November 2005

George H. W. Bush and the Semi-Institutional Vice Presidency

Jack Lechelt

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops

Part of the Political Science Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops/vol33/iss1/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Politics at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Political Science by an authorized editor of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact commons@coastal.edu.
While serving as Vice President in the two Reagan Administrations, George H. W. Bush was actively involved in the formulation and execution of foreign policy. Bush's prominent profile and contributions were made possible, in part, by the recently augmented resources, influence and prestige of his office, here termed the semi-institutionalization of the vice presidency. This article briefly recounts the origins, describes the nature, and by examining the conduct of Bush, explains the significance, of this phenomenon.

This article examines the roles played by George Herbert Walker Bush in the area of foreign policy while Vice President during the two Reagan Administrations. I will show that his substantial activities and significant contributions were made possible, in no small part, by the recently augmented resources, influence, and prestige of his office, which I term the "semi-institutional vice presidency." This institutional development has resulted from a number of factors, most significantly the increasing complexity of the international environment, the growth of the presidency, and the establishment of

precedents between President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale. These precedents have increased the likelihood that vice presidents will work in close proximity to their presidents, take on more important assignments, and have more influence over foreign policy.

Even with these changes, the vice presidency remains unique. Statutory guidance for the office is minimal, and it does not have a significant bureaucracy attached to it. The qualifying prefix in the term "semi-institutional vice presidency" acknowledges this uniqueness, and also recognizes two limits on the full-fledged institutionalization of the office.² These limitations are important, but should not be exaggerated. The first is that presidents have options in determining how they will utilize their vice presidents. It is unlikely, however, that modern Presidents would completely ignore their Vice Presidents, if only because, as Ronald Reagan rhetorically asked, "Why...let able-bodied manpower sit by?"³ Rather than consider if presidents will use their vice presidents, presidents are increasingly likely to consider how they will use them. The second limitation is that vice presidents can help or hurt their standings within an administration. Of course, this is also true for every Cabinet official and staff member. However, unlike Cabinet members and staff, there is no mechanism for a president to fire a vice president.⁴ More impor-

² Referring to the presidency, Ragsdale and Theis (1997, 1280) wrote that "institutionalization... involves the process by which the office as an organization attains stability and value as an end in itself. Stability denotes that the entity cannot be easily altered or eliminated, while value involves the entity acquiring a distinctive identity." Although the vice presidency approaches this definition of institutionalization, it cannot acquire levels of stability and value that the presidency possesses.


⁴ Vice presidents can be impeached and removed from office by Congress, but the president has no role in this procedure; on the other hand, presidents can seek to remove a vice president from the ticket in a re-election campaign.
tantly, vice presidents are ordinarily motivated to serve their presidents well. Indeed, they are often eager to reach the presidency and, recognizing that presidents are titular heads of their party and can have a large impact on nominations, vice presidents are motivated both to perform well in office and avoid becoming a nuisance to the man most responsible for their career ambitions. In light of this, George Bush worked hard to attain and maintain a positive relationship with Ronald Reagan, a fact particularly evident in Bush’s performance in response to the assassination attempt on Reagan.

As we will see, George Bush’s tenure as vice president serves as a useful case study for the semi-institutional vice presidency. Unlike Mondale, Bush competed for his party’s presidential nomination against the president he ended up serving. Furthermore, Bush hailed from the moderate wing of the Republican Party, whereas Reagan was closely aligned with the conservative wing. Finally, Reagan had a number of close confidantes who either followed him from his home state of California or had proven themselves staunch conservatives. Given the recent competition between the two men and their ideological (and other) differences, the fact that Bush was as active as he was in the Reagan administration provides striking evidence for the importance of the recently developed semi-institutionalization of the office.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE
SEMI-INSTITUTIONAL VICE PRESIDENCY

More distant factors in the development of the semi-institutional vice presidency concern the increasing complexity of the international system and the consequent effects it has had on the presidency. Edward Morse (1970) provides a useful account of this complexity, pointing out, for instance, that high pol-
icy issues such as national security and military matters have become increasingly intermingled with low policy issues like trade and economic policies. In addition, the distinction between foreign and domestic policy has weakened, leading to what one scholar has termed "intermestic affairs" (Manning 1977). As a result of such developments, the ability of presidents to control events became increasingly attenuated and this, in turn, contributed to the rise of the primacy of the presidency, especially in foreign affairs (Manning 1977). Yet the rising prominence and power of presidents has had the paradoxical effect of making it more difficult for them to handle all of their responsibilities. Given their desire to steer policy in their preferred direction and to control the bureaucracy, presidents have looked for help wherever they could find it. The vice presidency was a logical place for them to turn.5

Added to these larger environmental factors were the more recent events of the Vietnam War and Watergate, and the presidency of Jimmy Carter. As a candidate for the office, Carter’s status as a Washington outsider proved advantageous against the background of these recent national traumas. But neither that status, nor his lack of national experience, would serve Carter well once in office. To his credit, Carter recognized his dearth of Washington experience, and he intended to make up for it with the vice presidency: "I had made only one early decision about the Vice President—that it was important for me to choose a member of Congress as my running mate in order to provide some balance of experience to our ticket. Without ever having

---

5 Many years ago, Paul T. David (1967, 721) recognized the likelihood of presidents turning to their vice presidents: "the increasing recognition of the Vice Presidency reflects the hazards of the present world situation, in which the Vice President may be called upon at any time to take over as commander-in-chief, as well as the growing burdens on the time and strength of the President as chief executive, leader of his political party, and chief of state."
served in Washington myself, I needed someone who was famil-

iar with the federal government and particularly with the legisla-
tive branch” (Carter, 1982, 35).

From that decision and the eventual selection of Walter Mon-
dale, a Senator from Minnesota, as Carter’s running mate, Carter
and Mondale agreed on key components of the new vice presi-
dency. These new components, or precedents, were followed by
all of their successors. First, the vice president was going to have
an office in the West Wing of the White House, on the assump-
tion that proximity to the president is power. Second, the vice
president would have weekly private lunches with the president:
no formal agendas, no other staff. Third, the vice president
would be included in all paperwork loops, outgoing from the
president and incoming to the president. Fourth, the vice presi-
dent would be allowed to attend any meeting he wanted to at-
tend. Fifth, no specific tasks or commissions would be forced on
the vice president; he would be a general advisor to the presi-
dent. Sixth, to secure these ambitious goals, the vice president
would be given a budget line-item and the necessary staffing.
These changes to the office of the vice presidency were monu-
mental, particularly for an office once described by a former oc-
cupant, John Nance Garner, as not being worth a bucket of spit.

The establishment of precedents is important for understand-
ing much that occurs in and around the presidency, including the
vice presidency. Cass Sunstein has compared such precedents, or
“practices,” to the changing common law judicial interpretations
of the Constitution, contending that the presidency has become
more prominent over the years based on this sort of change. His
point is that “common law constitutionalism occurs outside the
judiciary. The development of these practices and understandings
resembles the process of common law development. It is recog-
nized that a certain practice ‘works’; Congress and the President
endorse the practice; and the practice therefore operates as a
guide for the future” (Sunstein, 1995, 15). Joel K. Goldstein (1995, 560) has applied the point to the vice presidency: “Once one President gives his Vice President a weekly private appointment...it becomes difficult for other Presidents not to follow suit. These practices when repeated once or twice create settled expectations.” Paul David (1967, 721) has similarly observed that the “functions, duties, and prerogatives of vice presidents are not likely to expand without presidential authorization, but once the authorization has been granted, it is more difficult to withdraw the grant of expanded prerogatives.” Since Carter and Mondale, the practices discussed here have been repeated four times, by Reagan-Bush, Bush-Quayle, Clinton-Gore, and Bush-Cheney.

Carter and Mondale left office after four years in an embarrassing defeat to another Washington outsider, Ronald Reagan. The two presidents, Carter and Reagan, could hardly have been more different politically or as managers. Carter was a hands-on devourer of detail; Reagan, in contrast, delegated many important tasks. Despite his desire to change many government processes, Reagan continued the Carter-Mondale precedents with his own vice president, George Bush. Bush also wanted to follow the “Mondale Model” of the newly-enhanced vice presidency. “My conclusion,” he said after examining the Mondale experience, “is that the Mondale model is a very good model.” In fact, Bush credited Carter and Mondale with making the important changes that he, Bush, benefited from (Smith, 1981, 28). In deciding to carry on the Carter-Mondale model, Reagan and Bush reinforced the semi-institutionalization of the vice presidency.

---

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

Perhaps no president in modern American history is more difficult to understand than Ronald Reagan. His inner thoughts and feelings and the degree to which he allowed himself to be influenced by those around him have baffled many people.\(^8\) Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Edmund Morris (1999, 579), personally picked by Reagan to write his biography, was granted a great deal of access to him and still found that Reagan “remained a mystery.” Specific aspects of Reagan’s management style also make understanding his presidency difficult. First, Reagan delegated extensively, believing that delegation was “the cornerstone of good management: Set clear goals and appoint good people to help you achieve them” (Reagan, 1990, 161). But clarity was not always achieved; as Martin Anderson (1988, 291) noted, “Because [Reagan did] not actively and constantly search out and demand things, he must rely on what is or is not brought to him.” Second, Reagan’s less-than-direct means of discussing the specifics of important foreign policy positions often caused friction among staff. In dealing with such weighty issues as Central America, the Middle East, and the Soviet Union, there always appeared to be two different schools or teams fighting each other for control of policy. One team represented the California conservatives, normally considered to be closer to Reagan’s heart.\(^9\) On the other side were pragmatic/realist/moderates often struggling to claim they represented Reagan’s best interests, if not his

\(^8\) Lou Cannon (2000, 144), in the single most useful and authoritative book on the Reagan presidency, wrote the following: “While Reagan was still in the White House, dismissed or disenchanted former members of his Cabinet and staff produced ten memoirs that reflect the frustrations of those who made the mistake of trying to breach the personal barrier…. [T]he memoirs find Reagan a puzzlement.”

\(^9\) The conservatives included Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, National Security Advisor William Clark, Director of Central Intelligence William Casey, and United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick.
true desires: George Bush hailed from that camp. Because Reagan failed to resolve or even oversee these factions and conflicts, it is often hard to discern his foreign policy goals and priorities.

Added to the difficulties of understanding the Reagan presidency was Bush’s preference for keeping his personal views as vice president to himself. Bush believed that the advice he gave to the president should be shared with no one. No doubt this stance helped Bush retain Reagan’s confidence; however, it makes understanding their relationship more difficult.

Although Bush had impressive foreign policy credentials, especially compared to Reagan’s limited experience with international affairs, Bush had reason to wonder if he was going to be accepted into Reagan’s inner sanctum. Reagan and Bush ended up on the same ticket after initially opposing each other in a fairly long and acrimonious fight for the 1980 GOP nomination (Untermeyer, 1997, 157). If any president and vice president were likely to have difficulties working together, it would be Reagan and Bush—and Reagan would not be the one kept out of the loop. Yet Reagan held no grudge and accepted Bush into the team. One important component of Reagan’s personality, as noted by Martin Anderson (1998, 288), was his “inherent humility”: “he [was] not an arrogant or haughty man.”

10 Those in the pragmatic camp included Secretary of State George Shultz, National Security Adviser [NSA] Robert McFarlane, Chief of Staff James Baker, Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver, and First Lady Nancy Reagan. Shultz became Secretary of State in 1982 after Alexander Haig resigned. McFarlane was one of six NSAs, but he was an important part of U.S.-Soviet policy and Iran-Contra.

11 Chapters nine and ten of Bush’s (1988) autobiography deal with his positions on advising the President. Herbert Parmet (2001, 258) wrote about the difficulties of understanding Bush’s vice presidency: “The last place to learn about the Bush-Reagan relationship would be by listening to George Bush.”

12 Any difficulties Bush suffered within the Administration came not from Reagan, but from his tightly knit conservative associates. After one successful trip to Europe in 1983, and just prior to another trip to Europe in the summer of that same year, conservatives

---

THE JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
By maintaining the precedents established by Carter/Mondale, Reagan and Bush were able to build a stronger relationship. Their weekly lunches, according to Bush’s national security adviser, Donald Gregg, gave them the opportunity to get to know each other: they enjoyed each other’s sense of humor and there was a great deal of mutual respect (D. Gregg, personal communication, June 3, 2005). Moreover, Bush’s office in the West Wing helped ensure that he kept in close contact with the President personally and through the flow of information coming from and going to the President.

Reagan made another decision that enhanced Bush’s prospects by choosing James Baker III to be the White House chief of staff. This Reagan did despite the fact that Baker was Bush’s presidential campaign chief—against Reagan in the 1980 GOP primaries. Moreover, Bush and Baker were both from Texas and close friends. Although the California conservatives distrusted Baker, Reagan’s appointment of him as the new chief of staff allowed the Vice President to have an additional channel to the President.13 In addition, Bush was well-respected by Deputy Chief of Staff Michael K. Deaver, perhaps Reagan’s closest assistant.14 Bush also made a helpful staff choice: in 1985, Craig

---

13 Lou Cannon (2000. 267) wrote that Baker and Bush “often worked in concert”—and this included work on foreign policy.
14 Deaver occupied a position far closer to the President than anyone save Nancy Reagan. Deaver was one-third of the “troika” that worked most closely with President Reagan throughout his first term (Baker and Meese made up the other two-thirds). According to Note continues on next page.
Fuller became Bush's vice presidential chief of staff. Fuller had long ties to Reagan, stretching back to 1973, and even longer ties to Michael Deaver. Fuller was included in top staff meetings and maintained close contact with Reagan's second chief of staff, Donald Regan.

To handle the large workload that confronts all presidents, Reagan believed that Cabinet government was going to be his best organizational management model. The idea that the President serves as a chairman of the board over a system that can carry out the decisions of the chief decision-maker has likely been the hope of every president; the reality, however, dictates a much more difficult process. To better enable the Cabinet to operate efficiently, Reagan aide Ed Meese created "Cabinet councils," which were smaller policy-focused Cabinet sub-sets. Reagan was the chairman of all councils and Bush, Meese, and Baker were "ex officio members of every council" (Anderson, 1988, 230). Anderson (1988, 230) describes the Cabinet councils as "the main policy chokepoint, a place where new ideas could be introduced, good ideas encouraged, and bad ideas sunk." Although this Cabinet council system dealt mostly with domestic policy, Reagan's domestic political staff was often heavily involved in foreign policy. And Reagan's extensive use of delegating was actually more evident in foreign policy, where he gave experts a freer hand than he did with domestic policy (Anderson, 1988, 306-7; 309).

Deaver (1987, 94) Bush was a "class person" and Deaver's preference for the vice presidential nomination.


Ibid.

Anderson adds that "Bush, Meese, and Baker rarely attended the meetings of the Cabinet councils unless the discussions reached a fairly critical stage. They largely left it to me to represent the president's views during the discussions."

THE JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
Martin Anderson (1988, 312) credits Richard Allen, Reagan's first national security adviser, as "the most important player in the formulation and shaping of Reagan's early foreign policy." Anderson went on to list the "traditional" members of Reagan's first foreign policy "directorate," which included Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, and Director of Central Intelligence William Casey. Also included in the directorate were United Nations Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Ed Meese, Jim Baker, Michael Deaver, and Vice President George Bush. Anderson (1988, 313) states that Reagan drew "Bush deep into the inner sanctums, virtually letting him sit by his side as he conducted his presidency." Anderson credits Haig and Allen as having "dominated" foreign policy in the early Reagan Administration, but Bush, Meese, Deaver, and Baker served, he claims, as "powerful and effective" checks in the foreign policy domain. In fact, in 1981 Reagan declared that Bush was to be in charge of the Crisis Management Team (eventually renamed the Special Situations Group [SSG]). The SSG was an inter-departmental group responsible for emergency foreign policy coordination (Parmet, 2001, 266). As will be explained below, the SSG and Bush's leadership of the group were important components in some of the Reagan Administration's more memorable crises.

Bush also boosted his usefulness to the Reagan team by maintaining extra channels of communication between the Administration and Congress. As a former member of the House of Representatives and as the President of the Senate, Bush worked hard and on the whole successfully to maintain positive relations with both houses of Congress.  

---

To better appreciate Vice President Bush’s activities in the Reagan White House and the actual workings of the semi-institutional vice presidency, it is necessary to examine certain events and policy arenas. The first major event of the Reagan Administration, which helped solidify Bush’s place on the Reagan team, was the assassination attempt on President Reagan. Reagan and Bush had been in office less than three months when, on March 30, 1981, John Hinckley attempted to kill President Reagan on the streets of Washington, DC. After the shooting, the White House was enmeshed in chaos. Most of the Cabinet and top presidential aides were gathered in and around the White House Situation Room. At one point in the afternoon, Secretary of State Haig rushed up to the press room to answer questions from the media. A famous video clip shows Haig stating that, “Constitutionally, gentleman, you have the President, the Vice President, and the Secretary of State, in that order. . . . As of now, I am in control here, in the White House, pending return of the Vice President” (Haig, 1984, 60). Media editing showed an out-of-breath Haig claiming “I am in control here.” Fair or not, this did not help his standing in the press, nor within the Administration.

In contrast to Haig, Vice President Bush exhibited measured poise, and made the most of this unexpected opportunity to further endear himself to Reagan and the President’s intimates. Upon reaching Andrews Air Force Base just outside of Washington, Bush was told that it would be quicker for him to take a helicopter directly to the White House. Bush’s handlers undoubtedly recognized that a South Lawn White House landing would make the Vice President look more presidential, but Bush declined, retorting, “only the President lands on the South Lawn.” Similarly, in order to show that the government was operating without a glitch, a Cabinet meeting was held the next day chaired
by Bush, but he pointedly refused to sit in the President’s chair. Symbolic actions perhaps, but Bush seemingly enhanced his standing within the Administration through such behavior. Even prior to the shooting, however, Bush was apparently ingratiating himself with the President; based on Presidential Daily Diaries from the first two weeks of February 1981, Bush spent more time in the presence of Reagan than did any other foreign policy official.\textsuperscript{19}

THE SOVIET UNION

From President Harry Truman in the 1940s, to President Reagan in the 1980s, no nation in the world received more attention in American foreign policy than the Soviet Union. As an advisor to the President, diplomat, and back-door political operator, Vice President Bush played important roles in the Reagan Administration’s efforts to deal with America’s major foe in the decades’ long Cold War. Bush’s loyalty to Reagan allowed the more moderate vice president to ably serve his conservative president in an area of foreign policy in which Reagan held strong convictions.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Tabulations of minutes from February 2, 1981 through February 13, 1981 (Monday through Friday) show that Bush was at meetings, functions, or ceremonies with Reagan for a total of 1,187 minutes. Others in foreign policy: R. Allen, NSA (876); A. Haig, Secretary of State (504); C. Weinberger, Secretary of Defense (493); W. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence (493); J. Kirkpatrick, UN Ambassador (121); and D. Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (90). In fact, Bush’s time rivals that of Reagan’s closest advisers: James Baker (1,619); Ed Meese (1,324); and Michael Deaver (955). (Presidential Diary, Feb. 2 through Feb. 5, 1981, folder “The President’s Daily Diary [1/27/81-2/5/81],” Ronald Reagan Library; Presidential Diary, Feb. 6 through Feb. 13, 1981, folder “The President’s Daily Diary [2/6/81-2/16/81],” Ronald Reagan Library). I started in February under the assumption that January 1981 would be filled with inaugural-related ceremonial activities.

\textsuperscript{20} I consulted many sources in attempting to understand the Reagan administration’s approach to dealing with the Soviet Union and George Bush’s role in that approach. The Reagan presidential biography by Cannon and the Bush biography by Parmet are useful.

Note continues on next page.
Prior Republican administrations, led by Presidents Nixon and Ford and their foreign policy advisor Henry Kissinger, preferred the realist policy of détente; both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. could coexist peacefully through a balance of power and the use of treaties to maintain that balance. For Reagan, détente cast moral acceptance on communism and the "evil empire" of the Soviet Union; he also believed that treaties held limited value because the Soviets could cheat too easily. Instead, Reagan wanted the U.S. to build up its military defenses and approach negotiations with the Soviets from a position of strength; when the Soviets came to recognize that they could not keep up with the mighty capitalistic military build-up of America, they would be far more willing to enter into agreements that were more advantageous to the U.S., and less likely to cheat once they did so. Hence Reagan was not inherently opposed to entering into treaties with the Soviets despite some of his rhetoric and conservative foreign policy outlook, a position that often annoyed the more conservative members in his Administration.

In 1981, at the start of the Reagan Administration, the military was accordingly infused with funding for Reagan's promised buildup. Within a few years, Reagan began to look for openings with which to approach the Soviets. With the help of Secretary of State George Shultz, and eventually Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, Reagan did find opportunities to build a less acrimonious U.S.-Soviet relationship. Until Gorbachev became the Soviet leader, Bush played a diplomatic role by


21 According to Hedrick Smith (1996, 72), Bush used one of his private weekly lunches with Reagan to urge him to “move quickly in 1985 toward a summit meeting with... Gorbachev.”
traveling to the Soviet Union on many occasions, officially representing the U.S. at the funerals of a string of General Secretaries who died in rapid succession. From Brezhnev to Andropov to Chernenko to Gorbachev, Bush and Shultz were always on hand to get first impressions of new Soviet leaders. Both men were among the first to recognize that Gorbachev represented a new kind of Soviet leader (Garthoff, 1994, 207; Shultz, 1993, 527-533).

The year 1983 proved to be a difficult and strained one for U.S.-Soviet relations, but one in which the Vice President was to have an impact. Shultz called 1983 “the year of the missile,” and with good reason. As part of a compact between President Carter and allies in Europe, the United States had only a limited time to install Pershing II intermediate-range nuclear ballistic missiles and cruise missiles on the European continent. This American action was in response to the growing number of intermediate range Soviet missiles (SS-20 missiles) in Eastern Europe that were pointed towards Western Europe. To make matters more difficult, the Reagan Administration had to deal with protests from the “freeze movement” at home in the United States and in Europe.  

Both the Soviets and the United States placed offers on the table to deal with the intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) problem. The Soviets would reduce their INF missiles in return for a promise by the United States not to install its missiles in Europe (Garthoff, 1994, 134). The United States offered what was referred to as the “zero option,” which dictated that the U.S. would not emplace its missiles in Europe if the Soviets removed

---

22 The freeze movement called for the unilateral freezing of nuclear missile increases by the United States. It was hoped that such a stance would garner a similar response from the Soviet Union. For a thorough discussion of the freeze movement, see Wirles (1992, 103-132).
their INF missiles. Both countries saw the other’s offer as making unilateral demands and, hence, as unacceptable. Given this stalemate and the pending missile deployment in Europe, the Soviets walked out of ongoing treaty talks with the Americans at Geneva, Switzerland.

Vice President Bush was sent on a seven-nation European mission at the beginning of “the year of the missile.” It was intended to help contain the fears of the continent’s populace, while bolstering the concerns of the various nations’ leaders. Europeans were reassured that the missiles were to be deployed for peaceful purposes and reflected Reagan’s belief that the Soviets must be dealt with from positions of strength. Through the military buildup and European INF deployments, the U.S. was supposedly creating stronger bargaining positions. In this context, Bush’s diplomatic skills proved helpful to both American foreign policy and European leaders. According to the *Washington Post*, Bush “played the role of an effective public relations man for the Reagan Administration. In private, there is also reason to believe that Bush handled himself well in his meetings with European leaders.”

The *Washington Post* editorial board offered laudatory marks for Bush’s European tour, claiming that “George Did It.” The trip did not have a strategically substantive purpose, but public relations and symbolism were important.

---

23 Bush referred to his task as a “two-track mission.” First, Bush was to meet with Europe’s leaders and inform them of the President’s support and steadfastness in having the missiles deployed; second, Bush needed to “stop Yuri V. Andropov, the Soviet leader, from ‘running away with the ballgame’ in the heated public relations contest for the minds of the European audience” (Clines, F. X. 1983. “The Vice President: No Comment on the Future.” *New York Times*, p. A-18).


factors in American foreign policy, particularly amidst U.S.-Soviet tensions during 1983.

On a second trip to Europe in 1983, Bush was able to open a “special channel” of communication with the Finnish government (D. Gregg, personal communication, June 3, 2005). Bush’s national security adviser, Donald Gregg, had contacts in the Finnish government, and realized that they were well versed on Soviet affairs. According to Gregg, the Finns informed him early on that Gorbachev was a star on the rise, and that if he became the Soviet leader, new opportunities would follow. When Bush met with Finnish President Mauno Koivisto, they both ensured that the channel between the Vice President’s office and the Finnish President’s office remained intact. As mentioned above, Bush later met Gorbachev at Soviet leader Chernenko’s funeral. Gregg is convinced that Bush’s ensuing report to Reagan regarding his meeting with Gorbachev was important to the opening of opportunities between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. (after every such trip, Bush prepared a thorough report for the President).

Bush also used his lunch meetings to help prod Reagan towards a less confrontational posture after the downing of Korean Air Liner 007. Bush’s efforts “resulted in a speech Reagan delivered at the White House...in which he said ‘we must and will engage the Soviets in a dialogue as serious and constructive as possible.’”

Bush was also influential in dealing with Poland’s relationship with the Soviet Union. In the early 1980s, the Solidarity

---

26 Hoffman, D. 1986. “Bush: Loyal Soldier Maneuvers in Private; Influenced President on Soviets but held back Deficit Warning,” Washington Post, 28 October. Retrieved June 6, 2005 from LexisNexis. Bush dealt with the downing of KAL 007 in another capacity. As head of the Special Situations Group, he brought the SSG together and was able to acquire early pieces of data that were helpful to Shultz and others dealing with initial reports on the tragedy (Garthoff, 1994, 119). The most up-to-date resource on the tragedy is Murray Sayle’s (1993) article for the New Yorker magazine.
union (led by Lech Walesa) was a constant burr in the side of the communist government. The Soviet leaders and Polish president Wojciech Jaruzelski decided to crack down on the Solidarity movement, and Vice President Bush took the lead in urging the President to adopt sanctions against both Poland and the USSR. Bush did this through the use of the Special Situations Group. 27

When Shultz, who hoped to improve dialogue with the Soviet Union, became Secretary of State, he asked that an interdepartmental Saturday breakfast be established. For that, NSA McFarlane turned to his assistant for Soviet matters, Jack Matlock, to create the group that would have on-going and open discussions about Soviet foreign policy. Along with Weinberger, DCI Casey, Shultz, and their assistants, Bush “participated actively and usefully in many of the group’s meetings” (Matlock, 2004, 75). Moreover, Bush served a useful function in keeping Shultz plugged into the inner workings of the White House (Shultz, 1993, 312, 317, 423). According to Bush’s national security adviser, Donald Gregg (personal communication, June 3, 2005), Gregg met regularly with a confidante of Secretary of State George Shultz, Charles Hill. Gregg felt that this was a valuable information resource for both Bush and Shultz. After each meeting Gregg reported everything to Bush. 28

Throughout the remainder of the Reagan Administration, and with the rise to power of Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, the chances of confrontation with the U.S.S.R. and nu-

28 Bush also worked with, and through, NSA McFarlane: “Early in 1984, when hard-line and more pragmatic factions in the Administration were at odds over what approach it should take, Mr. Bush worked with Robert C. McFarlane...to move Mr. Reagan to a less hostile view of Moscow” (Boyd, G. M. 1987. “Issue for ’88: Who is George Bush?” New York Times, November 20. Retrieved February 11, 2004 from LexisNexis). There was a closeness between McFarlane and Bush that added to Bush’s ability to maintain a back-channel influence in foreign policy (Timberg, 1995, 369).
clear holocaust diminished greatly. There were still difficulties ahead for U.S. and Soviet negotiators. Reagan’s insistence on moving forward with the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which was supposed to provide a shield over the U.S. against nuclear attack, proved to be a difficult negotiating barrier between Reagan and Gorbachev. At the same time, SDI aligned perfectly with Reagan’s detestation of nuclear weapons and his desire to see the world rid of them. During the second summit between Reagan and Gorbachev, in Reykjavik, Iceland in 1986, the superpowers came remarkably close to removing their entire nuclear arsenals, but Reagan’s desire to maintain SDI prevented an agreement. Interestingly, although Bush did not care for the conservative hard-line of the first term, he also did not care for what he saw as excessive naivete in Reagan’s willingness to deal away too many missiles: it seemed to him unlikely that the world could safely dismantle much of its nuclear stockpiles (Oberdorfer, 1992, 329). However, during his own presidency, Bush continued working on different variations of missile defense. In any event, SDI was not an insurmountable issue; Reagan and Gorbachev came to important agreements on the reduction of nuclear forces toward the end of Reagan’s second term. As vice president (and later as president), Bush played important parts as the United States saw one of its greatest foreign

29 At around the time of Gorbachev’s rise to the office of General Secretary, Reagan was deciding to minimize the number of people he consulted with on US-Soviet foreign policy: “I would consult only with a small group—George Bush, George Shultz, Cap Weinberger, and Bud McFarlane...in the National Security Planning Group to determine whether we could develop a long-range plan that offered the Russians a series of small steps, and showed that we were sincere about wanting to improve relations as a prelude to a summit and hoped they were, too” (Reagan, 1990, 594-595).

30 Vice President Quayle’s national security adviser, Carnes Lord, credited Quayle and his staff with effectively influencing Bush Administration policy on missile defense (C. Lord, personal communication, May 24, 2005).
The 1,900 American military service members made fairly quick work of the island, though not without difficulties. Among the many problems U.S. forces encountered was faulty intelligence about the enemy’s defense preparedness. Also, there were poor communications among the various branches deployed on or around the island. When all the firing stopped, eighteen service members were killed and the U.S. was triumphant (Rosati, 2004, 72). Parmet (2001, 285) wrote that “Bush did not exactly ‘orchestrate’ the invasion...but he certainly was at the heart of the planning operation. ...More significantly for Bush in the long run was his ringside seat at the creation of the first significant combat deployment since Vietnam.”

The apparent success of the Grenada invasion could not have come at a more needed time for the Reagan Administration. As decisions for the invasion were being made, news arrived that a deployment of U.S. forces (mostly marines) in Lebanon suffered the loss of 241 men who were instantly killed when a terrorist drove a bomb-laden truck into their housing facility (Huchthausen, 2003, 59). American forces had been placed in Lebanon in August, 1982, in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon earlier in the year. A strong Syrian presence in the country, along with the multi-religious complexities existing in Beirut, added to the normally high tensions in the Middle Eastern region. With Beirut slipping into chaos, President Reagan and Secretary of State Shultz decided to intervene. A multi-national force, led by the United States, was deployed to

---

32 For a brief analysis of the problems encountered by U.S. forces in Grenada, see Rosati (2004, 172); also see Huchthausen (2003, 65-85). As for Bush’s role, Gerald Boyd of the New York Times wrote the following: “As chairman of Mr. Reagan’s ‘crisis management’ team, Mr. Bush played a far greater role in the invasion of Grenada in October 1983 than was publicly disclosed at the time. With the President in Augusta, Ga., Mr. Bush convened a meeting of top-level officials, recommended the military action and then conveyed the proposal to Mr. Reagan, who concurred” (“Issue for ‘88: Who is George Bush?” New York Times, November 20. Retrieved February 11, 2004 from LexisNexis).
policy triumphs unfold: the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union

GRENADA, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND OTHER EVENTS

As chairman of the Special Situations Group, Bush played an important role in one of the Reagan Administration’s early military ventures, Grenada. A small Caribbean island nation, Grenada experienced two coups. A radically anti-American, pro-Cuban government was the result. Also, almost 600 American citizens were on the island as students at a local medical school. At the time the decision was made for American forces to invade in October 1983, Reagan was on a golf trip in Augusta, Georgia. Bush convened the National Security Council and received word from the President to proceed with the invasion. According to Herbert Parmet (2001, 284), “Bush, never hesitant as other senior officials, then telephoned Noriega [leader of Panama] to ask Castro to abandon any idea of countering by sending in Cuban troops.”

31 There are many theories regarding the changing relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Many conservatives prefer to credit Reagan with maintaining a tough posture towards the Soviets: his military buildup forced the Soviets to the bargaining table (for example, see Schweizer, 1994, 2002). Others prefer to credit Gorbachev and the changing intellectual climate in the Soviet Union (English, 2000); also, Garthoff found Reagan’s pronouncements and actions to be anything but helpful in working with the Soviet Union, particularly when Gorbachev had to face the growing domestic problems in his country (Garthoff, 1994). Beth Fischer pointed out that Reagan’s position changed dramatically from that of a tough and uncompromising cold warrior, to a more congenially willing participant in negotiations (Fischer, 1997). Jack Matlock, who worked in the Reagan Administration, found that the end of the Cold War was bigger than the two main players. Contrary to Fischer’s argument, Matlock claims that Reagan was always consistent, and unique, in his desire to work with the Soviets. Finally, Melvyn Leffler credits the Truman administration for instituting the tough policies necessary to confront the growing Soviet threat; subsequent administrations followed Truman’s lead (1992, 27-28; Leffler, 2004).
the region. As has often been the case in American national security politics, the entire Administration was not on the same page. Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger believed that American forces should not have been deployed to Lebanon (1990, 157-158).  

Bush’s opinion on whether or not the United States should have provided American troops to secure Lebanon remains a mystery; however, after the bombing of the marines’ barracks, Bush ardently supported pulling the U.S. forces out. Much to the consternation of Shultz, Bush actively lobbied the President. In fact, while the President was in California, “Vice President Bush, with Cap Weinberger at his side, convened a series of crisis-management meetings out of which came decisions to move up and condense the schedule for departure of the marines with no compensating deployment....The vice president said that there is nothing more important than getting those marines out” (Shultz, 1993, 230-231). This was certainly not a foreign policy victory for the United States, but Bush’s role in the Lebanon-American forces pull-out was evident.

Crises were not the only area of foreign policy involvement for George Bush. He also acted on foreign economic issues. For example, early in the first term, Bush was placed in charge of helping the President prepare for a western economic summit in Canada. In another area of importance for foreign economic

33 Weinberger’s beliefs as to when American soldiers should be deployed abroad were better known as the Weinberger Doctrine (which would become more well known as the Powell Doctrine, after Colin Powell): “we should not commit American troops to any situation unless objectives were so important to American interests that we had to fight, and that if those conditions were met, and all diplomatic efforts failed, then we had to commit, as a last resort, not just token forces to provide an American presence, but enough forces to win and win overwhelmingly” (Weinberger, 1990, 159-160). For a helpful and concise review of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine, see Rosati (2004, 188).


Note continues on next page.

THE JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
policy, Japanese automotive imports, Bush offered to Reagan the idea that Japan "voluntarily" reduce their auto exports. Reagan liked the idea and had Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield suggest it to the Japanese government (Reagan, 1990, 254; Rosellini, 1981). After Reagan traveled to Japan in 1983, Bush was placed in charge of a task force to ensure that agreements between the two nations were carried out; in leading the task force, Bush dealt directly with Japan's Prime Minister Nakasone (Shultz, 1993, 190).

Although Bush benefited from the semi-institutionalized vice presidency, he also made an important change to it: unlike Vice President Mondale, Bush did not refrain from specific assignments. One such assignment was Bush's supervision of an anti-terrorism task force. Unfortunately, as evidenced by future events like Iran-Contra, the recommendations based on Bush's work were not followed. 35 Bush also supervised the South Florida Task Force, which was formed in 1982 to address the increased amounts of marijuana and cocaine entering the U.S. Although Bush was able to bring together diverse elements of the U.S. bureaucracy in the war on drugs, over time cocaine increasingly entered the country and became more affordable (Parmet, 2001, 265; Rothenberg, 1988). Still, Bush made an important contribution to the precedents of the semi-institutional vice presidency by establishing that specific assignments need not hinder a vice president's general advisory ability. His successors, Quayle,
Gore, and Cheney, took on specific, and sometimes vital, assignments.36

Clearly, Bush played an important diplomatic role for the Reagan Administration. He traveled 1.3 million miles as vice president and visited 74 countries. According to Kenneth Walsh (1988) of U. S. News & World Report, Bush familiarized himself with virtually every major head of state, ranging from Mikhail Gorbachev to China’s paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping. ... Bush’s closest friends in world capitals included Canada’s Brian Mulroney, Britain’s Margaret Thatcher and West Germany’s Helmut Kohl, and he has a strong bond with France’s Francois Mitterand. Without fanfare, Bush has hosted heads of state such as President Sese Seko Mobutu of Zaire and Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore.

CENTRAL AMERICA AND IRAN-CONTRA

Ironically, the best place to uncover Vice President Bush’s active involvement in foreign policy is in the one area he would prefer no one looked: the Iran-Contra scandal. The largest presidential controversy since Nixon’s Watergate, Iran-Contra captured the nation’s attention at a time when Bush least wanted the issue to bubble up in November 1986, since he was about to launch his second run for the presidency. Although the vice president’s role in foreign policy has dramatically increased, especially since Walter Mondale, the increased stature has not often translated into a promotion to the presidency. Not since Martin Van Buren in 1836 had a sitting vice president been

36 For example, Gore’s national security adviser, Leon Fuerth, pointed out that Gore’s leadership on four bi-national commissions with Russia, Ukraine, South Africa, and Egypt all produced positive results for the United States (L. Fuerth, personal communication, May 11, 2005). Also, Cheney was placed in charge of the G.W. Bush transition effort in 2000/2001, and he was responsible for assessing the nation’s terrorism preparedness prior to the 9/11 attacks (Lechelt, 2004, 24, 26).
elected president. Bush did win the presidential election of 1988, but Iran-Contra was certainly not a help to him.

To better understand Bush's role in Iran-Contra and the scandal, it is important to consider earlier, and related, issues. First and foremost there is Panama and its leader Manuel Noriega. As vice president, Bush had minimal contact with Noriega, who took control of Panama in 1983. But in late 1983, while Bush was traveling to Argentina for the swearing in of a new president, his national security advisor, Donald Gregg, and the soon-to-be-infamous Oliver North, accompanied the Vice President as they stopped in Panama to tell Noriega to cease helping Salvadoran death squads. The death squads were led by right-wing militants who were aggressively anti-communist. Of course, the vehement anti-communist position of the squads accommodated Reagan's own policy preferences, but it is difficult to argue for the human rights benefits of rejecting communism when those fighting communism are not respecting human rights. Hence the Bush warning to Noriega, one later made to leaders in El Salvador as well (Parmet, 2001, 285-286). Gregg states that Bush

37 In 1960, Richard Nixon, as Eisenhower's vice president, ran for president and lost to John F. Kennedy; but Nixon was elected president in 1968.

38 Bush's connections to Noriega stretched back to 1976, when Bush was Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) and learned that Noriega, then head of Panama's intelligence agency, was spying on Americans in Panama; the Americans were, in turn, spying on the Panamanian government (Engelberg, S. 1988. "Bush and Noriega: Examination of Their Ties," New York Times, 28 September. Retrieved February 11, 1004 from LexisNexis). Central America, as with most regions of the world, was considered more important to American interests because of the Cold War. Communist forces were supposedly infiltrating many countries in the region, and Noriega was then considered a friend in the ongoing Cold War chess game. With all of that in mind, DCI Bush was not eager to go after Noriega for spying activities.

39 Bush traveled to other Central and South American nations, always carrying the Reagan Doctrine message that "The United States believes in the self-determination of peoples... It also believes in nonintervention. But it cannot and will not sit by while foreign powers—hostile to the principles we in the Americas have struggled so long for—intervene brutally in the international affairs of one of our neighbors" (Parmet, Note continues on next page.)
dealt “with death squads in El Salvador in just a tremendously powerful way...calling the military leaders in and just absolutely berating them” (D. Gregg, personal communication, June 3, 2005). Bush’s impact on the situation in El Salvador appeared to pay off as the list of demands the Vice President gave to Salvadoran leaders was mostly met by early January 1984: “a new military command was installed; some military officers who had been linked with death squads were transferred, allowing the authorities to get a grip on the free-lance vigilantes; and the army stood back and let the political process unfold” (Gutman, 1988, 185).40

Eventually, the Reagan team recognized the difficulties of dealing with Noriega. Towards the end of the Administration, and with Bush fully engaged in 1988 campaign politics, the Vice President vehemently argued with President Reagan over the handling of the Panamanian leader. In February 1988, federal prosecutors indicted Noriega for his drug-smuggling activities. Reagan, however, was willing to compromise: if Noriega would resign his control over the Panamanian government and leave the country, President Reagan was willing to lift sanctions against Panama and waive indictments against Noriega. In the presence of other Administration officials, Bush spoke up against the President (Parmet, 2001, 332; Powell & Persico, 1995, 375). The deal was not carried out, and Bush would have to wait until he

2001, 287). The Reagan Doctrine sought the “rollback of Soviet influence in the third world”—particularly Central America, but also in Afghanistan (Gutman, 1988, 268).

was president in order to see Noriega’s forced removal from power.

In hindsight, perhaps Bush should have argued similarly against the various issues that were labeled under the “Iran-Contra” rubric. As for the Contra side of the scandal, Nicaragua was the focal point for the majority of the problems the United States faced in Central America during the Reagan years. At the end of the Carter presidency, the dictator of Nicaragua, General Anastasio Somoza, was overthrown by the Sandinista National Liberation Front led largely by Daniel Ortega. Ortega and the Sandinistas had leftist leanings that were further cemented when Ortega gained control of the Sandinistas and, hence, the new government. Although Carter made goodwill economic aid gestures to the new government, Ortega embraced the Soviet Union. With the entrance of the Reagan Administration in January 1981, a more confrontational approach to the Sandinistas was adopted. Reagan wanted to repel the Sandinistas by funding counter-revolutionaries (or “Contrarrevolucionarios,” and their better-known nomenclature, “Contras”). The Contras were a loose network associated with the former Somoza regime and other fighters who opposed the Sandinistas. The conservatives in the Reagan Administration admired the Contras and wanted to support their fight against the communist-leaning government (Draper, 1991, 15-16).41

41 The Iran-Contra affair has generated no shortage of investigations. The most informative and thorough account of the entire affair is Theodore Draper’s *A Very Thin Line* Draper, Theodore. (1991.) . Another useful account that focuses on the Nicaragua aspect is Roy Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua, 1981-1987.* New York: Simon and Schuster (1998). The United States Government, in many different capacities, thoroughly investigated the Iran-Contra affair. First, the Reagan administration appointed an in-house effort led by Attorney General Ed Meese. Then, realizing there was a larger public clamor for a more thorough investigation, the President appointed a commission led by former Senator John Tower (after whom the commission is more commonly known, the Tower Commission). After that, the President Note continues on next page.
Interestingly, the “Contra” in the Iran-Contra affair actually preceded the Iran part of the scandal. The Iran-hostage aspect presented itself a bit later in the Reagan presidency (Draper, 1991, 3). With the fall of the Shah of Iran during the Carter Administration, the new radical rulers of the Muslim nation had established ties to other militant Muslim groups throughout the Middle Eastern region, and some of those groups dealt in terrorism. One such terrorist group, Hizballah, maintained operations in Lebanon and was responsible for the kidnapping of Americans working at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut. One of those kidnapped was William A. Buckley, the CIA station chief in Lebanon, and this especially bothered Bush, who was a former CIA Director (Parmet, 2001, 305).

As a means of getting the hostages released in Lebanon and making inroads with a supposed moderate element in Iran, a plan was devised of almost comical (and tragic) proportions. As with the Contra initiative, conservative elements working largely out of the National Security Council Staff and CIA believed that the hostages could be released if the Iranian government applied pressure to the Hizballah terrorists in Lebanon. Many believed that the most effective means of getting the Iranians to apply this pressure was by providing them with weapons for their ongoing war with Iraq.

As mentioned above, the NSC Staff was the main coordinating arm of both aspects of Iran-Contra, with assistance from DCI William Casey. The two NSAs who were the main coordinators for the Iran and Contra initiatives were, first, Bud McFarlane, and then John Poindexter (who also served as McFarlane’s deputy NSA). The man destined to rise as the focus of attention for appointed an independent counsel, Lawrence Walsh, to investigate whether or not any laws were broken. Finally, Congress also produced reports based on their investigations: one for the majority Democrats, and one for the minority Republicans.
the Iran-Contra investigations was Lt. Col. Oliver North. He was the main point-man on the NSC staff for both the Iran and Contra initiatives, and for the fateful linking of both aspects, which was the diversion of profits from the sale of arms to Iran to help the Contras in Nicaragua. Officially, North was the deputy director for political-military affairs of the National Security Council staff; in actuality, North was the glue holding the scandal-to-be together, along with McFarlane and Poindexter.

Aside from believing both approaches unwise, Secretary of State Shultz and Secretary of Defense Weinberger also feared that the initiatives might have been illegal. With regard to funding the Contras, legality was certainly in question: Congress had passed a few bills, all of which the President signed into law, containing restrictions on the flow of money to the Contras. Democrats in Congress wanted the Administration to utilize diplomacy in dealing with Ortega and the Sandinista government. The Democrats feared that military force could slip out of control and engulf neighboring countries like Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. Also adding to frustrations in Congress was one particular semi-military operation led by the CIA, namely, the mining of Nicaraguan harbors to prevent the flow of oil from benefiting the Sandinistas. Congress was outraged. Even staunch Republican Senator Barry Goldwater, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, was angry with the CIA (Gutman, 1988).

Because of the Congressional restrictions, North sought to continue funding the Contras by employing some imaginative schemes to maintain the money flow. First, he contacted other governments and asked them to help out. Saudi Arabia contributed $32 million and Taiwan another $2 million. Second, there were the contributions of private citizens, which came to $1.7 million. Finally, proceeds from sales of arms to Iran were diverted to the Contras (L. E. Walsh, 1994, 447).
And so, in all of this, where was Vice President Bush? Depending on when the question was asked, his response almost literally varied from “everywhere” to “nowhere.” In a *Business Week* interview held just a few months before the Iran initiative became a public controversy in November 1986, Bush claimed he was deeply involved in Administration policy: “I’m in on everything. If our policies aren’t working, I can’t say, ‘Wait a minute, I’m not to blame’” (1986). Even in his own diary regarding Iran-Contra, Bush claimed that he was “one of the few people that know fully the details” (L. E. Walsh, 1994, 480, fn 474). Yet in his autobiography (1988, 238), written after Iran-Contra was center-stage in public debate, Bush wrote that “I’d been deliberately excluded from key meetings involving details of the Iran operation” and did not have a “real chance to see the picture as a whole” (see also Draper, 1993, 54). He also bluntly stated that he was “out of the loop” (Shultz, 1993, 809).

In dealings with the Iranian initiative, Bush was present for practically every meeting of importance among Reagan’s top national security advisors. This included the first meeting in 1985 in which it was agreed that the United States was to replenish Israeli missile stockpiles after Israel sold missiles to Iran. At another meeting on January 7, 1986, Shultz and Weinberger, two Administration officials who rarely agreed on anything, both stated quite clearly that they were opposed to the Iran initiative. George Bush was present for these important meetings, and although his positions were not clearly stated, his silence was understood to mean agreement with the President’s position of continuing arms-for-hostages efforts.\(^42\) Furthermore, according to

---

\(^{42}\) Shultz stated that “it was clear to me...that the President, the Vice President, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Attorney General, the Chief of Staff, the National Security Advisor all had one opinion and I had a different one and Cap shared it” (Tower, Muskie, & Scowcroft, 1987, 225).
Draper (1993, 54), “It is on record that Reagan, Bush, and the chief of staff met every morning at 9 AM, and Reagan, Bush, and the national security adviser met at 9:30 AM, whenever Bush was in Washington, which was most of the time. At these meetings Reagan invariably brought up the hostages.”

Bush not only served as presidential confidante and advisor for Iran issues, he also acted as an ambassador on behalf of the policy. In fact, on one overseas trip, Bush met with a close advisor to then-Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in July 1986. Israel was in the middle of the arms for hostages swap in the early stages: Israel shipped its weapons to Iran, and the U.S. re-stocked Israel’s missile supply. Amiram Nir was Israel’s go-to official for dealing with Iranian issues, and his official title was “Special Assistant on Counterterrorism” to the Prime Minister. The meeting was relatively brief and various accounts of its importance exist in the public record. Bush (1988, 239-240) described it as nothing more than a “listening session” on his part and felt that it only supplied “pieces” to a larger puzzle. Bush’s Chief of Staff, Craig Fuller, recorded however a far more detailed briefing given by Nir. If Bush claimed to know little about the arms-for-hostages deal up until that meeting, he could hardly make that claim after the meeting. Nir laid it all out on the table by describing the logic of selling arms to Iran. As noted by Fuller, “the VP made no commitments nor did he give any direction to Nir” (Tower et al., 1987, 389). But Bush’s report of the meeting helped the President decide to resume arms sales to Iran (L. E. Walsh, 1994, 480).

In November 1986, after the media got hold of the arms-for-hostages story, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi ambassador to the United States, came to the White House to meet with Bush. Bandar was concerned that publication of the story was going to force U.S. policy to change regarding Iran; Bush assured the Saudi ambassador that there would be no change.
Theodore Draper (1993, 56) noted that “if Bush took it upon himself to give such assurances to Bandar, he was clearly privy to all or at least enough of what had been going on in the Administration’s highest circles. In fact, it is significant that Bandar should have sought out Bush for an answer.”

As Bush fulfilled important roles on the Middle Eastern/Iranian side of the Iran-Contra scandal, he was also involved in supporting the Contras of Central America. First and foremost, Bush strongly favored the efforts made to acquire third party funding for the Contras, as long as no *quid-pro-quo* agreements were made for the funds. Hence, although a complete and accurate understanding of the Iran-Contra scandal may never be known, there is no mistaking that George Bush was a major part of this foreign policy fiasco.

---

43 Also, two members of Bush’s staff—national security advisor Donald Gregg and deputy national security advisor Col. Samuel J. Watson III—played significant roles, again providing evidence of Bush’s impact on Reagan’s foreign policy. Gregg and Watson were closely connected with the Contra activities through their contact, Felix Rodriguez. Rodriguez’s main role in the Contra supply effort was his work with the Salvadoran Air Force. After a Contra-re-supply plane was shot down in Central America with an American on board, the U.S. media found out that the flight was sponsored by the CIA, with Rodriguez providing another link between shady activities and the upper-echelons of the White House (Walsh, 1994, 485).

44 Murray Waas and Craig Unger (1992) wrote of a Bush-Casey connection that has received scant attention elsewhere. During the 1980s, while the arms-for-hostages affair was ongoing, Iran was engaged in a lengthy eight-year war with Iraq, a nation then ruled by Saddam Hussein. According to Waas and Unger, Bush was part of a Casey-devised plan to continually balance the abilities of Iran and Iraq against each other on the theory that those two countries could best be occupied by a lengthy war between them. According to Waas and Unger, Bush was able to balance the factions within the Reagan Administration, one of which favored Iraq, the other favoring Iran. If Waas and Unger are accurate, and they term the affair “Iraqgate,” Bush played a very important role in bolstering Iraq against Iran.
CONCLUSION

Vice President George Bush was an active and influential force on Reagan’s foreign policy team. As a presidential advisor, Congressional liaison, diplomat-at-large, and as a leader of certain specific tasks and responsibilities such as the Special Situations Group, Bush took part in all of the major foreign policy issues of the Reagan Administration. Bush was able to do this in part because of his competence and the wishes of his President, but also because of the semi-institutionalization of the vice presidency. It was President Carter and Vice President Mondale who together established a variety of precedents augmenting the prominence, power and resources of vice presidents. Those precedents included a vice presidential office in the West Wing, weekly private lunches between the president and vice president, inclusion of the vice president in the paperwork loop, the freedom of the vice president or a member of his staff to attend virtually all presidential and national security meetings, and the continuance of a substantive budget line-item and staff resources for the office. President Reagan and Vice President Bush maintained those precedents. In fact, Bush added a precedent of his own: he proved that a vice president could take on specific and important assignments without diminishing his general advisory status or influence. The precedents established by Carter/Mondale, and reinforced by Reagan/Bush, have persisted through to the current day.

The vice presidency is a unique office, as are the individuals who fill it. Although the office has increased resources, it does not come close to what Cabinet Secretaries possess. Furthermore, there are few legal guidelines dictating how the vice presidency should be utilized. But as with important increases in presidential power, precedents have filled in where the law has been silent. In *The Imperial Presidency*, Arthur Schlessinger (1973) pointed out that the power relationship between the presi-
dent and Congress has shifted back and forth over the years, with the presidency making net gains overall. Likewise, the semi-institutional vice presidency recognizes that every vice president will not have the same influence as Mondale or Bush: some will have more and others will have less. Presidents have options in determining how they will use their vice presidents, and vice presidents will at times help or hinder their standing within an administration. However, the pre-Mondale vice president will now be the exception, rather than the rule.

REFERENCES


