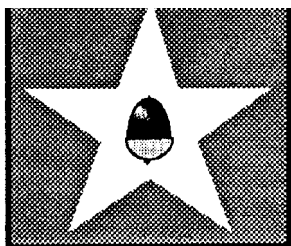


Conflict Studies Research Centre

J-L Marret

**Resolution of Conflicts &
Politico-Moral Personalities**

July 2002



M26

Resolution of Conflicts & Politico-Moral Personalities

J-L Marret

It is very common when discussing conflict resolution for us to associate famous personalities with a peace process or an *ad hoc* commission - Willi Brandt, Olaf Palme, Lord Carrington, G Harlem-Brundtland, the Aga Khan, J Nyerere and more recently Jimmy Carter or James Baker are some of the best-known examples.

Such individuals may act on their own initiative - an attempt to prolong their political existence in the case of former heads of state? A desire to restore their reputation? A self-serving gesture for their own gratification? Or are their actions based on genuinely humanitarian motives? Jimmy Carter's recent trip to Cuba lends itself to this type of analysis. These people can act as pilot fish for the States to which they belong, regardless of the links that unite them. Formal negotiations may be conducted by a well-known personality, a senior civil servant for example or a private individual with a high media profile, who acts as a State's representative in the preparation of a conciliation process between two parties (Dennis Ross and his role as special coordinator for the Middle East as part of the American diplomatic process; Richard Holbrooke in Bosnia). For its part, the UN often appoints "experts", "special representatives" or "special reporters" tasked with investigating events and preparing reports. NGOs are sometimes quicker off the mark, however, and even before the reporter arrives on site, already have a precise idea of the tolls exacted (Guatemala, Bolivia, El Salvador, Poland, Afghanistan, Iran, Cuba, Myanmar, Zaire, Yugoslavia and Rwanda). But by operating in this way, the UN renders its action symbolic, investing it with an aura of respectability and providing assurances to its member states by appointing some of their former leaders.

This mix of styles - a private individual who can act officially or unofficially on behalf of a state or simply expose a political problem and raise awareness - is symptomatic of the ambiguous nature of the status, situations and strategies of the players in the current system of international relations. This type of action differs from the old "éminences grises" (powers behind the throne). It now entails taking action that will create a stir or at the very least generate media interest, however minimal. Secrecy is no longer the objective, except if necessary when it comes to the details of the negotiations - the technical aspects of a diplomatic process which are in any case of little interest either to the media or the general public. There are various reasons why famous expertise is exploited in this way:

- A desire to benefit from the expertise and network of individuals who have often held or may hold important political office again in future. Former heads of state, former heads of government or former ministers have a greater ability to mobilise material or symbolic resources than do people of lesser stature.
- A desire to take advantage of media coverage thanks to the interest that a film star for example can generate in a particular political problem.

- The status of the mediator is a crucial factor in assessing the potential effectiveness of mediation. A series of empirical studies has shown a very clear correlation between high mediator status and the success of the mediation.¹ This is backed up by a classic law of psychosociology, which states that the loyalty and approval of a specific population (negotiators for example) are directly determined by the origin of the source and that the greater the symbolic power of this source, the greater the population's support. In plain language, this simply means that we attribute greater wisdom to well-known personalities and endow them with special virtues.
- States may unofficially prolong their diplomatic efforts by exploring difficult avenues that conflict with their traditional positions or obviate the need to recognise the over-formal links that might bind them. For their part the aggressor states may view such intervention by a celebrity as recognition by other states of their existence, interests and objectives, even if such recognition is unofficial.

In fact the fame or reputation factor, which we shall consider here as the ability to mobilise resources, in particular media and/or promotional resources, is very useful when it comes to establishing a typology of individual mediation operations. We shall examine all the types of people potentially acting in these situations, not merely private individuals.

Between Nostalgia & Posterity: Former Heads of State

Obviously one of the responsibilities of a head of state is to embody diplomatic action. Conducting foreign policy in representative democracies is in effect one of the classic regalian functions. When resolving a conflict, the actions of a head of state may demonstrate his desire to seize hold of an issue, follow a voluntarist doctrine on the subject and/or to show that it is a visible priority. This brings us to the conditions under which a political strategy is elaborated in this complex environment and to the many competing players that make up a democracy. From secret diplomacy to loudspeaker diplomacy with saturation media coverage, a head of state may intervene in a peace process as the result of internal bargaining within a country. In these circumstances a political problem is commandeered, reactivated or put under the spotlight, if for example the political powers that be see some advantage to be gained from showing an interest in it. Taking as an example Bill Clinton's intervention in the negotiation process in Ireland, one of the motives behind his action was clearly the power and influence of the Irish-American interest group - voters of Irish origin traditionally tending to vote Democrat (the concept is one of political advantage gained from an identified sociocultural, ethnic and/or cultural electoral component).²

Former heads of state often have an unofficial diplomatic role. In particular this entails pursuing a prestigious line of action that prolongs their mandate and if necessary enables them to correct any misperceptions of their time in power or even to enhance their reputation amongst future generations.

The best-known example of this has to be Jimmy Carter, bearing in mind the office he held in the seventies and his current activities in the area of conflict resolution. Based at a research centre located in Atlanta, attached to Emory University and established in 1986 entirely from private funds (individuals, foundations, corporations) of 28 million dollars, he specialises in wide-ranging interventions in

Resolution of Conflicts & Politico-Moral Personalities

developing countries. He organises many conferences on peace and development issues (conference with Uganda's president Museveni on conflicts and refugees in the Great Lakes region, conference with the World Bank ("Transition from war to peace"), etc and travels the world on a crusade for democracy and the Rights of Man. This altruism did not prevent him from routinely informing the American State of his activities and reporting to it on the outcome of all his trips. It should also be noted that Jimmy Carter's activities have often been associated with American diplomacy, which he prolonged in regions that were difficult for the United States (North Korea with whom Carter negotiated a nuclear weapons/civil development aid link) or that generated little interest (Sub-Saharan Africa). Jimmy Carter also met opponents of the Cuban government or instigated certain actions in Central America (contacts with various political organisations), which would have provoked extremely vociferous criticism from Congress had they been official. These actions appear to have coincided to a large degree with the general thrust of Bill Clinton's American Democrat diplomacy. The latter was able to count on the services of an ex-President who shared the same political - and religious - values as his, who was keen to play a role in international relations, who therefore undertook a real parallel role in humanitarian diplomacy and who despite his idealistic words never loses sight of American interests, even on a partisan basis. Carter's visit to Cuba in May 2002 thus had repercussions for the United States, where there appears to be a Democrat/Republic conflict over United States/Cuba relations and where Americans of Cuban origin - who are largely anti-Castro - are a key factor in any future electoral ballot.

One of his most important activities relates to the post-peace agreement phase and in particular monitoring proper electoral procedure. In December 1997 he visited Jamaica with a 55-man delegation, which included several Afro-American celebrities (General Colin Powell, the boxer Evander Holyfield), to observe the parliamentary elections there. The Carter centre had sent 40 international observers several months earlier to monitor the elections in Liberia and drafted a study for Mexico on the organisation and legalisation of contentious electoral procedures. In 1998 during a visit to Bamako to attend a conference on the Guinea worm, he mediated with the various political parties in Mali on municipal elections in that country. By way of a compromise, he recommended the creation of "a political forum to study the problems of organising elections" and "a full audit" of the operations of the independent national electoral commission. Like others, this intervention sometimes caused a certain embarrassment related to the fact that someone from outside was intervening in a political crisis. This visit was interpreted, however, as a signal of Washington's support for President Konaré, although Mali had not featured on President Clinton's travel agenda.

The actions of the former President are often partisan, if not militant: he spent two days in Mozambique in April 1998 and although this was never confirmed by the United States, it appears that a secondary motive for this trip (followed by visits to Kenya and Tanzania) was to limit Maputo's displeasure at being excluded from President Clinton's African tour. Jimmy Carter arrived in a country in the throes of a serious internal political crisis - Renamo was threatening to boycott the elections and accusing Frelimo, the party in power, of not rectifying a suspect electoral census. Despite the measured tone of Jimmy Carter's public intervention, in private he was much more vehement concerning the importance of a multi-party system and democracy for Mozambique, to the extent of meddling in the view of certain diplomats stationed in Mozambique.

Mediation by Government Officials

Former government officials also spend a substantial amount of time attempting to resolve conflicts. However, they do not have the same resources or ability to mobilise the media as former heads of State, particularly American ones. Like them, however, they owe their role to the support of those in power who stand to benefit from using their latent skills, or to the economic interests they represent.

James Baker III is a perfect example of such ambivalence - George Bush's former Defence Secretary from 1989 to 1992, Ronald Reagan's former Treasury Secretary from 1985 to 1988, who was appointed on the recommendation of the Clinton administration, as special representative to the Secretary General of the United Nations, on the Western Sahara issue. The United Nations have been trying for years to organise a referendum on self-determination, with the parties involved (Morocco, the Polisario Front, Algeria and Mauritania) disagreeing on many points, in particular definition of the populations affected by the election. In July 1997, James Baker noted that the two parties intended to settle their dispute solely on the basis of the United Nations plan and concluded that the only way to get the process moving again was to arrange for the two parties to meet and talk face to face. Moreover the ceasefire had been observed for six years and both parties - Morocco and Polisario - had reason to believe in the continued existence of the *status quo*. In six months he made un hoped-for progress: Morocco's agreement to delay examination of 50,000 candidates for identification and Polisario's consent to UN HCR intervention in the refugee camps. Baker also managed to get the parties to agree on the following: no candidates from the most contentious groups, a numerical but unnamed list of the identifications already made. On the other hand, the issue of billeting the forces of the two parties in the run-up to and during the referendum and of preparing a code of good conduct still had to be discussed. It was also totally impossible to predict whether or not the referendum was feasible in the short term. Morocco felt at this stage that the mediation by Baker, and the United States in general, favoured Algerian interests in the promised referendum, particularly when it came to bilateral oil issues, and appeared to adopt a much more critical stance.

In contrast, Lord Carrington's more substantial, government-driven mediation in Zimbabwe is an example of highly directional mediation undertaken by a senior government official. The issues under discussion included democracy, land division, minority rights ("one man, one vote" was a principle which the white party had to concede *a priori*). Disarming the guerrillas was after all a stage that required careful definition. As a negotiator Lord Carrington did not want to witness a failure similar to that experienced by the UK in Cyprus or Palestine. He owed his power to his position in British foreign affairs and the *ad hoc* mandate assigned to him by the Commonwealth.

At the outset the positions of the parties to the conflict were diametrically opposed, leading the British mediator to conclude that the only solution was to impose an agreement. Initially the Patriotic Front felt that the only solution was a military one. The very fact that it negotiated shows the extent to which it changed its position. Mugabe stated however that he was only negotiating the procedures for the transfer of power and that he wanted independence, sovereignty for Zimbabwe and the dismantling of Ian Smith's army. Land was the issue on which the parties proved the most inflexible. Lord Carrington insisted that the rights of the white landowners should be guaranteed, to which the Patriotic Front agreed in return for economic development aid. By agreement, the transition process was the

responsibility of the military commands of both parties. As for the ceasefire, the Patriotic Front agreed to its protection by British military forces, a massive concession on the part of Lord Carrington, given his mandate and material capabilities.

The attitude of the parties and their situation governed the format of the mediation process: Carrington always negotiated in the first instance with the Rhodesians, then after obtaining their agreement, with the other party, on whom the pressure was then huge. He reaped maximum benefit from the preliminary declaration by the Patriotic Front to the effect that it would only negotiate directly with the British. He was not an impartial negotiator, more of an arbiter than a mediator who used his authority (based on British power) to force the parties into agreement. He never ceased to apply pressure to the two parties (threat of a front line of hostile states around Rhodesia, prospect of an agreement unfavourable to the Patriotic Front).

Business & Artistic Philanthropy

Among the mix of current styles, international companies are claiming the ethical high ground, adopting a vast array of social labels and codes of good conduct, the substantial nature of which dictates that at the very least they should be checked out on a case by case basis. Certain businessmen - in an attempt to raise their spiritual stock? improve their image? for political motives? - have decided to become involved in the humanitarian arena, particularly in the cause of peace. George Soros for example is an international financier who manages an investment fund - the *Quantum Fund* - and who has at times been accused of currency speculation for his own profit (by the Prime Minister of Malaysia for example). At the same time he has links with a large number of humanitarian associations and campaigns, especially in Eastern Europe and the United States (the Open Society).

For their part, NGOs have been forced to change their persuasive strategies. They used to rely on the tried and tested traditional tools of collective action: leaflets, public meetings, demonstrations, petitions, boycotts. The latter exercise did not require much in the way of funds and enabled each member of the public to participate actively in a cause, to exert a certain power over the world. Increased competition? Need for more and more funds? Public apathy? NGOs are increasingly using techniques based on money-making methods of communication: organisation of media events, mailings, commercials, object-based communication (by-products such as pins, tee-shirts, etc aimed at cultural awareness-raising among the general public and obtaining funds), lobbying, promotion, sponsorship. Thus companies turn to humanitarian causes and the NGOs adopt commercial techniques, so that ultimately all that distinguishes a NGO from a company is the objective rather than the structure. There is no longer any distinction between the associative message and the commercial message.

In September 1997, Ted Turner, owner of CNN, announced to resounding media fanfare that each year for 10 years he would be donating 100 million dollars in Time Warner shares to a foundation to be set up to support certain United Nations causes (refugees, anti-personnel mines and the fight against certain diseases). This gesture was a major innovation in relations between international institutions and the world of commerce and finance. The initiative coincided with UN pressure on the United States to repay their debt. By taking this action, Ted Turner was exempt from paying value-added tax and became eligible for discounts worth millions of

dollars on his taxes each year. His action might not be unconnected with certain political ambitions on his part (he subsequently confirmed this).

The United Nations foundation set up to manage the Turner funds presented its projects in May 1998 through its director Thomas Wirth, a former Democrat senator in Colorado, at a meeting held in Geneva by the multinational Humanitarian Liaison Group (HLWG). The foundation, a charitable organisation governed by American law (law 501 (c)3 non-profit), announced its four main objectives:

- Provision of additional resources for programmes implemented by the United Nations in the economic, environmental, social and humanitarian sectors, with special emphasis on issues of climate change, protection of women (in particular during population movements) and child health. In fact during the first year of donation, two agencies each received 50%: the UNFPA (refugees) 12.2 million dollars and UNICEF (18.6 million dollars).
- Reinforcement of UN institutions.
- Education of the public, in particular the American public, concerning the achievements of the United Nations, with a view to showing how international cooperation can serve the general interest and American interests in particular.
- Encouraging potential new donors, especially in the private sector, to contribute to the financing of United Nations programmes.

Symptomatically, the diplomats attending this presentation meeting asked questions that demonstrated a certain scepticism:

- Why did the foundation insist on selecting the projects itself? This risked jamming the “generosity signal” generated by Ted Turner (Denmark).
- Why didn’t the foundation make do with co-financing projects already identified by the funds and programmes? (France).
- Who would be responsible for the projects *in fine*: the foundation or the agencies? (Netherlands), etc.
- What would happen if Time Warner’s shares were to fall? Reply: “They won’t fall.”
- Wasn’t the creation of this foundation the first step towards privatising the United Nations? Reply: “Governments cannot do everything, the private sector and the civil sector must also get involved.”

Although the fears of the states appear to have diminished over time, Ted Turner’s action was a typical example of promotional communication. Benefiting from maximum coverage all over the world, with the assistance of his own media, he succeeded in getting himself talked about, as too were his companies when associated with his name. In addition to tax reasons, and while ensuring that the financing policies of his foundation coincided with his own opinions - in particular pro-choice on abortion or concerning nuclear disarmament (Initiative Threat Reduction with Sam Nunn), the media time obtained was considerable and also free of charge.

Resolution of Conflicts & Politico-Moral Personalities

NGOs also practise this type of corporate financing. A famous example in France was Catherine Deneuve who, after recording commercials for soap and a bank, lent her support to the “Green Africa” campaign launched by *Frères des hommes*. Support from a music star or famous actor can have definite advantages when it comes to promoting a cause: Lady Diana and the dangers of anti-personnel mines, Kim Basinger or Brigitte Bardot and animal rights, Jane Fonda against the Vietnam War, Sally Fields and Save the Children, the Barbra Streisand Foundation, Paul Newman’s activities, Richard Gere and Tibet, aid from film directors David Geffen, Jeffrey Katzenberg and Steven Spielberg for the American Jewish community, etc. Balanced between self-promotion and sincere altruism, NGOs appeal particularly to famous artists for two reasons: the opportunity to attract media attention and raise the symbolic profile of the star. The actions of this type of celebrity are far removed in this instance from the technicalities of mediation in conflict resolution. It is more a case of raising public awareness or a fund-raising technique. Compared to other players, who are better equipped technically, more capable of making a direct contribution to the peacemaking process, they have the power to mobilise a wide range of material or media resources.

Conclusion

The role of “politico-moral personalities” in resolving conflicts ultimately comes down to the ambiguity, the diversity of the players in current international relations. It is not always easy to make a distinction between “state” and “private” action. What ability do they actually have to act?

The following table shows the complexity of the situations and strategies used by different players:

Players	Public/ Private	Expertise	Ability to mobilise resources	Media- grabbing potential	Examples
Heads of State	Public	Maximum	Maximum	Maximum	Clinton/Ireland or Middle East
Senior Civil Servants	Public	Maximum	Very high	Medium	Lord Carrington, Ross, Holbrooke
Former Heads of State	Mixed	Very high	Depends on support from powers that be	High	Carter and democratisation in Africa
Former Ministers	Mixed	Very high	Depends on support from powers that be	Medium	Baker and Western Sahara, Rocard and Sub-Saharan Africa
Members of Parliament	Public	High	Medium	Low/medium	Belgian and French parliamentary commissions on Rwanda
Philanthropic Financiers	Private	Medium	Maximum	Quite high	George Soros and democratisation of Eastern Europe, Turner and the UN
Media Personalities (artists, religious, etc)	Private	Low	Very high	Maximum	Hollywood and Tibet

Between media mobilisation and action in the field, technical mediation expertise and oracular speeches, conflict resolution is wide-ranging, and includes elements of coordination (international NGO networks, the UN, religion, states) and competition (ability to mobilise public and private resources). Hence there is a kind of specialisation, a social division of the work undertaken by players in the peace process: broadly speaking, coercive and inter-state mediation as regards states and international organisations, local and horizontal mediation as regards NGOs and/or politico-moral celebrities. However, this distinction conceals far more subtle, fluid and varied practices. The reality appears to be closer to a continuum or a community of players who have different characteristics and functions, but who move or interact through a strategy of effectiveness, than a group of players whose roles and nature are defined once and for all. In particular the criterion of private/public distinction seems inadequate to describe their diverse statuses. The same applies to the parallel distinction State/non-State. To a large extent this attempt at categorisation over-simplifies the complexity of the players seen participating in conflict resolution.

ENDNOTES

¹ J Bercovitch & A Houston, "Influence of Mediator Characteristics and Behavior on the Success of Mediation in International Relations", *International Journal of Conflict Management*, No 4, October 1996.

² A Deconde, *Ethnicity, Race & American Foreign Policy*, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1992.

The author is Researcher at the Foundation for Strategic Research, Associate Lecturer at Saint-Cyr Military Academy.

Translated by MOD LS.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the
Author and not necessarily those of the
UK Ministry of Defence

ISBN 1-903584-89-2

Published By:

The Conflict Studies Research
Centre

Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 4PQ
England

Telephone : (44) 1276 412346
Or 412375

Fax : (44) 1276 686880

E-mail: csrc@defenceacademy.mod.uk
<http://www.csrc.ac.uk>

ISBN 1-903584-9-2