

Winning is Everything: The Presidency of George W. Bush

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After the events of 9/11/01, the United States rallied around President George W. Bush. An administration that was initially weak and semi-legitimate came to directly control the executive and legislative branches of government and gradually strengthen its influence over the judiciary. Bush and the Republican majority in Congress attained hegemony domestically as well as internationally. Having acquired the power to ignore the rules, they often proceeded to do so. A semi-idealistic “winning is everything” approach to foreign policy led the United States into a quagmire in Iraq. An unempirical “winning is everything” approach to domestic policy, which often distorts the rules (law, science, and standard economics) and ignores the “referees” (the GAO, the CBO, the IMF), has created potentially disastrous medium and long-term problems for the United States.

Key Words: George W. Bush, U.S. foreign policy, U.S. domestic politics, international rules.

Ganar lo es todo: la presidencia de George W. Bush

Tras los eventos del 11 de septiembre de 2001, la nación estadounidense se congregó alrededor de la figura del presidente George W. Bush, lo cual permitió a su administración –débil y semilegitima en sus inicios– controlar directamente los poderes ejecutivo y legislativo y fortalecer gradualmente su influencia sobre el jurídico. Bush y la mayoría republicana alcanzaron la hegemonía dentro y fuera de su país y, por ende, tuvieron el poder para ignorar las reglas. Un enfoque semiidealista de la política exterior que se podría resumir en “ganar lo es todo” ha colocado a los Estados Unidos en una situación pantanosa en Iraq. Paralelamente, en la política interna, la presuposición “ganar lo es todo”, que frecuentemente distorsiona las reglas e ignora a los “árbitros”, ha creado problemas potencialmente desastrosos a mediano y largo plazo para los Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: George W. Bush. política exterior estadounidense, política interna estadounidense.

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The American eagle felt omnipotent, happy, and carefree. It did not know it was enclosed in an immense, imperceptible aviary. It had never flown far enough to smash its head and break its wings against the wire netting and had not yet discovered the inflexible and mortal limitations of its freedom. Americans as I knew them in the twenties had not yet been really tested by spiteful and sardonic history.

Luigi Barzini (1977)

I. INTRODUCTION

In a gentler age, it was sometimes said: “It’s not whether you win or lose, it’s how you play the game”. Those days are long gone. Vince Lombardi, former head coach of the Green Bay Packers, is known for his statement: “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.” In the fall of 2005, an advertisement for professional football on Fox Sports Net said: “Anything goes as long as you follow one sacred rule: ‘Win at any cost’”. For many coaches, players and sports commentators, breaking the rules is a problem only if you get caught.

One way of testing Lombardi’s “winning is the only thing” philosophy would be to play an important college or professional football game without referees. The game would turn into a war, not only between the players, but between the opposing fans as well. Football games have both rules and referees. Winning without rules and referees is war.¹ Winning or losing without rules would be meaningless. Applying the rules without referees would be impossible, particularly in the context of a winning-is-everything culture. The coaches and play-

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1 Most wars have at least limited rules, such as the 1949 Geneva Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

ers have vested interests in interpreting the rules their way and often see what they want to see. The fans on opposing sides of a game also tend to see the decisions of referees differently. Concisely, allegiances mold perceptions. Fans of football teams whose only difference is place of residence can see the same play and interpret it differently, sometimes to the point of screaming “kill the ref!”. True-believer football fans undergo a psychological bonding process which seems comparable to nationalism on a societal level, and nationalism is known to distort reality for leaders and followers alike.

The key foreign and domestic policies of the George W. Bush (Bush, from now on) presidency may be described in terms of short-term success and long-term failure. In foreign policy, the immediate response to the events of 9/11/01 was successful, largely because “winning” was an appropriate short-term objective. The United States quickly defeated the Taliban in Afghanistan and overthrew Saddam Hussein in Iraq. In domestic politics, Bush successfully rallied the nation in the wake of the 9/11/01 attacks, created the Homeland Security Administration, implemented his tax reduction policies, and won the 2002 mid-term elections and the 2004 presidential election. The longer-term outcomes of Bush’s key foreign and domestic policies are questionable, at best. Using the football metaphor, this paper will argue that the origins of long-term failures—especially with respect to Iraq and fiscal matters—may be found in an over-emphasis on “winning” at the expense of “rules” and “referees”².

II. WINNING IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

International politics is similar to American football in several respects: Citizens of different countries are like the fans in a football game; the military forces are like the football players. Less obviously, there are rules and referees in international politics, and there are many more than there used to be. The incredible carnage of World War I starkly illustrated the need for rules and referees in the international sphere. The League of Nations, the International Labor Organization, and the Permanent Court of International Justice were created to help put an end to war. The League and its affiliated organizations failed, however, in part because the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the League of Nations treaty. The even more incredible carnage of World War II (WWII) led to the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Coal and Steel Community (which eventually be-

came the European Union), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the World Trade Organization, a long list of regional organizations, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Within a decade of the end of WWII, “a totally new system of international law and organizations had been created”, with crucial leadership from the United States (Sands, 2005: 10). International law had previously “regulated” only the relationships between states. With the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN General Assembly and subsequent legally binding instruments, such as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, it became assumed that human rights should be internationally protected through the rule of law. Arms control agreements and treaties relating to the protection of the global environment followed.

If virtually identical groups of Texans can see penalty calls differently in a football game, it should not be surprising that citizens of countries with divergent interests, cultures, histories, languages, institutions, and religions will perceive issues in international politics differently. Nor should it be surprising that rules and referees are extraordinarily important. Like football, international politics and economics have to do with competition (and cooperation) within a framework of rules. Without effective rules, there is war, chaos, and humanitarian disaster. Without neutral referees we cannot keep score, and may lose track of objective reality.

The analogy is obviously not perfect. Politics in the international arena is not a game. The score does not start from zero every year and the players are not merely injured, as in football; they are often killed. The “fans” from different countries have more than a symbolic stake in the outcome of political and economic competition. International political and economic competition does not occur on a level playing field, and neither the rules nor the “referees” are strictly impartial. Nor are the referees able to enforce the rules in many cases. Finally, each country plays multiple “games” simultaneously. Despite these differences, the comparison between competitive sport and jockeying for advantage between nations can help understand the importance of the “rules of the game.”

A “winning is the only thing” approach to international politics, which ignores the rules, works only for the “big kid on the block”. Even then, it often works only for a limited time and ends up failing in the long run. The case of Israel is illustrative: In military terms, this country is the “big kid on the block” in

² The terms “rules” and “referees” are used broadly here. Taking account of scientific evidence is considered to be a form of rule-following.

the Middle East. For a long time, Israel has ignored the rules (international law) and the referees (the UN) by building settlements on the West Bank of the Jordan River and by assassinating Palestinians who are considered terrorists by Israeli Prime Ministers (Ostrovsky & Hoy, 1991: 24–26). Although Israel has won every battle, it has lost the war to secure peace and safety for its citizens. One (but only one) reason for this is that Hamas and other radical Palestinian groups recognize no rules for the conflict whatsoever. For them, there is no such thing as an innocent Israeli. The relationship between Israel and the Palestinians has an emotional charge of several million volts, making objectivity impossible. However, it seems clear to me that those who opposed the peace settlement brokered between Israel and the Palestinians during the Clinton administration were wrong. It would have been infinitely better if rules governing the relationship between Israel and the incipient Palestinian state had been agreed upon. Wherever one places the blame for the failure of the peace talks, this much seems certain. The current situation, in which both sides “win”—**Hamas by killing Jews and Israel by killing terrorists—has resulted in both sides actually losing.**

III. WINNING IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State under Presidents Nixon and Ford, was a realist. In International Relations literature, realists such as E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan see politics as a struggle for personal, group and national interests. The realist “never risks the collectivity’s survival in the pursuit of limitless growth, or in defense of ideological, moralistic or legalistic righteousness.” Prudence and pragmatism are realist virtues (Couloumbis & Wolfe, 1990: 7). Kissinger had a balance of power (or balance of terror) approach to international politics. He did not try to win *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union, a country with thousands of nuclear weapons; he could live with a draw. Kissinger believed in *détente*, in setting rules to limit the arms race. He thus negotiated a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) with the Soviets in 1972. However, in the fall of 1975 President Ford installed Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense. Dick Cheney succeeded Rumsfeld as White House Chief of Staff. Ford made George H. W. Bush (George Bush Senior, from now on) head of the CIA and replaced Nelson Rockefeller as his 1976 Vice Presidential running mate. In short order, Rumsfeld, Cheney, and a team of outside intelligence experts had undermined *détente* as the preferred approach to deal with the Soviet Union. They believed that the Soviets were trying to

attain military superiority over the United States. Therefore, they inferred that the United States needed a military buildup of its own; under this logic, the United States needed to win, not limit, the arms race (Mann, 2004: 56–78).

Jimmy Carter began his presidency (1976–1980) as an idealist. The idealist school of International Relations includes “pacifists, world federalists, humanitarians, legalists, and moralists.” For idealists such as Mahatma Gandhi, Woodrow Wilson and Bertrand Russell, a good politician “does not do what is possible; rather, he or she does what is good” (Couloumbis & Wolfe, 1990: 8). Perhaps the most religious U.S. President of the twentieth century, Carter emphasized the importance of human rights in foreign policy. He wanted to be his brother’s keeper and play by the Golden Rule in international relations. Carter reduced the number of covert operations undertaken by the CIA on ethical grounds. He negotiated the Camp David accords between Israel and the Palestinians. Carter’s attempts to negotiate and ratify a SALT II treaty with the Soviet Union foundered after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Yael Aronoff (2006: 425–450) argues that National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski converted Carter to a more realistic approach to foreign policy in the wake of the Soviet takeover of Afghanistan. The Carter administration was also confronted by the 1979 Revolution in Iran. Carter was undone politically by the ongoing hostage crisis and by the failure of the Special Forces mission to rescue the U.S. diplomats taken prisoner in the course of the Iranian Revolution.

President Ronald Reagan (1980–88), though not a particularly religious man, was a curious mixture of foreign policy realist and idealist. An incorrigible optimist, Reagan believed that communism was evil and that it could be defeated. An idealistic goal could be achieved by realistic means. To this end, the Reagan administration engaged in a massive military buildup directed at the Soviet Union. With respect to arms control, Reagan stated “trust but verify.” His administration made covert proxy war on the Marxist government of Nicaragua and on the Soviet-controlled government of Afghanistan. Playing by the rules was not a significant consideration in either case. The outcome was all that Reagan could have wished for. The Soviets were defeated by the Mujahadin rebels in Afghanistan, massively supplied by the CIA.³ The Nicaraguan Sandinistas were finally defeated electorally in 1990. And most important was the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the “Evil Empire”. Reagan, the idealist, had won! His democratic ideals were triumphant. Good had triumphed over evil.

3 See Crile (2003).

When George Bush Senior became President (1988–1992), the pendulum swung back again. His foreign policy team was composed primarily of realists. Secretaries of State James Baker and Lawrence Eagleburger, and National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft would support John Quincy Adams' 1821 statement that "America applauds those who fight for liberty and independence, but she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy" (quoted in Daalder & Lindsay, 2003: 4). In the first Gulf War, in 1991, George Bush Senior was successful in obtaining UN authorization to use force to liberate Kuwait and in creating a large international coalition of forces to do so. Afterwards, he resisted the temptation to remove Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. To have done so would have exceeded his UN mandate and would have done great damage to that organization just when it seemed to be reaching its full potential after the end of the Cold War. To have invaded Iraq at that point would have been perceived as a betrayal by the Arab members of the U.S.-led coalition and would have also damaged the U.S. relationship with Russia. As is obvious today, the fall of Saddam would unleash unpredictable forces in the country and the region. Finally, there was no exit strategy for U.S. troops. Whatever mistakes George Bush Senior made in the Iraq war, such as ending the war a day or two too soon and allowing the Republican Guard to escape relatively intact, failing to invade Iraq was not one of them. In football terms, George Bush Senior followed the rules of war, paid attention to the referee (the UN) and resisted the temptation to "run up the score."

Daalder and Lindsay (2003) write that "Bill Clinton's presidency in most ways represented a continuation of the traditional Wilsonian [idealist] approach of building a world order based on the rule of law" (p.12). Clinton supported economic globalization and secured the congressional ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that his predecessor had negotiated. His administration advanced arms control agreements and signed (but did not submit for ratification) the Kyoto Protocol on the environment and the Rome Treaty, which would create the International Criminal Court. But the world changed geopolitically during the 1990s. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States became the world's only superpower, both militarily and economically. Robert Kagan (2003) writes that:

This "unipolar moment" had an entirely natural and predictable consequence: It made the United States more willing to use force abroad. With the check of Soviet power removed, the

United States was free to intervene practically wherever and whenever it chose—a fact reflected in the proliferation of overseas military interventions that began during the first Bush administration with the invasion of Panama in 1989, the Persian Gulf War in 1991, and the humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1992, and continued during the Clinton years with interventions in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. (p.26)

The victory of George W. Bush in the disputed 2000 presidential election strengthened the unilateral tendencies of the United States. Key figures in the executive branch, the Congress, conservative think tanks, and the Republican base were dismissive of international law and were hostile toward the UN. In both foreign and domestic policy, the Bush administration has been a re-play of the Reagan years. After the 9/11/01 attacks, Bush moved in the direction of a "winning is the only thing" approach to world politics. In this context, "winning" meant defeating terrorists, spreading freedom or democracy throughout the world, and maintaining unchallenged military power.⁴ In several power centers of the Bush administration, the attitude was that "we are the big kids on the block". In spite of the fact that the rules and the referees of international politics tend to favor dominant players like the United States, Bush felt that he did not need the international community and did not want to be held back. He rejected the Kyoto Protocol, withdrew from the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty with Russia, refused to ratify the Rome Treaty, opposed a pact to control trafficking in small arms, opposed a new protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention, and negotiated an agreement with India that undermined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.⁵ He also went to war with Iraq without the sanction of the UN Security Council and created a legal black hole at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where neither domestic nor international law applied.⁶

It can be argued that the tactics of the Al Qaeda terrorists justifies U.S. unilateralism. Osama Bin Laden's philosophy is extraordinarily simplistic and brutal: God is on our side; westerners and their allies are the Devil; and we are justified in killing as many of them as we can. Turning the other cheek to such an enemy is suicidal and politically impossible. Nor does deterrence work against attackers willing to commit suicide for their cause. However, unilateralism also results from the mind set of key Bush administration officials with black and white, anti-communist mentalities. Others have specifically religious orientations. In either case, they are fighting the Devil, who has

4 In his Graduation Speech at West Point, June 1, 2002, Bush (quoted in Singer, 2004) said: "America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge—thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace" (p. 178).

5 See Mann (2004), Daalder and Lindsay (2003), and "From Bad to Worse: America's Nuclear Deal with India" (2006) published in *The Economist*.

6 The U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Rasul v. Bush*, on June 28, 2004, that prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba do have access to U.S. federal courts to determine the legality of their detention (Sands, 2005).

simply changed his form from communism during the Cold War to terrorism today. The Devil is so evil and so powerful that any means can be justified in fighting him. There are few rules and there must be no compromise.

The most serious problems arise when we ignore the rules with normal states, as opposed to non-state terrorists. This occurred when the Bush administration claimed the right—even if the main referee (the UN Security Council) and the rest of the world disagreed—to attack countries that have neither attacked nor threatened to attack the United States, under the premise that they might attack this country. On the basis of the principle that “a nation in possession of weapons of mass destruction threatens another nation,” writes Peter Singer (2004), “the threatened nation is justified in making a preemptive strike. . . . North Korea would have been justified in making a preemptive strike against the United States [in 2003]” (p. 183). As many analysts have argued, the Bush doctrine of *preventive*—as opposed to pre-emptive—war, assumes the existence of highly reliable information, undermines international alliances and international law, and cannot be sustained.⁷

In *The President of Good and Evil*, Singer (2004) writes that Bush’s position may really be: “good nations are justified in striking preemptively against evil ones, but not the other way around.” “But as a principle of international law,” says Singer, “this criterion is hopeless” (p.183). Although true, this misses the key point: The Bush administration is not interested in establishing principles of international law. Bush foreign policy has been antagonistic toward the development of international law except where it serves the immediate (usually financial or commercial) interests of the United States.⁸ Stephen Peter Rosen (2003) is more to the point in suggesting that, as an empire, the United States should “create and enforce the rules of a hierarchical interstate order.” However, the imperial power “is not itself bound by the rules it prescribes for others” (p.53).

Both the Bush administration and U.S. citizens should consider how the country would view a problem such as the 9/11/01 attacks if the United States were not the “big kid on the block”, that is to say, if this country were not the world’s only superpower. This is the way the world looks to most people in other countries. Assuming their perspective would help U.S. citizens understand why Europeans are more interested in international law and alliances than they are. Kagan (2003)

explains the difference between the European position and the U.S. position:

Europe is turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiations and cooperation. . . . Meanwhile, the United States remains mired in . . . an anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable, and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might. (p.3)

In its first six years, the Bush administration had the power to go it alone. But the moment could not last. Unilateralism, in the absence of international legitimacy, is too expensive and too difficult. During the first Iraq war, the broad coalition put together by George Bush Senior picked up \$53 billion of the \$61–71 billion cost; combat fatalities stopped once Kuwait was liberated (less than 300 Americans died); and, in spite of very substantial Iraqi casualties, world public opinion was on the side of the United States. This time in Iraq, with Great Britain as its only significant military ally, the United States has picked up most of the cost of the war. In January 2002, White House advisor Lawrence Lindsey was chastised for estimating the cost of the Iraq War as being between \$100 and \$200 billion. Budget Director Mitch Daniels called the estimate “very, very high”. The occupation of Iraq and operations in Afghanistan are currently costing the United States about three billion dollars per week. The direct cost of defeating Saddam Hussein and occupying Iraq as of 09/04/07, was approximately \$466 billion dollars. Former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes concluded in February 2006 that the true costs of the war would exceed a trillion dollars, assuming that all U.S. troops returned by 2010. This figure does not include costs to other countries, the increased costs of oil, or costs to Iraq (loss of lives and infrastructure destruction) (2006, *National Bureau of Economic Research working paper 12054*). As of 09/03/07, 3,849 members of the U.S. military were dead and by 10/01/07, 37,659 had required Medical Air transportation. In terms of manpower, the U.S. military is stretched to its limits. World public opinion turned dramatically against the United States when, together with Great Britain, it went ahead with the war without UN Security Council authorization. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. wrote in 2004: “. . . never before in American history has the United States been so feared and hated by the rest of the world” (p.xiii).

7 See Jervis (2003; 2005) and chapter 2 of Okerstrom (2006). John Lewis Gaddis (2005) argues that “the old distinction between preemption and prevention . . . was one of the many casualties of September 11” (p.5).

8 See Sands (2005).

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ignored military advice and went into Iraq with a small force which, while adequate for a military victory, proved totally inadequate for the occupation. Widespread looting and a security breakdown resulting from the demobilization of the Iraqi Army destroyed most of the good will that had been generated in Iraq by the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The decision to dismiss thousands of senior Iraqi officials linked to the Bath Party was another crucial mistake. Many of the most heinous crimes of the suicide bombers were directly or indirectly blamed on the U.S. occupation forces which prop up the Iraqi government (Luttwak, 2005: 28–29). The worldwide dissemination of pictures of U.S. abuse of prisoners at Abu Grahیب was the ultimate public relations disaster.⁹ Finally, it seems wrongheaded for the Bush administration to have assigned primary responsibility for the governance and reconstruction of Iraq to the Defense Department (Dobbins et al., 2006: iii), marginalizing the State Department and the CIA. The Pentagon predictably focused on winning the war; it had neither the expertise nor the appropriate mind set for democratic nation-building, which is a long-term proposition. The State Department's 13-volume Future of Iraq project was ignored. The Director of this project was reportedly removed from retired General Jay Garner's post-war reconstruction team on orders of the Secretary of Defense, perhaps at the direction of Vice President Cheney. In October 2004, James Fallows published an article entitled "Bush's Lost Year" in *The Atlantic Monthly*. He writes: "I have sat through arguments among soldiers and scholars about whether the invasion of Iraq should be considered the worst strategic error in America's history or only the worst since Vietnam" (p. 71).

The ongoing war in Iraq was unnecessary, unwise, and counterproductive. In 2003, Saddam Hussein posed no military threat to the United States or to his neighbors. There were no weapons of mass destruction; there was no link between Hussein and Al Qaeda; there was little chance of establishing a working democracy in Iraq; and the risks were enormous. The geopolitical outcome of the war has been to strengthen Iran, destabilize the Middle East, increase the cost of oil, and provide a training ground for terrorists.

Condoleezza Rice was promoted from National Security Advisor to Secretary of State in 2004, at the beginning of Bush's second term as President. This change coincided with a gradual shift toward realism in U.S. foreign policy, a position which Rice had been associated with earlier in her career.¹⁰ The new Secretary of State immediately attempted to repair relations

with European allies, which had been damaged by the Iraq War. In 2007, the administration reached an agreement with North Korea on nuclear proliferation—which was anathema to hard liners—and began to talk to Syria and Iran, something that had been urged by the bi-partisan Iraq Study Group. The power of foreign policy hawks such as Vice President Dick Cheney seemed to be waning. It became more and more difficult to consider spreading democracy a serious objective of U.S. foreign policy, although this goal was not formally repudiated. However, Bush rejected the central recommendation of the bi-partisan Iraq Study Group—co-directed by Lee Hamilton and James Baker—to gradually withdraw the U.S. military from Iraq. Bush decided on the surge option, to temporarily *increase* the number of U.S. troops in that country. He was still going for a win.

The present writer has often thought that a tie would be the best outcome when two American football teams play an exceptionally good and close game. This rarely happens. A coach will sometimes have to choose between kicking an extra point for a draw and going for the two-point play for a win. The coach, the players, and the fans nearly always want to go for the win—the idealist outcome—even when the odds are against them. This is a matter of taste that has consequences only for the career of the losing coach. In the world of international politics, however, an excessive focus on winning may have serious consequences indeed. It may exclude negotiation and compromise, damage international organizations, and marginalize the role of "referees" and law. Finally, an excessive focus on winning—as in "Winning the War on Terrorism" or "Winning the Peace"—distorts reality, language, and public opinion. An effort to combat terrorism is not "war"; peace can be achieved, but not "won".

Javier Solana (2004), Secretary General of the Council of the European Union, asks why U.S. citizens should play by the rules even if power will accomplish their objectives faster:

The first answer is that bending or amending rules makes other nations more likely to do the same. We sign treaties on the rights of children, detained soldiers, and diplomats in part because sometimes it is our children, our soldiers and our diplomats whose rights are in peril. The second and broader answer is that power alone will not deliver a safer and more prosperous world. Global trade, telecommunications, air travel, and the international financial system all require rules. So does the international political system. (p.75)

9 From summer 2002 to March 2004, U.S. favorability ratings declined in Britain from 75% to 58%; in France, from 63% to 37%; and in Germany, from 61% to 38% (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2004: 1).

10 E. H. Carr once described realism as the impact of thinking on wishing.

IV. WINNING IN U.S. DOMESTIC POLITICS

The rules in U.S. collegiate football are determined and modified by subcommittees of the Sports and Rules Committees of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. In college football games, the rules are applied by referees wearing striped suits. For spectators at football games, **the referees are the visible manifestation of an underlying administrative/political structure.**

The basic rules in U.S. government and politics are specified in the national and state constitutions. National and state laws constitute a subsidiary structure of rules, applied in regulatory and administrative agencies and by judges in state and federal courts. “Judges,” says U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts, “are like umpires. Umpires don’t make the rules; they apply them” (Lazarus, 2007: 24). Legislative bodies create their own internal rules.

U.S. domestic politics is often considered a game, although playing periods are longer than in football. It is a “game” with two-year, four-year and six-year electoral cycles for the House of Representatives, the Presidency, and the Senate respectively. Politicians, who are often lawyers, are the most visible players. Winning is of paramount importance in this game. Bush, for example, was chosen as the presidential candidate of the Republican Party in 1999, not because he was well qualified to be President, but because he had a famous name, was Governor of Texas, and looked like a winner. The national Democratic and Republican Parties in the United States are essentially electoral machines which will support the policy preferences of whatever Presidential candidate emerges victorious in the primary elections. In 2003, for example, the Democratic Party rallied behind John Kerry’s Senate vote in favor of the Iraq War because he was the nominee, not because the majority of Democrats believed the war was justified.

Federal and state judges and regulatory agencies are the formal referees in the game of politics and government. But for the “game” to work well, the rules must be considered legitimate and the referees must be seen as honest and objective. Informal norms are probably as important as formal rules.

The media, academic institutions, scientists, and ministers/priests perform informal gatekeeping functions in U.S.

politics and government, but less successfully than in the past. Few individuals or institutions are considered objective or above politics during the current period of ideological polarization of elites. Informal, objective “referees” are hard to find. An institution such as the *New York Times*, which in 1971 was universally recognized as *the* leading newspaper, with incomparable resources, esteem, and influence, is now just a representative of the liberal media establishment (Salisbury, 1980: 3). Conservatives have their own media establishment.¹¹ The creatively anarchic Internet distributes information and disinformation with equal efficiency, in spite of some useful fact-checks.¹² Science no longer represents objective truth; now there is liberal and conservative science. Conservatives disparage “junk science,” which supports positions they dislike, and applaud “sound science,” which produces conclusions they approve of.¹³ Economists and environmental scientists have sunk to the level of lawyers. Politicians and interest groups hire those who agree with them to testify before Congress. Ideological think-tanks have proliferated, employing only those who support their ideological position. Judges are increasingly considered liberals or conservatives rather than neutral figures who objectively interpret the law. The U.S. Supreme Court lost credibility with conservatives in allowing abortion and pornography; it lost credibility with liberals in the 2000 *Bush v. Gore* decision, which awarded the presidential election to Bush.

A “winning is the only thing” philosophy became particularly strong in U.S. domestic policy during the presidency of Bush. This happened for some of the same reasons an idealistic, “winning is everything” philosophy dominated his foreign policy. In *Of Paradise and Power*, Robert Kagan (2003) writes of the “unipolar” moment after the collapse of the Soviet Union when strong U.S. military forces were deployed around the world without a single, formidable adversary. “This . . . had an entirely natural and predictable consequence: It made the United States more willing to use force abroad” (p.24). In the language of this paper, being more willing to use force usually implies a greater willingness to break the rules and ignore the referees. The United States intervened in Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo during the Clinton Presidency, but with the support of most of the international community. Everything changed after the November 2000 presidential election and, in particular, after the events of 9/11/01. Now, with the threat of terrorism, the President had a plausible rationale for unilateral intervention abroad, in addition to the power to intervene.

11 Eric Alterman (2003) writes that the U.S. conservative media include “the Fox News Channel, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, the *New York Post*, *Washington Times*, *Weekly Standard*, *National Review*, *American Spectator*, *Human Events*, www.andrewsullivan.com, the Drudge Report, Rush Limbaugh, the entire universe of talk radio, and most of the punditocracy” (p.225).

12 See Schulman (2007: 30–33, 82) for a description of bloggers as gatekeepers.

13 See Gough (2003) and Mooney (2005).

The attacks of 9/11/01 created a “unilateral” moment in U.S. domestic politics as well. The nation rallied around its flag; a President who had been weak and illegitimate for half of the U.S. population—because of the disputed 2000 election process—became a man of steel. Vice President Cheney and his allies had long thought that the Presidency had become too weak in the wake of the Watergate Affair in the Nixon administration. This was their opportunity to reverse the tide. Congress bowed before Bush as he conquered Afghanistan and Iraq and acquiesced in the Patriot Act, the Homeland Security Administration, and Bush’s domestic policy legislation. The Democrats offered resistance for a time when they took control of the Senate after Vermont Senator James Jeffords left the Republican Party. But it was not to last long. The Republicans regained control of the Senate in the 2002 off-year election and increased their majority in the House of Representatives. Now they had it all: the Presidency, both houses of Congress and an increasing dominance of the judicial branch. Hegemony was within their grasp domestically as well as in the world at large. And as in foreign policy, the Republicans had a radical, idealistic, domestic agenda to implement. They already had the answers, many of which existed independently of changing reality.¹⁴

At the beginning of the Bush administration, there was no obvious crisis that needed to be addressed, with the exception of the threat of climate change—which was largely ignored. The budget was in surplus, the country was at peace, and the federal government was doing its job. However, for ideological reasons, the new administration turned a \$127 billion surplus into a \$413 billion deficit in four years, giving hundreds of billions of dollars of tax breaks to the rich. It added over \$200 billion per year to the defense budget, at a time when the United States had no major enemies, even after the events of 9/11/01. The administration simultaneously cut taxes by roughly \$200 billion a year, creating long-term crises for the Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security Programs. Bush curtailed regulation of business and politicized the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which failed the test of Hurricane Katrina. It outsourced key governmental operations, often with inadequate supervision.¹⁵ Republican leaders of Congress often acted as if they wanted to tear down Jefferson’s wall of separation between church and state. Opponents argued that neither they nor the President seemed to respect civil liberties. In October 2001, the President secretly allowed the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on U.S. citizens without legally required authorization by the Federal Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) Court. Thousands of “national security letters” were

used to get around consumer privacy laws after 9/11/01 (Suskind, 2006: 37–41). Lobbyists like Jack Abramoff corrupted the Congress, a number of whose former members have joined him in jail. Republican Congressional leaders neglected their responsibility to oversee executive branch agencies and ignored institutional rules and norms. Noted Congressional scholars Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann wrote in 2006:

We have never seen the culture so sick or the legislative process so dysfunctional. . . . If you can play fast and loose with the rules of the game in lawmaking, it becomes easier to consider playing fast and loose with everything else, including relations with lobbyists, acceptance of favors, the use of official resources and the discharge of governmental power. (Orstein & Mann, 2006: ¶ 2)

A surprising number of Republicans are now critical of the Bush administration. Former Congressman Mickey Edwards (Oklahoma) is working with conservatives to limit the President’s power in areas such as wiretapping without warrants. When referring to Bush, he has said “This guy thinks he’s a monarch, and that’s scary as hell” (quoted in Golberg, 2007). Richard Viguerie, major guru of the modern conservative movement, has written a book entitled *Conservatives Betrayed: How George W. Bush and Other Big Government Republicans Hijacked the Conservative Cause* (Goldberg, 2007: 40–46). Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul says that the latest Iraq War was a mistake and virtually all presidential candidates say the war has been mismanaged. Former Reagan and George Bush Senior staffer Bruce Bartlett wrote *Imposter: How George W. Bush Bankrupted America and Betrayed the Reagan Legacy* (2006) and was fired from the Dallas-based National Center for Policy Analysis for doing so. Many conservatives were outraged that after six years in office, Bush—like previous presidents—had failed to enforce immigration laws on the employment of illegal aliens and had not controlled the border with Mexico. How could intelligent and experienced people have made such a mess of the U.S. government?

V. THE ROOTS OF A CRISIS

The Democratic coalition includes trial lawyers, recent minorities, and poor people who need government, lawyers, and the protection of the courts. It follows that a Republican administration, which wants government to be more like business, might be less oriented toward rules, law, and lawyers than a

14 See Krugman (2002). Policies on global warming, the link between Saddam Hussein and 9/11/01, government regulation of business, and outsourcing government functions have also been resistant to change on the basis of evidence.

15 Management of the Deepwater project to modernize the Coast Guard Fleet was delegated to Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman with disastrous results (Lipton, 2006). Problems with outsourcing the reconstruction of Iraq are documented in Chandrasekaran (2007).

Democratic administration would be. Both President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney are primarily businessmen–politicians, not lawyers. As businessmen, they believe in market forces, as opposed to rule–based government bureaucracies; that government operations should be privatized as much as possible. In both an ideological and a practical sense, the President’s key men have been anti–government.

Vice President Cheney, a man with enormous experience in government, has always been an outsider. Neither he nor former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld trusted the CIA or the State Department. Cheney set up a miniature National Security Council in the Vice President’s office; Rumsfeld set up a miniature intelligence agency in the Pentagon. According to former National Security Council expert on Iraq Kenneth Pollack:

What the Bush people did was dismantle the existing filtering process that for fifty years had been preventing the policymakers from getting bad information. They created stovepipes to get the information they wanted directly to the top leadership. Their position is that the professional bureaucracy is deliberately and maliciously keeping information from them. (Hersh, 2003: 77)

Something similar has happened in the domestic arena. Key public policies have been made outside of normal bureaucratic channels. Neither Paul O’Neill nor John Snow, the first two Secretaries of the Treasury in the Bush administration, had a substantial role in shaping economic policy. Decisions on matters such as the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts and the failed attempt to overhaul the Social Security system in 2005 were taken by a small group of advisors in the White House, including Cheney (Rutenberg & Andrews, 2006: B–1). The President himself, an incurious man with little interest in the details of policy matters, “was caught in an echo chamber of his own making, cut off from everyone other than a circle around him that’s tiny and getting smaller and in concert on everything...” (Suskind, 2004: 293).

Many members of today’s national Republican elite (and some Democrats as well) believe in what might be called public policy fundamentalism, consisting of beliefs which are not subject to falsification by evidence.¹⁶ In effect, they deny the objectivity of social and natural science. Some members of the U.S. Congress believe that the end of the world is near, making long–term matters of public policy relatively unimportant. Others, like Grover Norquist, President of Americans for Tax

Reform, believe that government should not be in the business of redistributing income, for whatever reason. Norquist’s number one priority is cutting the size of government at all levels in half in 25 years (as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product [GDP]) and suggests doing this again in the next 25 years (*The Tax Reformer*, 2004: 3). In effect, Norquist would repeal Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal.¹⁷ His focus is almost exclusively on winning, on achieving his goal of reducing the size of government. He has little to say about the type of society which would result from implementation of his proposal.

Supply–side economics is one type of public policy fundamentalism. The problem began with Reagan, who took office in 1980 when the U.S. federal debt was \$909 billion (\$2.13 trillion in constant 2007 dollars). Jack Kemp, Jude Wanniski and Art Laffer converted Reagan to supply–side economics and sold him on the Laffer Curve: the idea that a lower marginal tax rate will stimulate economic growth and increase tax revenues. It was a free lunch. You could lower taxes and get more growth if the savings were invested productively, and—because of the additional growth—a lower tax rate would generate more tax dollars! George Bush Senior famously called this “Voodoo Economics” during the Republican primary elections that year. Under certain circumstances, it might work, but Reagan came to believe that it would nearly always work. David Stockman, a prime proponent of supply–side theory, served as Director of the Office of Management and Budget for the first five years of Reagan’s presidency (1981–89). In his book *The Triumph of Politics: Why the Reagan Revolution Failed*, Stockman (1986) admitted the enormous mistakes he had made. He wrote “The Reagan Revolution was radical, imprudent, and arrogant” (p. 395). Stockman describes a *trillion–dollar error* in the deficit projections between 1982 and 1986:

So there we sat, looking at a fiscal shambles, heading for a monstrous deficit in excess of \$300 billion by the middle of the decade. And in marched Donald T. Regan, Paul Craig Roberts, Jack Kemp, Jude Wanniski, Art Laffer, and Irving Kristol, saying, We’re still not wrong. Stand pat. It will go away. (pp. 396–397)

Reagan won the 1984 election over Walter Mondale, who openly advocated raising taxes. The Democrats learned the lesson that fiscal responsibility does not pay electoral dividends and acted accordingly. Supply–side economics was not popular with economists, but Reagan had won the election, so the theory was politically legitimated. The deficits continued. In 1988, in his speech to the Republican Party Conven-

16 See Ornstein and Mann (2006), and Mooney (2005).

17 During January 2006 the web page of Americans for Tax Reform (www.atr.org) displayed a quotation of President Grover Cleveland: “I will not be a party to stealing money from one group of citizens to give to another group of citizens, no matter what the need or apparent justification.” (Quotation no longer available at Americans for Tax reform web page)

tion, presidential candidate George Bush Senior said to wild applause: “Read my lips: no new taxes.” He did raise taxes during his presidency, but apologized during the 1992 primary elections for having done so.

Between 1980 and 1992, the Gross Federal Debt as a percentage of the GDP increased from 33.3% to 64.4% (Budget for Fiscal Year 2004, Historical Tables). Senator Bob Dole, the 1996 Republican presidential candidate, nevertheless proposed an additional 15% tax cut. Third-party candidate Ross Perot *did* make the deficit an issue. Bill Clinton won the election and promptly raised taxes on the wealthy, without a single Republican vote in the House of Representatives.

In 1994, the Republicans took control of the House of Representatives and installed Newt Gingrich of Georgia as Speaker. The newly elected Republicans did not attend the traditional “freshman orientation” at Harvard University. Gingrich and the freshman in the House were not interested in learning how things had been done in the past; they wanted revolutionary changes in the federal government. Revolutionaries are rarely interested in rule-following. Gingrich abolished the objective Office of Technology Assessment in the Congress. To pressure Clinton to adopt their positions, House Republicans threatened to default on the federal debt by not authorizing a debt increase, and shut down non-essential government services by not authorizing a budget (Rubin & Weisberg, 2003). Winning was everything. It was an unprecedented breach of political norms in Washington, which ultimately failed. The Gingrich program, called The Contract for America, included a Balanced Budget Amendment, which was opposed by most Democrats and a few Republicans as being excessively mechanistic. It did not square with Keynesian economics. The Balanced Budget Amendment was defeated in the Senate. Republican control of the House of Representatives continued from 1994 to 2007. This period saw a notable decline in bipartisanship and respect for traditional norms.¹⁸

By the end of the Clinton years, there were budget surpluses: \$237 billion in 2000 and \$127 billion in 2001. This happened because of astute economic and fiscal policies, a long stock market boom (which increased tax revenues), and a stalemate between Democrats and Republicans in the Congress. Neither party could get what it wanted, so they compromised by paying down the national debt.¹⁹

The free lunch returned during the 2000 election campaign. In a nationally televised election debate, George W. Bush proposed an enormous tax cut, citing a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projection of a possible budget surplus of up to \$1.9 trillion over the next decade. Bush said that “the vast majority of the help goes to the people at the bottom end of the economic ladder.” In fact, 42% of this tax cut were to go to the richest 1% of American families, whose incomes exceeded \$330,000 per year (Paul Krugman, 2003: §5 ¶16). Democratic candidate Al Gore proposed a smaller tax cut not biased toward the rich. Neither candidate questioned the reliability of the CBO estimate, although Robert D. Reischauer, CBO Director from 1989 to 1995, had written a widely printed article saying that the ten-year budgetary surplus was likely to be more like \$100 billion rather than \$1.9 trillion (*Corpus Christi Caller Times*, 2000: A-9).

Bush became President by virtue of a Supreme Court decision which finally resolved the 2000 election. His administration was strengthened by the 9/11/01 attacks, which allowed Bush to implement his foreign and domestic policy preferences. In all he did, however, there was unceasing attention to the ultimate goal of winning re-election in 2004. According to John J. Dilulio Jr., former head of the White House faith-based policy office:

There is no precedent in any modern White House for what is going on in this one: a complete lack of a policy apparatus. . . . What you’ve got is everything—and I mean everything—being run by the political arm”. There were no actual policy white papers on domestic issues. There were, truth be told, only a couple of people in the West Wing [of the White House] who worried at all about policy substance and analysis. (Suskind, 2004: 170-171)

In Suskind’s *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O’Neill* (2003), former Bush Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill contrasts the policy-making process he observed in the Nixon administration to that which he found in the Bush White House. O’Neill describes how President Nixon ordered the Office of Management and Budget and major departments to prepare “Brandeis briefs” on all major issues. Named after Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, these were careful issue analyses which described the advantages and disadvantages of different policy alternatives. O’Neill deplores the absence of Brandeis briefs in the first

18 See “The Collapse of Ethical Standards” (in Ornstein & Mann, 2006: 184-191).

19 Rubin and Weisberg (2003) describe the economic policy during the Clinton administration.

term of Bush, saying that a small group composed of Cheney, Karl Rove, Karen Hughes and, increasingly, Condoleezza Rice, seemed to be making decisions by default. “The biggest difference between then [the Nixon administration] and now is that our group was mostly about evidence and analysis, and Karl, Dick, Karen, and the gang seemed to be mostly about politics. It’s a huge distinction” (O’Neill quoted in Suskind, 2004: 167–169).

Cutting taxes appeared to be an ideological imperative for the Bush administration and the Republican Party in Congress to be pursued regardless of the fiscal situation or the fact that the United States is a comparatively low-tax country.²⁰ New justifications for the cuts appeared in the face of recession, the 9/11/01 attacks, and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.²¹ Krugman (2003) quotes Republican House Majority Leader Tom DeLay as saying: “Nothing is more important in the face of a war than cutting taxes” (p.56). Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill quotes Vice President Cheney as saying during a meeting of the senior economic team with the White House staff that (former President) “Reagan proved deficits don’t matter.” O’Neill was unenthusiastic about the tax cuts and was replaced.

By 11/05/07, the U.S. federal debt had reached \$9.1 trillion (Hall, *National Debt Clock*, 2007). Interest payments on the debt, now 19% of the federal budget, are likely to increase rapidly as huge deficits continue and interest rates rise. According to Comptroller General David Walker, government is now spending 20% of GDP while raising only 16% of GDP, the lowest level since 1950 (Zeller, 2005: 40). “If Congress and the administration extend recent tax cuts, now slated to expire, interest on the federal debt alone will exceed [total] projected tax revenues [of the federal government] by 2040” (Zeller, 2005: 42). Walker writes:

When you look back at history and see the great republics that have existed on this earth, none of them has lasted over 300 years. And one of the reasons was fiscal irresponsibility—when people realized that you could have things today and put off paying for it until tomorrow. But ultimately the day of reckoning comes. (Zeller, 2005: 35)

VI. POLITICIZING SCIENCE

In February 2004, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) produced a statement ultimately signed by 48 Nobel Prize winners, 62 National Medal of Science recipients, and 135 members of the National Academy of Sciences. Signatories included Russell Train, a lifelong Republican, former Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under Presidents Nixon and Ford, and recipient of the Medal of Freedom from President George Bush Senior. The UCS (quoted in Mooney, 2005) denounced the George W. Bush administration for:

. . . misrepresenting and suppressing scientific information and tampering with the process by which scientific advice makes its way to government officials. Examples included distorting the science of climate change, quashing government scientific reports, and stacking scientific advisory panels. ‘Other administrations have, on occasion, engaged in such practices, but not so systematically nor on so wide a front.’ . . . (pp. 224–225)

Distinguished scientists in institutional settings are key “referees” of the public policy process. Scientific knowledge, accumulated in peer-reviewed journals, is a fundamental component of the “rules” by which government should be run. Liberals have been guilty of politicizing science at times. However, Chris Mooney, in *The Republican War on Science* (2005), and Seth Shulman, in *Undermining Science: Suppression and Distortion in the Bush Administration* (2006), have argued convincingly that the Bush administration and the Republican Party in Congress have been by far the worst offenders, often in the service of business interests. Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe, who chaired the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee until January 2007, once called the Environmental Protection Agency a “Gestapo bureaucracy.” He has called the idea that global warming is caused by human activity possibly “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people” (Mooney, 2005: 78–79, 287).²²

Widely accepted referees of the public interest are sadly lacking in the United States today. One would think that

20 According to Paul Krugman (2003), all U.S. taxes—federal, state, and local—accounted for 26.3% of GDP in 2002, a figure which is declining. In 1999, Canada collected 38.2% of GDP in taxes; France, 45.8%; and Sweden, 52.2%.

21 See Krugman (2002).

22 Quotations extracted from an Inhofe Senate floor speech entitled “The Science of Climate Change,” July 28, 2003. Complete speech is available at <<http://inhofe.senate.gov/pressreleases/climate.htm>>

Lawrence Summers, a former Chief Economist for the World Bank who successfully served as Secretary of the Treasury in the second Clinton administration (before becoming President of Harvard University), would command attention. Summers (2004) argued that U.S. spending and the deficit of about 5% of U.S. gross national product was reaching a critical stage, which could ignite trade protectionism and threaten global economic integration (pp. 46–47).²³ But the Bush White House lived in a world in which allegiance to its team took priority.

Until the 2006 mid-term elections, the President had sufficient power that he did not have to listen and calls for tax cuts continued.²⁴ The direction of public policy began to change in 2007 on environmental matters and other issues, but largely because of the 2006 mid-term elections. In the case of the U.S. Senate, liberal science and policy positions were politically legitimated by a few thousand votes in Virginia and Montana.

VII. BUSH UNBOUND

American football games are examples of winning in its purist form. People seldom ask why it is important to win; it just is. Winning is important to the players and the coaches at the professional level because it brings fame and fortune. But why is it important to the fans? The Dallas Cowboy organization could fire the coach and most of the players and the fans would still want “their” team to win. “Their team” or “our team” consists of more than an organization. It consists of people who have bonded with each other and with the organization through a psychological process of regional or institutional identification. In the world of international politics, “our team” is usually the nation-state, with its patriotic symbols and rituals, although it may also be a religious or ethnic group. In national elections, “our team” is usually a political party. Nations, political parties, and football teams are alike in that the process of identification is prior to formal objectives. People often want “us” (our country or political party) to win more than they want to accomplish particular objectives, which helps explain the astonishing reversals of policy positions by political parties.²⁵ However, winning can be dangerous. American folk wisdom has it that you should be careful what you wish for, because you may get it.

Bush won effective control of the national government after the events of the 9/11/01. His team attempted to create a permanent Republican majority and won the Super Bowl of U.S. politics in November 2004: the presidential election. It was a famous victory. Bush acted as if he were Prime Minister or CEO of the United States; few restraints were considered necessary. The National Security Agency listened in on U.S. citizens’ telephone calls without court authorization.²⁶ Bush issued statements indicating parts of some 800 laws he considered unconstitutional and did not plan to enforce. This tactic sharply limited Congress’s ability to override his positions.²⁷ Republican leadership in the Congress enforced party discipline in legislative matters and ensured that there would be little oversight of the executive branch. It proposed the “nuclear option” of abolishing the Filibuster rule in the U.S. Senate.²⁸ Operational plans were made to attack Iran with nuclear weapons (Hersh, 2006). Efforts were made to politicize the Justice Department and other agencies of the national government.

The President appeared to have won the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq. But he failed to “win the peace” in either country—a process which requires a different set of skills and resources. In the insurgents in Iraq, the U.S. administration encountered people who want to win even more than they do, have no scruples, and command significant resources of weapons and personnel. The insurgents are willing to die for their beliefs and prepared to kill anyone who gets in their way. In the referred football terms, there are no rules or referees and there is no time limit. Even worse, Iraq has become a school and a recruiting ground for terrorists.

The Iraq War, which UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has called an illegal breach of the Charter of the UN, is in part the result of a previous orgy of rule-breaking in Afghanistan (Tyler, 2004: A11). George Crile (2003) writes:

For anyone trying to make sense of this new enemy [Islamic terrorists], it would seem relevant that for over a decade in the 1980s and early 1990s, the U.S. government sponsored the largest and most successful jihad in modern history; that the CIA secretly armed and trained several hundred thousand fundamentalist warriors to fight against our common Soviet en-

²³ See also chapter 4 entitled “Convenient Untruths” of Gore (2007: 100–128).

²⁴ See Krugman (2005).

²⁵ Since 1980, the Republican Party in government has reversed its policies on deficits, prudence in international relations, nation building, small government (in effect, if not in theory), and the rule of law.

²⁶ See Bamford (2005) on warrantless monitoring of U.S. citizens by the National Security Agency.

²⁷ See Savage (2006).

²⁸ This was blocked by a small bi-partisan group of senators.

emy; and that many of those who now targeted America were veterans of that earlier CIA-sponsored jihad. (p.508)

The ultimate irony of the Bush presidency is that it is schizophrenic. As Melvyn Leffler (2004: 26) has written, its foreign policy objectives cannot be reconciled with domestic policies that call for lower taxes. Huge tax cuts in wartime are not sustainable. Bankrupting the federal government is incompatible with the foreign policy objective of maintaining U.S. hegemony abroad.

Peter Peterson (2004) says that: “. . . both political parties . . . adopted what one might call a pragmatic theology, which is to win elections at any cost—including the cost to our own kids” (p.xxv). The Republicans have adopted a strategy of playing to their core supporters rather than trying to straddle the middle of the political spectrum. The strategy was successful until 2006, allowing them to win elections by identification with their religious base, emphasizing moral issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and stem-cell research—while simultaneously favoring the rich and impoverishing future generations. The Democrats, not immune to the temptation to lie for the greater good, say that they can fix all these problems without much pain, if only they can control the government again.

Peterson is wrong about one thing: the part about the pragmatic theology of winning elections at any price, including the price to “our own kids”. *Their* kids will be fine. The

President’s children and those of the hereditary upper-class which the progressive abolition of the inheritance tax would help create, have won the lottery of life. *They* will not be killed in Iraq; their families will not go without jobs, a good education, food, shelter or medical care in retirement. When disaster strikes, it will be silent. Iraq is noisy, but the U.S. dollar makes no sound as it falls. Prices will rise quietly as foreigners demand higher interest rates to finance our national debt. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid will decline after Bush leaves the White House. And when these programs fail, it will be somebody else’s fault. Few remember today that it was Ronald Reagan and George Bush Senior who doubled the national debt as a percentage of the GDP, and already, there are those who wish to place Reagan’s image on the American dime, to replace that of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

It is not Bush who has to worry about what happens during the remainder of his presidency. It is the rest of us. We have to worry about our country because we cannot get along without compromise, rules and referees, either at home or abroad. There *are* laws of men, of economics, of human behavior and of nature. If we ignore them, if we degrade our currency, our society, the domestic and international legal system, and our environment, the American eagle will once again—as in 1929—“smash its head and break its wings against the wire netting of an immense, imperceptible aviary”, discovering again “the inflexible and mortal limitations of its freedom.”



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