The Transformations of the Bush Presidency: 9/11 and Beyond

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On September 10, 2001, George W. Bush, a man whom many believed did not actually win the presidency, was the object of more derision than respect. Bush's alleged lack of intelligence made him an irresistible target for late-night comedians such as Jay Leno and David Letterman, who openly referred to Bush as "blockhead" and worse. The president's bumbling, fumbling syntax and bland, simplistic rhetoric made him more a national joke than admiral leader.

But, as the old American standard song, "What a difference a Day Makes," suggests, twenty-four hours in politics can be a lifetime. Overnight George W. Bush morphed from Barney Fife, to Arnold Schwarzenager, from the Village Idiot to General Patton.

How, why did this dramatic, overnight transformation take place? September 11! The terrorist attack against the United States so dramatically changed political circumstances and public expectations that the very (political) ground on which George W. Bush stood shifted dramatically. The tectonic plates of the political geography produced a crisis presidency and power shifted to the White House, and into the hands of George W. Bush.

What changed? Bush? Perhaps. Conditions? Certainly. This paper will examine the extent to which the altered political and personal positions of George W. Bush are a function of a) changed conditions; b) a changed Bush; and c) the needs and demands of the public.

**The Crisis Presidency**

One of the key lessons taught to us by leadership studies, is the fact that while skill is important, leadership is largely contextual. As circumstances change, the politically permissible levels of power also change.

In times of peace and calm, the normal checks and balances of the Madisonian system- a strong Congress, for example- tend to bind a president and limit his range of political power. The separation-of-powers, the sharing of power between the president and Congress, was designed to limit executive abuse of power, not to promote efficiency. It is a clumsy, burdensome system that proves frustrating, even maddening to presidents.
But in times of great upheaval, in war or crisis, the Madisonian checks designed to balance power, go into remission. In a crisis, the public (and Congress) looks to the president as crisis manager, leader, problem-solver, and savior.¹ The president's responsibility increases. But so too does his power. He becomes, in Clinton Rossiter's apt phrase, "A constitutional dictator."

Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War assumed and was granted extraordinary power to deal with the crisis at hand. Franklin D. Roosevelt during the depression, then World War II, likewise, assumed and was granted powers that in normal circumstances would have been unacceptable.

**George W. Bush and the Crisis Presidency**

"Some men are born great,  
Some achieve greatness, And some  
Have greatness thrust upon them."  
-William Shakespeare  
Twelfth Night, Act 2, Scene 5

In the lives of presidents, replacing the word "greatness, with "opportunity" seems more appropriate. After all, presidents are only rarely given opportunities for greatness, but they must earn the title. Some, like Buchanan, squander the opportunity. Others, like FDR, take opportunity and turn it into greatness. George W. Bush, unlike his father and unlike his predecessor William Jefferson Clinton, was given the gift of opportunity. How he plays the opportunity card will determine his place and history.

How best to explain the transformations of George W. Bush? While the president may have "grown" to meet the demands of crisis, the primary reason why Bush became a president of power is that circumstances changed—changed dramatically.

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¹ See: Michael A. Genovese, "Presidential Leadership and Crisis Management."  
After the shocking terrorist attack of 9-11, the Democratic opposition in Congress fell nearly silent, the public rallied around the nation and the president, and once the U.S. launched a military assault on Afghanistan, the president’s popularity soared. Much the same would have happened if Al Gore, Bill Clinton, or you or I were president. Bush benefited, not by a sudden infusion of skill and will, but as a function of the changed conditions created by the terrorist attack of 9-11.

But of course, the question is: what does one do in and with these changed circumstances? Crisis opened the door to power. How did Bush exercise this power?

Therefore, to evaluate Bush as president, we must understand the role of context in the achievement of power, but also examine the use of that power. That is, the skill the president applied to the circumstances, and the purposes to which that skill was applied.

Not all presidents exercised skill, wisdom or courage in the face of crisis. As the United States edged closer and closer to Civil War, as the southern states pulled out of the union, President Buchanan had an opportunity to exercise leadership. But Buchanan, rather than being energized by the challenge, became paralyzed by it. He shrank when he needed to rise.²

When Abraham Lincoln took office, the crisis had deepened. But unlike his predecessor, Lincoln rose to meet the crisis and exercised skill, wisdom, and good judgement in the face of enormous pressure.

Some office-holders have a narrow, limited repertoire of political skills, or can do but one or two things well. They apply the same style of leadership to every political circumstance. But different circumstances require different styles of leadership. In war, one needs authority and decisiveness. In peacetime, a softer, more collaborative style might be necessary. In times of change, a president with vision might be needed. In times of grief, the president might need to be a national healer.

There is no one style that fits all circumstances. A good leader a) recognizes what the circumstances require; and b) chooses from a broad range of skills and applies the correct style to fit the demands of the problem. In short, good leaders are astute enough to see what is needed, skilled enough to apply wisdom to the problem, and flexible enough to make appropriate alterations in style.

Lincoln had it all; Buchanan did not. Franklin D. Roosevelt, known as "the juggler" had it. Churchill did not. Churchill did not? Precisely. In war, Churchill was a truly great leader. But in times of peace, Churchill floundered. Why? Because Churchill's style and skill were perfectly suited to the demands of war, but ill suited to times of peace. And Churchill could not, or did not, or would not style-flex; adjust his style to different circumstances. When Churchill's skills matched the times (war) he was extraordinary. But when circumstances called for a different style of leadership, Churchill remained rigid and inflexible. He was not able to apply a different style in the different circumstances.

Effective leadership, then is a function of context, granting a president a wide or narrow opportunity, wisdom, to see clearly and understand what is needed; skill applied to circumstances that helps determine the level of resources and power available to a leader, and a vision of a good and just outcome.

Within that framework, we can ask: how well, or poorly did George W. Bush apply wisdom and skill to the circumstances of 9-11?

**Four Phases of the Bush Presidency**

Between inauguration and January 2003, the Bush presidency could be divided into distinct four phases: Phase I, inauguration to 9-10-01; Phase II, 9-11 to Spring 2002 when the Palestine/Israeli conflict erupted; Phase III, from Spring 2002 to the November UN resolution on Iraq, and Phase IV, only now beginning.
Each phase presented very different demands and circumstances, requiring different skills and styles. How well, or poorly, did George W. Bush perform in these vastly different phases?

**Phase I**

Nearly-elected President George W. Bush had a problem. The 2000 election that brought him to the White House proved problematic, as the race was so close between Bush and his Democratic rival vice-president Al Gore that no one could determine the "real" winner. Everything hinged on the outcome of the controversial and confused results of the vote in Florida.

On election night, confusion reigned. Gore was declared the winner, then that declaration was withdrawn, then it was called for Bush, then it was too close to call….then it really got confusing! It took more than four weeks before, finally, the United States Supreme Court in a controversial (and confusing) decision in *Bush v. Gore*, gave the election to Bush.

Of course, the disputed nature of the election/selection called Bush's legitimacy into question. Would the public accept Bush as president? Could Bush establish his legitimacy or would he forever be a tainted president? To his credit, Bush quickly asserted and established his authority, and averted a potential disaster. He was president, but could he govern?

In Phase I, President Bush had ups (a tax cut, education reform) and downs (the defection of Republican Senator Jim Jeffords that led to the Republican loss of control of the Senate), but overall, his first eight months in office were, by most standards, rather ordinary. He was a poor communicator but an engaging politician; a delegating administrator and a moderate to conservative Republican, a superficial thinker, but a sincere person. Not the kind of president who would lead a revolution, but a pragmatic conservative who might be able to get a bit here and a bit there. Little was expected of him, and there seemed to actually be little he wanted to do.

**Phase II**

On September 10, George W. Bush looked very much like a one-term president. The butt of endless "dumb-Bush" jokes, and cannon-fodder for
late-night comedians, Bush seemed intellectually thin; and politically vulnerable. But, as the song goes, "What a difference a day makes…".

The terrorist attack on U.S. targets on September 11, 2001, utterly changed everything-politically- for George W. Bush. He was given, because of changed circumstances, powers he had never dreamed of exercising.

In a crisis, the President is granted a wide breadth of powers. These emergency (or perogative) powers assumed by the President have a variety of justifications. Clinton Rossiter laid out an elaborate rational for emergency presidential power in *The Constitutional Dictatorship*, as did Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. in *The Imperial Presidency*, Richard M. Pious in *The American Presidency*, and Robert E. Di Clerico in *The American President*. But, whatever the specific rationale, all agree that during a crisis, the body politic turns to the President to "save" the political system.

A crisis is meant to suggest a conflict that occurs suddenly, heightens tensions, where stakes are high (usually a threat to "vital" national interests), where there is little time to decide, where decision-makers are under intense pressure, in an atmosphere of uncertainty containing expectations of hostile action. 9-11 fits most of these standards.

The attack of 9-11 changed the political arithmetic in the president's favor. If he so chose, power was his. After a fumbling start, Bush asserted himself and geared up for action. While not capable of inspiring rhetoric, Bush squarely defined the threat, the challenge, and the initial steps for dealing with the terrorist attack.

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The 9-11 attack gave the administration a focus, a clear task. It also removed many of the obstacles that impeded presidential authority prior to the attack. The public rallied behind the president. The Congress overwhelmingly supported Bush. The Democratic opposition gave Bush nearly a free hand to act. Other nations gave their support. The president had POWER.

How would Bush use this power? The president already had in place, an experienced foreign policy team. They were given a clear goal: stop terrorism. And the usually complex world was reduced to a simple equation: call it revenge or justice, terrorists were the enemy, they had to be defeated! It was a single-minded goal and it gave drive and focus to the administration.

Bush himself seemed to change as well. Presidential scholar Fred I. Greenstein noted "a dramatic transformation in his performance," arguing that Bush "became strikingly more presidential, " and that "there has been an impressive increase in his political competence…" The public seemed to agree. Not surprisingly, for it happens with every foreign crisis, the president's popularity shot up. Perhaps surprisingly, it went over, and stayed over 80% for quite some time.

Had Bush grown? Did he rise to meet the challenge? Yes, in part. The 9-11 crisis did give Bush added power, and in the immediate aftermath of the attack he performed quite competently. But, I would argue, more than Bush growing what took place was that we, the public needed to believe that he had grown.

The United States was horrified, shocked and frightened by the attacks of 9-11. The public had a deep psychological need, a hunger to be reassured, comforted. We needed to believe that, in an out-of-control world, someone was in control; that everything would be okay. And while Bush did some of this, we chose to see him- because we need to see him- as bigger, better and different than he was.

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The president is a Shaman-in-Chief, a national healer (e.g. Reagan following a Challenger crash, and Clinton after the Oklahoma City bombing). Presidents fulfill a variety of psychological roles for us. They are Reassurer-in-Chief, a kind of security blanket for the nation. And while Bush, because of his verbal insufficiencies, did not perform this function well, the public so needed to see him as a national reassurer, that we- for psychological reasons-made Bush something he wasn't. Yes, Bush grew, but more than Bush changing, we saw him through the eyes of need - we made him fill that need regardless of his performance. It was more about us, than him.9

As playwright Arthur Miller writes:

What we want from leading men is quite the same thing as we demand of our leaders, the reassurance that we are in the hands of one who has mastered events and his own uncertainties. Human beings, as the poet said, cannot bear very much reality, and the art of politics is our best proof.10

In Phase II, Bush orchestrated the military assault on Afghanistan, the defeat of the Taliban government, the damaging of the Al Queda terrorist network, and the international effort to destroy terrorist cells.

Riding the wave of this success, the president began to push too far, grab too much, misstep. Fearing a drop in his popularity, the president decided to declare war on terrorism and lower taxes in a move reminiscent of Lyndon Johnson's ill-fated effort to fund a war on poverty and a war in Vietnam, while not raising taxes. Bush wanted a war on the cheap; a war that required no sacrifices, one in which he would not disturb the consumerism of the public. "Travel," he said; "spend" be implored. This "war without sacrifice" effort marked many suggested, a lack of political courage and failure of leadership, on the part of the president.


While this was going on, the president's right-wing lightning rod, Attorney General, John Ashcroft began a presumptive counter-offensive designed to silence all criticism. He directly questioned the patriotism of the few critics of the war on terrorism; and accused anyone who criticized the administration of aiding the enemy. Ashcroft also orchestrated a narrowing of the civil/constitutional rights of U.S. citizens, arresting citizens without charging them with a crime, refusing to allow them to see an attorney, all in the name of fighting terrorism. But critics questioned the tactics employed, arguing that it is precisely these rights we are supposed to be fighting for! United States citizens are being arrested, without being charged, and without the right to an attorney. A Military Commission was established to circumvent the judicial process, where there is no independent review, no right to appeal, evidentiary standards that dismiss legal standards, and they can hold trials in secret. The New York Times (November 15, 2001) editorialized that this war "a breathtaking departure from due process."

The president pursues policies which are eroding the constitution, because, we are told, of the need to fight terrorism. And so the administration violates elements of the First Amendment (free speech, assembly), Fourth Amendment (prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures), Fifth Amendment, (prohibiting indefinite incarceration without a trial), Sixth Amendment (right to a prompt and public trial), Eighth Amendment (protection against cruel and unusual punishment), and Fourteenth Amendment (right to an attorney). The terrorist threat does pose difficult choices as we balance liberty and safety. That is why we must use reason and not emotion when making the painful choices.

Others charged that the administration was using the war on terrorism as an excuse for resurrecting the Imperial Presidency.\textsuperscript{11} Even before 9-11, the administration has been obsessed with secrecy, excessive in its application of executive privilege, and miserly on its willingness to allow administration officials to testify before Congress.

Bush has been allowed-due to the events of 9-11-to institute a president-centric view of power. The war on terrorism has eroded the separation-of-powers system of checks and balances, and the war allowed Bush to promulgate an Administrative Presidency, sans the annoying

\textsuperscript{11} Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Imperial Presidency (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).
intrusions of Congress. It threatens a presidency, disembodied from the systemic checks created to control unchecked executive power. Everything is filtered through the lens of a war that is used as an excuse for grabbing power and challenging the patriotism of those who demure. The war metaphor is the reason and the excuse to grab power. Under this notion, the president is the government!

But as the months passed, other events intruded and began to crowd out the war against terrorism. Economic scandals at home (Enron, Worldcom, Xerox) a crash of the stock market, and ethnic clashes, border disputes, and religious conflicts across the globe, proved that the world was not static but dynamic; and as this messy, confusing reality intruded into the neat, tidy world of good v. evil; us v. them; freedom v. terrorism; the president's simple construction of reality began to collapse. Thus, the seeds of Bush's problems stem from what in Phase II appeared to be his success. For planted in the heady days of Phase II-amid military victory abroad and popular support at home-were the problems that would soon reveal the dilemmas of an administration in over its head; an administration that was one-dimensional. And so, we enter Phase III.

**Phase III**

The war against terrorism; as important as it is, is not the only issue of importance to the U.S. and to the world. In the Spring of '02 reality intruded into George W. Bush's world. And reality has a funny way of biting one in the nose!

Phase III began, I would argue, with the Israeli/Palestinian clash that began in the Spring of 2002. If one accepted the George Bush view of the world, everything would be so simple -good versus bad; democracy versus terrorism. And in response to Palestinian attacks against Israeli citizens the answer would be ever so clear: condemn terrorist attack, destroy the PLO, support Israel.

But life-and politics-is much more complex and nuanced than the world according to Bush. It requires a more sophisticated, complex and multi-dimensional view than the president seemed capable of accepting.
In Phase III, the single-mindedness of Bush looked like simple-mindedness as the world refused to cooperate with Bush's good versus evil simplicity, as other deep conflicts-ethnic, religious, territorial, historic-worked their way onto the world's agenda. And the president, when confronted with this complex reality, mumbled, fumbled, stumbled, and was reduced to the "deer caught in the headlights" look. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the president's simplistic formulation could be viewed as an asset: focused, determined, single-minded. But in time, the asset turned into a liability. What was called "The Bush Doctrine," after President Bush's, September 2001 statement to Congress, "from this day forward any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime," went form doctrine to dilemma, from guiding vision to a political and moral quagmire. New York Times columnist Frank Rich summed up the problem:

Bush, who once spoke of rigid lines drawn between "good" men and "evildoers," has now been so overrun by fresh hellish events and situational geopolitical bargaining that his old formulations - "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" - have been rendered meaningless.12

"Look, my job isn't to try to nuance," Bush told a British journalist. Well, actually, it is his job to nuance. The president had reduced the world down to an understandable, simple, equation; one that he could comprehend. But the world did not cooperate with Bush's concept.

"I think moral clarity is important," Bush said, and indeed it is. But Bush's moral certitude towards the Taliban degenerated into hypocrisy when the Israeli/Palestine conflict forced Bush to nuance or retreat. Bush's initial effort to define the world simply did not apply to this conflict. And while it was clear that indeed, the PLO had been supporting terrorism, to them make them "a hostile regime," while satisfying a need for moral clarity undermined a variety of other, more complex, and arguably more important geopolitical and national security needs. Former Reagan administration Middle East expert Geoffrey Kemp suggested that applying Bush's simplistic formula to the Middle East conflict "reflects either appalling arrogance or ignorance."13

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While a young political scientist at Wesleyan University, Woodrow Wilson gave a lecture entitled, "Leaders of Men." In it, Wilson pointed out how to persuade, or lead opinion. "Men are not led by being told what they do not know…Their confidence is not gained by preaching new thoughts to them. It is gained by qualities which they can recognize at first sight, by arguments which find easy and immediate entrance into their minds."\(^{14}\)

Here, Wilson recognizes the dual role of leaders in a democracy: they must think in complex terms, but speak in simple terms. But in a crisis, the burden of persuasion shifts from a leader trying to gain support to -in the crisis- the leader already having support. Therefore, in a crisis, the leader need not take the people on a journey from point A to B (they are already at point B). Having that luxury means the job of a leader in crisis is to devise complex strategies to deal with complex issues and explain them in simple terms.

On the heels of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict come other clashes that undermined the president's "clarity": the India/Pakistan dispute, later the North/South Korea hostilities and finally the announcement that North Korea-one of Bush's "axis of evil" countries- had nuclear weapons. All these clashes-and indeed all of world politics-suggests a complex, even contradictory, mixed and mixed up world, where simplistic sloganeering, however appealing, simple doesn't work. Reducing the complexities of the world down to a few simple absolutes that can be understood may seem comforting, but it is in actuality an escape from reality. We can't deal with a world we wish existed, we must deal with the one we've got. And that is why Phase III reveals the weakness of Bush and the problems with his approach and (mis) understanding of the world.

Phase III for President Bush ended however on a light note. The result of the 2002 mid-term election in which the president's party gained seats in Congress, giving the Republican control of both Chambers of Congress, is testimony to Bush's political courage (he squarely put his reputation on the line by actively campaigning in a umber of close races) and his political skill (he defied the historical odds and won over a number of swing voters). This big win was followed by a UN resolution calling for Iraq to disarm and re-

admit UN arms inspectors. It was less than the President wanted but more than might have been expected.

**Phase IV**

Phase IV conceptually at least, begins in the Fall of 2002 with the release of the administration's new formulation of the basis of US foreign policy, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America." This document announces the replacement of deterrence with preemption as the governing principle of US policy.

Arguing that in the post Cold War world, a new strategy is required to meet new needs, the Bush administration document calls for the US to so dramatically outspend potential rivals on defense that they won't every think of catching up to the US in weaponry. Currently the US spends more on defense than the next 15 countries- combined! It also announces that the US can- when it determines that another nation might sometime in the future, threaten us or our allies- attack them before they engage in any act- thus the "preemption" of part of the new policy.

This makes the United States not only the Policeman of the world, but its supreme legislature, judge, jury, and executioner. It is a breathtaking assertion of unilateral power. There is no check, no balance, no rule of law, it is the president who decides.

This, of course, goes against everything the Founders of our Republic believed about. Human Nature and the potential for power to corrupt. Uncontrolled power is what the Framers feared. It is now US policy.

**Understanding George W. Bush**

President Bush has five characteristics that define his presidency his: 1) way of thinking; 2) view of politics; 3) efforts to distance and differentiate himself from Bill Clinton; 4) obsession with reelection; 5) and most importantly his effort to reconcile his father's presidency with his own. His way of thinking is shaped by his need to reduce the world down to simple, understandable formulas. This is most clearly seen in his characterization of terrorism as us versus them; good versus evil. Of course, we all reduce the complex world down to simpler, more manageable formulas. But it is a matter of degrees. The president thinks in absolutes. Bush seems unable to think in degrees (the mark of a thoughtful, educated person). His black-and white-thinking reduces terrorism down to an "axis of evil" formula, a simple,
unicausal, simplistic view that does not distinguish between the different, social, political, historical, religious and cultural roots of the many different forms and elements of what he calls terrorism, and in so doing, he makes it less-not more-likely that he will be able to get to the roots of terrorism and reduce the threat that continues to hang over the nation. If we have the wrong diagnosis, we are likely to apply the wrong remedy.

Rather than being seen as a problem, Bush's lack of understanding and lack of curiosity are seen as an asset by the administration. Bush's "my job is not to be nuanced" should have been met with shock and scorn. But to Bush, ignorance is not only bliss, it is necessary. He is happy not knowing! And because of this, he is not able to grow, not able to learn. President Bush is a man of breathtaking ignorance on public policy matters, and he doesn't see this as a problem. \(^{15}\)

Secondly, Bush's view of politics is shaped by seeing the world in simple terms of personality. It is not institutions that shape behavior, not ideologies, not religion, not territorial or geopolitical forces, not economic or strategic factors, but PEOPLE. Repeatedly, Bush reverts back to phrases like "leaders have to lead," or "he is not leading" or "Arafat isn't leading" etc. It is individuals, disembodied from institutions, systems, cultures, and other restraints, that matter. If only leaders would lead, so the simplistic equation goes, everything would be all right. This overly personalistic view is at odds with reality, but seeing the world as merely "what people do" and not the forces and interests behind "people," allows Bush to understand the complex world as governed by two principles a) only "leaders" matter; and therefore b) if only leaders would be "good" (people and leaders), everything would be all right. This is all neat, clear, comfortable, and wrong.

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\(^{15}\) Two, of a possible countless number of example should suffice: just days before the 2000 election, candidate Bush made it clear he did not know that Social Security was a problem of the federal government. Or, during a meeting with President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, of Brazil, Bush shocked his guest by asking, "Do you have blacks, too?" Bush's national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, on noticing the stunned look on the face of the Brazilian President, quickly explained to Bush: "Mr. President, Brazil probably has more blacks than the U.S.A.; it is said to have more black people than any country outside Africa." Later, Brazil's president said of Bush, he is "still learning." See: The New Republic and Der Spiegel May 19, 2002.
The third driving forcer that animates Bush is his effort to distance and differentiate himself from the presidency and persona of William Jefferson Clinton. President Clinton was and is, to Republicans, the poster boy for everything that is wrong with America. Their hatred for Clinton runs deep. While some of their distaste is based on the well documented character flaws of Clinton, the level and depth of their hatred far exceeds any rational judgement. It gut-level, unthinking, knee-jerk. And George Bush shares much of this pathological hatred.

He, and members of administration, have repeatedly blamed Clinton for problems from the Mid East violence to our Economic woes. Often, after blurring out a snide attack against Clinton, administration officials are forced to back down and apologize. But this "blame Clinton first" reaction reflects a lack of maturity on the part of officials who cannot accept responsibility for their own actions.

Ironically, as much as Bush dislikes Clinton, one could argue that in many ways, he is doing a pretty good job of imitating Clinton (politically, not personally). Remember Clinton's "Third Way"? Bush's version is called "compassionate conservatism." Remember Clinton's efforts to "triangulate"? That is precisely what Bush is doing-positioning himself between the liberal Democrats and the conservative Republicans. Remember Clinton's grotesque fundraising? Bush has eclipsed even Clinton in this field, with White House "sleepovers" jokingly referred to as "Bed, Bush, and Beyond." Remember Clinton's serial dissembling? President Bush does a pretty good job of this himself, as when he denied that the administration does polling (it does, and that is another link to Clinton), or when he claimed to have read a government report on global warming when in fact he had not. Remember how Clinton, to stay politically viable would bite the bullet and accept, even embrace Republican positions (e.g. Welfare reform)? How else can one explain President Bush signing a campaign finance reform bill he deeply opposed? And finally (although one could go on) remember how obsessed Clinton was with his popularity? Bush seems to be equally sensitive to public approval, and shapes his message and policies towards keeping his ratings high. Which leads to the next factor: the 2004 election.

Fourth, George W. Bush is-like most if not all politicians-utterly obsessed with reelection. From triangulation to compassionate conservatism,
2004 is the end zone. And while the rhetoric is that everything takes a back seat to the war on terrorism, the reality is that everything takes a back seat to reelection. How else can one explain Bush's pandering on steel protectionism, a deeply cynical effort to woo steelworkers to vote for the president in 2004. Bush's party building efforts, and massive fundraising are blatant (and appropriate, I would argue) efforts to boost his and his party's electoral bid in 2004. His goal is to a) secure his base; b) chip away a few discrete Democratic groups or interests that can swing a close state in the president's favor; and c) remind everyone that we are at war.

Finally, and I would argue, most importantly, George W. Bush is very much the product of and servant to his father's presidency. The major premise, the overriding driving force that both motivates and imprisons the George W. Bush ("W") presidency is the George H. Bush presidency ("H"). In effect, W is trying to reconcile himself to the sins of the father, while also trying to avoid the mistake of his father, and restore luster to the Bush family name, the Bush Dynasty.

Be it W's preoccupation with Saddam Hussein in Iraq (to complete the task left behind by his father as well as to avenge a failed assassination attempt by Hussein against the senior Bush), his obsessive focus on reelection (to make up for the defeat of the father in 1992), to W's blind devotion to tax cuts at any cost (to avoid H's "read my lips, no new taxes" reversal), to W's compassionate conservatism (the latest rebirth of H's "kinder, gentler America"), to W's drive towards education reform (to make up for H's passivity when he said he wanted to be "the education president"), nothing moves W like H.

So much of W's life can be understood as an effort to live up to the very high standards set by H. It must not have been easy being in the shadow of a father who accomplished so much: member of the House of Representatives, head of the Republican Party, U.S. envoy to China, head of the CIA, two-term vice-president, and then president. W's life and career sought to mimic the father: Yale University (but not military service, except for the safety—during the Vietnam War of the National Guard), the oil business (where W used his father's connections to make millions from failed business ventures), a run for Congress, and later the White House. And yet, in all these efforts, W always seemed a dim afterglow of the more luminous father. It was Bush, but Bush-lite.
In the struggle to climb out of the shadow of his accomplished father, W embraces a dynastic road to self-promotion. It seeks both to reconcile W with H, as it also constrains the son. George W. Bush acts less for King and country, and more for father and family. It empowers and imprisons the president. He is not his own man because he is not his own person. In this, George W. Bush is a slave to his past. This helps explain the Bush administration's peculiar ruling limiting the release of the papers of the former presidents. Bush has made it much more difficult for scholars to gain access to what by law are supposed to be public papers. Why do such a thing? One explanation is that Bush the Elder has much to fear from the release of the full Iran-Contra story. The evidence suggests that the former president may have lied under oath in denying participation in meeting about the scandal and further lied about positions he took on this matter. How to protect the reputation of father and family? Keep the information under wraps.

The Bush family is ferociously loyal (W was considered the loyalty enforcer in H's administration) and W is consumed with both not repeating the mistake of the father, and rectifying the embarrassment of the 1992 electoral defeat. Apart from righting those wrongs, W seems overly conscious of the unfinished business of H's presidency (especially in W's determination to unseat Saddam Hussein), and of learning the lessons of H's presidency—so much so that rather than illuminating W, this focus seems to obscure judgment.

**Conclusion**

In the end, presidents are judged by the size of the problems they must face the skill with which they confronted these problems, the long-term impact of their actions, and the ends they sought. After 9-11, President Bush faced a big problem. But he was granted and he used, extraordinary and extra-constitutional power to confront this problem.

Much has been done; much is yet to do. In part, President Bush grew to fit the demands of crisis; in part he was unable to grow to the proportions necessary to fully confront the problems he faced. At first, Bush handled the post 9-11 crisis well; later, the fundamental weaknesses or flaws that are a part of who and what Bush is overwhelmed the president and exposed the limits that are George W. Bush. Now, as we approach Phase IV of the Bush administration (war against Iraq ?), new questions, and new concerns are
raised about the long term implications for US policy as "preventive" and "preemptive" strikes become a part of U.S. policy.

While it would be unfair to say "the emperor has no clothes," it is fair to say, I think, that the president is not up to the complexity of the job. The president is just not able to think in complex terms. His limitations force the president to reduce complexity down to simple one-dimensional terms. To an extent, we all do this. But a president must be able to think in complex terms while he reduces complexity down to manageable terms, communicates that to the public; translates that into policy, oversees execution of policy and reexamines actions in light of new information: The president lacks the analytical and intellectual skills to deal effectively with complexity. And when the "simple" task (attack terrorism) became more complex (phase III), the president could not adjust to the new demands. Myopic in its version, simplistic in its approach, one-dimensional in its worldview, the administration was not able to make the transition from uni-dimensionality to multi-dimensionality when events demanded such a transition.

It is a lot to ask of anyone. But no one forced Bush to seek the presidency, as no one anticipated the vast demands that would be imposed on his shoulders after 9-11. Crisis tends to paralyze some and animate others. Crisis paralyzed President Buchanan and energized President Lincoln. While George W. Bush is no Buchanan, he is no Lincoln either.