Crisis. The term *crisis* comes from the Greek krio, meaning to separate. A medical crisis is a turning point in a serious illness toward either recovery or death. In international politics, the turning point may be between *war* and *peace*.

Scholarship and analysis in world politics has stipulated more specific meanings for crisis. At least three alternative definitions deserve attention. They represent not only definitional distinctions but also different levels of analysis and alternative theoretical and practical concerns. Thus it is possible to distinguish between systemic crises, international confrontation crises, and governmental decision-making crises.

*International systems consist of a set of actors regularly interacting according to some structure that is maintained by norms, laws, or the distribution of capabilities. From a systemic perspective, a crisis is a strong shock to the structure that holds the system together. Thus a systemic crisis threatens the stability of the international system and creates the possibility of a system transformation. For example, the bipolar international system led by the opposing *superpowers that prevailed after World War II had experienced a crisis with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the *Warsaw Treaty Organization.*

A core question to those, such as Kenneth Waltz (Theory of International Politics, New York, 1979), concerned with systemic crises is: When does a crisis lead to the *destabilization of the international system? Some scholarship has inquired whether one kind of international system (e.g., multipolar vs. bipolar) is more susceptible to crises and the conditions under which they destabilize the system. Descriptive studies have sought to determine the conditions that trigger systemic crises. Typically these
have been envisioned as wars or revolutions that dramatically alter the power distribution among actors in international politics. In the increasingly economically interdependent international system that prevails today, other types of events (e.g., national currency collapse, depression) may be future crisis triggers.

Not all systemic crises need be dysfunctional for a system, particularly if it has leaders with a capacity to adapt and learn from the shocks. Leaders in systems or subsystems may actually use crises as a means of forcing member governments to take initiatives they otherwise might not take. The leadership of the European Community has repeatedly used deadline crises as a means of forcing member governments to take further integrative steps or risk collapse of that subsystem, which produces beneficial results no party wishes to forgo.

A second type of crisis is an international confrontational crisis that typically, but not always, is bilateral. Whereas systemic crises concern the fate of the system as a whole, crises between actors focus only on the consequences for nations confronting one another. These crises are defined as a major challenge by one actor to the status quo position of another. After an initial escalatory challenge that triggers the situation, the fundamental dynamic involves bargaining—either directly or by means of some form of tacit signaling. Analysts using the actor confrontation perspective on crisis frequently rely on one of two methods of inquiry—comparative case studies or the theory of games. Researchers apply game theory generally to address the conditions under which a stable solution to the crisis can be found. Analysts using case studies have focused on such issues as types of strategy, third-party intervention, and the conditions governing escalation. Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing (Conflict Among Nations, Princeton, N.J., 1977) have effectively illustrated both approaches. Like other students of international confrontational crises, they pose the basic question: What bargaining strategies produce a successful outcome without escalation to greater violence or war?

In the third orientation to crisis, the focus is on a single country. Governmental or decision-making crises involve an event or other stimulus that poses a severe problem for the policymakers and possibly their constituents. Definitions of crisis emphasize properties of the situation facing the policymakers, usually as they are perceived by the decision makers. My own definition (Charles F. Hermann, "International Crisis as a Situational Variable," in James N. Rosenau, ed., International Politics and Foreign Policy, New York, 1969) involved three properties: high threat, short time, and surprise. More specifically a crisis involves the combination of high threat to basic goals of the policymakers, short time before the situation evolves in a manner undesired by them, and appearance as a surprise (i.e., a lack of expectation that the situation would occur).

From a decision-making perspective a basic question is: What effects do crises have on the quality of decisions? A decision-making crisis need not involve an international problem. Unless one of the defining characteristics is the probability of war, a crisis may include domestic events that threaten the government as well as those emerging in world affairs. Thus in *comparative politics a governmental crisis refers to a pending vote of no confidence in a parliamentary regime that challenges the continuation of the government.

Prescriptive studies seek to advance means to avoid crises or to manage them without severe consequences. Such studies can be undertaken at any of the three levels of crisis, but they tend to be concentrated at that of governmental decision making. Crisis management research establishes a standard for the quality of decisions (e.g., rationality, adaptation, avoidance of war) and then identifies circumstances in policy-making that tend to produce a deviation from that standard. Proposals for avoiding these crisis-induced difficulties are then recommended. For example, Irving Janis (Victims of Groupthink, Boston, 1972) contends that decision groups in crisis tend to engage in excessive concurrence seeking that erodes the quality of decisions. He proposes steps to reduce this concurrence-seeking behavior.

Each of the three levels (and definitions) of crisis concerns different questions. In systemic crises, when do such events lead to destabilization? In international confrontational crises, when do bargaining strategies produce successful outcomes without war? In governmental crises, what effects do such events have on the quality of decisions? Thus, the definition of crisis and the level of analysis used depend upon the problems to be addressed. At all levels, the overarching question is how the affected actor(s) deals with an acutely threatening situation.

(See also Cold War; Deterrence; Diplomacy; Interdependence.)


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CROATIA. See Yugoslavia.

CUBA. Lying 145 kilometers (90 mi.) off the U.S. coast, Cuba is situated at the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico. Consequently, despite its small size (about 11 million people in 1992), it has always been of strategic interest to the United States, which has tried many ways to acquire control over Cuba or to assure its allegiance. The Cubans, however, have had other ideas.

Historical Background. Cuba's independence from Spain in 1898, as the so-called Spanish-American War, to lose the struggle, the United States inherited as spoils the island of Cuba: full sovereignty after the war. The Platt Amendment, derived from the Platt Amendment to the 1901 and 1923 Conventions, granted the United States the right to intervene in Cuba's affairs and to protect U.S. interests, especially in sugar. Over the years, U.S. marines have been stationed in Cuba to reduce order and protect economic interests on the island.

In 1933, Gerardo Machado, who had been overthrown in 1930, was forced to resign under U.S. pressure. After the student-led opposition, the reformer Dr. Ramon Grau San Marti was elected president in 1934, and the new government had a "communist" president backed by a coup by Colonel Fulgencio Batista in 1952. A mutiny of Cuba's army and labor legislation, but it was too late for him to pursue his goals.

The years 1944–1952, Cuba under liberal democracy, were marked by corruption and inefficiency. The country was governed by a military junta under Grau San Marti and then by Batista. Although the period was marked by optimism inspired by the belief that Cuba would return to power, Batista's elections in 1946 were viewed by the United States as more unscrupulous and more in the interests of Cuba.

Led by a young university student, Fidel Castro, a handful of Cubans to create a new government. The military coup in 1953, with the support of the United States, was a military success, and Castro was allowed to leave Cuba. He returned in 1959, and the United States was left with no option but to support his regime. The United States, however, have had other ideas.