Effect of the 2018 Martian global dust storm on the CO2 density in the lower nightside thermosphere observed from MAVEN/IUVS Lyman-α absorption

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Abstract

The Imaging Ultraviolet Spectrograph (IUVS) on the Mars Atmosphere and Volatile EvolutioN (MAVEN) mission measures Lyman-α emissions from interplanetary and martian hydrogen at the limb and through the extended corona of the planet. In June 2018, an intense global dust storm surrounded Mars for a few months, heating the lower atmosphere and leading to an expansion of the Martian atmosphere of few kilometers in the thermosphere. Nightside IUVS observations before and throughout this Planet Encircling Dust Event (PEDE) showed the altitude of CO2 absorption of Lyman-α photons in the lower thermosphere to increase by 4.5±1.0 km on 8 June 2018. This altitude shift is attributed to an increase of the CO2 density by a factor 1.9±0.2 at 110 km due to the heating of the lower atmosphere during the large dust storm occurring at the surface of Mars. These nightside observations, not previously used to study dust storms, in an altitude range not sampled by other instruments, are consistent with dayside MAVEN observations and allow for more comprehensive determination of the global changes produced by the PEDE event on the Martian thermosphere.

2. Method

For each orbit, Six inbound limb scans are done in each orbit with a sampling of approximately 10 km. 7 spatial bins are transmitted per limb scan, leading to 42 individual limb profiles per orbit (Figure 1).

Figure 1 : Left : Vertical profiles of the H Lyman-α brightness measured at limb between 40 and 200 km for each of 7 spatial bins. Right average profile with a vertical resolution of 8 km.

By analogy with stellar occultations, we can calculate the average vertical profile of a transmission function (Figure 2), independent on the absolute calibration of the instrument. Each average transmission profile is fitted with a simple analytical function assuming an isothermal layer between 110 and 160 km, and a spherically symmetric atmosphere near the limb.
3. Effect of the global dust storm and systematic source of errors

The altitude where the slant CO$_2$ optical thickness is equal to 1 is shown in Figure 3a for the full set of observations. The two free parameters of the fit (Temperature and CO$_2$ density at 110 km) are compared to the values from the Mars Climate Database (red) (Figure 3b, 3c). The temperature uncertainty is large and the variations could be due to the noise. If we assume a constant average temperature during all the periods, the CO$_2$ density at 110 km (Figure 3d) follows the altitude of the absorption.

An increase of the altitude of the absorption layer from 114.5±0.5 km (before Ls = 189$^\circ$) to 119.0±0.5 km (after Ls = 189$^\circ$). No temperature variations is detected while an increase of the CO$_2$ density of 1.9±0.2 is derived. This increase is probably due to an expansion of the Martian atmosphere driven by the heating of the lower atmosphere by the global dust storm. Several assumptions can lead to systematic errors in the derived values. The uncertainty from the isothermal assumption has been estimated using profiles from stellar occultation or MCD, and its effect on the altitude of absorption is estimated to less than 2 km. The uncertainty on the pointing could shift the absorption altitude by few km but if this error is systematic it should not change the shift in altitude observed near 8 June 2018.

4. Summary and Conclusions

A increase by 4.5±1 km of the altitude of the Lyman-α absorption layer is observed on 8 June 2018. At this time an increase of the dayglow peak altitude was also observed at the dayside near MAVEN periapsis and the CO$_2$ density increase is also detected by the NAVCAM instrument. This increase is due to the heating of the lower atmosphere during the global dust storm. This analysis confirms the global effect of the PEDE on the nightside thermosphere of Mars at altitudes not sampled by other instruments and will provide additional constraints to better understand the dynamics and heating distribution associated with such events. It also confirms the possibility to derive quantitative information on the CO$_2$ density from Lyman-α absorption at the nightside.

Acknowledgements

This work and the MAVEN project are supported by NASA through the Mars Exploration Program. J-Y. Chaufray is supported by the Centre National d’Etudes Spatiales

References