

Kelly Brownell:

Hello everyone and welcome to Policy360. We took a break from producing the podcast this summer, but school has started up again and so have we. My name is Kelly Brownell. I'm the Dean of the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.

Today, I'm very pleased to welcome my colleague, Bruce Jentleson to the studio. Bruce has a new book in the works called *Peacemakers: Lessons Learned from Twentieth-Century Statesmanship*. Bruce is a leading scholar of American foreign policy and has served in a number of U.S. policy and political positions. For example, in 2015 through 16, he was the Henry A. Kissinger Chair in Foreign Policy and International Relations at the John W. Kluge Center Library of Congress.

Welcome to Policy360, Bruce.

Bruce Jentleson:

Thank you. Good to be here.

Kelly Brownell:

So this book would be timely almost in any point in human history, but seems especially timely at the moment. In the preface of the book, you tell a story about the genesis of what you've written. Would you read us the first paragraph of the book?

Bruce Jentleson:

Sure, happy to. Towards the end of the U.S. foreign policy course I taught in the early 1980s at the University of California-Davis, I'd ask the students their thoughts on the future. "Well, Professor Jentleson," one earnest young man said, "I think the Cold War will end, and end peacefully." And from another bright-eyed one, "Apartheid will end and South Africa will transition to a black majority democracy." Our responses at the time were along the lines of it's nice to be young, naive, and California dreaming, but let's be realistic.

Kelly Brownell:

And of course, your students turned out to be right. Why did you start the book with this?

Bruce Jentleson:

For a couple of reasons, one, I think for those of us as professors, we always look at how important it is to integrate our scholarship and our teaching and this really was a moment where the original idea for a book came from interaction with students. And I think the other was a little bit of humble pie for all of us so-called experts who thought we knew where the world was going and to dismiss these views as just young and naive and to find out it actually went in that direction. And it got me thinking about the role of leaders. So it really was one of those moments that stayed with me for a long time.

Kelly Brownell:

So you recall being discouraged in graduate school from looking at individual leaders, why was this?

Bruce Jentleson:

So you and I both know that all of our scholarly and academic disciplines each have our conceits. And I think in political science, one of the conceits is that if you study systems and structures and processes

and institutions, you'll understand everything going on in the world. And while it's true for much of the world, when you really look at history in contemporary events, the role of individual leaders becomes really important for where things kind of go in a different direction than predicted.

Having spent a lot of time in Washington, too, I feel like inside the Beltway, journalists and policy makers put too much emphasis on individuals and in academia, we sometimes put too little. So I was really trying to strike a balance between the role that individual leaders play without getting into sort of the great person theory of history.

Kelly Brownell:

So you've researched leaders who had to reconcile the politics of identity. Maybe you could explain a little bit about what that means, like the story of Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams or the Northern Ireland women for peace. So why did you choose them and how did they lead?

Bruce Jentleson:

What I mean by the... I look at global peace in a number of different areas. And one is this notion of where conflicts are based not just on ideology or interests but on identity, who I am, who you are, and what the differences are. And indeed, we see an awful lot of that in today's world.

Some of the stories I tell about other areas are with big figures of history like Henry Kissinger, Zhou Enlai and the U.S. opening to China, Mikhail Gorbachev at the end of the Cold War. But when you look at it in the role of civil society and individuals, this was a very interesting story of two very ordinary Northern Ireland women. One was a secretary in a Guinness brewery who experienced what was called then The Troubles, the massive killing among Catholics and Protestants in the early 1970s. And just took a stand, got out there, organized people. And while it took another 20 years for the Good Friday Agreement to be signed to formalize the peace, the killings never went up to the level they were before Corrigan and Williams really made their move, and in fact, won the Nobel Peace Prize for what they did.

Kelly Brownell:

So Nelson Mandela, of course, is well known for reconciling the politics of identity. Did he share strategies with Corrigan and Williams?

Bruce Jentleson:

They're in the same part of the book, Mandela, Yitzhak Rabin as well for what he achieved and didn't achieve in terms of Israeli, Palestinian.

Mandela is the iconic figure that we all wish we had more Mandelas in the world and his ability to both keep his more radical elements with him and at the same time have some appeal and reconciliation with the white Afrikaners was truly extraordinary, especially for a person who had been a political prisoner for 27 years.

I mean, I can think of what I might have been like, you can think of what you might have been like, but to come out without the bitterness and to set really the gold standard in many respects. South Africa has a lot of problems today, but it made the peaceful transition to democracy and it's not going through a race war, and those were Mandela's huge contributions.

Kelly Brownell:

So one of the most challenging leadership dilemmas has to do with global sustainability. Why is that?

Bruce Jentleson:

Well, it's one of those issues that everybody has their full inbox. And for many years, we talked about climate change, the possibility of global pandemics as something sort of way down the road. And we're so busy today, politicians are so busy and I think it's been hard to make that case, less so as we see all sorts of things happening and as we speak, we're coming off of Hurricane Harvey and about to experience Hurricane Irma and climate change scientists don't say that climate change causes it, but it surely amplifies them.

And so, I think we've seen particularly what's really interesting is the notion that you could only be green in one way or the other, either for the economy or for the environment, frankly, is not as widely accepted as it was particularly in the business world. Right now, the insurance industry has become very pro-environment because they look at all these buildings that they insure in Miami Beach, for example, and they see that you can be pro-environment and pro-energy, and I think sustainability is one of those issues that's going to be moved up the ladder of importance to global peace and security in the years ahead.

Kelly Brownell:

So one of the people you discussed in your book is Norwegian politician, Gro Harlem Brundtland. I know of her in the capacity as Director General of the World Health Organization, which she did after she was a top political figure in her country of Norway. Why did you choose her?

Bruce Jentleson:

As you said, Kelly, she played a very important role. She'd been prime minister of Norway. And before the WHO, she was asked to chair a global commission that wasn't an official UN commission, but was endorsed by the UN that was looking at the notion of sustainable development. In fact, it really coined the term sustainable development to get at this notion of not necessarily trade-offs.

And there too, our policies haven't changed fully in that area and to negotiate that at a time where leaders from the developing world were kind of saying, "Oh, hey, you guys from the rich world, you already did what you wanted to do to develop. It's now our turn." And it took real political skills that she uniquely had to bring those sides together to issue a report that unlike a lot of other international reports, wasn't just on a shelf, but really began to change thinking. It was followed by the Rio conference on the environment.

And as you mentioned, she went on to the WHO in the 1990s when it was in very bad shape, did some major reforms, got it working on pandemic prevention after the SARS epidemic in China, linked poverty and health more so than anybody before. We know the WHO has had problems since then under other leaders, but she really tried to make the breakthroughs for others to build on and did it with great skill in some very difficult policy areas.

Kelly Brownell:

She was especially effective at some of the chronic disease things she took on WHO with respect to smoking, the Framework Convention on Tobacco that really revolutionized the way the world looked at tobacco. And then also on diet, physical activity and health, she was a major figure as well and was very courageous in standing up to industry influences during that time.

Bruce Jentleson:

Exactly right.

Kelly Brownell:

And so, probably all that political capital that she had acquired over the years as such a revered politician really paid off in that capacity.

Bruce Jentleson:

And the skills too that she had. She was prime minister of Norway at least twice, if not three times. And of course, had to negotiate coalitions in her own national context.

Kelly Brownell:

So in the work that you're doing on your book, which leadership story was the most revealing? Is there one that really surprised you?

Bruce Jentleson:

That's a great question. My publisher, we've actually talked about creating a social media game for book clubs to say, "Who would you choose for this book?" I'd have to say of all of them, Gorbachev, because if you go back to the 1980s, nobody believed that a Soviet leader like that was possible, whether it was Democrats or Republicans in American policy or academics.

And what he did basically to bring the Cold War to a peaceful end was really extraordinary. Ronald Reagan was a partner in it, but I think that I use in the book this notion that frankly comes out of my love of baseball, where when you do baseball, there's this wins-against-replacement statistic, which is how does this third... And I call it statesman-against-replacement-leader, SARL. And if you ask the question would another Soviet leader have made the same decisions, the answer is no.

Having said that, he ended up miscalculating some of his own internal politics. That's probably an understatement and being deposed in his own country. We have tensions with Russia today. It's a longer discussion, separate, it's not a Cold War. It's not the same as it was during the Cold War. We were on the nuclear brink when it was global. And what he managed to achieve really was extraordinary and would not have been achievable with any other imaginable leader.

Kelly Brownell:

Well, let me ask you about Donald Trump's election. You said that his election made the research you were doing more urgent than ever. Why did you say that?

Bruce Jentleson:

Well, for one thing, it demonstrates that leaders matter, right? The notion that American presidents are interchangeable whether for good or bad, people may have different views about that, but there's no question that his persona is having a huge impact. So it reminds us of this notion we started with that individuals matter.

The other frankly is someone who does not particularly believe he's helping peace and security. My publisher had been joking if there's a sliver of silver lining, it's that interest in constructive statesmanship is even greater than it was before last November. And obviously we want to get our book out to a lot of people, but in a serious way, there is a need for alternative strategies not just for the United States but for other leaders around the world to deal with the pressing agenda that we have.

Kelly Brownell:

So if you look at the current political climate in the United States, does it support people being great leaders? Does it undermine people being great leaders? Do great leaders prevail over it no matter what goes on?

Bruce Jentleson:

It's very hard. There's no question that the world of 24/7 media, Facebook, Twitter, et cetera, makes leadership hard. But I have to say when you look in history, sometimes I feel we get into a little bit too much of woe is us-ism. There've been other periods in American history and world history where the challenges of leadership have been formidable.

In the 1850s, we had members of the House of Representatives beating each other with a cane practically to death on the floor of the House over slavery. So I think we have to acknowledge that there are some particularities of the current political environment that are very difficult, but it doesn't preclude leadership. And I think in some ways, it makes it all the more necessary and it'll come from a lot of directions. Some will be like the Northern Ireland case bottom up, some will sort of be middle out and some will be top down from figures that are leaders of countries. There are people in the book that were leaders of international institutions like Dag Hammarskjold, the only secretary general to make the UN really effective.

So I think we just have to face up to the challenges what they are. And I end the book on a note saying this book shows how difficult it is, it shows it's possible, and as we look at the world today, it shows how necessary it is.

Kelly Brownell:

So if you were having a conversation with President Trump and could give him some advice based on what you've learned from your research, what would you say?

Bruce Jentleson:

In my elevator speech, I'd say two things. One, you can't help the United States in ways that don't connect with the world because we're interconnected in ways that aren't going to go away. Sometimes our interests are different, but fundamentally there is this interconnection. And secondly, the true glory for any president of the United States or any world leader is in making the world a better place, not just somehow winning for your side.

Kelly Brownell:

So are you optimistic that the next generation of great leaders is in the mix?

Bruce Jentleson:

I think part of the reason we don't point to this or that person I think is because in many of the cases I talked about, nobody would have predicted that was the person. Gorbachev was an average apparatchik. Henry Kissinger, who has some other areas that people don't think were particularly for peace but the U.S.-China opening, was a professor. Lech Walesa was a dockworker. Aung San Suu Kyi was out of her country for all those years.

So, I think they're there. And I think what we try to do in the book, particularly in this who, why, how, what is to put it together. It's not so much looking for the next LeBron James to be born or the Mozart, which is one of the good lessons of the book. I think that it's not just a resume, but it's how

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people respond to situations that really make them this combination of the person in the moment, the man in the moment, the woman in the moment that really is the recipe for major leadership.

Kelly Brownell:

Well, a few issues are more important to the wellbeing of the world than this. So thank you for your scholarship, thank you for your leadership and thank you for preparing this book.

Bruce Jentleson:

My pleasure. It's been a great opportunity. I appreciate it.

Kelly Brownell:

My guest today has been Bruce Jentleson. His book is called *The Peacemakers: Lessons Learned from Twentieth-Century Statesmanship*. It'll be published by Norton. We will have more in our website Policy360.org. Until next time, I'm Kelly Brownell.