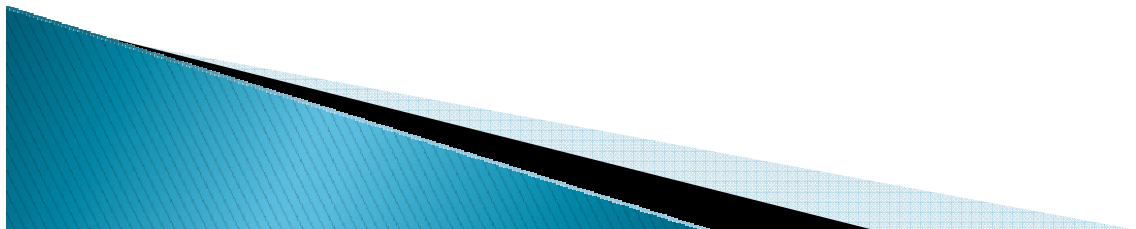# Crisis foreign policy as a process of self organisation

Paper presented by Kai Lehmann at the 'Complexity and the International Arena' seminar

Part of ESRC Seminar Series 'Complexity as the New Framework for Policy'

University of Lancaster

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# Characteristics of Complex Adaptive Systems

▸ They consist of a large number of elements which interact with each other across time and space

▸ This interaction is rich, which is to say that many elements influence, and are influenced, by many others

▸ These elements interact in often non-linear ways, making the development of the system only partially predictable

▸ The interactions are usually short-range, even though their impact can extend much further

▸ The systems are characterized by continuous feed-back loops, which can be both positive or negative

▸ The systems are open to, and interact with, their environment.

▸ They operate under conditions far from equilibrium

▸ They evolve over time and therefore have a history which has a significant impact on their current and future state of development

▸ Elements of the system evolve according to local boundary conditions, ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole

Adapted from Cilliers (1998)
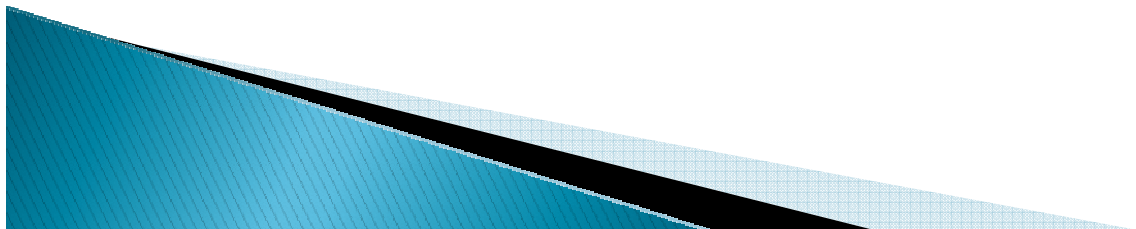
The CDE model: Conditions for self-organisation

- Containers: All those things that bound the system and hold it together
- Differences: Any distinction within the system that constitute the potential for movement and change
- Exchanges: Transactions and connections between and among agents at any level
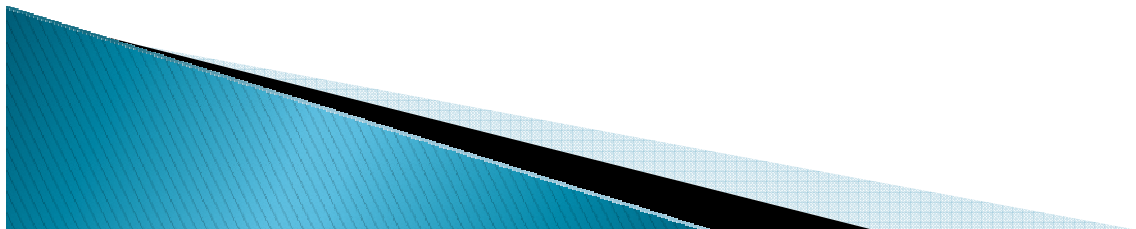
Normal foreign policy processes as self-organisation

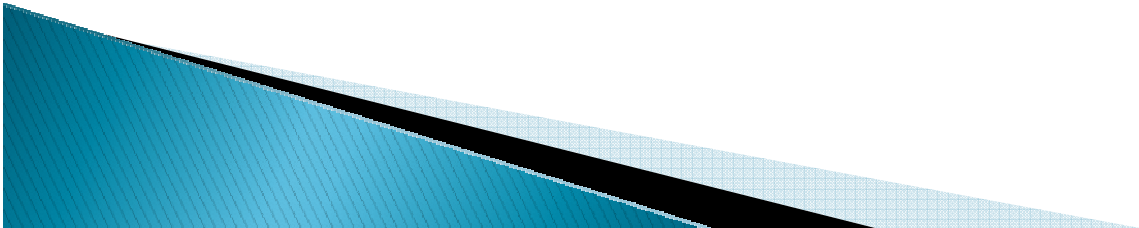| Conditions for Self-organisation	Medium Constraint
Container	Many and entangled
Difference	Many, some significant
Exchange	Loose, ambiguous
Emergent Behaviour	Emergent patterns Emergent structure Nonlinear cause and effect Loose coupling
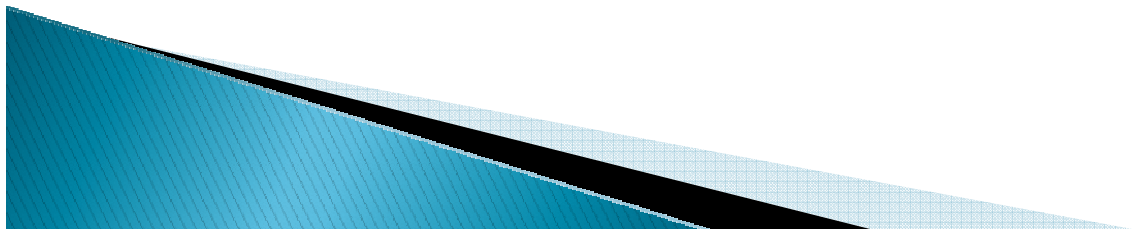
Crisis foreign policy-making as self-organisation

| Conditions for Self-organisation	High Constraint
Container	Small and few
Difference	Few
Exchange	Tight, clear
Emergent Behaviour	Predictable pattern, rigid structure Clear cause and effect Tight coupling
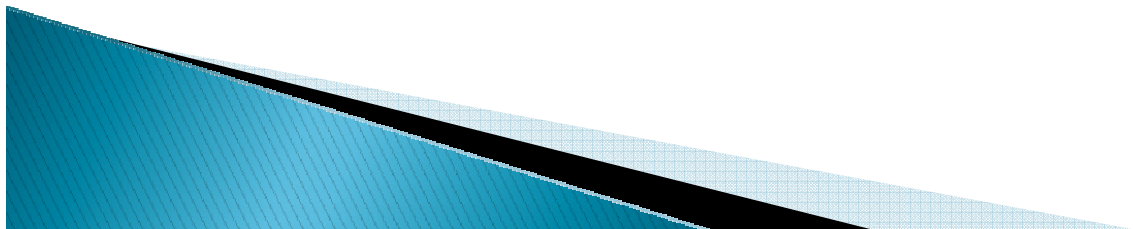
Result: Development of simple policy

Gather data:	Who are the terrorist organisations of global reach and where are they located?
Analyze data:	What can be done to defeat these groups?
Formulate solution:	Develop policy (military action, regime change, install liberal democracy
Implement solution:	Implement policy
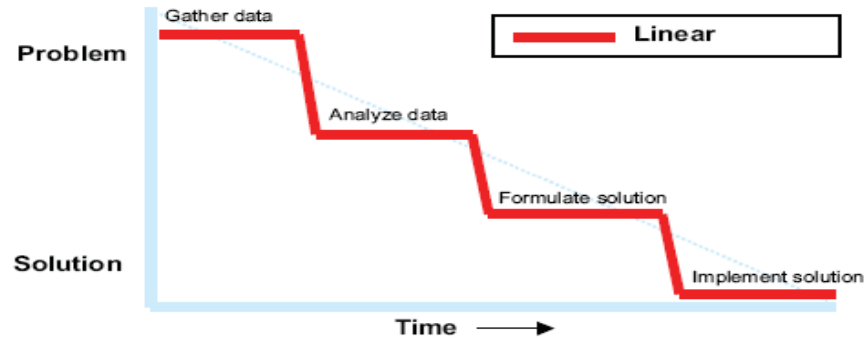
Impact of long-lasting centralisation on self-organisation

Conditions for Self-organisation	Normal times (medium constraint)	Crisis High Constraint (desired)	Maintenance of crisis mode over time (consequence, low constraint)
Container	Many and entangled:	Few	Large and many
Difference	Many, some significant	Few	Innumerable
Exchange	Loose and ambiguous	Tight, clear	Arbitrary and meaningless
Emergent Behaviour	Emergent patterns and structure, complex cause and effect, loose coupling	Fast decision-making, unambiguous, clarity of pattern	Uncoupling Random No cause and effect
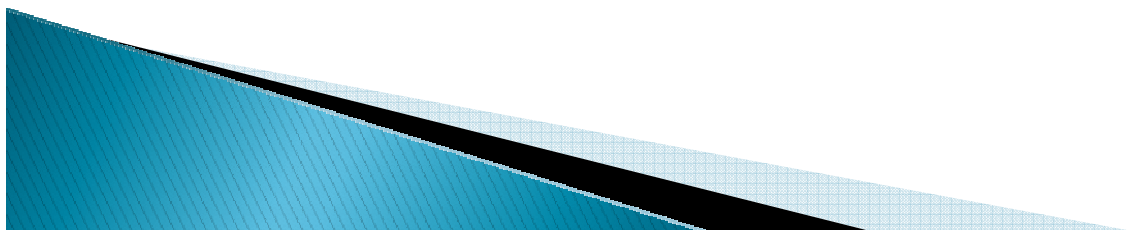
Conclusions

The above conclusion requires a re-assessment of both the role of political leaders and the political systems they have to work in. Any crisis policy-making system needs to focus on ensuring:

- Flexibility in order to be able to respond to changing circumstances across time and space
- Ability to embrace differing and changing methods and tools as a situation develops
- Realism in terms of what any policy can achieve
- Ability to adjust objectives accordingly in order to *facilitate* and *enable* a process of self-organisation