2022

<https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID19#T>.

² Khoulood, Laffet, Haboubi Fatma, Elkadri Noomene, Georges Nohra Rita, and Rothan-Tondeur Monique. "The Early Stage of the COVID-19 Outbreak in Tunisia, France, and Germany: A Systematic Mapping Review of the Different National Strategies." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 8622, 18, no. 16 (August 15, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168622>.

³ Ben-Hassine, Wafa. "Tunisian Civil Society's Unmistakable Role in Keeping the Peace." Web log. *MENASource* (blog). The Atlantic Council, January 19, 2018. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/tunisian-civil-society-sunmistakable-role-in-keeping-the-peace/>.

⁴2021-2022 *Provisional Model Arab League Agenda*, 2021. p. 1-2.

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- “Addressing the Impacts of Automation on the Global Workforce.”¹
- “Improving Inclusivity of Disabled Workers into the Future Labor Market.”²

Using a strategy of dividing up research among the questions, the author was able to work with an assigned student partner as part of the delegation to understand the relative political stance of Tunisia on both issues, where the author was tasked with the first issue. However, calculating the opportunities for Tunisia to make itself heard in this political arena was especially challenging for the author based on two assumptions that he was reliably able to draw from previous research: the first being that Tunisia currently faces an unemployment crisis that pre-dates the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the second being that Tunisia would seek to ensure that its educated professionals are maximally employed. In other words, this meant that the author would have to argue a solution to an issue where potential solutions would largely clash with the stated outward policy goals of the Republic of Tunisia.

However, the approach to the second issue was more generous towards the author’s delegation, where Tunisia had previously taken leading positions in addressing this on the domestic front through legislation like the 1981 “Law for the Promotion of the Handicapped”³, and initiatives such as the 2002 “National Program for the Scholastic Integration of Schools” that guaranteed of disabled students in Tunisia’s national school system⁴. With this, the author’s delegation was able to have much more influence on authoring resolutions for the International Labour Organization committee, a

¹ *SRMUN Charlotte 2022 International Labour Organization (ILO) Background Guide*. Bronx, New York: Southern Regional Model United Nations Inc., 2022.http://www.srmun.org/charlotte/docs/2022/CLT22_ILO_BGG_FINAL.pdf.

² *SRMUN Charlotte 2022 International Labour Organization (ILO) Background Guide*, 2022. p. 9.

³ *Rep. Tunisia: Atlas Council Shadow Report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. The Atlas Council, 31 October 2010.https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1337076/1930_1365433968_atlascouncil-tunisia_5thsesison.pdf.

⁴Shaub, Kaitlan, "Special Education in Tunisia: A Case Study in Social Entrepreneurship" (2016). Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. 2376. https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2376

process that seemingly reflects the real-world experience of diplomats in such international organizations.

Section III: Consideration of Representation

Of course, the framework of Tunisia's representation within both the Model League of Arab States and the Model United Nations is not only constrained and influenced by the topics on the agenda for consideration, but also the ability for Tunisia—and indeed for all states represented—to express their diplomatic voices and influence within the diplomatic simulations. Based on direct experience, this lends to inconsistencies in the overall level of realism offered to participants in the simulation. Below, the author uses this section to discuss how the level of influence individual delegations have on their respective committees is displayed in both organizations.

The most obvious point to note is an aspect that is common to both organizations: in which each delegation is assigned a set number of delegates to each committee represented in each conference. For most committees in both organizations, the preferred number of delegates is two—except for committees that usually have a single delegate assigned in the real-world organizations they simulate, such as the UNSC. This theoretically evens the ground in representation between delegations, however, certain delegations may only have one person representing them because of delegation size from their respective institution. This has an uneven impact on the ability of each delegation to voice its opinion, especially in larger diplomacy models wherein there are dozens, if not hundreds of competing delegations.

A) Representation in Model Arab League

In the case of Tunisia, the author's experience has been varied, and it is notable that the ability of each state represented in both MAL and Model United Nations to have strong effect on the topic and resolution depends greatly on the skill of the individual students involved. This was observed as being the case in both simulations involved. Expanding upon this: the author was the sole delegate from the Republic of Tunisia on MAL's Council on Political Affairs, where five other individual delegates served representing other Arab states and an appointed Chair of the "committee". The author was appointed as vice-chair of the committee and was thus able to exercise more control

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of the proceedings— especially in the absence of the appointed chair—than the author otherwise might have. In addition, a strong delegation from the Kingdom of Jordan ended up taking the leading role on the resolutions formulated by the council for the issues at hand, in this case because of the experience in performing in multiple previous model diplomacy conferences in comparison to students representing other delegations. This would, of course, differ from the real-world situations that occur in the League of Arab States, since national political influence cannot truly be modelled in these situations, and therefore personal debating and negotiating strengths tend to be the factor that is substituted.

B) Representation in Model United Nations

This trend was continued in the Model United Nations conference attended by the author, wherein the author served on a team of two students representing the Republic of Tunisia's delegation to the International Labour Organization (ILO). As the simulation was now of a global organization, the number of delegations represented was now one-hundred-and-seventeen of varying sizes of either one or two delegates, rather than the six in the MAL "committee" attended by the author. This is where the author notes that individual skill by students seemed to be of greater importance due to the number of delegations represented rather— in contrast to real-world political influence—as more negotiations on resolution formation took place in unmoderated direct discussions (as opposed to what was observed in MAL) and smaller states such as the Czech Republic were more visible in leading the creation of resolutions. Meanwhile, the author observed that several larger states— such as the Russian Federation and the United States of America—ended up with less influence on the outcome of the resolutions that were eventually voted on by the committee.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the author finds that model diplomacy simulations such as the ones discussed above represent important tools for students to grow themselves as communicators and as debaters in a professional setting but finds a distressing lack of emphasis on fact-finding and accurate representation of national foreign policies. Based on the observations undertaken by the author, the following are suggested as recommendations to improve the scope of research and realism

represented in model diplomacy simulations such as MAL and the Model United Nations:

- NCUSAR, through its connections with the governments of Arab states, provides an excellent example of connecting student participants in MAL with representatives of Arab League states through representatives at their embassies. Organizations running model diplomacy simulations should seek to encourage the facilitation of educational ties with states represented in said simulations between participant schools and either official representatives of the state in question or through ties within academic channels of expertise on the foreign policies of said states.
- Organizers of model diplomacy simulations should consider methods of scoring participants based on their adherence to observed political preferences of the states represented and seek to encourage the factual accuracy of the research presented in preparation for such simulations.

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