

ships to delay intercepting Soviet vessels until the last possible moment. *and had the order transmitted in the clear.* The Soviets, who were certain to intercept the message, would thus learn that they had additional time in which to formulate a response to the blockade. This ploy also revealed a sophisticated understanding of the social psychology of communication: information from a distrusted source is more likely to be believed if it is obtained through the recipient's own efforts. The Soviet decision on October 25 to slow down the westward progress of their ships in mid-Atlantic can also be interpreted as an effort to lengthen decision time.

A comparison of the 1914 and 1962 crises points to the importance of a subjective rather than an objective definition of decision time. Owing to vast differences in military capabilities, time was objectively of far greater importance in 1962 than in 1914. Hence, Soviet and American leaders were no less aware of time pressures and of the potential costs of delaying action than were their counterparts in 1914. But they also perceived the dangers of acting in haste, and they were successful in mitigating the most severe dangers attending such pressures. They resisted the pressures for premature decisions and took a number of actions which avoided putting their adversaries in a position of having to respond in haste. President Kennedy later acknowledged that the ability to delay a decision after receipt of the photographic evidence of missile sites was crucial to the content of American policy: "If we had had to act on Wednesday [October 17], in the first 24 hours, I don't think probably we would have chosen as prudently as we finally did, the quarantine against the use of offensive weapons."<sup>59</sup>

**Policy Options.** During the missile crisis, the search for alternatives was intimately related to time pressures; in the words of Arthur Schlesinger, "The deadline defined the strategy."<sup>60</sup> Pressures of time notwithstanding, "American policy makers made efforts to prevent premature foreclosure of options. McGeorge Bundy noted that upon

receiving the first news of the photographic evidence, "his [Kennedy's] first reaction was that we must make sure, and were we making sure, and would there be evidence on which he could decide that this was in fact really the case? As late as October 18, a series of alternatives was being considered pending more accurate information, and while the decision to institute a blockade was being hammered out, open discussion of the alternatives was encouraged. The President recalled that "though at the beginning there was a much sharper division. . . this was very valuable, because the people involved had particular responsibilities of their own."<sup>62</sup> Another participant in the crisis decision group asserted that President Kennedy, aware that discussion of alternatives in the National Security Council would be more frank in his absence, encouraged the group to hold preliminary meetings without him. Thus, the eventual decision was reached by relatively open and frank discussion.

Six alternative responses emerged from the initial discussions between the President's advisers. Ultimately, the choice narrowed down to the blockade and the air strike. Initially, the option of a sudden air strike against the missile sites had strong support among most of the conferees, including that of the President. An informal vote is reported to have revealed an 11-6 majority in favor of the blockade.<sup>63</sup> The United States Air Force could not guarantee, however, that an air strike would be 100 percent effective. The blockade did not necessarily guarantee success; on the other hand, it did not rule out further measures. After much shifting of positions, the blockade option was selected, partly on the reasoning that "the course we finally adopted had the advantage of permitting other steps, if this one was unsuccessful. In other words, we were starting, in a sense, at a minimum place."<sup>64</sup>

The desire to avoid killing Soviet troops also weighed heavily against the air strike option. The blockade shifted the immediate burden of decision concerning the use of violence to Premier Khrushchev and, should the blockade have proved

unsuccessful. it did not preclude later employment of a "much more massive action."<sup>65</sup> By adopting that strategy, no irrevocable decisions on the USC of violence had been made and multiple options remained for possible future actions by the United States. At the same time, Soviet leaders were given the time and the opportunity to assess their own choices. Thus, unlike several of the key foreign policy officials in the 1914 crisis, those in October 1962 seemed to perceive a close relationship between their own actions and the options of their adversaries. According to Theodore Sorensen, "We discussed what the Soviet reaction would be to any possible move by the United States, what our reaction with them would have to be to that Soviet reaction, and so on, trying to follow each of those roads to their ultimate conclusion."<sup>66</sup>

American decision makers also displayed a sensitivity for the position and perspective of the adversary, trying to insure that a number of options other than total war or total surrender were available to Soviet leaders. An important advantage of the blockade over other strategies was that it appeared to avoid placing Soviet leaders in that situation. An air strike on the missile bases or invasion of the island would have left Soviet leaders only the alternatives of capitulating to the United States or of counterattacking. In that case, the latter might have seemed the less distasteful course. In disagreeing with General Curtis LeMay's optimistic assessment of the likely Soviet response to air raids on the missile installations, the President asserted, "They, no more than we, can let things go by without doing something."<sup>67</sup> A blockade, on the other hand, gave the Soviet government a choice between turning back the weapons-bearing ships or running the blockade.

By October 26 it seemed clear that, Khrushchev's earlier threats to the contrary notwithstanding, Soviet ships would not challenge the blockade. Despite the advent of negotiations, however, it was far from certain that the Soviet missiles would be removed from Cuba: indeed, there was ample evidence of an accelerated pace of construction on the launching sites in Cuba that, it was then

believed, would be completed by October 30. Thus, the question of further steps to be taken in case the blockade proved insufficient to force withdrawal of all offensive missiles again confronted American leaders. Among the options considered were: tightening the blockade to include all commodities other than food and medicine, increased low-level flights over Cuba for purposes of reconnaissance and harassment, action within Cuba, an air strike, and an invasion. In the meanwhile, the President's brother delivered an ultimatum to the Soviet ambassador, and both direct and indirect bargaining resulted in a settlement? Just before the most serious meeting ever to take place at the White House<sup>69</sup> was to have started, Premier Khrushchev agreed to withdraw all offensive missiles from Cuba in exchange for President Kennedy's pledge not to invade Cuba.

Time pressure and the search for alternatives are key elements in crisis decision making. Data from 1914 indicate that these factors did in fact vary as crisis-induced stress increased, and these changes apparently had serious consequences for critical policy decisions. A more impressionistic analysis of the Cuban confrontation suggests that the ability of American decision makers to mitigate some of the adverse consequences of crisis contributed to its eventual peaceful resolution. In many respects, President Kennedy's behavior during the Cuban crisis appeared consciously designed to avert repetition of the 1914 disaster. Indeed, he frequently referred to the decision processes leading up to World War I as a source of negative lessons. Having read Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August*, for example, the President said: "I am not going to follow a course which will allow anyone to write a comparable book about this time. *The Missiles of October*. If anybody is around to write after this, they are going to understand that we made every effort to find peace and every effort to give our adversary room to move. I am not going to push the Russians an inch beyond what is necessary."<sup>70</sup> Even when discussing the Cuban missile crisis some weeks after its conclusion, he asserted, "Well now, if you look at the

history of this century where World War I really came through a series of misjudgments of the intentions of others... it's very difficult to always make judgments here about what the effect will be of our decisions on other countries."<sup>71</sup> Yet the ability of American and Soviet leaders to avoid a nuclear Armageddon in October 1962 is not assurance that even great skill in crisis management will always yield a peaceful solution. As President Kennedy said some months later, referring to the missile crisis, "You can't have too many of those."<sup>72</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The approach described here suffers from some clear limitations that should be addressed explicitly. Several objections might be raised about the relevance of the individual stress model of crisis decision making.<sup>73</sup> Does it adequately take into account the executive's prior experience in coping with crises? Will not experience, when combined with selective recruitment and promotion, weed out those who cannot stand "the heat in the kitchen" well before they reach top leadership positions? It is true that individuals differ in abilities to cope with crises and stress. The peak, breaking point and slope of the "inverted U" curve may vary not only according to the complexity of the task, but also across individuals. Thus, the point at which increasing stress begins to hamper cognitive performance, and the rate at which it does so, is not the same for all persons. But only the most optimistic will assume that the correlation between the importance of the executive's role and ability to cope with crisis-induced stress approaches unity. Richard Nixon's behavior during the Watergate episode is a grim reminder to the contrary. Perhaps even more sobering is Robert Kennedy's recollection of the Cuban missile crisis: "That kind of [crisis-induced] pressure does strange things to a human being, even to brilliant, self-confident, experienced men. For some it brings out characteristics and strengths that perhaps they never knew they had, and for others the pressure is too overwhelming."<sup>74</sup>

A second possible objection is that, whereas the emphasis here has been on the individual's cognitive performance under conditions of crisis-induced stress, foreign policy leaders rarely need to face crises alone. They can instead draw upon support and resources from both advisory groups and the larger organizations of which they are a part. This point is valid, but on further examination it is not wholly comforting. There is some evidence that during crises advisory groups may be vulnerable to such malfunctions as "group-think." For various reasons, including perceived needs for secrecy, easier coordination, and the like, decision-making groups tend to become smaller during crises. There may be, moreover, a tendency to consult others less as the pressure of time increases, as well as to rely more heavily upon those who support the prevailing "wisdom." Finally, leaders differ not only in their "executive styles" (note, for example, the strikingly different problem-solving styles exhibited by presidents Coolidge, Franklin Roosevelt, and Nixon), but also in their abilities to employ advisory groups effectively — that is, in ways that may help them to counteract some of the potentially adverse consequences of crisis. Even the same executive may demonstrate great skill during one crisis and equal ineptitude in another instance. John F. Kennedy's use of advisers during the missile crisis and the Bay of Pigs fiasco are illustrative in this respect.

Some more specific limitations can also be identified. Certainly, the two cases are not representative of all crises in any statistical sense. Thus, the results described here should be viewed as illustrative rather than definitive. Moreover, the analysis focused on very limited aspects of crises, to the exclusion of many other potentially fruitful comparisons... In any case, the rather different findings for the 1914 and 1962 crises raise a series of additional questions about the necessary and sufficient conditions for avoiding decision-making malfunctions that have barely been touched upon here. The individual stress model focuses on a few aspects of crisis and consciously excludes others. By posing some questions and not others,

we have limited the range of answers. Every model or theoretical perspective does so, with some inevitable losses and, it is to be hoped, at least some commensurate gains. The proper question to ask, then, is not **whether** this approach serves as a complete model for all crises — the answer is unquestionably negative — but **whether** it directs our **attention** to important **phenomena** that might otherwise remain beyond our purview.

Variants of the individual **stress model** of crisis decision making have been employed in other studies and, not surprisingly, the **pattern** of findings is mixed.... In their impressive study of a dozen international crises — including Fashoda (1898), Bosnia (1908-1909), Munich (1938), **Iran (1945-1946)**, and Berlin (1948-1949) — Snyder and Diesing found no evidence of adverse consequences arising from high stress.<sup>75</sup> Yet they did report that misperception, miscalculation, and other cognitive malfunctions **were** common occurrences during the crises. Because their research was not designed to test for either the existence or consequences of crisis-induced stress, perhaps it is premature to count this study as **definitive** evidence **against** the propositions advanced here. On the other hand, drawing on his research on Israeli behavior during the crises of 1956, 1967, and 1970, Ruccher found strong support for the hypotheses that time will be **perceived** as more salient, that decision makers will become more concerned with

the immediate rather than the distant future, and that they will perceive the range of alternatives' open to themselves to be narrow.?. .

These mixed results are not surprising, nor should they occasion premature conclusions about lack of significant research progress or the future of this approach **for** diplomatic history, theory, or even policy. Other studies could be cited in support **of and against** the individual stress model, but this does not appear to be the most fruitful way of proceeding. Sustained interest in the effects of crisis-induced stress does not depend on finding that **every** crisis from the historical past resulted in substandard decision-making performance, any more than concern for the consequences of smoking must await evidence that all smokers develop lung cancer. The much more interesting and important questions emerge precisely at the point of recognizing that the dangers and opportunities inherent in crises can give rise to various patterns of coping. At that point our attention is directed to a series of further questions — for example, what are the decision-making structures, personal attributes of leaders, strategies of crisis management, and other variables that are associated with more or less **successful** coping — that have barely been touched upon in this chapter. It is at this point that we can perhaps begin to **appreciate** the **value of** interdisciplinary approaches for the study **of** crises decision making.

## ENDNOTES

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- 3 Herman Kahn, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 38.
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- 7 Herbert Simon, *Organizations* (New York: Wiley, 1958), p. 138.
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