37. International Crisis as a Situational Variable

Charles F. Hermann is Assistant Professor of Politics at Princeton University. The author of a number of important articles on research problems in the international field, Professor Hermann has also collaborated with his wife on innovative empirical inquiries into the dynamics of foreign policy behavior (see Selection 51). In particular, his work has focused on behavior in crisis situations and, as such, has contributed to the emergence of crisis as a major concept in the field. Although the reader will doubtless wish to ponder for himself the question of whether crises should be treated as dependent or independent variables—as merely the outcome of underlying processes or as processes that in themselves significantly contribute to the outcome of situations—here Professor Hermann provides a persuasive answer to the question. He examines the possible impact of crises on the behaviour of a single national actor and, in so doing, demonstrates several ways in which crises can influence decisional processes and thus operate as more than the outcome of underlying processes. [*This paper was written especially for this volume.*]

I

Interpreters of international politics have discussed numerous variables in their efforts to understand the variety of actions taken in the name of nation-states and other international actors. Single acts of foreign policy as well as patterns of interaction have been explained in terms of goals and national interests, the available national capabilities, the type of government, the personalities of national leaders, the influential nongovernmental agents within a country, or the human and nonhuman environment outside the country. One cluster of variables of potential value in explaining the behavior of international actors characterizes the situation that provides the occasion for action. Situational analysis, as it has been applied in other areas,[1] assumes that the action of an agent (in this case an international actor) is a function of the immediate situation it confronts.

With appreciation for the multiplicity of variables operating in international politics and with the availability of multivariate techniques of analysis, students of world affairs have increasingly avoided

[1] For some applications of situational analysis in other fields, see G. W. Allport, "Prejudice: A Problem in Psychological and Social Causation," in T. Parsons and E. A. Shils, eds., *Toward a General Theory of Action* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) Torchbook edition, pp. 365–87; L. J. Carr, *Situational Analysis* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948); R. Boguslow, "Situational Analysis and the Problem of Action," *Social Problems*, VIII, 3, (1960–61), 212–19; D. Cartwright, ed., *K. Lewin's Field Theory in Social Science* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), especially Chap. 10.

reliance on simplistic, single-factor explanations of their subject. No reversal of this trend is intended in this discussion of situational analysis. Rather this essay suggests that for the explication of some foreign policy actions, specific situational variables should be examined together with other factors. Situational variables are among a number of independent variables that can be expected to contribute significantly in accounting for the variation in international actions.

Assuming that a researcher plans to include reference to the immediate situation, what specific variables can he use to characterize the event? Some time ago Snyder and his associates observed: "We ought to recognize that a systematic frame of reference for the study of international politics will require several typologies, one of which will be concerned with situations."[2] As a step in the development of a typology of situations, individual categories of situations can be isolated and defined. Crisis constitutes one possible category if only because it has been analyzed so frequently by observers of international politics.

Secretary of State Rusk gave evidence of the frequency of crises when he told a Senate subcommittee that the world experienced forty-seven international political crises between 1961 and mid-1966.[3] These recurrent situations that often contain far-reaching implications for the future have not gone unexamined. Policy-makers, journalists, and academics all have undertaken descriptions and analyses of international crises. But one remarkable quality about most studies of crises has been their failure to provide cumulative knowledge about the class of events they investigate. Recollections of crises in the autobiographies of statesmen or reconstructions of events by reporters and scholars provide a more or less satisfactory interpretation of a particular crisis, but these analyses prove of limited value in understanding subsequent crises. As a given crisis recedes into history, critical attention shifts to the new, current crises. Because the accounts of the former crisis lack relevance for the most recent

situations, new studies are prepared and replace the previous ones.

A number of reasons can be offered for this state of affairs in the study of crisis. First, only the vaguest common meaning appears attached to the concept. Since many analysts fail to define crisis at all, the reader is left to infer from the context that the situation concerns some "critical" or "urgent" problem. In the attempt to call attention to every important issue, we suffer from the indiscriminate use of the term "crisis." Second, many individuals who write about crisis seem to believe in the uniqueness of every situation. At least they find unique the combination of properties necessary to provide a satisfactory explanation of a specific event. For example, in discussing some implications of economic theory for international relations, Aron observes: "It has not yet been proven that 'crisis situations' are all alike. It is possible that each crisis is unique or, if you prefer, has its own particular story...."[4] If we foster the conviction that each crisis is totally distinct from those encountered in the past and to be encountered in the future, then it is not surprising that we have little accumulated knowledge about crises. Third, the prevailing mode of analysis has been the detailed case history of a single crisis. Despite the satisfaction gained by reading a thorough and well-written case study, this method of analysis makes it unnecessary for the writer to consider how the crisis under examination compares with other situations.[5] Not only is the development of empirically verifiable generalizations by the original author hampered, but the absence of parallel construction between case studies makes it difficult for hypotheses to be abstracted by the reader of several studies.

These difficulties must be overcome if crisis is to be used as a situational variable accounting for certain foreign policy behaviors of nations. Although this essay deals primarily with the problems of definition and analysis, the question concerning the uniqueness of events requires brief consideration.

[2] R. C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and B. Sapin, eds., *Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 81.

[3] Statement of Dean Rusk at Hearing before the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, 89th Congress, 2nd Session, August 25, 1966.

[4] R. Aron, "What Is a Theory of International Relations?" *Journal of International Affairs*, XXI, 2 (1967), p. 188.

[5] Insightful statements concerning the problems of case studies can be found in G. D. Paige, *The Korean Decision* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), Chap. 1; and J. N. Rosenau, "Moral Fervor, Systematic Analysis, and Scientific Consciousness in Foreign Policy Research," in A. Ranney, ed., *Political Science and Public Policy* (Chicago: Markham, 1968), Chap. 9.

Every situation is novel when all its properties are considered. Even two simple situations—one a carefully executed replication of the other—differ in numerous ways. Between these occurrences, time will have elapsed. The earth and solar system will have moved. Human actors will be older and will have had intervening experiences. Given the novelty of simple, controlled situations, it is clear that countless differences exist between two complex international events such as the Berlin blockade of 1948 and Khrushchev's ultimatum on Berlin in 1958. Man would be unable to cope with his daily existence, however, if he did not treat most new situations as comparable to some situations he has met or learned about in the past. For purposes of evaluation and action, all humans categorize events according to a limited number of properties and ignore the rest. The adequacy of a response to a situation will depend in part upon the quality of the classifying categories and our ability to correctly recognize the situation as a member of a class of events. Having established how the present circumstances are related to some already experienced, man can bring the success or failure of past responses to bear on his present action. Of course, explanation and action are not the same; nor are the simple situations of daily living similar to the complex ones of international events. Nevertheless, if we *correctly* recognize a few critical properties of an international situation which identify it as a member of a general set of situations, we may establish many things about it even without examining many other qualities that make it unique.[6]

II

Definitions of crisis which identify a specific class of situations can be constructed with reference to either of two approaches which are among those prevalent in the contemporary study of international politics. These two are the systemic and decision-making approaches. A set of crisis situations does

[6] Of course, policy-makers can get into serious trouble by the misclassification of events. See A. M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Bitter Heritage* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967). The problem of situation recognition and classification is somewhat different for the art of policy-making than it is for the development of a science of politics. In the latter case new situations provide an opportunity for hypothesis-testing and refinement of categories, whereas in the former an unfamiliar situation introduces the risk of a policy misfortune.

not automatically emerge once the analyst selects either the decision-making or systemic framework for organizing his research. But the approach helps structure the kind of hypotheses in which crisis can prove to be a significant explanatory variable. The effect of the approach or organizing framework on a situational variable will become more evident upon closer examination of crisis defined from the systemic perspective.

We shall stipulate that a system is a set of actors (for example, nations, international organizations, and so on) interacting with one another in established patterns and through designated structures. In any given international political system, critical variables must be maintained within certain limits or the instability of the system will be greatly increased—perhaps to the point where a new system will be formed. A crisis is a situation which disrupts the system or some part of the system (that is, a subsystem such as an alliance or an individual actor). More specifically, a crisis is a situation that creates an abrupt or sudden change in one or more of the basic systemic variables.

In the present international system the existing military relationships depend in part on the relative superiority of the strategic weapon systems of the two superpowers and their deterrence capabilities with respect to each other. A sudden change in one of the superpowers' ability to deter the other would constitute a crisis for the system. The deterrence crisis might not transform the system or the subsystem comprised of the Soviet Union and the United States, but it has the potential to do so.

Rosecrance identifies nine international political systems between the years 1740 and 1960[7] which indicate the role of crisis in system transformation. In his analysis, system-transforming events includes the French Revolution, the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the revolutions of 1848, the Franco-Prussian War, the dismissal of Bismarck, and the two World Wars of the present century. Although the extended conflicts that Rosecrance describes as the usual transition between systems cannot be considered as crises under the present definition, several of these events were triggered by crises. The long years of World War I, for example, followed the crisis in late June and July 1914.

[7] R. N. Rosecrance, *Action and Reaction in World Politics* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1963).

The characterization of crisis from the systemic approach suggests the relationship of the concept to such terms as change and conflict. Because crises engage one or more of the critical variables necessary to maintain the existing pattern of relationships between actors, they necessarily can effect significant changes in the international system. Whether or not a crisis actually produces significant change depends on a number of factors such as the nature of the modified variables, the existing destabilizing factors, and the available techniques for crisis management. Just as not all crises lead to important changes, not all significant changes are crises. A gradual shift in the rate of exchange between nations could ultimately have a profound effect on the system, despite small increments of change at any given point in time. The association of crisis with abrupt change also bears on its relationship to conflict. A conflict between parties that continues at a relatively constant level of intensity would not constitute a crisis, but a sudden shift in the level of hostilities—most notably from peace to war—would be a crisis at least for the subsystem comprised of the combatants.

Although the proposed systemic definition of crisis has been an arbitrary one, it is consistent with much of the writing about crisis from a systemic perspective. Thus, crisis has been described as "intensive inputs to the international system . . . unbalancing stabilities,"[8] or as "some kind of boundary or turning point,"[9] or as "involving significant actual or potential international conflict in either a novel form or at an abruptly changing level."[10] One of the more complete systemic definitions of crisis is offered by Young: "An international crisis, then, is a set of rapidly unfolding events which raises the impact of destabilizing forces in the general international system or any of its subsystems substantially above "normal" (i.e., average) levels and increases the likelihood of violence occurring in the system."[11]

If a class of crisis situations can be operationally defined from the guidelines discussed above, what

contribution might this variable make to the analysis of international political systems? The structures and processes that maintain an international system may be more or less subject to the sudden stresses imposed by crisis. The question then arises as to what structures and processes are most "sensitive" to crisis situations. Sensitivity can vary in several ways including the tendency for some parts of the system to be more frequently exposed to crises. For example, interactions between actors who seek alterations in their international status are more prone to crises than interactions between actors who have accepted their status positions. Sensitivity also develops because some elements of a system can vary less than others without exceeding critical thresholds. For example, a system may be able to withstand considerably greater variation in the degree of conflict between smaller states than it can between major states. Essentially these questions concern the effect of crisis on system stability and transformation.

Because international systems differ, the impact of crisis can be expected to vary according to the type of system. This observation leads to such research questions as: Does the nature of the international system influence the frequency with which crises occur? Are certain systems better structured to allow policy-makers to cope with crises without destroying the system? According to Waltz, one "distinguishing factor in the bipolar balance, as we thus far know it, is the nearly constant presence of pressure and the recurrence of crises."[12] In addition to finding crises more frequent in a bipolar system than in a multipolar system, Waltz also contends that in a multipolar world a nation's policy-makers can create a crisis to further their objectives with the hope that opponents of the change will not coalesce in opposition. In a bipolar system, the permanency of opposing polar powers greatly increases the probability that any move to initiate a crisis will be countered.[13] Thus, two relevant hypotheses from the Waltz study are that the type of international system influences (1) the rate with which crises occur, and (2) the probability of direct confrontations

[8] J. F. Triska and D. D. Finley, *Soviet Foreign Policy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 317.

[9] K. E. Boulding, *Conflict and Defense* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) Torchbook edition, p. 250.

[10] A. J. Wiener and H. Kahn (eds.), *Crisis and Arms Control*, Hudson Institute, Advanced Research Projects Agency Contract No. SD-105, October 9, 1962, p. 12.

[11] O. R. Young, *The Intermediaries: Third Parties in International Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 10.

[12] K. N. Waltz, "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus*, XCIII, 3 (1964), p. 883.

[13] It is interesting to note in this context that one of the polar powers in the present system, the United States, was directly or indirectly involved in one-third of the forty-eight crises mentioned by Secretary Rusk.

between actors when any actor attempts to abruptly change significant systemic variables.

Conflicting hypotheses exist concerning the systemic consequences of numerous crises. Wright contends that the probability of war in a given period of time increases with the frequency of crises.[14] McClelland and Waltz make the counter-hypothesis although they use different arguments.[15] The nature of a given international system may be introduced as a mediating variable to resolve this apparent contradiction. In some inherently unstable systems, the appearance of a single crisis might trigger war. In other systems with effective regulatory mechanisms, crises might be repeatedly managed without resort to war. The availability to both the Soviet Union and the United States of a tremendous destructive capability that can be applied even after absorbing an initial nuclear attack may serve as such a regulator of crisis effects in the present international system.

These questions and hypotheses are only a few of those that might be examined using crisis as a systemic variable. To date, however, few empirical studies have been designed to investigate issues of this type which concern the entire international system. Authors with commitment to the systemic framework tend to examine the interaction of a subsystem in a single crisis.[16] The inspection of subsystem interaction or even a single national actor, treated as a system component, undoubtedly

can yield important insights into the role of crisis as a situational variable. But the effect of crisis on the relations within an alliance or between two adversaries may be quite different from the effect of that same crisis on the overall system. A specific crisis may drastically alter a subsystem without having any destabilizing consequences for the total international system. A greater variety of research methods must be employed to examine issues like the role of crisis as an instrument of system change and the effects of alternative systems on crisis management. In order to compare the effect of crises as a class of situations in different international systems we must expand the period of history in which crises are scrutinized. Furthermore, the single case study which describes in detail the interaction between a few parties in a crisis must be augmented by research which (1) views crisis from the perspective of the entire system, and (2) examines a number of crises with attention to comparable structures and processes. The need for additional methods of analysis using the systemic approach parallels requirements that become evident when crisis is defined using the decision-making approach.

III

As the name suggests, central to the decision-making approach is the process by which decisions are made on questions of policy. Also basic to this organizing framework are the persons who, as individuals or in some collective form, constitute the authoritative decision-makers. The decision-makers behave according to their interpretation of the situation, not according to its "objective" character as viewed by some theoretical omnipotent observer.[17] Therefore, in attempting to explain how different kinds of situations influence the type of choice that is made, the analyst must interpret the situation as it is perceived by the decision-makers.

The use of crisis as a situational variable which partially explains the policy-makers' decision is not unlike the stimulus-response model familiar to psychologists. Crisis acts as a stimulus; the decision represents a response. In the usual experimental application of this model, the researcher varies an

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[14] Q. Wright, *A Study of War* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 1272.

[15] Charles McClelland proposes that experience is gained with the management of each crisis; therefore, policy makers cope more successfully with subsequent crises. See his "The Acute International Crisis," *World Politics*, XIV, 1 (1961), 187–88. Kenneth Waltz suggests that if continuing hostility exists between two parties, crises may become a substitute for war (*op. cit.*, p. 884). Raymond Aron notes a "trend toward the diminution of the force used" in direct crises between the Soviet Union and the United States, but he does not speculate that this pattern could be generalized to all parties experiencing repeated crises. See his *Peace and War*, translated by R. Howard and A. B. Fox (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), p. 565.

[16] Examples of subsystem crisis studies are W. P. Davison, *The Berlin Blockade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); C. A. McClelland, "Decisional Opportunity and Political Controversy: The Quemoy Case," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, VI, 3, (1962), 201–13; A. Wohlstetter and R. Wohlstetter, *Controlling the Risks in Cuba*, Adelphi Paper No. 17, Institute for Strategic Studies, London, England, April, 1965.

[17] Harold and Margaret Sprout are among those who have carefully explicated this point. See their *The Ecological Perspective on Human Affairs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), especially pp. 28–30.

event or act which is used to account for any observed variation in the respondent's behavior. Applying this model to the interaction between policy makers of two nation-states, several political scientists expanded the paradigm to include: (1) the stimulus or actual policy of the initiating state, (2) the perception of that stimulus by the decision-makers in the recipient state, (3) the response or actual reply of the recipient state, and (4) the perception of that response by the decision-makers in the initiating state.[18] As in this modification of the stimulus-response model, the definition of crisis required by the decision-making approach must take into account the screening processes of human perceptions.

Those analysts who have studied crisis using the decision-making framework display no more agreement regarding the definition of crisis than do their counterparts who have applied the systemic approach. As before, we stipulate a definition which delimits a class of situations and contains some of the properties frequently associated with crisis. Specifically, a crisis is a situation that (1) threatens high-priority goals of the decision-making unit, (2) restricts the amount of time available for response before the decision is transformed, and (3) surprises the members of the decision-making unit by its occurrence. Threat, time, and surprise all have been cited as traits of crisis,[19] although seldom have all three properties been combined. Underlying the proposed definition is the hypothesis that if all three traits are present then the decision process will be substantially different than if only one or two of the characteristics appear. Contained in the set of events specified by this definition are many that observers commonly refer to as crises for American policy-makers, for example, the 1950 decision to defend South Korea, the 1962 Cuban missile episode, and the 1965 decision to send marines to the Dominican Republic. But other situations would not be considered crises for policy-makers in the United States; the 1958 ultimatum on Berlin, the extended

Greek-Turkish-Cypriot dispute, and the mission in 1964 to rescue Europeans in Stanleyville (Congo) are illustrative in this regard. The exclusion of these and other situations that do not contain at least one of the three traits does not deny the importance of these situations or the significant consequences of the resulting decisions. The classification of them as noncrises simply indicates that these situations may be different with respect to the decision process in some systematic ways from those included in the crisis set.

Before hypothesizing how the decision process in crisis differs from noncrisis, we must return to the perceptual problem. The proposed definition clearly refers to the decision-makers' perceptions of crisis situations, but how can this definition be implemented? The ideal answer is as obvious as it is difficult to achieve. Through interviews the researcher would get decision-makers to assess the amount of threat, time, and surprise they thought a given situation involved. Even if interviews should not be feasible, however, perceptual data on each crisis trait can be developed through the use of the public statements of policy-makers, their memoirs, and reports of their perceptions by other political leaders and by journalists.

Once we assume that the decision-makers' perceptions of a situation can be measured, a phenomenological question arises: Do the elements of the definition represent actual properties of situations as well as images in the minds of policy-makers? That is, do these qualities represent measurable stimuli independent of perceptions? Experimental data have been assembled elsewhere that offer an affirmative reply to this inquiry.[20] Without reviewing that evidence we may note that situations do vary in the extent to which they obstruct goals sought by policy-makers, and hence, situations differ in measurable threat. Moreover, most situations contain dynamic elements which lead to their evolution after a measurable period of time regardless of whether these aspects of the situations are recognized by the affected decision makers. Finally, the frequency with which similar events have occurred in the past and the existence of contingency planning are indicators of the amount

[18] O. R. Holsti, R. A. Brody, and R. C. North, "Affect and Action in International Reaction Models," *Journal of Peace Research*, III-IV (1964), 170–90.

[19] See the review of these traits in C. F. Hermann, "Some Consequences of Crisis which Limit the Viability of Organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, VIII, 1 (1963), 61–82 and C. F. Hermann, *Crises in Foreign Policy: A Simulation Analysis* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

[20] See C. F. Hermann, "Threat, Time, and Surprise," in C. F. Hermann, ed., *Contemporary Research on International Crises*, forthcoming.

of potential surprise contained in a situation. In short, the three crisis traits can be measured directly as properties of the situation or indirectly as perceptions of the decision-makers.

Because situations differ in their degree of threat, in their duration through time, and in their amount of surprise, each of the three traits that define a crisis can be conceived as one extreme on a dimension with scale positions for every possible quantity of each property. When taken together at
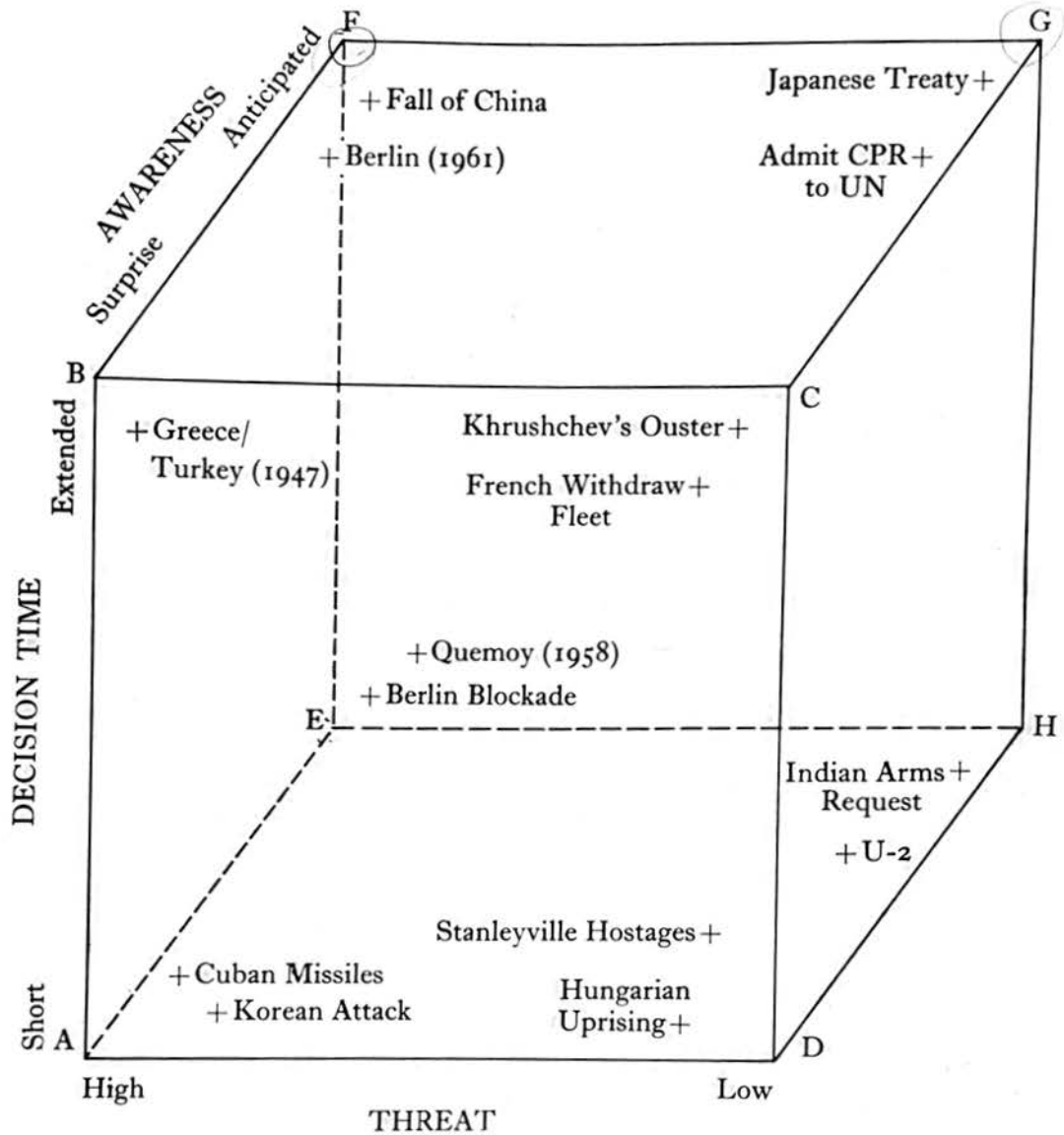

Figure 1. A situational cube representing the three dimensions of threat, decision time, and awareness, with illustrative situations from the perspective of American decision-makers. (*Note:* The representation of a three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional diagram makes it difficult to interpret the locations of the situations; their positions should not be considered exact in any case.)

A. Crisis Situation
   High Threat/Short Time/Surprise
B. Innovative Situation
   High Threat/Extended Time/Surprise
C. Inertia Situation
   Low Threat/Extended Time/Surprise
D. Circumstantial Situation
   Low Threat/Short Time/Surprise

E. Reflexive Situation
   High Threat/Short Time/Anticipated
F. Deliberative Situation
   High Threat/Extended Time/Anticipated
G. Routinized Situation
   Low Threat/Extended Time/Anticipated
H. Administrative Situation
   Low Threat/Short Time/Anticipated

right angles, these three scales form a three dimensional space in which all situations can be located according to their degree of threat, time, and awareness (surprise).[21] In Figure 1, this space has been closed to form a cube, the eight corners of which represent all possible combinations of the extreme values of the three dimensions. Thus, the corners of the cube represent ideal types of situations with respect to threat, time, and awareness.[22] Few, if any, actual situations can be considered to correspond to these ideal types, but as the location in the cube of a specific situation approaches one of the corners, that situation can be treated as influencing decision-making in a manner similar to the ideal type.

To illustrate the location of a situation along a dimension, consider the element of decision time in both the Korean crisis of 1950 and the Cuban crisis of 1962. As the South Korean army crumbled before the North Korean advance, the initial optimism of American decision-makers changed to a realization that unless the United States intervened quickly the invaders would control the entire peninsula. The first meeting with the President to discuss the Korean situation occurred on Sunday evening, June 25. After a series of steps taken in the next several days to support the faltering South Korean army, President Truman decided early Friday morning, June 30, to commit American ground forces. Although Truman and his advisers considered the time to be extremely short, other situations such as the detection of a launched ballistic missile attack could offer even less time for decision. Thus, on the time dimension the Korean decision would be located near the short time end of the scale, but would not be at the most extreme point. The Cuban missile crisis also presented short decision time because, as the American policy-makers observed, once the missiles were operational they would be extremely difficult to remove without the possibility that some of them would be launched in retaliation. With missiles prepared for firing, the

situation facing the leaders of the United States would be drastically altered. The first presidential session on that crisis occurred on the morning of Tuesday, October 26; the following Tuesday President Kennedy issued the "Proclamation of the Interdiction of Offensive Weapons" that ordered the blockade to begin the next morning. In actual time the decision in the missile crisis was more extended than that in the Korean crisis. If the decision-makers' perceptions of available time are used, some evidence indicates that the Korean crisis as compared to the Cuban crisis involved even less time than estimates based on clock or calendar. Despite these differences, the perceived time for both decisions puts them near the extreme of short time and both decision processes could be expected to bear resemblance to ideal type situations involving short decision time.

Hypothesized differences in decision-making introduced by crisis can be indicated by comparing crises with the other types of situations represented by the corners of the cube in Figure 1. The more decision makers perceive a situation to approximate the specified characteristics of crisis, the more applicable the following comments should be.

Crisis Situations

In a crisis, with its extreme danger to national goals, the highest level of governmental officials makes the decision. The time limitations together with the ability of these high-ranking decision-makers to commit the government allow them to ignore usual bureaucratic procedures. Information about the situation is at a premium because of the short time for collecting new intelligence and the absence of the serious data-gathering that precedes expected situations of importance. To a greater degree than in other situations the inputs that provide the basis for choice must be other than information about the immediate situation. For example, decision-makers may have a tendency to rely on incomplete analogies with previous situations or on their prior judgments about the friendliness or hostility of the source of the crisis. Although some substantive disagreements may occur among the policy-makers, personal antagonisms remain subdued because of a felt need for ultimate consensus. Compared to the policies

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[21] We shall use surprise as one extreme on an awareness dimension in order to permit a construction parallel to that for threat and time. Thus, the complete absence of awareness is surprise; the other extreme is anticipation. Because awareness refers to a condition of the decision-maker (i.e., his perception), the term would be less satisfactory if the remainder of this essay were concerned with the objective properties present in the situation.

[22] An earlier version of this situational cube appears in C. F. Hermann, *Crises in Foreign Policy, op. cit.*

made in response to other situations, crisis decisions tend more toward under- or over-reaction. An extreme response is encouraged by certain constraints imposed by the decision process (e.g., minimal information, increased importance of the decision-makers' personalities). The high stakes of a crisis decision and the uncertainty surrounding the outcome lead the decision-makers to remain quite anxious after the decision. Consequently, they expend considerable energy in the post-decision phase seeking support for their policy from allies and others.

Innovative Situations

A situation perceived to contain high threat and surprise but an extended amount of time can be described as encouraging an innovative decision. The threat to high-priority objectives increases the likelihood that the situation will receive the attention of the most able men available and, similarly, that considerable energy will be devoted to investigating the problem. Unlike a crisis decision, the greater time allows the government to undertake considerable search—a process motivated by the threat. Occasionally individuals in an agency charged with conducting foreign policy have programs or ideas that they have been unable to gain support for under normal conditions. A situation of the innovative type, for which there is no planned response and an openness to new ideas, will be sought by such individuals as an opportunity to obtain acceptance for their proposals. As in crises, ad hoc groups may be organized for the consideration of the situation, but they are not as free as crisis decision-makers to ignore normal administrative procedures.

Consider the following illustrations of innovative decisions. The deteriorating economic and political situation in Western Europe became increasingly visible to policy-makers in Washington during the last months of 1946. Against this background on February 21, 1947, the British surprised American officials by notifying them that beginning the first of April, Britain would be forced to discontinue financial assistance to embattled Greece. The same note also indicated that the British government would be unable to supply all the military assistance required by Turkey. That incident resulted in what Jones has called "the fifteen weeks" that

culminated in the Marshall Plan.[23] A second example of an innovative decision followed Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in July 1956. That situation appears to have been perceived as a high-threat, surprise situation by decision-makers in Britain and France. They apparently felt that the decision time was sufficiently extended to explore several possible alternatives (e.g., the users' conference, a United Nations resolution) while coordinating their military operations that led to the dramatic attack on Egypt, October 31.

Inertia Situations

Situations perceived as involving low threat, extended time, and surprise often lead to inertia decisions, that is, to decisions not to act or to discussions that never result in a decision. The surprise quality of the situation makes less likely the existence of preparations appropriate for coping with it. Being unexpected, no agency or bureau may see the situation as salient to its own plans. As a result the situation may be discussed by the various offices to which it is referred without the commitment of any agency. A decision is further inhibited by the absence of any sense of urgency. Given the number of policy situations at any given time that pose considerable danger to the objectives of policy-makers, this type of situation has difficulty being assigned a place on the crowded agenda of men with the authority to commit the state. Actual situations which, from the American perspective, approach the prototype for inertia decisions include the fall of Khrushchev on October 15, 1964 and De Gaulle's sudden withdrawal of the French Mediterranean Fleet from NATO in 1959. The latter situation was an annoyance to American objectives, but by itself was not recognized as a serious threat. Nor did it seem likely that De Gaulle would soon alter the situation if no American decision was made immediately.

Circumstantial Situations

Circumstantial decisions are increasingly likely in situations that policy-makers recognize as involving low threat, short time, and surprise. Like crises these are situational conditions that require a quick decision

[23] J. M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), Harbinger book edition.

if a choice is to be made before the situation is transformed in some manner that makes action more difficult. But unlike crises, and more like inertia decisions, the stakes in the present type of situation are not high. A failure to make the "right" decision in time is not seen as leaving important national goals in jeopardy. Under these conditions whether or not the nation's policy makers reach a decision depends on other circumstances that exist at the time the situation is recognized. In other words, the three situational variables are not likely to be critical determinants in the low threat, short time, and surprise configuration.

The captives held at Stanleyville in the Congo during November 1964 and the Hungarian revolt in November 1956 both created some threat to American objectives. On balance, however, these two situations must be located near the corner of the cube in Figure 1 designated "circumstantial." Both situations illustrate the importance of other factors in determining the response. When the uprising occurred in Hungary, policy-makers in the United States were preoccupied with the Anglo-French-Israeli assault on Egypt and the Suez Canal. They made no decision on the Hungarian issue until after the presence of Soviet troops had radically altered that situation. By contrast, the availability of Belgian troops and the interest of their government in cooperating with the United States to prevent the threatened murder of the European and American hostages resulted in 600 Belgian paratroopers being flown to Stanleyville on November 24, 1964, in aircraft furnished by the United States.

Reflexive Situations

The first four classes of situations involved surprise; the remaining four (located at the back of the cube in Figure 1) mark the opposite end of the awareness dimension. The lower left-hand corner of the cube represents situations that are recognized by policy-makers as containing high threat, short time, and anticipation. This situational configuration increases the probability of reflexive decisions. With decision time at a premium, no elaborate search routines or consultations are possible to disclose methods for coping with the situation. In this sense the decision process is similar to that for crises, the difference being that for reflexive decisions the policy-makers

have expected the situation to occur. Because they will experience a serious threat to their goals if it does develop, the policy-makers probably produce a contingency plan in the period before the situation emerges. Once the situation appears, minor alterations may be made in the proposed plan, but time pressures deny decision-makers the chance to consider major alternatives. In fact, the knowledge that they have already considered the problem may lead policy-makers to an almost reflexive response. Under these circumstances the decision process will be more rapid than in a crisis.

The blockade of Berlin in 1948 provides an example. American decision-makers perceived the threat to their objectives to be severe. They also recognized decision time to be restricted both by the dwindling supply of essential commodities in Berlin and by the need for a rapid response to assure Europeans of the commitment of the United States. As early as January 1948, the Soviets introduced various restrictions on transportation moving through East Germany to Berlin. By early April, General Clay had proposed to Washington an airlift to Berlin—at least for American dependents—if access on the ground were denied. When the Soviets began to stop traffic on June 24, Clay called for an airlift to begin the following day as an interim measure.[24] After a month, the President and his advisers agreed to continue this temporary measure on an increased scale for the duration of the blockade. The confrontation over the Taiwan Straits in 1958 may be another illustration of a situation containing the characteristics that lead to a reflexive decision. Policy-makers in the United States considered the shelling of Quemoy and Matsu islands—which began on August 23—as a serious threat requiring a quick decision if the islands were to be defended. American intelligence detected clues of the forthcoming assault during the first days of August, which added to the sense of anticipation already created by previous encounters. When the shelling of the islands began, the United States quickly responded by reinforcing the Seventh Fleet, which was operating in the area. Although engaging in overstatement, Stewart Alsop revealed the reflexive nature of the American reaction with his observation: "There is little real significance in the

[24] J. E. Smith, *The Defense of Berlin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p. 107.

inner history of the 1958 crisis, simply because the basic decisions had already been made in 1954 and 1955."[25]

Deliberative Situations

The combination of high threat, extended time, and anticipation often results in a decision process that can be described as deliberative. The reaction of decision-makers parallels that for the innovative decision in many respects. High threat increases the probability that the situation receives careful attention, but unlike a crisis, the deliberations are not limited to a small group of the highest-ranking officials. Consideration of the problem occurs at different levels and in different agencies. The time available for discussion both prior to the actual appearance of the situation (as a result of anticipation) and after it emerges (as a result of extended decision time) can lead to organizational difficulties. Many groups in and out of government may become committed to a particular method of handling the problem. As the following examples indicate, deliberative situations increase the likelihood of hard bargaining between groups with alternative proposals.

In August 1949, the Soviet Union achieved its first nuclear explosion. That threatening event had been anticipated by the American government, but had not been expected until 1952 or 1953. In the next several months it became evident to the American government that the civil war in China would result in a Communist regime on the Chinese mainland. With the background of the Soviet atomic explosion, the actual formation of the Chinese Peoples Republic created an anticipated situation for United States policy-makers of high threat and extended time. The response to the situation included the preparation of NSC-68, a document that makes a series of policy recommendations on the basis of a comprehensive statement of national strategy. These recommendations for rearmament involving large increases in military expenditures became the subject of an extensive debate within the Truman administration during the spring of 1950—a debate that was ultimately resolved by the attack on South Korea. The Soviet ultimatum on June 4, 1961, created a similar type of situation. The Soviet government warned that it would sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany within six months unless the Western powers withdrew their military forces from Berlin which was to become a demilitarized city. The U.S.S.R. had made a similar demand in November 1958. Moreover, Khrushchev for months before the formal note was dispatched had boasted that he would sign such a treaty. Despite the anticipated quality of the situation and the relatively extended period of time for decision, the American decision-makers perceived it as quite threatening. The decision process in response to this situation involved considerable internal dissent among United States policy-makers as well as sharp divisions between the Western allies.[26]

Routinized Situations

A diagonal running through the center of the cube in Figure 1 which has crisis decisions at one end has routinized decisions located at the other extreme. Routinized decisions frequently occur in low threat, extended time, and anticipated situations. Many, but not all, situations of this type are anticipated because they reappear with considerable regularity. Agencies charged with the conduct of foreign policy develop programmed routines for meeting recurrent low threat situations. Because established procedures are available, these situations tend to be dealt with by policy-makers at the lower and middle levels of the organization. The decision process follows one of two general patterns. In the first pattern decision-makers treat the problem in the same manner as they have treated previous situations of the same genus. Execution of the recommended course of action follows prompt agreement, unless temporary delays develop because policy-makers, whose approval is required, are engaged in more urgent business. If the situation lacks precedent or becomes the pawn in an interagency dispute, it follows the second pattern. Under these circumstances it may never come to a decision or may lie fallow until personnel change. Fear of bureaucratic obstruction provides one reason why policy-makers offer strong resistance to proposals for altering the response

[25] S. Alsop, "The Story Behind Quemoy: How We Drifted Close to War," *Saturday Evening Post*, CCXXXI (December 13, 1958), p. 88. Evidence that American intelligence had indications of the Chinese move early in August appears in D. D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 292.

[26] See Smith, *op. cit.*

to an issue for which there are established procedures. For the United States the question of admitting Communist China to the United Nations is a routinized decision regularly considered before the General Assembly convenes. Efforts to change the American response to this situation—as in 1961—have met with opposition in the government. The signing of a peace treaty with Japan offers another example. American policy-makers, some of whom had anticipated the problem since the closing days of World War II, began formulating a response when the situation arose in 1947. But differences developed over the issue. Not until September 1951 was the United States able to call the San Francisco Conference at which forty-eight nations signed the treaty of peace with Japan.[27]

Administrative Situations

The final corner of the situational cube represents low threat, short time, and anticipation—a combination that usually results in a decision process described in this essay as administrative. Administrative decisions engage middle-level officials of foreign policy organizations, men who have the authority to energize selected parts of the decision machinery for quick responses to situations that contain limited threat. Efforts to seek out new information about the situation are limited by the short decision time and by the relatively low priority of low threat situations in gaining access to the government's facilities for search. In a fashion similar to reflexive decisions, the treatment of an administrative decision depends on the extent to which policy-makers have taken advantage of their expectation that the situation is likely to occur. If they anticipate that the situation will involve minimal threat, policy-makers may be reluctant to invest much time in the preparation of a possible response. On the other hand, when a low threat situation materializes they have less of a felt need for some kind of action than do the participants in a reflexive decision. Hence, those engaged in an administrative decision are unlikely to act at all unless they are confident that the proposed response

[27] The appointment of John Foster Dulles as a special counselor in the State Department charged with overseeing the task appears to have been a critical step in obtaining a decision on this situation. See B. C. Cohen, *The Political Process and Foreign Policy: The Making of the Japanese Peace Settlement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

is appropriate to the situation. In brief, a low threat, short time, anticipated situation will mobilize existing work groups who will not engage in any significant amount of bargaining or search and who will reach a decision only if they are confident in their choice at the time it is made.

On May 1, 1960, when American decision-makers received notification that a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft was missing over the Soviet Union, the situation for them involved low threat, short time, and anticipation. The possibility that a U-2 might be lost over the U.S.S.R. had been considered previously. On the assumption that the Soviets would be unable to produce any substantial evidence regarding the plane's mission, United States policy-makers had prepared a series of guidelines for a cover story. The credibility of the cover story would be weakened if it were held until the Soviets made specific charges rather than being released immediately at the time the plane went down. Thus, a quick decision was made to issue the cover story.[28] That the decision-makers had confidence in the released statement is suggested by their repetition of the story after the Soviets announced they had shot down a spy plane. Once the pilot and other evidence were produced the situation was radically changed. A second illustration of the administrative type of situation is the Indian request for arms during the October 1962 border conflict with China. The issue of military aid to India had been extensively explored during the previous months, especially since May when it appeared that India might turn to the Soviet Union for military support. When

[28] The following excerpt provides insight into the level of government at which the U-2 problem was initially handled as well as an indication of the low threat, anticipated quality of the situation: "Cumming [Hugh S. Cumming, Jr., chief of Intelligence and Research] was the only State Department man present. The rest were C.I.A. officials and technical experts. The men who gathered around the table this afternoon were concerned, but not overly so. True, there was every indication that Powers [the U-2 pilot] was down in the Soviet Union, but the chances that the Russians would recover any damning physical evidence of the overflight was slim. . . . The discussion, therefore, centered on the cover story. . . . The cover story pulled out of the files on May 1 and under consideration by the men meeting at the clandestine C.I.A. headquarters stated that the U-2 had taken off from Turkey on an upper-altitude-research mission and had, unfortunately, overflown Pakistan without authorization after the pilot reported mechanical difficulty." D. Wise and T. B. Ross, *The U-2 Affair* (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), pp. 23–24.

Prime Minister Nehru made an urgent appeal to the United States on October 29, the United States decision followed with such speed that the first shipments arrived within the week. This American decision was made while the highest levels of the government remained involved in the Cuban missile crisis.

We should reiterate that the statements about the decision processes that develop in response to various types of situations are hypotheses which may or may not be confirmed by further research. Thus, the statement about confidence in administrative decisions could be recast in the customary form for hypotheses as follows: The less threat and decision time and the more anticipation that decision-makers perceive in a given situation, the greater will be their initial confidence in any decision made about that situation. We hypothesize that situational variables increase the tendency for the occurrence of a certain kind of process or decision, but these variables alone may not determine the outcome. Other variables reinforce or alter the influence of the specified situational variables. It is possible, of course, that the effect of some situational configurations—perhaps crisis—is so strong that the impact of other variables seldom changes the situational effect on the decision. The question of how much variance in decisions is accounted for by particular situational variables is a matter for empirical research.

The situational cube offers one technique for increasing the cumulative knowledge about crises using the decision-making approach. The use of any classification scheme encourages the analyst to compare a particular situation with others he believes to be similar in specified qualities and to distinguish it from those assumed to be different.[29]

Many classifications for differentiating crises from other situations may prove to be of little use in explaining various types of decisions and will be discarded in favor of better alternatives. This process itself is valuable in increasing our knowledge about the important attributes of situational variables.

The examples used for the situational cube illustrate that previously written case studies can provide material for evaluating hypotheses about the effect of crises on decisions once these propositions have been advanced. As in the systemic approach, however, certain problems arise in re-interpreting a series of prepared studies, each describing an individual situation. The original authors may have excluded important information necessary for inspection of the hypotheses or they may have attached different meanings to important variables. If the same analyst examines a number of cases with the hypotheses in mind, some of these problems are overcome. Nevertheless, as we move from the statement of hypotheses about crisis as a situational variable to the rigorous testing of these hypotheses, the case study necessarily must be augmented by other methods of analysis. This requirement, together with more exact definitions of the situational variable, seems necessary for further crisis analysis using either the systemic or decision-making approaches.

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[29] Other ways of classifying situations have been proposed. One fourfold scheme separates situations according to whether the decision-makers agree on (1) the means to use in the response (the authors refer to this as beliefs about causation) and (2) the ends toward which the response is directed (the authors refer to this as preferences about outcomes). See J. D. Thompson and A. Tuden, "Strategies, Structures, and Processes of Organizational Decision," in J. D. Thompson and associates, *Comparative Studies in Administration* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1959), pp. 196–211. Another fourfold classification is based on the decision-makers' level of understanding of the situation and whether the resulting decision can yield large or small changes in the initial situation. See D. Braybrooke and C. E. Lindblom, *A Strategy of Decision* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), especially pp. 66–79.

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