Presidential Power

Theories and Dilemmas

by John P. Burke

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Understanding presidential power is central to understanding the American presidency and its place in politics. The nation looks to the president for direction on an ever-growing number of domestic and foreign policy issues and expects him or her to achieve results and make progress. Right or wrong, this is the political reality, and one that is unlikely to change in the near future. Given this, how can presidents effectively exercise power to achieve their goals while still remaining within the rightful bounds and limits of the office? This major dilemma has been—and will continue to be—one that presidents have grappled with, and it forms the heart of this book.

This book brings together in one volume what I believe are the major theories and dilemmas of presidential power. It interlaces a number of strands of my scholarly interests and my research that has spanned more than three decades. As a graduate student at Princeton, I had the good fortune to work with Fred I. Greenstein. His pursuit, on the basis of new archival evidence, of constructing a different understanding of Dwight D. Eisenhower’s presidency fascinated me. Greenstein’s research revealed a more nuanced leadership style, and it was a game changer: not only did it suggest a more successful Eisenhower presidency but it also differed markedly from conventional wisdom that assumed a president needed to be a hands-on, direct bargainer.

I was inspired to delve in, and one of my earliest publications examined Eisenhower’s battle with Democrats in Congress over the federal budget in 1957. Leading presidential scholars of the period, such as Richard E. Neustadt, as well as contemporary observers often use the budget battle of 1957 as an example of Ike at his worst. My research not only depicted a more engaged Eisenhower but also demonstrated that he deployed a varied and more complex set of strategies to attain his policy goals.
My inquiry into the presidency and budget politics continued with the early Reagan presidency. Reagan enjoyed remarkable success during his first year in office, achieving significant budget cuts and tax reform, but he encountered resistance from Congress in subsequent years. In my view, the latter resulted from Reagan’s lack of flexibility during the remainder of his first term. But at the time I noted two other factors. One was his successful deployment of direct public appeals to pressure Congress to follow his policy lead. Reagan was not the first president to use this tactic, but his communication skills and his ability to build public support served him very well in 1981. The second factor was Reagan’s changing political fortunes after his first year. At the time, I had only a glimmer of understanding of the shifting political opportunities and challenges presidents face as they advance through their term or terms in office. Since then, I have developed a longtime interest in this area and have focused much of my research on presidents’ transition to office, its effects on early presidential efforts, as well as the dynamics of the second term.

Political history has always fascinated me. In the early 1990s, I greatly benefited from working with Herbert Brownell in writing his memoirs. Brownell was Eisenhower’s first attorney general and, before that, presidential candidate Thomas E. Dewey’s chief political adviser. Herb was not only a delight to work with but also significantly enhanced my understanding of the politics of the time. Of all my scholarly efforts over the years, this one I most enjoyed and fondly recollect.

Writing this book has enabled me to bring together my scholarly work and gave me the opportunity to share with my colleagues how I have structured my presidency courses over the years. Many deserve thanks for making this book possible, but first and foremost I am indebted to students at the University of Vermont who took my courses on the American presidency: they provided me with continuous dialogue and feedback. I want to thank Craig Rimmerman for inviting me to submit a proposal for his Dilemmas in American Politics series for Westview Press. Initially, I did not think I had the time to write it, but he persevered. I especially want to thank Ada Fung, senior editor at Westview Press, for her astute guidance. Dear reader, she has saved you from much unneeded professorial verbiage. Well done, Ada! Sincere gratitude to the Westview Press team: Acquisitions Director Grace Fujimoto, Sales and Marketing Director Renee Malis, Senior Marketing Manager Victoria Henson, my project editor Carolyn Sobczak, and my copyeditor Christina Yeager.
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Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank R. Stafford Johnson, my spouse, for putting up with me as I wrote this book. Stafford was ever patient and encouraging as I worked on it, all while I put in long hours serving as an associate dean of our College of Arts and Sciences.

John P. Burke
Introduction

Presidential Power and Its Dilemmas

This book examines the issues and theories of presidential power, that is, the ability of a president to attain political and policy goals. Examining presidential power is central to understanding the presidency, which is important because for better or worse, intentional or not the American presidency has emerged as the central focus of our system of government. Starting in the twentieth century, especially since Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency and his efforts to grapple with the Great Depression and World War II, we have turned to the presidency to solve national and international problems. What traditionally might have been regarded as largely local or state-level problems—or even matters of personal choice and responsibility—are seen today as presidential issues, calling for executive response and action. A few examples include the quality of education in local public schools, the costs of college and university education, gun violence and gun control, racial tensions in communities, health care, and environmental quality and conservation issues. If you are surprised that these were not always regarded as matters of clear presidential response and action, then that is all the more telling.

Policies that we take for granted today were not seen as presidential issues, much less the responsibility of the federal government, in eras past. Housing for the poor and the indigent? Until federal housing projects began in the 1930s under Roosevelt, the local “poorhouse” was the only option for those without housing. Financial support for retired seniors? Social Security started during FDR’s second term, but before that retirement income was entirely the responsibility of individuals. This was the same case for medical care, though local charity
hospitals were sometimes available to those who could not pay. For seniors, government-assisted medical care started to be seriously discussed only after World War II, during Harry Truman’s presidency, and it took until 1965, during Lyndon Johnson’s administration, for Medicare to become law. And before Dwight D. Eisenhower’s successful effort in 1956 to create interstate highways, states and locales created their own turnpikes, parkways, or freeways, but often they were not connected. In each of these cases, the president took the initiative to bring these issues under federal jurisdiction.

Of course, not all public policy originates with the president; much can percolate through Congress on its own and become law. Although this book focuses on how presidents secure their policy ends and goals, Congress is still obviously central to attaining presidential initiatives, especially if legislation is required, and the president must convince Congress to take action. How do presidents influence Congress? Is it just through traditional, direct bargaining? What about alternative strategies such as approaching Congress indirectly through third parties or using presidential appeals to the public to exert pressure on their congressional representatives? Presidents also often attempt to achieve their ends acting on their own through a variety of executive actions such as executive orders, proclamations, and declarations. This invites certain questions of power: Does the president legitimately possess those powers? Is the president powerful enough to successfully assert these claims? Congress plays a role here as well in recognizing, and often legislatively authorizing, presidential claims to power but also sometimes denying them. Given this, presidents often exercise caution with executive actions when Congress is assertive and act bolder when it is not.

And as we shall explore in Chapter 3, the Supreme Court has had final say on a number of important constitutional issues in this area. Sometimes the president wins, and at other times the president loses. These tactics are all part of the presidential power toolkit, and as we shall explore throughout this book, presidents often need to employ some combination of these methods to achieve their goals. Depending on the situation and the context, some work better than others.

A DIGRESSION BACK IN TIME:
EARLY AND ENDURING DILEMMAS

To begin framing our analysis of the issues and challenges concerning presidential power and its dilemmas, let us go back in time to a president of a different era,
Rutherford B. Hayes. He served as the nineteenth president from 1877 to early 1881, and he kept extensive diaries of his life. On March 18, 1878, he records a typical day as president:

I rise at about 7 a.m.; write until breakfast, about 8:30 a.m. After breakfast, prayers—i.e., the reading of a chapter in the Bible, each one present reading a verse in turn, and all kneeling repeat the Lord’s Prayer; then, usually, I write and arrange business until 10 a.m. From 10 to 12 in the Cabinet Room, the Members of Congress having the preference of all visitors except Cabinet ministers. Callers “to pay respects” are usually permitted to come in to shake hands whenever the number reaches about a half dozen waiting. Twelve to 2 p.m., on Tuesdays and Fridays, are Cabinet hours. On other days that time is given to miscellaneous business callers. At 2 p.m., lunch. I commonly invite to that—cup of tea and biscuit and butter with cold meat—any gentleman I wish to have more conference with than is practicable in hours given to miscellaneous business. After lunch the correspondence of the day, well briefed, and each letter in an envelope, is examined. By this time it is 3:30 p.m., and I then drive an hour and a half. Returning I glance over the business and correspondence again, take a fifteen or twenty minutes’ nap, and get ready to dine at 6 p.m.¹

There are a number of revealing items here. The president’s cabinet mattered more than it does today, and Hayes met with them regularly as a group. Members of Congress might stop by to visit, but these calls were not necessarily scheduled. The White House at the time was an open, public building. As Hayes notes, “presentable” folks could actually enter and “pay respects” to the president. Most notably, the president’s day ended at three thirty in the afternoon, much earlier than it does today, and dinner followed promptly at six o’clock. (No alcohol was served, by the way, in the Hayes White House. A popular nickname for his wife was “Lemonade Lucy,” and the joke at the time was that at a Hayes White House formal dinner water flowed like wine.) Hayes was hardly overburdened by his official duties. Sunday was even more leisurely: “I have gone to church at least once every Sunday since I became President. Sunday after lunch I ride regularly with Secretary [of Treasury John] Sherman two to three hours. We talk over affairs and visit the finest drives and scenes near Washington.”²

The most important takeaway is that things have changed considerably since Hayes’s day. The contemporary presidency looks much different. For example,
today’s Congress members do not simply “drop by” or visit unless scheduled. Meetings of the full cabinet are rare, and good luck to citizens who want to enter the White House and pay their respects to the president. There is no mention in Hayes’s diary of the press, of presidential speeches and travel, or of the White House staff. In fact the latter was quite small, fewer than ten in number. Hayes’s longtime friend William King Rogers and then the president’s own son, Webb Hayes, each served as personal secretary to the president (what was then the chief of staff position). But it was a vastly different job compared to that of the president’s chief aides today. Neither was a substantive policy or strategic political adviser. They provided familiar comfort to Hayes, organized his letters and correspondence, took notes at meetings, and arranged his schedule. Today, the White House staff numbers over twenty-five hundred (and this is a conservative estimate).

However—and this is a very important point—Hayes still had to reckon with a core dilemma of presidential power: how to exert influence and work with the other two branches of government to achieve his legislative agenda. High on his list were returning the former states of the Confederacy to home rule while preserving the rights of African Americans and encouraging civil service reform. He often vetoed legislation, especially attempts to weaken the gold standard, to curtail federal monitoring of elections in the South, and to remove the federal government’s power to deal with the Ku Klux Klan. Hayes used his executive powers to send troops to stop a national railroad strike and to pursue Mexican bandits across the border. He also issued an executive order that prevented federal employees from being required to make campaign contributions. Although not the broad agenda of a contemporary president, Hayes still needed to exert power and influence to achieve his goals. In this, Hayes struggled: his civil rights policies and efforts at civil service reform met with great resistance.

Hayes also serves as an example of the impact of political and historical context on a president’s power, an issue we explore in this book. In Hayes’s case, as a Republican, he had to deal with a Democratic majority in the House. This was not the progressive Democratic Party of today. Rather, it was a party that gained control of the House as southern states returned to home rule and white southerners, opposed to post–Civil War Reconstruction and civil rights for African Americans, rose to political power once again. Hayes did not always have an easy time with his own party either. The Republican Party’s old guard, the “Stalwart” wing, clung to political patronage and fought against Hayes’s efforts for civil service reform. In addition, Hayes was president during an era of congressional
dominance, and his position was somewhat weakened because of this. Moreover, it was an era when party leaders and political bosses essentially determined the party’s candidate for the presidency.

Hayes’s presidency also helps illustrate the issue I refer to as the “internal time” of the presidency. What are the opportunities and constraints on power in each year of a president’s first term? And what about the remaining four if there is a second term? Hayes became president in 1876 after a contested election, one in which he lost the popular vote but won the Electoral College by one vote after an improvised commission awarded him electoral votes in several southern states. It was not unlike the Bush-Gore election in 2000 but more weakening to the president in the way that it was resolved. Hayes’s opponents quickly labeled him “President Rutherfraud” and “His Fraudulency.” He also pledged not to run for reelection. Neither was helpful to Hayes’s attempts to exercise presidential power during his time in office.

GREATER EXPECTATIONS MAGNIFY THE DILEMMAS OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER

If Hayes encountered difficulty and often considerable opposition in achieving his goals, think about the situation contemporary presidents face. The presidency has more of an impact on policy; the reach of policy initiatives is substantially broader; the daily activity of the White House is much more frenetic; and the twenty-four-hour media cycle (and Internet) is ever watchful. The role of the president and our expectations of the presidency have grown and heightened over time.

We now expect the president to be the chief proposer of domestic policies in response to the issues of the day. This ranges across a number of policy domains that would have been unfathomable not only to Hayes but also to a later president such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, including mandated health care, immigration reform, gay and lesbian rights, climate change, abortion policy, and gun control regulations, to list but a few. We also expect the president to be the guardian of our economic well-being. If there is a recession, if inflation and unemployment rates rise, or if stock markets drift downward, we turn to the White House for action.

In terms of foreign affairs, we expect the president to immediately have a strategy for dealing with any international crisis that develops. Should American force be needed, we expect the president to be a skilled commander in chief who
is knowledgeable about military affairs and adept at crafting a successful response (hopefully one with a quick resolution). We expect the president to also manage crises in the domestic arena. If a school shooting occurs, we expect the president to address it and to propose remedies to minimize chances of it happening again. If a hurricane or a flood strikes, we expect an appropriate presidential response and immediate action. We expect the president to always be a skilled public communicator, one who is never caught off guard, always reassuring at times of crisis but also able to contextualize the issues and put forth the right policy initiatives. We shall explore the demands of this “public presidency” also in this book.

Finally, in the aftermath of September 11 and during the continuing war on terror, we expect the president to be ever vigilant in protecting homeland security and to take steps against those who threaten it. This is a relatively new presidential assignment and perhaps the most difficult of all. There is some history here in terms of presidents claiming inherent national security powers, and as we shall explore, the Supreme Court has ruled in a number of cases that presidents can go only so far with those claims. And as recent presidents have also experienced, excessive claims to power and the actions stemming from such claims can sometimes boomerang and hurt them.

All of these expectations can be summed up as our desire for the president to be a successful head of government. But there is an added major assignment. We also expect the president to be a successful head of state, respected by other world leaders, and the symbol and spokesperson of America’s role in world affairs. In many political systems, these two roles are separated: the latter is represented by a monarch or a president, and the former by a prime minister or chancellor. This is how it is done in most of Europe, Russia, Japan, India, Israel, and Iraq, to name but a few. In the United States, both roles are filled by one person. Pardon the pun, but this is surely a “heady”—and difficult—assignment. In short, for contemporary presidents, the scope of power is vastly different and more challenging than ever. Thus, the enduring dilemmas of presidential power from the days of Rutherford B. Hayes, including how to work with the other two branches to achieve presidential goals and how to contend with the specific challenges presented by political and historical context, are magnified for contemporary presidents. With ever-growing expectations for leadership in a greater number of areas, it is imperative for contemporary presidents to utilize every tool of presidential power available to them, from bargaining and public appeals to executive actions, to achieve a successful presidency.
INTRODUCTION: PRESIDENTIAL POWER AND ITS DILEMMAS

PLAN OF THE BOOK

So, what should presidents do to manage and resolve the public’s expectations and the power they must wield to accomplish their goals? There are no easy, simple answers. However, broad lessons and conclusions about presidential power, based upon practical, presidential experience as well as scholarly insight, can be drawn. The job description for contemporary presidents has expanded significantly since the days of the Framers of our Constitution, but presidents are still constrained by the blueprint of “separate but shared powers” as laid out in the Constitution. In this book, I examine the various tools of power available to presidents and the historical and political circumstances in which they must exercise power, hopefully in an understandable way for readers who are learning about the presidency.

Chapter 1 begins with the creation of the presidency during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, laying the foundation for the book’s discussions of why the issue of presidential power is so crucial. The chapter is called “The Madisonian Dilemma” to reflect James Madison’s key role at the convention, which earned him the title of “architect of the Constitution.” Madison believed that although a national executive was needed, “checks” on too much executive power were also required. His solution was that each branch of the federal government should share in some of the powers of the others, contesting for power and thus preventing any one branch from becoming too dominant. Unfortunately, there was little guidance in how that contest might be properly resolved. Nor, I might add, was there much anticipation that, in future times, we might expect more leadership on the president’s part and thus more empowerment, not less. Control rather than empowerment is embedded in Madison’s constitutional legacy, and that is the crux of the major dilemma of presidential power. This chapter also explores how George Washington immediately had to create a new presidency when he took office but with imperfect guidance in Article II (which directly addresses the presidency) to rely upon. It also explores the quick rise of political parties, and how that put a major wrench in the Framers’ ideas on how selection of a president should work and how Congress and the presidency should operate and interact.

Chapter 2, “Neustadt and the Modern Conception of Presidential Power,” moves us forward into the modern presidency and introduces what remains one of the most important works on this topic: Richard E. Neustadt’s classic,
Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership. The first edition was published in 1960, followed by several others and with the final one covering the Reagan presidency. This chapter explicates and unpacks Neustadt’s work and explores some of its difficulties and challenges. However, we also begin to examine alternatives to Neustadt’s theory. Although his point about recognizing that power is at stake and exercising influence through bargaining remains important, the process of attaining presidential goals is a complex one. And as we shall see, there are other paths to attaining presidential ends beyond what Neustadt lays out.

In Chapter 3, “The Executive’s Prerogative: Inherent Constitutional Powers,” we explore why the exercise of constitutional powers remains important to presidents. Neustadt argues that use of constitutional “commands” does not do a president much good and that presidents who just stick to the Constitution are mere “clerks.” However, the issue is more complex: because much is left unstated in the Constitution, it requires interpretation. In particular, this chapter focuses on what has been termed the exercise of a president’s inherent and prerogative powers—those not clearly given to the president, but those that might be interpreted as inherent to the office based on several clauses in Article II. Such powers were anticipated but left broadly undetermined by the Framers of the Constitution, and today they have become a key part of post-9/11 executive action. Using presidential prerogative, Neustadt’s “clerks” can still claim great power, depending on the circumstances. At the same time, we must bear in mind that this is contested terrain. Although the Supreme Court is often reluctant to intervene in cases involving the powers of the other two branches, it does so on occasion. We shall explore the major patterns in the court’s reasoning, in its jurisprudence, in these cases, because this is important to understanding the dilemmas in the exercise of the president’s prerogative. Finally, we shall examine how claims—and often the exercise—of inherent powers became increasingly important for both Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama in the post-9/11 era.

Chapter 4, “Going Public and Presidential Power,” focuses on public appeals and public support as a source of power. For Neustadt, what he calls “public prestige” is an ancillary resource, something that is only useful in bolstering bargaining power. However, though Neustadt may be correct about its impact on bargaining, his conception of the impact of public appeals may be too limited. In this chapter, we explore the idea that direct appeals to the public for support are often seen by presidents as a tool of power in its own right. A number of scholars, Samuel Kernell most notably, have argued that going public is now a central
component of presidential power. Others, such as George C. Edwards III, have argued that it is overrated: little public opinion is actually moved and politically activated by presidential appeals. Presidents may not positively profit as much as they might think from going public. Finally, this chapter looks at how the ever-changing media pose significant challenges to presidents. In short, presidents must go public in ways that recognize the media technology of the times—they suffer when they don’t.

In Chapter 5, “Presidential Power and Historical Time, Variously Interpreted,” we discuss the historical factors that might affect the exercise and analysis of presidential power. The point in time a president occupies office may present both challenges and opportunities that are different had he or she become president earlier or later. As we shall see, scholars differ on the historical factors that most affect the successes or failures of a presidency. Is it the broader political regime or political coalition in which presidents finds themselves located, as Stephen Skowronek argues? Others argue that the interjection of new policy ideas, shifts in political ideology, or swings in public mood are of greater significance, and we consider all of these forms of historical change in this chapter. Furthermore, we examine whether and how presidents are able to understand the historical place they occupy. Can they understand the specific opportunities and challenges facing them and take appropriate steps during their time in office? Or is historical context simply something that helps us form a fuller understanding of a president’s exercise of power as we study it in hindsight?

In Chapter 6, we turn inward and consider the internal rhythms of a president’s first (and sometimes only) term. In short, we consider how the individual years of a term matter in different ways, and the different challenges presidents face in each year. This chapter begins with what we have learned as presidential scholars about the changing power situation within a presidential term—for example, that successful transitions greatly matter. It is crucial for presidents to use their transition periods to get personnel in place, organize the White House staff, and develop an early set of policy initiatives. Failure here likely proves problematic, whereas success bolsters presidential power. The remainder of the first term presents other challenges. Almost every president is dealt a blow when the first midterm congressional elections occur. After that, opportunities to secure proposals might surface in the pipeline, but they are often diminished by a decline in congressional support. And not long after the midterms, attention shifts to reelection.
Chapter 7 focuses on the internal rhythms of the second term, when presidents often seem to be especially bedeviled and politically weakened. This chapter explores some of those dynamics and how they differ from aspects of the first term. Recent reelections have been largely won based on the challenger’s shortcomings, not the positive presentation of a prospective agenda. Given this, how do presidents build support for a second term agenda? Most presidents suffer from a “sixth-year itch” on the part of the electorate, and party support in Congress suffers; thus, many have turned to foreign policy to secure their legacy in the second term. Has this worked? The question of presidential power in the second term is further complicated by the almost certain loss of congressional seats in the midterm and by waning focus on the president’s agenda during the final two years of the second term as attention quickly turns to the election of a successor.

It is clear, even from this introduction, that contemporary presidents face a great number of tasks and challenges and that there are no easy answers or simple theories on how to best exercise presidential power. Given all they face, presidents today cannot rely on a single method of exercising power, nor can they ignore how historical context and the internal rhythms of their first and second terms can influence their presidencies. In the book’s conclusion, I attempt to deduce broad lessons based on what we have learned of the benefits and limitations of each tool of power as well as what we have come to understand about the opportunities and challenges of historical time and internal time. I lay out a blueprint for how contemporary presidents might exercise power to address problems and achieve their goals.

NOTES
2. Ibid.
Neustadt and the Modern Conception of Presidential Power

George Washington, needless to say, was not the only American president forced to deal with the issue of presidential power within the Madisonian framework. Over time, new and shifting forces created a changing political landscape and historical context that had real impact on the executive office and the efforts of presidents to influence the political process. These historical changes produced new opportunities as well as constraints, and they generated new political, social, and economic problems that came to be viewed as the president’s responsibility.

Thomas Jefferson, for example, took advantage of the development of political parties and began to tap the loyalty of his party’s caucus in Congress as a way of exercising influence. Moreover, Jefferson was also not averse to broader exercises of power, even given his strong attachment to a strict interpretation of the Constitution. Most notable was the Louisiana Purchase, which doubled the geographic size of the nation in 1803. Despite having initial reservations and toying for a while with drafting a constitutional amendment that would empower him to make the purchase, as well as facing some domestic opposition (a House vote on funds for the purchase passed by the narrow margin of 59–57), a treaty was negotiated and approved, and funds for the purchase were obtained.

By the start of the twentieth century, times were especially ripe for presidential activism. The largely unregulated muscle of American industry had created conditions calling for reform and regulation. In the political landscape, the story was similar: the control of party bosses, political machines, and the power of
special interests had corrupted politics in many locales. The Progressive Movement, which crossed party boundaries, developed to address these political and societal ills. Both Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, despite differences in party affiliation, were adherents, albeit with some political and policy differences. Both proved to be activist presidents: Roosevelt with his Square Deal, trust busting, and reliance on the office’s public platform for popular support; Wilson with his New Freedoms, regulatory zeal, and similarly direct appeals to the public.

The watershed moment though, was the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR). The need to deal with effects of the Great Depression clearly altered the relationship of the public and private sectors, greatly expanding the policy sphere of the federal government. And, through FDR’s activism, it changed the power equation of the presidency in our politics. As a result of his efforts, the federal government took on great powers of social and economic relief, regulation, and the creation of the beginnings of a social safety net. For many scholars, FDR’s administration marks the emergence of the modern presidency. FDR’s efforts created a presidency that became the driving force for policy proposals: a presidency that clearly builds on the idea that it is the dominant branch of the federal government; a presidency that is center stage in media attention and a stronger force for communication to the public; and a presidency that begins the institutional development of the White House staff and its now great power.

Scholarly analysis of these events as presidential practice and politics, and their impact, from the time is slim. Perhaps the one exception is Woodrow Wilson’s own writings before he became president. At first, as expressed in his 1885 book *Congressional Government*, he believed that a congressionally centered politics was the best solution. At the time, Wilson admired the British parliamentary system, but later his views changed. By 1908, in *Constitutional Government in the United States*, Wilson saw the presidency as the driving force: the presidency “will be as big as and as influential as the man who occupies it.”

In this chapter, we explore how the field of American presidency began to grapple with issues of presidential power, focusing in particular on a book that proved to be a significant game changer: Richard E. Neustadt’s *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership*. Neustadt’s work was especially important in establishing why presidents need to exercise power and develop strategies, predominantly through bargaining, to achieve success. We shall also explore other forms of power presidents might exert to secure presidential goals, those that Neustadt fails to
recognize, from symbolic power and loyalty power to charismatic power and dominant power. Most notably, we examine the leadership style of Dwight D. Eisenhower, a president whom Neustadt finds ineffective but who may have simply been using different means of exercising power. We also explore the later editions of Neustadt’s book that touch upon aspects of presidential power that are now more central to the workings of the office for recent presidents.

**RICHARD E. NEUSTADT’S PRESIDENTIAL POWER**

A graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, Richard E. Neustadt obtained his master’s degree at Harvard in 1941 before joining the US Navy during World War II. After the war, Neustadt resumed his graduate studies at Harvard and worked in the Truman White House, first as a staff member in Bureau of the Budget (BOB), and then as a special assistant to the president. This was an experience that served him well: the BOB played a major role in policy development and oversight during the Truman years, and his stint on the White House staff gave him a front row seat on the inner workings of the Truman presidency. In early 1960, he published his remarkable book, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership*. At the time of the book’s publication, Neustadt was a professor of political science at Columbia University. Later that year, he became one of the two principal advisers to John F. Kennedy during his transition to the presidency. Neustadt would soon return to Harvard and serve as the guiding founder in the creation of its John F. Kennedy School of Government. He retired many decades later in 1989.

Neustadt did not have an easy time in securing the initial publication of *Presidential Power*, possibly because of its new and different approach. Until its publication, scholarly work by political scientists at the time was largely bound by historical analysis of particular presidents, descriptive analysis of the office (particularly, its expanding “roles” in the American political system), or by presidential power viewed from the perspective of constitutional law. Neustadt changed that landscape. *Presidential Power*, whatever its shortcomings might be, still frames our discussion of presidential power and perhaps even serves as its foundation. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a course on the presidency that in some way does not make reference to his book.

Neustadt would return to the project over the course of his career, analyzing successive presidential administrations and then incorporating their respective

In this section, I take a closer look at the major arguments in Neustadt’s book and why they would prove to be very important to understanding and studying presidential power. Neustadt argues that presidents need to recognize when issues of presidential power arise and require a strategic response. He claims that constitutional and legal resources are generally not effective tools for the job and presents an alternate view that presidents must persuade, principally through bargaining, to attain the compliance of others. Bargaining, in turn, is enhanced by a president’s reputation for past success and by his standing with the public.

**Recognizing the Need for Effective Exercise of Power**

In Neustadt’s view, there is a huge gap between what we expect of a president and his or her ability to effectively meet those expectations, leading to potentially weak presidencies. As he notes in the preface to the 1990 edition: “Presidential weakness was the underlying theme of Presidential Power... Weakness is still what I see.” Moreover, presidential expectations have increased significantly in the decades since the book was first published. What was once seen as exceptional is now a routine demand in presidential politics. Effective exercise of power is the ingredient needed to bridge that gap between expectations and the ability to achieve a commendable performance. Some presidents have been successful at this, others less so. That the path to effective power is not clearly demarcated compounds this presidential dilemma. Neustadt sets out to explore what this path entails—the resources to meet the increasing demands of the presidency must be understood and skillfully used.

To meet these ever-growing expectations, Neustadt strongly believed that the focus should be on how individual presidents personally conceive of power. Neustadt is not unmindful, even in the first edition, that the presidency is a large institution with a staff in the thousands. But he chose to focus on the president as an individual and his or her capacity to influence others: “Presidential on the title page means nothing but the President. Power means his influence.” Presidents
are expected to be leaders, but the president only starts as a “clerk” in Neustadt’s view, albeit an invaluable one. The president’s service is in great demand, and no one else’s will suffice, but the power and ability to meet those challenges are not automatically granted. In particular, the president’s “formal constitutional, statutory, or customary authority”6 is not enough. What is required, according to Neustadt, are more informal strategies of power, grounded in personal influence.

In making this claim, Neustadt takes us beyond the conception of the office that many of the Framers envisioned. Although the Framers did not say that constitutional powers alone would suffice, their views on personal influence were more subtle. As you might recall from Chapter 1, Madison believed that presidential ambition would be central, but within the context of shared powers pitting the ambitions of each branch of the federal government against each other. James Wilson favored the “energy” of the single executive. Hamilton agreed but also thought the selection process would yield presidents of character. Still, the notions of “ambition,” “energy,” and “character” are more than a bit vague. Neustadt suggests that effectiveness requires a more concrete and complex equation, a more developed theory of presidential power. Expectations of leadership obviously do not guarantee leadership, and presidents should recognize that they need to do more to gain influence and power.7

The Limits of Exercising Command

In the second chapter of his book, “Three Cases of Command,” Neustadt argues for his view of effective leadership by looking at three attempts to exercise command, that is, exercising power through constitutional and legal means: (1) Truman’s firing of General Douglas MacArthur at the height of the Korean War; (2) Truman’s seizure of the nation’s steel mills a year later to prevent a labor strike that might have had serious repercussions on the war effort; and (3) Eisenhower’s ordering of federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to quell local resistance to desegregation of its Central High School. On the surface, these three case studies seem to prove the opposite of what Neustadt is arguing: the presidents’ use of formal powers in each case appears to be consequential. However, as Neustadt explores the facts and consequences of each case, he attempts to establish the limitations of formal powers and show that their deployment can have unwanted costs. Neustadt seeks to demonstrate that power as influence remains the preferred course even in situations in which constitutional and legal means seem the most logical.
Case 1: President Truman’s Dismissal of General MacArthur. General Douglas MacArthur was one of the great, if not at times controversial, military figures of the twentieth century. He had served as army chief of staff—the army’s top position—in the early 1930s and then became commander of army forces in the Far East during World War II. After the war, he was appointed by President Harry Truman as the Supreme Commander for Allied Powers in the Far East. In effect, he became the military governor of Japan. When North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950, he immediately resumed the role of chief military commander of United Nation forces. Truman, by the way, did not ask Congress for any authorization of US forces to engage in combat. Rather, he relied on a United Nations resolution—and US treaty obligations to the UN—in authorizing a military response to the North Korean invasion.

The North Koreans almost succeeded in driving US and South Korean forces out of Korea. However, MacArthur’s bold move in striking behind the battle lines with a perilous, yet successful, land invasion at Inchon set the stage for a quick retreat of North Korean forces almost to their border with the recently established People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Yet MacArthur yearned for more: pushing the army of North Korea out of the Korean peninsula and, perhaps, directly engaging the PRC in a military confrontation that would lead to its downfall. Needless to say, his aims differed from those of the Truman administration. President Truman disliked him intensely, but MacArthur was an immensely popular figure. The situation came to a head in 1951. Truman finally was forced to fire him.

The immediate reason for MacArthur’s dismissal was the letter that he sent in April 1951 to Rep. Joseph Martin (R-MA), the minority leader of the House at the time, criticizing the administration’s policy in Korea. It was only the latest in a number of public statements MacArthur had made that were at odds with administration policy, but it proved to be the final straw for Truman when the letter was read by Rep. Martin at a House session. In my view and probably that of most presidential scholars, Truman was correct in firing MacArthur. Neustadt, however, takes a step back and argues that Truman’s extreme measure was the result of earlier failure. In December 1950, the White House issued a directive requiring that any statements by military or civilian officials about war policy obtain official clearance and approval. Although the order implicitly was directed at MacArthur, it was framed in a general way, addressed to all departments, and issued routinely, perhaps to spare MacArthur from personal embarrassment or to
avoid the appearance of Truman directly confronting his popular field commander. In Neustadt’s view, this course of action was ill-advised. Because of this fairly subtle action, MacArthur might not have anticipated Truman’s strong response to his letter, thinking that at most, there might be some mild rebuke from Truman, like before. And Truman virtually invited yet another bellicose MacArthur statement by tolerating a number of his public criticisms of the Truman administration in the past.\(^8\)

It is clear that MacArthur’s penchant for making public statements against administration policy needed to be curbed. Truman achieved this goal through command, through his use of formal power, and MacArthur was dismissed. However, this action was costly to Truman. MacArthur came home to ticker-tape parades and delivered a famous address, to thunderous applause, before a joint session of Congress. Opinion polls registered disagreement with Truman’s action, and his approval rating started to plummet, declining to 22 percent approval by February 1952, the lowest recorded to date (and even lower than Nixon’s on the eve of his resignation from office). Should MacArthur have been fired in this situation? Or should a more moderate course of action been pursued—which Truman thought he had done? Had Truman missed some important, earlier opportunities to resolve the situation?

**Case 2: Truman’s Seizure of the Steel Mills.** The Korean war presented another dilemma for Truman. In 1952, Truman ordered his secretary of commerce, Charles Sawyer, to have the federal government take over steel mills across the country just hours before a labor strike was set to commence. The order was carried out, and the affected labor unions agreed that steelworkers would continue at their jobs, albeit as government employees. Truman’s command appeared to work—he had seemingly averted a dangerous pause in steel production at the height of war. Unfortunately for the president, however, the steel companies took their case to federal court, which ruled that Truman did not have constitutional or statutory (law-based) authority to seize the mills. The unions then ordered a strike, but three days later, the federal court of appeals stayed the district’s court decision pending an appeal to the US Supreme Court. The steelworkers returned to work and bargaining between labor and management resumed. When the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case, it ordered that no change in wages occur. Bargaining broke down, and the involved parties awaited the court’s decision for a resolution.
That decision, *Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer*, often dubbed the “steel seizure case,” proved to be a landmark case concerning claims of inherent presidential power. One of the chief foundations of the government’s arguments in defense of Truman was that the nation was at war and, as such, the president possessed powers not clearly set out or otherwise implied by some stated clause in the Constitution to take protective action. The majority of the court disagreed. Truman complied with the court’s verdict, and the steel companies resumed operation of the mills. Unsurprisingly, the unions struck. After a seven-week impasse, collective bargaining and some concessions to the steel companies on price limits resulted in a resolution. In the end, it was a costly affair for Truman. His actions led to one of the most important Supreme Court decisions ostensibly curbing presidential claims of inherent powers. The 6–3 decision was a bitter one personally for Truman. Two of Truman’s appointees to the court voted against him, including Tom Clark, who had been Truman’s own attorney general. We discuss the reasoning behind the court’s decision in greater depth in Chapter 3.

In Neustadt’s view, earlier steps could have been taken to avoid this outcome. An outgrowth of World War II, elaborate bureaucracies still existed in this period. They regulated both wages and prices to ensure economic stability, equity for labor, and fair profit for management. Had Truman more effectively utilized the wage and price-setting bureaucracy, a collective bargaining agreement might have been achieved at an earlier point, he could have avoided the seizure of the steel mills, and the Supreme Court might not have been forced to issue the *Youngstown* decision.

**Case 3: Eisenhower’s Ordering of Federal Troops into Little Rock.** In this case, Neustadt posits that Eisenhower’s command—ordering federal troops into Little Rock and federalizing the Arkansas National Guard to enforce a court mandate to desegregate its public schools—was precipitated by a series of actions by Arkansas governor Orval Faubus. Faubus, ostensibly to prevent mob violence, used the state guard to prevent African American students from starting classes at Little Rock’s Central High School. The school board, which had initiated the desegregation effort, then obtained an order from the federal court mandating that integration be carried out. However, Faubus did not comply with this order; he did not insist that the state national guard accompany the students into school.

Another petition was filed instructing the governor to carry out the court’s order. In the interim, Faubus met privately with Eisenhower, but the outcome
was not conclusive. Days later, the federal judge commanded Faubus to stop interfering with the desegregation order, and Faubus responded by removing the state guard from patrol around the school. The next day, with the guard gone, mob violence flared. Eisenhower responded by ordering in the federal troops and by federalizing the state national guard. Central High School was finally desegregated as troops stood guard and the nine African American students were escorted inside. This was not an outcome Eisenhower wanted or anticipated. Only months before in July 1957, he told reporters that “I can’t imagine any set of circumstances that would ever induce me to send Federal troops . . . into any area to enforce the orders of Federal Court. . . . I would never believe that it would be a wise thing to do in this country.”

In each case, Neustadt argued, although the president’s command was carried out, the “decisive order was a painful last resort” and “one suggestive less of mastery than failure—the failure to gain an end by softer means.” Moreover, Neustadt believed that even when command is exercised it should not simply be an order. For the command to be effective, it must be carefully exercised, with appropriate planning and strategic preparation. Presidents must understand that exercising command should reside within the domain of influence, which is central to Neustadt’s conception of presidential power, and that it must be sparingly used—it is “not a method suitable for everyday employment.”

In my view, Neustadt may be overstating his case here. He does have a point in suggesting that prior, softer steps might have been more effective before resorting to command. But both presidents did take some of those steps. Truman thought his directive to the military requiring clearance of public statements concerning war policy might curb MacArthur, and Eisenhower thought that he had Governor Faubus’s agreement, following their private meeting, to assist in the integration of Little Rock’s high school. Unfortunately, both presidents were mistaken and were unable to predict the fallout from their exercises of command.

**Exercising Power Through Persuasion and Bargaining**

So what does a president need to do to reach desired goals if command is a limited and occasional resource? For Neustadt, the core of successful leadership and the best way for presidents to attain their goals are by influencing others through *persuasion*, primarily by *bargaining* with them. Presidents’ bargaining powers stem from their unique advantages, or *vantage points*, that can tilt the field in
their favor if they are used well and perceived properly by others. However, presidents still need to persuade others that what the president wants is in their interest. And as a result of our Madisonian system of shared powers, those with whom presidents must deal have their own status, authority, and vantage points. As such, persuasion becomes a game of give-and-take; essentially, “the power to persuade is the power to bargain.” For Neustadt, bargaining’s effectiveness can be enhanced by two ancillary resources that indirectly bolster the president’s bargaining advantage: professional reputation and public prestige.

**Professional Reputation.** The first of the two ancillary resources is the president’s *professional reputation*, especially as perceived within the Washington community but also by other actors in the wider political landscape, such as General MacArthur, the steel mill owners, and Governor Faubus from the case studies referenced earlier. Here, the past haunts the present: presidential weakness in the past diminishes a president’s bargaining ability in the future. Likewise, past success can lead to perceptions of presidential strength and formidability. Ideally, a president would achieve the reputation of always winning, but if this is not attainable, then the president should at least make others think that it is risky to thwart or oppose presidential will. The goal is a professional reputation that enhances rather than detracts from the exercise of power.

Neustadt argues, for example, that MacArthur might not have been emboldened to make public statements challenging the administration’s Korean War strategy if he had perceived Truman as a much stronger actor—a president who would fire him if he spoke out again. But because Truman had treated MacArthur delicately in the past, the general likely calculated that Truman would do so again. Likewise, the steel industry may have calculated that Truman would never take the bold step of actually seizing the mills. By April 1952, the Truman presidency was in clear trouble. The Korean War was in a stalemate, the administration was beset by a number of corruption scandals, and Truman’s preferred candidate for the Democratic Party nomination, Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois, was rebuffing efforts to enter into the race. (Stevenson eventually relented and became the nominee, only to lose to the popular Eisenhower.) By contrast, after his inauguration in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt took Congress by storm. In its initial “Hundred Day” session, Congress speedily passed legislation the White House proposed. Roosevelt’s professional reputation quickly grew; he was not the genial New York country aristocrat that some had initially thought. Rather, he was a skilled and at times cunning political operative.
Public Prestige. Those who directly deal with a president must not only consider the president’s reputation as a power broker but also factor in his or her standing with the public, or public prestige. Like reputation, it is a game of anticipated reactions. Most of the people a president deals with, especially members of Congress, may also depend public support. Even if they do not depend directly on voters, public perceptions of their abilities, standing, and importance may be at stake in supporting or opposing a president: they “must take account of popular reaction to their actions.” Neustadt believes that presidents can appeal for public support; however—and this is a very important distinction—what he advocates is not quite the same as the contemporary strategy known as going public, coined by Samuel Kernell, which we discuss in Chapter 4. Nor is Neustadt suggesting a plebiscitary presidency, where presidents regularly go over the heads of members of Congress and make strong public appeals for support. Neustadt’s argument is more subtle and indirect: just the perception of public support can positively (or negatively) affect the willingness of others to accept the presidential deal or bargain.

To return to our earlier cases, a decline in public standing also may have been a contributing factor to Truman’s troubles. By early 1951, his popularity had begun to wane, which may have emboldened MacArthur to again make his views on the war known. And in 1952, the steel companies may have calculated that Truman, an unpopular lame duck, was in such a weak position that he would never do anything so bold as to seize their mills, buying time to gain a better bargain with the labor unions. In both cases, Truman acted despite his weakened position. However, Neustadt posits that had Truman’s public prestige and professional reputation been stronger, he would have been in a better position earlier on to achieve the ends he desired without resorting to his ultimate powers of command.

EXERCISING INFLUENCE BEYOND NEUSTADT’S BARGAINING

Neustadt’s framing of successful presidential power as effective persuasion and bargaining is attractive, and he is undoubtedly correct in his assessment: these are tools presidents need to use. But if presidential power is the attempt to influence some person or groups of persons who are not eagerly or naturally inclined to follow the president’s preferred course (and that is how Neustadt himself defines it), bargaining may not always be enough. What are the other avenues of influence open to the president? To take but one example: Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) is the
classic case of a president who often bargained but also used other methods to achieve his goals. As president, and earlier as majority leader of Senate Democrats during six of the eight years of the Eisenhower administration, LBJ understood where each senator stood and what was needed to get him or her on his side. He was not averse to using other “inducements” if he detected weakness, whether they were political, financial, or even personal. He also was quite the physical presence, often dominating others with whom he dealt.

Other Sources of Power

When I teach about presidential power, I ask my students to ponder how we attempt to exercise some measure of power or influence in our daily lives. We constantly seek to get someone—roommate, family member, colleague, even a stranger on the street—to do something that person might otherwise be disinclined to do. What stratagems do we attempt to use? The list is always quite long, and bargaining is only one among a number of possibilities. Presidents, especially because of their exalted environs, possess an expanded menu of options for exercising influence that does not just involve bargaining. Here are but a few:

- **Symbolic power:** This power comes from the office of the president and the trappings associated with it, including an invitation to the presidential retreat at Camp David or an invitation to travel on Air Force One. The presidential environment and connection can be consuming and a source of awe, even for the most well-seasoned of Washingtonians. David Gergen, political commentator and former White House staff member for several presidents, has often pointed out that one of the dumber things that Jimmy Carter did was to sell the presidential yacht *Sequoia*: a nice evening cruise down the Potomac was a useful resource in dealing with members of Congress.

- **Ambition power:** This power comes from the belief that compliance with presidential preference *may* reap future rewards, even if no direct bargain is made. This type of power is particularly relevant to those seeking further advancement and favor, whether within the presidential inner circle or within Congress. It also might apply to Washington-attentive members of the media: a favorable story written today may lead to a valuable “leak” or exclusive interview in the future.
Exercising Influence Beyond Neustadt’s Bargaining

- **Loyalty power:** This type of power relies on a personal belief in the president or in his or her policy program or broader ideology. This is compliance to presidential will based upon admiration, belief, and trust without the need for the quid pro quo of a bargain. At the extreme, it can manifest as subservience, the unquestioned loyalty of the “yes man,” which ultimately serves the president poorly.

- **Charismatic power:** This form of power stems from exceptional personal qualities that set a leader apart and evoke a strong sense of devotion from followers. Few, if any presidents fall in this category. Perhaps FDR is an example, but he was also anathema to traditional Republicans. There were hopes for Barack Obama at the start among his most fervent followers, though those mostly disappeared as his presidency wore on.

- **Expertise and knowledge-based power:** In this case, power comes from expertise. Presidents generally defer to others’ expertise, but there are some cases in which the president is the source of expertise. One largely unknown example is Gerald Ford, who exhibited mastery of the federal budget developed from his many years in Congress. On the other side, Jimmy Carter often strove to prove he was the smartest person in the room, delving deep into policy details, but his behavior often had a negative effect on deliberations.

- **Rational persuasion power:** Sometimes presidents can win simply by explaining things. As we discuss in the next section, this was a tactic that Eisenhower often employed.

- **Manipulative power:** Guilt and shame are often used to secure compliance in everyday life, and they can also be tools for presidents. So, too, presidents can be devious and shrewd in dealing with others. A more benign version of this was central to Eisenhower’s “hidden-hand” exercise of power, discussed in the next section.

- **Dominant power:** Here, influence comes less from persuasion and more from domination. LBJ is the classic example, with his “Johnson treatment.” One description noted that “its velocity was breathtaking, and it was all in one direction. Interjections from the target were rare. Johnson anticipated them before they could be spoken. He moved in close, his face a scant millimeter from his target, his eyes widening and narrowing, his eyebrows rising and falling. From his pockets poured clippings, memos, statistics. Mimicry, humor, and the genius of analogy
made ‘The Treatment an almost hypnotic experience and rendered the target stunned and helpless.’ By the same token, domination can hurt a president’s deliberations, as LBJ himself faced at times when he had to deal with difficult issues regarding escalation of war in Vietnam.

- **Coercive power:** In this case, power derives from the potential to penalize or punish. Or even just perception that a negative outcome might result if compliance does not occur. The Johnson treatment can also fall into this category. Richard Nixon’s “enemies list” is another example, although he suffered when details of this list became public. FDR provides another cautionary tale: in the 1938 midterm congressional elections he sought to defeat several conservative Democrats who opposed his programs, but the effort largely failed and weakened Roosevelt.

- **Agenda power:** This exercise of influence is particularly important; it comes from controlling the larger context of the issue. The standard exercise of power is A (the president) trying to induce B (e.g., a powerful member of Congress) to do something he or she might not be inclined to do. But control of the broader, more encompassing agenda raises the “game” between them to a higher level. Although specific bargains within a game’s broader parameters matter, in the end they may just be small potatoes. The person who wins control over framing and defining the game that is being played largely wins the war. Interestingly, George W. Bush succeeded at this in his first six months in office as he secured passage of his tax cuts. The game being played was no longer Bush’s tax-cut plan versus Al Gore’s “steady as she goes” plan of the 2000 campaign. Once the election was finally settled, the new agenda quickly became how much would be cut. In the end, Bush got most of what he wanted.

The bottom line here is that an array of strategies for attempting to exercise influence over others exists—bargaining is simply one of them. Influence is more complex and multistranded than what Neustadt posits. The Eisenhower presidency is especially instructive here: a presidential effort to exercise power but without bargaining as its centerpiece. Let us now look at it in more detail.

**The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower Reappraised**

Eisenhower does not fare well in Neustadt’s analysis of presidential power. Writing at the end of Eisenhower’s presidency, Neustadt conveyed the general sentiment
of many journalists and other political observers that although Ike was certainly popular, he was a passive president and certainly not a good example of a president exercising power effectively. Critiques included the following: he was too prone to delegate authority and responsibility to others, especially in foreign and national security affairs; he relied heavily on his chief of staff; and he was bogged down in weekly meetings of his cabinet and his National Security Council. It was government by committee that produced lowest-common-denominator policy advice. To top it all off, Eisenhower was an adequate speaker, but his frequent press conferences often left reporters confused about what he had in fact said. As Fred I. Greenstein observes, the conventional wisdom at the time, even among the most serious of scholars and commentators, was that he was “an aging hero who reigned more than he ruled and who lacked the energy, motivation, and political skill to have a significant impact on events.”15 This view of a passive Eisenhower especially is present in Neustadt’s chapter “Men in Office,” the seventh in the original book.

Not surprisingly, Neustadt praises FDR’s competitive style. FDR carefully parceled out assignments, often sending one of his aides to gather information about a project or proposal without telling others who were assigned the same task. FDR kept organizations fluid and overlapping, and he liked strong and competitive personalities. All of this kept the decision-making process firmly in his hands. In Neustadt’s opinion, Eisenhower was precisely the opposite. Eisenhower was trapped by the more organized advisory arrangements he had created, and he “seemingly preferred to let subordinates proceed upon the lowest common denominators of agreement than to have their quarrels—and issues and details—pushed up to him.” Neustadt asks: “Why does one man [FDR] give himself the help he needs,” and “why does the other man [Eisenhower] deny it to himself?”16

This commonly held view of the Eisenhower presidency began to change once the most sensitive of his presidential papers became open to researchers in the mid-1970s. Most notable of the works that took a new look at Eisenhower was Greenstein’s book *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader.*17 This book not only reveals him as a more activist president but outlines a leadership style and a conception of presidential power that are quite different from the one Neustadt presents as most effective. Per Greenstein, although Eisenhower did sometimes bargain, he often preferred a more indirect approach to attaining his ends. One example is his relationship to then-Senator Lyndon Johnson, the powerful majority leader for the Democrats for most of Eisenhower’s presidency. When Eisenhower needed LBJ’s cooperation, he would sometimes turn to
their mutual friends in the Texas oil industry, asking them to work on Johnson. During his second term, Eisenhower used his secretary of the treasury, Robert Anderson, who was a prominent Texas lawyer and personal friend of LBJ’s “to serve as private administration conduit to and pulse taker of the mercurial Senate Democratic leader by maintaining virtually daily contact with Johnson.”\textsuperscript{18}

Note that this relationship differs from that which Neustadt advocates. It is not A bargaining with B but A appealing to allied third parties, or C, who then exercise various forms of influence with B. Greenstein terms this a \textit{hidden-hand presidency}, in which presidential activism operates through intermediaries and is often concealed from view.

One of the most interesting examples of hidden-hand leadership that Greenstein discusses is Eisenhower’s efforts to deal with Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) and his reckless allegations of communist influence in a wide range of public and private institutions. Unlike Truman, who challenged McCarthy head on and with little positive effect, Eisenhower worked behind the scenes with his aides to put an end to McCarthy’s demagogic activities. According to Greenstein, “The overall strategy was to avoid \textit{direct mention} of McCarthy in the president’s public statements, lest McCarthy win sympathy as a spunky David battling against the presidential Goliath. Instead Eisenhower systematically condemned the \textit{types} of actions in which McCarthy engaged.”\textsuperscript{19} Most importantly, the White House worked extensively and in the background in the events that prompted the Senate to investigate McCarthy’s conduct, which led finally to his censure in late 1954.

Eisenhower did delegate to others, but it was selective delegation not wholesale abdication. Selectivity was based on a careful assessment of his subordinates’ strengths and weaknesses. If Eisenhower had a highly favorable view of a person’s judgment, as was the case with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, he permitted greater latitude. His first secretary of defense, Charles E. Wilson, was a different matter. Wilson was the president of General Motors before joining the cabinet in 1953, and Eisenhower valued him for his organizational and budgetary abilities. However, Wilson was not an expert in defense and military affairs and had little impact in these areas, which is precisely what Eisenhower wanted. Wilson’s successor in 1957 was Neil McElroy, the president of Procter and Gamble—a background similar to Wilson’s. Eisenhower preferred someone with strong corporate skills, but not necessarily deep expertise on defense matters.

Eisenhower deliberately made efforts to appear above the political fray because his popularity crossed party lines and he was acutely sensitive to that. Public
prestige mattered to Eisenhower, but he managed it in a way that diverges from what Neustadt suggests. Eisenhower was careful to avoid being perceived as too partisan and confrontational, and so he exercised his influence behind the scenes and often indirectly. He was also willing to compromise his professional reputation to preserve his prestige, a trade-off Neustadt would see as very problematic because he believes that reputation bolsters bargaining ability. A notable example was Eisenhower’s frequent and deliberate efforts to appear evasive at press conferences in order to dodge answering questions. He would sometimes say, “Well, this is the first I have heard about that,” or “You cannot expect me to know the legal complexities of that issue.” On one occasion, his press secretary, James Hagerty, warned him about a particularly touchy foreign policy issue that was likely to come up in a press meeting later that day. “Don’t worry, Jim,” Eisenhower told him, “if that question comes up, I’ll just confuse them.” Greenstein notes that most presidents occasionally feign ignorance, “but out-and-out denials of knowledge are far more common in Eisenhower’s press conferences than in those of other modern presidents.” For Neustadt, expressions of ignorance, even if deliberate, threaten professional reputation. For Eisenhower, it was an expense worth paying to achieve his ends. As Greenstein observes, “There can be advantages to the lack of professional reputation as long as the actual performance of the political system and society satisfies the electorate.” Moreover, Eisenhower’s efforts to appear above the political fray and to not be perceived as a professional politician “can add to the store of what Neustadt properly identifies as another of the major resources for presidential influence, prestige with the general public.”

Eisenhower also embraced other forms of exercising influence that did not involve just bargaining; he would deal directly with others, just not in the way Neustadt counsels. As Greenstein notes, Eisenhower “preferred to persuade other leaders through reasoned discourse, but did so only with those of his counterparts who he thought had the capacity and motivation to be influenced by rational argument.” A more attentive and activist Eisenhower is also revealed in the drafting of speeches and in his private correspondence. He edited his more formal public addresses deeply and carefully. Letters to friends and associates, of which he wrote many of significant length, are models of clarity, thought, and precision. Eisenhower also valued the advice of others, whether received through formal or informal channels. He was a master of organization and understood its impact on his decision making. Although Neustadt acknowledges these resources, they are not central to his theory of presidential power in the manner of bargaining,
professional reputation, and prestige. Neustadt does not have much positive to say about Eisenhower’s White House and its decision-making processes. Yet, for Eisenhower, a supportive, well-functioning staff was an asset to his leadership. His most enduring contribution, which other presidents have largely followed, was the creation of the position of chief of staff and the role of the national security adviser. Although previous presidents had assigned aides the task of lobbying Congress, Eisenhower was the first to recognize that effort required better organization and staffing, so he created the Office of Congressional Affairs.

For Eisenhower, the advisory process not only was central to his decision making but also played a role in his leadership style. For example, on taking office he recognized that he needed to establish a good relationship with congressional Republicans, and so he began the practice of meeting their leaders on a regular basis through his presidency. As Eisenhower himself explained at a meeting of his soon-to-be cabinet in January 1953, shortly before he took office: “There is no Republican in Congress today who was ever there under a Republican President, with the result that anything the Executive proposes is almost automatically opposed by the Republicans in Congress.”23 In his view, “We must come at it on the basis of nurturing and carrying along these people until they understand that we . . . are their friends, that we are the guys they have to help, not kick in the teeth.”24 This is not direct influence but the establishment of positive relationships before efforts to influence—a type of agenda-setting activity that likely has beneficial consequences down the line.

Eisenhower’s use of consultation—whether with his cabinet or the National Security Council—was part of his leadership style and a way of attaining presidential goals. Eisenhower knew that advice seeking was an effective tool for winning the willing support of those he consulted, even though he might not take their advice. Simply by being consulted, Greenstein observes, “Eisenhower’s associates were encouraged to think of themselves as part of a collective enterprise rather than as individual entrepreneurs.”25 Here, A does not take the opposing interests of B as given but seeks to mold or change those interests beforehand. This strategy goes beyond Neustadt’s equation, but it clearly is an important presidential tool.

Greenstein’s account of the Eisenhower presidency presents a more positive depiction of Eisenhower and alerts us to the fact that presidential power needs to be more broadly understood. Power does not necessarily come from a president acting alone but involves a broader set of institutional resources upon which a
president might draw and benefit. Or, if the president is particularly adept—as Eisenhower arguably was—an ability to design and mold advisory and institutional resources to serve their own needs and purposes. However, for every Eisenhower, there may be an LBJ or Nixon whose personal imprint on advisory arrangements may seem to serve personal needs, but not necessarily advance effective deliberations and ultimately sound presidential decisions.

NEUSTADT’S RELEVANCY OVER TIME:
DOES BARGAINING STILL MATTER?

Readers of the first eight chapters of *Presidential Power* might come to the conclusion that, although this might have been an important work at the time it was initially published, its analysis and recommendations are now dated and largely of historical rather than contemporary interest. FDR, Truman, and Eisenhower present interesting cases in the *historical* study of presidential power, but too much has changed in our politics to make them of relevance today.

Presidential candidates are no longer selected at “brokered” conventions. This is difficult to understand today, but the national party conventions really mattered during the period that is the core of Neustadt’s initial book. Presidential primaries were less important and the impact of party leaders was much greater. At the 1952 Republican Convention, for example, it was not yet clear that Eisenhower would become the nominee, but he eventually prevailed. For the Democrats in 1952, it was not until the third ballot of the convention delegates that Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois achieved a majority that made him his party’s nominee. This was the last time that either party went beyond one ballot in selecting its respective nominee.

Other changes have occurred. The major parties are now more geographically and politically polarized. One of the foundations of FDR’s “New Deal” Democratic coalition was the then-solid Democratic South. That is obviously no more. The same is true for what was then reliable Republican territory in most of New England. Members of Congress from each party were more broadly distributed across the political spectrum in the 1930s through the 1950s. That distributional band has now narrowed considerably, to say the least. Political and ideological polarization has made the president’s job more difficult, especially when the opposition party controls one or both chambers of Congress (although there is considerable debate among political scientists about how much this really matters).
In addition, party allegiance among voters has lessened and voters identifying themselves as independents have increased substantially since the 1950s.

Channels of communication to the public were also limited at the time of Neustadt’s initial study. FDR only had radio and his fireside chats. Television started after World War II but only became widespread in the very late 1940s and into the early 1950s. The print media—newspapers and national magazines—were the dominant source of political information, but this has clearly changed significantly with the advent of cable television, the Internet, and social media.

These are all issues that we revisit in subsequent chapters as we explore the impact of historical time (the period of time in which a presidency occurs) as well as internal time (the internal rhythms within a president’s first and second terms) on presidential power. Suffice it to say, they present challenges to Neustadt’s theory of presidential power. In fact, Neustadt himself was cognizant of changes in the presidency and the American political system. His own shifts in narrative and perspective in the subsequent editions of his book proved that he, too, recognized the need to broaden our understanding of presidential power.

**Neustadt Addresses Contemporary Presidents**

Neustadt did not substantively alter the text of his original 1960 version in subsequent editions. Instead, new prefaces were written and chapters were added. This is useful to us because it implicitly provides us a “test” of his original theory as time passed. Did *Presidential Power* withstand that test of time? Did the argument essentially stay the same or did it subtly change? Recognizing any revisions and additions that Neustadt made to his own argument may help us understand aspects of presidential power that have become more relevant for contemporary presidents.

Neustadt’s second edition of the work included an afterword on JFK (it became Chapter 9 in subsequent editions). Although it is somewhat brief, Neustadt raises several new questions directed at appraising performance. His question on presidential purposes is particularly telling because it directs us to think not just about the *exercise* of power in a strategic or instrumental sense but also power to what *end*. Moreover, Neustadt asks whether these purposes run with or against the grain of history—were they relevant to the needs of the time? This emphasis is especially important because it introduces a focus of attention on the broader historical context of a presidency and the effect of that context on performance.
The impact of particular periods in history is not addressed in Neustadt’s original theory, but he does introduce it in the second edition, and it is an important topic that we shall turn to in Chapter 5.28 Neustadt also draws attention to the internal time of a presidency, although this topic is not explicitly raised as a question. Neustadt noted that Kennedy’s term in office was cut short, making the effects of internal time difficult to evaluate. However, in Neustadt’s view, there was evidence of effectiveness in the way Kennedy took office. Presidential transitions to office and the first eighteen months in office are crucial. It is a critical learning time for a president, as Kennedy himself experienced with the Bay of Pigs fiasco in April 1961. We don’t know what might have been in store after Kennedy’s two years and ten months in office, but Neustadt offers some important perspective for all presidents. The fourth year is a big test, as the president prepares for reelection, while the seventh year is the beginning of the end, as attention focuses on the election of a successor. As for opportunities for accomplishment, Neustadt identifies the third, fifth, and sixth years as the most important. For our purposes, Neustadt’s brief comments on the consequence of the internal rhythms of the presidential term were instructive and helped to shape future analysis of presidential power (see Chapters 6 and 7).

The third edition, published in 1976, included a new chapter on LBJ and Nixon. Neustadt acknowledges the turbulent events of the 1960s and the 1970s but concludes that the basic ingredients of presidential power have not changed very much and that power “derives from roughly the same sources as a generation ago.”29 However, he does conclude that LBJ and Nixon may have exercised too much power and that Vietnam and Watergate, respectively, became “symbols of their self-destruction.” At the same time, both presidents “found their power as contingent and variable as that of others.”30

Still, Neustadt makes some interesting new points, fine-tuning his argument to changing conditions, some of which signal important changes in his theory. For example, Neustadt cautions that extreme demands for loyalty and overeager aides striving to demonstrate loyalty could be potentially dangerous for a president and the White House—as it was for Nixon. Neustadt also raises the issue of legitimacy, or the widespread sense that a president possesses the basic right to govern. Here he points to a closer relationship between public prestige and professional reputation, especially when the president misleads the public on a large scale and a “credibility gap” develops. Legitimacy was a problem for Johnson as it became clearer, especially after the Tet offensive in early 1968, that the war
in Vietnam was not going as well as the administration’s public statements proclaimed. It was also an issue for Nixon once the details of the Watergate scandal and its cover-up slowly emerged in 1973 and 1974, culminating in his August 8, 1974, resignation from office. In both cases, what the president was publicly stating was met with increasing skepticism, by both the public and Washington insiders.31

In another new chapter (Chapter 11), Neustadt focuses on Jimmy Carter’s transition to the presidency and compares it to Kennedy’s transition efforts in 1960 and early 1961, in which Neustadt was a central participant. Here, Neustadt concentrates more on the institutional surroundings of the presidency and how they have changed. For example, he notes that the White House staff matters in its own right and how populating it with too many former associates in key positions—fellow Georgians in Carter’s case—can lead to presidential amateur hour. Neustadt also recognizes the increasing power of the media and the public mood. Carter came across poorly on television, and the public began to sour on his presidency.

In the final edition of the work, two additional chapters were added. The first covered Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Neustadt recognized that Reagan was an activist president who had strong policy convictions but believed that Reagan’s biggest problem was that he lacked detailed knowledge. Not surprisingly, Neustadt takes Reagan to task for the Iran-Contra scandal—an event that might have led to Reagan’s impeachment had more evidence of presidential knowledge and involvement been established. This major misstep initially involved trading military equipment to Iran in the hopes that moderate elements in the Iranian regime would put pressure on the Hezbollah militia in Syria to release American civilians that they had taken hostage. It was an ill-conceived, ill-informed, and largely fruitless effort. Both Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger thought the scheme foolish and believed it had ended. However, a new national security adviser, Vice Admiral John Poindexter, restarted the effort without Reagan’s approval—at least by most credible accounts. Moreover, Poindexter and a White House military aide, Lt. Col. Oliver North, then came up with the even more audacious move to use the funds from the sale of arms to finance the pro-American “Contras” in Nicaragua who were waging a civil war against the leftist Sandinista regime. This was done without Reagan’s knowledge or authorization. When the operation first became public, Reagan denied knowledge of the arms-for-hostages piece of it, although there was evidence to
the contrary. A special committee (the Tower Commission) convened to investigate the scandal and found no presidential involvement in funding the Contras, though it did suggest reforms that the administration then put into practice. In Neustadt’s view, Reagan was a good case study of his arguments on presidential power—but as a negative example. However, I believe the Iran-Contra scandal is less about the failure of presidential influence and bargaining (although the “deal” with the Iranians was a disaster) and more about the failure of Reagan to manage the machinations within the national security staff, an issue that relates to the importance of assembling and managing resources and staff (which we discuss in Chapters 6 and 7).

As with Neustadt’s views on Eisenhower, evaluation of Reagan’s actions as president is a matter of interpretation. Whereas Neustadt sees Reagan as a failure, other observers have applauded Reagan’s efforts, valuing his economic policies and his steadfastness in strengthening the American military, with some claiming the latter had direct effect on the decline of the Soviet Union. Still others go further and applaud Reagan’s foreign policy flexibility: he initially adopted a hard line with the Soviets but became more accommodating once Gorbachev took power.

The second additional chapter in the 1990 edition, “Two Cases of Self-Help,” presents two positive cases of presidential leadership. The first—Kennedy’s response to the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962—was expected. The second was an examination of Eisenhower’s deliberations in 1954 concerning US military intervention to support France in its efforts to defeat a communist insurgency in Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos today), then part of colonial France. This was less expected given Neustadt’s earlier negative assessment of Eisenhower. By 1954, the Indochina War had been going on for eight years and French forces were seemingly set for a major defeat at an isolated fortress in northwestern Vietnam called Dien Bien Phu. The French appealed to the White House for military assistance. The stakes were high: no one wanted blame for losing more territory to the communists, but no one wanted the United States to be drawn into another Korean War. Although Eisenhower gave the possibility of military action much thought and there was extensive deliberation, he ultimately decided against intervention.

Neustadt sees a more effective Eisenhower in this episode, acknowledging that Eisenhower played an astute game. On the one hand, Eisenhower dangled the possibility of *some* assistance *if* certain conditions were met. On the other
hand, he was astutely aware of the limits of American military power in the jungles of Southeast Asia. The outcome was probably the best to be hoped for at the time: partition of Vietnam into communist-controlled North and an ostensibly free South as well as the avoidance of “another Korea.”32

The subsequent editions of *Presidential Power* do not fully square with the theory of power that Neustadt originally lays out. Although bargaining and influence remain important to the presidents covered in the later chapters, other facets of power seem equally if not more crucial in accounting for success or failure in the presidencies. Neustadt is an astute presidential observer, and he captures the central themes and issues of these presidencies. But rather than confirming his original theory, Neustadt’s analysis in subsequent editions often highlights the new areas of analysis that presidential power must consider, such as making effective public appeals, understanding an administration’s place in historical time, and capitalizing on the internal time of a presidency. And as we discuss throughout this book, presidents must recognize the importance of, and utilize, each facet of presidential power to successfully achieve their agendas.

**Testing Neustadt’s Theory Against Recent Presidencies**

Let us now turn and consider the more recent presidents, those not studied by Neustadt in his book, such as Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. What would Neustadt have said about their influence and bargaining skills? Are those even the most important tools of these presidents, given how much has changed since Neustadt first wrote *Presidential Power*? Although some political scientists have cautioned us about the president’s ability to have significant impact on Congress’s legislative process, Neustadt remains correct in his assessment that a president’s bargaining abilities do matter. Imagine the media’s and political pundits’ reaction if the president failed to exert influence on major pieces of legislation, particularly those central to the White House’s policy agenda. Does the president determine the outcome? Probably not, except in extraordinary cases. But the president can and should exercise some influence, and key presidential achievements have been accomplished because bargaining occurs at crucial moments.

Bill Clinton secured accord on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993 with strong Republican support by making significant bargaining concessions, including price protections for citrus and winter vegetable
growers and sugar producers as well as expanded production of the C-17 cargo plane, the latter well beyond the parameters of a trade bill. However, we also need to bear in mind that free trade was part of the Republican agenda that had largely been crafted during George H. W. Bush’s presidency. Whereas bargaining certainly mattered at the margins to secure sufficient congressional support, Clinton’s efforts to seize control of what otherwise was part of the GOP agenda was the key to his success.

During his first year in office, George W. Bush was able to secure a major education reform bill by working closely with Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and other key Democrats in Congress to reach a compromise. Although the administration did not attain its goal of allowing students in failing public schools to use vouchers to attend private schools, other reforms such as standardized testing in public schools, annual measurement of a school’s performance, and the ability of parents to transfer their children to higher-performing public schools were achieved. Bargaining and compromise were key to Bush’s achievement, but other factors and tactics were at play. Bush pushed for education reform early in his presidency, the most opportune moment in the internal time of a president’s first term. He also carefully cultivated Kennedy and other Democrats to be in a supportive mood, inviting Kennedy and members of his family, for example, to a special White House screening of the film Thirteen Days, which favorably depicts JFK’s handling of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. As well, Bush renamed the headquarters of the Department of Justice in honor of the senator’s brother Robert F. Kennedy, a former attorney general. Bush also benefited from a period of congressional goodwill in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks—an impact of historical time.

Another success of the George W. Bush administration, the 2002 emergency spending bill that sought funds to defend the United States against foreign terrorism, could also be attributed to its timing in the aftermath of 9/11 and the widespread public concern about homeland security. Of course, it included unrelated appropriations such as $2 million to the Smithsonian Institution for constructing a new building to house its jars of biological specimens and $2.5 million to map coral reefs in Hawaii—a sign that bargaining was still necessary for the bill’s passage. Still, neither of Bush’s successes can be wholly attributed to Neustadt’s conception of presidential power as bargaining. Timing, both internal and historical, the substance of the policy initiatives, and other forms of power were also crucial to the success of these initiatives.
For Obama, the centerpiece of his first-term agenda was healthcare reform: the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (also known as “Obamacare”). In this case, bargaining was absolutely critical. It helped the administration secure support of key segments of the healthcare industry, especially drug manufacturers. And although the administration was not successful in winning bipartisan support, it was able, through individual bargaining with key Democratic members, to secure passage in March 2010. Still, there are a couple of points to bear in mind. Perhaps the most fundamental is that healthcare reform had a long lineage within the Democratic Party’s political agenda, going even as far back as the Truman presidency, so the Democrats were primed to see some form of healthcare reform pass. Equally important, Obama’s administration moved on this initiative immediately after his inauguration, recognizing the importance of internal time and that they needed to act when Obama’s power was at its strongest. This was in stark contrast to Clinton’s unsuccessful efforts on healthcare reform—his administration’s delay on this initiative was a significant contributing factor to its failure. We explore these dynamics further in Chapter 6.

And as the Obama White House learned in 2011 and 2012 when it sought a “grand bargain” with the leadership of the Republican-controlled House, sometimes bargaining is not effective. The aim was an historic agreement that combined debt reduction, revenue increases, and changes in entitlement programs. Obama and House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) got very close to a deal, but a final White House effort to secure more tax revenue bitterly soured the process. Both sides have different accounts concerning who is to blame. It would have made a fascinating case study for Neustadt to tackle. Neustadt would have likely focused on various errors in the bargaining process made by each side, such as the White House pulling back from its quest for higher taxes on the wealthiest Americans. I think the story is more complex than that. Each side seemed eager to make a deal, but the problem was whether they could politically deliver on their concessions. Obama was worried about his electoral base going into the 2012 presidential election, whereas Boehner’s hands were tied by the Republican ideological purists in the House. Bargaining today is more difficult than in the past—it is no longer just about powerful political leaders striking a deal. Today’s political leaders also face the daunting task of securing support for those deals within an increasingly polarized politics. Polarization ups the ante for devising ways of exercising presidential power. Waiting until the end of his first term to strike this bargain likely did not help Obama—that point in the internal cycle of a presidency simply isn’t favorable for grand efforts.
CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Bargaining matters, that much is clear. However, deal making and brokering—whether successful or unsuccessful—are only one resource of power. The shifts in Neustadt’s own narrative, as he moves from the initial account published in 1960 to the final edition in 1990, shows that even he understands the need to expand our conception of presidential power. Politics has certainly undergone change since the Reagan years: new resources for exercising influence have developed, and most notably, avenues for direct presidential communication have advanced significantly. Neustadt was initially a bit time-bound by his era, though in later editions he does allude to the importance of other factors in exercising presidential power such as historical time and internal time.

Still, Neustadt is dead right on the need for presidents to recognize their “power stakes”: a president must anticipate and understand when appropriate, and decisive, action is needed. When recent presidents have failed in this, it has proven costly. George W. Bush initially bungled the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. There was a quick flyover of New Orleans in Air Force One, but there was no immediate action on the ground. Obama’s administration failed to anticipate and monitor the implementation of their healthcare reform plan. The system of participant enrollment was plagued with failures in its rollout—the website crashed and people experienced difficulties in signing up. These problems should have been anticipated and thus could have been avoided. Another example was the scandal of the treatment of former servicemen and women in veterans’ hospitals. The system was severely mismanaged, and some veterans got preferred treatment while others experienced long delays. There had been reports for a number of years—even going back to the Bush presidency—of difficulties in veterans’ hospitals, but the issue was simply not on the radar of the Obama administration.

A final question to consider is: Power to what end? This takes us beyond Neustadt’s project, because he largely leaves this question untouched in his book, choosing instead to focus on influence and bargaining, but not on what is achieved by their use. Although Neustadt provides us no prescriptive or normative guidance on this matter, this is an important piece of presidential leadership to think about. There are two related issues to ponder here. One, which Neustadt does raise, concerns the effects when presidents become too preoccupied with power. As he observes, “Johnson and Nixon, by all accounts assiduous in thinking about power—both, indeed, preoccupied with it to the point of obsession—set themselves on disastrous courses, leading one to premature retirement and the other
to forced resignation.” But what if they had pulled back a bit? It is likely that if they had charted a more restrained course, and set a more appropriate set of goals for their power, they could have been more successful leaders. The second issue concerns how presidential power, especially as we now consider the ends it seeks to achieve, squares with our system of shared powers. Does it create a presidency that is seen as the dominant and driving force in our political system to the exclusion of other institutions, processes, and levels of government? Perhaps the presidency is now the central focus largely because of the increasing expectations we have placed on the office and the higher bar we have set for the president’s public communications. But should the presidency be so paramount? Should the presidency be the driving engine in our democracy? Should presidential policy goals—rather than Congress, an equally elected branch of our federal government—set the national agenda? Madison, I suspect, would have an answer to these questions that might differ from what our expectations are today: each branch is entitled to claim some terrain, in his view, and ambition must be pitted against ambition. Whichever answer is correct still sets dilemmas for presidential power.

NOTES

2. The Bureau of the Budget was reorganized during the Nixon presidency into today’s Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
5. Ibid., 4.
6. Ibid., 321.
7. Ibid., 8.
8. Ibid., 19.
10. Ibid., 24.
11. Ibid., 28.
12. Ibid., 32.
13. Ibid., 73.
18. Ibid., 60.
22. Ibid., 70.
23. As quoted in ibid., 112
24. Ibid., 112.
25. Ibid., 115.
26. Divided government was not unknown to these presidents. Truman faced a Republican-controlled Congress in 1947 and 1948, and the Democrats controlled Congress for the last six years of Eisenhower’s presidency.
27. In the 1976 edition, the new material on the Johnson and Nixon presidencies appeared as an introductory chapter. In the 1980 edition, this material was moved to the end of the work and appeared as Chapter 10. The 1980 edition also included new material on Jimmy Carter that appeared as Chapter 11, “Hazards of Transition.”
28. The other three questions he raises are: (1) What was the president’s “feel” for power? (2) How was pressure in office handled? (3) What imprint was left of the office?
30. Ibid., xi.
31. Neustadt is also more cognizant of the impact of the White House staff. Although he does pay greater attention to what transpires below the president than he did in the original “Men in Office” chapter, the emphasis is still on the president as an individual rather than on the broader institutional effects.
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