

Diplomatic Afterlives

ANDREW F. COOPER



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—— Andrew F. Cooper ——

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vi
1 Former Leaders on the Global Stage	1
2 The Prototypical Model	19
3 A Contested Reinvention	45
4 Salvaging or Savaging Reputations?	71
5 Leveraging Iconic Status	99
6 Building Network Power	124
7 Taking Hyper-Empowered Individuals Seriously	156
<i>Notes</i>	172
<i>Index</i>	190

Preface

An increasing number of former leaders have demonstrated that they both seek and possess extended diplomatic after-lives. Breaking free of an exclusive association with the statecentric system, a hybrid form of actor – both insider and freelance diplomat – has emerged. From Nelson Mandela to Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, to Tony Blair and Mikhail Gorbachev, these highly empowered individuals increasingly work to make a difference on the global stage by capitalizing on their celebrity status while building on their embedded club attributes and connections.

The methods deployed through their initiatives may still be hierarchical but are more inclusive as well as harmonious with the increasingly dispersed nature of authority. The agenda privileged by these networks covers an extended domain, including poverty alleviation, health and disease control, and crisis prevention; much of the work involved has shifted beyond the recognized power centers.

The concept grounding this book is that the contributions of these former leaders need to be recognized and examined seriously as operational boundary-spanners. The growing literature on ideational and policy networks

highlights the contribution of nongovernmental organizations, especially functions taken on by civil-society organizations and business groups. The role of hyper-empowered individuals generally, and former leaders more specifically, however, remains unexamined, notwithstanding their unique set of advantages in terms of global projection.

If this innovative cluster has taken on numerous new roles and responsibilities in the twenty-first century, however, their activities are not uncontested. Ex-leaders use their diplomatic afterlife as a form of rehabilitation or compensation for political unpopularity and policy failure when they were in office. Moreover, some major former leaders can be criticized for mixing public goods and private material benefits. The image of policy-directed and norm entrepreneurship in the international arena blends with the perception that this form of activity can be both opportunistic and lacking accountability in practice.

The course from the initial idea to the completion of this book spanned two visiting appointments, my selection as Canada–US Fulbright Research Chair, Center on Public Diplomacy, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, University of Southern California, Los Angeles in 2009 and my appointment as Senior Fellow, Centre for Global Cooperation Research (CGCR), Duisburg, Germany in 2014. My research as Fulbright Chair related to the role of norm entrepreneurs, and my focus at CGCR dealt with the ascendancy of informality in global governance: topics that underscored the wider context of the Diplomatic Afterlives project. My targeted focus on the connections/disconnects between conventional and unconventional diplomacy was stimulated by my time as Associate Director and Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI). This interest was embellished in turn by my academic activities at the Department of Political Science, University of Waterloo and the Balsillie School of International Affairs.

In my attempt to forge a nexus between intellectual analysis and global practice, I have benefited from a highly

stimulating and productive relationship with Jorge Heine and Ramesh Thakur, with whom I co-edited the ambitious *Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* in 2013, after four and a half years of sustained research. Among the larger group of scholars and practitioners I have benefited from interacting with over the years have been Brian Hocking, Iver Neumann, Vincent Pouliot, Sharon Pardo, Michael Hawes, Geoff Pigman, Bill Maley, Sir Nicholas Bayne, John Kirton, Daniel Drache, Greg Chin, and Alan Alexandroff.

Eric Helleiner, Gerry Boychuk, Will Coleman, and Bessma Momani, to name just a few, have made the Department of Political Science a congenial academic home. I benefited from interacting with, among others, Geoff Wiseman at USC, and Dirk Messner, Silke Weinlich, Markus Böckenförde, and Abou Jeng at CGCR.

Throughout the research and writing process I am grateful to have worked with a number of talented research assistants. At USC, where I taught a course on unconventional diplomacy, Danielle Kelton did some first-rate preliminary research. At CIGI and BSIA, Tahnee Prior supplemented this research process in an impressive fashion, as did Andy Chater, Dan Herman, Asif Farooq, Amanda Sadowski, Ryan Hilimoniuk, and Jasmine Bélanger-Gulick at the University of Waterloo.

The catalyst for this book has been Louise Knight at Polity Press, who enthusiastically championed this project from the outset. I have very much appreciated her work in guiding the book to completion, along with the editorial team with David Winters initially and then Pascal Porcheron managing the project.

My final thanks, as in my entire repertoire of writings, are to my partner Sarah Maddocks. Although always interested in where my intellectual enthusiasms are taking me, she made sure that a balance existed between thinking about Diplomatic Afterlives and the practice of everyday life. It is to her I dedicate this book.

“I got out of politics early enough to have a second act in life. Why shouldn’t a politician be able to do that?”

Tony Blair, December 2009,
in an interview with the *Sunday Times*.

Former Leaders on the Global Stage

The recognition that leaders have an exceptional status in public affairs is far from novel. What is new is the manner by which leaders extend the global span of their influence after their term of office is over. Traditionally, if leaders had an “afterlife,” it was animated in one of two ways. In the public sphere, former leaders guided national debate over strategic purpose as wise counselors. Lee Kuan Yew, the architect of the dynamic modern Singaporean state, served as an exemplar of this approach.¹ But across a wide variety of countries, both democratic and nondemocratic, the phenomenon of former leaders playing formidable behind-the-scenes roles is widely embedded. Some perform this role as quintessential insiders, influencing big moments of national transition. Contradicting the image of wholesale generational change at the Chinese Communist Party’s Eighteenth National Congress held in Beijing during November 2012 was the visible presence of Jiang Zemin, the former General Secretary of the Communist Party (1989–2002). Others such as Margaret Thatcher devoted their post-leadership years to acting as robust if awkward defenders of their own ideological legacies, uniting their loyalists but dividing their parties. From the time she left

office in November 1990, Thatcher was a polarizing figure in the Conservative party: “While declaring repeatedly that she wants to do nothing to make [her successor’s] life miserable, she has done nothing but that.”²

In the private sphere, a number of former leaders have concentrated on enhancing their own material positions. The phrase “dash for cash” was coined to describe the actions of Bob Hawke, the Australian Prime Minister (1983–1991), who focused exclusively in his post-political years to building up the wealth that was not available to him as either a trade union leader or Labor party politician.³ Indeed, Hawke’s commercially oriented consulting activities proved extremely lucrative, especially those focused on building economic connections to China. Although considered a path-breaker as a go-between for entrepreneurs, Hawke was far from alone. A cluster of former leaders had formal associations with The Carlyle Group, the high-profile global asset management firm specializing in private equity dealmaking. George H. W. Bush is the best known of this group, serving as Senior Advisor to the Carlyle Asia Advisory Board from April 1998 to October 2003. The global reach of this pattern of engagement, however, was extended through the connections built up by John Major, the former British Prime Minister, who acted as Chair, Carlyle Europe in the period from 2001–4, as well as Anand Panyarachun and Thaksin Shinawatra, former Prime Ministers of Thailand, and Fidel Ramos, former Prime Minister of the Philippines, all members of the Carlyle Asia Advisory Board until it was disbanded in 2004.

If still meriting notice, this kind of engagement has a backward-looking, restrictive feel, evoking an accentuated concentric ring of activity. Although their post-retirement endeavors contained a significant international reach, the former leaders in the policy influencer segment remained trapped by the state-centric system in which they had been pivotal players.⁴ Their frame of reference was and continued to be the national interest of their particular countries.

They were thoroughly embedded in the traditional “club” system in which communication and other forms of interaction remained targeted exclusively on members of their successor peer group. They predictably clung to state-based privileges. After stepping down as prime minister Lee Kuan Yew served as Senior Minister from 1990 to 2004. Thatcher used the House of Lords as a formidable bully pulpit.

The materially driven were different not so much in motivation but in terms of scale of reward and projection from a wide number of antecedents. A small number of ex-US presidents tried to cash in on their fame even before the late twentieth century. Ulysses Grant, after embarking on a two-year global tour, became a principal in the establishment of the newly formed Mexican Southern Railroad Co., an enterprise that eventually failed. He then resorted to writing a memoir, as other civil war generals had done. In a similar vein Calvin Coolidge was appointed to a directorship on the board of the New York Life Insurance Company.⁵

What makes the extended reach of former leaders more fascinating and salient, albeit also more ambiguous, is the reinvention of the approach through a different style and substantive way of doing things. Through such a shape-shifting, the top tier of this newer, more dynamic wave has taken on hybrid personae, situated in the nexus between traditional club membership and transnational diplomacy. The core members of this twenty-first century wave – mega-individuals such as Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, Mikhail Gorbachev, Tony Blair, and, up to his death in 2013, the iconic Nelson Mandela – retain many of the characteristics of privileged members of the state-centric circle. No less than Lee Kuan Yew or Margaret Thatcher, they retained access to their successor peer group in office as well as other important decision-makers entrenched within the extended state apparatus. Yet, released from the restrictions of a closed culture dominated by hierarchy and imperatives of secrecy, these same individuals tapped into

a much larger network of actors with different modes of representation and identity definition.

In terms of purpose, these former leaders stepped beyond the narrow confines of interest-based decision-making to a more ambitious and open-ended ideational/normative approach based on a project of advancing tenets of transnational social purpose. They could lever their state-based connections through various forms of troubleshooting diplomacy, via mediation and election monitoring. Isolation in an exclusive political culture is replaced by some components of a globally oriented project via the delivery of select public goods.

To signal the magnitude of this break is not to suggest that it took place as a decisive rupture rather than an incremental process of change. Some signs of a different configuration, a reinvented brand for ex-leaders, predated the rise of the newer, more dynamic and inter-connected cluster. It is striking that the most commercially oriented former leaders sought to offset the instrumental image by directing attention to work they did for the advancement of international cooperation. Bob Hawke, looking beyond his years in politics, pointed to his contribution to the establishment of the Boao Forum as an Asian equivalent to the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF), as an endorsement of his commitment to social purpose. Gerhard Schröder, the former German Chancellor, more clumsily sought to compensate for his own controversial tilt toward the dash for cash by references to his performance as a statesman who stood up to George W. Bush during the 2003 Iraq invasion. In adopting such a counternarrative he brought to the fore the sharp juxtaposition between his longstanding reputation as a principled politician and the opprobrium attaching to an ex-leader dismissed by the chair of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs as a “political prostitute” for his willingness to sell his services to the Russian state company Gazprom as head of the shareholders’ committee of Nord Stream.⁶

Other policy influencers also signaled that they could combine conviction politics and dash-for-cash practices. As a harbinger of what was to come in the afterlives of Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, and Mikhail Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher broke new ground not only in creating the first personal foundation created by an ex-leader (the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, to promote the ideals of the former prime minister)⁷ but in the size of the fees that she was able to extract for her speaking tours and royalties. The publication rights for her memoirs brought between \$2.5 and \$3 million, and she commanded \$50,000 an hour for speeches.⁸ On both counts she stands out as the precursor of the other piece of the duality captured in the activity to follow: the blend of a global conviction trajectory with material self-enhancement.

The extended approach transcended the attributes and persona of the first disjointed cluster. Not only were there a much larger number of engaged former leaders, they were far more willing to go beyond the gatekeeper model of diplomatic activity. One difference was simply the number of former leaders who took on this hybrid status. The policy influencers in the first cluster, as mentioned, stayed firmly entrenched in their national institutions. In doing so, they continued to be connected to the dominant club culture. Yet, as seen in the activities of Margaret Thatcher, attempts to juggle the defense of an ideological/political legacy with the extraction of material resources proved awkward when framed in the context of national interest. By contrast, the embrace of the global provided some degree of legitimacy for the approach, with a demonstration effect for other former leaders to become involved.

Another point of divergence is the nature of their public personalities. The big individuals of the traditional cluster certainly held some core elements of celebrity status, but it was a status that was based narrowly (albeit impressively) on national political leadership. In some cases, it adhered tightly to a framework of achievement in which

celebrity status is earned by doing, through the projection of ample amounts of skill and talent. The members of the new wave retained this achievement component, but embellished it via the addition of an emphasis on the projection of a transnational public image. Within the framework of the hybrid approach, authority derived from state-based experience and then combined with public admiration derived from a global projection of fame.⁹

Concentration on the ascriptive connotation provides some advantages post-power, with the focus on diplomatic social purpose. With the focus of attention channeled exclusively through serious media outlets, the activities of the former leaders of the first cluster are treated substantively, with a high degree of gravitas cum contestation. The only time that members of this cluster grabbed attention in the popular media was when they – or their family members or close circle – got caught up in some sensitive life situation. The asymmetrical nature of this scrutiny was evident in the case of Margaret Thatcher, when her son was arrested in South Africa in 2004 for allegedly planning a coup in Equatorial Guinea; or when her daughter Carol released two books, the first of which (in 1996) criticized Thatcher's skills as a mother and the second (in 2008, with some of the themes that came out in the movie, *The Iron Lady*) confirming that she suffered from dementia.

The personae of the former leaders at the core of the new approach, however, correspond to the image of celebrities more generically, both users of and targets for an abundance of continuous attention from a wide variety of media sources. Unlike the traditional cluster, who were tied to the statecentric club culture as a barometer for their sense of identity, authority, and legitimacy, the reconfigured approach was linked to a sense of credibility beyond the state. What stands out is the appreciation of the integral connection between their instrumental activities in the afterlife with their ability to deliver spectacle in the performance of global star turns. A codependency developed

between the nature of their performances and the nature of their image as mega-individuals.

The stretched-out sense of hybridity between what can be termed (to build on Thomas Friedman's label) super- or hyper-empowered individualism, building on the personalism of the older cohort, but interjecting a focus on the ability "to act much more directly and much more powerfully" on the world stage at the heart of the reinvented model.¹⁰ Building on but extending the model of country-specific or localistic leadership, a great deal of emphasis on the hyper-empowered individualism component centered on the extended transformation of an upwardly mobile aspirant to the "extraordinary" persona positioned in the transnational public sphere. Here references to Jimmy Carter as the peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia; Bill Clinton, as the boy from Hope, Arkansas; and Tony Blair as "a regular guy" with lots of interests outside of politics,¹¹ maintain their relevance. What is different in the reconfigured approach of former leaders' activity is that these personal attributes are married in varied formats to strong and sustained network power.

Given their entrapment within national institutional structures, the traditional cohort had no incentive to break out into freelance transnational activity. Externally Lee Kuan Yew was able to exert considerable leverage post-formal retirement from the US (meeting and counseling every president from Richard Nixon to Barack Obama) to China. Internally, with the accolade of "Minister Mentor" accorded to him by his son Lee Hsien Loong when the latter became Singapore's third prime minister in 2004, Lee Kuan Yew extended his links with the state. Nor could this older expression of ex-leader activity mesh easily with the network age. Here the experience of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation is an illuminating illustration. Instead of building a professional operation, the foundation retained a family-based structure. Margaret Thatcher's son Mark played an active role and a year after its opening the foundation was still without permanent

staff or headquarters. In such an atmosphere the ambitious plans, most notably for commissioned research and distribution of educational grants, and assistance to the former Communist states of central and Eastern Europe, stalled. By the end of 1994 the foundation had given away just 10 percent of monies collected.¹²

By contrast, the authority and legitimacy of the hyper-empowered individuals at the core of the reinvented approach were leveraged after their formal retirement by the image of them as both insiders and outsiders with huge organizational capacity and well-established sets of contacts and resources outside as well as inside the state system. Instead of restricting their activities to the stereotypes of what former leaders might be expected to do – symbolic meetings with current leaders and the production of policy advice either publically (via op eds) or privately (through privileged access) – this new cluster wanted to deliver tangible results across a wider array of geographic and functional domains.

In putting this script into operation, the hyper-empowered individuals at the core of the reconfigured approach have carved out, in mediation, a distinctive but derivative niche. Again, there are elements of continuity in this form of activity. Teddy Roosevelt intervened to find an end to the 1905 war between Russia and Japan – and won the Nobel Peace Prize for attaining this goal via the Treaty of Portsmouth. Prominent business leaders such as Armand Hammer, the CEO of Occidental Petroleum Co., acted as go-betweens in the Cold War era – although the impact of such figures is debated. And specific conflicts have seen the mobilization of a wide range of mediators, state and non-state, ranging from trusted personal advisors of leaders, ambassadors at large, and respected academics, as well as UN special representatives. What is new is the scale and geographic scope of this form of activity.

Former leaders mix the traditional role for mega-individuals with an innovative mode of operation as norm and policy entrepreneurs. In terms of extended hybridity, they

straddle not only the closed world of the diplomatic club culture but the diverse worlds of nonstate actors. They replicate the trajectory in the world of business: “Entrepreneurs may act individually, but often they create organizations or networks for propagating their ideas.”¹³

The twist in the mode of operation by former leaders is that unlike many other norm and policy entrepreneurs the top-tier former leaders were not molded by the structure of the organization that they were part of, with the organization providing a platform for the individual entrepreneurs by prescribing a certain way of using information, knowledge, and expertise.¹⁴ Indeed, this is a key source of difference as well between the freelance orientation of Carter, Clinton, Gorbachev, Blair, and Mandela and a wider subset of other former leaders that embraced more formal means of global animation. In contrast to the mode of activity adopted by these other clusters, the former leaders at the core of this book created organizations designed to enhance their personal imprint in terms of agency, to give them day-to-day control over all of the workings of their personalized foundations.

Conceptually as well as operationally, the top-tier cluster of former leaders can be depicted as bridging the spectrum between the worlds of public and private authority. Research on the expanding influence of private authority has focused almost uniformly on the link between this phenomenon and the extension of organizational complexity as located in business, civil society, and especially regulatory bodies.¹⁵ Such a perspective, nonetheless, forms only part of the analysis. Big individual actors must be interjected into the structure, as they have the ability to shape some aspects of global affairs according to their own preferences. In terms of agency the new cluster of former leaders have the advantage of access not at the domestic level but at an accentuated transnational level. Moreover they have a greater ability to transcend complexity through the impact of spectacle.¹⁶ That is to say, the reconfigured approach is premised on the fact that the top-tier former

leaders can leverage substantive advantages not only because they have insider status in terms of elite policy but because they have a high degree of attention-grabbing status among the wider public, a combination unavailable to other actors.

Setting the Context for Bringing Former Leaders In

The orthodox International Relations literature has severely neglected if not shut out completely the role of individuals, the so-called first image of international politics. Structure trumps agency generally and individual agency in particular. This neglect is most explicit in the parsimony associated with the “black box” treatment of state actors so vital in neorealism.¹⁷ But other schools of thought also downplay the role of the individual, though perhaps not as rigidly. Liberal institutionalists emphasize the salience of state preferences.¹⁸ Unlike in formal economics, individuals are in the mix – commonly as actors that shape preferences – but they are not given extensive, nuanced expression. Even social constructivists who privilege the creation of norms – or the reconstruction of norms – through a recognition of the creative nature of human agency have put the onus on transnational advocacy networks without much consideration of the individual dimension.

The exceptions to this rule are those studies that locate leaders at the apex of authority in either national state settings or as heads of formal institutions. A huge literature exists concerning the psychological as well as the social characteristics of leaders in a statecentric context, with a bias toward those in command and control positions in large powerful countries.¹⁹ Integrating work that links ideas and institutional change has also become available, with an appreciation of the role of key individuals at