

THE PRESIDENT AS WORLD LEADER



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**For Ernest F. Kellerman,
whose veneration of Franklin Roosevelt and
his comrade in leadership, Winston Churchill,
was the source.**

BLK

and

For Gerard, Madeleine, Christine, and Paul

RJB

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Preface

As described in Kellerman's book, *The Political Presidency: Practice of Leadership*, four of the six most recent presidents—John Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter—failed to exercise leadership on behalf of the domestic priority that each had deemed most important.¹ What, we wondered, were the implications of this finding for American foreign policy? If American presidents had so much trouble leading at home, in a contained environment with which they were ostensibly familiar, how could they ever exercise leadership abroad? Could it be that different skills come into play in domestic and foreign affairs, that the same president might be successful as a leader in one domain but not in the other? If so, why? And if not, does that compel us to conclude that Americans frequently elect presidents who are simply incompetent as leaders both at home and abroad?

Once again the issue is not whether our presidents are wise, clever, or just. Rather, the focus is on their ability to get others to follow where they lead. *The President as World Leader* explores how effectively five recent executives shaped the American foreign policy process with regard to at least one major initiative and affected attitudes and events relating to this initiative beyond America's borders. We know that in the American political system the president is ultimately responsible for formulating, articulating, and implementing foreign policy. We also know that simply by virtue of the fact that the chief executive holds the highest office in one of the most powerful countries in the world, his global influence is thought to be extensive. But we have never really done comparative studies of how presidents accomplish, or fail to accomplish, their foreign policy tasks. Nor have we compared their effectiveness as agents of change at the international level.

In "The Two Presidencies," written two decades ago, Aaron Wildavsky explored the differences between the president's role in domestic and foreign politics. "The President's normal problem with domestic policy is to get congressional support for the program he prefers," Wildavsky wrote. "In foreign affairs, in contrast, he can almost always get support for policies that he believes will protect the nation. . . ."² Wildavsky's essay presaged the findings in *The Political Presidency*, which confirm that in order for presidents to exert leadership in the domestic arena, they must demonstrate political skills that go well beyond those it takes to get elected. What remains to be seen, however, is whether in fact presidents "can almost always get support" for the programs they really want in defense and foreign policy. What also remains to be determined is the extent to which leadership in American foreign policy is synonymous with leadership in world politics. For there is no reason

to assume automatically that presidents who are able to influence domestic political elites will be able as well to influence political elites in other countries. In fact, these second "influence relationships" tend to be of a quite different nature. For example, when the president tries to get another national leader to follow his lead, what we have is not a leader-follower relationship in any conventional sense. Instead, a leader-leader relationship is forged, in which both parties are ostensibly equals, with few, if any, cultural or historical ties to bind them.

Moreover, times have changed since Wildavsky developed his "two presidencies" argument. At home, the post-World War II consensus on foreign policy has given way to post-Vietnam dissension.³ And the international environment has changed in ways that reduce rather than enhance opportunities for leadership on a global scale. Among the recent changes that have taken place are: the stunning decline of communism worldwide, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union; the waning of the cold war; an increase in the number of sovereign states; growth in the relative military strength of the major powers; proliferation of nuclear weapons; the increasing independence and militancy of Third World countries; and the declining position of the U.S. in the global economy.

Presidential leadership in world politics, then, is a two-step process. Step one consists of shaping and articulating foreign policy; step two consists of implementing that policy and then managing the consequences. Put another way, in order to be a leader in world politics the president must first exercise leadership at home. And then he must exercise leadership abroad.

To shed light on how these very different leadership tasks can be met, this book focuses on three key elements: the leader, the followers, and the situation. We address such questions as:

- What is the president's role? What is the scope of his authority? What is his personality like? What leadership skills does he have? And what are his sources of power?
- Who are the followers? What is the nature of their relationship to the president? What motivates them to go along with his attempts at direction? Or, alternatively, why do they ignore or even resist him?
- What are the domestic and international contexts within which the leadership process is taking place? What is the long-range history pertaining to this particular issue? And what are the tasks and demands immediately at hand?

Part I of this book responds to the above questions by exploring the contextual and personal aspects of leadership. The focus is on the domestic and global environments within which the president must lead if he is to make his mark on world politics; on those whom he would have as followers; and on the president himself. Chapter 1 is thus devoted to a broad-based discussion of the international environment. It argues that while America's position is still very powerful relative to that of most other nations, it has both political and economic competitors with whom it must inevitably reckon. Chapter 2 is an overview of American foreign policy since the beginning of the Republic. It provides some of the history with which contemporary presidents must contend if they are to lead effectively in foreign affairs. Chapter 3 looks

directly at the president's role in the making of American foreign policy. What becomes clear, above all, is that despite the president's role as chief initiator and architect of foreign policy, there remain considerable constitutional and legal constraints on the executive's freedom to act. Chapter 4 addresses the personal and psychological dimensions of presidential leadership and then places these in the context of the international environment. It explores how a president can marshal forces on his own behalf in relationship to key players at home and abroad.

Part II of the book narrows the focus. Here the material presented in Part I becomes background for case studies of presidential leadership in world politics over the last quarter century. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Carter, and Reagan are scrutinized in terms of how well they led the nation and the world with regard to a foreign policy goal in which they were heavily invested.* In particular, we ask whether the president's goal was clearly articulated and communicated; how energetically he used his authority and exercised power and influence; which tactics of power, authority, and influence he employed; what motivated domestic and foreign constituencies to accept, or reject, his attempt to lead; which sources of power, authority, and influence were most effective; and whether implementation was in fact accomplished.

We selected the cases according to three criteria: First, we asked what the president himself, at the outset of his White House tenure, claimed was most important. In at least one administration—Kennedy's—the foreign policy initiative he insisted was most important—the Alliance for Progress—was, arguably, not. But of the fact that Kennedy, like the other presidents, staked his reputation on the Alliance, invested major resources in ushering it through the policy-making process, and came back to it time and again, there is no doubt.

A second criterion for selection was that the case had to be an example of *directive leadership*—that is, of leadership that gave evidence of the president as an initiator rather than merely as a responder to events imposed on him from outside.

Finally, the case had to be an example of how leadership in foreign policy is exercised under *routine*, or noncrisis, conditions. Routine conditions may be defined as those in which problems abound but no single one is perceived as presenting an imminent threat to the national welfare. Under such circumstances there is generally no domestic consensus on which of the many pressing foreign policy issues should take priority, or even on how to address fundamental and enduring concerns such as how to reduce the threat of nuclear war. In short, each case study is an example of how presidents led, or tried to, in domestic environments in which there was no clear or widely agreed-on foreign policy agenda.

The case studies (chapters 5–9) are divided into four sections. The first provides a context for the particular case by describing the leadership tactics and strategies with which the president was generally associated and by demonstrating how his *Weltanschauung*, or view of the world, shaped his foreign policy agenda.

The second section moves on to the facts of the case at hand. It chronicles

*Probably due to the unusual circumstances under which Gerald Ford became president (which dictated an overriding emphasis on resecuring a sense of normalcy at home), as well as his short tenure, it is impossible to identify a major foreign policy initiative during his administration. He is not, therefore, a subject of this book.

what happened on the domestic front with regard to what was, during the early years of his administration, the president's most important foreign policy initiative. In particular, it reveals how the executive tried to mobilize the support of key groups and individuals—within the administration as well as outside it—on behalf of what was deemed a top priority.

The third section of each case study contains an analysis of the president's leadership at the international level. As we will see, American presidents, for all their power and influence relative to other national leaders, find directive leadership in world politics to be difficult at best. Power is usually costly to assert, influence is typically in short supply, and formal authority is nonexistent.

The final section of each case study consists of an analysis and assessment of the president's capacities as world leader. Was he ultimately an agent of change? If so, to what can we attribute his effectiveness? Conversely, if the goal remained elusive, to what should we attribute the president's failure?

The book closes with a chapter that comments on the effectiveness of particular presidents as foreign policy leaders, compares them and the changing environments within which they conducted foreign affairs, and offers a few conclusions about the American president as world leader in the late twentieth century. An epilogue on George Bush constitutes the last word.

No single case study of leadership in foreign affairs should be considered a judgment on overall presidential competence. Different cases suggest different conclusions, and every president has a broad range of issues to which he in one way or another responds. In particular, chief executives generally have more than one foreign policy initiative in which they are invested. The case studies in this book, then, are descriptive rather than definitive. Together with the material in Part I, they shed light on how the constellation of leader, followers, and situation interact to promote—or resist—political change at the international level. They also allow us to make at least preliminary comparisons, for while the differences among presidents and the situations they encountered necessarily outweighed the similarities, the leadership task itself suggests certain commonalities: How accurately were circumstances assessed? How well drawn was the agenda for change? And how successfully were followers engaged?

Our canvas is large, for we are talking about leadership in foreign policy and international relations and about political actors at home and abroad. Given the rapidly changing nature of world politics, the lessons learned on how one person can make a big difference—or fail to—should be of practical as well as theoretical consequence.

NOTES

1. Barbara Kellerman, *The Political Presidency: Practice of Leadership* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

2. Aaron Wildavsky, "The Two Presidencies," *Trans-Action* 4 no. 2 (December 1966).

3. For an elaboration of this theme, see, for example, I. M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984).

*The transaction of business with foreign
nations is executive altogether.*

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

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Part I

THE BIG PICTURE: Presidential Leadership in World Politics

The International Environment

When the First Congress of the United States met in 1789, it brought to life the government created in the Constitution. Among its first concerns were the title, salary, and protocol for the president.¹ While Americans did not want a king, they believed that their Republic's leader would be respected at home and abroad only if he were vested with the familiar trappings of authority. Thus the president was given a large salary (\$25,000), a grand house was ordered for his residence, and certain rules of etiquette were established to separate him from other citizens—although the House of Representatives ultimately rejected a Senate proposal to address the chief executive as “His Highness the President of the United States.”²

The founders' attention to the dignity of the executive highlights the fact that the president has always been much more than the key figure in national politics. He has been a leader of international prominence as well. Even in those early days of the Republic, the president was a player in the realm of international politics—a peer of kings. The “two presidencies” thus has its roots in the very nature of the office itself. Inevitably, the chief executive was then as he is now: the United States' most important link to the world outside.

This outside world has undergone considerable change since America's founding period, but its essential elements have remained the same. Let us then proceed to examine the international environment and America's place in it in the late twentieth century.

THE STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Today's international political order has its roots in the diplomatic settlement concluded among the European powers after the defeat of Napoleon. The Congress of Vienna (1815), which arranged the settlement, provided that no single government would rule world affairs. Neither the old Holy Roman Empire nor Napoleon's French empire would be replaced by other regimes that would seek world dominance. International politics, which at the time meant European politics, would be conducted among national states bound together only by voluntary arrangements and a code of diplomatic behavior.³

But the patterns and habits of world politics in the nineteenth century were transformed in the twentieth. Two world wars and the tensions of the

U.S.-Soviet "cold war" inevitably left their mark.⁴ The "superpowers" divided the world into spheres of influence and struggled for dominance among developing nations. During this period, American foreign policy was directed toward the containment of Soviet influence around the globe as Moscow supported revolutionary and anti-American movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The United States used force to intervene in Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic in attempts to halt the spread of communism. However, since both sides possessed enormously powerful weapons and feared the consequences of a nuclear war, direct conflict between the superpowers was avoided.

Eventually, changing circumstances eased U.S.-Soviet tensions. The growth of nuclear arsenals alarmed not only Soviet and American policymakers but the rest of the world as well. Moreover, each of the superpowers saw a need for greater cooperation: the United States hoped that the Soviet Union could assist it in resolving the Vietnam conflict and reduce the risk of war in the Middle East; for its part, Moscow desired trade with Western nations to provide food and shore up its weakening economy. Each side remained wary of the other, most especially during Ronald Reagan's first term, but by the late 1980s the superpowers had come to see even greater benefits from warmer relations. Soviet leaders faced growing popular demands for consumer goods and a higher standard of living, which could be purchased only by reducing Moscow's heavy commitment to defense spending. At the same time, American officials were under pressure to reduce the nation's large budget deficit, which also required trimming military expenditures.

During the last decade in particular, international relations have been in transition from the bipolar politics of the cold war to a situation of complexity and fragmented power. The allies of the superpowers have felt increasingly free to develop their own independent foreign policies toward the rest of the world. In the early 1980s, for example, West Germany and several other European nations encouraged construction of a Soviet natural gas pipeline to the West, despite American objections. Political and economic power has also become more diffuse. Japan is the most outstanding example of a country that, through its economic prowess, has come to play a major political role as well. A "Third World" of developing nations, most former colonies of the European powers, has grown in number and importance. And the United States, once confident in its role as the capital of the noncommunist world, searched for a new definition of its role in a rapidly changing environment.

Despite these changes, however, the essential structure of the international environment remains the same. The most fundamental characteristic of world politics is *anarchy*, that is, the absence of an overarching government to establish and maintain order. World politics resembles what eighteenth-century thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke called the "state of nature." It is not a state of chaos, but one in which certain conditions prevail: relations between individual states are regulated by force and/or voluntary cooperation; conflict is frequently used to settle disputes; and whatever "rules" exist (whether diplomatic protocol or international law) are essentially customary in nature and enforceable only to the extent of the willingness of the parties involved to obey those rules.⁵

International anarchy does not mean that world politics is a constant

“war of all against all.” But it does mean that there is no appeal to a central authority that can ensure justice, peace, and order. Each unit in the environment must therefore rely on self-help and/or on the voluntary (and often self-interested) help of others.

Two types of units participate in international affairs: The first, states, are by far the most important actors in world politics. The second, nonstate actors—groups or organizations that play a role in world politics but do not share the characteristics of states—at times compete with them for influence over the direction of world affairs. These groups range from the United Nations (UN) and the Red Cross to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT).

Modern states share certain characteristics: First, they have a territorial basis,⁶ exercising administrative control over specific territories and all that is included within their boundaries. These boundaries may have been imposed without regard to ethnic, religious, or even geographical divisions, as in Nigeria and many other African states that were once European colonies. At the same time, borders often do parallel natural and social boundaries, as in Spain or Japan. In any case, the modern concept of the state, in contrast to ancient and medieval notions of tribal communities, is of an entity that possesses a kind of “shell” in the form of fixed borders.

Second, states possess sovereignty and political independence. Theoretically, they are free from control by other units of the international environment and exercise absolute authority over their own internal affairs. In reality, many states do not actually possess sovereignty and independence: they are “penetrated” in a variety of ways.⁷ For example, many small states rely on large ones for economic, political, and military support. Cuba depends heavily on the Soviet Union for economic survival and its protection against possible military action by the United States. Similarly, the Philippines and Israel are examples of states that depend on American economic and military aid.

Political independence is further compromised by the fact that in the late twentieth century most states in the international environment are economically interdependent. This situation results from the fact that even large, powerful states lack sufficient resources to meet all of their needs. The United States, for example, must import chrome, magnesium, and an array of minerals that are vital to the manufacture of weapons, computer hardware, and other advanced technology.

Finally, the modern state is also a national state. That is, it is the focus of group identity for its population. *Nationalism* refers to the development of strong emotional ties by individuals to the ethnic group and/or to the state to which they belong. In some states, such as the U.S. and most European countries, the *nation* and the *state* are essentially the same thing. However, in other states, such as those countries artificially created from former colonial territories, deliberate attempts have been made to develop a sense of national identity around the central government.⁸ Pakistan, for example, was formed by uniting three rival Muslim groups who were once under British rule. Since its creation in 1947, it has struggled to develop its people’s identity with the national state rather than with their own ethnic groups. The country’s difficulty in affecting such a change was highlighted by the creation of the new state of Bangladesh out of the territory of East Pakistan.