The Amazon—the world’s largest rainforest—is disappearing. As much as 17 percent of Brazil to elect a new president. However, with Bolsonaro still discouraged any attempt at outside influence. A low-risk option is for the United States to maintain its current policy of sanctions, but Bolsonaro has made clear that Brazil would likely fiercely resist such measures. Sanctions would also set the strongest precedent for undermining a country’s sovereignty on behalf of the environment, opening the door to similar sanctions against the United States. The United States could also provide Brazil with economic incentives to stop deforestation and to farm using more sustainable methods. Economic incentives have succeeded in the past; an 80 percent decrease in deforestation between 2004 and 2012 coincided with significant aid from the internationally funded Amazon Fund. Aid carries less risk of harming diplomatic and economic relations and is more respectful of Brazilian sovereignty than sanctions, but Bolsonaro has still discouraged any attempt at outside influence. A final, low-risk option is for the United States to maintain its current policy of simply making statements condemning deforestation, perhaps while waiting for Brazil to elect a new president. However, with the Amazon nearing a tipping point, the window for curbing deforestation could be closing.

Additional Resources:
1. Reimagining Sovereignty in a Global Era (World101)
2. Deforestation in the Amazon (Council on Foreign Relations)
3. The Amazon and You (Project Syndicate)

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Pop-Up Case Guidelines

Pop-up cases from Model Diplomacy are short case studies on current events that put students in the shoes of policymakers facing the most pressing issues in international relations. There are lots of ways to organize a discussion using a pop-up case. It is always helpful to think about your goals for the discussion and then to consider any time or participation constraints you could have. If you are teaching online and cannot discuss synchronously, consider a short writing assignment or using an online discussion board (see some excellent tips here and here). If you are teaching face-to-face or over videoconference and are looking for some inspiration, here are a few ideas:

Gauge reaction:

If you want to show what students are thinking before diving into the discussion, here are two easy ways to do it. In one, often called “four corners,” assign each policy option to a corner of the room, and then ask students to stand in the corner associated with the policy option they support. In the other, if you want your students to think along a spectrum instead (e.g., interventionist-isolationist, unilateral-multilateral, more urgent–less urgent), put the ends of your spectrum at either end of your blackboard and have students stand along the board to indicate where along the spectrum they fall. With both approaches, everyone will sit down again with a sense of where they stand regarding the case. Use this knowledge to shape discussion—eliciting less popular opinions, challenging more popular ones, encouraging like-minded students to further develop their ideas, or having students who disagree discuss in small groups.

Think-Pair-Share:

This exercise is particularly useful for groups where some students are hesitant. Ask everyone to spend a few minutes quietly gathering their thoughts and articulating them in a notebook (“think”), then have them turn to the person sitting next to them to compare notes (“pair”), and then have students report out to the whole group (“share”), knowing that everyone will have had time to think through something to say.

Whiparound:

Ask students to briefly share their position one after the other without responding to each other. Typically, everyone speaks in the order they are sitting. This can be a way to see where everyone stands before launching into a discussion. If you expect a topic to be particularly contentious, you could have students listen to each other and then reflect in writing.

Simple NSC simulation:

If you would like to simulate a simplified version of a more realistic policy debate, you can appoint yourself (or a randomly chosen student) president. Ask students to debate the policy options (or come up with new ones) and try to reach consensus on a recommendation to the president.

NSC simulation with assigned opinions:

While assigning individual roles for a brief case study is complicated, you could assign opinions. For example, assign one-third of the class to be isolationist, one-third to favor a military response, and one-third to favor a diplomatic response. Let the groups caucus for a few minutes, then present their policy options and debate them, leaving the final decision up to you (or a student) as president.

Note: In our experience, simulations are often most productive if students imagine they are advising a generic president rather than a specific one.

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