

# The Academy of Political Science

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## POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

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Volume 125 · Number 3 · Fall 2010

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*Political Science Quarterly*

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that the author consulted to produce his short, insightful, and quite interesting accounts of the early presidents.

Greenstein assesses how well each president embodied his six leadership qualities. Washington, for example, gets high marks for political skill and cognitive style. Jefferson stands out as the most effective public communicator, the best at organizing the executive branch, and “the most tactically able of the presidents” (p. 101). And James Monroe, essentially a career politician of modest means who did not complete college, engaged in extensive tours of the nation to gather intelligence and “consolidate his political support” (pp. 71–72), assembled “an exceptionally strong cabinet” (p. 71), and exercised sound political judgment. Three presidents fare especially poorly by Greenstein’s measures: John Adams, James Madison, and John Quincy Adams. In particular, the second Adams, despite a distinguished prior career as a diplomat, senator, and secretary of state, was “one of the least effective presidents in American history” (p. 76).

Although Greenstein’s portraits and analysis make a compelling case that personal qualities can decisively affect presidential leadership, those attuned to constitutional and institutional interpretations will wonder whether some of the less effective early presidents were hobbled by forces over which they had little control. Madison, for example, was effectively elected and re-elected by Congress (specifically, the Republican congressional caucus), even though the Framers had rejected congressional election for fear it would weaken the president. One also wonders if John Quincy Adams’s election by the House of Representatives in 1824 over the more popular Andrew Jackson would have delegitimized him in the eyes of many even if he had not contributed to the notion of a corrupt bargain by appointing Henry Clay as Secretary of State. Finally, there is the deeper matter of how the provisions of the U.S. Constitution—such as the electoral college mode of selection, the four-year term, re-eligibility, a salary that cannot be changed during any one term, and substantial powers—incline presidents to defend their constitutional prerogatives, to effectively administer the laws, to defend the nation’s interests in a dangerous world, and in other ways to faithfully discharge their duties, whatever personal leadership qualities they happen to bring to the executive office.

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**National Security in the Obama Administration: Reassessing the Bush Doctrine** by Stanley Renshon. *New York, Routledge, 2009. 291 pp. \$34.95.*

There are not too many academics brave enough to support the Bush doctrine, but Stanley Renshon attempts a spirited defense of the 43rd president’s

national security policy after the terrorist attacks of September 11. His argument dovetails with that of the George W. Bush administration: September 11 changed everything, and thus the United States needed a new approach. How much September 11 altered, however, is a subject for discussion, not assertion, and ultimately, any assessment of the Bush doctrine, as with any foreign policy approach, rests on the president's ability to match ends and means. That is why the Bush team's mismanagement of the economy and the decision to launch a war in Iraq before completing the task in Afghanistan leave the reader rather dubious of the merits of the doctrine.

September 11 was a wake-up call rather than a dramatic reshaping of world affairs. The reshaping had occurred a decade earlier when the Soviet Union collapsed, marking the end of the bipolar international order that had structured world politics for 40 years. The early 1990s also marked the onset of globalization, which unleashed powerful new forces for good and ill in the world.

Renshon writes as if the problems posed by the leaders of Iran and Iraq, for example, materialized after September 11. But Saddam Hussein had ruled for decades, and the Iranian revolution had occurred in 1979. Both countries had been trying to take advantage of the post-Soviet landscape across the Middle East ever since the end of the Cold War. Similarly, nearly all of the major threats we noticed after September 11—including terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—were problems well before September 11. Most Americans, like President Bush, simply had not paid attention.

Renshon usefully argues that the “premises of the Bush Doctrine reflect five strategic elements. These are: American primacy, assertive realism, stand-apart alliances, a new internationalism, and democratic transformation” (p. 40). These could have served as helpful starting points to distinguish Barack Obama's foreign policy from that of his predecessor, as well as to underline important continuities from Bill Clinton to Bush. Clinton and his second-term secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, after all, spoke of America as the “indispensable nation,” used the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to go to war in 1999 when United Nations authorization was not possible, and promoted the enlargement of the community of democracies as a central feature of the U.S. national security strategy.

And while there is continuity even from Bush to Obama, those five elements—and especially the first and the last—are helpful ways to compare the two presidents. Bush, especially in his first term, seemed to believe there were no limits to American power; Obama, on the other hand, appears acutely aware of them. And whereas Bush made the end of tyranny a state goal of his administration, Obama has tread carefully in promoting democracy (in part because of those beliefs in the limits of American power).

Renshon deserves credit for raising these subjects for debate. Occasionally, he offers insights generated from his distinguished record in political

psychology; one wishes he had devoted more space to those issues related to his primary area of expertise. And while combating Islamic extremism remains important for U.S. national security, the Obama team's ability to develop a comprehensive strategy rests on understanding the extent to which American military and economic power translates into global influence, and on understanding what China's growing assertiveness means for the future of world politics.

JAMES GOLDGEIER

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**The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President** by Taylor Branch. New York, Simon and Schuster, 2009. 707 pages. \$35.00.

Contemporary presidents have not done very well with their court scribes. Edmund Morris, eminent author of a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Theodore Roosevelt, anointed by the administration of Ronald Reagan to provide a definitive account of its history, struggled for years to capture the Reagan mystique. He finally wrote *Dutch*, a book in which imagination, observation, and recollection are intermixed in such a way that it is unclear whether it is a work of fact or fiction. Even the staunchest Reaganites were unhappy with Morris's final product.

George W. Bush fared a little better, at least initially. Opening his White House files and requesting his senior staff to cooperate with journalist Bob Woodward, Bush's leadership imagery benefited from the portrayal in the first book of Woodward's trilogy, *Bush at War*. The President's leadership skills did not fare nearly as well in the second, *Plan of Attack*, and by the end of the third book, *State of Denial*, readers saw the consequences of the President's faulty assumptions, his administration's groupthink mentality, its poor planning, incoherent decision making, and refusal to see, much less acknowledge, a multitude of mistakes. I doubt very much whether Bush's own account will be able to reverse the historical portrait that Woodward paints and that media accounts and first-hand reflections have reinforced.

Even before he became President, Clinton and his aides were thinking about their place in history (pp. 21–31). To chronicle his inauguration, Clinton turned to an old friend, Taylor Branch, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *America in the King Years* and fellow political activist who had worked with Bill and Hillary on the 1972 campaign of George McGovern in Texas. Initially, Branch's task was to provide a descriptive commentary of Clinton's 1992 inauguration; nine months later, it was to record the President on his presidency.

Over the course of eight years in office, Clinton met with his chronicler 73 times. Branch provided the questions and Clinton the answers, along with other reflections. The President took the tape at the end of each interview.