

A photograph of George W. Bush, President of the United States, giving a thumbs up. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. The background is blurred, showing a crowd of people.

GARY L. GREGG II

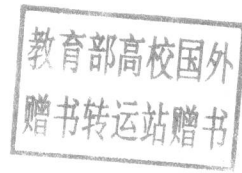
MARK J. ROZELL

Considering the

BUSH

PRESIDENCY

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CONSIDERING THE BUSH PRESIDENCY

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Preface

Although barely past the midterm point, the George W. Bush presidency has already made a significant impact on the institution. Bush came to office under some of the most unusual circumstances in presidential history. He lost the popular vote to incumbent Vice President Albert Gore and then for thirty-six days the outcome of the election remained in doubt as a vote recount proceeded in Florida and the courts became involved in settling the controversy. Bush eventually won the presidency only after a highly controversial 5–4 Supreme Court decision went in his favor and stopped the recounting of ballots. Even though many Democrats were angry at the outcome and questioned its legitimacy, once the Court had spoken most of the country accepted that the election controversy was over. In a gracious speech that many observers said was better than any he had given as a candidate for the presidency, Gore dropped his legal challenges and conceded to Bush.

The president-elect thus had an abbreviated transition period during which he could pull together his White House team and map out a policy agenda. To be sure, much of that work was going on during the legal challenges in anticipation of a possible Bush victory. But the election controversy had taken considerable attention away from the transition effort and led many to believe that this distraction would harm Bush's efforts to enter the presidency "hitting the ground running." Furthermore, political observers never hesitated to point out that although Bush won the presidency, he had lost the popular vote and would be leading from a position of weakness.

When he entered office, Bush did not act like a president who needed to prove his legitimacy. He moved quickly to consolidate his power and to promote a domestic policy agenda led by large tax cuts and education reform. Having Republican control of both houses of Congress—something that was short-lived—Bush saw an opportunity to make his mark on the presidency early. The hallmark of the early months of his presidency was a tax rebate that many Democrats criticized as unneeded and ultimately bad for the economy. Bush moved with a singular focus on this issue and made the bold move of personally campaigning for the tax cut in the states of some wavering Democratic senators. Having become so personally invested in its success, Bush risked an embarrassing defeat but ultimately prevailed in achieving a \$1.3 trillion tax reduction package.

During the summer of 2001, the administration's momentum stalled. The economy began to slip seriously, business scandals and bankruptcies domi-

nated the news, the president was embattled by a controversial moral issue (stem cell research) that he did not want to be a major focus at that stage of his term, and national polls were showing some loss in his support. Then September 11, 2001, changed America and refocused the Bush presidency.

The impact of September 11 on the Bush presidency is explored in many of the essays in this book. As our lead author James Pfiffner puts it, the Bush presidency was transformed by the terrorist attacks on the United States, and it is essential to analyze the administration's record to date on that basis. Nonetheless, the tragedy of September 11 does not alone define Bush's presidency, and the contributors to this volume provide a broad-ranging overview of his leadership at home and abroad.

Bush achieved a major leadership opportunity after the GOP (Grand Old Party) victories in the 2002 midterm elections. Once again, the president personally campaigned in key states and risked the stigma of a very public defeat. When the GOP prevailed in most of the key contests in which the president had become involved, observers credited Bush and his political advisers for a brilliant strategy and the courage to use (and put at risk) the presidential image. With party control once again of both houses of Congress, the Republicans appeared poised to make major policy gains in the second half of Bush's term.

President Bush retains high levels of public support at home, yet the second half of his term is likely to be characterized by the especially troublesome issues of economic instability and war. Many observers, including a number of this volume's authors, believe that Bush met some crucial leadership challenges during the first half of his term. The ultimate success of the Bush presidency now depends on how he handles the challenges that await him as we approach the elections of 2004.

Every author has a story or two about the origins of a book. Ours is quite simple. We celebrated St. Patrick's Day 2002 together at a popular Irish pub in Washington, D.C., and began discussing the fascinating twists and turns of the incumbent administration. It became quickly evident that we shared an interest in making a contribution to the discussion about the Bush presidency within the academic community and among our students. Both of us have worked in one capacity or another with some of the very best presidential scholars, and we knew that they had important things to say about Bush's leadership. We decided to bring those scholars together for this volume.

Every author also incurs some debts during the process of developing a book. We are grateful for the assistance of our students Aaron Nathaniel Coleman and Kelly Hanlon of University of Louisville and Margaret Sammon of The Catholic University of America. Mary Ann Ealey (Catholic University) provided much-needed secretarial assistance. We also thank our colleagues who contributed to this volume with their timely and thoughtful essays on what is developing as a historic presidency.

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CONSIDERING
THE BUSH PRESIDENCY

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Introduction

Assessing the Bush Presidency

JAMES P. PFIFFNER

George W. Bush began his presidency with as little political capital as any president since Gerald R. Ford; his opponent, Al Gore, outpolled him by more than a half-million votes in the November 2000 election. The lack of an obvious mandate did not deter the president from pursuing conservative policy priorities in the first phase of his presidency. By the end of his first six months in office, President Bush had won a major tax-cut victory and had begun to take his administration in a conservative policy direction. At the end of the summer of 2002 his poll ratings had dropped to the low fifties, and the administration was looking forward to a fall of battles with Democrats in the Senate. The second phase of the administration began with the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., and the outpouring of public support for the president. With the war in Afghanistan going well and beginning to wind down, President Bush began the third phase of his presidency when he initiated his political campaign to convince the country that “regime change” in Iraq was essential to the security of the United States.

This chapter will examine the three phases of the first two years of President Bush’s presidency: the transition and initial agenda, the war on terrorism, and the campaign for war with Iraq.

I. TRANSITION AND INITIAL AGENDA

President George W. Bush’s transition into office was one of the shortest but most efficiently run in recent times. Because of the growth of the size and scope of the national government, transitions since the 1970s have been elaborately planned and bureaucratized. There never seems to be enough time to fully prepare to take over the government. Yet because of the delay in the authoritative outcome of the 2000 election, the incoming Bush administration had five fewer weeks for officially preparing to take office, about half as much time as other administrations. Surprisingly, under the circumstances, they accomplished the major tasks of the transitions—designating

a White House staff, naming a cabinet, and laying the groundwork for their initial policy agenda—with dispatch.

The key to President Bush's White House staff was Vice President Richard Cheney, who was chosen to be the running mate because of his experience, competence, and relationship with the head of the ticket. Cheney was to break the mold of vice presidential unimportance in an administration. He ran the transition and dominated most of the organizational and policy deliberations early in the administration. Administration officials took pains to emphasize that all final decisions were in fact made by President Bush and that Cheney's role was merely advisory.

As chief of staff, the president chose Andrew Card, an experienced Washington insider. He had worked in the White House for Ronald Reagan and had been a deputy to John Sununu in the administration of the elder George Bush before being appointed secretary of transportation; he also ran the 2000 Republican National Convention for Bush. While Card was the key to managing the White House, the dominant person, short of the President, was clearly Vice President Cheney, whose national experience far outmatched that of President Bush. Cheney put together an impressive staff of his own, including his own national security aides and a domestic policy staff. Because of Cheney's prominence in the administration, White House officials were careful to emphasize his subordinate position to the president. According to Cheney's counselor, Mary Matalin, "The vice president has no personal or political agenda other than advising President Bush."¹

After Cheney and Card, the two key aides to Bush were his political strategist, Karl Rove, and his counselor, Karen Hughes. Hughes had been Bush's closest aide while he was governor of Texas and throughout his campaign for the presidency. When he reached the White House, Bush said, "I want you in every meeting where major decisions are made."² She played important roles in creating a sense of order in the White House and crafting Bush's public image. She was in charge of forty-two staffers involved in communications or press issues. The president lost an important adviser when she left the administration in the summer of 2002, though she continued to advise the president from her home in Texas.

Karl Rove had been Bush's top campaign strategist, and in the White House played the role of senior political adviser, directing the offices of Political Affairs and Public Liaison. While not as close to Bush as Hughes, Rove played the important roles of concentrating on political strategy and tending to Bush's links to the conservative wing of the Republican Party. At the senior level was the Rove-led "Strategery Group" (named for a humorous television skit on Bush diction) of the top domestic and national security aides. He was also in charge of the Office of Communications, which had a two- to three-week time horizon, and the Press Office with a twenty-four- to forty-eight-hour time horizon.³

Bush's national security assistant, Condoleezza Rice, was a veteran aide to Brent Scowcroft in the administration of the first President Bush and top

national security adviser to candidate Bush during the 2000 presidential campaign, where she earned his respect and trust. She was, at forty-six, the youngest person to direct national security as well as the first woman in the post. Rice's initial move was to restructure the National Security Council (NSC) and cut its staff by a third. Rice would focus on advising the president, but—just as her mentor, Scowcroft—she did not plan to dominate the national security policy-making process. In the Bush administration it would be difficult for *anyone* to dominate the policy process, with such formidable principals as Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Secretary of State Colin Powell, each with their own sizable staffs, on the National Security Council.

The Bush cabinet selection committee consisted of only four people: the president-elect, Dick Cheney, transition director Clay Johnson, and Andrew Card. Great pains were taken to keep cabinet choices secret until immediately before their announcement.⁴

Without echoing President Clinton's promise to appoint a cabinet that "looks like America," Bush recruited a cabinet equally diverse by contemporary standards. Bush appointed four women (Elaine Chao at Labor, Ann Veneman at Agriculture, Gale Norton at Interior, and Christine Whitman at the Environmental Protection Agency—designated as part of the cabinet), two African Americans (Colin Powell at State and Roderick Paige at Education), one Arab American (Spencer Abraham at Energy), one Hispanic (Mel Martinez at Housing and Urban Development), and two Asian Americans (Chao and Norman Mineta at Transportation, also a Democrat who had been secretary of commerce in the Clinton administration). Only six of the fifteen were white males. The diversity of the cabinet reflected both the increasingly qualified pool of minorities in the United States and the signal that Bush wanted to send to draw minority voters from the Democratic to the Republican Party.

Despite Bush's care in recruiting an experienced and well-credentialed cabinet, he was not about to reverse the trend of the past four decades of power gravitating to the White House. All of the policy priorities of the early administration were dominated by White House staffers rather than led from the cabinet. The administration began with monthly cabinet meetings and frequent contact between cabinet members and the White House staff, but that did not translate into policy clout.

During the presidential campaign of 2000, candidate Bush set a moderate tone by asserting that he was a "compassionate conservative" and advocating educational proposals that often appealed to Democratic voters. He promised to "change the tone" in Washington by taking a bipartisan approach to governing, as he had in Texas. While arguing for more defense spending and a national missile defense, privatization of part of Social Security, and a large tax cut, the emphasis was not on the more conservative aspects of his policy agenda.

In his first weeks in office he followed up on his promise to change the tone in Washington by meeting with a large number of members of Con-

gress, many of them Democrats. He even attended caucus meetings of the Democrats in the House and the Senate to show that he was willing to communicate with the opposition. In his initial policy agenda, however, he pursued a conservative agenda that pleased his Republican base in the House of Representatives and the electorate.⁵ His first executive order reversed U.S. policy and shut off U.S. funds to international family planning programs that allowed abortions. He also suspended, and later canceled, Department of Labor ergonomic regulations designed to reduce harm from repetitive-motion injuries.

In January 2001 Republicans controlled both houses of Congress and the presidency for the first time since the beginning of the Eisenhower administration, but their control of Congress was tenuous. The Senate was split 50–50, and Republican control depended on the tie-breaking vote of the vice president. The partisan split in the House in the first session of the 107th Congress was 222 to 211 (with two Independents), and the defection of a handful of Republican votes could defeat Republican measures.

President Bush's first and largest legislative initiative was to propose a large tax cut, as he had promised in the campaign. The administration's proposal was for a \$1.6 trillion cut over ten years that included reducing the top brackets, eliminating the estate tax, reducing the marriage penalty, and increasing child credits. Democrats argued that most of the benefits would go to the relatively well off and that the overall size of the reduction in revenues would threaten the projected surpluses; they favored a smaller cut that was targeted at lower income levels. The House passed Bush's plan, but the Senate held out for a smaller cut. After negotiations, the Senate went along with the House to vote for a \$1.35 trillion cut, an important policy victory for the president.

In another of Bush's top priorities he established by executive action a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to facilitate the use of federal funds for social purposes to be administered by faith-based organizations. He proposed privatizing part of the Social Security system by setting aside a portion of contributions to the system for private investment in personal retirement accounts. Although much of his education agenda was endorsed by Democrats, Bush favored the creation of vouchers allowing public funds to be used by parents to send their children to private schools. A version of his education plan, without vouchers, was passed by Congress in the late fall of 2001.

In the late spring of 2001 the president had won an important victory in his large tax cut and was turning to his other priorities when his political power was dealt a blow. Senator James Jeffords, a third-term Republican from Vermont, had been a moderate but loyal Republican, but he had felt increasingly out of place in the conservative Republican Party of the 1990s. He felt particularly strongly about special education policy, and felt that his priorities were being ignored by Republican conservatives in Congress. He decided that he no longer felt welcome in the Republican Party

and, after voting for the Bush tax cut, switched his affiliation to Independent and caucused with the Democrats in the Senate. He said that the Republican Party was moving away from the traditional values of "the Party of Lincoln," specifically, "moderation, tolerance, fiscal responsibility."⁶

Thus in the middle of the first session of the 107th Congress, party control of the Senate shifted from the Republicans to the Democrats. With the 50–50 split after the election, the Republicans could count on a tie-breaking vote from the vice president. But with the Democrats controlling fifty-one votes to the Republicans' forty-nine, control of the Senate agenda, along with chairmanships of all the committees, went to the Democrats, who would not be as sympathetic to President Bush's priorities.

At 180 days in office President Bush enjoyed public approval of 57 percent—not bad, but lower than the postwar presidents except for Bill Clinton, at 45 percent. In late summer President Bush won three victories in the House—on his comprehensive energy plan, the Faith-Based Initiative, and on a patients' bill of rights. But victories in the Senate were going to be much more difficult with the new Democratic majority.

Thus in the summer of 2001 the Bush administration began to recalibrate its policy priorities to adjust to Democratic control in the Senate and looked forward to some difficult policy battles in the fall. Then came the terrorist attacks that transformed the Bush presidency and the nation's priorities.

II. THE BUSH PRESIDENCY TRANSFORMED

At 8:48 A.M. on September 11, 2001, American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center; at 9:03 A.M. United Airline Flight 175 slammed into the south tower; at 9:45 A.M. American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon; by 10:30 A.M. both towers had collapsed and the west section of the Pentagon was in flames. More than 3,000 people died in the attacks: almost all were Americans, along with several hundred citizens of more than fifty other nations. Thus were world history, international relations, American politics, and the Bush presidency transformed within minutes. A surge of public unity gave President Bush unprecedented public support; a compliant Congress voted support for his administration's war on terrorism; and early successes in the war in Afghanistan bolstered the President's popularity.

The first and most important political effect of the terrorist bombings of September 11 was a huge jump in public approval of President Bush. In the September 7–10 Gallup poll, public approval of the President stood at 51 percent; the next poll, on September 14–15, registered 86 percent approval—a 35 percent jump virtually overnight. It is common for presidents to enjoy increased public approval whenever there is a crisis involving U.S. national security, called by political scientists a "rally event." But the magnitude of sudden change in public opinion was unprecedented; for instance, the Vietnam peace agreement in 1973 caused a sixteen-point jump, and the Truman

Doctrine and the Cuban Missile Crisis each caused a twelve-point jump.⁷ Interestingly, the increased public approval for the president was accompanied by jumps in approval for the federal government in general and for Congress. For the remainder of 2001 public approval of President Bush averaged 87 percent, whereas his approval for the first several months of his presidency averaged 56 percent.

The sustained historically high public approval ratings of President Bush reflected public confidence in the way he and Congress handled the U.S. reaction to the terrorist bombings. In an address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, President Bush declared, "Tonight we are a country awakened to a danger and called to defend freedom. . . . Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done" (White House transcript 2001). Congress responded quickly with virtually unanimous support for measures designed to support what the President called a war on terrorism. Congress quickly passed a bill providing \$40 billion in emergency appropriations for military action, beefing up domestic security, and rebuilding New York City.

The administration also asked for and got sweeping authority to pursue an international war on terrorism. On September 14 Congress passed a joint resolution giving President Bush broad discretion in his direction of the military response to the terrorist attacks. Section 2(a) of the resolution provided:

That the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.

The grant of power was sweeping in that it allowed the president to decide as "he determines" which "nations, organizations, or persons" United States forces may attack.

On September 12, the day after the attacks, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and military leaders briefed the president on plans that had been under way to deal with Al Qaeda and current military options. President Bush then made the key initial decisions of the war after meeting on September 15 at Camp David with his war council, who presented a range of options for pursuing the war. The key elements of his decision were that the initial military actions would be limited to Afghanistan and that the war would begin with a massive air campaign before ground forces were introduced in large numbers.⁸ On October 7 airstrikes began on Taliban forces in Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. U.S. ground forces cooperating with the Northern Alliance began attacking Taliban forces, with the tide turning in favor of the United States in mid-November, with Kabul falling to the Northern Alliance on November 13. In early December allied forces took control