11 *Conclusions: the politics of crisis exploitation*

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Crisis aftermaths as framing contests

Crises cast shadows on the polities in which they occur. The sense of threat and uncertainty that pervades them shatters people's understanding of the world around them. Scholars have argued that the very occurrence of a crisis or the widespread use of the 'crisis' label to denote a particular state of affairs or development implies a 'dislocation' of hitherto dominant social, political or administrative discourses (Wagner-Pacifici 1986, 1994; Howarth et al. 2000). This dislocation can delegitimise the power and authority relationships that these discourses underpin, and may pose grave challenges to the position of incumbent officeholders and institutions or to established policies and organisations. At the same time, crisis opens up semantic and political space for actors to redefine issues, propose new policies, foster public reflection, or simply to gain popularity and strike at opponents. Typically, such opportunism rides on the wave of crisis-induced processes of accountability and learning.

Edelman was right in pointing out that incumbent elites are not necessarily threatened by crises. Some disturbances or emergencies may fit their purposes quite neatly. They may actively seek to 'create' crises in order to gain authority. He observes with characteristic succinctness: 'Any regime that prides itself on crisis management is sure to find crises to manage' (Edelman 1977: 47). But the same goes for the other end of the political power spectrum: parliamentary opposition figures, interest group leaders and self-appointed public voices may actively work to 'discover' and inflate crises. This accords with the 'garbage can' model of policy processes where policy entrepreneurs look for 'problems' in order to promote their own preferred 'solutions': in this case ranging from prompting a particular policy option to the removal from office of a political opponent (Cohen et al. 1972; Kingdon 2003).

Hence incumbent leaders as well as their critics and challengers engage in the kind of 'meaning making' that the collective stress generated by crisis evokes and requires (Edelman 1971; Boin et al. 2005). Crises can thus be understood as 'contests' between frames and counterframes. These contestations concern the nature and depth (severity) of a crisis, its causes (agency), the assignment of blame for its occurrence or escalation (responsibility), and implications for the future (learning and reform) put forward by actors with different interests and perspectives in relation to the status quo ante ('t Hart 1993; Tarrow 1994; Brändström et al., this volume; Olmeda, this volume). The bottom line of this process is that each of the actors involved seeks to exploit the disruption of 'governance as usual' that crises entail: to defend and strengthen their positions and authority, to attract or deflect public attention, to get rid of old policies or sow the seeds of new ones.

Given the multitude of stakeholders, the temporary absence of fixed rules for proceeding and the volatility of public passions, the outcomes of these crisis exploitation games are unpredictable. They unfold with differing speeds and intensities at different levels. The political fortunes of key players, policies and institutions may settle or change drastically over the course of a few days, as illustrated by the Spanish and German cases in this volume. But they may also be in limbo for several months if not years during and following the painstaking work of investigation committees, as highlighted by the saga of NASA following the Space Shuttle *Challenger* explosion (see Boin, this volume; Jarman and Kouzmin 1991). Some actors will initially be cast on the defensive, but may come to find that the crisis aftermath also throws up opportunities for them. George W. Bush, for example, unsuccessfully tried at first to prevent the 9/11 Commission inquiry, but subsequently embraced it and used it to his own political advantage (Parker and Dekker, this volume).

Others might experience the opposite. Federal Emergency Management Agency director Michael Brown was forced to resign after the Hurricane Katrina disaster and was vilified in a congressional hearing. When the House committee presented its final report in February 2006, it argued forcefully that Brown had by no means been the only public leader to fail prior to and following the disaster. In fact, the report spoke of nothing less than a 'national failure' – at all levels of the community, within and beyond government. This way of framing issues of causation and responsibility may have been bad news for national

self-respect and, perhaps, the American public's trust in its government and public institutions, but paradoxically it was probably a relief for any individual agency or policy maker who had feared the committee's axe might have come down on them in particular.

This volume has examined up close the collision of frames and the evolving game of crisis exploitation that takes place as societies work through crisis-induced processes of accountability and learning. As the case chapters have demonstrated, these contests take place in different public forums – the mass media, official investigation committees, parliament and the courts. They have shown that despite government leaders being in a privileged position in the political game of 'normal' times, they are all but 'in control' of the thickening of activities and intensive communication in forums characteristic of crisis 'processing' in the public domain. Government leaders and top officials may try to regain such control in order to impose their frames upon the public understanding of the crisis and its wider implications, but as becomes apparent from the various chapters, their success at doing so is not to be taken for granted.

One question that looms large in any study of crisis-induced politics and public leadership is: under which conditions can incumbent elites (re)impose their control over the terms of the public debate, the rhythms of the political process and the content of policy and organisational agendas – all of which are shattered or at least disturbed by the crisis? In reflecting upon this question in this chapter, we will learn something about the conditions under which crises provide the proverbial 'windows of opportunity' (Keeler 1993; Kingdon 2003) for other actors to advance their ideas and interests, for organisations to survive and even prosper, and for public policies and institutions to endure or be changed. In short, when we capture the factors that shape the course and outcomes of crisis-induced framing contests, we will enhance our understanding of the reasons why some crises generate particular 'lessons' and 'reforms' and others do not. From an agency perspective on political analysis, we may then also be able to articulate a theory of *crisis exploitation*. By this we mean *the purposeful utilisation by actors of the institutional 'dislocation' generated by crisis, to significantly affect political processes of sense making, judgement and choice*.

Ours is intended as a modest step towards this aim. The cases assembled in this volume were not selected to enable regularised, systemic,

national or sectoral comparisons. The case studies in Part I focused primarily on questions relating to the effects of crises on the (electoral) fortunes and accountability of political leaders. Those in Part II were designed to look primarily at the 'learning' process and its effects on policies and organisations. Moreover, the case study authors were free to articulate and employ their own analytical frameworks. This autonomy produced a variety of distinct but largely complementary theoretical angles: crisis leadership style (Preston), elite blame management strategies (Brändström et al.), crisis impact on government popularity (Bytzek, Olmeda), crisis commission politics (Staelraeve and 't Hart, Parker and Dekker), crisis-induced organisational learning (Boin), crises and policy stability and change (Hansén, Schwartz and McConnell). Hence it is impossible to treat these cases as a patterned sample allowing systematic comparison and external generalisation. We can, however, use the loosely structured variety of cases and insights gathered here for heuristic purposes: to advance inductive generalisations about various manifestations of the phenomenon that tie all these papers together: the course and outcomes of crisis-induced politics and governance.

We first reflect on the bottom-line outcomes of crisis: the impact on the fates of leaders, policies and organisations. In addressing these issues, we return to our typologies of leadership and policy and organisational outcomes outlined in Chapter 1. We look at one cluster of factors that shapes these outcomes: the behavior of public policy makers. In particular, we examine what the cases teach us about the ways in which elites handle the public accountability process that is part and parcel of crisis aftermaths. For example, are leaders who engage in blame avoidance and deflection likely to fare better or worse than those who accept responsibility for what have come to be publicly understood as errors and omissions? Next, we look at the dynamics and impact of a key arena where the framing contests of crisis-induced politics take shape: crisis inquiries. This section draws on the case findings to put forward ideas about how crisis inquiries may affect crisis outcomes; what members of crisis inquiries can do to make sure their work makes a difference; and what incumbent policy makers can do to make these inquiries work for and not against them. Finally, we examine the chances and limitations that crises offer for those seeking to exploit crises by forging learning and reform.

Shadows cast by crises

We begin by examining the course and outcomes of the crisis-induced trajectories presented in this book. The nature of this study dictated that so-called 'fast-burning' crises ('t Hart and Boin 2001), critical episodes whose political shadows fade quickly when the operational action is over, were few and far between. In a sense, the German floods were of this kind: intensely reported and debated for 3 weeks, and then their political significance declined sharply after the election (whose outcomes they helped shape). Obviously there were major debates about reconstruction issues as well as about the lessons for water management and crisis preparedness, but there were no politically critical issues concerning responsibility and blame.

The other cases all belonged to the category of 'long-shadow crises' (Boin et al. 2005): there was no immediate closure of the political crisis mood following the termination of the operational crisis response activities. Still, there were significant differences in the nature, duration and intensity of the sociopolitical tensions generated by the various crises. Following Boin et al. (2005), we distinguish between three types of long-shadow crises. Each generates a particular political agenda for the crisis aftermath.

'Incomprehensible' crises are highly unexpected events that surpass and defy existing political–bureaucratic repertoires of crisis prevention and response. These are crises that few people (if any) can even fathom let alone plan for: instances of strategic military surprise; major public disorders or collective disruption in otherwise highly peaceful and 'clean' societies. The 9/11 attacks represent a near-perfect example of this category. The Dutroux crisis in Belgium, although on a completely different scale, had a comparable traumatising impact. Incomprehensible crises come as a complete surprise to both the general public and political elites, and cause bewilderment and dismay. A nagging question tends to follow: 'why did we not see this coming?' Almost invariably, postmortem activities bring to light the existence of multiple, albeit scattered and sometimes ambiguous hunches, signals and warnings about growing vulnerabilities and threats along the lines of the scenario that actually transpired. These were evidently not acted upon effectively, and much of the political controversy in the aftermath of 'incomprehensible' crises focuses on the question of why no

action was taken. As Barry Turner (Turner and Pidgeon 1997), Willem Wagenaar (1986) and other scholars have argued, some crises occur *precisely because* people in charge appear to have been unaware of the very possibility that a crisis might be looming, or because they have chosen not to act on warnings. Politically, the difference between these two scenarios is highly salient. Debates about responsibility, blame and liability take a different turn depending upon which causal story about the genesis of the crisis comes to prevail: that of top-level policy makers not being informed about any looming vulnerabilities and threats (in which case blame goes down the hierarchy); or that of top brass unwilling to address the growing risk brought to their attention (in which case postcrisis politics can easily escalate into a full-blown political crisis). The 9/11 Commission steered a middle course when it ascribed the tragedy to 'a failure of imagination', and then demonstrated that this failure had deep-rooted institutional causes.

'Mismanaged' crises and their postcrisis controversies concern not the causes of crisis, but official crisis management responses. When the response to a particular incident or development is widely perceived as being slow, disorganised or insensitive to the needs of the stricken community, the image of institutional failure continues to fuel the crisis. Of the cases in this volume, the Scandinavian governments' tsunami responses and the U.S. federal response to the Katrina floods in Louisiana come closest to this ideal type. The main thrust of postcrisis politics is distinctly different from that of the 'incomprehensible' crisis, because it zooms in on crisis-coping capacity. Debates concerning accountability and blame put the spotlight mostly on officials and agencies tasked with contingency planning, civic preparedness and governmental emergency management. This is exactly what transpired in the tsunami and Katrina cases. In the United States, both the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the White House took a terrible public beating: not so much because they had failed to prevent the floods (although the federal government was certainly blamed by state and local authorities for long having neglected the poor state of flood defences in the region) but because the disaster presented an image of total disarray at the very heart of the government's much vaunted post-9/11 crisis management machinery. In Sweden, the tsunami investigation revealed clear evidence that the need to build and maintain crisis response capacity at cabinet level had not been given the priority it deserved. Moreover, the clumsy attempts by both the prime

minister and the foreign minister to deflect blame for the slow response clearly compounded their problems. Not only did they fail to instigate quick and effective crisis operations, their limited grasp of the symbolic dimensions of the tsunami predicament was painfully exposed.

'Agenda-setting' crises hit at the heart of existing policy domains, exposing deficiencies in regulatory or service delivery arrangements. As a consequence, such crises provide a major opportunity for issue advocates to raise the salience of the issue domain and reshape its hitherto dominant problem definitions and policy mixes. The Three Mile Island near-accident with a nuclear reactor had this effect on U.S. energy policy, and the Chernobyl reactor fire focused attention on the special ramifications of the problem in (central and eastern) Europe. Among the cases in this volume, the Walkerton water crisis exemplifies this category, as does the dioxin contamination case in Belgium and the German embassy drama in Stockholm. From the point of view of government leaders, the crisis-induced politics of agenda-setting crises lends itself more readily to 'compartmentalisation' through expert committees making recommendations for policy reform and organisational renewal within the confines of the policy community at hand. This compartmentalisation will often serve to depoliticise the issues and remove them from the front stage of mainstream politics. To be sure, the policy aftermath of agenda-setting crises may at times throw up perplexing political questions – about the future of nuclear power plants, for example – but it is less likely to put into question the competence and legitimacy of the (centre of) government and its crisis management capacities.

Fates of leaders, institutions and policies

Each of these types of long-shadow crises is capable of generating a range of possible outcomes in terms of the fate of leaders, institutions and policies. What, however, actually transpired in our cases? We shall give some overall impressions here, before going more deeply into each of these domains (personal and policy/institutional effects) in separate sections to follow. In doing so, we return to the typologies of leadership fates and levels of learning as detailed in Chapter 1.

Table 11.1 shows that most but not all of the core political and executive leaders whose role and performance were scrutinised in the wake of crisis tended to survive this scrutiny. However, survival comes in

Table 11.1. *Crisis outcomes: an overview*

Case	Effects on key political officeholders	Category and strength of leadership outcomes	Effects on policies/ institutions	Levels of learning/ policy change
Spain – 3/11 attacks	Election loss, prime minister's party	Elite damage***	Withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq (precrisis electoral commitment by then opposition party)	Policy reform and paradigm shift
Germany – Elbe floods	Election win, governing coalition/chancellor	Elite reinvigoration**	National civil protection agency founded	Fine tuning
Sweden – tsunami	Reputation loss, prime minister and foreign minister	Elite damage**	Major upgrade of central government crisis coping capacities	Policy reform and fine tuning
Finland – tsunami	PM admission of 'government shortcomings'	Elite escape	No major institutional effects	Fine tuning
Norway – tsunami	Foreign minister and PM admission of errors	Elite escape	Government proposes major overhaul of crisis response system	Policy reform and fine tuning
U.S. – 9/11 attacks	Surge in presidential and mayoral popularity	Elite reinvigoration***	Major security policy and institutional reform	Policy reform and paradigm shift
Belgium – Dutroux	Large drop in government's public support; massive public marches nationwide; two ministerial resignations	Elite damage***	Major police reform	Policy reform and possibly paradigm shift
Belgium – dioxin	Ministerial resignations; election loss, government parties	Elite damage*	Agenda setting; minor policy adjustments	Fine tuning
U.S. – Katrina	Large drop in presidential support (recovering in longer term), resignation of agency chief executive	Elite damage**	Overhaul of policy and practices across sectors such as health, employment and emergency planning	Policy reform and fine tuning across multiple policy sectors, with possible paradigm shift in the longer term
U.S. – *Challenger* crash	Removal of key NASA administrators	Elite damage*	Major overhaul of Space Shuttle Program management and safety practices	Fine tuning
U.S. – *Columbia* crash	Some reorganisation of staff	Elite escape	Space shuttle is to be officially retired in the near future	Fine tuning
Sweden – embassy seizure	None	Elite escape	Agenda setting; no immediate policy change	Fine tuning – close to nil
Canada – Walkerton water	Some damage to premier and his neoliberal reform agenda	Elite damage*	Major changes in water management legislation and regulatory oversight practices	Policy reform and fine tuning
Israel – hall collapse	None	Elite escape	No policy change despite commission report urging major restructuring	Nil

Note: The number of asterisks denotes the strength of the phenomenon in each catgory: low (*), medium (**) and high (***).

different guises. *Elite reinvigoration* is certainly the most sought after outcome for those in positions of authority. Some elites benefited clearly and decisively from intensive media reporting of the statesman-like postures they adopted in dealing with major emergencies, reinforced by generic public solidarity at times of deep social trauma, and even genuine appreciation of their crisis performance. In our cases, the most compelling example is New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani: written off by all prior to 9/11, but a New York and national hero in its wake. Also, despite his dubious role in the subsequent inquiry (highlighted in the Parker and Dekker chapter), George W. Bush saw his popularity soar to unprecedented and long-enduring heights on the wings of the same crisis. Another beneficiary, although on a more modest scale, was German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder after the Elbe floods. Responsibility for operational crisis management was largely decentralised (to the states). This aspect of public administration created space for quite successful strategies of symbolic reassurance that national leaders were doing what they could to sort out the chaos that was being dealt with (as well as partly caused and escalated) by other levels of the governmental system.

Elite damage, by contrast, befell several key figures in our case studies. Some were relatively minor (such as NASA administrators, and Ontario Premier Mike Harris after the Walkerton tragedy). Others were more significant, with a few political careers, aspirations and reputations taking a sharp downturn (outgoing Prime Minister Aznar in Spain; chancellor candidate Stoiber in Germany; Belgian Prime Minister Dehaene). In others, the damage was temporary: their public standing and political strength was compromised considerably in the short term as they struggled with the 'crisis after the crisis' ('t Hart et al. 2001). As time elapsed, however, political agendas changed and the leaders in question could recuperate from the damage sustained. Tsunami-damaged Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson was a case in point.

This recovery highlights the political fact that more often than not, the sharp and immediate edge of challenges to legitimacy posed by crises will blur over time, as they mingle with public judgements on the merits of new proposals, the advent of new issues and the media's inevitable quest for new political stories. Such features are the essence of *elite escape* postcrisis outcomes. This was certainly the case in the Norwegian and Finish tsunami responses, Swedish embassy seizure,

Columbia crash and the Israeli banquet hall collapse. There are no discernable patterns in these cases as to why 'escape' was possible (for example, the banquet hall collapse was dwarfed by security and defence issues in Israel, and pressure was eased on Finnish leaders because of early admission that mistakes had been made). Perhaps the only common theme is leadership judgement that political flak would diminish if a particular course of action (or inaction) was taken. As we will see shortly, however, such elite manoeuvring is a risky game with no guarantee of success.

As far as the effects of crises on public policies and institutions are concerned, the majority of cases in this book confirm the idea that crisis-induced learning processes can temporarily open sociopolitical windows for reform (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 2003). When change-oriented government critics and policy entrepreneurs play their cards well, crises may enable them to bring about shifts in the balance of public sympathies and policy coalitions. There are, however, degrees of learning, and we can capture these (as per Chapter 1) in our three layers of learning: *fine tuning, policy reform* and *paradigm shift*.

With the exception of the Israeli banquet hall, all our cases exhibited some degree of *fine tuning*. In other words, there was some form of instrumental adaption to procedures and ways of working. Sometimes such minor reforms were the product of clear political promises (Elbe floods, Finland's tsunami response) while others were the result of policy reform not matching reform rhetoric (NASA). As a general rule, it would be surprising if some form of secondary learning did not take place after a crisis. The legitimacy of any organisation (and perhaps even its funding from its paymasters) is vulnerable if it does not show willingness to promote some form of adaption in its procedures.

Fine tuning seems to be the 'quickest fix' possible. In the game of crisis-induced politics, government leaders are usually (but not always, as we will see) cheerleaders for the existing institutional order in their respective portfolios. Other than common sense might lead us to expect, it turns out that even in the aftermath of serious crises, most government leaders consider it far more politically expedient to throw in their lot with existing institutions and policies, while leaving lesson drawing and reform to the margins. When inquiries manage to gain widespread support for penetrating criticism of existing practices, leaders who are reluctant to change can attempt to ride out the political mood of the moment by making some symbolic changes and paying

lip service to 'learning the lessons' on the front stage of politics, whilst on the backstage they can use their procedural and informal powers to put their foot on the brake. For example, although forced to admit after the Stockholm embassy drama that remote and peaceful Sweden could not hope to be spared the spells of terrorism that were plaguing most of Europe at the time, the fact that the event was semiexogenous (German terrorists trying to pressure the German government, albeit on Swedish soil) made it possible for Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme to sidetrack calls from within the police for a significant upgrading of its counter-terrorist capabilities. Therefore, the immediate reflex that 'something must be done' was quelled by a largely symbolic codification of already emergent enforcement and extradition practices (see Hansén, this volume).

Policy reform refers to key changes in entrenched policies and policy sectors, and was evident in just under half of our cases. Based on this small sample, our more generalised instinct is that *policy reform* tends to occur when *fine tuning* alone is politically unsustainable. It could, for example, be to appease public concerns and/or satisfy a powerful coalition of interests (Belgian police reform, Walkerton/Ontario water regulation, U.S. homeland security). Sometimes the 'policy' aspect was the most reformist aspect of change (Ontario's water regulation) and at other times, reform of particular policy sectors touched on *paradigmatic* societal issues (Spain's withdrawal of troops from Iraq, and the United States' sweeping anti-terror reform). Indeed, it can be difficult at times to tell where *policy reform* and *paradigm shift* begin and end. To take the latter example, the post 9/11 overhaul of homeland security in the U.S. constituted *policy reform* because it entailed a thoroughgoing reform in one particular policy sector (domestic security), but it was underpinned by discourse that tapped into deeper *paradigmatic* constitutional rights to free speech and privacy.

Importantly, most of the cases examined here betray a greater tendency among incumbent policy makers to respond to crisis by attempts to consolidate the status quo than to make sweeping commitments to *policy reform* and change in societal *paradigms*. Perhaps this is unsurprising (see Boin et al. 2005; Heyse et al. 2006). Crisis-induced politics entails a competition between tight and loosely coupled coalitions in favour of either securing or altering the various rights and rewards that stakeholders received in the precrisis context. Those individuals and groups with inherited political, economic and social powers – sustained

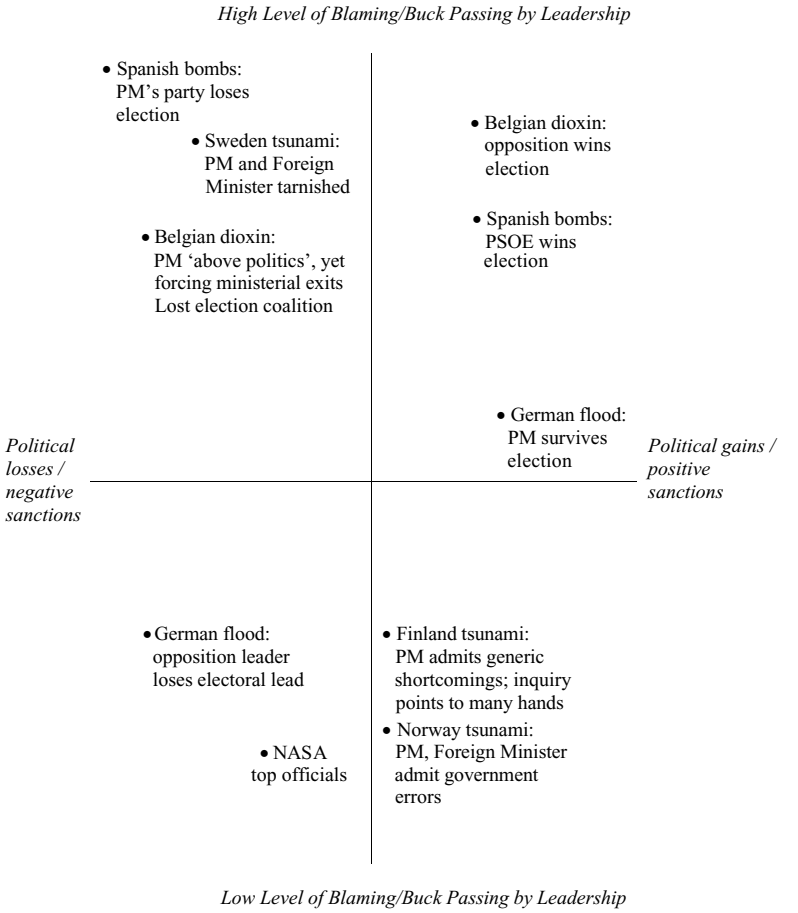

Figure 11.1. Does blame management work? Leader behaviour and leaders' postcrisis fates.

through institutional structures and path dependencies – do not easily submit to change in policies or entrenched societal values.

Crisis exploitation: elite manoeuvring

Table 11.1 shows that the fates of leaders vary greatly in the wake of crises. The issue we take up now is the extent to which these variations depend on leader behaviour in the crisis-induced aftermath. Figure 11.1 suggests that it is not easy to detect hard and fast 'winning strategies' for

political leaders who are caught up in crisis-induced framing contests. It shows that virtually all government and opposition leaders for whose behaviour we have sufficient information to reliably score, resorted to 'blame game' style tactics in dealing with questions about the causes and significance of crises. Yet it also shows that there were roughly as many political beneficiaries as there were losers from these crises. Nor did these fall into the pattern of government vs. opposition (according the blame theory, the former would be the likely loser and the latter the likely beneficiary). Postcrisis election gains by the Spanish Socialists and the Belgian Liberal, Green and French Socialist parties stand next to incumbent Chancellor Schröder's hitherto unlikely electoral survival on the strength of the Elbe floods.

Blaming others is not a good predictor of these outcomes either. The most conspicuous losers – Spanish Prime Minister Aznar, Belgian Prime Minister Dehaene and German opposition chancellor candidate Stoiber, whose parties all lost elections in the immediate wake of crises – displayed different levels of blame management behaviour. Those who might argue that Stoiber lost precisely because he did not do what is expected of an opposition leader (blaming the government for the floods and criticising it for shortcomings in flood response) would have a hard time explaining why the Spanish socialist opposition candidate led his party to electoral success in the wake of the Madrid bombings, while deliberately keeping his own blaming rhetoric firmly in check. Also, incumbent leaders who publicly admitted government errors and took responsibility for them, such as the Norwegian foreign minister and the Finnish prime minister, ended up avoiding political flak much better than their Swedish counterparts who persisted with blame-avoidance strategies.

In short: there does not appear to be a self-evident pattern here. In part this is because the number of cases coded is low. In part it is simply in line with the results of voting behaviour studies that tend to show that the personality and behaviour of leaders matter a great deal less than commonly assumed (King 2004; McAllister 2006a, 2006b). Although often taken for granted (the 'rally effect' hypothesis; see Bytzek, this volume), electoral effects of crisis behaviour are actually difficult to prove and may in fact not be substantial.

There may also be a more fundamental reason why it is difficult to detect any straightforward pattern in the results of various

crisis-induced blame management strategies. Perhaps the famous Miles' law assumption that underlies much of blame management theory – where you stand depends on where you sit – and which Graham Allison (1971) made so much of in his famous 'Model III' analysis of the Cuban missile crisis ('t Hart and Rosenthal 1998; Allison and Zelikov 1999) is too simple a guide to actor behaviour in postcrisis politics.

A 'Milesian' proposition concerning crisis-induced elite behavior would read as follows: ceteris paribus, government actors will (1) attribute crisis origins and response problems to exogenous circumstances, (2) seek to obstruct and constrain crisis inquiries and (3) resist taking responsibility. By contrast, nongovernment actors will (1) attribute crisis origins and response problems to endogenous factors (i.e. related to government actors and policies), (2) seek to promote, widen and deepen crisis inquiries and (3) insist on office-holders being held personally responsible for any faults and shortcomings noted by inquiries. To be sure, sometimes roles do seem unequivocally to induce postcrisis political stances: the Belgian opposition loudly advocated a wide-ranging parliamentary inquiry into the dioxin affair, but several weeks later some of the parties assumed government office and then made attempts to constrict the scope of the inquiry.

In the main, however, our cases provide much evidence to undercut 'Milesian' role-theoretical and implicit rational choice determinism. Government leaders do not always defend the government's record; opposition leaders do not invariably turn into moral crusaders whenever a crisis occurs; and the mass media do not always claim that government heads should roll.

Conceptualising crisis-induced politics in terms of framing contests must be tempered by the fact that the world is not infinitely malleable. The agency-based notion of 'crisis exploitation' should not blind us to the constraints upon the discourse and actions that policy makers and other stakeholders can feasibly engage in following a crisis.

Following our lead in Chapter 1, s*ituational* characteristics can play an autonomous role, particularly when events are so compelling that the scope for 'meaning making' is, or at least appears to be, rather limited. For example, it was obviously hard to deny that serious errors had been made when another NASA space shuttle exploded, or when it transpired that convicted child molester and rapist Marc Dutroux was not quickly and methodically investigated when children started

disappearing. But it was not so obvious who was at fault when a bunch of fanatical and well-organised terrorists successfully used hitherto unprecedented methods to attack the U.S. mainland, or when a spate of bad weather upstream caused massive riverine flooding in Germany. To create a politically dominant view of those latter types of crises as a product of avoidable policy failures required a lot more 'framing work'. The evident role of exogenous forces – nature; foreign suicide bombers – constricted (at least initially) the scope of feasible opposition criticism of the government. The sheer gravity of the impact of both cases imposed on all actors a symbolic script emphasising national solidarity rather than political back biting. This offered the Bush administration and the Schröder government a different scope for defensive manoeuvres than enjoyed by NASA administrators and Belgian authorities. The Madrid bombings would have had the same type of impact had it not been for Spain's long experience with domestic terrorism and the preexisting intense controversies surrounding Basque separatists ETA. That alone served to immediately 'endogenise' and thus politicise a crisis that otherwise may have been experienced as an overwhelming, unique and exogenous tragedy.

There was, of course, another factor at play in Spain: it occurred a few days prior to national elections. This brings us to another set of factors (also outlined in Chapter 1) that limit the utility of a Model III-type analysis of postcrisis politics: *contextual* factors. Crises are discrete episodes in ongoing political and bureaucratic processes. Therefore, the timing of their occurrence matters greatly in relation to the ongoing rhythms of governance and organisational life. The contrast between the relatively intense yet ultimately politically inconsequential Swedish post-tsunami politics and the dramatic, immediate German and Spanish crisis-induced electoral reversals of fortune is illuminating in this regard. We can never know, of course, but would Göran Persson have survived the tsunami blame game had the crisis occurred in an election period rather than at midterm? The location of crises in political time provides different actors with particular incentives to inflate or deflate issues of responsibility and blame. On balance, the cases reported here suggest the following proposition about the timing of crisis in relation to elections: *ceteris paribus, the closer a crisis hits to the (anticipated) time of an election, the more likely that political actors will attempt to politicise an emergency/disturbance, and thus the longer the expected duration of the crisis aftermath, the greater the*

intensity of its blame games and the higher the likelihood that crisis investigations will produce political fatalities.

The Miles law perspective assumes that the main predictor of elite behaviour in times of crisis is the big distinction between government and opposition. This overlooks the fact that crises occur at different points in the political careers of key protagonists. The cases show that long-time incumbent leaders are more likely to adopt defensive postures than newly incumbent leaders whose personal record is less likely to be at stake in postcrisis inquiries. Indeed they may in fact welcome crisis episodes as a way of putting distance between themselves and their predecessor's regime and policies. To be sure, doctrines of ministerial responsibility presuppose that the office-holder is held responsible even for the behaviour of his or her predecessors. However, in political practice, personal noninvolvement in crises or fiascoes is usually enough to get novice office-holders off the hook, particularly when they themselves champion the cause of far-reaching investigation and sweeping reform. Hence we can derive another contextual proposition: *the shorter an actor's occupancy of a position of influence on government/agency policy at the time of crisis occurrence, the more likely that that actor will forego defensive responses and escape political damage as a result of crisis-induced accountability proceedings*.

Finally, although most of the case studies in this book have not given systematic attention to crisis coverage by the mass media, we should not underestimate the importance of such coverage as a contextual 'backdrop' against which blame games take place. The chapter by Bytzek on German floods and Brändström et al. on the Scandinavian tsunami response, clearly indicate the relevance of such factors. Bytzek's analysis of the German case points to the importance of issue salience. In particular, media influence upon the political fortunes of key actors is greater for crises that receive continued intense media coverage, as opposed to those relegated to secondary importance once the operational crisis reporting has run its course. The content analysis of media coverage conducted by Brändström et al. provides some support for the idea that the selection and tone of media reporting also matter. Hence our third contextual proposition: *the more the media's crisis reporting and commentary emphasises exogenous interpretations of a crisis, the less likely that government actors will suffer negative political consequences in its aftermath; the more it emphasises endogenous ones, the more likely that they will*.

This proposition leads to a follow-up question: can we predict the emphasis ('bias') of media crisis reporting? Although the cases display too much variation in this regard to make any solid empirical statement, let us offer a speculative one: crises intensify but generally do not suddenly change the tone and content of media reporting about the chief actors involved (Wilkins 1987; Wilkins et al. 1989; Seeger et al. 2003). Hence our fourth proposition, posited with due awareness of its relative explanatory power: *the thrust of media reporting and opinion of an actor's behaviour in relation to crisis episodes correlates highly with its precrisis reporting and opinion about that actor, regardless of that actor's specific crisis communication behavior*. It is the media analogy of the so-called Matthew 'rule' – familiar to all scholars applying for research grants: he who has shall be given. And thus the already popular leaders (parties, governments) are more likely to emerge as the crisis heroes or will at least be spared from being publicly branded its villains.

This suggestion may be overly deterministic. It cannot be a coincidence that the bulk of contemporary crisis management textbooks are written from a communication perspective (cf. Coombs 1999; Seeger et al. 2003; Curtin et al. 2005). These books tell us that whilst public relations and media coverage in particular need to be 'managed' in normal times, the need to do so is even greater in times of crisis. And then they proceed in fine detail to describe what policy makers and managers can do to ensure their messages get heard and their personal and organisational reputations are spared (Henry 2000). Hence, as a counterweight to the former two propositions, we forward an additional one, more in line with the agency perspective of 'crisis exploitation', yet an equally well-refutable one: *the degree to which media reporting/commentary on crisis episodes aligns with the frames put forward by a particular political actor depends upon the quality (preparedness, timeliness, accuracy, understandability and 'symbolic intelligence') of that actor's crisis communication behavior*.

These heuristic comparisons of a limited number of like and unlike cases by no means allow us to draw firm conclusions about which factors determine the fortunes of political office-holders in the wake of major crises. The propositions formulated above are just a preliminary building block for the kind of rigorous, controlled, larger-N comparison that would be needed to gain more insight. Yet our limited effort does show very clearly that when a major crisis befalls the community,

political leaders on both sides of the government-opposition fence have reason to be both fearful and hopeful. They may be fearful because crises can unleash public moods and political forces beyond their control, and appear to harbour strong incentives for many actors to start potentially damaging blame games. They can be hopeful because at the same time, and partly for the same reasons, quite a few political careers have actually been made or enhanced by smart and well-balanced crisis behaviour – in the operational arena, but even more so in the symbolic domain of public 'meaning making' in times of collective uncertainty and despair.

The politics of crisis commissions

Edelman (1977: 103) argued long ago that 'sceptical search for truth is bound before long to collide with established norms and authority'. One might expect crisis inquiries would lend ample illustration to this dictum. That is not the case for the crises studied in this book (see Table 11.2). Only the 9/11 Commission was confronted with overt and persistent attempts by President Bush and his staff to prevent, obstruct and 'shape' its work. In most of the other cases, the incumbent authorities may or may not have been tempted down an obstructionist path, but they were politically unable to do so. The Bush administration proved ultimately that resistance was not a politically viable option. Crises, it seems, tend to put so much public and political pressure on governments to open up and have the record examined, that little can be done to resist that push. Overt moves to do so would be politically counterproductive. Parker and Dekker (this volume) put it effectively when they observe: '. . . to publicly oppose and block the creation of an independent commission would have made the White House part of the problem of resolving questions about what went wrong on September 11. Doing so would have been associated with inaction and obstructionism, while publicly endorsing the commission was emblematic of leadership and the possibility of resolution and renewal'. We should note, however, that a public embracing of openness and investigation does not rule out more unobtrusive forms of resistance.

Most governments in our case studies probably did not cherish the prospect of an upcoming crisis inquiry but wisely chose default options: at least trying to prevent the inquiry from being run in the adversarial, politicised parliamentary arena (only the Belgian government had

Table 11.2. *Crisis inquiries: a comparative overview*

	Inquiry type and mandate	Politicisation of inquiry process	Govt attempt to obstruct/ manipulate	Tone of inquiry report	Political and policy impact of inquiry
Belgium: *Dutroux*	Parliamentary; Case-based accountability assessment, as well as sweeping review of police/justice system	High: rationale, scope	No	Critical evaluation of police/justice system performance; advocates integration of rival police forces	Political: + Policy: + (in 2nd instance)
Belgium: *dioxin*	Parliamentary; Determine causes of contamination	Moderate: composition, scope	No	Broad sectoral analysis; reform proposals	Political: – Policy: –
Sweden: *police reform*	Expert commission led initially by politician and then by judge; sweeping review of entire police system; crisis component embedded in larger issues	Low	No	No specific crisis evaluation; broad programme of reform measures	Political: – Policy: –
USA: Challenger	Expert commission led by former secretary of state; determine causes of accident; recommend remedies	Low	No	Sweeping criticism of NASA risk management systems and practices	Political: – Policy: +
USA: *Columbia*	Expert commission led by former admiral; determine causes of accident; recommend remedies	Moderate	No	Sweeping criticism of NASA failure to learn lessons of the *Challenger* crisis/inquiry	Political: + Policy: ++
USA: *9/11*	Independent blue-ribbon commission	High: Rationale, scope, composition, access	Yes	Highly critical analysis of U.S. homeland security architecture and practices; 'shopping list' of recommendations	Political: + Policy: +
Canada: water tragedy	Expert inquiry led by judge	Low	No	Across the board critique of all actors involved, particularly Ministry of Environment	Political: + Policy: ++
Israel: *banquet hall*	Expert inquiry led by judge	Low	No	Highly critical of building codes and the inaction on previous attempts to reform	Political: + Policy: –

to acquiesce to parliamentary investigations). The vast majority were conducted by blue-ribbon commissions or senior lawyers. Although such moves, as it turns out, are no guarantee that inquiry findings will be devoid of critical statements about the government's role in a crisis, there is at least a reasonable expectation that the inquiry will not become a political witch-hunt. Expert-driven inquiries tend to go for policy substance, not for 'political skulls'. This distinction is supported in our case studies. Whilst the tones of inquiries were grave, their focus was mostly on regulatory, managerial and cultural factors. Questions about political responsibility were usually hinted at but seldom addressed in an up-front manner – experts and lawyers predictably defer to parliaments to make those judgements. Hence, expert commissions are less likely to result in political fatalities.

It seems safe to assume that the relation between governmental leaders and postcrisis inquiries is affected by the perceived nature of the crisis at hand. A commission that investigates a crisis that directly threatens the heart of society (such as the 9/11 attacks) can count on more reticence or even active opposition from leaders. This contrasts with a commission investigating a crisis that falls in a government domain sufficiently far removed from central government (space shuttles/water crises) or within a domain that is characterised by indirect government responsibility (the Israeli banquet hall collapse). High politics during a crisis will translate into high commission politics.

When it comes to the fate of governmental leaders, much depends on the leadership of a postcrisis inquiry. It appears, paradoxically perhaps, that a high level of 'commission statesmanship' is least dangerous for the politicians and civil servants involved. Commission chairs who understand the importance of combining the symbolic function of their inquiry with the learning imperative, and who seek accordingly to separate back-stage politics from front-stage performance, also tend to understand that public mudslinging with the powers that be may erode the long-term legitimacy of the commission's efforts. If they want their report to 'make history' (i.e. be the authoritative guide to an important historical juncture that their grandchildren will read) (see Parker and Dekker, this volume) – commission leaders cannot afford to be seen as politically motivated finger pointers. It follows that public leaders who wish to avoid direct criticism are wise to appoint highly qualified, statesman-like commission chairs (or people known to harbour such ambitions).

Several chapters in this book help us understand that 'running' a commission of inquiry is no easy job. The leaders of these inquiries must somehow balance public performance – casting an image of sage, neutral, determined council to the nation – with a heavy administrative hand in order to coordinate the efforts of many researchers, manage limited resources and meet looming deadlines. Overt sympathy for the victims may undermine the commission's authority (see the 'spaghetti incident' in the Dutroux chapter, Staelraeve and 't Hart, this volume). By contrast too much emphasis on research technicalities may undermine faith in the commission's commitment to the bigger picture of improving societal safety and security.

The chapters also show that crisis commissions tend to work in rapidly evolving environments. The initiation of an inquiry creates a new venue that all actors in the postcrisis phase will seek to exploit (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Some will seek to further escalate the crisis. For instance, the White Marches in Belgium (Staelraeve and 't Hart, this volume) deepened the crisis mood, as the victims' families demonstrated that they could count on the support of the Belgian public. Others sought to boost or transform their image by embracing the investigation and its outcomes. President Bush felt forced to change strategy midcourse to protect his image as the protector of American security (Parker and Dekker, this volume). After Hurricane Katrina, the Democrats distanced themselves from the House investigation (anticipating a Republican whitewash), only to welcome the findings when the Republicans eventually published a report that fiercely criticised the president and his administration (Preston, this volume).

Some chairmen (very few commissions are chaired by women) turn out to be remarkably well versed in the public choreography of inquiry dynamics. They use public hearings and partial reports to create a comprehensible storyline, preparing all involved for what then appears a 'logical' end result. They write a readable report, which leads the reader from a distant point in the past on the path toward disaster. They graciously distribute blame, but always emphasise the necessity of improving the system so this crisis will never happen again. They understand how the media works and try to accommodate their needs by equally dividing 'exclusives' and by providing sufficient background information that helps reporters understand what the commission is trying to achieve.

These chairmen understand that style cannot mask a lack of substance. A good report contains a narrative that is comprehensive and indisputable (the last thing a chairman wants is to argue about facts). It carefully separates analysis from recommendations. To become perceived as a fair judge, the analysis will have to pay attention to the interplay between various levels, actors and interests. It will have to take context (such as limited resources or impossible objectives) into account. It will have to carefully weigh avoidable errors against gross negligence. Finally, it will have to formulate recommendations that are both reasonable and feasible.

Several chapters in this book cast doubt on the quality of postcrisis inquiries and the reports they produce. The 9/11 report, for instance, was widely heralded for its literary qualities and its outstanding narrative, but the analysis and recommendations met with some persistent critics. The reports on the NASA shuttle failures hardly encountered any criticism, but a quick read will demonstrate the lack of specificity and feasibility surrounding some of the most powerful recommendations ('become a learning organisation'). Perhaps the perfect report simply does not exist.

At least some of this imperfection can be attributed to the role of experts in commissions. These ad hoc groups are forced to do what many academics have found impossible in practice: engage in interdisciplinary research. It is hard enough to get an engineer or a scientist to understand a psychologist or political scientist (the other way around may be even harder, we hasten to add), but to get experts with different theoretical backgrounds to *agree* on something is a truly monumental task. To do this within a limited time period and under media pressure is bound to incur some major compromises. As a coping measure, commissions will be tempted to adopt the non-intervention principle: technical experts study technological issues, psychologists study human error and political scientists study all remaining issues. This seemingly logical division of labour is helpful to a degree but may disguise the elementary differences that separate the disciplines. These divisions may subtly undermine the validity of the commission's findings (we will have more to say about this in the following section).

From an analytical point of view, it appears necessary to approach commissions and their effects from different angles. For further research, we suggest a distinction between three different lenses that

shape expectations and interpretations of committees (similar, but not identical, to Parker and Dekker, this volume). These lenses help formulate hypotheses with regard to the degree of independence of the commissions. Taken singly, each of these hypotheses is obviously of limited explanatory value; but used in combination they form a useful, dialectic analytical tool kit.

The *just world* lens suggests that a good, analytically sharp and fair-minded committee will command public authority, which in turn enables it to make dominant judgements about causes, responsibilities and implications of the crisis. This perspective suggests a straightforward relation between the degree of independence (in terms of the authority of members, the width of terms of reference, resources and staffing, time limits and access to all relevant information) of a crisis inquiry and its accountability impact. Therefore, an operating hypothesis would be as follows: *the higher a crisis commission's degree of independence, the higher its political and policy impact*. Moreover: *the higher a crisis commission's degree of independence, the more likely its report is critical of key government policies, organisations and figures*.

The *garbage can* paradigm reminds us that crisis committees and their reports are just one among the many disparate forces operating in the crisis-induced framing contest, whose contributions interact in complex and impenetrable ways. The procedural and professional quality of a committee may not necessarily augment its potential impact. In postcrisis politics, anything can happen. The garbage can null hypothesis is thus obvious: *there is no correlation between the degree of independence of crisis commissions and the level of criticality of inquiry reports towards governments; nor is there any correlation with policy impact*.

The *perverse effects* paradigm views crisis-induced politics as such a tough and mean game that it devours crisis committees trying to operate on the basis of detached expert inquiry. In the absence of sweeping mandates and extensive powers to create political faits accomplis, crisis inquiries and the political discussions that follow their inquiry reports are, obviously, focal points not only for supporters for typically reformist policy recommendations, but also for veto players and lobbyists bent on shielding existing policies and institutions from any crisis-induced 'knee-jerk' responses (Hood and Lodge 2002). At worst, they are susceptible to manipulation and abuse by the most astute and unscrupulous actors in the game – inside and outside government.

The key underlying hypothesis, therefore, is: *the higher a crisis commission's degree of independence, the lower its political and policy impact*.

Political crisis exploitation by 'learning' and 'reform'

In the wake of devastation and sorrow, we expect more from government than restoring a sense of order. We expect government to study the causes and initiate actions that ensure this crisis will never happen again. The chapters in this book explain why this expectation is unlikely to be met: the politics of the postcrisis phase create dynamics that make learning a difficult enterprise.

To be sure, it appears relatively easy to establish the direct cause of a crisis – especially those involving technology: experts locate the malfunctioning part, identify the operator who last touched it and describe how this first-order factor triggered the crisis. They often puzzle the crisis trajectory together within a very short period of time. These first-order causes are usually easy to fix (e.g. redesign the part, fire the operator). If crisis learning was confined to first-order causes and quick fixes, there would be little room for crisis dynamics to impede this process.

In recent decades, this simple, linear model of crisis causation has come to be seen as inadequate and incomplete. We no longer accept that a crisis is caused by a broken part or an erring operator. As a result, or so it seems, contemporary crisis investigations have begun to pay much more attention to the conditions under which these first-order factors cause a crisis. The investigations concentrate on second-dimension factors such as ergonomics, group dynamics, organisational rules and cultures, interagency warfare, budget cuts and risk regimes (Van Duin 1992). This common wisdom may be viewed as a victory for social science research: notably the insights of academics such as Barry Turner (Turner and Pidgeon 1997) who emphasised the importance of the incubation periods that precede crises.

This work is often used to support the common misperception that crises leave a trail of early warning signals. The crisis is perceived in this line of thinking as an ontological entity, something 'out there'. It is envisioned to produce 'signals' that announce its impending arrival. If only public organisations would pay attention! Looking back at a crisis, there are plenty of signals. The question is whether these signals

really matter, for they tend to be ubiquitous in most organisations or policy fields (many of which do not suffer from a crisis).

The search for second-order causalities thus is not as simple as it may seem (Perrow 1994). With the benefit of hindsight, it is fairly easy to construct a narrative that combines various levels of causality with the immediate agreed-upon trigger. Yet although such a narrative may seem convincing, it really is only a hypothesis. The existing theories simply do not 'provide proof' as lay persons are wont to think. They provide *possible explanations* that require much more work before they can be accepted as 'truths'. But commissions are not in the business of theory testing; they must construct a convincing storyline under severe time pressure. The weakness of second-order causations is often revealed by the accompanying recommendations. Second-order causalities require reform, but when we consider the reform proposals in the various reports, it is rarely self-evident how these proposed changes will remedy the observed cause of the crisis.

The investigation of second- and third-order dimensions of crisis is not only a mission impossible (at least from a truth-finding perspective), it renders the investigation vulnerable to the forces of postcrisis politics. By considering 'all possible factors' and 'leaving no stone unturned' – the typical remit of today's commissions – the investigation leaves the domain of exact science and detective work, and enters a new domain of imprecise concepts, abstract theories, multiple perspectives and alternate futures. In short, investigations enter the world of contestable and competing frames. The increased vagueness opens the door for intense and often politically inspired discussions that cannot be resolved on the basis of agreed-upon criteria. The laws of physics do not apply to second-order causalities.

In other respects, the use of experts does help justify any call for reform that the commission may agree upon. If commission members are convinced that failed intelligence lay at the heart of the crisis, there are plenty of experts and theories that will allow for a convincing underlying analysis. However, in the absence of hard and undisputable proof, opponents of the proposed reform can easily formulate equally convincing alternatives or counternarratives. Learning and reform can thus rapidly become subject to the forces of politicisation. And rightly so: in the absence of hard proof of their effectiveness, learning and reform are political at heart.

The political nature of postcrisis lessons and reform proposals is, of course, not lost on those who have to implement them (Boin and Otten 1996). In the most optimistic scenario, the organisations that bear the brunt of reform will seek a subtle accommodation between organisational routines that work, and first-order causalities that must be fixed. But the more politically inspired reforms become reified as the one and only path towards a safer future, the harder it will be for organisations to honour them in practice without compromising long-standing routines and structures that had nothing to do with the crisis.

For those who adhere to the 'learning imperative' (akin to the 'just world' perspective outlined earlier), the solution is easy. The remit of postcrisis commissions should be limited to identifying key errors and design failures, which can be resolved – not necessarily quickly or easily – without changing all parameters (changing the parameters may, after all, introduce new failure paths). Identifying second-order causes should probably be left to academic researchers and those working in the organisations. The commission could organise follow-up audits by experts and colleagues to gauge the level of improvement. The same process could apply to policy change.

From the 'garbage can' and 'perverse effects' perspectives presented above, such a solution is naïve at best and perhaps misleading. If there is no exact science of reform, then reform should be considered either as some sort of non-linear process and/or as a highly political issue to be addressed and resolved through the pulling and hauling of the political process. In this sense, an investigation committee provides a temporary venue to deal with the crisis. It can also be done through existing venues, but the initiation of a crisis inquiry helps to remedy the legitimacy problems incurred as a result of the crisis. Whether this venue manages to articulate an authoritative diagnosis and produce widely supported 'lessons' and 'reforms' is another matter.

One way of bridging the gap between these perspectives is an a priori debate with regard to the preventable nature of a crisis. Very few inquiries begin to ask whether and to which extent the crisis at hand is the result of preventable factors (of the first or second order) or should be considered the unfortunate materialisation of a risk taken. Can terrorist attacks such as 9/11 really be prevented (and at which costs)? If we operate dangerous technology, should we not expect an occasional major accident – and thus debate whether we are willing

to run that risk (Perrow 1984)? Such debates would help define the boundaries of inquiry, limiting (but not prohibiting) room for crisis-induced learning and reform.

All this suggests that postcrisis inquiries may help to restore order to a tumultuous period by performing two types of activities. First, these committees should establish direct causes in an authoritative way. They should help people understand what happened before, during and immediately after a crisis. Second, they should set the stage for a political and perhaps societal debate on the necessity of reform. Rather than aiming to 'close' the crisis by presenting a firm set of reforms, they should leave the political dimension of crisis to the political arena.

This may sound like a throwback to the artificial separation between politics and administration, a fiction that has long informed normative debates in public administration and political science. It is, however, quite the opposite. It recognises that the postcrisis phase is intensely political and suggests that the politics of crisis management should take place in the arenas designed for such activities. It moves politics from the back stage to the front stage. In a period when society debates future options and directions, that is exactly where it should be.

Coda: crisis management and the transformation of governance

Ulrich Beck was prophetic when he argued 20 years ago that issues of 'risk' would become the dominant mobilising force in western societies and polities (Beck 1992). The first 5 years of the twenty-first century have borne out his prediction. We live in a world where many social issues and entire domains of public policy have become 'securitised' (Buzan et al. 1997) and where 'threat politics' (Eriksson 2001) has become well and truly institutionalised, pervading public debates, election campaigns and government policy making on issues as widely divergent as education, border control, food chain management, privacy, water management and freedom of religion.

In polities where the discovery, framing and management of threats are the stuff of the main political game in town, crises are no longer marginal phenomena. From occasional disturbances in a political system that is otherwise preoccupied by issues of economic management and welfare provision, crises of various kinds (past and future ones, local and far away ones, natural, technological and antagonistic ones),

have risen to unprecedented prominence on public and political agendas. This heightened salience has occurred partly because, as Beck and others have shown, the reflexivity of modern technologies of production and social control has increased the scope for truly catastrophic damage on a transnational scale to human life, property and ecosystems. At the same time, a relative convergence in dominant party ideologies, in contrast to the more adversary divisions that dominated most of the twentieth century, has created a void to be filled by other logics of political mobilisation. Finally, the current prominence of threat, risk and crisis in political discourse and public policy making has also been a by-product of the increasing importance of mass media in public life (the media thrives on the kinds of ominous stories and pictures that crises tend to provide). To the extent that the media's reporting choices shape public attention, politicians cannot but follow suit in taking these things seriously.

It follows that 'crisis management' – once an esoteric, unprestigious activity pursued by small bands of expert practitioners and scholars alike – has now become a highly topical subject. While it is surely an exaggeration to say, as U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara is said to have remarked after the Cuban missile crisis, that 'there is no longer such a thing as strategy, only crisis management', there is no denying that today's politicians and officials cannot afford to ignore its imperatives. Crisis management has gone beyond the essentially low-level, technocratic sphere it was once confined to in all but the foreign and defence policy domains. It has also become considerably more complex than the mere deployment of 'fixers', 'spin doctors' and 'lightning rods' as coping mechanisms vis-á-vis scandal-hungry journalists. In the post-9/11 era we have seen crisis management become professionalised and institutionalised in many different ways – both in 'politics' and in 'administration'.

To understand what this means, for the way in which we are being governed and the future of democracy, should be a central imperative of political scientists. It is time for crisis management research to come out of its academic ghetto and blend in with the mainstay of research on governance and democracy. Likewise, it is time for mainstream scholars – from those involved in voting studies, policy analysis and leadership studies to name but a few – to examine much more systematically, how the 'punctuations' that crises cause in political life may transform it in fundamental and enduring ways. If this volume

helps convince some of them that it might be worthwhile to make that intellectual leap, it will have served its purpose.

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