

ANALYSIS OF A BELLIGERENT THRESHOLD: THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

Is there a mechanism common to all international belligerent crises? The answer is yes: the process was developed in 1991, then refined to a pattern known since 1995, which underlined the importance of the effect of threshold. Presented as a major moment of the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis is analyzed here through this pattern, as it is a complex threshold, with numerous interweavings: indeed every element relates to other components, which are themselves linked to others.

Keywords: threshold, international crises, nuclear, conflict, media.

1. INTRODUCTION

For long ago, the analysis of belligerent crises has raised questions about the concept of “threshold”, of “rupture”: when the crisis becomes or does not become an armed conflict. The impact of this rupture on the later geopolitical relations has to be added: will we have an appeasement or a new crisis?

This question became more evident during the International Symposium of Military History in Athens, in August 1987, devoted to national uprisings and movements. The succession of papers on the topic led to a finding: their mechanism was almost identical.

Several academics¹, whose training did not limit itself to historical thought, conceived then a project closer to political science than to history, but in which this one held a major role: was it conceivable to think that there was a common mechanism, with common parameters, in all potentially belligerent international crises?

¹ They were led by André Martel, director of the Centre d’Histoire Militaire et d’Etudes de Défense Nationale (C.H.M.E.D.N.) - Center of Military History and National Defence Studies - of Montpellier.

Worn by the Center of Military History and National Defence Studies of Montpellier² (France), supervised by Professor André Martel, a first test appeared in 1991³, which determined the overall mechanism, but ran into the difficulty to classify the variables and their interactions. Thinking went forward in 1996, and was the subject of a conference and a summary publication at the Institute of Political Studies (Institut d'Etudes Politiques – Sciences Po) in Aix-en-Provence (France). Then it stopped, because the change of the head of the team had brought the dilution of the military and geostrategic studies in a larger package: thus, the project disappeared in 1997.

At this moment, I was a student of this Professor at the Institute of Political Studies of Aix-en-Provence, I was excited about this project, and saddened when it disappeared. Being able to have at my disposal the notes and unpublished works of researchers in charge of the project, I decided thus to pursue this reflection, although obviously, without resources and a dedicated team, that intent was difficult to fully carry to completion.

What is a potentially belligerent international crisis?

It is possible to better understand this worrying episode of international relations by establishing a parallel with the Hippocrates treaty *Airs, Waters, Places*, designating the precise moment, the moment of rupture, when the fate of the patient leaves discern, changes: this is the moment when everything can change. Alike the condition of a patient in crisis can be analyzed by clinical signs completed with specific technical examinations, could the determination and the analysis of the components of an international crisis proceed to a “clinical” and “technical” examination of the situation, leading to a diagnosis?

It was said in the journal entitled *Perspectives internationales (International Perspectives)*, in 2013⁴: “a crisis is an episode of international relations at the conjunction of several concepts. These concepts are: the concept of predictability (was the crisis predictable?), the concepts of tension and interdependence (what are the constraints, themselves stemming from which interactive parameters?), the concept of spatiality (in which defined fields are these constraints acting?).”

² This center was established in 1968 by André Martel. It disappeared during the evolution of the team to the establishment of the Joint Research Unit “États, sociétés, idéologies, défense” (E.S.I.D.) [States, societies, ideologies, defense] with others questionings.

³ It was published in the journal belonging to this Center in 1991.

⁴ Jandot A. Crises internationales: quid du déclenchement de l'intervention? [International crises: what triggered the intervention?]. *Perspectives internationales*. 2013; 3: 27-54.

It was then added during a conference in Montreal⁵: “Is there a mechanism common to all international belligerent crises? The answer is yes: the process was developed in 1991, then refined to a pattern known since 1995, which underlined the importance of the effect of “threshold”. Are there any identifiers, variables, parameters common to all international belligerent crises that can characterize and measure this effect of “threshold”? Initiated since 1991, this reflection on the arguments⁶ has taken much longer to complete. If the nature of the various elements was defined in 1996, their mutual interweavings according to inter-active exponential progression is not still totally succeeded, every crisis seeming specific.”

There will be here a return on these elements, and then a try to deepen the notion of rupture, of threshold.

At first, an explanation will be given on the components of this question of “threshold”: the pattern and the parameters common to all potentially belligerent international crises explain this precise moment.

Secondly, thanks to these components, an analysis will be made on a crisis including the question of nuclear weapon, namely the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962.

2. METHODS: The question of threshold in the international belligerent crises

a. The common pattern:

What is the pattern common to all potentially belligerent crises?

⁵ Jandot A. Le déclenchement du conflit: paramètres des crises européennes (1905-1914) [The trigger of the conflict: parameters of the European crisis (1905-1914)]. 21st International Symposium of the A.E.D.D.H.U.M. (University of Montreal, Canada).

⁶ With a computer meaning of the word: “variable whose value determines the value of a function”.

Pattern of an international crisis

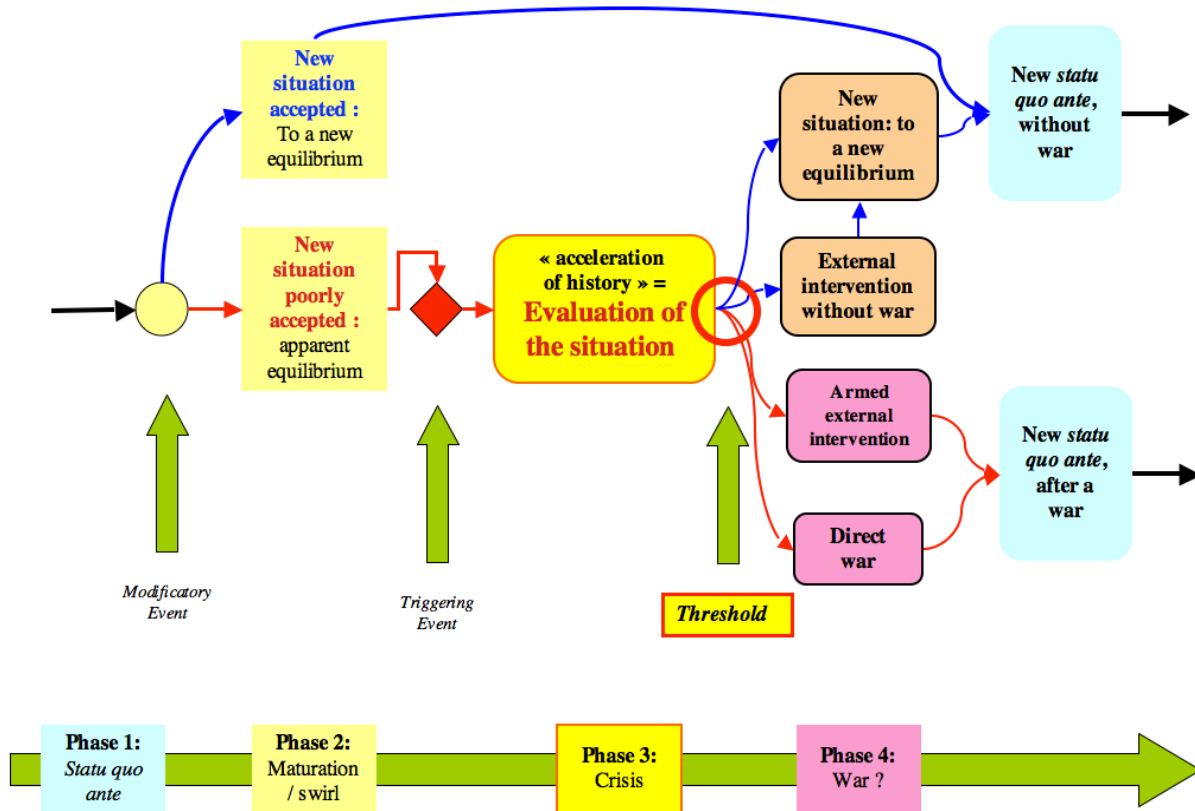


Figure 1: General pattern of a potentially belligerent crisis

All these crises are organized into four unequal phases in time, determined by three specific events, that is to say seven elements.

The first phase is that of the *statu quo ante*. Resulting from a previous situation, this is the more or less long time during which this so-called initial situation mature. It is itself resulting from a previous process. We can consider this period as that of an equilibrium, either this one is stable or in permanent reconstruction.

This phase ends with a punctual modificatory event, and even sometimes with a series of joint events in time, otherwise related events.

The modificatory event makes the phase of *statu quo ante* switch to a new situation, in which this equilibrium is altered, inflected, but without showing a rupture: this modificatory event forces itself as an obviousness or as a diktat. Is it still seen its fair value?

This event is sometimes the fact of one of the potential protagonists, thus wanted. A typical example is given by the militarization of the Rhineland in March 1936.

This event is sometimes external to the potential protagonists, who are subjecting it without being able to change it. A typical example is given by the “Roosevelt Corollary” in December 1904, felt by the major European powers as a new element, explicitly questioning their former supremacy.

The second phase therefore opens with this punctual event.

It is characterized by a period of maturation, often punctuated with intense swirls, both in home policy of states as well in terms of international relations. There is no “rupture” but “inflexion” of the *statu quo ante*. There is no discontinuity but change.

It results either in a new equilibrium, a new *statu quo ante*, or in an apparent equilibrium, which is actually a situation of imbalance. This new and badly assumed situation weakens the political power. The duration of this “second phase” can be very short (a few weeks) or longer-lasting (sometimes decades). A typical example is that of Franco-German relations, over four decades, after the Treaty of Frankfurt signed in May 1871.

In a democracy, this phase is characterized by the ceaseless replacement of the executives at the highest level, which is a symptom often doubled by “demonstrations” of discontent that can go up to violent attempts to take power. In dictatorships, it is the consideration of the increased “exclusions” (trials, executions, deportations...) that indicates this fermentation rate. Other major elements, the modifying of curriculum contents and the manipulation of public opinion through the media are all signs of a slow preparation of minds to a crisis situation.

In the case of an apparent equilibrium, this phase ends with a triggering event. The triggering event makes tip over the period of maturation towards a crisis situation. It induces a rupture.

This triggering event can be a real turning point: it is the case of a direct aggression against a country or its possessions. A typical exemple is given by Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

This event can be sometimes considered as a pretext: it is the case of an used event. A typical exemple is given by “the affair of the fan” in April 1827, which was the pretext of the conquest of Algeria.

This event can be sometimes very complex to analyze, because its real meaning is not the one noticeable at first glance and its interweavings are numerous. A typical exemple is given by the

Sarajevo assassination in June 1914. This one aggravated the tensions in Austria-Hungary, not by the personality of Archduke Franz Ferdinand⁷, but by the place and the date when it occurred. Indeed, the place, a focal center of several trans-Balkan major routes⁸, served to reveal: if insecurity had persisted, all the ways and passages of Bosnia, Herzegovina and its margins would have been no longer reliable. The date, June the 28th, was the day of the celebration of *Vidovdan* (*Видовдан*), commemorative of the Battle of Kossovo-Polje⁹, in other words a powerful symbol, the one of the “eternal Serbia”. Locally, the message was clear: either Emperor Franz Joseph had to curb its economic expansion, had to be satisfied with the single Slovenian passage in the south, had to manage the rise of centrifugal movements in its poly-cultural empire; or he had to “bring order”, this meant put an end to the Serbian “problem”¹⁰. The Sarajevo assassination is thus the emergence of the interweaving of multiple tensions.

The third phase, which follows this triggering event, is that of the belligerent crisis itself. During this phase, the evaluation of the situation by the protagonists is often felt as “an acceleration of history”, as a loss of influence on the real time¹¹.

This phase is thus the one of multiple analyses which are made in a period of “crisis” if they were not previously made. The role of intelligence services is here major.

Following this evaluation, the crisis is rocking or not to a conflict. Why? What characterizes this threshold of tipping?

The choice, the quantification and the interdependences of the several elements of this “threshold” were first the object of these researches. Indeed, as the former researchers in charge of this study demonstrated it, the conjunction of these elements allows to end or not in a conflict.

⁷ His marriage with Sophie Chotek Hohenberg, a morganatic marriage, did not allow him to ensure the dynastic descent.

⁸ Sarajevo has a significant interest through its site (wide valley and high defensive positions) and moreover by its location at the issue of several major routes: the Neretva passage towards the excellent port of Ploče -Kardeljevo; the passage of the Bosna to the Sava and the Danube, in conjunction with the passage of the Vrbas; the passage of the Drina to the Save and the Danube, also important for the lock of Višegrad (the Sokolović Bridge) towards the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, this means towards Kosovo and the Vardar.

⁹ The Serbian defeat of Kossovo Polje took place on the 15th of June, 1389 (Gregorian calendar), that is to say on the 28th of June, 1389 according to the Orthodox calendar (Julian calendar). Serbian national Day, *Vidovdan* marks the first day of a resistance of five centuries (1389-1878), during which the Serbian people kept their religion (founded in the Patriarchate of Peć, in Kosovo, which remains their spiritual center), their language, their determination. The visit of the Archduke in Sarajevo that day could only be interpreted as an arrogant challenge to this resistance, or even as the expression of a voluntary and profound contempt for the Serbs in Bosnia. The assassination is a response of the same level.

¹⁰ Could not Austria-Hungary, morally “heir to the Holy Roman Empire,” “subdue” these people as did the Ottomans?

¹¹ See the seminal work quoted in the references: Le problème du temps [Time and Method].

Here comes then the fourth phase, which amounts to four possibilities.

Either the conflict is not appropriate: by mutual agreement or by submission, the potential opponents do not choose the way of the conflict. Or the conflict can be avoided, with the intervention of a third power which uses the diplomacy, sometimes matched by the threat.

Or the conflict breaks out, up to the submission of one of the opponents. Or the conflict breaks out, with the support of a third power which uses the strength.

In every case the outcome is a new equilibrium, a new *statu quo ante*, which, let us call back it, can be carrier of later situation of tension.

The key is therefore this notion of “threshold”, itself linked to the evaluation of the parameters of crisis. We come back here to the center of our reflection about the rupture. Since this threshold is the key of the belligerent situation, what are the elements which always come into play? On which one is it possible to play in order to avoid the conflict or to provoke the conflict¹²?

b. The parameters of evaluation of the threshold:

These are the ones that interact permanently, that are present in all crises. It is either data independent from the decision-making power, or data on which this power acts or can act in long, average or short-term.

Every crisis can be analyzed in two general parameters, which have interdependencies by their components: this is one of the difficulties of the analysis.

We will call here these general parameters “expansionisms” and “geopolitics”¹³. Both include six variables decomposed into several identifiers.

Let us now clarify these elements.

The general parameter “expansionisms” comes in six variables, organized into three groups.

The first group, economic expansionisms, cover on one hand the needs for raw materials, new spaces, or more generally wealth; on the other hand the necessities of outlets for its products, for its capital, or sometimes for its people. The subject is complex, we will not explain it here in detail.

¹² This latter sentence can not shock, since it reflects realities: isn't it more sensible to ensure that the opponent is induced to make the mistake, to “declare you the war” or to assault you directly, in order to dress oneself the tunic of the victim, towards its own people as towards the other states?

¹³ They are generic words on which we remain by default.

Ideological expansionisms represent the second group. They are defined by the will (or the unwillingness) to spread, even to impose, on one hand its religion, on the other hand its political system. These types of expansionisms are so widely spread that they are generally perceived only in the sense of someone else to oneself.

Mental expansionisms constitute the third group. They lay in the will to dominate minds on one hand in long-term through the control of the educational system, on the other hand in the short and medium term through the control of the media. Sometimes the coaching of minds is such that the legal system defines what must be said and thought. We overtake here the common phenomena of dominant thought to reach the required thought.

Each variable (needs, control of the educational system...) is then analyzed in four to six identifiers according to a multifactorial progression. Let us take here for example the evolution of the identifier “mental images”, which belongs to the variables “control of education” and “control of mass media”.

We have to recall first that a “mental image” is often composed of a noun with a qualifier, a binomial that influence the thought of the listener or the reader. This form of mind manipulation has been known and used for centuries, but its use through curricula and mass media is making it a formidable instrument, which always directs to the dichotomy of the thought (good / bad).

The table below summarizes the staggering of this identifier: the progression is of a linear type (1 to 10, fractionned) but with a complex impact on the “threshold”, because combining with the other identifiers, leading thus to an algorithmic progression.

Table 1: Analysis of the progression of the identifier “mental images” in mass media

Scale	Characteristics of this identifier	Elements of explanation
0.1 to 0.9	Virtually no mental images	Media hardly have no mental images: information is only attached to the facts.
1.0 to 1.9	Rare mental images	Mental images are present, but rare: less than 4 occurrences per page for a daily paper.
2.0 to 2.9	Mental images not very frequent	Mental images are present, but few: 4 to 8 occurrences per page for a daily paper.
3.0 to 3.9	Frequent mental images	Mental images are frequent in number, with implicit value judgments.
4.0 to 4.9	Mental images almost systematic	Mental images are frequent in number, with recurrent and explicit value judgments.
5.0 to 5.9	Mental images almost systematic + binary discourse	<i>Idem</i> , accompanied by a binary discourse (good / bad).
6.0 to 6.9	Mental images almost systematic + binary discourse + patriotism	<i>Idem</i> ; are added elements of patriotism, to the delimitation of a socio-proxemics space ¹⁴ .
7.0 to 7.9	Psychological bath of strong mental images + binary discourse + patriotism	<i>Idem</i> + mental images are everywhere.
8.0 to 8.9	Psychological bath of strong mental images + binary discourse + appeal to roots	<i>Idem</i> ; patriotism becomes appeal to historical roots; some of the highlights of history are redesigned.
9.0 to 9.9	Psychological bath of strong mental images + binary discourse + appeal to roots + rewriting of history	<i>Idem</i> ; history is revised, rewritten, to serve as a justification for the call to the roots.
10	Psychological bath of strong mental images + binary discourse + appeal to roots + rewriting of history + aggressiveness	<i>Idem</i> ; the discourse becomes aggressive, threatening to “the other”.

The second general parameter, the general parameter “geopolitics”, is analyzed to the same: it is based on the consideration of three groups of variables.

The first group, the analysis of the space, rests first of all on its geographical components, thus on its potential wealth. Has to be added the state of its economy, its potential financial dependence and its possible debts, as well as its demography in all its components. This analysis is declined in two variables: the real space, sometimes hidden; the perceived space, first internally by the populations living in this space, then externally by the foreigners to this space.

¹⁴ “Proxemics” according to Edward T. Hall is a physical distance established between people. Societies behave as individuals, establishing proxemic spheres, areas of ownership: national borders are the personal space of the society that inhabits. Cleverly led, this behavior brings the responsible citizen to defend its national space, thus increased by a strong emotional connotation, as his own property; for the individuals concerned, an assault on this space is then perceived as a personal attack.

The external supports represent the second group. They are measured by the existence of at least one system of alliance, with two connected variables: the actual content of this alliance, the reliability of this alliance. The bound systems of alliances¹⁵ introduce obviously elements of complexity in this variable.

The armed forces constitute the third group. They are evaluated according to their potentialities and according to the determination of their leaders, this latter component being fundamental. This evaluation comes in a series of parameters characterizing on one hand the material reality of armament systems, including intelligence engineerings, on the other hand the human reality of the fighters and the civilians, including the political motivations of the populations and of their leaders. Here, more than elsewhere, the sentence of d'Ardant du Picq "Man is the first instrument of the fight"¹⁶ becomes important¹⁷.

As previously, each variable of the general parameter "geopolitics" is divided into several identifiers, which we shall not detail here.

Thus, the quantification of the "threshold" is determined by all the elements inherent to the general parameters "expansionisms" and "geopolitics", gathered in a general table below for more clarity: two parameters, twelve variables, sixty identifiers.

All these elements, quantified according to a complex mathematical progression, shall allow to determine the level of "threshold" from which a belligerent crisis leads to a conflict.

¹⁵ A typical example is given by the countries of the Triple Entente in 1914, with the Russian Empire and the British Empire, respectively allied with Serbia and Belgium.

¹⁶ Ardant du Picq C. *Études sur le Combat* [Studies on the Fight]. Paris: Hachette and Dumaine; 1880.

¹⁷ A typical case is the determination and the dynamism of the people of Vietnam during the eponymous war.

Table 2: Set of the elements (parameters, variables, identifiers)

<i>Identifiers</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Groups of variables</i>	<i>Parameters</i>		<i>Groups of variables</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Identifiers</i>
6	Needs	Economic	EXPANSIONISMS	GEO POLITICS	Own space	Real space	6
6	Outlets					Perceived space	6
5	Political	Ideological			External supports	Alliances (systems)	4
5	Religious					Alliances (reliability)	4
4	Control of mass media	Mental			Forces	Human	5
4	Control of education					Equipment	5

With this, successive analyses of various crises were made. Thus, progresses were made, which allowed to understand better the interactions between these elements. The ambition was to end to an IT program common to all situations. Indeed, at the origin of this research begun in 1987, the question was: is there an equation, an IT program, a docimology of the belligerent crises?

Still today we ignore it, what means:

- ❖ either, for an historian: “Certainly not, this question makes no sense.”
- ❖ or, for a political scientist: “Why not? This question thus deserves deepening.”

Here we will go on with a new attempt to apply this method¹⁸, with the example of the Cuban Missile Crisis, a threshold in the theme of “nuclear weapon”.

3. RESULTS: The Cuban Missile Crisis, a threshold in the theme of nuclear weapon

We have approached this theme since 1998¹⁹. It is a constitutive part of our history and our international functioning since the uses of this weapon of mass destruction in August 1945.

¹⁸ We may mention here two analyses, using this method: on the European crisis from 1905 to 1914, and on the European crisis from 1933 to 1939.

¹⁹ It was the subject of our master’s thesis at the Institut of Political Studies in Aix-en-Provence, honored with the Price of the Saint John Perse Foundation (Foreign Affairs); published in 2003 by L’Harmattan (see references).

It has completely changed our relationship to the “threshold” from which a conflict can be opened, by the horror that its use implies, by the main character of its employment.

Linked to this theme and presented as a major moment of the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis is a complex threshold, with numerous interweavings: indeed every element relates to other components, which are themselves linked to others.

What was this crisis, in a few lines?

It was a Soviet operation of positioning of human forces and nuclear missiles in Cuba, nearby the United States of America. It was the answer of the U.S.A. under the shape of a blockade of the island. It was, after a series of incidents, the rise of the tension up to a war between the two states, up to a potentially nuclear conflict. It was an exit of crisis in which each of the parties preserved “the face”, what became later a model of negotiation: in each camp, the populations were persuaded to have taken the victory.

This crisis, like all others until now analyzed, forms in the same pattern.

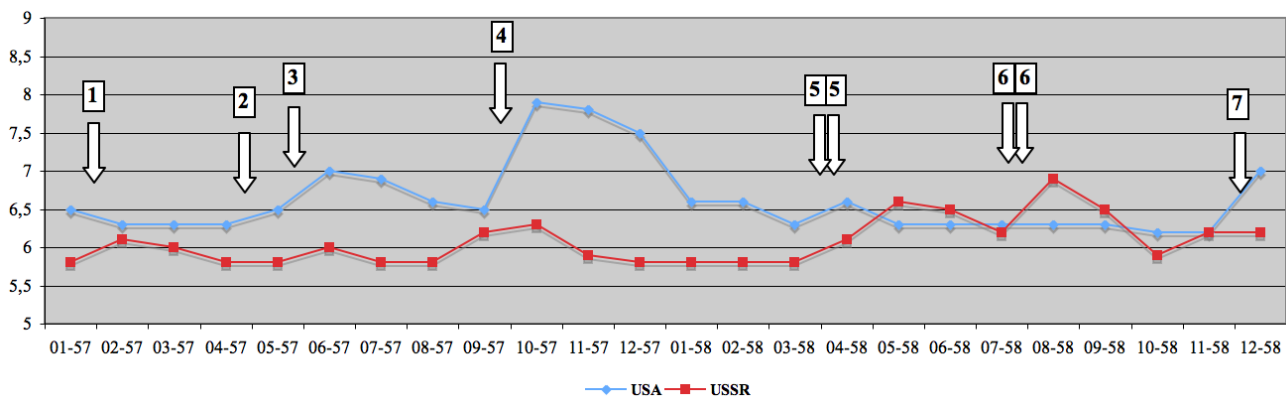
What is the modificatory event of the *statu quo ante*, leading to this crisis, in this difficult period of the Cold War? The answer is difficult to give. The evolution of the parameters of crisis allows to mitigate the real complexity and to obtain this answer: the Cuban Missile Crisis includes not one but two different modificatory events, each being specific of one of the two parties. How do we reach there?

Over the period 1957 to 1962, was pointed out that these parameters do not change in a significant way, except for a key identifier, the identifier “mental images”. The importance of this identifier was already underlined. It is a valuable tool, because it gives a very clear picture of what we might call public opinion, as we suppose it manipulated by mass media (in a coercive political system) or simply reflected by mass media (in the case of a rigorously independent press), with all nuances between these two extremes. In the media, the variation of the occurrences but also the terms of the contents are deeply significant of the tension of a population. That its leaders make the echo of this tension or that they manipulate it in an underhand way is part of the same state of affairs: the measurable tension of the media is identical to that which exists or is desired by the population or by the ruling political class.

What does the evolution of this identifier show between January 1957 and December 1962²⁰? To be more understandable, it is presented here by putting it in touch with the almost concomitant events.

144 analyses over six years were made, emphasized by the graphs below, which show month by month the weight of mental images in a representative media on both sides, thus two media studied in its language of origin: *Izvestia* and *The Washington Post*. They will be detailed here visually in three series of two years, in order to gain clarity as to make more explicit the links between the changes and the main events. The first three graphs have the same scale of time (24 months) and of intensity (5 to 10) for a better comparison. A fourth graph of synthesis emphasizes the main phases of the general pattern of a potential belligerent crisis. Then a last graph for year 1962 contains all the elements.

a. The 144 analyses:



Graph 1: Weight of mental images in the media, 1957-1958

The connection of the main events with the two curves is significant.

(1) “Eisenhower Doctrine”, this means the special powers given to the U.S. President for the fight against communism, caused a light rise of the Soviet tension, as (2) the Soviet call to the U.S.A. and the U.K. for the cessation of nuclear tests. (3) The first Soviet intercontinental missile²¹ which could carry a nuclear warhead of type A worried much more the U.S.A. But it was (4) the launch of Sputnik 1 thanks to a more compact spatial thrower²² which caused the

²⁰ It would be possible to study the evolution over a longer period, with a further frequency of analysis (one of the week): we limit ourselves here to this sample, as it is extremely significant.

²¹ R-7 Semioroka, 8K71-type.

²² R-7 Semioroka, 8K71 PS-type.

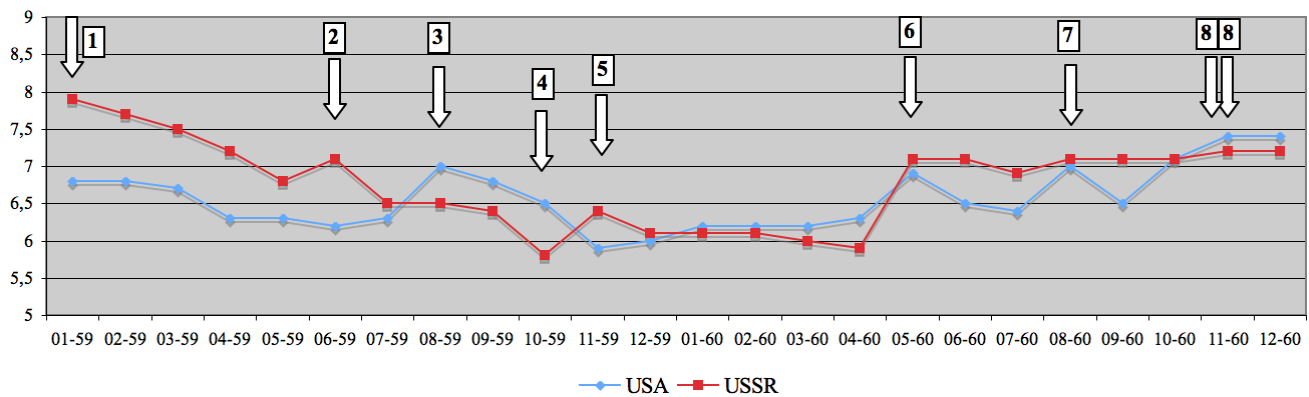
major bend of the curve: the rough rise of the curve indicates the presence of a modificatory event for the U.S.A. Why?

In this October 4th, 1957, the shock was deep in the American opinion: the “sacred” ground of the United States of America could be directly reached, without a possible reverse. Indeed, the thrower used by Moscow had a maximal payload of 5.5 tons: it could be thus used as an intercontinental ballistic missile carrying a nuclear warhead of type A-bomb. Obviously, it was the method chosen by the Soviets, that allowed them to take the initiative, this weapon being less heavy. The Americans preferred to develop an application based on the H-bomb, but this one being heavier, they possessed then no vector for its employment. Thus, in a few weeks, was multiplied the mental images on one hand hostile to communism, to the Soviet Union, on the other hand and at the same time aggravating the dangerousness and the monstrous character of this weapon. However, three months after, these mental images became much more rare; it would seem that the internal tension felt again, although this is not a certainty.

Two simultaneous events brought then the inversion of the curves, the tension so becoming superior in the U.S.S.R. These two simultaneous events (5) were the American rejection of the Soviet call for the cessation of nuclear tests and the signature of the N.A.A.D.C.²³ between Canada and the U.S.A. Three months later (6), the creation of the N.A.S.A.²⁴ and the crossing under the ice floe of the American nuclear submarine “Nautilus” increased the concern in the U.S.S.R. Then Khrushchev ultimatum on a new status for Berlin (7) boosted the tension in the U.S.A.

²³ It was conceived as a U.S. - Canadian cooperation for the defense of the northern American air space, based in Colorado. The system was composed of three geographical areas: Alaska (Elmendorf), Canada (Winnipeg), “Continental” (Tyndall, in Florida, close to Cuba). It was created in August 1957, and became completely operational in May 1958, with the setting-up of radars turned to the Soviet Union in the Alaskan N.A.A.D.C. Region (A.N.R.), centered on Elmendorf Base, having been accelerated during winter 1957-1958, in spite of weather conditions. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (N.A.A.D.C.) became the N.O.R.A.D. in March 1981.

²⁴ It means National Aeronautics and Space Administration.



Graph 2: Weight of mental images in the media, 1959-1960

Let us continue.

In January 1959, Alaska became the 49th state of the U.S.A.: the tension rised brutally in the U.S.S.R. (1), whose curve rised from 6.2 in December 1958 to 7.9 in January 1959. This indicates the presence of a modificatory event for the Soviets. Why?

Both countries were from then distant only from approximately 80 kilometers, the width of the Bering Strait. Even if it was only symbolic, the fact tended to reassure the American opinion: “they were in our impact”. The strengthening of the activities of Eielson and Elmendorf bases²⁵ in Alaska, a few minutes away from flight of the Chukchi Autonomous District²⁶, the oriental extremity of the Soviet territory, held more than a gesture towards the internal opinion than an operational efficiency, because the potentiality of a strike on the United States of America with intercontinental ballistic missiles²⁷ made forward secondary the organization of the N.A.A.D.C. But the threat on Anadyr, capital of the Chukchi district, became a symbol in the Russian media. This tension remained high with (2) the launch of “George Washington”, the first U.S. S.S.B.N. Then, the ambiguous statement of Nikita Khrushchev (3), “I give my solemn pledge that the Soviet Union will ‘never, never, never’ begin a war”, brought a new inversion of the curves. From there, both evolutions are joint, marked by ups and downs, a characteristic sign of a joint phase of swirl (phase 2).

In October 1959 (4), the media success of Khrushchev travel in the U.S.A. brought an illusion of relaxation. This travel, from 15 till 28 September, 1959, tightened within its first hours, modified

²⁵ They are U.S. Air Forces Bases, respectively situated near Fairbanks and near Anchorage.

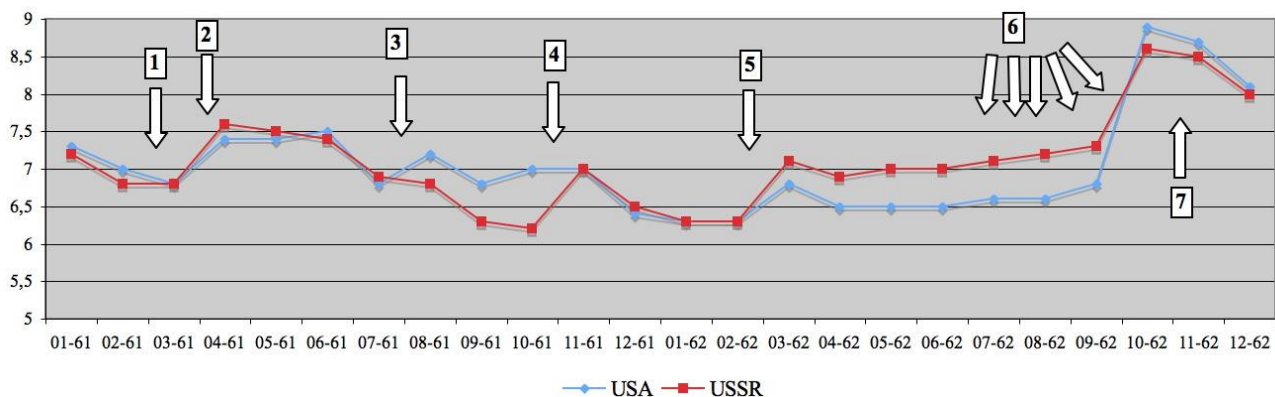
²⁶ In 1958 it was called Chukchi Autonomous District, today it is Chukotka. Its capital is Anadyr.

²⁷ With Semiorkas, already evoked.

gradually, but completely, the image the American citizens had of Khrushchev²⁸, and beyond the image of his country. Did not he come, a few weeks before this travel, to refuse to provide China with nuclear weapon (on the 20th of June, 1959)? A few days later, did not he plead, during his visit in Beijing (on the 30th of September), for the peaceful coexistence of the capitalist and communist worlds, rejecting the hardline of Mao? His remarkable operation of communication lowered, it is perfectly visible on the curve, the intensity of the mistrust: for the only time in four years, the weight of mental images came down under the 6 level.

Then, the travel of Eisenhower in several countries of the Third World (5), with the assertion of the doctrine of American help, irritated a little the U.S.S.R., but without a long-lasting echo.

The tension started again since May 1960, with several connected events: the question of the U2 spy plane shot over the Soviet Union territory (6), followed by (7) the nationalization of foreign companies (including those of the U.S.A.) in Cuba, and the heated debate in the General Assembly of the U.N. (8), marked by the glorious deed of Khrushchev and at the same time (8) Khrushchev “promises” to provide Fidel Castro with “defensive” missiles in order to prevent Cuba from a “foreign” attack. Let us observe on the graph that, on both sides, the level is between 7 and 7.5.



Graph 3: Weight of mental images in the media, 1961-1962

Let us now pay attention to the third detailed graph.

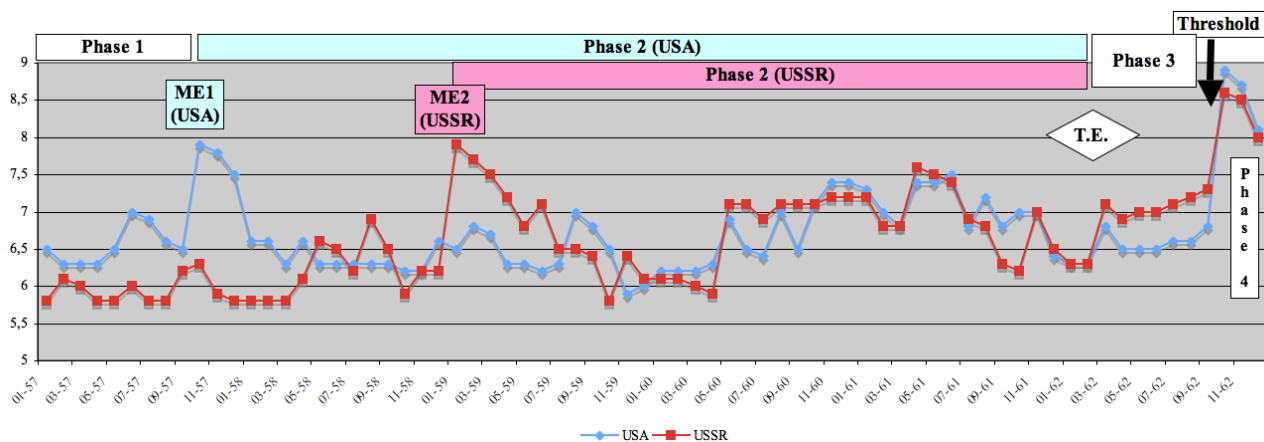
At the beginning of 1961, while the tension began to fall, (1) the strengthened armament program launched by President Kennedy, then (2) the failure of the pro-American landing in Cuba made progress both curves. While an appeasement could have taken place, (3) the

²⁸ The images taken on the deep of the “film news” are eloquent: motionless, cold crowds, without a hello at the beginning of his travel; merry crowds cheering him in the last days of this one.

beginning of the construction of the Berlin Wall, then (4) the creation of the D.I.A.²⁹ and (5) the officialization of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam caused many moments of tension.

From March 1962, this tension has been continuous. The rise of the curve reached the 8.8 level for the U.S.A., the 8.6 level for the U.S.S.R., after a series of imbricated events, engaged by the Soviet operation “Anadyr”³⁰ in Cuba which begun in May 1962 (6): the strengthening of the Soviet military and technical support in Cuba, then the mutual warnings of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., then the Operation Kama³¹, at last the discovery of the missiles by the U.S.A. on October the 16th, 1962. With that discovery, it is the opening of the crisis itself, with a threshold (7) reached in October 1962, resulting from the cumulative effect of the causes of tension: the rough progress of the curves is revealing of the paroxystic aspect of the period.

b. The synthesis:



Graph 4: Weight of mental images in the media, 1957-1962

Thanks to a graph of synthesis, let us analyze now all these changes over these six years³². This graph emphasizes the main phases of the general pattern of a potential belligerent crisis.

- Phase 1: *Statu quo ante*.

²⁹ It means Defense Intelligence Agency, with a strictly military vocation: military, technological and operational intelligence.

³⁰ It was an armament of Cuba: the sending of Soviet troops and ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads.

³¹ It was an escort of the Soviet cargo boats of the Operation Anadyr by submarines carrying the nuclear weapon.

³² Remark: the use of the same Y-axis scale (5 to 9) as on the previous graphs with a different scale of abscissas (72 months instead of 24 months) tends to aggravate visually the differences of levels in the curve. Therefore, the differences of impacts of the modificatory events and of the threshold are very clearly evident.

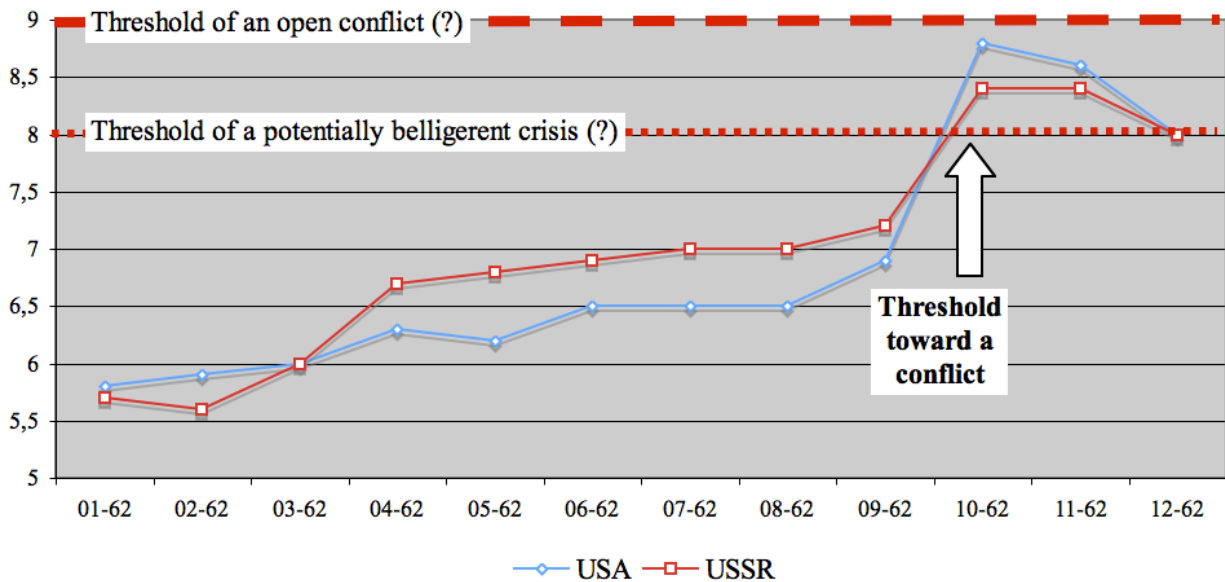
- ME1 (U.S.A.): Impact on the United States of America of the launch of the first Soviet artificial satellite: modificatory event for the U.S.A.
- Phase 2 (U.S.A.): Period of maturation and swirl for the United States of America.
- ME2 (U.S.S.R.): Impact on the Soviet Union of the entrance of Alaska as the 49th state of the U.S.A.: modificatory event for the U.S.S.R.
- Phase 2 (U.S.S.R.): Period of maturation and swirl for the U.S.S.R., from then joining that of the U.S.A.
- T.E.: Triggering event: Operation Anadyr.
- Phase 3: Cuban Missile Crisis.
- Threshold: Moment of the potential tipping towards conflict or appeasement.
- Phase 4: Outcom of the crisis.

At last, to go further, let us analyze over the 12 months of the year 1962 the progression of all the elements which may determine the concept of “threshold” from which a belligerent crisis results in a conflict.

Let us call back that the reached level gathers here all the elements inherent to the parameters “expansionisms” and “geopolitics”, their identifiers and variables being modulated according to a complex progression, taking into account the correlative importance and the mutual interactions of these parameters.

And let us make an introductory remark before studying this graph (graph 5): the studies led to this day emphasized that the tipping towards a potentially belligerent level is made towards the “8 level”, while the tipping in an open conflict is every time of the “9 level”. Obviously, other studies have to be made in the future, to know if there is really a measurable level of the “tipping” towards the conflict.

As for the crisis that was analyzed here, what give the calculations onto all the variables between January and December 1962?



Graph 5: Set of the parameters of crisis, year 1962

The examination of the graph confirms the previous analyses: if the threshold of the potentially belligerent crisis (level 8) is reached in October 1962, it does not progress up to the threshold of the open conflict (level 9). To give here an example of these previous analyses, this curve is similar, globally, to those which had been drawn for the periods from 1905 till 1914 and from 1933 till 1939 in Europe, excepted that the level 9, that of the outbreak of a conflict, was overtaken for these periods.

In the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, what is the limiting element which came online? Certainly, the two big actors of this crisis were perfectly aware of the reality, of the potentiality of the stake. The explanation holds in two words: “nuclear weapon”, in a connected mental image: “nuclear war”, in a concept: “nuclear fear”.

It is necessary here to remind that, since the explosions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear weapon has been a carrier of the mental image of the ultimate weapon, of the deep horror, much more than the chemical, biological and bacteriological weapons have done.

During this crisis, each of the protagonists knew profoundly that if he crossed the threshold of the threat to reach that of the action, he was going to switch his country in horror. None of the two protagonists was ready for this sacrifice in 1962, because in both countries the tension was not enough aggravated. As France and the United Kingdom in September 1938, a moment when

“Czechoslovakia was not worth a war”³³, the United States of America and the Soviet Union broke off momentarily in 1962: “Cuba was not worth a war”, understand here a nuclear confrontation and not a conventional war as the one that both protagonists were leading in Vietnam, the one directly, the other one in an interposed way.

That the western camp perceived in the decision of Nikita Khrushchev a “retreat” is only in the normality of the writing of its history; that *Izvestia* perceived here the mark of the [socialist] “reason” against the [capitalist] “madness” is only in the normality of the writing of its history.

The crisis was solved by the dialogue between “serious people”. It is an obvious fact. It was also an inflexion in the relations between East and West. It was the rupture of the period of the mutual ignorance of the other one. It was the implementation of what became a new political *statu quo ante* thanks to means of communication allowing the direct dialogue between the two major executives.

4. DISCUSSION: Cuba, the rupture towards the reasoned nuclear era?

East and West perceived clearly in the Cuban Missile Crisis a rupture, marked by the necessity of a dialogue, marked by the urgent need to make nuclear weapon a real deterrent weapon, and not a tactical tool; although in both camps tactical nuclear weapons have been since elaborated and built. The Cuban Missile Crisis is thus the threshold of the reason, the threshold of a paradox: can possess the nuclear weapon only those whose reason will make that they will never employ it. Therefore, besides the immediate systems to mitigate any later crisis of the same type³⁴, long-term systems were set up to fight against its proliferation.

The Cuban Missile Crisis marks well a rupture : after this event, the stages followed one another, to keep in this weapon its status of deterrence tool, whereas at the same time the “crowds” were almost conditioned by movies, etc in order to develop the media dimension of the horror connected to this tool. From then, nuclear power, which belonged to them to scientists and military, has become by the game of the media a stake of general policy: the “Question of the nuclear power”, which extended gradually from the nuclear power with war purposes (the military nuclear, the Bomb) to the nuclear power with energy purposes (the civilian nuclear, the power plants).

³³ This is a free and personal resumed of the talk of Neville Chamberlain in front of the House of Commons, on March the 12th, 1938: “Austria is not worth a war”.

³⁴ These systems are for example telexes mediatized under the term of “Hot line”, linking directly the two heads of state, established in August 1963 (Moscow - Washington), in November 2007 (Beijing - Washington),... without omitting all the systems less mediatized of direct and immediate intercommunications.

And this stake was immediately taken back by politicians to become the “environmental Question”, the political environmentalism³⁵. By the way, let us notice that it has been since 1962, in the speeches, works, subjects, generally held by the same authors, that the golden age, promised by the Marxist and post-Marxist theorists has become gradually the environmental age. This change has become more marked after the visible end of the political communism, at the beginning of 1990s, a main geopolitical threshold since 1945.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was analyzed here through modellings, through the establishment of quantitative factors, which is a little current practice in History. Nevertheless, in this analysis, History holds the major role.

Therein, I think that the theorization of events presents for an historian a triple interest. First, it requires an in-depth study of the past, in which no field of History and of the auxiliary sciences of History is neglected. Secondly, it underlines the fundamental role of the historian for the understanding of the events of the past. Finally, it gives to History a new face, a “use” for the understanding of our current world.

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