

المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES
(Doha Institute)



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Research Paper

The International Crisis and the International System

A study on the interplay between the management of international strategic crises and the structure of the international system

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Doha, January - 2012

Series (Research Papers)

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Executive Summary

The structure of the international system affects the manner in which its sub-units manage international crises, due to its influence on the tools and outcomes of crisis management. Conversely, the manner in which international crises are managed, especially by the superpowers, affects the international system itself. A complete transformation and change in the form of polarity exhibited by the international system is caused by both major and minor changes within. This study uses three variables: international alignments, the arena of international struggle, and international values. These variables are used to present a comparative analysis of the management of international crises under various structures of the international system (multipolarity, bipolarity, and unipolarity). The aim is to understand the manner in which international crises are managed according to each of these structural models, as well as to understand the behavior of major powers and their awareness of limits to the influence of the variables during crises.

Research Question

The international system regulates the behavior of its sub-units during the management of international strategic crises; however, the recurrence of international crises within a certain international system points to the anarchic nature of policies between the states within this system. In the absence of a central power regulating the behavior of a large number of independent political units, the conflict of interests between these units would persist. This conflict increases the probability of direct military confrontations between these international units, even though such confrontations could be avoided through mutual de-escalation and accurate calculations of the parties' interests. Some conflicts escalate to the point where threats of using military force are made, and enmity between countries increases to the point where war becomes imminent or probable. At the flaring of such crises, the manner of their management affects relations between the great powers. Conflicts between great powers might be suspended, or divisive issues might be resolved, preparing the way for more stable and harmonious relations in the long term.

Research Hypothesis

The relationship between the international crisis and the structure of the international system is one of mutual influence during times of crises. Just as the structure of the international system affects the management of a crisis by affecting the methods of its management and its outcome, the international system is similarly affected by the manner in which this crisis is being managed. The outcome might contribute to the international system's stability, or contribute to a transformation of the system into one of a different model of polarity through deep or minor changes made within.

The Scholarly Significance of the Study

This study represents an academic contribution to the field of international crisis management, since it directly addresses the relation of mutual influence between an international crisis and the structure of the international system. International crises began playing a central role in world events since the beginnings of the twentieth century, with the crises of Fashoda (1889), Morocco (1905-1906), Bosnia (1908-1909), Agadir (1911), and the Balkans (1913), leading to the First World War.¹ Similarly, the crises caused by Hitler in the 1930s ushered the Second World War. Moreover, the international crises that took place during the Cold War nearly led to a confrontation between the two superpowers. The literature agrees that the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis represented a quantum leap in the interest afforded to the study of international crises² due to the high amount of flexibility exhibited in the management of the crisis, under critical international circumstances, and with the need to take quick decisions within a limited amount of time and with a high degree of competence, since the management of this crisis could avert or lead to a confrontation between the two great nuclear powers. Despite the increased interest in the study of international crises since that time, further scholarly studies and research on international crises published in Arabic are needed, especially with the conditions currently prevalent in the world, conditions which have led to the increased militarization of crises.

Literature Review

Literature in the study of the relationship between international crises and the international system is considered the most important theoretical contribution to the field of international crisis management from the viewpoint of the international system. Coral Bell focuses on the notion of the balance of power within the international system as the main factor preventing the outbreak of war. Bell's study also addresses the types of behavior averting the transformation of crises into large scale wars; it also discussed the tools and methods for managing international crisis as well as the problems associated with the administration of crises, especially when the international system moves away from the bipolar model into another modality of polarization.³

Charles McClelland presented another study focused on the transformation of the relationship between sovereign states from relations of peace to those of war.⁴

Another valuable study authored by Paul Diesing and Glen Snyder discusses the influence of the international system on the behavior of states during times of international crises. The book also

¹ Ben D. Mor, *Decision and Interaction in Crisis: A Model of International Crisis Behavior*, (London: West Part Connection, 1993), p. 4.

² James L. Richardson, *Crisis Diplomacy: The Great Powers Since the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (Great Britain, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 3.

³ Coral Bell, *The Convention of Crisis: A Study in Diplomatic Management*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁴ Charles McClelland, "The Beginning, Duration and Abatement of International Crises: Comparison In Two Conflict Arenas", In Charles F. Herman (Ed.) *International Crisis Insights from Behavioral Research*, (New York, The Free Press, 1972).

offers an extensive analysis of the management of crises in the contexts of multipolarity and unipolarity, stressing the influence of the nature of international alliances upon international crisis management.⁵

Work by Charles F. Herman is considered to be among the most important theoretical works for the study of international crises, and is often considered an indispensable starting point for those interested in the field.⁶

Aside from these works, another cluster of books offer useful contributions to the field of study of international crises. Those include James L. Richardson's "Crisis Diplomacy", in which he attempts to use the results of the studies on great and famous crises in order to analyze less-notorious crises. He also attempts to define the general features of crisis diplomacy by examining each case within its general and analytic framework and assessing the various theoretical approaches to the study of crisis behavior in light of this analysis. Our study benefits from the sections of Richardson's book that discuss the relationship between the crisis and the international system, and this relationship's influence on changes in the international system.⁷

On the other hand, Richard C. Buck's "International Crisis and Conflict" focuses on analyzing the relationship between the outbreak of wars and international crises. Given that the end of the Cold War has left an unstable world, Buck naturally foresees the outbreak of many crises in the future. His book offers a deep analysis of several international strategic crises in different time periods, parting from the belief that case studies play an important role in clarifying the problems that are likely to emerge in the future –i.e., analyzing past and contemporary crises help us understand how to deal with the problems of the future.⁸

Our study also benefits from many other works such as that of Ole Holsti's "Theories of Crisis Decision Making" and that of Alexander George's "Avoiding War: Problems in International Crisis Management".⁹ These studies focus on clarifying the concept of the international crisis, defining the features of a crisis situation, and on identifying the strategies and tools used by the state to manage a crisis situation.

The Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study is centered on a number of concepts:

- A. The concept of the international system.

⁵ Glen H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making and System Structure in International Crises*, (New Jersey: Princeton, University Press, 1977).

⁶ Charles F. Herman (Ed.), *International Crisis: Insights from Behavioral Research*, (New York, The Free Press, 1972).

⁷ Richardson, op. cit.

⁸ Richard Clutter Buck, *International Crisis and Conflict*, (New York: Martin's Press, 1993).

⁹ Alex L. George, *Avoiding War: Problems in International Crisis Management*, (San Francisco, West View Press, 1991).

- B. The concept of the international crisis.
- C. The concept of international crisis management.

A- The Concept of the International System

International relations scholars define the “international system” as a cluster of units that are linked together through a process of interaction; the system is distinguished by the interconnection of its units, and this interaction features a pattern that can be observed, interpreted, and predicted. The international system has a structure, which is a number of independent or interconnected units; the structure of the international system is determined according to the distribution and concentration of resources, in addition to the hierarchy of interaction between these units. The system structure could be that of a unipolar system, a bipolar system, or a multipolar system. The nature of the international system engenders specific conditions whose effects are reflected in the form of recurrent patterns of behavior for the international unit.¹⁰ Kenneth Waltz argues that international systems should be distinguished according to the number of superpowers within them; the system structure is bipolar if only two superpowers exist, and is multipolar if that number exceeds two. On the other hand, William Thompson argues that the distribution of resources between the superpowers is also vital, in addition to their number. Scholars also believe that international relations play a paramount and catalyst role in conflict within the international system.¹¹

Change in the International System

The occurrence of change in the international system represents the end of a certain system and the emergence of a new one, with simultaneous radical changes in all aspects of this system. The international system that emerged since the end of the Cold War could be seen as a qualitative rupture from the post WWII system. That systemic change took place in a peaceful manner, unlike the radical changes occurring at the heels of wars and armed conflicts. There are a number of indicators regarding these transformations in the international system: the end of Communism as a political ideology due to the collapse of Eastern European regimes, the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union leading to the end of the international conflict that dominated the scene since 1945, and the end of the arms’ race and otherwise changing relations between the two international poles.¹²

These shifts led to the appearance of the so called “new world order”, which is distinctly unipolar given that the United States currently performs a leading role in the international system

¹⁰ Imad Jad Badras, “The Effect of the International System on International Alliances”, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cairo University, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, 1998, pp. 16-17.

¹¹ Paul Huth and Christopher Gelpi, “The Escalation of Great Power Militarized Disputes”, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3, September 1993, pp. 609-619.

¹² Badras, op. cit, pp. 16-17.

following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the inability of Japan, China, and Europe to possess the element of an international entity with a global strategy.¹³

B- The Concept of the International Crisis

The systemic definition of the international crisis focused on featuring the relationship between the phenomenon of international crises on the one hand, and the international system on the other. It studies the international crisis within the conceptual framework of the systemic method in analyzing international relations.¹⁴ The definitions of the pioneers of the systemic school (Kenneth Baldwin, Coral Bell, Oren Young, Alaster Boucan, Charles McClelland) came in tune with the etymological definition of the term “crisis” in the English language, which means a point of transformation, and a period that is fraught with difficulties, risk, concern over the future, and the necessity to take a specific decision.¹⁵

Coral Bell defines the international crisis as a turning point in the nature of the relationship between parties, with conflicts escalating to a level that threatens to change the nature of the relations between states. In the case of crises occurring between allies, an alliance turns to discord; when crises take place between rivals, their relationship turns from one of peace to one of war. Coral Bell also makes a distinction between the veritable international crisis, and the pseudo-crisis. Pseudo-crisis are more difficult to explain, for they resemble the syndromes of a deeper ailment, with their apparent causes differing from the real ones. Bell also distinguishes situations of tension, termed “sub-crises”, from real international crises. Sub-crises do not qualify as veritable crises. Bell also classifies international crises according to their geographic location and the parties involved; she considers local or regional crises to be important, but not carrying the same gravity as a crisis between nuclear powers. The military repercussions of the former remain local if global superpowers do not intervene as involved parties. She also notes that the international crisis is narrower than open conflict, is more precisely managed, clearer to define, and an easier phenomenon to distinguish than conflict.¹⁶

This definition of the international crisis has faced various criticisms, more importantly regarding the ability of gradual changes to create a transformation in international relations in a manner more assertive and clear than sudden crises, the potentiality of unpredictable turning points such as the death of a crucial actor, or a change in a government preventing it from getting involved in a conflict, preventing the occurrence of a crisis.¹⁷ Charles McClelland argues that the international crisis is a specific type of essential change in the pattern of relations between the parties in a certain conflict. This transformation is due to a change in the flow pattern of actions

¹³ Badr Ahmad Abd Al-'Ati, “The Effect of International Transformations on the Policy of Japan Towards the Arab-Israeli Peace Process”, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cairo University, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, 2003, pp. 29-30.

¹⁴ Mustafa 'Alawi, “The International Behavior of Egypt During the May-June 1967 Crisis”, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cairo University, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, 1981, p.8.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁶ Bell, op. cit., pp. 4–9.

¹⁷ Richardson, op. cit., p. 10.

and reactions of the parties involved. At the beginning of a crisis and its escalation, we see a rise in the rate of conflicting reactions and actions, with the purpose of exhibiting or employing physical power. Another noticeable shift in the pattern of interaction between the parties of the crisis takes place as the crisis begins to die down or be settled; this marks this stage apart from that of the escalation of the crisis and that of the non-crisis (i.e., the period preceding the crisis). In the phase of crisis de-escalation, we see a reduction in the rate of conflicting actions and reactions aiming to exhibit or employ physical power – with this rate falling below that registered during the stage of the escalation of the crisis, or even the stage preceding the crisis. On the other hand, the rate in which the two sides exchange verbal conflicting actions, accusations, protests, ideas, warnings, and threats increases in a noticeable manner, as if the parties of the crisis resort during the stage of resolution to camouflaging the concessions that they are offering with intransigent acrimonious rhetoric.¹⁸ According to this definition, crisis can be considered a middle ground between the state of peace and the state of war.¹⁹ The crisis could be the effective beginning of the path to war or to averting it.²⁰ Charles McClelland also affirms that the international crisis is a critical juncture in which fateful decisions are made.²¹

McClelland argues that an international crisis is borne out of one of three situations:²²

- a. Leaders who are attempting to preserve their leadership positions by seeking an external source of threat, consequently entering into an external conflict to achieve internal unity.
- b. When the parties participating in the international system experience a transformation in their social institutions due to the joining or parting coalitions, which could lead to new crisis situations in unfamiliar spheres of competition.
- c. The collapse of a bipolar system, which could make it difficult for the major parties to reshape and adapt their strategies according to the new conditions.²³

In these situations, the intensity of the crisis increases and it becomes less likely to contain the situation without the use of force or resorting to war.

McClelland also sees that there are other factors that aid in de-escalating and calming a crisis, including:²⁴

¹⁸ Quoted in Mustafa 'Alawi, "The International Behavior of Egypt during the May-June 1967 Crisis", op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁹ McClelland, "The Beginning, Duration, and Abatement of International Crises: Comparison in Two Conflict Arenas", op. cit., p. 83.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83

²¹ Charles A. McClelland, "The Acute International Crisis", In: Dean G. Pruitt and Richard C. Snyder, (Eds), *Theory and Research on the Causes of War*, (Prentice Hall, 1969), p. 96.

²² Izzat Abd Al-Wahid Sayyid, "Crisis Management in Egyptian Foreign Policy", unpublished Masters dissertation, Cairo University, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, 1994, p.16.

²³ This effectively took place following the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the world entering a hazy phase in which the elements of instability were heightened, and led to the flaring of a large number of international crises, as we shall discuss further.

- a. The actions taken by one side or more in a veritable crisis, or the intervention of other parties to de-escalate the situation.
- b. The pacification of a pseudo-crisis by its involved parties, or through other actors.

Oran Young writes that the international crisis is a series of quick, consecutive events that increase the effect of the factors of instability in the broader international system or any of its sub-systems noticeably above habitual levels. It increases the probability of the occurrence of violence in the international system.²⁵

According to Alastair Buchan, the international crisis signifies an intentional challenge and an intentional response by each of the parties involved, with each of the sides believing that this crisis could change the course of history in its favor.²⁶

Some other definitions of the international crisis went along the systemic definition. Robert C. North defined the international crisis as a sharp escalation of action and reaction, or as a process of dissent through which the scale of interaction between states escalates, leading to the increase in the level of threats and coercion. North believes that crises often precede wars, but that not all crises lead to war.²⁷

On the other hand, John Spanier defines the international crisis as a situation in which a state makes certain attempts to change the status quo. Resisted by other states, the attempts lead to a high level of awareness of the potentiality of war.²⁸

Spanier establishes a link between the international crisis and the nature of the international system, arguing that the bipolar world after World War II was characterized by the dissuasion and the multiplicity of crises. This was due to the state of fear and insecurity between the superpowers, making it difficult to avoid the occurrence of crises.

Spanier agrees with the notion that it is better to have an acute crisis in a bipolar system rather than a small war at a later date. He sees crises as proof of the quest to maintain the balance of power; a crisis reflects the general state of international politics. With incompatible motives, one of the rivals must be forced to re-assess his position and offer concessions. It is sometimes difficult to pressure the adversary into halting its ongoing activities, as was the case in the Berlin

²⁴ McClelland, "The Beginning, Duration, and Abatement of International Crises: Comparison in Two Conflict Arenas", op. cit., p. 85.

²⁵ Oran R. Young, *The Politics of Force: Bargaining During International Crises*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 15.

²⁶ Quoted in 'Alawi, "The International Behavior of Egypt During the May-June 1967 Crisis", op. cit., p. 6.

²⁷ Robert C. North, *War, Peace, Survival: Global Politics and Conceptual Synthesis*, (San Francisco & Oxford West View Press), p. 168.

²⁸ John Spanier, *Games Nations Play: Analyzing International Politics*, (New York, 1972), p. 197.

Crisis; the difficulty increases if the rival is being forced to concede a privilege that it had acquired, as was the case in the Cuban Missile Crisis.²⁹

Ben D. Mor defines the international crisis as a process in which a state demands to change or to maintain the status quo, which forces another state to take steps as a reaction. The result for both sides is a heightened possibility of war.³⁰ This definition agrees with that of Spanier in that both are based on the notion of the management of the crisis; the state that wishes to change the status quo begins by provoking a crisis in order to achieve its purposes.

It should be noted that these definitions agree that a crisis emerges from a rejection of the status quo and the need to change it, whether a crisis between enemies or a crisis inside a coalition between two or more states. It is only natural for crises between rivals to be more threatening than those between allies, due to the increased probability of direct military confrontation.³¹

As a general rule, the definitions of the systemic school focused on two elements. The first is that an international crisis is a turning point in the evolution of an international system, whether a comprehensive system or a sub-system. The second is that a crisis increases the possibility of war and of resorting to the use of military power.³²

The definitions of the systemic school assume that a crisis causes a shift in the international system, and that the scale and extent of this change is determined by several factors:

- a. If variables being modified due to the international crisis were prominent and influential in determining the characteristic of the international system, modifying them would cause a change in the international system itself. For example, the Cuban Missile Crisis affected the global strategic balance between the two major superpowers, leading to a noticeable change in the international system in its aftermath. The law of impossibility of comprehensive war between the two sides was affirmed. Similarly, the crisis of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the following liberation war led by the United States, led to the setting of the foundations of a new world system and the undermining of the existing one.
- b. The existence of elements of instability in the international system before the crisis strengthens the potential for change in the system as a result of crises.
- c. If the available tools for the international system are effective in pacifying crises, the system is less likely to be changed.
- d. The international system is more deeply affected by the crisis of major powers than those of minor powers.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

³⁰ Mor, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³¹ Ameen Huwaidi, "Crisis Management in an Elusive international System", *Al-Siyasa Al-Dawliya Journal*, Issue 112, 29th year, April 1993, p. 177.

³² 'Alawi, "The International Behavior of Egypt During the May-June 1967 Crisis", *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

- e. The effect of an international crisis can be limited to a regional sub-system, sparing the global international system.

On the other hand, the definitions of the systemic school link between the international crisis and the occurrence of violence, with war being its clearest and most intense form. The crisis signifies an increase in the likelihood of the parties resorting to war and acts of violence.

The systemic school links the international crisis to the events preceding it, since the decisions of the parties involved that frame their behavior during the crisis are adopted before the outbreak of the crisis itself. This means that the decision of war is usually taken before the flaring of the crisis based on a preliminary study and an extensive calculation of interests, objectives, options, and possibilities. The crisis comes and the war decision is executed in its midst.

The pioneers of the systemic school believe that the linkage between crises and the increased possibility of war is mainly due to the relation between crises and the perpetual conflict between its parties, if the existing international system is already a competitive one based on each side attempting to expand and upkeep its national power. The competition that exists prior to the crisis is the reason behind the decision to go to war.

The systemic school analysis of crises in which the great powers of the global system are direct or indirect parties is of primary importance. In these instances, the factors of instability in the international system heighten, and the rate of belligerent actions and reactions increases. This represents the essence of the systemic approach in the study of the international crisis.³³

C- The Concept of International Crisis Management

As a general rule, the methods and principles of management of crises in social relations are inspired by the science of public administration, due to the unity of the nature of management in the various fields of study in human activity.³⁴ There are multiple studies in the literature on international relations that focus on the process of international crisis management. These studies take various routes in researching the different aspects and in analyzing the tools of crisis management.³⁵ Unfortunately, these studies, while numerous, remain unclear in their concept of crisis management.³⁶ Alexander George defines crisis management as the restraints that are placed on the process of coercion in international relations, in the sense that crisis management keeps the effects of the conflict under control and lessens their intensity in order to prevent the conflict from escalating into violence and war.³⁷

³³ McClelland, "The Beginning, Duration, and Abatement of International Crises: Comparison in Two Conflict Arenas", op. cit., p. 83-84.

³⁴ Abbas Rushdi Al-'Amari, *Crisis Management in a Changing World*, (Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Translation and Publication, 1993), p. 43.

³⁵ 'Alawi, "The International Behavior of Egypt During the May-June 1967 Crisis", op. cit., p. 29.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

Phill Williams defines crisis management as “the series of procedures (decisions) aiming to control the crisis, and to prevent it from escalating into the level of war.”³⁸

Hence Peter Newhold has stated that crisis management is “the containment of the crisis and lessening its intensity in a manner that makes unlikely the occurrence of widespread military confrontations.”³⁹ Snyder defines international crisis management as “the parties of a crisis seeking either to exert pressure in a flexible and wise manner according to the necessities of the situation, or to coexist and conciliate without their states bearing high costs or losses.”⁴⁰ Richard Clutter Buck has noted that crisis management means “reaching a resolution to a dangerous confrontation without the outbreak of war, while maintaining at the same time the vital interests of the parties involved.”⁴¹

According to Leslie Lipson, crisis management is “reaching an acceptable solution for the parties in a crisis without resorting to war.”⁴² Kintner and Schwarz argue that crisis management is “to triumph in a crisis while at the same time keeping it within the limits of acceptable risk for both sides.”⁴³ Phil Williams defines crisis management as the measures that control and regulate the crisis situation to prevent it from spiraling out of control and causing the outbreak of war, and, the reaching of a resolution to the crisis on a basis that is satisfactory to its parties and that preserves their vital interests.⁴⁴

The above definitions of the concept of crisis management focus on two points: the avoidance of dangerous confrontations between the parties of a crisis and the preserving of vital interests of its parties. Due to the large discrepancy in the distribution of power between states on the global level, the objective of crisis management and its tool differ according to the nature of the parties involved. This leads us to the necessity of defining the models of crisis management.

Research Methodology

This study uses the method of system analysis and the comparative method.

Systemic analysis uses the system as a unit of analysis, viewing it as a cluster of interconnected and interacting elements. According to the system analysis method, this interaction could be horizontal between the units existing on the same level, or vertical, between units on several levels. The system also exists in an environment, with which it interacts. According to this

³⁸ Quoted in: Al-'Amari, op. cit., p. 48.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴⁰ Glenn H. Snyder, "Crisis Bargaining", Charles F. Herman (ed), *International Crisis: Insights From Behavior Research*, p. 240.

⁴¹ Buck, op. cit., p. 8.

⁴² Phil Williams, *Crisis Management, Confrontation and Diplomacy in The Nuclear Age*, (Martin Robertson, 1976), p. 28.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

methodology, this study focuses on the interaction between the great powers at the summit of the international system in terms of international crisis management.

The comparative method helps us understand the varying effects of different models of international polarization on the manner in which international units manage international crises. These influences offer opportunities, or impose restrictions on the ability of these units to manage international crises in terms of the ability to maneuver and to exert methods of pressure and coercion, as well as conciliatory tools. Comparing multiple crises also helps us to understand the factors behind the varying ability to manage a certain international crisis under a certain international regime.

Management of Crises and the Structure of the International System

International crises and the international system are locked together in a relationship of mutual influence. A crisis could be a test for the rules of the game between the major powers in the system, or it may contribute to altering the system by affecting the nature of other secondary systems. This contribution could reach the level of transforming the system entirely, and not merely modifying it.⁴⁵

A crisis also affects the state of the system and its operations in terms of stability, balance, and peace. It may challenge the system to the point where a major war breaks out, or it could disrupt its pillars in a manner that engenders new values and rules for its management; or, conversely, the matter could end with a reassertion of the status quo.⁴⁶

A crisis could also leave one of its parties feeling aggrieved and the other feeling superior. Neither sentiment aids in improving relations. The crisis may also invoke a reassessment, as took place following the Cuban Missile Crisis when Washington and Moscow both admitted the necessity to avoid repeated confrontations.⁴⁷

Similarly, the international crisis reflects the nature of the system structure. The behavior of states in international crises is affected by the nature of the dominant international system at the time of the crisis. This could be termed “the external effect” in the process of interaction between the parties in a crisis.⁴⁸ The nature of the system structure also affects the outcome of the crisis resolution,⁴⁹ as well as its general characteristics.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Nadia Mahmoud Mustafa, “The Gulf Crisis and the International System” in: Ahmad al-Rachid (editor), *The International and Regional Repercussions of the Gulf Crisis*, (The Center for Political Research and Studies, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University 1999), p. 58.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁷ Phil William, *Contemporary Strategy*, op. cit., p. 234.

⁴⁸ Snyder and Diesing, op. cit., p. 417.

⁴⁹ Nadia Mustafa, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵⁰ Richardson, op. cit., p. 220.

Evolutions in the international system explain the transformations of limited conflicts into acute conflicts, which hastens the appearance of additional crises.⁵¹ The study of the international system helps us understand why war remains a relative possibility, and why the peaceful resolution of crises is more difficult in a certain system structure as opposed to another. The recurrence of international crises within an international system indicates the anarchic nature of international policies in that system. This reflects the absence of a central authority that can regulate the behavior of a large number of independent political units, and leads to a permanent struggle over interests among these units.⁵²

Despite the fact that direct military confrontations can be avoided through mutual pacification and accurate calculations of interests, some power conflicts escalate and turn into crises threatening the use of military force. Enmity between countries increases to the point where war becomes imminent or probable.⁵³

Crises also affect relations between major powers. They may suspend conflict between them, or even contribute to resolving some issues over which the major actors were divided. Thus, crises could pave the way to more stable and coordinated relations in the long run. For instance, the 1948 Berlin crisis was the most important indication of the escalation of the Cold War between the East and the West. The crisis led to the hastening of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis was of the second category, because it contributed to establishing the détente between the superpowers.⁵⁴

This study examines the management of the international crisis in the phase of multipolarity, bipolarity, and in the post-bipolar era. This examination will take place through the lens of three main variables: international alignments, the international arena, and international norms.

International Crisis Management During Multipolarity

International Alignments

The main feature of crises in a multipolar system is the quick defection from alignment, because the main contenders often greatly rely on allies or semi-allies either as a force of pressure or a force of resistance. Receiving aid from allies is not guaranteed in a multipolar system, in addition to the fact that defections from one camp to another are a constant possibility either during the crisis or as a result of the nature of its settlement.⁵⁵ Crises in a multipolar system are characterized by a high degree of interaction and negotiation, with both enemies and allies, making them more complex than crises in a bipolar system, as we shall see below.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 219.

⁵² Ibid., p. 220.

⁵³ Phil William, *Crisis Management, Confrontation and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age*, op. cit., p. 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁵ Snyder and Diesing, op. cit., p. 430.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 430.

In all contests between allies and enemies, there is a process of mutual dependence between the main parties, but the nature of this dependence is different from case to case. Allies may field an amount of relative independence, the risks involved being a mix of direct interests vested in the conflict on the one hand, and competition among allies on the other.⁵⁷

One of the main motives for the challenger in a crisis could be its desire to weaken the opposing alliance, or to terminate that alliance. In contrast, the interest of the other party would be in maintaining and strengthening the bond with its allies.⁵⁸ Considerations of alliances complicate the assessment of the relative power of the main parties in a crisis; in a crisis situation, each side must accurately calculate the amount of potential aid it will receive from its allies. Support from allies is essential during the settlement of a crisis. Predictions on the interests and the intentions of allies and third parties greatly affect the negotiating positions and the amount of threat used. Since these interests and intentions may not be fully clear in a multipolar system, miscalculations are to be expected, and sometimes with tragic results.⁵⁹

The commitments of allies may be restricted to a specific accord or a specific geographic location. If a crisis takes place outside of this sphere, the allies may exert pressure by threatening to cease support. Bismarck was capable of limiting Austria during its crisis with Russia over Bulgaria in 1880, when he pointed to the fact that Germany's alliance with Austria is strictly defensive and that Germany would fight on Austria's side only if it were exposed to a direct assault. Germany would not follow along in an attempt to expel Russia from Bulgaria, neither diplomatically nor militarily.⁶⁰

In a multipolar system, states face a choice between comprehensive and clear alliance commitments, which increase collective bargaining power, and vague understandings that keep the door open to their choices of alignment.⁶¹ Furthermore, each ally may perceive the main threat to its interests from a different angle. Thus, an escalating crisis with a specific adversary over a specific issue could directly touch on the interests of some allies and not on the interests of others. Austria had no direct interests in the two Moroccan crises between Germany and France, while Germany's direct interests were far smaller than those of Austria in its multiple crises with Russia in the Balkans. Assuming that one or all of the allies have some special interests in a crisis, the nature and importance of their interests could differ. Both France and

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 430.

⁵⁸ That was one of the main motives for Germany to challenge France during the Moroccan Crisis in 1905; while Britain's main objective during the crisis was to maintain its 1904 cordial agreement with France.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 431. Germany miscalculated its position during the 1905 Moroccan Crisis in terms of the level of support offered by Great Britain to France; Germany had also overestimated the amount of support that it expected to garner from its own allies Austria and Italy. The result was a complete diplomatic defeat for Germany.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 433.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 434.

Great Britain had vested interests in the Moroccan crises, though Great Britain's interests were of a completely different magnitude than those of France.⁶²

Naturally, an ally that plays a supporting role would be less concerned with the conflict in question. This could create a degree of conflict among allies over how severe or lenient towards the adversary they should be. The adversary could exploit this gulf and place its demands above what might be otherwise acceptable. The adversary acts in the belief that the supporting ally will apply pressure to resolve the conflict and give in to such demands.⁶³

Before 1880, international alignments were often informal, created for a specific purpose, and tended to be lasting. In the intervening period between the two World Wars, narrow and specialized international alliances were created, with their most prominent feature being the relative absence of stable alliances. International defections were more acute compared to the phase of European entente. Shifts in international alliances were often seen as the tools through which international actors adapt to the relative changes in the balance of power.⁶⁴ The process of polarization that takes place during or as a result of crisis offers a source of bargaining power among allies. During the Bosnia crisis, Russia hinted that it might end its alliance with France and its accord with Britain if they did not extend support to its position.⁶⁵ Bargaining could extend to include the adversary or one of its allies. One of the main adversaries could offer to draw one of the enemy's allies, or at least offer it attractive privileges in an ongoing conflict, if it changes its position or withdraws its support to the enemy.⁶⁶ The state could seek de-escalation in a crisis in fear that inflexibility may push the adversary toward a third state, either during or after the crisis.⁶⁷

Supporting allies in a multipolar crisis face a number of dilemmas that are partially the result of the incompatibility of objectives. In a crisis situation, the supporting ally may prefer to preserve the peace rather than gain victory. There are usually two ways to maintain peace: dissuade the adversary or impose pressure on the ally. If the state opts to impose restraints on its ally, the most effective method to do so would be to threaten to withdraw and to not extend support. However, if the adversary knows of these attempts beforehand, it would be likely to become more confident and more intractable in its position.⁶⁸ If the option of the state were to dissuade the adversary, the mere declaration of threat would make the ally more confident and more

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 435.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 434. Hitler masterfully performed this game during the Munich crisis, despite his exaggerated demands during his meeting with Britain's Prime Minister Chamberlain in Godesberg, which pushed the British prime minister to take an intransigent position. Hitler quickly rectified the situation in the last moment by adopting a conciliatory track.

⁶⁴ Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁶⁵ Snyder and Diesing, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

⁶⁷ Bismarck supported Russian claims to Bulgaria in 1880 against the wishes of his ally, Austria, in order to lessen Russia's incentive to side with France.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

extreme.⁶⁹ A major dilemma arises here, because extreme dissuasion or compulsion towards an adversary could provoke and hasten future conflicts, while pressuring an ally may lead to an end to the alliance or a changing of sides in a conflict. In a multipolar system, the outcome of a crisis strongly influences alignment in the international system.⁷⁰

Change in the International Arena

Despite the fact that the multipolar system structure persisted between the 1830s and the 1930s, shifts in the hierarchy of great powers affected international relations and diplomacy in crises in important ways.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the main arena of struggle was in Europe, but the end of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of two non-European powers: Japan and the United States of America. This coincided with the increasing intensity of imperialistic conflicts that affected the stability of the international system. The expansion of the political arena from Europe to the rest of the world was accepted in the inter-war period, but the international system became more fluid and less stable.⁷¹

The crisis between Russia and Japan over the Kuril Islands in the early twentieth century could be seen as resulting from the expansion of the great powers' system, as was the Pearl Harbor crisis between two emerging global powers. The expansion of the arena of conflict contributed to increasing instability in the multipolar system of the twentieth century, increased the level of obscurity in international alignments, and narrowed the margin of consensus over norms.⁷²

International Norms

The official norms associated with the international system could be an important source of conflict among major international powers. The inter-war period saw a radical collapse of normative agreements due to the instability of international alliances or to the absence of a veritable balance of power. The global peace established in 1919 was based on values of self-determination, non-aggression, and peaceful resolution of international conflicts. The matter of imposing sanctions on an aggressor was in the founding texts of the Charter of the League of Nations. However, the absence of many powers from the League of Nations indicated the lack of agreement over a specific value system. Additionally, the inconsistency in the application of the right to self-determination was one of the sources of Germany's complaints regarding the Treaty of Versailles, and led to a protracted conflict with Great Britain over the treaty's legitimacy. The League of Nations encountered strong popular support in Great Britain and a number of small member states, but it was viewed with suspicion in France. France preferred to preserve the

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 437.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 439.

⁷¹ Richardson, op. cit., p. 222.

⁷² Ibid., p. 222.

status quo through alliances. Popular support for the principles of the league was weak in the United States, which was not a member.⁷³

The greatest challenge to the League of Nations came in the 1930s, with the increased desire of Germany, Italy, and Japan to enact regional changes that could be equated to essential changes in the structure of the international system. Those actions increased the value of the balance of power, but it did not create a conciliation in norms between the United States and its allies France and Great Britain. There was also a state of discord between the Soviet Union and western powers, with elements of doubt and suspicion feeding this discord. The 1939 Sudeten crisis exhibited the effects of this normative disagreement; Great Britain supported peaceful change and the preservation of the status quo, while France was not completely in agreement with Britain's wishes. There was also a normative gulf separating the British leaders from their German peers, and Hitler was capable of inflaming and mobilizing international public opinion under the banner of the right to self-determination. However, there was no agreed-upon normative rule between Hitler and the western powers, and any resolution of conflicts was to take place according to instrumental calculations.⁷⁴

The same discrepancy in norms was seen between the United States and Japan in 1941 during their protracted negotiations. Each side adopted a number of contradicting principles: non-discrimination, non-aggression, and self-determination on the one hand, and access to primary materials and US non-interference in Japan's vital sphere on the other. There was, naturally, a discrepancy between global liberal principles and notions of Japanese regional hegemony. Settlement was possible in the short run, but not from the viewpoint of conflicts in the international system.⁷⁵

International Crisis Management During Bipolarity

Until the final months of his life, former American President Franklin Roosevelt believed that there was no need for large quantities of arms to preserve global peace if the United States and the Soviet Union worked cooperatively together. He believed in the ability of the United Nations to play an effective role in preserving world peace, more so than the defunct League of Nations. However, Roosevelt became aware in 1944 that Stalin did not hold positive intentions toward the capitalist world, and that he intended to control Europe in its entirety by fanning domestic revolutions or through military intervention. Roosevelt also believed that Stalin intended to seize control over many colonies of the capitalist world. Following Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, US President Harry Truman adopted a firm approach to dealing with the Russians, in coordination with British Prime Ministers Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee. This new approach was apparent during the Potsdam Conference. The world entered a new period, termed

⁷³ Ibid., p. 231.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 231.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 232-233.

“the Cold War” by Bernard Baruch in a session of US Congress, based on strategies of attrition, propaganda, and the limited use of weapons under the umbrella of nuclear deterrence.⁷⁶

The crisis of the 1948 Berlin siege (that officially inaugurated the Cold War) affirmed the decreasing role of international alliances in the bipolar system. Differences among Western nations in managing the crisis made the situation worse, but reflected an important truth: the role of European allies had become limited to attempting to influence their dominant partner, the United States of America.⁷⁷

The Berlin crisis came as the bipolar system was in its formative phase. There was an Anglo-American alliance in Germany and other regions that reflected the structural influences that led the system into a bipolar form; this coincided with the dying down of French opposition to these stances.⁷⁸ Planning for the post WWII phase was made with the assumption that the arena of competition had become global, reflected in a condition made during the foundation of the United Nations mandating the permanent presence of five major states in the Security Council. The struggle of the superpowers was more intense over European issues, with the siege of Berlin as an example, though the Korean War of 1950 to 1953 affirmed the persisting global character of bipolar conflict. The Berlin crisis did clarify two facets of the international arena after WWII: the intense tension and instability during the siege, and the imbalanced initiative towards de-escalation and pacification of tensions during the crisis.⁷⁹

As for the normative dimension of the international conflict in the post 1945 phase, competition between the United States and the Soviet Union over Eastern Europe was similar to the competition between the US and Japan over East Asia years before that. American universalism and its principles of non-discrimination, self-determination, democracy, and its open door policy clashed with the Soviet insistence that its security necessitated preserving friendly governments in Eastern Europe. There were two essential differences between the US-Japan conflict and the Cold War. Firstly, the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe was a fact on the ground achieved by successful military occupation, while Japan’s occupation of parts of China in 1941 was resisted by force and did not extend to most of Southeast Asia. Secondly, there was great reluctance on all sides to go to war in 1945.⁸⁰

The environment of inescapable bipolarity, affirmed following the 1948 Berlin crisis, was reflected in a number of strategic decisions by the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, that led to increasing instability in the international system. The most notable of these decisions on the American side was the Marshall Plan to rebuild and reconstruct Western Europe, the multilateral decision to establish the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in

⁷⁶ Buck, op. cit., pp. 79-81.

⁷⁷ Richardson, op. cit., p. 225.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 225.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 222.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 223.

1949, the American decisions relating to the Berlin crisis in 1948 and 1949, the decision to intervene in Korea in 1950 during the Korean War, the lack of any decisions to slow the rate of armament or to disarm until 1963, the decisions relating to the Suez crisis in 1956, the decision to impose a blockade over Cuba in 1962, and the decision to enter into military conflict in Vietnam.

On the other side, we saw Soviet decisions to form COMECON and the Warsaw Pact in 1955 in response to West Germany joining NATO in 1954, the decision to intervene in Hungary and Poland in 1956, and the decision to position medium-range nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962.⁸¹

The reigning belief in the United States until 1947 was that the Soviet Union was mainly a source of political threat to the United States. That was the belief of George Kennan, the architect and theorist of the containment policy, a belief that went along with President Truman's concern with economic performance and, consequently, keeping defense spending under control. However, China's conversion to communism in 1949 and the revelation of the Soviet nuclear bomb were developments that fed a new American awareness that the Soviet threat was not merely a political one, but was also a permanent military threat to the security of the United States and its allies, and necessitated maintaining the build-up of the American traditional military along with its new nuclear capabilities. That was considered an early foundation for the strategy of flexible reaction that was later adopted by US President John F. Kennedy and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The build-up also affirmed the global strategy of the United States following the Second World War, which included a permanent commitment toward its European allies on the assumption that competition between the superpowers would continue in the long term. The Korean War then came to extend the containment policy to the Asian continent, and to reinforce awareness of the military threat represented by the Soviet Union in the circles of American strategic decision-making.⁸²

In bipolar crises, especially after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the main focus was on avoiding aggressive confrontation. The interests vested in a bipolar crisis are largely common between the allies, which means that their interests are highly homogenous. Diplomacy among allies is based on the notion of coordinating between them; therefore, allies develop common strategies and formulate coordinated negotiating positions in a manner serving their shared interest. Calculations are less complex in the state of multipolarity, because the challenging party, as well as the defending party, is expected to receive support from allies as a matter of fact. In the case of crises pitting superpowers directly against each other, the support of allies becomes unimportant in the pure logic of power. When a superpower challenges a small state in the opposing camp, the rival superpower would rise to support the defending party, regardless of the degree of support. When crises take place between small states, the major powers defending these states intervene. The situation between the superpowers in such a crisis could become

⁸¹ Mustafa Alawi, "The Environment in the Making of the Strategic Decision", *Al-Fikr Al Istrateji Al-Arabi*, Issue 37, July 1991, pp. 41-42.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

dangerous if one superpower intervenes at a level beyond the basic provision of aid and diplomatic support. The focus in such crises is on the extent of concern the superpowers have in resolving them.

Kenneth Waltz argues that the superpower in a bipolar system has the ability to separate itself from its allies in a crisis situation, unlike the position of allies in a multipolar system, where allies have a weaker ability to isolate themselves or to limit the behavior of others during crises.⁸³ Superpowers can influence their allies in various ways, including communicating disapproval on moral grounds, opposing actions within the United Nations, and by applying economic pressure. Since allies are largely dependent on the superpower, the superpower can apply pressure by threatening to not extend support during war.⁸⁴ The economic and strategic gap between the superpower and its allies tends to give the superpower the reins in any crisis, but there are moral and political considerations that limit the ability of a superpower to act alone. It may find itself in need of moral legitimacy for its behavior during crisis,⁸⁵ in which case allies would be capable of extending this legitimacy or abstaining to do so.⁸⁶

Détente and Crises

A situation of détente has varying effects on multipolar and bipolar systems. International détente can be defined as the de-escalation of conflict between rivals by resolving some differences and making agreements to achieve common interests. International détente signifies, in the state of multipolarity, the shifting of a relationship from one of enmity to one of rapprochement or alliance. On the other hand, the situation is not similar in a bipolar system. Détente between superpowers does not lead to an alliance, due to the lack of a third party against which an alliance could be made. Détente in a bipolar system is essentially an agreement to pacify conflict and enmity between the superpowers, and to possibly enable cooperation between them. Therefore, détente does not alter the latent aggressive nature of the superpowers.⁸⁷

The period of international détente following the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis helped to create the so-called “adverse partnership”. The concept reflected the awareness of the two superpowers of

⁸³ During the 1956 Suez Crisis, the United States was capable of isolating itself and putting a halt to the French-British expedition against Egypt. In 1914, however, Germany was incapable of extricating itself from Austria's schemes against Serbia and could not limit Austria's field of action, because it relied on the power of Austria to the point where it could not withstand its defeat or its defection to another camp.

⁸⁴ That was clear during the October 1973 crisis, when the United States was capable of forcing Israel to accept a ceasefire and to withdraw from the territories that it had occupied, by implicitly or explicitly threatening to halt military aid.

⁸⁵ During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States did not need to rely on its allies in the strategic sense, but it required their moral and political support. Even though the interests of NATO allies were not directly vested in this crisis, the United States found itself obligated to inform them of the challenge it was facing before its official disclosure, with the aim of garnering their diplomatic support, especially in the United Nations. The US government also conferred with its allies in Latin America. This support enabled the United States to exert coercive power on the Soviet Union during the crisis.

⁸⁶ Snyder and Diesing, *op. cit.*, pp. 443-445.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

the existence of common interests between them, just as they share conflicting interests. This adverse partnership is the product of the power balance between the superpowers.⁸⁸

Crisis management in an adverse partnership is circular. Successful management of the crisis enables enemies to create partnerships. This can make future crisis management more amenable, although the competing superpowers may terminate this relationship at any moment.⁸⁹

There is no doubt that the era of *détente* lessened the possibility of crises between superpowers turning into devastating wars, by offering adverse partners an additional chance to avert war and pacify hostilities. Prefaced by the resolution of the Cuban Crisis, the spirit of *détente* has prevented the two superpowers from being deeply implicated in the wars and crises occurring between their clients. That especially applies to crises in and near the Middle East, such as the 1967 War, the 1970 Palestinian-Jordanian crisis, and the 1972 war between India and Pakistan. The *détente* also allowed for a calmer form of competition in the Vietnam War.⁹⁰

In spite of that, the 1973 crisis exhibited the fragility of international *détente*, especially its point of weakness relating to the prevention of crises. In 1973, there was a possibility of the two superpowers sliding into a direct confrontation because of their clients. The crisis though shows how international *détente* can pacify the aggressive behavior of superpowers, and ease the control and resolution of the crisis.⁹¹

The relationship between international *détente* and international crisis can be summed up in three main points:⁹²

- a. The *détente* proved the existence of strict restraints on the strategic actions of the superpowers; *détente* can prevent some crises, but is not a guarantee against their escalation.
- b. As one of the tools of controlling a crisis, international *détente* does not function separately from the interests of superpowers vested in the crisis.
- c. International *détente* does not become an effective tool for controlling a crisis until the probability of direct involvement of the superpowers increases and becomes dangerous.

Coral Bell believes that there are several major factors that helped create the adverse partnership, and reflects on essential rules imposed by the international system that determine the management of international crises. These factors are:

- a. The exchange of hostages

⁸⁸ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁹⁰ 'Alawi, "The International Behavior of Egypt During the May-June 1967 Crisis", *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁹¹ Snyder and Diesing, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 449.

- b. The system of mutual surveillance
- c. The common strategic ideology

The first factor relates to the amount of destruction and civilian casualties each side could inflict upon the other. In the age of nuclear strikes, civilians in the two dominant powers, and in their clients, are seen as hostages to the repercussions of decisions that their governments make. Governments would not be capable of protecting their citizens from the potential military retaliation of the enemy.

The second factor relates to the ability of the superpowers to monitor one another in order to assess each party's military capabilities, political objectives, and level of preparedness for military action.

The third factor reflects the growth in stockpiles of modern weaponry on both sides since 1953, the fear of which led to the signing of a number of strategic treaties.⁹³ These included the 1963 Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the 1966 Outer Space Treaty, the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the February 1971 Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Seabed and Ocean Floor, the 1972 First Strategic Arms Limitation Talk (SALT I), the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, and the 1973 US-USSR Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War.⁹⁴

However, the settlement of the crisis of the 1973 war, leaving the United States alone in charge of the peaceful resolution between Egypt and Israel, was a sign of the fragility of the first détente and its instability as a basis for US-Soviet relations, and generally for international relations. With the crumbling of the international détente and the USSR's exit from the Middle East arena, Moscow took quick and strong initiatives in the third world in order to compensate for its strategic defeat in the Middle East. As a result, the Soviet Union made decisions to support the new government of Ethiopia in 1974, to support the government of independent Angola in 1975, and the Sandinista in Nicaragua. The peak of Soviet expansion came in the form of the decision to intervene in Afghanistan in December 1979.⁹⁵

The Afghanistan invasion came in tandem with the decision of the US Congress not to approve the SALT II Treaty for nuclear armament control in 1977. The two events represented the end of the first phase of international détente, and the early inauguration of the second Cold War

⁹³ Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-72.

⁹⁴ 'Alawi, "The International Behavior of Egypt During the May-June 1967 Crisis", *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁹⁵ Despite the fact that the collapse of the détente was not accompanied by military confrontations between the superpowers, it definitely renewed fears of the occurrence of clashes between the great powers. The Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, in specific, pushed the United States to develop contingency plans and a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) in preparation for the potential confrontation between the superpowers in the Arabian Gulf. The formation of this force was an implicit acknowledgement by the United States that the *modus operandi* of the great powers of the early 70s, with relations based on irregular cooperation in managing crises and the expansion of the field of cooperation in order to avoid or prevent crises, had all vanished.

between the US and USSR. With the arrival of the neo-conservatives led by Ronald Reagan to the presidency of the United States, the second Cold War was officially inaugurated. The anti-USSR ideological perspective was revived, presenting the image of the “Evil Empire” that must be confronted. The dominant strategic thinking focused on the necessity to restore the image of the mighty and great America, feared and respected by everybody (even if not liked), and to force the Soviet Union into an armament race that it could not sustain, as a way to defeat and remove the USSR from the arena of competition for leadership of the international system.

In this environment came the most notable American strategic decisions under the Reagan administration: the decision to launch the Strategic Defense Initiative known as “Star Wars”, the decision to triple US defense spending from \$100 billion in 1980 to \$300 billion, and the decision to support the Contra rebels in Nicaragua and right-wing regimes in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and other central American states. Then came the decision to impose a ban on the export of strategic technology from the United States and the other NATO members to the USSR, and the decision to sign the Strategic Cooperation Agreement with Israel in 1983.⁹⁶

Nuclear Armament and the Management of International Crises

William Kaufmann says that the main problem relating to the management of crises in the nuclear age is in managing things skillfully enough to avoid the horrendous threat of nuclear weapons, while at the same time preserving vital interests.⁹⁷

Most concepts and theories developed since 1945 on the use of force attempted to resolve this problem. Dissuasion, for instance, was dependent on the skill of not using force, to the point where respect is due to those capable of both preserving peace and vital interests. The nuclear age became the age of the small war. States resorted to wars in some instances, but there was a major incentive to keep them limited. Crisis management had the objective of achieving the goals of the state, and of keeping the situation under control to prevent the outbreak or escalation of war.⁹⁸

This duality encloses the main difference between the crises of the nuclear age and those of previous eras. In the past, it was relatively easy for states to resort to war in order to achieve their objectives in the crisis, despite the awareness of the parties that war could end in disaster. In the pre-nuclear age, European states believed that, by going to war, they were more likely to gain than to lose.⁹⁹

The main impact of nuclear weapons on international crises, at least among nuclear powers, was in the widening gulf between the interests vested in the conflict and the potential cost for war. This gulf was relatively narrow or non-existent before the nuclear era, but in the nuclear age it is

⁹⁶ Alawi, “The International Behavior of Egypt During the May-June 1967 Crisis”, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

⁹⁷ Phil William, *Contemporary Strategy*, op. cit., p. 238.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

difficult to imagine anything equaling the cost of nuclear war or the risk of igniting it. In a crisis situation, states are always faced with the tension between wanting to benefit and at the same time avoid war. Similarly, bargaining in a crisis situation involves the threat to undermine common interest.¹⁰⁰ States are careful that the tactics of coercion and counter-coercion do not push things too far and cause the situation to spiral out of control, with the state finding itself forced to enter into a veritable war.¹⁰¹

The evolution of weapons of mass destruction has made an all out war impossible by undermining any practical or logical relationship between the tools of violence on the one hand, and the objectives for which they are used on the other. Resorting to war has now become a reflection of failure or policy malfunction.¹⁰² Crises have taken the place of war in terms of resolving conflicts, at least between the great powers. With weapons of mass destruction, the potential cost of war increased exponentially, with major risks for both sides.¹⁰³

The specter of nuclear holocaust has threatened the world four times during the quarter century following the Second World War. The first of these instances was in the late 1950s, when the forces of American General Douglas McArthur, fighting under the banner of the United Nations, met a crushing defeat in the Korean War. The defeat prompted President Truman to threaten to use nuclear weapons. The second instance was when President Dwight Eisenhower used the same threat to put an end to the war in Korea. The third came in the last days of October 1962, when confrontation seemed imminent between the two superpowers with the Cuban Missile Crisis. The fourth case was in the last days of the October 1973 War. The USSR raised the level of readiness of its airborne forces in anticipation of breaking the siege around the Egyptian Third Army, and the United States in turn raised the level of readiness of its strategic forces.¹⁰⁴

These threats of nuclear holocaust prompted debates on the creation of a mechanism to prevent crises between the superpowers. The creation of the Crisis Prevention Regime became clearer in the declaration of basic principles for relations agreed upon in the 1972 Moscow Summit; however, the agreement was a “fake” one, as described by Alexander George. The agreement contained an essential contradiction between the Soviet affirmation of peaceful coexistence and the American insistence that no party shall receive unilateral privilege at the expense of the other party. The United States saw the agreement as an attempt to prevent the superpowers from being implicated in all the crises in the Third World, while the Soviets viewed it as a way to prevent situations that might lead to direct confrontations between the superpowers. The Soviet notion meant that, if the United States were not implicated in a specific situation, the USSR would have the freedom to maneuver how it wished. This went against the belief of the Nixon administration that the agreement would function as an alternative and continue to fulfill the demands of the

¹⁰⁰ Snyder and Diesing, op. cit., p. 450.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 450.

¹⁰² Phil William, *Nuclear Weapons and Crisis Management*, op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁰³ Snyder, op. cit., p. 220.

¹⁰⁴ Al-'Amari, op. cit, p. 6.

containment policy, at a time when the people of the United States were no longer willing to sacrifice with the backdrop of the Vietnam crisis. When this agreement did not lead to limiting the movement of the USSR as expected, there was a widespread feeling in Washington that the United States had been deceived. Following the Afghanistan crisis, military containment once again became a major priority of US policy.¹⁰⁵

The United States and the Soviet Union entered into a protracted nuclear arms race, with each side seeking to surpass the other in the development and deployment of modern military systems. Due to the high costs and threats inherent in unproductive arms races, both parties extended tools - both formal and informal - to help maintain stability and to make it difficult for any party to achieve the position of nuclear supremacy. This explains their agreement to various limits and divisions in the international system and in specific regions, in search for pacification based on acceptable norms of behavior. Had it not been for nuclear weapons, the importance of containing crises before they reach the level of open warfare would have been far less pressing. Despite the fact that nuclear arms have made crises a much more frightening affair, it was not enough to end these crises altogether.¹⁰⁶

The superpowers did not often gravitate toward a nuclear impasse due to the fact that they both had at their disposal retaliatory forces that could inflict devastating damage upon the enemy, even after receiving the first strike. Even when the United States monopolized nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union did not lack counter measures. Western Europe was effectively a hostage of the USSR, and the situation remained until the mid 1950s when the Soviet Union developed an extensive nuclear capacity, and some American cities became exposed to the reach of its nuclear strikes. The nuclear balance has given each superpower the deterrent to defend its territory in the event of a direct nuclear attack against it or against its allies.¹⁰⁷

The fears encircling the superpowers were in one of them taking an action - due to a miscalculation - that the other superpower couldn't tolerate. In the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States could not tolerate the USSR actions in Cuba, leading it to raising the level of preparedness of its nuclear and conventional forces to the highest level; in response, the Soviet Union backed down from its plans to build missile bases on the island.¹⁰⁸

The strategic environment in today's world requires an essential transformation in the ways of thinking about international crisis management. Political leaders must focus their attention on controlling crises more than on achieving gains.¹⁰⁹ An essential problem remains in crisis management in a world of multiple nuclear powers, because small states do not have the same amount of responsibility in using nuclear weapons compared to the superpowers. The low

¹⁰⁵ Phil William, *Contemporary Strategy*, op. cit., p. 235.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Nedlebow, "Is Crisis Management Always Possible?", Charles W. Kegly, Eugene R. Witt Korf (eds), *The Global Agenda Issues and Perspectives*, Third Edition, (McGraw, Hill Inc., 1992), pp. 83-84.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

probability of a nuclear war between the superpowers was not so much due to the actual balance of power; what made nuclear war improbable was the stability of the system of balances they established.¹¹⁰

International Crisis Management in the Post-Bipolar Phase

The end of the Cold War has made the world unstable compared to the era of the original cold war during the days of Stalin, with a large number of international crises threatening to erupt.¹¹¹ Changes in the hierarchy of powers at the summit of the international system can complicate things, as with the ascendancy of China and the rise of Japan to the ranks of the great powers, and could expand the field of conflicts in which the great powers can be implicated.¹¹² Additionally, the beginning of a turbulent era without the formulation of clear rules for managing relations between states indicates that the presence of international crises will be a major and recurrent characteristic of international relations.¹¹³

While the Persian Gulf War following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was the greatest real crisis of the post World War phase, it was managed with more ease and competence than any past crisis, due to the complete change in Soviet foreign policy at the time. Most countries saw the crisis not from an ideological perspective, or in terms of relations between the East and the West, but as a matter of direct aggression and annexation of Kuwait. Saddam Hussein attempted to employ the strategic language of the Cold War era without success.¹¹⁴

These developments have contributed to world domination by the United States, and specifically, the affirmation of American hegemony over third world countries and their strategic issues. The USA will become the paramount, most effective, and most influential factor in the international environment, and in strategic decisions emanating from or otherwise concerning third world countries and their causes.¹¹⁵

Historically, the main challenge to the hegemony of an empire that dominates vast territories is in the lack of the required power to impose its unchallenged control, and to prevent these regions from dissenting or witnessing disorder and conflicts. The Roman Empire was a case in point; colonialist empires provide other examples, especially European empires that from the sixteenth century spread out across the seas. The control garnered by the United States and the Soviet

¹¹⁰ Phil William, *Contemporary Strategy*, op. cit., p. 236.

¹¹¹ Richard Clutter Buck, op. cit., p. 3.

¹¹² Phil William, *Crisis Management*, op. cit., p. 237.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 237.

¹¹⁴ Graham E. Fuller, "Soviet – American Cooperation in the Middle East: The Changing Face of International Conflict", in: Steven L. Spiegel (Ed), *Conflict Management in the Middle East*, (San Francisco: West View Press, 1992), p. 15-16.

¹¹⁵ 'Alawi, "The International Behavior of Egypt During the May-June 1967 Crisis", op. cit., pp. 46-47.

Union over the regions that fell under their influence is described as a form of imperial hegemony.¹¹⁶

The post Cold War system was based on a new value system; as described by former US President George Bush Sr., the new world order is freer from the threat of terrorism, more immune in enacting justice, and more safe in the quest for peace. It is a new world ruled by law, in which states acknowledge their shared responsibility to achieve freedom and justice.¹¹⁷

The new value system of the new world order has opened the door wide to the possibility of foreign military intervention in the domestic affairs of states, and the sovereignty of the vast majority of states is now subject to the pressure of others wishing to impose their own values upon them.¹¹⁸

The NATO campaign in Kosovo established a precedent that could lead to the agitation of international relations for years to come. NATO's insistence that international law has evolved to give primacy to humanitarian considerations led to the negligence of a principle rule: domestic matters are the affair of each state alone. The NATO organization has taken the role of the United Nations, taking it upon itself to decide where, when, and under what conditions military intervention is justified. Based on the new values of the international system, both the United States and NATO attempted to solidify the pattern of unipolarity, despite the fact that the military and economic supremacy of the United States may make it less dependent on its allies to achieve its vital objectives. The disappearance of the threat that was the Soviet Union has made the persistence of current alliances difficult, at least in their initial iteration, such as the the NATO alliance or the alliance between Japan and the US. The war in Yugoslavia clearly showed the United States' readiness to forsake its NATO allies; the United States was no longer in need of its allies.¹¹⁹

However, the new challenges emerging after September 11, 2001, have affirmed the necessity to create support for the "Coalitions of the Willing", which is a complex process in which ethical dimensions mix with national interests. Due to the changes in the international situation, friends and allies can become enemies or neutral states; this direction clearly manifested itself during what was termed the "Global War on Terrorism".¹²⁰

The events of September 11th have reconstituted international alliances; the United States and Russia both became part of an international coalition to defeat a common enemy. The leaders of

¹¹⁶ Marcel Searl, "The Gulf Crisis and the New World Order", translated by Hasan Nafi'a. (Cairo: the Ibin Khaldoun Center for Development Studies, 1992), p. 37.

¹¹⁷ During the Kuwait liberation war, the United States received political and financial support from a coalition that shared its sense of moral anger towards Iraq; this not only reflected the change of values in the international system, but also heralded a new world order, despite the existence of a global hierarchy of power.

¹¹⁸ C.J. Dick, "Conflict in a Changing World: Looking Two Decades Forward", *European Security*, Vol. 11, No.3 Autumn 2002, p. 20.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

both nations agree that international terrorism is one of the major and greatest threats to their national security and to civilization. The new cooperation emerging with Russia has permitted the United States to wage its war in Afghanistan, a country situated in Russia's backyard and which caused the collapse of the Soviet Union, without the hurdles that used to be imposed by the constraints of the Cold War. These developments in the relationship of the two countries engendered concern that American-Russian supremacy might marginalize the role of the European Union.¹²¹ Furthermore, Russia's alliance with the United States also made easier the presence of American forces in central Asia and Georgia, and softened Putin's reaction to the United States' cancelation of the ABM treaty and to the expansion of NATO membership.¹²²

A number of points could be listed regarding the management of international crises under the current international system:¹²³

- a. There is no longer such a thing as an intervening power and an observing power in what relates to the management of regional crises. All actors assume their roles, even if to varying extents.
- b. It has become easier for the global superpower to directly manage regional crises following the disappearance of other global challengers. At the same time, the use of a regional power in managing a regional crisis has become more difficult and fraught with great risks, because global powers closely monitor these crises and are ready to intervene at any moment.
- c. If the objective of crisis management in the bipolar international system is to prevent the use of military force, this rule remains under current conditions with one exception: escalation of a crisis can now pave the way to the intervention of international powers to decide the situation. Such interventions were heavily restrained in the past.
- d. The use of international legitimacy to control some regional conflicts has increased, despite its selective application.
- e. The supply of weapons to crisis zones has become more a matter of commerce than politics.
- f. Domestic outbreaks within states have become more frequent than conflicts between states within a region. Under slogans of humanitarian concerns and to prevent the oppression of central governments on their citizens, international intervention to regulate a state's internal affairs has become acceptable.

¹²¹ Angela Stent and Lilia Shevtsova, "America, Russia and Europe: A Realignment?", *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 4, Winter 2002-2003, p. 121.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹²³ Ameen Huwaidi, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

Thus, the notion of absolute sovereignty has changed, as well as that of political borders, which now coincide in some instances with the “secure borders” of states. The United Nations began calling for the formation of an international force under its command for the purpose of direct intervention in crises, even if in a preemptive manner to prevent the anticipated escalation of any given crisis.

Conclusions

This study has proven the validity of the main research hypothesis, that the relationship between an international crisis and the international system structure at the time of the crisis is characterized by mutual influence between them. The behavior of states in international crises is affected by the nature of the dominant international system, which could be termed the “the external effect” in the interaction between the parties of a crisis. Crises also affect the state of the system and its operations in terms of stability, balance, and peace. The nature of the system structure affects the outcome and characteristics of the crisis resolution. A crisis may challenge the system to the point where a major war breaks out, or it could disrupt its pillars in a manner that brings about new values and rules for its management; or, conversely, the matter could end with a reassertion of the status quo.

The study has reached a number of other conclusions:

- a. A crisis could leave one of its parties feeling aggrieved and the other feeling superior; neither sentiment aids in improving relations. A crisis may also invoke a reassessment of relations, as took place following the Cuban Missile Crisis when Washington and Moscow both admitted the necessity to avoid repeated confrontations.
- b. Evolutions in the international system explain the transformations of limited conflicts into acute conflicts, which hastens the appearance of additional crises. The study of the international system helps us understand why war remains a relative possibility, and why the peaceful resolution of crises is more difficult in a certain system structure as opposed to another. The recurrence of international crises in an international system indicates the anarchic nature of international policies within that system. This reflects the absence of a central authority that regulates the behavior of a large number of independent political units, and leads to a permanent struggle over interests among these units.
- c. Despite the fact that direct military confrontations can be avoided through mutual pacification and accurate calculations of interests, some power conflicts escalate and turn into crises threatening the use of military force. Enmity between countries increases to the point where war becomes imminent or probable.
- d. Crises also affect relations between major powers. They may suspend conflict between them, or even contribute to resolving some issues over which the major actors were divided. Thus, crises could pave the way to more stable and coordinated relations in the long run.

- e. There is no longer such a thing as an intervening power and an observing power in what relates to the management of regional crises. All actors assume their roles, even if to varying extents. It has become easier for the global superpower to directly manage regional crises following the disappearance of other global challengers. At the same time, the use of a regional power in managing a regional crisis has become more difficult and fraught with great risks, because global powers closely monitor these crises and are ready to intervene at any moment.
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- g. The use of international legitimacy to control some regional conflicts has increased, despite its selective application. Domestic outbreaks within states have become more frequent than conflicts between states within a region. Under slogans of humanitarian concerns and to prevent the oppression of central governments on their citizens, international intervention to regulate a state's internal affairs has become acceptable.