

[Alex Gillespie](#)

Nuclear brinkmanship: a study in non-linguistic communication

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Gillespie, Alex (2013) *Nuclear brinkmanship: a study in non-linguistic communication*. [Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science](#). ISSN 1932-4502

DOI: [10.1007/s12124-013-9245-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-013-9245-z)

© 2013 [Springer](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/52606/>

Available in LSE Research Online: August 2014

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Nuclear Brinkmanship: A Study in Non-Linguistic Symbolic Interaction

Alex Gillespie

Abstract

The article uses Goffman's distinction between expressions 'given' and 'given off' to advance the study of how nuclear bombs and military maneuvers are used to create meaning. The data is verbatim audio recordings from the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The analysis reveals that actions do indeed sometimes speak louder than words. Moreover, who is being spoken to is often a semi-visible third-party, such as world opinion. The analysis identifies a novel process of 'staging the other', that is, when one side tries to create a situation which will force the other side to act in a way which will create a negative impression on world opinion. In so far as the staging is not perceived by the audience and the target does indeed make themselves look bad, then staging is a particularly powerful form of impression management.

Keywords: Impression management, non-linguistic communication, Cuban Missile Crisis, brinkmanship, staging.

Nuclear Brinkmanship: A Study in Non-Linguistic Symbolic Interaction

On October 30th 1961, the USSR, led by Nikita Khrushchev, detonated the largest and most powerful nuclear bomb in history over an uninhabited region within the Arctic Circle. The ‘Tsar Bomba,’ as it became known, had a yield of 50 megatons, many times the size of any bomb ever exploded by the USA and equivalent to ten times all the explosives used during World War II (Adamsky and Smirnov 1994). The explosion broke windows 900 km away and was visible 1000 km away. Following the detonation, Khrushchev made a public announcement:

We have said that we have a 100-megaton bomb. This is true. But we are not going to explode it, because even if we did so at the most remote site, we might knock out all our windows. We are therefore going to hold off for the time being and not set the bomb off. However, in exploding the 50-megaton bomb we are testing the device for triggering a 100-megaton bomb. But may God grant, as they used to say, that we are never called upon to explode these bombs over anybody’s territory. (Adamsky and Smirnov 1994:20)

It is now known that there was no second bomb. Although a second shell was created and displayed, it was empty. So why did the USSR ‘waste’ its most awesome military asset to create a 64 km high mushroom cloud? The explosion was a communicative dramatization of power (Etheredge 1992), which succeeded in creating an impression of awe and fear around the globe.

The present manuscript examines posturing with nuclear weapons as a form of communication. Linell (2005) has convincingly argued that there is a ‘written language bias,’ that communication, even spoken communication, is studied from a written point of view. Human speech, it is argued, should be the basis for theories of language use and comprehension (Lieberman 2006). However, one could also argue that there is an even more pervasive “general language bias” or a “logocentric stance” in studies of

communication (Linell 2005:192). People do things with words (Austin 1962), but, people also communicate by doing things.

Symbolic interactionism has long recognized the communicative significance of actions as gestures (Mead 1922, Blumer and Morrione 2004). What people do, the way they dress, and even the tattoos they display are communicative (Phelan and Hunt 1998). However, like the work on non-verbal communication, much of this literature remains at the inter-personal level. Indeed, Goffman (1959:13) defined impression management as that which occurs when someone “enters the presence of others”. But the core ideas of symbolic interactionism have broader applicability, and can be used to elucidate inter-group interaction and collective behavior (McPhail 2006). The aim of the present article is to use these concepts to study the communicative significance of gestures, particularly military maneuvers, in during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

One notable exception to ‘the language bias,’ beyond symbolic interactionist research, is the work by Schelling. Schelling (1966 preface to 2008 edition) has observed that although nuclear weapons have not been used in violence since 1945 they have been very communicative in international relations. Equally, in the context of a limited war fought by superpowers Schelling (1960) argued that there are lots of instances of arms control, not maintained by signatures, but, maintained by actions and self-interests. For example, a good reason for not bombing the enemy’s civilians is to prevent them from bombing one’s own civilians.

Perhaps the psychology and the sanctions and the mode of communication, the kinds of reasoning involved, the lack of formal agreement or even acknowledgement, that typify limited war, represent a more central and typical process of international negotiation than we usually give it credit for [...] The limits in limited war are arrived at not by verbal bargaining, but by maneuver, by actions, and by statements and declarations that are not direct communication to the enemy (Schelling 1960:903)

Government, Schelling (1960:905) observes, “speaks through the actions it takes” and part of his project was to understand this ‘language of action.’

The present article utilizes a symbolic interactionist approach to advance our understanding of non-linguistic communication at the inter-group level. The next section introduces the impression management literature, and the subsequent sections apply them to the Cuban Missile Crisis. The analysis underscores the importance of non-linguistic communication and also introduces the concept of ‘staging the other,’ which occurs when one party tries to create a situation which will force the action of the other party in relation to world opinion.

Impression Management

George Herbert Mead (1910, 1922) proposed that communication, or symbolic activity, begins with the response of a second organism. If the actions of the first organism are of consequence for the second organism, the second organism learns to ‘read’ observed actions as indexing future actions. For example, the dog’s pace and display of teeth signal a future bite. Advanced, or significantly symbolic, communication occurs when the first organism is able to anticipate the anticipatory response of the second organism to a given gesture, and is thus able to use the gesture to create an impression on the second organism (Gillespie 2005). For example, a boxer might feign a punch in order to elicit a block and thus open up an opportunity.

Goffman’s work (1959:14) distinguished between “two radically different kinds of sign activity,” namely:

the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*. The first involves verbal symbols or their substitutes which he uses admittedly and solely to convey the information that he and others are known to attach to these symbols. This is communication in the traditional and narrow sense. The second involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of

the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way.

A guest exclaiming “your cooking is wonderful” is ‘giving’ an expression. But, knowing that words are cheap, the host is likely to pay more attention to the eagerness and gusto with which the guest eats. The scenario is complicated by the fact that the guest is likely to be aware of the communicative significance of their eating behavior, and thus may ‘give off’ expressions of eagerness and gusto. The distinction between expressions given and given off has been found to be robust and is widely used (Farr 1997). However, the following analysis of nuclear brinkmanship depends upon two theoretical refinements which need to be introduced, namely, ‘unintended impressions’ and ‘staging the other.’

Goffman (1959:16) writes that expressions given off can be either “purposely engineered or not.” This definition includes both intentional and unintentional communication. While it is somewhat unfashionable to consider intended meaning (Cobb 1994), I suggest that despite being risky, it does have analytic value. Specifically it acknowledges the plurality of the social world and allows us to conceptualize misunderstandings. Sometimes the expression given or given off does not match the impression created, and in such a case we can talk of an unintended impression (Ichheiser 1949). An unintended impression is meaning created in the mind of the other which the source did not intend. Unintended impressions relate to the actors’ “blindspot” (Farr 1996:79) and thus the “surplus” meaning (Gillespie 2003) or “excess” meaning (Bakhtin 1923/1990:22) that any expression creates in its audience.

The second concept, staging the other, is a novel contribution that expands the notion of impression management. Impression management is seen to be more inclusive than self-presentation because it includes managing the impressions of both

other and self (Leary, Allen and Terry 2011:412). Most of the literature on impression management with other people has focused on either using other people as props for self-presentation (Goffman 1959) or supporting the self-presentation efforts of friends and family (Goffman 1963, Schlenker and Britt 1999). All interactions occur in the shadow of third parties, even if they are not present or active (Linell, 2009, Markova, 2008). Third parties are clearly evident in televised debates, where political candidates ostensibly talk to one another, but are more focused upon the impression they make on the viewing public (Beck 1996). Recent analysis has shown that impression management includes efforts targeted at influencing the way in which the other is perceived by third parties (Condor 2006). Thus the traditional view of impression management as occurring within a dyadic relationship is giving way to a triadic model, and the concept of ‘staging the other’ contributes to this development. Staging the other entails using actions or utterances to create a constraining situation for the other that forces them to act in such a way as to create a negative impression on a third party.

Impression management concepts were developed to study inter-personal interactions, and the following analysis uses them to analyze an inter-group interaction. These levels are not equivalent; in face-to-face interaction individuals can be conceptualized as individually responsible for the impressions they seek to create, but in an inter-group interaction, there are many layers of impression management. Governments, for example, are not homogenous entities, with singular purposes (Allison 1969). They comprise departments with disparate interests and histories, and within the departments, there are individuals, again with differential histories and interests. Thus impression management by a government includes individuals positioning themselves *vis-à-vis* other individuals, departments positioning themselves

vis-à-vis other departments, and finally the collectivity that is the government is positioning itself *vis-à-vis* other governments. Nevertheless, as the following analysis aims to demonstrate, even though inter-national impression management has many layers of impression management, it is nonetheless impression management.

The literature on nuclear brinkmanship includes many brief and suggestive references to impression management (e.g., Guttieri, Wallace and Suedfeld 1995, Booth and Wheeler 2008). The following analysis is the first systematic attempt to understand the Cuban Missile Crisis through the lens of impression management, and the contribution is a demonstration of the importance of third parties and the phenomenon of ‘staging the other.’

Materials and Method of Analysis

The Cuban Missile Crisis is well suited to a case study of non-linguistic communication for two reasons. First, the channels of linguistic communication between the White House and the Kremlin were very slow. The ‘hot-line’ was an outcome of the Crisis. During the Crisis messages were sent via ambassadors and could take a day or more. Second, we have good data on the American side.

The main data is verbatim transcripts of discussions held in the White House (Zelikow and May 2001a, 2001b). These transcripts are from a secret recording device that President Kennedy used during “almost every meeting and telephone call he participated in during the Cuban missile crisis” (Powers 1996:86). Between 16th and 28th October 1962, which was the main phase of the Crisis, there are 726 pages of transcript (over 350,000 words). The discussions are mainly between the members of ExComm, but they also include the President’s discussions with ExComm and other

relevant people, such as Intelligence Officials, Ambassadors, past Presidents, members of Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The data from the Soviet side is less abundant and of lesser quality (Scott 2007). Nevertheless, two self-report documents are used in the interests of maintaining the two sides of the communicative interaction in the analysis (but all the key points are based on the ExComm data). First, Anatoly Dobrynin's (1962) report to Khrushchev of his meeting with Robert Kennedy is used because it provides the best available account of this critical meeting. Second, Khrushchev's *Memoirs* (1971 2007) are used in the analysis to provide some limited and speculative insight into Soviet thinking during the Crisis. This material is included in an attempt to study the communication

The analysis is a case study (Yin, 1994), and as such issues of sampling, frequency and representativeness are of limited importance. The focus is on what actually occurred in this particular instance of nuclear brinkmanship. The analytic procedure entailed using the concepts and assumptions outlined above as interpretative tools to make visible impression management dynamics within the Crisis. Specific questions were asked of the material: How does each side represent and orient to the other side? How does each side interpret the expressive action of the other side? And how does each side attempt to control the expressions it was giving and giving off? The validity of the analysis, however, cannot be determined on the basis of methodological procedure (Danziger 1990), rather it must be determined by the results of the analysis in relation to alternative interpretations. The main finding, that ExComm were trying to force the Soviets to make moves which would create a negative impression in world opinion, emerged out of the analysis. The validity of the

analysis rests, in part, on the fact that all the data is public and accordingly it is fully open to refutation or re-interpretation.

Nuclear Missiles in Cuba: “Why?”

President Kennedy and his advisors were surprised to learn, in mid-October 1962, that Soviet nuclear missiles were being installed in Cuba. ExComm knew that the USA had nuclear superiority, and, of course, missiles in Cuba did something to redress this imbalance. However, it was seen to be very risky and the USSR had alternatives they were developing, such as inter-continental missiles and nuclear submarines.

President Kennedy: If it doesn't increase very much their strategic strength why is it – can any Russian expert tell us – why then..? After all Khrushchev demonstrated a sense of caution over Laos, Berlin, he's been cautious [...] It's just as if we suddenly began to put a major number of MRBMs [Medium Range Ballistic Missiles] in Turkey. Now that'd be goddamn dangerous, I would think.

Bundy: Well, we did, Mr. President. (Zelikow and May 2001a:450-1)

Kennedy urges his advisors to 'read' the Soviet's intentions, and future actions, from their military maneuver. Kennedy, attempting to understand the Soviet point of view, imagines a reversal of positions (Gillespie 2005), asking, under what conditions the USA would do something similar. It turns out that the USA did do something similar; they put MRBMs in Turkey, Italy and the UK when they believed they were weak. Thus the reversal does yield a productive answer. In 1962 it was the USSR which felt weak. Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, presents this argument as follows:

One thing Mr Khrushchev may have in mind is that he knows that we have substantial nuclear superiority, but he also knows that we don't really live under fear of his nuclear weapons to the extent that he has to live under fear of ours [...] Khrushchev may feel that it's important for us to learn about living under medium-range missiles, and he's doing that to sort of balance that political, psychological flank. (Zelikow and May 2001a: 410-11)

Not only did the USA have nuclear superiority, but by having missiles in Turkey, Italy and the UK it was making its arsenal have a psychological impact on the USSR. The maneuver, Rusk suggests, may be an attempt to make the fewer Soviet missiles make a bigger impression upon the American populace.

Another answer to Kennedy's question "why?" is that Khrushchev might be trying "to trade something in Berlin" (Zelikow and May 2001a:451). West Berlin was controlled by the Allies, and the Soviet administration was concerned that it was spreading capitalist influence. The Allies thought that Khrushchev wanted to seize Western Berlin, and thus the missiles might be a first step in creating a situation which would enable a direct trade (missiles out of Cuba for a Soviet occupation of West Berlin). Dean Rusk develops the idea:

[T]hey may be thinking that they can either bargain Berlin and Cuba against each other, or that they could provoke us into a kind of action in Cuba which would give an umbrella for them to take action with respect to Berlin. [...] If they could provoke us into taking the first overt action, then the world would be confused and they would have what they would consider to be justification for making a move. (Zelikow and May 2001a:411)

Military representatives in ExComm viewed the Crisis as an opportunity for a military solution that would remove Fidel Castro from power. Rusk sees the political dimension: military action in Cuba would provide legitimation for the USSR to take Berlin. According to this interpenetration, the missiles, rather than being defensive or even offensive, were actually meant to 'invite' an invasion.

Yet another answer to the question "why?" was provided by General Earle Wheeler, Army Chief of Staff. He frames the existence missiles as an attack on the USA's prestige which requires a strong response:

The announcement of a Soviet base in Cuba would immediately have a profound effect in all of Latin America at least and probably worldwide because the question would arise: Is the United States incapable of doing

something about it or unwilling to do something about it? In other words, it would attack our prestige. (Zelikow and May 2001a:586)

The USSR, Wheeler (and the CIA, October 20th 1962) argued, was not interested in a costly and logistically complex conflict in the Caribbean. Rather, the maneuver was a projection of Soviet strength towards Latin America in an attempt to support movements towards socialism. Thus the missiles were meant to be communicative, and they were not even addressing the USA, but rather third parties in Latin America. Incidentally this view corresponds to Khrushchev's retrospective account that his main concern was that the USA would invade Cuba and he would be unable to defend it, which in turn would "undermine the will for revolution" in Latin America (Khrushchev 2007:322). According to this account, the maneuver was a response to a potential future that never occurred – just like the anticipatory response of the boxer to the perceived future blow.

Gradually, Kennedy and his advisors come to appreciate the meanings being created: if the USA attacked Cuba, it would, in the eyes of the world, legitimate the USSR to move on Berlin; and if the USA did not move on Cuba, it would send a message to Latin America that the USSR can protect nation states that want to move towards Communism.

Expressions Given: Khrushchev's Letters

President Kennedy's response was to issue a public condemnation, demand that the missiles be removed, and order a naval blockade of Cuba. These actions created a significant escalation, constituting a "public drama" (Etheredge 1992:62). They were calculated to use utterance backed up with action to create an impression of resolve.

As the Crisis neared its peak, on the 26th of October, President Kennedy received a private letter from Chairman Khrushchev. The tone of the letter was troubled and thoughtful. Khrushchev tried to reassure the President, writing, “we are of sound mind and understand perfectly well that if we attack you, you will respond the same way” (Zelikow and May 2001b:351). Having outlined their joint predicament, Khrushchev offered Kennedy a deal. He offered to withdraw the missiles from Cuba in exchange for a guarantee that the USA would not interfere in the sovereignty of Cuba. However, before ExComm had a chance to fully consider the offer, a second letter arrived.

On the morning of 27th October, known as ‘Black Saturday’ (Scott 2007:55), a second letter from Khrushchev was released to the media containing a more hardline message. In addition to requesting a guarantee not to interfere with Cuba, Khrushchev also requested that the USA remove its nuclear missiles from Turkey. Khrushchev wrote:

I understand your concern for the security of the United States [...] You want to relieve your country from danger and this is understandable. However, Cuba also wants this. All countries want to relieve themselves from danger. But how can we, the Soviet Union and our government, assess your actions which, in effect, mean that you have surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases [...] Your rockets are stationed in Britain and in Italy and pointed at us. Your rockets are stationed in Turkey. You are worried over Cuba. You say that it worries you because it lies at a distance of 90 miles across the sea from the shores of the United States. However, Turkey lies next to us. [...] Do you believe that you have the right to demand security for your country and the removal of such weapons that you qualify as offensive, while not recognizing this right for us? (Zelikow and May 2001b:372-3)

Both of Khrushchev’s letters were, in Goffman’s sense, expressions given. However, while the first was sent privately the second was released to the mass media. Thus, although the second letter ostensibly addresses President Kennedy, it has many third parties (i.e., home audiences, allies, and world opinion). The second letter begins with

Khrushchev accepting Kennedy's concern with the security of the USA, and on the same principle, argues that Cuba and indeed any country must be allowed to have the same concern. In short, the letter publicly accuses the USA of hypocrisy, but it is more subtle than being a 'denigration ceremony' (Garfinkel 1956:420). While it does involve appeals to collectively held norms (fairness) it does not simply label the USA as being unfair, rather, it stages Kennedy. It creates a situation within which Kennedy's own actions will determine whether, in the eyes of the world, the USA has double standards.

Unintended Impressions: Escalation

The explicit meaning of each of Khrushchev's letters is quite clear. However, because the two letters offer different deals, the unintended impression made is quite different from the explicit meaning. Kennedy's advisors vie to make sense of the discrepancy. Vice President Johnson asks the question: "So what happened? Is somebody forcing him to up his ante? Or did he try to just say: 'Well, maybe they'll give up more. Let's try it'" (Zelikow and May 2001b:471). Thompson, Advisor on Russian Affairs, suggests that maybe "Khrushchev was overruled" (Zelikow and May 2001b:471). ExComm get more meaning out of the letters than is contained in either letter; what is communicating is the discrepancy between the letters. Schelling (1956) argues that freedom is a weakness in bargaining because it makes concession possible. In contrast, demonstrable lack of freedom is strength in bargaining, because it forces the other to make the concession. The question here for ExComm is whether Khrushchev still has any freedom to maneuver.

While ExComm were discussing the two letters, they received news that a U-2 surveillance plane had been shot down over Cuba resulting in the death of the pilot. A

range of interpretations were discussed (Zelikow and May 2001b:446-51): They question whether the Soviet's have "fired the first shot?" Whether the plane was brought down by "mechanical failure"? And whether the shooting was done by "undisciplined" Cuban soldiers, rather than Soviet soldiers? Each interpretation indicates different responses. During the course of the discussion it is confirmed that the shooting was done by a Russian SAM site. This fact leads to the suggestion that the shooting was "not any accident" (Zelikow and May 2001b:451), but a deliberate communication from the Kremlin designed to add emphasis to Khrushchev's second hardline letter. Thompson (Zelikow and May 2001b:478) sums up this interpretation saying: "They've upped the price [asking for the Cuba-Turkey trade], and they've upped the action."

There is no evidence that the Soviet SAM site was ordered to shoot down the U-2 spy plane. Thus, what seemed to be an expression given (i.e. an intentional communication from the Kremlin) was most likely an unintended impression (i.e. inferred by ExComm). Research has shown that when there is little information in the communication channel, interlocutors rely increasingly upon background assumptions (Collins and Marková, 1999). ExComm, at this point, were weaving together the hardline shift and the shooting into a mutually reinforcing interpretation of 'escalation.'

Crafting a Response: Expressions Given Off

The State Department had been asked to look into the implications of removing the Jupiter missiles from Turkey. They report that they would "be *delighted* to trade those missiles in Turkey for the thing in Cuba" (Zelikow and May 2001b:459, emphasis in the original). The Jupiter missiles were described as "obsolete." The

missiles had serious upkeep costs and added little strategic advantage given the advent of Polaris missiles which could be launched from submarines. However, ExComm decide against removing the missiles from Turkey because of the impression it would create:

Vice President Johnson: Look, the weakness of the whole thing is, you say: “Well they [the Soviets] shot down one plane, and they [the Americans] gave up Turkey.” Then they [the Soviets] shoot down another, and they [the Americans] give up Berlin. You know, like a mad dog – he tastes a little blood, he.... (Zelikow and May 2001b:470)

To be seen to accept the trade would, according to Thompson, be a “sign of weakness” (Zelikow and May 2001b:476). The problem is that appearing weak might not only undermine the reputation of the USA, but it might embolden Khrushchev.

Accordingly, ExComm consider courses of action that would communicate a strength, resolve and restraint. One popular option is to destroy the SAM site which was accused of shooting down the U-2 plane.

Vice President Johnson: You just ask yourself what made the greatest impression on you today, whether it was his letter last night, or whether it was his letter this morning, or whether it was that U-2 boy going down.

Dillon [Secretary of Treasury]: The U-2 boy

Vice President Johnson: That’s exactly right; that’s what did it. That’s when everybody started to change, and that [attacking a SAM site] is what’s going to make an impression upon him (Zelikow and May 2001b:477)

Shooting, Johnson argues, speaks louder than words. Attacking the SAM site would communicate strength and resolve yet, because the response would be proportional, the USA would also be communicating discipline and restraint (Scott 2007:117). In these decisions, the communicative function of actions rises above their practical significance. As Kennedy said: “What we have to do first is get, I would think, is just act very quickly until we get a chance to think a little more about it” (Zelikow and May 2001b:380). That the response is swift is as important as the nature of the

response itself because the act of responding is as communicative as the nature of the response.

According to Goffman (1959) people engage in impression management aims to control the conduct of others. ExComm are trying to create an impression of strength, restraint and resolve so as to encourage the USSR to back down and maintain an international reputation of being reasonable. Such is the communicative logic of brinkmanship that if they were to signal that they would not step up to the brink, then the Soviets would gain the upper hand, confidently pushing their own interests until the USA backed down. The impression of strength and resolve is meant to encourage the Soviet Union to back down. However, a second mechanism for influencing the conduct of the USSR is evident within the White House transcripts, namely, 'staging the other.'

Staging the Other

Khrushchev was aware that the struggle was not primarily a military struggle, but rather a struggle "to win the minds and hearts of people" (Khrushchev 2007:345). Khrushchev's second letter publicly questioned the right of the USA to demand a level of security that it would not allow to others. Khrushchev was staging the USA, setting up Kennedy to create a negative impression on world opinion.

President Kennedy: They've got a very good product. This one is going to be very tough, I think, for us. It's going to be tough in England, I'm sure, as well as other places on the Continent. If we then are forced to take action, this will be, in my opinion, not a blank check but a pretty good check [for the Soviets] to take action in Berlin on the grounds that we are wholly unreasonable. Emotionally, people will think this is a rather even trade and we ought to take advantage of it. Therefore, it makes it much more difficult for us to move [against Cuba] with world support. These are all the things that – why this is a pretty good play of his (Zelikow and May 2001b:381)

Khrushchev has staged the communicative significance of Kennedy's actions: If the President accepts the deal offered in the second letter, then the USA would have to publicly accept the idea that Turkey and Cuba are equivalent, and thus the disarmament of Cuba would become tied to the disarmament of Turkey. ExComm feared that such a trade would appear weak, and open the door for similar arguments to be made about the US nuclear missiles in Italy and Britain. But rejecting the deal would make it look like the USA was demanding a level of security that it was not prepared to offer other nations. Moreover, if the USA took the nuclear missiles out of Cuba by force, as Kennedy's military advisors recommended, then the USSR would have justification for moving into Berlin and/or Turkey.

The presence of third parties in Kennedy's utterance and thought is a mediating moment (Cornish 2004). It is a moment when distal third parties comprising the abstract notion of 'world opinion' manifest in the White House discussions and arguably change the course of history. The voices are ventriloquized by Vice President Johnson who characterizes the allies as saying: "Well we've lived all these years [with missiles]. Why can't you? Why get your blood pressure up?" (Zelikow and May 2001a:415). ExComm want world opinion on their side; but to get it they are being forced to act in accordance with Khrushchev's wishes.

In retaliation President Kennedy suggests a counter-staging, to make the USSR appear unreasonable. He says:

I think we ought to put our emphasis, right now, on the fact that we want an indication from him in the next 24 hours that he's going to stand still, and disarm these weapons. Then we will say that under those conditions, we'll be glad to discuss these matters. But I think that if we don't say that, he's going to say that we rejected his offer and, therefore, he's going to have public opinion with him. So, I think our only hope to escape from that is to say that, we should insist that, he should stand still now. We don't think he'll do that. Therefore, we're in a much better shape. (Zelikow and May 2001b:398)

Kennedy suggests making the seemingly reasonable request that the USSR stops work on the missile bases before any negotiation of a resolution. However, because the missiles in Cuba are useless until they are armed, Kennedy believes that Khrushchev will not stop working on the bases. Thus Kennedy's suggestion is to put the USSR in a situation where they themselves create a negative impression on world opinion. "If they won't agree to that," Kennedy (Zelikow and May 2001b:400) says, "then we retain the initiative."

A second suggestion for dealing with Khrushchev's maneuver comes from McNamara, Secretary for Defense. He foresees mutual escalation resulting in an invasion of Cuba. The USSR would avoid the logistical problems of conducting military operations in the Caribbean, and would instead use the previously discussed equivalence between Cuba and Turkey to "attack the Turkish missiles" (Zelikow and May 2001b:458). He continues:

Now, I'm not sure we can avoid anything like that if we attack Cuba. But I think we should make every effort to avoid it. And one way to avoid it is to defuse the Turkish missiles before we attack Cuba. (Zelikow and May 2001b:458)

The plan is to covertly remove or defuse the missiles in Turkey, and then, "just a few hours" before attacking Cuba, to make the information public (Zelikow and May 2001b:457). This would "give them no excuse to apply military force" (Zelikow and May 2001b:415). McNamara is proposing to stage a situation within which the USSR has no reasonable grounds for invading Turkey. This plan pins Khrushchev publicly to his own logic of the equivalence between Cuba and Turkey.

The third suggestion for responding to Khrushchev's staging comes from Thompson. Thompson's idea hinges upon the realization that Khrushchev's first letter

was private while his second one was public. Accordingly, the media was, at the time, fixed on the second letter.

We ought to surface all of this correspondence with him, including this [private] letter [of October 26]. He broke his [new] proposal [to the press] before you got it. And I'd do the same thing [to his previous proposal]. Then you've got the rest of the world's focus back on Cuban and Latin American and the fact that we're prepared not to invade. And this makes it, I think, much tougher for him (Zelikow and May 2001b:418)

Releasing the first, private, letter to the media would shift world attention to the first letter, such that in the public sphere the second hardline letter would be eclipsed by the first letter. Then, if the USA were also to accept the terms of the first letter, it would further gain in significance *vis-à-vis* the second letter. It would stage a situation where the USSR had to refuse agreement to the proposal of the first letter, and insist upon a hardline stance which would undermine the reasonableness of the Soviet position.

Khrushchev's public second letter had created a stage for Kennedy to appear hypocritical; Kennedy and his advisors plot how to create a stage for Khrushchev to appear unreasonable. Such subtle communicative moves make denigrating the other seem very crude. Denigration in this context would have no credibility. But, if either side can make the other denigrate themselves through forcing an action which creates a negative impression, then a very subtle act of communication has been achieved.

Resolution by Unintended Impression

The official White House story of the resolution of the Crisis was that Kennedy decided to make public Khrushchev's first letter and agree to the terms of that letter (Scott 2007:55). Robert Kennedy, the President's brother and Attorney General, met with Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador in Washington. The deal agreed was that President Kennedy would guarantee the sovereignty of Cuba in exchange for the

USSR withdrawing its missiles. President Kennedy made a public acceptance of the deal offered in the first letter, and Chairman Khrushchev gave orders to remove the missiles from Cuba.

However, it is now known that Robert Kennedy communicated a secret second message to Dobrynin (Hershberg 1995). This message was only known to a small group of the President's advisors. The message was that the USA would remove its missiles from Turkey, but, only on condition that this second aspect of the deal could never be written down or made public. Thus, in effect, Robert Kennedy, on behalf of the President, offered to agree to Khrushchev's second hardline letter. Shortly after the Crisis, the USA did remove its nuclear missiles from Turkey. The secrecy of this deal was because of President Kennedy, as an individual, seeking to avoid negative impressions in the minds of his advisors or electorate.

Although the meeting between Dobrynin and Robert Kennedy is usually presented as the resolution to the Crisis, Soviet records indicate that the resolution to the Crisis was actually quite independent of that meeting (Scott 2007). On the morning of the 28th, before receiving Dobrynin's report, Khrushchev was confronted with two bits of news. First, that the U-2 spy plane had been shot down, which Khrushchev assumed to be the work of Cuban forces. Second, a letter arrived from Castro that seemed to Khrushchev to request a pre-emptive nuclear strike "to eliminate" the "imperialists" (Blight and Lang 2005:68). In actuality Castro's letter requested a nuclear strike if there was an invasion of Cuba. In any case, these two bits of information created the impression in Khrushchev's mind that things were getting out of control in Cuba (Khrushchev 2007). No doubt, Castro in his letter and those who shot down the U-2 plane were trying to embolden Khrushchev. But the unintended impression created, in the mind of Khrushchev, was the exact opposite: Khrushchev

feared the situation was getting out of control. On the morning of the 28th, before receiving Dobrynin's report, Khrushchev called together the Presidium and said: "In order to save the world, we must retreat" (Scott 2007:57). That Khrushchev, on the basis of Dobrynin's report, was able to get the nuclear missiles out of Turkey was due to the fortunate timing of events.

Discussion

The present analysis has pushed the boundary on what is usually considered communication. Much contemporary communication literature focuses on linguistic communication, especially written communication (Linell 2005). The field of political communication, in contrast, has been at the forefront of recognizing the communicative significance of action. Violence and the threat of violence have long been recognized as communicative (Schelling 1960). Equally, acts of terror and public acts of torture are often carefully crafted communications, staged for an audience (Hesford 2006). The foregoing analysis supports this literature. As Goffman (1959) observed, words are easily manipulated, but perhaps more importantly words are cheap. Cheap talk is good for exchanging private information if the participants have reason to trust one another. But in the context of a power struggle and distrust, then it is action which really makes an impression (Farrell and Rabin 1996). Maintaining missiles in Cuba or detonating a 50 megaton bomb does not need to be accompanied by any verbal assurance that 'we are serious.'

The analysis has shown how the lens of impression management provides insight into the Cuban Missile Crisis. For example, Khrushchev's deployment of missiles in Cuba was of limited practical benefit, and is best understood when one considers the communicative significance of the deployment for socialist groups in

Latin America. Equally, ExComm's insistence that the nuclear missiles in Turkey could not be traded, despite the fact that they were obsolete and expensive to upkeep, is best understood by considering ExComm's desire to create the impression of being resolute and strong. These findings support existing literature which has pointed to the importance of complex impression management dynamics in the Cuban Missile Crisis (Allison 1969, Guttieri, Wallace and Suedfeld 1995) and nuclear brinkmanship (Schelling 1966, Booth and Wheeler 2008).

The analysis goes beyond existing literature by distinguishing different impression management processes operating at various stages in the Crisis. For example, unintended impressions were found to be important. Utterances and actions do not have clear-cut meanings, as dictionaries suggest (Rommetveit 1974, Wittgenstein 1954). When communication is situated within the frame of interacting perspectives it becomes clear that not only must we consider expressions given and given off, as emphasized by Goffman (1959), but we must also consider the impressions made (Ichheiser 1949). The other may 'read' certain actions or gestures as communicative unbeknownst to the actor. The communicative significance for ExComm of receiving discrepant letters from Khrushchev was quite distinct from the explicit meanings given by Khrushchev in either letter. Equally, the effect of Castro's request to eliminate the enemy on Khrushchev (2007) was the opposite of emboldening him; it made him back down.

The main contribution of the present article is the introduction of the concept of 'staging the other.' Goffman (1959) described the move to 'expressions given off' as part of an arms race. Expressions given are distrusted, so observers begin to 'read' the significance of actions which are thought to be hard to control, and subsequently self-presenters have learned to control those actions (i.e., expressions given off). Staging

the other indicates a further step in this arms race. Staging, like basic self-presentation, is an attempt to influence the conduct of others. However, the first step in staging the other is not primarily communicative, rather it is to create a situation (a stage) upon which the other will act (or be forced to act) in such a way as to create the impression desired by the stager in the minds of a third party. For example, Kennedy's request that Khrushchev stop assembling the nuclear missiles in Cuba, was a clear act of staging because he assumed that Khrushchev would not stop the assembly and thus it was an attempt to make Khrushchev make himself appear unreasonable.

Staging is more complex than denigration or stigmatization (Garfinkel 1956, Goffman 1963) where the other is directly named and shamed. Staging the other entails creating a situation in which the other shame themselves in the eyes of a third party. Staging is powerful because audiences tend to underestimate situational determinants of behavior (Nisbett, Caputo, Legant and Marecek 1993), and thus the staging is likely to be invisible, which in turn, makes the impression created all the more potent. Staging the other disrupts common sense notions of communication because it entails a deliberate effort to make the other make an unintentional impression in the mind of a third party. Conceptualizing such non-linguistic communication dynamics necessitates starting with Mead's (1910, 1922) key insight, namely, that the meaning of a gesture begins with the response of the other.

References

- Adamsky, Viktor and Smirnov Yuri. 1994. "Moscow's Biggest Bomb: The 50-Megaton Test of October 1961." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 4(3):19–21.
- Allison, Graham T. 1969. "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *The American Political Science Review* 63(3):689–718. Retrieved June 5, 2012.
- Austin, John L. 1962. *How to do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. 1923. "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, vol. 9, *University of Texas Press Slavic Series*, edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Beck, Christina S. 1996. "'I've Got Some Points I'd Like to Make Here': The Achievement of Social Face Through Turn Management During the 1992 Vice Presidential Debate." *Political Communication* 13(2):165–180.
- Blight, James G. and Janet M. Lang. 2005. *The Fog Of War: Lessons From The Life Of Robert S. Mcnamara*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Blumer, Herbert and Thomas J. Morrione. 2004. *George Herbert Mead and Human Conduct*. New York: Altamira Press.
- Booth, Ken and Nick J. Wheeler. 2008. *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Central Intelligence Agency. 1962. *Major Consequences of Certain US Courses of Action on Cuba*. Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency.
- Cobb, Sara. 1994. "A Critique of Critical Discourse Analysis: Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Role of Intention." *Communication theory* 4(2):132–152.
- Collins, Sarah and Ivana Markova. 1999. "Interaction Between Impaired and Unimpaired Speakers: Inter-Subjectivity and the Interplay of Culturally Shared and Situation Specific Knowledge." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 38:339–368.
- Condor, Susan 2006. "Public Prejudice as Collaborative Accomplishment: Towards a Dialogic Social Psychology of Racism." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 16(1):1–18.
- Cornish, Flora 2004. "Making 'Context' Concrete: A Dialogical Approach to the Society-Health Relation." *Journal of health psychology* 9(2):281–294.
- Danziger, Kurt. 1990. *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dobrynin, Anatoly. 1995. "Dobrynin Cable to the USSR Foreign Ministry, 27 October 1962." pp. 523-526 in Richard N. Lebow and Janice G. Stein, *We all lost the Cold War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ekman, Paul and Wallace V. Friesen. 1969. "The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding." *Semiotica*, 1(1):49-98.

Etheredge, Lloyd S. 1992. "On Being More Rational than the Rationality Assumption: Dramatic Requirements, Nuclear Deterrence, and the Agenda for Learning." Pp. 59-78 in *Political Psychology and Foreign Policy*, edited by Eric Singer and Valerie Hudson. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Farr, Rob 1997. "The Significance of the Skin as a Natural Boundary in the Sub-Division of Psychology." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 27(2-3):305-323.

Farr, Rob M. 1996. *The Roots of Modern Social Psychology: 1874-1954*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Farr, Rob and Rangnar Rommetveit. 1995. "The Communicative Act: An Epilogue to Mutualities in Dialogue." Pp. 264-74 in *Mutualities in Dialogue*, edited by Ivana Marková, Carl F. Graumann and Klaus Foppa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Farrell, Joseph and Matthew Rabin. 1996. "Cheap Talk." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10(3):103-118.

Garfinkel, Harold 1956. "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies." *American journal of Sociology* 61(5):420-424.

Gillespie, Alex T. 2003. "Supplementarity and Surplus: Moving Between the Dimensions of Otherness." *Culture & psychology* 9(3):209-220.

Gillespie, Alex. 2005. "G.H. Mead: Theorist of the Social Act." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 35(1):19-39.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Touchstone.

Guttieri, Karen, Michael D. Wallace and Peter Suedfeld. 1995. "The Integrative Complexity of American Decision Makers in the Cuban Missile Crisis." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39(4):595-621.

Hershberg, James G. 1995. "Anatomy of a Controversy: Anatoly F. Dobrynin's Meeting with Robert F. Kennedy, Saturday, 27 October 1962." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 5 (Spring):75-80.

Hesford, Wendy S. 2006. "Staging Terror." *TDR: The Drama Review*, 50:29-41.

- Ichheiser, Gustav. 1949. "Misunderstandings in Human Relations: A Study in False Social Perception." *American Journal of Sociology* 55 (suppl.):1-72.
- Khrushchev, Nikita. 1971. *Khrushchev Remembers*. London: Little, Brown & Company.
- Khrushchev, Nikita. 2007. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Volume 3: Statesman, 1953-1964*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Leary, Mark R., Ashley Batts Allen, and Meredith L. Terry. 2011. "Managing Social Images in Naturalistic Versus Laboratory Settings: Implications for Understanding and Studying Self-Presentation." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 41(4):411-421.
- Lieberman, Philip. 2006. "The Pied Piper of Cambridge." *Linguistic Review*, 22:289-301.
- Linell, Per. 2005. *The Written Language Bias in Linguistics: Its Nature, Origins and Transformations*. London: Routledge.
- Linell, Per. 2009. *Rethinking Language, Mind, and World Dialogically: Interactional and Contextual Theories of Human Sense-Making*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Marková, Ivana. 2008. "The Epistemological Significance of the Theory of Social Representations." *Journal for the theory of social behaviour* 38(4):461-487.
- McPhail, Clark. 2006. "The Crowd and Collective Behavior: Bringing Symbolic Interaction Back In." *Symbolic Interaction* 29(4):433-463.
- Mead, George H. 1910. "Social Consciousness and the Consciousness of Meaning." *Psychological Bulletin* 7:397-405.
- Mead, George H. 1922. "A Behavioristic Account of the Significant Symbol." *Journal of Philosophy* 19(6):157-163.
- Nisbett, Richard E, Craig Caputo, Patricia Legant and Jeanne Marecek. 1973. "Behavior as Seen by the Actor and as Seen by the Observer." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27(2):154-164.
- Phelan, Michael P. and Scott A. Hunt. 1998. "Prison Gang Members' Tattoos as Identity Work: The Visual Communication of Moral Careers." *Symbolic Interaction* 21(3):277-298.
- Powers, John. 1996. "The History of Presidential Audio Recordings and the Archival Issues Surrounding Their Use." *CIDs Paper, National Archives and Records Administration*, 12 July:86-108.
- Rommetveit, R. 1974. *On Message Structure: A Framework for the Study of Language and Communication*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

- Schelling, Thomas C. 1956. "An Essay on Bargaining." *The American Economic Review* 46(3):281–306.
- Schelling, Thomas C. 1960. "Reciprocal Measures for Arms Stabilization." *Daedalus* 89(4):892–914.
- Schelling, Thomas C. 1966. *Arms and Influence*. Yale University Press.
- Schlenker, Barry R., and Thomas W. Britt. 1999. "Beneficial Impression Management: Strategically Controlling Information to Help Friends." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76(4):559–573.
- Scott, Len. 2008. *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Threat of Nuclear War*. London: Continuum.
- Sullivan, Denis G., and Roger D. Masters. 1988. "'Happy Warriors': Leaders' Facial Displays, Viewers' Emotions, and Political Support." *American Journal of Political Science* 32(2):345–368.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Yin, Robert K. 2008. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Zelikow, Philip D. and Ernest R. May. 2001a. *The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises, Volume Two*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Zelikow, Philip D. and Ernest R. May. 2001b. *The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises, Volume Three*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.