

## CHAPTER 9

### Perversion and creativity in the language of war

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We examine the degree of association between creativity and the risk of war in political documents issued before or during international conflicts. The documents are speeches, conversations, and diplomatic memos prepared or recorded before or during WW I, WW II, the Cuban missile crisis, and the Anglo-American intervention in Iraq. We analyze the texts using computer-readable semantic filters. The filters touch on several indicators of creativity and one indicator of the risk of war (using the motives of need for affiliation and need for power). We evaluate creativity through thesauri that weigh the levels of imagery, concreteness, meaningfulness, and regressive thought contents in texts. We assess the risk of war in texts by measuring the gap between contents of affiliation and contents of power. In the past, such a gap consistently preceded the outbreak of wars. In the main, when the risk of war increases, words for war reflect a management of simplification. When war is in the making, political leaders communicate to the public with simple concrete words that everybody can understand. This strategy reflects a management of simplification that brushes aside opportunities of change.

Under pressure toward novelty, car makers build new models of cars. They know that marketing the same car years on end makes customers bored and leads them to abandon the brand. For the same reason, novelists and poets write literary works containing ever more novel images (Martindale, 1975). For the same reason too, scientists write scientific works ever more abstract and complex (Hayes, 1992; Hogenraad *et al.*, 1995). This is because the rule of science involves grouping concrete facts under a single abstract heading. Political leaders also produce words. It is an important part of their job. How political leaders deal with pressure toward novelty is low on the list of questions for most of us. Except in two cases: When leaders engage in war

with another nation and when they fix conflicts with other nations. This is the question we address in this chapter.

Pressure toward novelty may not be the major constraint on political language, but it is a constant one. How does pressure toward novelty shape the language of political leaders? There are as many reasons to expect more imagery and concrete words in political language when war is in the making as when a conflict is on the way to a solution. On the one hand, we can achieve a compromise on concrete issues, not on matters of principles. This effect of rhetoric (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) is enough to cause us to expect more images and concrete words while negotiating a peace. On the other hand, to find solutions to a conflict demands one to make up new ways of looking at the political reality. Take the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. "Our principal problem is to try and imaginatively to think what the world would be like if we do this, and what it will be like if we don't" (McGeorge Bundy, President's Assistant, in May & Zelikow, 1997, p. 102). Finding a peaceful solution to a conflict supposes managing complex cognitive mechanisms that are the contrary of the clichéd gale-force speeches of war (Guttieri *et al.*, 1995). To that we can oppose Cattaneo's (1963) theory according to which new ideas come from conflicting rather than from harmonious relations:

*"A quell'opera di nemico era necessario un altro intelletto. È perciò che i grandi pensatori (...), i quali ruppero il circolo della tradizione (...), si mostrano quasi sempre accinti con tutte le forze loro come ad un'impresa di Guerra"* (To behave as an enemy, another mind is necessary. This is why great thinkers, who broke with tradition, were almost always engaged as if in a war enterprise).

Dmitry Ushakov (2005) pointed out that French-speaking psychologists like Perret-Clermont *et al.* (1976) further developed Cattaneo's theory, exploring experimentally the socio-cognitive conflict as a motor of cognitive development.

One difficulty is the influence of war on language. For Virginia Woolf, World War I was responsible for the collapse of the old language of rational control (Hussey, 1991). The military sound of words is present in several of her novels, as in "Jacob's Room" (Woolf, 2000). The French linguist Brice Parain (1934; see also Merton, 1976) denounced the dizzying feeling of inexactness of language. Words are sick, he claimed, in which peace means aggression, freedom, oppression, and socialism, a regime of social inequalities. In the poem, "The White Man's Burden", Rudyard Kipling (1899) wrote of "savage wars of peace" after the US take over of the

Philippines following the Spanish-American war of 1898. It is as if a form of perversion, as a way of pushing further the limits of what is possible, made it possible for political elites to blur the differences between the meaning of words (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1996). And to alter reality. The poignant (and perhaps justified) Armageddon style of the speeches of President G. W. Bush and Prime Minister Blair is a carry-over from biblical language to idealized secular matters:

*“The ideal of America is the hope of all mankind... That hope still lights the way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not overcome it.” (Accessed June 2, 2006  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020911-3.html>).*

Transferring language from one realm (the Bible) to another (reality) results in a transfigured wonderfully shining reality from which death is excluded. Anyway, perversion of language is not one-sided:

*“But our words have no impact upon you, therefore I’m going to talk to you in a language that you understand. Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood”. (From a videotape of British-born Mohammad Sidiq Khan, West Yorkshire, supposed ringleader of the 7/7 London bombing –Guardian Weekly, Sept 9-15 2005, p. 8, accessed June 2, 2006:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/attackonlondon/story/0,,1561411,00.html>).*

Using the language of the Apocalypse to justify a war is another way to respond to pressure toward novelty –by dubiously crossing the frontiers of reality (Bacevich, 2005, especially chapter 5 “Onward” on Evangelicalism, pp. 122-146). Orwell’s (1990) “Newspeak” in Nineteen Eighty-four is a literary example of the same. Yet, if war eclipses the word, without words, political leaders could not go to war, contrary to what character Raunce replies in Henry Green’s novel, *Loving*: “It’s what we’re going to do whatever the name you give to it” (2000, p. 197). In this sense, the argument cuts two ways, which comes as something of a relief.

Sometimes, the lack of innovativeness in leaders hinges on passivity. To an irresolute Kaiser expressing whims of changing military plans that had been worked on for a year, General Moltke tersely replied on August 1st 1914 “Your Majesty, it cannot be done...once settled, it cannot be altered” (Tuchman, 1994, p. 79). And during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, to an aide expressing his hope that “the boat does not capsize”, Chairman Nikita Khrushchev answered “Now it’s too late to change

anything” (May & Zelikow, 1997, p. 681). In both examples, there is an implicit acknowledgment that some ideal moment for acting had long passed. In the first example, the fluffed opportunity caused 15,000,000 deaths, of which 8,500,000 were military ones (<http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat1.htm> - WW1). In the second one, a restraint on force led finally to a satisfactory agreement.

Perhaps we are part of the many bored with inconclusive theories on the way war and creativity interact. Political leaders can be innovative whether using images or complex abstract thought contents. Circumstances decide. Our own commitment is with predicting the outbreak of meat grinder conflicts. Predicting the outbreak of wars is possible using a dependable model of motivation. Assessing creativity is also possible through various indicators.

#### Power and affiliation: A motivational model of war

McClelland's predictive model of war (1975) involves two needs, which are the need for affiliation and the need for power. Intimacy, friendship, and positive emotional contacts with a person, as well as liking and wanting to be liked, define the need for affiliation. The will to power, to have an impact on another person or to get or to keep control over people, forms the essential of the need for power. These two criss-cross threads, power and affiliation, are always difficult to patch up with each other. Niccolò Machiavelli experienced this difficulty –in prison and under torture–, about which he wrote later: “A prince is always compelled to injure those who have made him the new ruler... As a result, you (...) cannot keep the friendship of those who have put you there” (1999, p. 8). Wrote Auden (1989, p. 62): “We tend to deprive of their faces any person whom we believe to be at the mercy of our will”, which is not a bad description of the unstable balance between affiliation and power. The use of one's own power to save others is often the link between an “imperial motivation pattern” (that is, the gap created by high need for power and low need for affiliation) and later wars (McClelland, 1975, pp. 314–359). The wider the gap, the greater the risk of war. No doubt a naïve view, but possible. McClelland's motivation theory of war stops short of predicting the moment beyond which war becomes unavoidable. That would be giving the model more than its due.

The violent logic that leads from reformist fervor for social justice to war has to do with the nature of spiritual perfection. Perfection does not exist. It breeds hypocrisy, as urging easily slips into the imperative. The awareness of a spiritual perfection coupled with the impossibility of reaching it causes one to indulge oneself with pretending to be perfect. Subject to that, one vents the

awareness of one's flaws through more militant calls to flawlessness in others, thus pressuring them to a near-Masonic severity. "Just think how many crimes have been committed because their author could not bear to be wrong!", this from Camus in *La Chute* (1956, p. 23). Even the outbreak of World War I, the precipitant of which one often imputes to the murder of Archduke Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, was about moral and religious ideas (Strachan, 2001). Puritan Germany's viewed its 'Tugend' (virtue) threatened by British materialism and French atheistic rationalism. Another example of compulsory salvation is in Graham Greene's (2001, p. 18) *The Quiet American*: "He was determined to do good, not only to any individual person, but to a country, a continent, a world". Whatever is virtuous in universalism always feeds a non-commendable form of imperialism (Bacevich, 2005, p. 75). Universalism replaces whatever was good in the past by something supposed to be even better, blurring differences again. Many answer positively to the question "Should democracy be universal?". Yet, other creeds may work in other times and places.

#### Assessing creativity

Literary and scientific writers, going at great lengths not to repeat themselves, share the same question "What can I do that has not yet been done?". To keep interest in their readers, writers use concrete words that bring out images (Cohen, 1966; Martindale, 1975). At the other side of the scale, the rule of certain styles, as in science, involves grouping varied concrete facts under a single abstract heading. This is because the rule in science requires it to become ever more abstract. In psychological jargon, images and metaphors, we call them primary process thought contents (Kris, 1952). Their opposite, that represent degrees of mental formulas, such as law and order, abstract thinking, time references, and moral imperatives, we call secondary process thought contents. Martindale (1990) set up the primary process and secondary process thought contents into a measuring instrument for content analysis, the *Regressive imagery dictionary*. The difference between primary process and secondary process thought contents is that between the sensate and notional schemes of culture (Sorokin, 1985). In sensate schemes, reality is that which is present to the sense organs, in notional schemes, one considers that it is the inner meaning that gives value to the world. Sensate contents are "found in the world" (love, sex, food, chaos, dream, flying, for example). Notional contents are "built into the world" (money, work, discipline, police, time, justice, law).

How does regressive imagery with its variants apply to the language of political leaders on the brink of war? There are limits to the use of abstract

notions, in political language as elsewhere. First, abstract words are more difficult to understand than concrete ones (Hayes, 1992). Secondly, there are intrinsic limits to the capacity for abstraction of human thought (Thorngate, 1990). For what little control political leaders have over laws laid down for them, managing a peaceful solution to a conflict supposes, as we pointed out earlier, complex cognitive mechanisms. We expect in this case expressions of abstract contents, allowing political leaders to group varied concrete events and facts under a single abstract heading, as if in a scientific language. From leaders intent to go to war, we would not expect an abstract language. Words of primary process thought contents (love, food, sex, body parts) are more those of literature than of political language. Yet, in the 172 speeches of President G. W. Bush (Hogenraad, 2005), the total frequency of usage of primary process versus secondary process thought contents is 12,037 words (and 770 different ones) versus 28,383 words (and 764 different ones). What counts however is the ratio of the ones to the others over time. Why indeed draw on abstract words difficult to understand while concrete incidents may serve to justify a war. In Saperstein's chaos theory of war (1995), a single event (the murder of Archduke Ferdinand) accounts for the death of millions of people in World War I.

We analyzed political documents using five semantic filters. The role of the filters is to transform a psychological motive or content into a tool—we dub it a dictionary—fit to isolate and evaluate the presence of that motive or content in a document. One such filter is the Motive dictionary (Hogenraad, 2003, 2005) that allows us to set power words to solidarity words into a semantic filtering and use the filter to estimate the risk of war from a document. The other dictionaries are the Regressive imagery dictionary (Martindale, 1975, 1990) and the Dictionaries of concreteness, imagery, and meaningfulness (Paivio *et al.*, 1968). We use the Martindale and Paivio dictionaries to evaluate creativity in documents. We then control if any increase in the risk of war in political documents goes with a similar increase—or decrease—in one of the indicators of creativity.

## Method

### Texts

1. The first corpus is about James W. Headlam's (1915) "History of Twelve Days". Headlam's "History" concerns the diplomatic history of the fortnight between the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia of July 24, 1914 and the British ultimatum to Germany of August 4, 1914. Headlam's

countdown to World War I covers, in chronological order, the exchanges of diplomatic telegrams and reports of conversations and negotiations. For the present analysis, Headlam's History corpus covers chapters II to XIII. Chapter I is an introduction to the previous relations between Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (see Table 9-1 for details on this and the other documents).

2. The next corpus is a 421-page document called "Events leading up to World War II. 1931—1944" (1944). It is a commented chronology set up by the Legislative Reference Service of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives. The document covers the period from 1931 to 1944; it concerns all the world events that led to World War II, and not only the ones involving Germany.

3. Closer to us are two series of documents about the 2003 Anglo-American intervention in Iraq. The first (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/response/resources2.html>) is about 55 speeches made by President G. W. Bush between March 13, 2002 and March 17, 2003, the day of the American entry into Iraq. Of the 172 speeches analyzed by Hogenraad (2005) over the period September 2001 - March 2003, March 13, 2002 is the point beyond which the risk of war increased regularly until the day of the intervention. It is now public knowledge that President Bush was already set on war when he met Prime Minister Blair on January 31, 2003 (Van Natta, 2006).

4. The other series continues with 72 speeches made by Prime Minister Tony Blair, between September 11, 2001 and March 20, 2003 (<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page5.asp>).

5. Then follow two documents about the solution of a conflict. One is the tale (Walder, 1958), in French, of the negotiations that led to the "Paix de Saint-Germain" settling the French "Wars of Religion" between Catholics and Huguenots in 1570.

6. The other is about the taped conversations held by President Kennedy's Executive Committee (excomm) during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis between October 16, 11:50 am, and October 29, 10:10 am (May & Zelikow, 1997).

Table 9-1. The corpus

Source	Divisions	Total N. of words	N. different words
WW I: "History of Twelve Days"	12 days (24 July—4 August, 1914); 43 subchapters	89,242	4,922
WW II: "Events leading up to World War II"	14 years (1931—1944)	170,125	10,663
Iraq II: President G. W. Bush	170 speeches (of which 55 pre- "Shock and Awe")	256,773	9,442
Iraq II: PM Tony Blair	72 speeches	123,660	6,244
Paix de St-Germain (1570)	20 chapters	33,921	6,169
Kennedy tapes	20 meetings	200,543	7,081

## Dictionaries

Equipped with proper dictionaries, content analysis packs an astonishing amount of information by filtering out the redundancies of speech. Filtering out allows us to keep only what one is looking for. In these dictionaries, any word assigned to one category cannot be present in another one. We formatted the dictionaries to work within the Protan program of computer-aided content analysis (Hogenraad *et al.*, 1995). A dictionary, in content analysis, is a list of words organized into categories, that is, words with a role in a hierarchy. When one applies a dictionary to a text, one looks for matches between a word in a dictionary and a word in a text. One then shoves the text words into the categories, counts the number of word matches in each category and takes the percentage of the number of word matches.

In the English version, the Motive dictionary has 788 entries in affiliation, and 1,422 in power. The Regressive imagery dictionary (English version) (Martindale, 1990) contains 1,815 entries in primary process thought contents, and 668 in secondary process thought contents. The Dictionaries of concreteness, imagery, and meaningfulness (Paivio and others, 1968) each contain 1,508 entries (words rated by judges on 7-point intensity scales). The French version of the Motive dictionary has 627 entries in affiliation and 1,391 in power. The French version of the Regressive imagery dictionary has 2,019 and 745 entries respectively in primary process and secondary process thought contents. For the French, we used a Dictionary of imagery of 1,130 entries (Hogenraad & Oriane, 1981).

In support of the Motive dictionary, we analyzed texts that contained facets of a conflict (Hogenraad, 2003, 2005). For example, texts about the outbreak of World War II show an increasing gap between power and affiliation (Hogenraad, 2003). By contrast, in the analysis of Robert Kennedy's memoirs (1969) of the October 1962 Caribbean missile crisis, the gap decreases over the 16 days of the crisis as a solution comes into view. Martindale (1975, 1979) and West *et al.*, (1985) had previously proved the dictionaries of Regressive imagery, concreteness, imagery, and meaningfulness to be valid indicators of creativity.

## Results

### The tide of war

*“Vive la guerre”* (long live the war) cried the crowd as President Raymond Poincaré and Premier René Viviani alighted from the train on their return from St-Petersburg on July 29, 1914 in Paris. Five short days later, the Great War broke out. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Channel, Virginia Woolf complained that, because of war, *“all creative power is cut off”* (Woolf, 1985, p. 235). What is proper of artists like Virginia Woolf is not of political leaders. The general design of the mosaic of results in Table 9-2 brings no support to Virginia Woolf. When the risk of war increases, imagery (and its variants) increases too. Secondary process thought contents are the opposite of the variants of imagery; risk of war and secondary process thought contents correlate logically in the opposite direction (Figs. 9-1 and 9-2). This general design needs qualification. The pattern holds for the first four documents analyzed (WW I and II, and Bush and Blair), in which a conflict did break out. In passing, the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval of two measures on the Bush speeches includes zero. Bootstrap statistics are calculated from the distribution of values after randomly resampling the data (Péladeau, 1996). In other words, we may be 95% confident that, say for risk of war and imagery, the true value of the correlation (.21) lies somewhere between -.05 and .43—which is not good enough because the sign of the association changes radically (Hogenraad & McKenzie, 1999). In the main, the risk of war in the St-Germain novel and the Kennedy tapes displays no statistically significant association with any indicator of creativity. It is no coincidence, as academics say, that these two documents point up to conflicts that were settled peacefully.

We further ran separate analyses on the Kennedy tapes corpus by splitting it into “hawks”, “doves”, and “President Kennedy”. The “doves” included Dean Rusk, Robert S. McNamara, George W. Ball, Theodore C. Sorensen, and Adlai E. Stevenson (Blight & Welch, 1989, pp. 9–15). The “hawks” included Paul H. Nitze, C. Douglas Dillon, General Maxwell D. Taylor, John McCone, Dean G. Acheson, and General Curtis E. LeMay. We could not catalogue Robert Kennedy or Special Assistant McGeorge Bundy in either group. We thought the more a group, including the President, wanted to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict, the more it would express complex thought contents (lower imagery and concreteness, but higher levels of secondary process thought contents).

Table 9-2. Correlations between the risk of war and indicators of novelty

Indicators of novelty	Risk of war					
	WW I (N = 43)	WW II (N = 14)	G. W. Bush (N = 55)	T. Blair (N = 72)	Paix de t-German (N = 20)	Kennedy tapes (N = 20)
Secondary process thought contents	r = .55 p < .001 ci .71/.36	r = .72 p < .001 ci .95/.48	r = .32 p < .01 ci -.53/.07	r = .40 p < .0001 ci .59/.19	ns	r = .31 p < .10 ci .78/.30
Concreteness	r = .28 p < .05 ci .07/.50	r = .89 p < .0001 ci .59/.98	r = .24 p < .05 ci -.05/.49	r = .42 p < .0001 ci .21/.59	-	ns
Imagery	r = .30 p < .05 ci .09/.52	r = .91 p < .0001 ci .43/.99	r = .21 p < .10 ci -.05/.43	r = .47 p < .0001 ci .26/.63	r = .32 p < .10 ci -.70/.18	ns
Meaningfulness	r = .48 p < .001 ci .27/.70	r = .71 p < .01 ci .21/.93	r = .44 p < .0001 ci .24/.61	r = .44 p < .0001 ci .22/.63	-	ns

Note: a Confidence interval

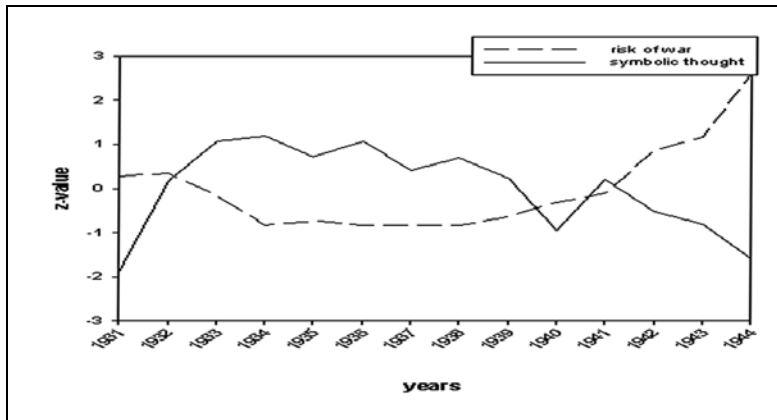


Figure 9-1. Risk of war and secondary process thought contents in diplomatic documents before and during World War II

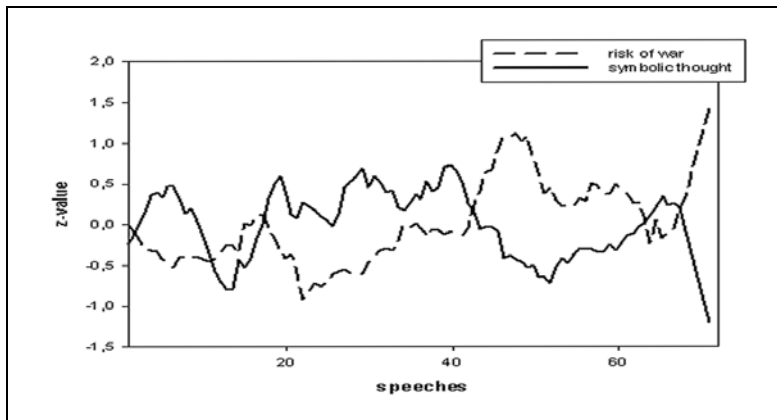


Figure 9-2. Risk of war and secondary process thought contents over 72 speeches made by PM Blair between September 11, 2001 and March 20, 2003  
2001: speeches 1 to 40  
2002: speeches 41 to 57  
2003: speeches 58 to 72.

We were wrong on that account, except in one—perhaps remarkable—case. President Kennedy stands out, with a correlation between risk of war (decreasing) and secondary process thought contents (increasing) of  $r(18) = -.37$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% confidence interval:  $.77/.16$ ). The equation of the trend for the risk of war in the interventions of President Kennedy is  $R^2 = .19$ ,  $F(1, 18) = 4.2$ ,  $p < .10$ . For secondary process thought contents, the equation is  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $F(1, 18) = 3.7$ ,  $p < .10$ . As the risk of a conflict between the USSR and the USA decreases, the language of the president becomes more abstract and complex (Fig. 9-3). Not by much, the correlation is barely significant, its confidence interval includes zero, but perhaps we have picked up a tip here. It is as if the president was summarizing the opinions of his advisers to identify the grounds on which he could patch up an agreement with Chairman Nikita Khrushchev. It would have been comfortable for readers to learn that both the “doves” and the president displayed this pattern, and in a stronger way at that. But readers would not pardon us their disappointment if future confounding facts decisively discarded this finding.

Using the integrative complexity of messages, Guttieri and others (1995) also analyzed documents related to the Cuban crisis of October 1962. The degree to which one distinguishes and integrates different perspectives when processing information makes their measure of integrative complexity efficient to evaluate complex circumstances expressed through verbal messages. Little wonder then if integrative complexity and secondary process thought contents yield similar results. The Kennedy tapes database used here includes most of the Guttieri data. Guttieri and others (pp. 614-616) showed the presence of moderate levels of integrative complexity through the crisis. They noted no significant differences between “hawks” and “doves” on that measure. And President Kennedy’s levels of complexity were lower at later stages of the crisis. Also, Suedfeld and Tetlock (1977) analyzed diplomatic documents related to the days before the outbreak of World War I. Their measure was again the integrative complexity of messages. Their data differ from ours, but the result of their analyses is consistent with ours. Complexity decreases significantly between the two periods before the outbreak of WW I they dub preliminary and climax. Their result matches the significant correlations of Table 9-2 (column “WW I”) between the risk of war (increasing) and indicators of creativity.

### Closing Remarks: Perversion and Creativity

The documents we analyzed are time data. For the historian, such documents suffer from the intrinsic weakness of being out of their historic context

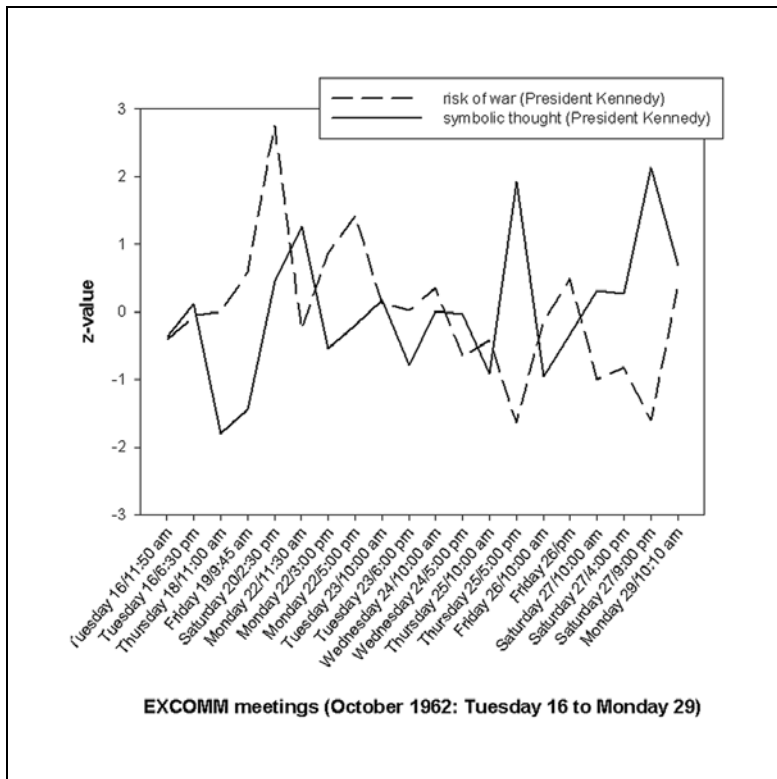


Figure 9-3. Risk of war and secondary process thought contents in the interventions of President Kennedy during the 20 EXCOMM meetings held between October 16 and October 29, 1962 during the Caribbean missile crisis

(Blight & Welch, 1989, p. 5). For the non-historian, that same weakness causes the results to be all the more robust—despite the limited number of

cases. The association between risk of war and creativity, in the cases where the war breaks out, reflects a management of simplification that brushes aside opportunities of change. When a conflict is in the offing, political elites communicate to the public with an excess of simple concrete items that everybody can understand. A denatured language indeed. A better combination of circumstances exists when a potential conflict, once unearthed, remains undisclosed, as during the early stages of the Cuban crisis. Political elites are then free to explore choices and rationalize them with their peers in as complex terms as necessary. And keep open opportunities of change.

*“And what is the purpose of a prophet except to find meaning in trouble”*  
(Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, p. 267)

#### Author note

For their inspiring comments, I thank Andrew Wilson, Linguistics, Lancaster University, UK, Dmitry Ushakov, Psychology, Moscow State University, and Vassilis Saroglou, Psychology, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

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