ABHANDLUNGEN

Views from Abroad: The Saga of George W. Bush – a Political Leader and His Times

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This article draws a profile of the current presidency in the United States by assessing, if tentatively, the political personality of George W. Bush, and intertwining that assessment with the conditions that have provided him with critical choices both domestically and internationally. President George W. Bush prefers to govern exclusively through his party on the domestic side and by unilateral fiat on the international side, distinguishing him from his two immediate predecessors, Clinton and his father, George H. W. Bush, while drawing comparison to the Presidency of Ronald Reagan. Bush's Presidency has been shaped by extraordinary contextual influences – the protracted 2000 electoral stalemate, the deepening of party polarization, and, especially, the war on terror post-11 September 2001. Although these conditions may beg for a non-partisan style of governing, Bush has instead governed as a strong partisan. The war on terror also has produced a demand for strong leadership from which Bush has benefited. In contrast to some of his predecessors, Bush has shown himself capable of making decisions, their judiciousness and prudence being what is in doubt.

Die nachfolgende Abhandlung analysiert das Profil der gegenwärtigen US-Präsidentschaft als Ergebnis von Persönlichkeitsmerkmalen George W. Bushs sowie jener nationalen und internationalen Kontextbedingungen, die seine bisherige Amtszeit prägten. Im Unterschied zu seinen unmittelbaren Vorgängern, Bill Clinton und seinem Vater, George H. W. Bush, stützt sich der amtierende Präsident innenpolitisch weitestgehend auf die eigene Partei, außenpolitische Entscheidungen fällt er nach Möglichkeit ohne Rücksprache mit Bündnispartnern. Sein Führungsstil ähnelt somit demjenigen Ronald Reagans. Allerdings wird Bushs Verhalten auch durch die besonderen Rahmenbedingungen seiner Präsidentschaft geprägt – den knappen Wahlsieg 2000, eine verschärfte parteipolitische Polarisierung sowie insbesondere den „Krieg gegen den Terrorismus" nach dem 11. September 2001, der eine starke Nachfrage nach politischer Führung erzeugte. Bush konnte davon profitieren, zeigte sich in der Folgezeit außergewöhnlich entscheidungsstark; die Qualität seiner Entscheidungen hingegen bleibt umstritten.

All political leaders are creatures of their contexts, and all are shaped by the particulars of the situations they confront. Such ideas are hardly novel, but they are fundamental. And they are fundamental precisely because it is only from an understanding of these shaping factors, derived from political context and situation, that we can grapple with how the choices made by any individual leader could have been different from the ones that were made. The counterfactual, in

other words, derives from the possibility that someone else would have acted differently under the same circumstances.

I should also note the obvious: any assessment of an individual currently holding office is inevitably tentative. An assessment from afar of any incumbent leader is a work still very much in progress and may be affected by hear-say as we cannot know the contemporaneous decision-making process other than through accounts leaked by "interested" parties. Judgments of an incumbent leader also are influenced by the current course of events, the outcomes of which are still uncertain. It is extremely difficult as well to assess policies and bargaining strategies that are still in play and have yet to be consummated. Can we know, for example, that Bush is committed to a war strategy against Iraq or merely a war threat as part of a hard-headed bargaining strategy to force the Saddam Hussein regime to comply with the weapons inspections that had been suspended four years previous? The fact is that we do not know that. It is certainly possible, even plausible, that the decision-making process itself, and the influence of actors involved in this process, may have induced learning and subtly changed strategy in ways of which the President – or any other leader under like conditions – might not be fully aware. What we believe is a policy strategy, in other words, is less likely to be axiomatic and deductive and more likely to be continuous and incremental, and to be shaped and reshaped by streams of events and actors whose presence or absence has elements of chance about it. As Herbert Simon once noted, there is no "the decision".[1] There are outcomes, of course. But we cannot yet know how many of these will turn out, nor will we know for well into the future the factors that may have been decisive in influencing the outcomes. My perspective, therefore, I stress, is tentative. Nevertheless, a profile of the Bush 43 presidency (so enumerated to distinguish his presidency from that of his father, George H. W. Bush, now known as Bush 41) and of George W. Bush as president has begun to take shape. I expect my understanding of the Bush 43 presidency to not be devoid of controversy. But all of our understandings are at this point incomplete and based on inferences from the public record. No doubt it is possible to draw a range of plausible inferences at this early stage, less about the record of the Bush 43 administration than about the man in whose name the record is being created. My effort in this essay is to assess and intertwine the political personality of George W. Bush with the conditions that have defined his presidency and provided him with critical choices on both the domestic and international scene.

1 *Simon, H. A.*: Administrative Behavior, 3rd ed., New York, 1975.

I. Who is George W. Bush?

Ordinarily, the element that we need to know about last is the political personality of a leader. For it is only once we have a grasp of the events, contexts, and conditions of the leader's exercise of power that we can see how much and in what ways the uniqueness of any leader's personality has influenced the decisions to be made, how they were made, and of increasing importance how they were sold. I choose in this case to talk about George W. Bush as a political personality because it will help to link the events of his coming to political power with the policies with which he has identified his administration and, above all, with his so-far remarkable success as a politician.

1. The Bush Dynasty and Political Change

Bush is not only the son of a recent sitting U.S. president; he is also a brother of the governor of the 4th largest state in the United States (Florida), and the grandson of a former U.S. Senator, Prescott Bush. By virtually any standard, the Bush family, without ever having caught the imagination of the media as a political dynasty, unlike, for example, the Kennedy family, has nonetheless become one of the foremost political dynasties in American history. Especially notable is that across the generations George W. Bush reflects the culmination of changing mores of American politics and the changing geography and appeals of the Republican party whose standard bearer he is. The President's grandfather, Senator Bush, represented the state of Connecticut in the 1950s and early 60s. The northeastern quadrant of the U.S. was then firm Republican territory. (It is now about the most solidly Democratic in the U.S.) Senator Prescott Bush adhered to the more formal and self-effacing political styles of the day. Politically, he was close to the Eisenhower administration and was associated with Eisenhower's effort to move the Republican party from isolationism to international engagement. Prescott's son, President George H. W. Bush (Bush 41) and the current President's father, represented the transition of Republican party politics from the northeast to the west, southwest, and south.

The son (Bush 41), as a young adult, moved his family to Texas to enter the energy business from which he then began to build a political career. In fact, George H. W. Bush had, at best, mixed success in electoral politics; he became best known for the positions to which he was appointed as United Nations Ambassador, Director of Central Intelligence, Chair of the Republican National Committee, Ambassador to China, and then the Vice-Presidential nominee on the

Reagan ticket. Bush 41 had become a professional at government, but his electoral magnetism was relatively weak, and his election to the presidency was mainly the result of there being little reason to upset the status quo that had become identified with Reagan. Part of Bush 41's lackluster political appeal was that he was a transition figure (between Connecticut and Texas) who had not fully escaped the embrace of his low key and reticent Connecticut Yankee father and the more taciturn Yankee culture. Bush 41 had skills for the politics of governing but fewer for electoral politics as the style of electoral politics has emerged in the United States. Bush 41 could not stay scripted. He had difficulty identifying a message, and did not particularly like the clamor of electoral politics. He preferred to be above it, not part of it. Furthermore, Bush 41 was essentially a moderately conservative and internationalist Republican with an anchor in the northeast, despite his own migration to the southwest. He was an accidental president in precisely the same sense as John Major had been an accidental prime minister in Britain. Each followed larger than life figures in their respective offices. Bush 41's path was smoothed by virtue of Reagan's need to have someone less identified with the Right than himself on his 1980 electoral ticket.

By contrast, the sons of Bush 41, George W. (Bush 43) and his brother Jeb, the Governor of Florida, had completed the transformation of the Republican base to the Sunbelt of the U.S. Neither George W. nor his brother had had significant political experience prior to running for the governorships of their respective states, Texas and Florida. Neither had grown up in the northeast. And, unlike their rather proper father, the two sons, and especially George W., were instinctive electoral politicians. Particularly instructive in the migration of the Republican soul from the grandfather, Senator Prescott Bush, to the grandsons' generation was that the Republican strategy had successfully adopted a *faux* populist style which was perfected by Ronald Reagan, the icon of the contemporary Republican party. Despite the fact that Republicans continue to draw disproportionate shares of the better-off segments of the electorate, they also have sharpened a strategy to appeal to younger white male voters on socio-cultural issues. especially in rural areas. Subtlety and nuance are decidedly *not* a part of this message. The reciprocal here is that the Democrats have become much more clearly identified as the party of working women, of minorities, and also the party less apt to be "tough" on matters of internal security (crime) and international security.

The transformation might be summed up by considering not only the generational contrast between Bush 43 and Bush 41, but also between the current U.S. President and his immediate predecessor, Bill Clinton. In American folklore, the term "Bubba" conjures up a rural working class white male from the South of

limited education, simple desires and lusts, and a certain vulgarity of style. Clinton essentially was born into "Bubba" status and educated his way out of it, except perhaps for his manifest libidinous tendencies. In fact, he cultivated his status as a well-read, highly informed policy intellectual. By contrast, George W. Bush has tried to develop an appeal to the "Bubbas" through the use of folksy mannerisms, simple, perhaps even simplistic, assertions, and a feet on the desk affectation. Notably, Clinton took his holidays at the homes of financial or entertainment moguls in exclusive eastern settings such as Martha's Vineyard. Even Bush 41 maintained his vacation home in Kennebunkport, Maine in the New England region from which he originally hailed. By contrast, Reagan rode horses and was frequently photographed chopping wood and "clearing brush" at his ranch near Santa Barbara; Bush 43's vacation residence is his ranch in central Texas, a setting that is both barren and climatically inhospitable. Like many rural or small town residents, Bush 43 also sports the proverbial pick-up truck at the ranch. Like Reagan, the current President is said to spend many hours at the ranch "clearing brush". Equally, like Reagan the style seems natural to the man.

2. Bush the Politician

After a succession of presidents with large flaws in the way they projected as political personalities – Johnson and Nixon's near paranoia and their brooding personalities, Ford's tendencies toward awkwardness and woodenness, Carter's tendencies toward self-righteousness, three of the next four presidents (Bush 41 excluded) seemed to be political naturals. Reagan exuded cheerfulness and optimism and self-confidence, and he knew how to read a script.[2] Clinton had the capacity for spontaneity (not in evidence in the presidency since Kennedy's time), and the ability to appear sincere to those in need of his commitments. Bush 43 shows the discipline to stay with a script and the ability to appear self-confident and certain in his judgments – a style that served him well after the cataclysmic events of 11 September 2001. Moreover, as Clinton honed the style of appearing reasonable, open, and inclusive while his opponents were painting themselves into exactly the opposite corner (exclusivist, unreasonable, and dogmatic), Bush also discovered that he could look to the center, appropriate its language, make himself the champion of bipartisanship and yet actually wind up governing almost exclusively to further the agenda of his party's key constituencies. Reagan

2 *Cannon, L.*: President Reagan – the Role of a Lifetime, New York, 1991.

made no pretense about his intent, but George W. Bush has been skilled at concealing his through rhetorical and symbolic flourishes about changing the climate of partisanship and seeking support across party lines. Yet, he has been equally as partisan and right-leaning as Reagan, and he has carefully cultivated Reagan's constituencies, ranging from the religious fundamentalist right to employer interests to energy and business interests. He has been fairly successful in making it look less overt and strident than was the case under Reagan.

In fact, appointees independent of these constituencies are apt to run into trouble very quickly in the Bush 43 administration as evidenced by the case of John Diuilio, a "Christian Democrat" professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania. Diuilio who is both religious and socially committed, and is best known for his work on crime, was appointed to head the President's much touted Program on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, a program that was largely a token to the Republican religious right's struggle against secularism. Diuilio's commitment to the use of faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as part of an overall effort to arrest social decay and funnel support to community organizations for social engagement was no doubt sincere as one would conclude from his scholarship. He lasted in the job less than half a year. The key for the Bush 43 administration, as matters turned out, was less on the social support side and more on the payoff to religious groups seeking rents from the state.

As a politician, Bush shows remarkable discipline in placing faith in his political handlers, most especially Karl Rove who is the chief political strategist inside the Bush White House. Bush stays carefully to the script, just as Reagan had and as Clinton could not. Indeed, during the presidential candidate debates of 2000, Bush frequently finished his scripted response to questions before his allotted time ran out. In the meantime, his opponent, Al Gore, was meandering at great length through answers which easily lost their point or which were mired in a level of policy detail that escaped virtually all parts of his audience outside of Washington. Gore was thought to be a very smart, well-studied politician with little instinct for the essence of political leadership, i.e., know who you are and act upon it. Gore had a great deal of difficulty carving out a consistent identity and like another American president, Richard Nixon, was continually reinventing himself.

As with Reagan or Harry Truman, for that matter, Bush does not suffer paralysis by analysis. Complexity does not make for a good sound bite; simplicity and certainty do, as Reagan adeptly illustrated. Bush is often fond of saying, he wants speeches and positions put in a way that "the boys in Lubbock can understand". (Lubbock is a west Texas town sitting on an arid plain and "the boys" Bush

often refers to, one assumes, did not receive degrees from the Kennedy School at Harvard or even the Johnson School at the University of Texas, but they probably do own pick-up trucks.) It is impossible to imagine Bush's father as being so comfortable with this formulation if only because the "boys from Lubbock" probably were not his crowd. It is difficult also to imagine presidents such as Carter or Clinton – who could see the balance sheet of costs and benefits to any choice and therefore often found themselves reluctant to make one – as being as capable of arriving at and standing by decisions as George W. Bush has been.

3. Bush as Decision-Maker

Leaders are often contrasted with their most immediate predecessors and their immediate successors. Reagan and Carter struck a remarkable contrast in style. One worked endlessly at the job, the other made it seem effortless. One studied policy papers in finely grained detail, the other read the headlines. One knew that choices came in varying shades of gray, the other saw things in black and white. Although we all hope that our leaders work hard and see things in sufficiently subtle ways, the plaudits typically go not to the agonized of mind but to those who are assured of their judgments. It may be that as the saying goes "only fools rush in where angels fear to tread" but one rarely knows ahead of time why it is that one should "fear to tread". Risk aversion is often the product of thinking too hard about all that could go wrong, a consequence of knowing what could go wrong. Risk taking is frequently the product of either discounting costs or not comprehending what they might be. An uncluttered mind can be a risk-taking one; a mind burdened with knowledge can be a risk-averting one. As a general matter, people like leaders to look decisive. Reagan did; Carter did not. For whichever of these, or perhaps other, reasons, Bush 43 appears to others as being decisive, as having focus, and as being willing to take risks – whether they are appropriate risks or not is a matter of some debate.

Bush 43 can be contrasted not only to his immediate predecessor, Bill Clinton, but also to his father, Bush 41. I have noted already the more "populist" political instincts of Bush 43 than those of his father who could not shake off the patrician aspects of his upbringing. As for Clinton, he was known for being famously late and disorganized, keeping legendary working hours, and maintaining a White House that had a weird sense of being both a perpetual seminar of free-flowing policy discussion and a college fraternity house free-flowing with less serious concerns. Bush 43's style has been a great contrast, although his pre-political life certainly had many elements of the frat house mind-set.

By contrast with Clinton, Bush was an indifferent student. Nevertheless, he is the first president to have a master's degree in business administration. There is no doubt that he prefers a high degree of organization, crisp schedules, highly focused meetings, and to have everyone in his administration reading from the same page. Extended policy discussions are not his style nor his comparative advantage. In sum, unlike Clinton, whose administration was often trying to find out on what page the fast-moving president was now on, the Bush administration runs with a degree of synchronous precision and internal discipline that is at least in a relative sense quite remarkable. The Bush administration has been skilled in staying on message even as new messages had to be adopted, i.e., the war on terror and the confrontation with Saddam Hussein.

Of course, Bush has not quelled all dissent, nor, to be fair, is there evidence that he chose to. Secretary of State Colin Powell, for example, has essentially been the advocate of multilateralist voices within an administration whose key international policy voices have been largely unilateralist. But Powell's activities have been subtle within a context of loyalty to the President's policies. As an army general best known for his refined skills as a bureaucratic politician, Powell's forte has been to develop the scenarios by which the President can be nudged into considering more rather than fewer options. He was a notably cautious voice preceding the Gulf War during the late 1990 build-up. In sum, Bush has not been a Richard Nixon type of president, unwilling to accept dissent, though he has been insistent upon dissent staying within carefully defined boundaries.

It has become increasingly clear that Bush is a decision maker with a linear mind set, perhaps characteristic of the highly organized style in which he likes to work. There are no all night skull sessions of the sort Clinton loved, nor endless discussions, nor perhaps even much rumination, introspection, or puzzling. In that sense, Bush 43 has much in common with Reagan when the latter was president. Once he makes up his mind – and his mind is deeply set in Texas Republican orthodoxy – he apparently wants to know how to get there. And, he also appears to force "means" by choosing "ends". In sum, Bush 43, not only relative to Clinton and Carter, but also to his father, is an exceedingly straightforward decision maker, disinclined to work through either policy complications or coalition-building ones (domestically as well as internationally). Make a decision and do it appears to be the creed. Decisional self-confidence tends to be at least superficially attractive to many elements of the mass public. But if my rendition of his decisional style is correct, then it is clear why, left to his own devices, Bush 43 prefers to govern exclusively through his party on the domestic side and by unilateral fiat on the international side.

4. Bush as Political Strategist

Because often there was not a position in the Clinton White House that would be adhered to for long, everything was more or less in play, yet infrequently acted upon until the last minute. The contrast is clear. The Bush administration appears to have an agenda, and it is easily comprehended. The Clinton administration, even when it was in a position to try to advance its own agenda in its first two years, was still applying the brush strokes to its plans very late in the day – for example, to its abundantly complicated health care plan. For its last six years, the Clinton administration largely responded to what the Republican led Congress proposed, and bargained with the Republican congressional leadership sometimes to mutual advantage, frequently to his own political advantage, and less frequently to his party's advantage. By contrast, Bush, for the most part, has been a president who also has looked after his party's interests in Congress and has given way to those interests when necessary, as in the case of nationalizing the security personnel at airports under a federal agency.

Yet, Bush 43 clearly absorbed lessons of a positive nature from Clinton and of a negative nature from his father as political candidates and leaders. From his father, George W. Bush concluded at least four things:

(1) act concerned even when there is little you can do (Bush 41 often appeared to be empathy-challenged especially as the economy slid in 1991–92);
(2) be consistent with your party on taxes, and do not lose your party by cutting across the grain (as Bush 41 did to generate a genuinely bi-partisan coalition in 1990 for tax increases and budget constraints despite campaigning against new taxes);
(3) finish the job when at war with Saddam Hussein, a resolution from which Bush 41 was dissuaded by, among others, then General Colin Powell; and
(4) be in control of the party convention at which you are the nominee, a situation with which Bush 41 was unable to cope during his re-nomination convention in Houston in 1992, allowing the religious/cultural right to control much of the convention, thus, scaring away some of the voters who would otherwise likely be a part of his own electoral coalition.

From Clinton, Bush learned different lessons. But he learned them keenly. The principal lesson was always to appear reasonable and willing to engage in dialogue and compromise. A president or candidate who appeared to be radical would scare much potential support away. That lesson included the Ronald Reagan story as well. Reagan left no doubt that he was essentially for repealing the American welfare state and for radically lessening marginal tax rates. His public persona was congenial, and while he did compromise (because the system in which he govern-

ed forced him to), it was clear where he stood. Mythology clouds the Reagan presidency. He was not terribly popular at all until the economy started its upturn in the second quarter of 1983. His approval ratings then went up, came down with the Iran-contra scandal, and returned back up toward the end of his administration enabling Bush 41 to coast into the presidency. In fact, Reagan was one of the least popular presidents at the time of his inauguration with only a little more than 50 % support from the public at a point when new presidents enjoy an afterglow from the election through their early stages in office.

Bush 43 observed Clinton's efforts to look willing to accommodate and negotiate. Clinton's style exuded reasonableness, and became particularly successful when the Republicans won the Congress in the 1994 elections and Clinton's main foes in the Republican leadership were fiery radicals such as Newt Gingrich and Tom DeLay. Clinton adopted the strategy of triangulation, following the advice of his consultant, Richard Morris, to position himself between the opposition party in Congress and his own party. Clinton thus could lay claim to the proverbial center, reflecting the tastes of the median voter.

Bush 43 concluded that this was likely to be a useful strategy as well, but only at the rhetorical level. He adopted it as a candidate, especially once he had his party's nomination, developing themes such as "compassionate conservatism" and "changing the partisan climate in Washington" (which he may have done by possibly making it worse) in the aftermath of the partisan effort to impeach Clinton in 1998–99. He developed the rhetoric and buzzwords that made him seem less doctrinaire and more appealing to those not identified with a party. An American idiomatic expression to describe the disjuncture between Bush's seemingly trans-partisan rhetoric and his behavior could be summed up in this fashion: "talks like Clinton, walks like Reagan". Unlike his father, Bush 43 concluded that he and his party needed to be in alignment when it came to behavior, but when it came to rhetoric it was best to exude reasonableness and a desire for pluralism and diversity. At his own nominating convention in Philadelphia in 2000, the staging was designed to place both women and minorities in prominent spots leading more than one observer to note that there was more diversity on the speakers' platform than in the uniformly white audience composed of Republican party delegates.

In part, Bush was the party choice in 2000 by default. He had put together, partly through his father's rolodex and his own connections, a campaign treasury so vast that it warded off many potentially serious competitors. In fact, Bush had so much money he chose not to accept federal support for his campaign which would have required him to adhere to spending limits. Bush ultimately was faced with one serious competitor for the party nomination in 2000, Senator John

McCain of Arizona, also the product of a dynasty, though in this case a military one – the grandson and son of two naval admirals, and himself a naval officer whose aircraft was shot down during the war in Vietnam and who was imprisoned there for seven years. McCain was viewed within his party as something of an outlier even though he was routinely conservative in ideology and votes. McCain was, however, an advocate of campaign finance reform, a position that was enormously unpopular among the Republican party leadership which aligned itself with Bush as the candidate of orthodoxy. As the campaign wore on and as McCain's support grew among those not committed to a party and even to some Democrats, he came to appeal to these potential constituencies – a tactic that could work to his advantage in the general election. However, one has to be nominated before getting to a general election, and within the Republican party McCain's appeals were not in most locales an advantage. The logic of the contest moved McCain to appeal to the media and to outside forces while Bush cultivated his party's grassroots and constituencies. This made him by default the voice of party orthodoxy. By carefully staying inside those boundaries and beating off a challenge perceived to be from his left (unlike his father in 1992 who had to beat off a challenge from his right), Bush was then free to control the convention and make it seem as though it were an extension of a Benetton advertisement (the Benetton world of colors which vividly displays models of various nationalities and races). In his campaign, which took place during a time of prosperity, he drew allusions to Clinton's lack of libidinal discipline and to the climate of hostile partisanship, leaving unstated the fact that his party contributed to at least a fair share of that climate. Again and again, he emphasized how he would temper the partisanship in Washington. Yet he owed his nomination to all of the Republicans' traditional and most activist constituencies. In the end, the latter set of facts has heretofore been most telling.

II. The Context of George W. Bush's Presidency

There are several key elements to thinking about the contextual influences shaping the Bush 43 presidency. First, the *election of 2000* as everyone now knows was one of the tightest in American history, although Bush actually lost the popular vote by approximately a half million votes. In the arcane system of U.S. presidential elections, the unprecedented protracted outcome hinged on whether votes could be recounted in several counties in Florida. The fact that the state and federal (U.S. Supreme Court) judicial processes sharply reflected political splits on the respective courts did little to make the outcome seem fair to the losers,

while it did a lot to reinforce the importance of political ideology in appointments to the courts for both parties.

In a parliamentary system, it is likely that an outcome so close would have necessitated a grand coalition or at least a limited agenda. That was an option that was Bush's to play – to be a president who might transcend the party differences under exceedingly unusual political circumstances and very bad feelings, especially the perception on the part of the losers that the outcome was an illegitimate one. Given the opportunity, Bush chose to ignore it. In fact, the opportunity arose again after the terrorist attacks in September of 2001. Again, the choice was otherwise, undoubtedly dictated by the onset of elections in 2002 which gave the President the opportunity to help his party mates through his popularity as a leader during duress.

Second, it is important to emphasize the *role of parties and of ideology* in American politics. Parties and ideology in America have been mythologized, respectively, as being weak and non-existent, and this myth has been even more pervasive abroad. It is true, of course, that many of the traditional "isms" have not been as prevalent in the U.S., but it would be quite inaccurate to say that either parties or ideology are weak. They rise and fall in cycles over time, but differences often have been fundamental and sharp. For approximately the past two and a half decades, both party and ideology have been in the ascendancy in American politics in ways that emulate, indeed perhaps supercede, traditional party-based politics in Europe.[3] There is no "the American ideology", rather there are quite intense conflicts especially between elites. Some are rooted in conflicts that evolved the American welfare state and developed partisan bases in labor-management cleavages. These have intensified. Others have expanded around the socio-cultural divide – secularism vs. fundamentalism, liberalism vs. traditionalism, nativism vs. pluralism. Still others have focused on international postures which are inconsistent – Republicans tend to be free trade advocates but are also more hawkish in regard to international disputes; Democrats tend to be more protectionist on behalf of their labor union and environmentalist constituencies but also more dovish in regard to international disputes. The American parties overlapping positions along these dimensions have been dramatically reduced during the current ascendancy of the party-ideology cycle. The party conflicts and divisions are about as fundamental as any other two major parties among western demo-

3 For example, see *Klingemann, H.-D./Hofferbert, R. I./Budge, I.:* Parties, Policies, and Democracy, Boulder, 1994, 136–154; *Gerring, J.*: Party Ideologies in America, 1828–1996, Cambridge, 1998; *Bond, J. R./Fleisher, R.* (eds.): Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era, Washington, D. C., 2000; and *Layman, G. C./Carsey, T. M.:* Party Polarization and "Conflict Extension" in the American Electorate, in: American Journal of Political Science 46/4 (2002), 786–802.

cracies. Bush did not generate the latest cycle of party polarization. He inherited it. But so far he has done little or nothing to alter it in actual practice.

A third critical element – perhaps the most critical element – in the context of Bush 43's presidency is the *war on terror* post-11 September 2001 (or as it is shorthanded in the U.S., 9–11). Indeed, it would not be extravagant to assert that Bush's presidency has been ironically vitalized by the devastation of 9–11 and the response that has followed. Shortly after the cataclysmic terror attack, Bush's approval ratings soared to levels not seen since those of his father's immediately after the Persian Gulf War against the omnipresent Saddam Hussein. Bush 43 has benefited from a prolonged "rally effect", but at the same time his presidency found its purpose. The demand for strong leadership arises from calamitous circumstances. After a moment of uncertainty, Bush found a vigilante's voice. This undoubtedly went over poorly outside of the U.S., but inside it resonated with a sudden passion to destroy the terrorist infrastructure and the terrorists themselves. Through strong words and then later through successful military action in eliminating the Taliban regime from Afghanistan, Bush eerily paralleled his father's footsteps only a decade earlier.

Consequently, Bush now had slack political resources in the way of popular approval and temporary support across party lines among the political elite. As in the aftermath of the highly disputed electoral outcome, he had critical choices to make. This time, however, he would be dealing from a condition of strength rather than of tenuousness. Should he focus on national unity and put aside the issues that most sharply split the parties? Or should he use his new-found popularity to gain political advantage? It should be kept in mind that only a few months before September 11, the Republicans lost their control of the Senate (which they subsequently have retaken by a narrow margin in the 2002 election) when a centrist Republican (from the northeast) defected from his party. Bush's response to the new found national unity was to play that card for about three months at which time partisan politics began to return as usual in preparation of the 2002 election. But now Bush's hand was strengthened by contrast to the relatively weaker hand he was given when he was inaugurated. A president whose legitimacy was in doubt when he came to office was no longer perceived that way.

It is worth noting that Bush's father (41) came to a similar crossroads in his presidency when in the aftermath of the successful prosecution of the Gulf War and with unprecedented levels of approval, Bush 41 could have gone to the center or veered to the right. Had he moved to an accommodation with the Democrats, he would have been a more elusive target for them just as Clinton proved to be for the Republicans. But because Bush 41 upset his party's congressional rank and file by earlier signing a budget bill that raised taxes, even while constraining

spending, he was also under pressure to accommodate his party's core constituencies. Bush 41 chose to move rightward and to strengthen his ties with his party. In so doing, he alienated potential support from the center. And when the economy became fragile, Bush 41 found himself facing plummeting ratings and being challenged from all sides – right, left, and center – during 1992.

Bush 43 seems to have drawn the conclusion that his father's biggest mistake was in alienating his party, something he was clearly not about to do. Therefore, the die was cast, and Bush 43 was going to be the Republican party leader and to be its most visible face. He, like Reagan, could put the veil of a pleasant, if somewhat petulant, personality over an agenda favored by his party's congressional leadership. In virtually every respect, George W. Bush's presidency represented the primacy of party leadership and partisan cause over any effort to create bipartisan coalitions. In fact, with apparent success, Republican candidates in the 2002 congressional election were successful in using Bush's version of the Homeland Security Bill as a hammer over Democratic candidates who objected to provisions in the bill that eliminated the protections of civil servants and could readily turn the department into a patronage mill for this or any other subsequent president. Bush, in other words, had little compunction, nor had the Republican party, to use the national security hammer over the Democrats whose image on these issues is weaker than the Republicans.

Although many Democrats and some Republicans voiced objections to Bush's demands for virtually unlimited discretion to invade Iraq, they largely succumbed to the steady beat of the war drums and overwhelmingly voted in the end for the President's resolution to do virtually anything he pleased. Democrats recognized their vulnerability, having largely opposed the resolution pressed by the administration of Bush 41 to go to war with Iraq unless the Iraqis pulled out of Kuwait. The outcome was not protracted or even costly for the allied forces as many anticipated. The Democrats believed therefore that they were vulnerable because of their skepticism. Looking backward from the perspective of 2002, few Democrats, and none of the prospective party candidates for president in 2004 currently serving in the Senate, voted against the Bush resolution. Most who had doubts on either side of the aisle swallowed them. Democrats particularly were fearful shortly before an election of looking vulnerable on national security and not giving Bush support. The Republicans, incidentally, showed no such concerns in 1999 when they overwhelmingly voted to support a cut-off of the U.S. forces in the NATO coalition against the Milosevic government's "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo. Under most circumstances, a war time president commands deference. Bush has shrewdly managed to milk all the deference and discretion it was possible to get, while also switching the subject from Al Queda to Saddam Hussein.

III. In Sum

George W. Bush is characteristic of where his party is now in the U.S. His policies are orthodox Republican doctrine, and he reflects the geographic drift of the Republican party to the south and to the west. His administration in foreign policy has many of the same faces that were there during Bush 41, but the balance of power is different because Bush the son is a different figure than Bush the father and because in the post-terrorist attack climate priorities have radically shifted from isolationism and skepticism of "nation-building" – the theme of George W. Bush's campaign foreign policy – has come a tendency toward unabashed unilateral military engagement or threats thereof, policies hard to imagine in the absence of 9–11. Whereas Bush 41 liked to talk a lot about prudence, Bush 43 seems to crave adventure. It is hard to know whether or not Bush 43 is a quick study, but whatever he studies, he does so quickly.

War, in essence, has made Bush's presidency, and Bush's presidency may have made war an essential part of its agenda and its claim to leadership. It is, after all, exceedingly unusual to have a president with approval levels of Bush's (still hovering well over 60 %) under economic circumstances that have significantly declined since the time he entered office. It is not entirely clear that this administration can afford to give up its bellicosity or at least its bellicose-sounding rhetoric.

Bush 43 has twice been granted opportunities to "change the partisan climate" he so decried when he campaigned in 2000. He twice chose otherwise and has, in fact, contributed to hardening partisan intensities. Like Reagan, he has qualities that project well in leadership roles. This is also reinforced deeply by the fact that George W. Bush is the President at a time when no one doubts the threat of nihilistic terrorists dedicated exclusively to achieving their goals of mass mayhem. It must be said that more than most leaders, the times have made the man; yet, it also must be conceded that the man has certain qualities that have immunized him at least temporarily against bad fortune and that have projected him as a leader up to the task of making hard decisions, if not necessarily wise or judicious ones.