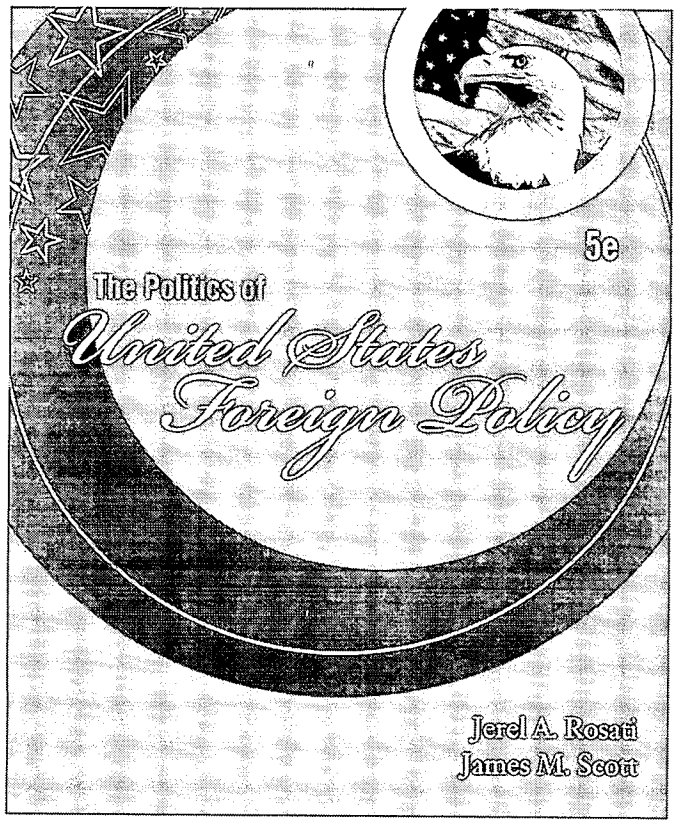
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The Politics of
United States
Foreign Policy
Jerel A. Rosati
James M. Scott

PART II

# GOVERNMENT AND THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS

*Part Two examines the center of the policymaking process, beginning with the president and moving outward to the bureaucracy of the executive branch, Congress, and the rest of government. Chapter 3 discusses the paradox of presidential power, the difficulty of governing in foreign policy, and importance of leadership. Chapter 4 discusses the significance of presidential management of the bureaucracy, focusing on the National Security Council system and process. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 discuss the important bureaucratic roles of the State Department, the military establishment, and the intelligence community in the making of foreign policy. Chapter 8 focuses on the growing role of the foreign economic bureaucracy and the development of the National Economic Council, including the role of state and local governments. Chapter 9 provides a synthesis of the overall policymaking process throughout the executive branch by summarizing the major models of decisionmaking theory and discussing important theoretical elements for better understanding policymaking. We then discuss the critical role of the Congress (and the Constitution and the courts) and the nature of legislative–executive relations in Chapter 10.*

CHAPTER 3

Courtesy of Getty Images.

U.S. PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA MAKES HIS KEY MIDDLE EAST SPEECH AT CAIRO UNIVERSITY JUNE 4, 2009 IN CAIRO, EGYPT. IN HIS SPEECH, PRESIDENT OBAMA CALLED FOR A "NEW BEGINNING BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND MUSLIMS," DECLARING THAT "THIS CYCLE OF SUSPICION AND DISCORD MUST END."

# PRESIDENTIAL POWER AND LEADERSHIP

Most Americans believe that the president is the most powerful political figure in the United States. In fact, many of us acquire an image of an almost omnipotent president. At a very young age, we are taught that the president is a benevolent father figure who controls the government and represents the American people. As Stanley Hoffmann (1968:289) observed thirty years ago, "The American system of government seems unable to prevent a kind of hand-wringing, starry-eyed, and slightly embarrassing deification of the man in the White House, a doleful celebration of his solitude and his burdens." Naturally, Hoffmann added parenthetically, "when things go badly, there is, of course, a tendency to besmirch the fallen idol."

This chapter examines presidential power and provides an overview of much of the book. It discusses the paradox of presidential power and how this affects the making of foreign policy, especially since World War II. *We examine the following major questions:* To what extent is this popular image of a nearly omnipotent president accurate? How much power does the president really have? What implications does this have for presidential governance, especially in the area of foreign affairs? How can presidents exercise leadership to maximize their power and success? How has presidential power and leadership been affected by seminal events such as World War II, the Vietnam War, the collapse of the cold war, the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Iraq War, and the recent economic crisis?

# THE PARADOX OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER

When President Lyndon Johnson left office, he offered a warning to his successor, Richard Nixon:

> Before you get to be president you think you can do anything. You think you're the most powerful leader since God. But when you get in that tall chair, as you're gonna find out, Mr. President, you can't count on people. You'll find your hands tied and people cussin' you. The office is kinda like the little country boy found the hoochie-koochie show at the carnival, once he'd paid his dime and got inside the tent: "It ain't exactly as it was advertised." (quoted in Cronin 1979:381)

President's Johnson's characterization nicely captures the tension between the powers and constraints that make up the paradox of presidential power.

The reality is that the president faces a paradox of presidential power. The president is the most powerful political actor in the United States. He occupies many constitutional roles and has many capabilities that contribute to his power. However, the president also faces many constraints that limit his power. The successful exercise of presidential power becomes even more problematic when one considers uncertain elements that impact the president, sometimes strengthening his hand and at other times weakening it. Therefore, the president is not nearly as powerful as most Americans believe. While at times he is able to successfully influence—even dominate—the policy process, at other times he has very little impact on that process, regardless of his best efforts to exercise power (see Cronin and Genovese 2004; Neustadt 1960; Pious 1979).

As President John F. Kennedy understood, the president "is rightly described as a man of extraordinary powers. Yet it is also true that he must wield those powers under extraordinary limitations" (quoted in Sorensen 1963:xii). To better understand this paradox, let us consider the elements of presidential power, limits and constraints on it, and uncertain factors that complicate the ability of the president to lead.

## Constitutional Roles and Strengths

The president occupies many different roles, or wears many different hats, that provide him with the capability to exercise considerable power. *The most important roles include:*

1. Commander in chief,
2. Chief diplomat,
3. Chief administrator,
4. Chief of state,
5. Chief legislator,
6. Voice of the people, and
7. Chief judicial officer.

These roles have their origins in Article II of the U.S. Constitution and have evolved throughout the history of the United States through constitutional amendments, legislation, judicial rulings, and changes in custom (see Rossiter 1960).

**COMMANDER IN CHIEF** According to the Constitution, the president is the commander in chief, which means that he has ultimate authority over the military. By virtue of his position as president, he is to be treated like a six-star general, and when he gives an order, members of the military and the Department of Defense comply. This gives the president considerable power because, as commander in chief, he dictates the use of American armed forces abroad.

Since World War II, the president has exercised his powers as commander in chief very broadly. President Harry Truman decided to send American troops to Korea in 1950, while American escalation and use of armed force in Vietnam throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s was a result of decisions made by presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon. The decision to secretly support the Contras in their effort to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua was made by President Ronald Reagan. President George H.W. Bush invaded Panama and fought the Persian Gulf War in 1991. President Clinton led a major NATO bombing campaign in the war in Kosovo. President George W. Bush led a global war on terrorism punctuated by two major military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. And President Barack Obama is escalating the American military footprint in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In spite of the fact that the Constitution provides Congress the powers to declare wars, raise and support armies, and make rules for their activities, all these examples represent presidential decisions with limited involvement by the U.S. Congress, which authorized the use of force in only a few instances and declared war in none.

**CHIEF DIPLOMAT** The president also is often referred to as the chief diplomat, or chief negotiator representing the United States. This role originates with the president's constitutional duty to nominate the secretary of state and ambassadors to countries abroad, to receive foreign ambassadors, and to negotiate treaties. Presidents also have the right to offer, or withdraw, official U.S. diplomatic relations with foreign governments. Finally, presidents can enter into executive agreements with foreign governments and, with the advice and consent of the Senate, can negotiate treaties that are binding on the United States and have the force of law.

The president has personally headed American diplomatic delegations and negotiated with foreign leaders, something that has increased in frequency over the last four decades with the rise of "summitry." For example, in 1972 President Nixon led the American delegation to Moscow to complete the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with the Soviet Union. President Carter spent thirteen days negotiating with President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel in 1978 to produce the Camp David Accords. President Reagan had four major summits with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev between 1985 and 1989 (more than any previous president since Franklin Roosevelt). President Clinton led the American delegation that attempted to bring a settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And President Obama has already traveled extensively throughout the world, meeting with foreign leaders concerning a variety of national security and economic issues, including a major address to the Muslim world from Cairo, Egypt in June 2009. Finally, U.S. presidents participate every year with leaders from the world's major economies (G-8) and developing countries (G-20) in summits to discuss measures to contribute to the stability and growth of the international political economy.

**CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR** The president is also the chief administrator, which means he has authority over the executive branch. So, in theory, all the governmental agencies within the executive branch, all the cabinet secretaries, and all the bureaucrats take their

direction from the president. One of the major ways the president exercises this administrative power is through appointments. The president selects his personal staff, nominates cabinet secretaries, and appoints most of the high-level officials in each of the departments and agencies that make up the executive branch. The president also establishes the structure and process by which policy is formulated and implemented, which reinforces his roles as commander in chief and chief diplomat as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

**CHIEF OF STATE** The president is not only the chief administrator, or official "head of the government," but is also the "chief of state," which means that he also represents the United States of America. Although primarily symbolic, symbolism should not be downplayed for the outcomes of politics are heavily a function of its successful use. To compare Great Britain and the United States, for example, when a foreign head of government arrives in Great Britain, the first official visit, according to the diplomatic protocols of international behavior, is with the queen, for she represents the state. In contrast, the same foreign leader coming to the United States will pay official respects first to the president.

**CHIEF LEGISLATOR** Although the president is not a member of Congress, he does occupy the role of de facto "chief legislator" because of his ability to both initiate and veto legislation. In the modern relationship between the legislative and executive branches, much of the legislation before Congress originates in the executive branch and is submitted by the president—such as the budget of the U.S. government, as well as programs for defense spending and foreign assistance. Therefore, Congress often responds to the president's agenda, thereby giving him a political advantage in gaining Congress's acceptance of his programs. The president also has the constitutional right to "veto" legislation. Congress may override a presidential veto with a two-chirds affirmative vote for the legislation in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, but this happens infrequently. For this reason, the president can stop legislation he does not like or, by threatening a veto, force members of Congress to modify legislation to conform to his desires—an important exercise of presidential power in the legislative area.

**VOICE OF THE PEOPLE** The president is often referred to as the "voice of the people" because, along with the vice president, he is the only public official who is elected (through the Electoral College) by the entire American populace. A member of Congress represents a district of roughly a half-million people. A senator represents a state (and its population). Only the president can claim a national electoral mandate to promote and implement those policies that were promised and discussed during the presidential campaign.

**CHIEF JUDICIAL OFFICER** The president also enjoys important judicial powers in two areas. First, the president has the authority to pardon any individual convicted of a crime. For example, President Ford pardoned former President Nixon before he could be indicted for violating his constitutional oath of office in the Watergate affair, while the elder President Bush pardoned the individuals who had been convicted or were under investigation for the Iran-Contra scandal during the Reagan administration. Second, all of the judges who serve on federal district courts, the federal courts of appeals, and the United States Supreme Court are nominated by the president. This can be a very important source of presidential power since federal judges, unlike state and local judges, are appointed for life and can be the final arbiters of the law of the land. As presidents appoint new judges to the courts, judicial decisions may change over time, thus effecting public policy. The

nomination of federal judges, however, may be the power of least significance to the president in exercising control over foreign policy since the judiciary typically tends to play a relatively passive role in the making of U.S. foreign policy.

## Limits and Constraints

Clearly, the president occupies a number of important roles that allow him to exercise considerable power. However, as the paradox of presidential power suggests, *the president faces a number of limitations and constraints that make it difficult to get his way, including:*

1. Time,
2. Information,
3. The bureaucracy,
4. Congress,
5. State and local governments,
6. Political parties, and
7. Interest groups and social movements.

The limits and constraints on presidential power tend to be strongest when it comes to domestic policy, but they are significant for foreign policy as well.

**TIME** The president's first major problem is insufficient time to complete all the tasks necessary to govern successfully. The president has one of the most demanding jobs imaginable: He is trying to govern a complex society of over 300 million people and is responsible for representing the United States throughout the globe. The president, however, like any human being, has only so much time to devote to the hundreds of issues and individuals for which he is ultimately responsible. Beyond eating and sleeping and attending to other personal needs, the presidency is a complicated, full-time occupation seven days a week, usually starting early in the morning and lasting late into the night. Much of his day is occupied with staff meetings, entertaining foreign dignitaries, publicly signing new pieces of legislation, or responding to crises and disasters. Although each president has his own style, the job demands a great deal of time and energy, especially if the president wants to govern successfully.

The president's time is limited not only from a daily perspective but in terms of his time in office as well. The president may have as little as four years and certainly no more than eight years (according to the Twenty-Second Amendment to the Constitution) to accomplish all that he has set his sights on. Moreover, as we discuss later, presidents tend to have more opportunity early in their terms. Therefore, presidents are forced to be selective as to how they will occupy their time. For those issues on which the president is extremely attentive, he may exercise considerable power. However, for the remaining issues on which he lacks interest or time, the president may find that he is the president in name only.

**INFORMATION** Another limitation on presidential power involves information problems. Despite having relevant experience such as being a governor, a member of Congress, or a vice president, much of the president's knowledge is acquired through "on-the-job training" because, unfortunately, there is no existing occupation that can adequately prepare one for becoming president of the United States. This means that presidents must use valuable time and require much staff support for getting information and advice.

The president faces two problems in terms of information: scarcity and overabundance. At times, a president may find that he does not have enough information. This is quite common, especially in the area of foreign policy. Presidents often have great difficulty getting sufficient information about international events, particularly during crises, when time becomes even more limited and important. Yet a president may have no choice but to make decisions. The other problem is that the president often gets too much information in dealing with an issue. The problem here is that, given his pressing schedule, he doesn't have enough time to digest all the available information or he may be provided with contradictory information. Nevertheless, decisions must be made. Having too little or too much information makes it that much more difficult for the president to successfully exercise power.

**THE BUREAUCRACY** The third major constraint is the bureaucracy. As chief executive and administrator, the president has great capacity to initiate action. However, the bureaucracy has also become so large and entrenched that it is often unresponsive to the president and his personal staff and policy advisers, with contradictory consequences for presidential power. It can be of great value for the president in his roles as commander in chief, chief diplomat, chief administrator, or chief legislator, yet can also be extremely unresponsive to presidential requests or commands. Hence, as we discuss in Chapter 4, all presidents must grapple with the problem of creating a structure and process to manage and control the far-flung administrative agencies as much as possible. Such efforts are never completely successful, however, because *bureaucratic organizations have a number of advantages* that allow them to remain relatively autonomous and free of presidential control (as will be discussed in Chapters 5–9).

First, a new president enters office with a set of policies and programs administered by the bureaucracy already in place under previous presidents. Each bureaucratic organization, therefore, tends to develop its own goals, subculture, and tasks over time that may be at odds with the policies preferred by the current president. Second, the president is heavily dependent on the bureaucracy for information. The bureaucracy determines not only the quantity of information available to the president but also its quality—its level of comprehensiveness, the interpretation of reality embedded in the language, and the range of viable options for presidential consideration (often protecting and reflecting the agency's position). Third, members of the bureaucracy have the advantage of time. The president and his personal staff are there for only four, perhaps eight, years, whereas many bureaucrats occupy positions of importance for ten, twenty, or thirty years (and as members of the civil service they have tenure or other rights that make it very difficult for presidents to fire them—even for incompetence). A fourth advantage is that bureaucrats often have close relationships with members of Congress, who ultimately must approve the programs and funding for the executive branch bureaucracy. Therefore, it is not unusual for networks to develop between executive branch employees and members of Congress (and interest groups) around various issues, all dependent on each other. The final advantage that some bureaucratic organizations enjoy official independence (at least in daily operations) from presidential authority, including the powerful Federal Reserve Board. These officially autonomous organizations not only can resist the president's exercise of power, but may also have the legal right to ignore presidential requests.

**CONGRESS** The president and Congress share power; in fact, there is no constitutional power provided to the president that the Congress does not share in some way. Therefore, while the president initiates and can veto legislation, Congress is often a major constraint on the

exercise of presidential power. When the president first enters office, he usually enjoys a brief honeymoon with Congress, during which members are more likely to be responsive to presidential requests in light of the president's recent victory. However, the honeymoon rarely lasts more than a few months, and then it is back to business as usual in which the president quickly finds that Congress is often extremely unresponsive to his requests and can at times be quite obstructionist.

Traditionally, since World War II, members of Congress have been more active on domestic policies and more responsive and less obstructionist in the area of foreign policy. However, Congress became much more independent and assertive in this area as well following the Vietnam War and Watergate. Many members of Congress also have agendas of their own that may be incompatible with the president's agenda. Furthermore, since the Vietnam War, the U.S. government has usually been divided (with a Republican president and a Democrat-run Congress, or vice versa) making it that much more difficult for the president to be effective. In sum, the fact that the legislature is an independent branch with independent power means that Congress and the president will be involved in a constant power struggle (as we will discuss in greater depth in Chapter 10).

**STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS** The president may be the commander in chief, the chief of state, and the chief administrator; however, he has little legal authority over state and local governments. State governments in the United States have their own power bases, embodied in the fifty state constitutions. The framers of the Constitution created a federal system of government in which two sets of governments, each with its own sovereignty and authority, were established: a central government, usually referred to as the "federal government" by Americans, and state governments.

**POLITICAL PARTIES** The president is the head of his party, but in the United States this does not translate into great political influence in governing and electoral politics. Unlike those in most other countries, American political parties, whether Democratic or Republican, are decentralized and weak. For example, presidents cannot force members of their own party to support them in Congress, for congressional members have independent power bases. Nor can the president dictate to the party his heir for the presidential nomination. Therefore, although electoral politics is important, as we will discuss in Chapter 12, the weakness of American parties makes it that much more difficult for the president to exercise power successfully.

**INTEREST GROUPS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS** A final impediment to the exercise of presidential power is the impact of interest groups and social movements on domestic politics and the governmental process. The United States contains thousands and thousands of groups organized to promote their own goals and interests, regardless of what the president believes or wants. These groups utilize all avenues available to them in making their views known and promoting their interests, including influencing Congress, members of the executive branch bureaucracy, the media, and the American public.

Presidents who attempt to change aspects of public policy (e.g., think health care or the Israeli-Palestinian question) find resistance not only within the federal bureaucracy and Congress, but throughout society from groups that are quite comfortable with the status quo. At the same time, many social movements and groups demand changes in governmental policy that, if opposed by the president, may result in the creation of political antagonists

or enemies. Interest groups and social movements tend to be more visible when it comes to domestic issues, but as discussed in Chapter 13, they have grown in importance in the area of foreign policy as well, thus complicating the lives of presidents even further.

## Uncertain Elements

In addition to these constraints and limitations, a number of uncertain elements that a president cannot control affect his ability to govern. Sometimes these elements may work for him, enhancing his power; other times they work against him, acting as another constraint on presidential power. *These uncertain elements in the makeup of presidential power include:*

1. The courts,
2. Public opinion,
3. The media, and
4. The global and historical context.

**THE COURTS** Although the president nominates all federal judges and the Senate tends to approve the nominations, with an occasional controversial exception, this does not guarantee that judges' rulings will support presidential policies (as will be discussed to a greater extent in Chapter 10). The classic example of an appointment run amok, at least from the president's perspective, was President Eisenhower's appointment of Earl Warren as chief justice of the Supreme Court. Eisenhower thought he was appointing a political moderate, but Earl Warren led the Supreme Court in a liberal direction over the course of the next two decades. The uncertainty of predicting the political views of judicial appointees is reinforced by the fact that most judicial rulings are made by federal judges who were appointed by previous presidents. Therefore, while the courts generally tend to play a more passive role in the area of foreign policy, the impact of judicial rulings on presidential power varies.

**PUBLIC OPINION** The public is an important source of presidential power, as we will find later in this chapter and Chapter 11. Yet, public opinion can also turn against a sitting president, as Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, the elder Bush, and the younger Bush all discovered. Public opinion tends to be most supportive of the president when he enters office (and during crises), but it tends to decline over time. Therefore, public opinion strengthens a president's power early in office but increasingly constrains presidential power through his tenure. Increasingly unpopular presidents and unpopular policies invite opposition, as well as defection by otherwise supportive individuals and groups.

**THE MEDIA** The media represent another source of great uncertainty in the exercise of presidential power. In order to better understand media coverage and its impact, discussed in Chapter 14, it is important to remember that different individuals and groups within government and throughout society try to influence the media and the power they have over the communications process to gain control of the government and influence domestic politics. Presidents, in particular, are heavily dependent on the media to help them promote a positive image. Overall, there is a cyclical pattern in the media's impact on presidential power. The media are a crucial source of presidential power early on for gaining the presidential nomination, winning the election, and exercising power in a new administration. However, they are also a source of much of the difficulty that presidents face later in office,

regardless of who is in office or his party affiliation, which contributes to the negative impact of the other constraints and uncertainties on presidential power discussed earlier.

**GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT** The final element that has an inconsistent impact on presidential power is the global and historical context, as already discussed in Chapter 2. First, although presidents make decisions that impact the global environment, they often react to events and developments as they occur abroad. Sometimes international events and crises strengthen the president's exercise of power; sometimes they create problems. For example, President George W. Bush had to react to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the 2008 economic meltdown with various policies, a legacy inherited by President Obama.

Not only are presidents unable to control events with which they are faced, but they also have little control over America's global position and power, which reflects a set of underlying, long-term structural trends within the international system. Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson each had the good fortune to be president during a period in which the United States was clearly the undisputed global superpower in every dimension, and in which a common enemy united American allies. However, subsequent presidents, beginning with Nixon, came to office during a time of relative decline of U.S. power, as reflected in the military challenge of the Soviet Union and the economic challenges posed by Europe, Japan, and the Pacific Rim countries. Post–cold war presidents have been provided with new opportunities for U.S. foreign policy, but also have the disadvantage of exercising power in an increasingly complex and globalized world. They also have to grapple with both the opportunities and the challenges of the remarkable power advantages—some would say hegemonic power—possessed by the United States in a world without a peer rival in the twenty-first century.

## THE PATTERNS OF THE PARADOX

The notion of paradox provides us with a general understanding of the nature of presidential power. Much more must be said, however, about when and where the president is most able, and least able, to exercise power. First, we need a better understanding of the concept of power and how it is exercised. Second, we must also be aware of different domains or issue areas in which it is possible to exercise power.

Power, very simply, is the ability to influence the surrounding environment in ways one prefers. *The exercise of power can be accomplished in one of two ways, through:*

1. Positive power, and
2. Negative power.

The "positive" exercise of power is the ability to initiate, implement, and make something happen. This is what most people think of as the exercise of power. Another way to exercise power may be called "negative" power, which is the ability to negate and to prevent others from doing something against one's wishes. The use of negative power is typically ignored, yet is important in the overall exercise of power (James 1974).

Does a president generally have the upper hand in exercising positive or negative power? On the one hand, to initiate and implement policy, he usually needs the support of others—a tall order to fill given the constraints and uncertainties he faces. He needs to

build political coalitions to support his initiatives and, at a minimum, convince others not to oppose his policies. The exercise of negative power, on the other hand, is less demanding. To stifle or negate something, presidents do not have to build or maintain extensive political coalitions in support of policy initiatives as they evolve over time. Rather, negation is more a question of preventing an initiative from surfacing on the political agenda or stopping it after it has surfaced—a much simpler task. The president, for example, has the unique ability to stifle virtually any piece of legislation he chooses through his use of the veto, which is rarely overridden. Although there is no guarantee that the president will succeed in exercising negative power, the odds are much higher than in his efforts to exercise positive power.

In addition to positive and negative power, we also need to discuss the domain, or issue area, in which power is exercised. Issues may be classified in a variety of ways, but *a breakdown into three issue areas helps to clarify the paradox of presidential power:*

1. Domestic issues,
2. Foreign policy issues, and
3. Intermestic issues.

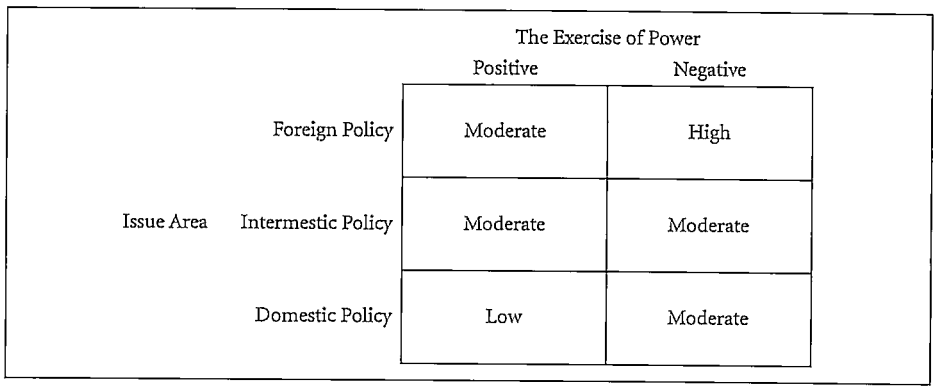
For some issues the president is likely to be a powerful political figure, while on other issues he may lack much power (Evangelista 1989; Potter 1980).

The president has greater strengths and fewer weaknesses in the exercise of power in foreign policy in general and national security policy in particular. Three of the constitutional roles contributing to presidential power really involve only foreign affairs: commander in chief, chief diplomat, and chief of state. While two of these areas are shared with Congress, these roles typically allow the president to exercise more power, both positive and negative, in the foreign policy area, especially during crises. Furthermore, many of the constraints that he faces tend to be weaker in the area of foreign policy. The bureaucracy, Congress, the courts, state and local governments, the public, political parties, the media, and interest groups all play independent roles in the making of U.S. foreign policy. However, they tend to be more active and influential concerning domestic policies.

However, with the major technological revolutions of the late twentieth century in information, communication, and transportation, an increasing array of issues straddles this traditional foreign and domestic policy divide. Issues involving economics, trade, immigration, the environment, and others are both international and domestic in orientation—thus, often referred to as intermestic issues (Manning 1977). Nowhere is this truer than with what Americans like to call the "domestic economy," which is increasingly (and has always been) interlinked with the global economy (see Friedman 2000).

The recent economic meltdown should have made this clear to all. The so-called American "great recession"—involving the banking and financial sector, the rise and collapse of real estate values, exorbitant individual, corporate, and governmental debt, and so on—also involves the collapse of the European economies and the entire global economy. When it comes to formulating policies to cope with such economic issues, for instance, everyone gets into the act and attempts to exercise influence and outcomes. On such issues, presidents must increasingly grapple with interest groups (especially corporate, financial, and labor), members of Congress, public opinion, and more within the United States, as well as governments, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions throughout the world. Such intermestic issues deeply affect the jobs, the lives, and the communities of peoples at home and abroad, but are very difficult to understand because of their complexity as

Figure 3.1 Categorizing Presidential Power




well as their domestic and international realities. In sum, *economic issues are neither about domestic or international politics, but both are intermestic*—and, therefore, an issue area of great challenge for presidents (and Americans) that will likely intensify as globalization becomes the norm in the twenty-first century.

Given the discussion thus far, the question of presidential power does not allow for a simple, black-or-white answer. By combining the two ways power can be exercised with the three types of issue areas, we can develop a simple, yet valuable, three-by-two classification scheme for making better sense of the paradox of presidential power (see figure 3.1). The president is most powerful in areas of foreign and national security policy, most constrained in the domestic policy arena, and somewhere in between for intermestic issues. He is most successful in exercising power when he opposes the initiatives of others but requires more skill and luck to promote successfully policies of his own. These are the patterns or trends that make up the paradox of presidential power, making it difficult for a president to govern successfully and, consequently, fulfill the high expectations most Americans have of him.

## THE PROBLEM OF PRESIDENTIAL GOVERNANCE

The paradox of presidential power makes it extremely difficult for a president to govern successfully, especially in domestic but also in foreign policy. *Two patterns seem to affect the president's ability to govern and lead the country:*

1. A president tends to go through a presidential life cycle in which presidents are strongest when they enter office and then their power tends to decline over time; and
2. A crisis of leadership (or governance) now seems to exist in American politics in which no individual or organization, including the presidency, is able to lead the government and country for long.

These patterns have become increasingly visible since the Vietnam War and have continued since the collapse of the Soviet Union and, despite the 9/11 attacks, having important

consequences for the foreign policymaking process (see Burns 1984; Cronin and Genovese 2004; Chubb and Peterson 1989; Huntington 1981; Lowi 1985; Sundquist 1980).

## The Presidential Life Cycle

Most presidents find that their ability to exercise power tends to go through a cyclical process over the course of their term of office: They enter office near the peak of their power, and by the end of their term they are considerably weaker. To explain this presidential life cycle, we must understand how the paradox of presidential power impacts the president's ability to govern over time.

A president enters office with all of his constitutional roles fully available to him, constraints at their weakest, and with most of the uncertain elements working in his favor. Newly elected presidents, as discussed earlier, proclaim an electoral mandate for themselves and their policies. During the first few months in office the president enjoys a so-called honeymoon period, not only with the Congress but with the media and the public as well. This begins with the president's inauguration, celebrated as a triumph of American democracy in action. People tend to be hopeful and interested in the new president, the first lady, their personal characteristics, and his style of governing, and the president enters a relatively hospitable political environment in which he is provided considerable leeway to initiate new policies. This makes it a most inopportune time for nonsupportive individuals and groups to be too critical of the new leader of the United States.

Within a short period of time—and one that seems to have grown shorter in more recent decades, the honeymoon with Congress and the media is over. Congress begins to act independently of presidential wishes, especially if the majority party is different from the president's party—a common occurrence since the Vietnam War. Members of the media soon spend more time addressing the issues and critically analyzing presidential policies. Interest groups and social movements descend on the policymaking process. Under such conditions a president quickly finds that he is no longer operating with a clean slate in an optimistic political environment. In fact, the longer the president is in office, the more likely that critical judgments will be made by individuals and groups throughout government and society concerning how well the president is doing and who benefits from his policies. As the political environment becomes more critical and uncontrollable, the president finds that his public approval rating also tends to decline.

Lyndon Johnson, a former majority leader in the U.S. Senate and a shrewd observer of American politics, once gave the following portrayal of the presidential life cycle after his 1964 landslide victory (quoted in Halberstam 1969:424):

> When you win big you can have anything you want for a time. You come home with that big landslide and there isn't a one of them [in Congress] who'll stand in your way. No, they'll be glad to be aboard and to have their photograph taken with you and be part of all that victory. They'll come along and they'll give you almost everything you want for a while and then they'll turn on you. They always do. They'll lay in waiting, waiting for you to make a slip and you will. They'll give you almost everything and then they'll make you pay for it. They'll get tired of all those columnists writing how smart you are and how weak they are and then the pendulum will swing back.

The president's ability to exercise power successfully usually declines significantly within a few years, or sometimes even sooner. During this period, his strengths diminish,

his constraints intensify, and the uncertain elements tend to work more often against him than with him. The decline of public support follows not a linear pattern but that of a bumpy road, with peaks and valleys. The major exception to this pattern occurs during times of national emergency and crisis, when the constraints on presidential power are temporarily reduced as the public rallies behind the president for leadership and crisis resolution. These spurts of public approval during crises are reinforced by congressional deference to the president, especially in foreign policy, and his tendency to dominate communications and the media. However, once the crisis subsides normal politics resurface and the downward pattern tends to continue. Eventually, the constraints multiply to the point that the president has considerable difficulty exercising power over most issues. By the end of his term, he may be so weak that he is referred to as a lame-duck president.

Figure 3.2 demonstrates the overall decline in public approval that every contemporary president has faced through the life cycle of his presidency. With the exception of President Bill Clinton, the trajectory has been downward for every president from the time they entered office to the time they have left office (obviously, the downward trend has been stronger for some presidents than others).

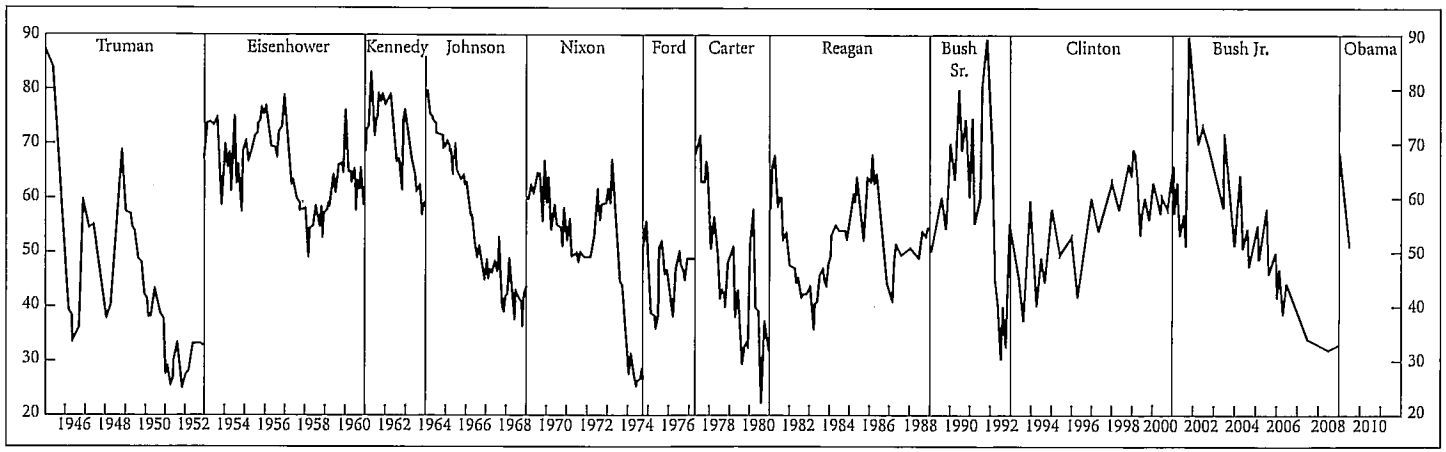
Even with the tremendous political impact of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush was not able to escape the presidential life cycle. As depicted by figure 3.3, Bush's approval skyrocketed to over 90 percent after the attacks, as the country and Congress rallied around the president and the global war on terror. However, from that high point in late 2001, public approval steadily declined, dropping below 50 percent in early 2005 and down to the mid-30s by the summer of 2006 until the end of his term of office.

Again, Lyndon Johnson had an instinctive feel for the rhythm of the presidency and the president's relationship with Congress (quoted in Smith 1988:333): "You've got to give it all you can, that first year," Johnson told Harry McPherson, a top aide. "Doesn't matter what kind of majority you come in with. You've got just one year when they treat you right and before they start worrying about themselves. The third year, you lose votes. . . . The fourth's all politics. You can't put anything through when half the Congress is thinking how to beat you." In fact, President Bush's approval ratings were so low near the end of his term that the lack of confidence that the country had in him may have reinforced the lack of confidence that existed for the economy in general during the economic meltdown of 2008, which also happened to be an election year. Certainly, President Obama has been trying to take advantage of his honeymoon and his first year in office with a flurry of political activity and policy initiatives. And yet, perhaps the very early stages of this life cycle can already be seen, as Obama's popularity, once higher than 70 percent, fell to the 50s as early as June 2009 as Obama advanced an ambitious agenda and confronted a host of controversial issues.

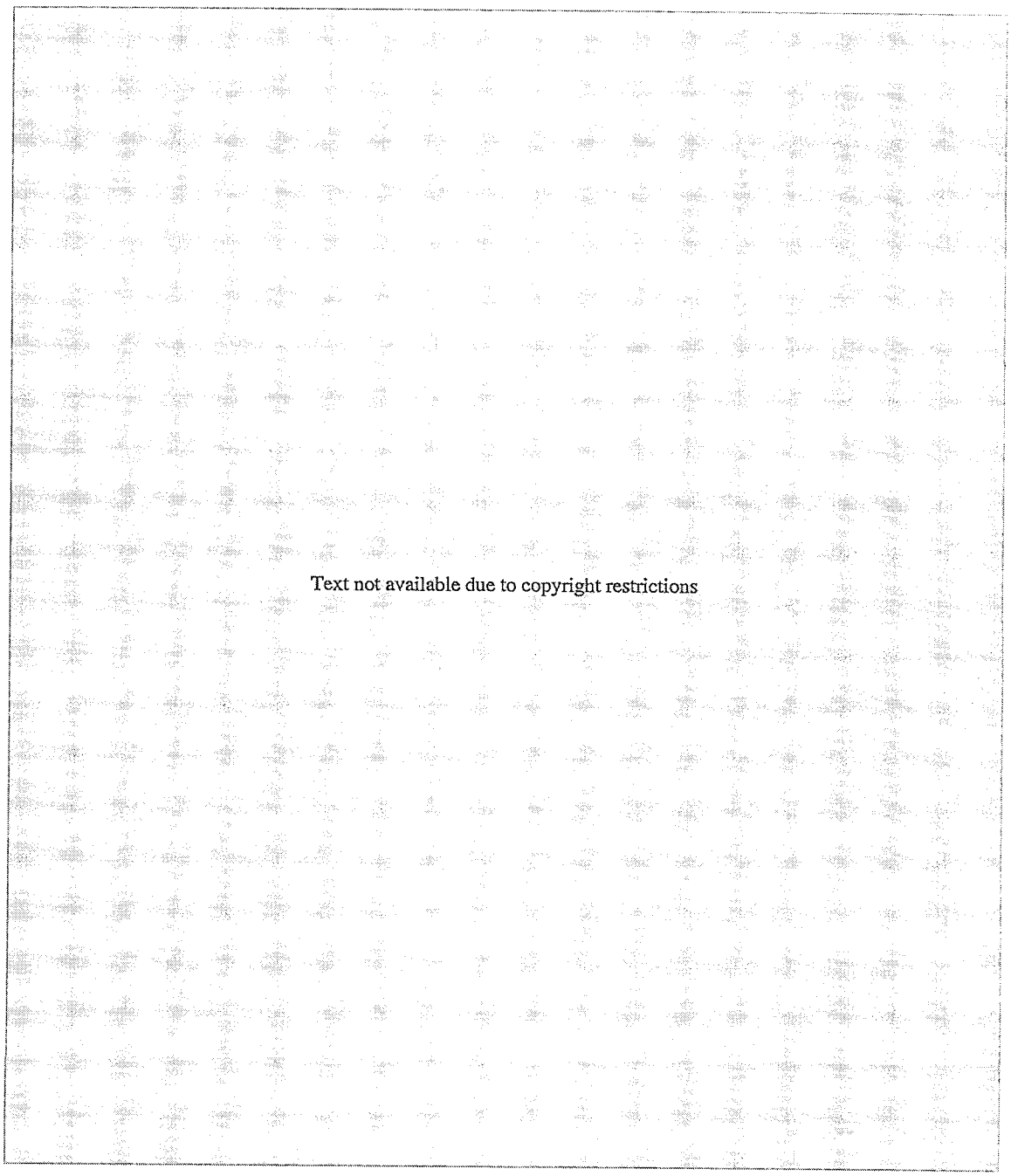
This cyclical pattern is largely a function of presidential promises and expectations—in the minds of political leaders, the politically involved and active, and especially members of the general public (Brody 1991). During the presidential nomination and general election campaigns, all candidates promise the American people that, if elected, they will improve the quality of voters' lives. They promise to clean up the environment, improve the quality of education, prevent American men and women from dying abroad, and keep America free and strong. Most importantly, candidates promise to restore or maintain economic prosperity, to reduce inflation and unemployment, to improve the economy so that all Americans will have a better chance of attaining the "American Dream."

These promises create expectations among the public that presidents find very difficult if not impossible to fulfill. Why? Because presidents are neither powerful enough nor do

Figure 3.2 Public Approval of Presidential Performance




SOURCE: The Gallup Opinion Index; The Gallup Report.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they serve long enough. David Halberstam (1969:64), in *The Best and the Brightest*, aptly describes this problem of the modern presidency back in the early 1960s:

> As President, Kennedy was faced with that great gap of any modern politician, but perhaps greatest in contemporary America: the gap between the new unbelievable velocity of modern life which can send information and images hurtling through the air onto the television screen, exciting desires and appetites, changing mores almost overnight, and the slowness of traditional governmental institutions produced by ideas and laws of another era, bound in normal bureaucratic red tape and traditional seniority.

The process of promoting expectations that are likely to remain unfulfilled reinforces the vicious life cycle of presidential power. The paradox of presidential power makes it very difficult for the president to implement his preferred policies. The inability to fulfill the optimism and high expectations created early on means that much of the American public eventually will grow disenchanted with the incumbent president and impatient to see a new individual as president, often from the other party. This sets the stage for a repeat performance of the presidential life cycle for the new president—early optimism eventually replaced by pessimism and frustration.

## The Crisis of Leadership

The paradox and life cycle of presidential power have led to a crisis of leadership (or governance) in American politics that has heightened since the Vietnam War and the end of the cold war. Presidents are elected to govern and lead the country, but they are unable to do so for political power is dispersed throughout government and society and the president faces major limitations and constraints in the exercise of his power for domestic, intermestic, and foreign policy issues. This means that, even when the problems facing the country are growing in severity, not only are presidents often unable to govern and lead, but their administrations are often seen as failures in the public eye.

The *rise of divided government and partisanship since the 1960s are potentially more problematic for presidential leadership.* Since the Vietnam War and Watergate, divided government, in which the president and Congress are led by people of opposing political parties, has become increasingly the norm. And partisanship has escalated in just about every way imaginable: among party leaders, in congressional voting behavior, and throughout the political arena. Partisanship was extremely evident when every Republican in the House and all but three in the Senate voted against President Obama's stimulus package at a time when the American economy was in crisis and collapsing (after many of these same Republicans supported President Bush's bail-out package in the fall of 2008).

In sum, given the popular image of presidential power, presidents receive credit when things are perceived as going well and are blamed when things go badly. Yet, should success occur, given the lack of presidential power, it is probably not by the president's own design. Nonetheless, the president—the person perceived to be the leader of the country—will be rewarded in terms of public prestige, greater power, and reelection (for him or his successor). However, if the president is perceived as unsuccessful—a failure—this results not only in a weakened president but one that the public wants replaced, creating the opportunity to challenge an incumbent president or his heir as presidential nominee. It also reinforces the imperative that the new president, from whichever party, will distance himself from many

of the policies of his predecessor. This contributes to change, as opposed to continuity, in the types of public policies pursued by presidents, making it very difficult for the U.S. government to form a coherent long-term program for governing and leading the country into the twenty-first century.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

How do presidents maximize their power and success? How can they overcome or minimize the crisis of governance in American politics? How can they increase their ability to govern foreign policy? The key is presidential leadership. Strong leaders, on the one hand, are able to maximize their strengths and capabilities, minimize the constraints they face, and force the uncertain elements to work better and longer in their favor. Strong presidents are more able to exercise power and govern. Weak leaders, on the other hand, have great difficulty exercising power and governing, for they operate in a world dominated by insurmountable obstacles and constraints. Although this is particularly the case in domestic policy, presidential leadership is also important for presidential power and governance in foreign policy (see Burns 1965, 1978; Skowronek 1997, 2008).

The classic statement on presidential leadership is *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* by Richard Neustadt (1960). Neustadt's basic argument is that the key to presidential power is the power to persuade, which is a function of political leadership. Presidents who enter office and expect to "command" are quickly disappointed and frustrated. Barking orders may get results for military leaders, but it does not work within the government. In fact, as Neustadt points out, efforts at exerting presidential power through command are an indication of presidential weakness, for presidents should rely on their legal and formal authority only as a last resort. The command model of governing may be consistent with the way most Americans are raised to think of presidential power, but the key for presidential governance is to persuade others that it is in their best interest to do what the president prefers. *Neustadt identified three crucial elements of political leadership and presidential power:*

1. Professional reputation,
2. Public prestige, and
3. Presidential choices.

Professional reputation refers to how other political actors inside and outside Washington, D.C. judge the president's ability to get things accomplished. Presidents with a reputation for being very skillful in exercising power and for having to be reckoned with when opposed are most persuasive. Public prestige refers to how other political actors—whether in the bureaucracy, Congress, interest groups, or the media—perceive the level of public support for the president. Presidents with a positive public image are more powerful because high credibility and popular support throughout the country enable a president to use professional reputation and public prestige to persuade.

This emphasis on professional reputation and prestige underscores the importance of perceptions and images that have always been important in politics, but with the rise of the electronic media, the importance of symbolism and "symbolic politics" has grown. Leadership involves the ability to create the illusion of being powerful. According to Hedrick Smith (1988:56) in *The Power Game,* "Presidents—past, present, and future—have less

power than the country imagines, but the successful ones convey the impression of power and get reputations as strong presidents by playing down their problems and trumpeting their few clear victories."

Much of a president's professional reputation and public prestige is a function of his personality and particular style of operating and presenting himself (which will be discussed at greater length in Chapters 4 and 9). Depending upon how his personal characteristics affect his leadership style, it can contribute to or hinder his professional reputation and public prestige. It is also important to remember that no individual can easily alter his personal characteristics and habits for they have been learned since childhood. But as George Reedy (1970:197) stated, the presidency "provides a stage upon which all of his personality traits are magnified and accentuated." Therefore, a president can try to mold a more positive image of himself (within the limitations of his personality). Presidents who want to exercise power successfully and govern need to be aware of these aspects of leadership long before they decide to run for the office (see Greenstein 2000; Skowronek 1997).

The third important element of presidential leadership is presidential choices. A president's ability to lead and persuade is a function of the choices he makes for which only he is responsible. The choices a president makes affect his professional reputation and public prestige. Ultimately, this requires that *the president and his staff need to be skillful in three areas:* (1) managing the executive branch and the decisionmaking process; (2) building coalitions and politically interacting with other players in and out of Washington, D.C.; and (3) symbolically communicating his priorities and preferences to American society and the world. These are political requirements involving important choices for successful presidential leadership and will be discussed throughout the book.

According to Neustadt, "passive" presidents tend to be little more than "clerks" who merely occupy the office. To lead and govern, presidents must be "active"—actively involved in becoming informed, making decisions, and supervising their implementation. They must know who they can and cannot rely on in the government and beyond. They must be aware of the political implications of what they say and do. In other words, a president's choices are the means by which he exercises leadership and power in the complex politics of U.S. foreign policy.

Richard Pious (1979), in *The American Presidency,* has added important insights into the nature of presidential choice and activism on presidential leadership. He argues that the paradox of presidential power has become so constraining that a president must exercise prerogative government if he wants to govern and lead the country. By prerogative government, Pious means that presidents must be very active and arrive at decisions that push the Constitution to its limits in exercising presidential power. Presidents are more likely to exercise presidential power and prerogative government during times of crisis and war. "The president justifies his decisions on constitutional grounds, on powers enumerated, or on those claimed. . . . When his expansive interpretation is challenged, he appeals to the public for support by defining his actions in terms of 'national security' or 'the national interest'" (Pious 1979:47; see also Fisher 2007).

Those presidents who have a more expansive view of presidential power tend to be the most successful in governing and go down in history as the best presidents. However, activist presidents who exercise prerogative government also run the political risk of abusing their power, which can damage or destroy them. This is because the Constitution is an ambiguous document, and it is often unclear whether a president is exercising power legitimately or abusing it. However, the final determinant of the legitimate exercise of presidential power is perceptions and politics.

Pious found that, throughout American history, *three political outcomes have occurred when presidents have exercised prerogative* government: frontlash, backlash, and overshoot and collapse. First, presidents are most successful in exercising prerogative government in the area of foreign affairs during a time of national emergency such as war. During such times, the president is able to legitimately exercise extraordinary powers because of the urgency of the situation. This is what happened under Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt—and perhaps George W. Bush after his first years in office—as they exercised prerogative government in the face of the greatest of all national emergencies, a civil war and a world war. The worst that presidents can expect under such circumstances is what Pious calls "frontlash" after the emergency has subsided. That is, presidents can expect Congress and domestic politics to reassert their significance during times of normalcy, again constraining presidential power.

Second, presidents may experience political "backlash" if they exercise prerogative government especially over domestic policy, even during a national emergency. In domestic policy, unlike foreign policy, presidents (facing the paradox of power) are not given much leeway or flexibility to respond to crises. Bureaucrats, members of Congress, and other political players are very protective of their positions and roles in the domestic policymaking process. Such was the case with President Harry Truman's seizure of steel mills in 1951 in the name of national security, in response to a strike during the Korean War. The political response was very critical of Truman for his exercise of emergency national security powers involving a labor-management dispute—clearly a domestic issue at the time. Presidents with an expansive view of the Constitution during domestic emergencies will eventually be perceived as abusing power and may expect to suffer severe political setbacks.

Presidents also run the risk of "overshoot and collapse" when exercising prerogative government, resulting in a president's fall from power. This risk is most likely to occur when there is no perception of emergency in society, and is especially acute if domestic affairs are involved. A president exercising prerogative government under these conditions will be widely perceived as abusing his power and oath of office. The domestic political resistance is likely to be so severe that the president may have to fight for his political life. President Nixon suffered from overshoot and collapse as a result of Watergate. President Reagan faced this possibility with the Iran-Contra affair and survived, while President Clinton was able to survive the Monica Lewinsky affair.

President George W. Bush's troubles peaked in his second term, stemmed at least in part because of controversies over the extensive prerogative power sought in the global war on terrorism and aggressive administration actions in making and defending the case for the invasion of Iraq, resulting in severe backlash. After Democrats gained control over both chambers of Congress in the November 2006 election, the younger Bush's presidency was effectively crippled. His successor, Barack Obama, has found himself forced to contend with a legacy of problems from the previous administration and has embraced an aggressive array of policies to confront an economic crisis, ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the persistent Arab-Israeli conflict, and a host of other issues. His success in these areas—and the impact of his assertiveness—will have a significant impact on his political fate.

## PRESIDENTIAL POWER IN FOREIGN POLICY

What are the implications for presidential power in foreign policy? Historically, it is important to understand that the president has not consistently dominated the foreign policy process throughout American history. As will be discussed in greater depth in

Chapter 10, the U.S. Constitution produced a central government with "separate institutions sharing powers," resulting in an "invitation to struggle" between the executive and legislative branches. In fact, executive–legislative relations in foreign policy have been fluid and dynamic and as described by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1989), in *The Imperial Presidency,* they have been characterized by a kind of "pendulum or cyclical effect." In times of national emergency, particularly war, power tends to flow toward the president and the executive branch. During times of peace, when conflict has subsided, power tends to flow back to Congress. Yet while Congress tends to reassert its constitutional authority and power following war, increases in presidential power during periods of conflict tend to be so extensive that it seldom returns to prewar levels.

The cyclical ebb and flow in executive relations in foreign policy has enabled presidents to steadily accumulate greater power over time, especially on issues of foreign policy and national security affairs. *Since the global Great Depression and World War II, presidential power in foreign policy has gone through four general stages:*

1. During the Great Depression and especially World War II, the modern and the "model" presidency occurred under President Franklin Roosevelt;
2. After World War II and during the cold war, presidential power in the making of foreign policy became supreme;
3. Since the Vietnam War, the president's ability to govern and lead foreign policy has declined and become much more complex; and
4. With the end of the cold war, the paradox of presidential power, the presidential life cycle, and the crisis of leadership power have further intensified.

In addition to the times and the situation, the concepts of professional reputation, public prestige, and presidential choices (especially prerogative government) are helpful for understanding the president's ability to lead and govern in general and in foreign affairs in particular. These three elements of presidential leadership help to explain why Franklin Roosevelt was the most successful president in modern times, why Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy were able to dominate foreign policy during the cold war, why the situation began to change under President Johnson, and why it has been so difficult for presidents to govern in foreign affairs since the Vietnam War and the end of the cold war.

## The Great Depression, World War II, and The Roosevelt Presidency

Regardless of whether one liked the direction in which he led the country, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was one of America's greatest presidents if greatness is measured by ability to govern and lead. He was elected president an unprecedented four times and occupied the office for thirteen years. Why? Because he was a politician with tremendous leadership skills and he became president at a unique time in American history.

Roosevelt entered office in 1933, when the United States was experiencing the full force of the Great Depression, the greatest national emergency to confront the United States since the Civil War. As a newly elected Democratic president, replacing Republican Herbert Hoover, he represented a change and hope for the future—two things for which people were looking given the severity of the economic collapse. As an activist president, he took advantage of the extraordinary situation to move his New Deal legislation through Congress as he presided over the most active first hundred days in the history of legislative–executive relations. Roosevelt was also a consummate politician who personally ran the White House

and restored the faith of the American people through his famous "fireside chats" over the radio. Moreover, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 presented the president and the country with another national emergency, which gave Roosevelt extraordinary powers to wage war as commander in chief.

Roosevelt was an extremely powerful president and successful political leader—to students of the presidency he is often considered the model presidential leader in modern American politics. Not surprisingly, it has been virtually impossible for subsequent presidents to match his feat, for not only did Roosevelt enjoy a strong professional reputation and high public prestige, he operated during times of domestic and international emergency allowing him to exercise prerogative government (see Burns 1989; Leuchtenburg 2001; Pious 2002).

## Presidential Supremacy During the Cold War

As a result of World War II and the rise of the cold war, the president became supreme in the making of foreign policy. Aaron Wildavsky (1966) wrote an influential article four decades ago articulating a two presidencies thesis in which he argued that there was a powerful presidency in foreign policy and a weak presidency in domestic policy. Examining the legislative–executive relationship during the 1950s and 1960s, he found that presidents were much more successful in influencing foreign policy legislation than domestic legislation. According to the two presidencies thesis, the paradox and life cycle of presidential power were operative predominantly in the realm of domestic policy, but the president was able to govern and lead the country when it came to foreign policy (see also Shull 1991).

It is important to recall that before World War II, few governmental institutions were oriented toward foreign affairs and national security—the policymaking elite was extremely small and centered in the State Department. World War II changed this dramatically. Overnight, the U.S. government was redirected to devote itself to fighting a global war: The military expanded enormously and civilian agencies grew to assist the president in fighting the war. The governmental war effort, in turn, put the economy and society on a war footing to provide the necessary personnel, equipment, and services to achieve U.S. victory. However, unlike previous wars in American history, the United States demobilized only for a short time following victory because although World War II took the country out of the Depression it did not produce lasting peace. Instead, mutual suspicion and fear between the United States and the Soviet Union escalated, especially with the Korean War, leading to a new global conflict. With the rise of anticommunism, the United States quickly remobilized and expanded its resources in order to fight a global cold war—another time of national emergency in the minds of most Americans.

This sense of national emergency gave presidents during the 1950s and 1960s extraordinary powers over national security and foreign policy, accounting for the popularity of the two presidencies thesis formulated by Aaron Wildavsky. The 1950s and 1960s were perceived to be a time when communism directly threatened the security of the United States. During such times of perceived national emergency, the president could exert considerable powers as commander in chief, head of state, chief diplomat, and chief administrator. Constraints were relatively weak, and the uncertain elements tended to be supportive of presidential efforts to contain the threat of communism.

The foreign policy bureaucracy, for example, expanded and became an important tool for implementing the president's containment policies. This was also a period in which political party differences were minimal and Congress developed a bipartisan consensus largely

supportive of most presidential initiatives in foreign policy. A strong anticommunist consensus also developed among the American citizenry and foreign policy elite, resulting in strong public, media, and interest group support of a policy of containment and presidential actions abroad (while state and local governments and the courts were relatively inactive in foreign policy). This supportive political climate also existed at a time when the United States was the world's preeminent power.

Presidential supremacy developed in foreign policymaking because the superpower conflict was perceived as a permanent time of crisis and national emergency for two decades following World War II. It is not that Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy had uniformly great leadership skills stemming from professional reputation and public prestige—the personal situation varied from president to president. Indeed, Truman, for example, had quite low public approval ratings for much of his presidency. The consequential factor was public perception that the cold war represented a contest that the United States and the free world could not afford to lose. It was fought through the strategy of containment, which emphasized the threat and use of force. These cold war beliefs and policies required a strong president who was able to combat the enemy quickly and secretly with public support and little opposition; therefore, the demands of national security took precedence. Presidents were able to exercise prerogative government in foreign policy as the norm for twenty years. Their power was virtually undisputed on questions of war and peace, as demonstrated by the long history of presidential decisions taken by Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and finally Johnson, resulting in the Americanization of the war in Vietnam.

The cold war years of American globalism were thus a time of extraordinary presidential power in foreign affairs—certainly not the norm in the history of U.S. foreign policy. This is not to say that the president faced no opposition or that he controlled all foreign policy issues. Nonetheless, the president was clearly the dominant political figure and exercised a disproportionate amount of influence over U.S. foreign policy within a cold war orientation. Presidents had the ability to formulate and implement policies in accordance with their cold war beliefs (see Hodgson 1976; Piper 1994).

## The Decline of Presidential Power Since the Vietnam War

Ironically, the Vietnam War represented not only the height of presidential power, but also the beginning of the end of the extraordinary exercise of prerogative power in foreign affairs. Because of the Vietnam War, presidents were challenged about their conduct in foreign policy for the first time in over twenty years. Once the bipartisan, cold war consensus shattered, what had been accepted as a legitimate exercise of presidential power in the political climate of the cold war years became increasingly considered presidential abuse of power in the political climate of the post–Vietnam War years. The uncertainties and constraints on presidential power, either silent or supportive of the president during the cold war, resurfaced.

The collapse of the anticommunist consensus produced a reassertive Congress, new and varied interest groups and social movements, more critical media, and a cynical public. In the past, given the strength of anticommunism and the national security state, the president could lead the country, but only in the direction of fervent anticommunism, containment, and interventionism. Since Vietnam, every president has failed to generate a new consensus or sustain much support for his policies for any length of time. Moreover, as Destler, Gelb, and Lake (1984:50) argue, "The making of American foreign policy has been growing far more political—or more precisely, far more partisan and ideological." Hence, according to Alexander George (1980b:236), "the necessity for ad hoc day-to-day building of consensus

under these circumstances makes it virtually impossible for the President to conduct long-range foreign policy in a coherent, effective manner."

Clearly, the era of two presidencies and extraordinary presidential power in foreign policy appeared to be over. Whereas the president's positive and negative power in foreign affairs was quite high during the cold war, his power since Vietnam has diminished, especially his ability to exercise positive power in foreign policy. Foreign economics and other so-called traditional domestic and "intermestic" issues likewise rose in significance and increasingly became a part of the foreign policy agenda. In fact, studies examining the two presidencies thesis after the Vietnam War tended to restrict—or even reject—the argument (Fleisher, Bond, Krutz, and Hanna 2000; Shull 1991). Even the original author of the idea has acknowledged its limits, concluding that "foreign policy has become much more like domestic policy—a realm marked by serious partisan divisions in which the president cannot count on a free ride" (Oldfield and Wildavsky 1991:188).

Now that the country no longer faced a state of permanent emergency, the immediate situation and presidential leadership skills involving professional reputation, public prestige, and presidential choices became much more important. Yet if we examine recent presidents, *strong and durable political leadership is not a common commodity.* Neither Johnson, Nixon, Ford, nor Carter had strong leadership skills overall. Consequently, these presidents were perceived as failures by the end of their terms of office. Only President Reagan was able to buck the trend, yet even he was politically damaged and considered a lame duck at the close of his term. President Reagan seemed to have maintained high levels of professional reputation and public prestige, which may explain why he has been the most successful of contemporary presidents, even while suffering from the Iran-Contra affair.

**THE JOHNSON PRESIDENCY** President Lyndon Johnson represented both the height and decline of what became referred to as the imperial presidency (Schlesinger 1989; 2005). He was the first victim of the changed political environment facing the president. Known from his days as Senate majority leader for his ability to wheel and deal in Washington's corridors of power, his professional reputation was a result of his overall aggressiveness and strong style of personal interaction. When he assumed the presidency after the 1963 assassination of John Kennedy, his discomfort before the general public became more obvious. He lacked charisma and was unable to display a sense of confidence in public appearances, such as on national television, which hurt his public prestige and contributed to his severely declining popularity after the 1964 electoral landslide as his administration's handling of the Vietnam War was increasingly challenged (see Kearns 1976).

Operating with cold war beliefs that emphasized the need to contain communist aggression, President Johnson escalated American intervention in Vietnam from 18,000 American troops in 1963 to over 550,000 troops by 1966. While the American role grew and the war continued, President Johnson and other military and administrative leaders told the American people that it was only a matter of time until the Vietnam War would be won—that there was "light at the end of the tunnel." Then in February of 1968, during the Vietnamese holiday Tet, the North Vietnamese army and Vietcong guerrillas launched a major offensive in which most of the country, including cities throughout the south and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, came under enemy occupation or siege. Although it was repulsed by American and South Vietnamese forces, the Tet offensive indicated that the Johnson administration's public optimism was unjustified, and his credibility with the American people was destroyed.

Although Johnson was in many ways a master of the political smoke-filled room, his weak skills at building public prestige made it impossible for him to overcome the crisis

of governance that he experienced over the Vietnam War. The president, the American war effort in Vietnam, and the cold war beliefs on which the containment strategy was founded were increasingly challenged both within the government and throughout the domestic arena by a growing antiwar movement and public disenchantment. Johnson was so deeply affected by his loss of support that, rather than fight the political changes that were taking place around him, he declined to seek the Democratic presidential nomination for the 1968 election and withdrew from public life—the first post–World War II presidential casualty of a failed major U.S. foreign policy initiative.

**THE NIXON PRESIDENCY** President Nixon, like Johnson before him, was known for his ruthless exercise of power within Washington. Nixon's professional reputation was neither so strong as Johnson's, nor was his public prestige so weak. President Nixon was able to build a strong staff that centralized and exercised power in the White House. Although not a strong orator, he was better able to communicate to what he called the "silent majority" and, given all his years in public life, he had strong support among more conservative segments of the public (see Wills 1969).

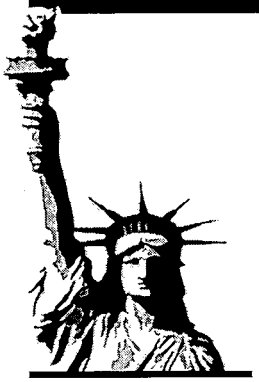
Nixon's downfall came because he did not fully understand (or accept) the extent to which the domestic political environment was changing. As his predecessors had, Nixon tried to govern foreign policy with a free hand, while more and more Americans doubted the validity of communism as the major threat to the United States and questioned the basis of twenty years of containment policies and of presidential prerogative government in foreign affairs. From Nixon's perspective, the traditional authority of presidential power in national security affairs was being challenged. His reaction was to set in motion activities to fight the domestic political opposition, leading to Watergate and the abuse of presidential power.

The key to understanding the fate of President Nixon was his policy toward the war in Vietnam. He had told the American public in 1968 that he had a "secret plan" to end the Vietnam War, which would restore peace while maintaining American honor. The secret plan consisted of a strategy involving simultaneous de-escalation, escalation, and negotiations. De-escalation meant that U.S. troops were slowly phased out through a process of "Vietnamization." Escalation entailed stepped-up American bombing of Indochina as well as invading guerrilla sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos. De-escalation and escalation, reinforced by détente initiatives with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, were intended to elicit a negotiated agreement with the North Vietnamese, producing "peace with honor" and buying South Vietnam a "decent interval" for survival.

However, with the escalation the antiwar movement reached its height, calling for the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Indochina and challenged American interventionism abroad. Nixon, a scrappy fighter from his earliest political days, responded by attacking the domestic opposition as if it were the enemy. This led to a number of illegal and unconstitutional activities by the Nixon White House and came to be known as Watergate (see the Liberty-Security Dilemma box 3.1).

Revelations about Nixon's abuse of presidential power led to his downfall and the diminution of presidential power. First, a Senate committee held hearings, followed by House Judiciary Committee hearings, which voted three counts of impeachment. This led President Nixon to resign in 1974, fearing a near-certain House of Representatives vote in favor of impeachment and conviction in the Senate. Therefore, soon after his triumphant reelection in 1972, Nixon was forced to leave office in disgrace—only the second president in American history to face impeachment for "high crimes and misdemeanors," and the second presidential casualty of U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam.

**THE LIBERTY-SECURITY DILEMMA 3.1**



## What Watergate Was all About

As opposition to his Vietnamization policy grew, especially with military escalation, President Nixon responded by turning to members of his White House staff to conduct a series of illegal and unconstitutional activities, illustrating the tension that can develop between the demands of national security and democracy. First, Nixon ordered wiretaps of members of the National Security Council staff and a number of journalists in an effort to determine who was leaking information to the media (about the secret U.S. bombing of Cambodia)—hence, referred to as the "plumbers." Second, these efforts soon grew into broader attempts to discredit, disrupt, and derail the antiwar movement and critics of the Nixon administration such as the surveillance of activist groups and sabotage of demonstrations, use of the Federal Communications Commission to coerce the news media into providing less negative coverage of the administration, threatening individuals with tax audits by the Internal Revenue Service, and burglarizing Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office in an effort to find scandalous information that would discredit Ellsberg, who had been responsible for leaking the explosive *Pentagon Papers* to the media (which had exposed the government's Vietnam policy process in the 1960s).

Eventually, given the growing antiwar opposition throughout the country, President Nixon's reelection fears resulted in White House involvement in a number of dirty tricks and illegal activities designed to ensure the president's reelection in 1972. Taking no chances, the Nixon White House attempted to sabotage the campaigns of the political opposition, including Edward Kennedy and Edmund Muskie. It was this type of activity that led to the burglary of the Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C., which gave the ensuing scandal its name and publicly exposed the wide-ranging illegalities and subsequent cover-up by President Nixon. From wiretapping, to an "enemies project," to efforts to ensure the reelection of the president, and finally to the cover-up, the legacy of these illegal and unconstitutional activities was a destroyed president and a successful challenge to Nixon's claims of prerogative government in the name of national security to the demands of democracy (see Bernstein and Woodward 1974; Dean 1977; Lukas 1973).

The overshoot and collapse of the Nixon presidency thus came about in part because of difficulties of his own making because he had failed to understand the limitations and constraints on the exercise of presidential power generated by events such as the Vietnam War. This new political environment had new negative consequences for presidential exercise of prerogative government, which Nixon failed to recognize or adapt. At the same time, the administration's failure also came about because of the fragility of Nixon's public prestige (he was not particularly admired or well liked by either his political peers or the general public). He had been in the public limelight since the late 1940s, usually attacking others politically, as with the Alger Hiss affair, or defending his record, as he did as vice president under Eisenhower and after his unsuccessful race for the presidency in 1960. He created

political enemies along the way and developed a reputation among much of the public as a mean-spirited politician (symbolized by the popular nickname "Tricky Dick"). The weak foundation of Nixon's public prestige, therefore, made him politically vulnerable during Watergate.

**THE FORD PRESIDENCY** Gerald Ford was a relatively passive president who had low levels of professional reputation and public prestige. Ford was a likable person but never would have become president on his own. Nixon had picked him as vice president to replace Spiro T. Agnew, who had been forced to resign on charges of corruption. Not only was Ford catapulted overnight into the presidency after having been minority leader in the House of Representatives, but he also possessed no election mandate. These circumstances were reinforced by his passivity in managing the government and the general public perception that he was not a particularly "presidential" individual.

President Ford was unable to overcome the stigma of Watergate and his pardon of President Nixon. He continued to pursue many of the policies emphasized during the Nixon administration, as reflected in his retaining Henry Kissinger as secretary of state, but now they were under attack. American intervention in Angola was cut off by liberal opponents who feared another Vietnam. Détente with the Soviet Union and efforts to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China were attacked for being too "soft" by conservative anticommunists within his own party. In fact, Ford barely survived a challenge by Ronald Reagan for the Republican presidential nomination. The situation got so bad that Ford and Kissinger no longer used the word *détente* when discussing U.S. foreign policy. Given his low levels of professional reputation and public prestige, it was not surprising that Ford was voted out of office in 1976 after having been president only three years—another failed president.

**THE CARTER PRESIDENCY** Jimmy Carter attempted to put the tragic episodes of Vietnam and Watergate behind the country by instilling in the office a new spirit of honesty and idealism, represented by his commitment to human rights and peace. Carter was the first person to gain the presidency by running against Washington, pledging that he would clean up governmental corruption and discard the politics-as-usual approach. As a true "outsider" to national politics, his political experience had been as governor of Georgia, he entered office resistant to the politics of Washington and with few political friends. Nevertheless, although not a great orator, Carter had a public presence that instilled hope and high public expectations about the future, especially among the more liberal segments of the population.

He entered office as an activist president with relatively high public prestige and very low professional reputation. Though extremely intelligent, President Carter was naive about the importance of presidential leadership and the difficulties of exercising political power within Washington, D.C. Early on, he antagonized members of Congress and the bureaucracy, thus destroying his honeymoon and his professional reputation. Despite the popularity of his human rights campaign and his ability to bring peace to Egypt and Israel with the Camp David accords, by the end of his administration the economy went into a tailspin with double-digit inflation and unemployment.

The public's perception of his mishandling of U.S. foreign policy abroad haunted him as it had his predecessors, especially the Iran hostage crisis. After years of U.S. support since the 1950s, the shah of Iran fell from power in 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini, a prominent religious figure, became Iran's new leader, and in the political turmoil fifty-two American

diplomatic personnel were taken hostage in Teheran. For 444 days, the hostage crisis was the lead story in American politics. This initially resulted in a rise in public support for the president, but Carter's inability to free the American hostages destroyed the earlier optimism that had surrounded his presidency. Americans became frustrated, which intensified when the Soviet Union invaded neighboring Afghanistan in 1979 to prop up their allied regime in Kabul. President Carter was never able to recover politically from the economy and the events in Iran and Afghanistan—he became another victim of the crisis of leadership, written off by most of the public as a failure (see Glad 1980; Jordan 1982).

Surprisingly, since he left office, popular approval and admiration have grown for Jimmy Carter—which is quite unique among ex-presidents. Unlike most former presidents, Jimmy Carter has not disappeared into retirement and private life. Instead, Carter has chosen to remain involved in world affairs through his activities with the Carter Center in Atlanta. He has committed himself to the pursuit of good works such as promoting human rights, overseeing foreign democratic elections, negotiating regional conflicts, and assisting human development abroad and at home—eventually receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts (see Chambers 1998; Rozell 1993).

**THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY** Ronald Reagan was the only president since the Vietnam War and before the collapse of the cold war who was able to overcome the paradox and life cycle of presidential power. But even Reagan experienced a major crisis of governance during his administration—the Iran-Contra affair—where at the height of the crisis in 1987 it was unclear whether President Reagan would survive politically (Cannon 1991; Wills 1988).

As the only contemporary president who has enjoyed high levels of both public prestige and professional reputation, Ronald Reagan was able to overcome the constraints and uncertainties that a president faces throughout his term of office. Reagan actually entered politics with low levels of both public prestige and professional reputation. When he assumed the governorship of California, he had been written off as a conservative ideologue and two-bit actor. He proved the political pundits wrong then and would do so again. It may be that these initially low expectations about a Reagan presidency worked to his advantage.

Reagan was, in fact, a complex man of many contradictions. While he rarely immersed himself in the issues, he entered office with a very active agenda. Although he was relatively uninvolved in the daily operations of presidential governance, he recruited a strong presidential staff that was capable of pursuing his policies. This played to his greatest strength: his ability to communicate to the general public. Reagan, as an individual, became well liked by the American people, especially after his 1981 assassination attempt. He had the ability to speak to them and gain their support by using language and symbols that most Americans understood and to which they responded. It was as if the more the American people became familiar with Reagan, the more they liked him. Not only was Reagan good at being the "great communicator," he actually was most comfortable when in the public limelight. It was his rise in public prestige, reinforced by his growing professional reputation, which was the key to his ability to govern, lead, and survive.

President Reagan assumed office prepared to initiate a new conservative agenda: to strengthen American defense forces and resolve overseas while unleashing the market to restore economic prosperity at home and abroad. He pledged to renew and strengthen America's efforts to combat communism and terrorism abroad. The Reagan administration's high priority was to defeat and contain the communist threat posed by the Soviet Union,

especially in Central America. In that region, the goal of U.S. foreign policy was to defeat the Marxist-Leninist–led guerrillas in El Salvador and to overthrow the Sandinista revolutionary regime in Nicaragua through the threat and use of force. The U.S. government provided financial and military support to friendly regimes in the region, such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, to help them in their fight. Covertly, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) became responsible for creating, arming, and supporting a counterrevolutionary group to overthrow the Sandinistas known as the "Contras."

To finance his Central American policy, President Reagan requested large amounts of assistance from Congress. Despite Reagan's efforts to raise public consciousness about the gravity of the situation, the threat of communism in Central America never became a high-priority issue among the majority of the public, and there was much public criticism of his policies. Members of Congress initially granted the Reagan administration only a portion of the assistance it wanted during the first few years, but the issue became so politicized that Congress prohibited the U.S. government from providing any support or assistance to the Contras at all during 1985 and 1986.

This set the stage for the Iran-Contra affair. Regardless of the congressional ban, Reagan decided that the threat of communism and the future of Nicaragua required that the administration continue covert support to the Contras (these operations are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7, on the intelligence community). President Reagan also decided that he was willing to covertly sell arms to Iran in exchange for American hostages. It was not long before White House operations in support of the Contras leaked to the press.

The public revelation that really came to haunt the Reagan presidency, however, involved the story that the United States was trading arms for hostages with Iran. After being told by Reagan that he would never negotiate secretly with terrorists and that they only understood force, most Americans could not believe that the president had agreed to negotiate with the so-called leading terrorist of them all, the Ayatollah Khomeini. President Reagan's denials only made the political situation worse for him and his administration. Then the public learned that some of the money the administration had received from the Iranian arms deal had been illegally diverted from the U.S. treasury to the Contras.

As with Watergate, a congressional investigation proceeded to determine the level of presidential abuse of power, and members of the Reagan administration were indicted. For almost a year, President Reagan and his administration were badly shaken and on the defensive about Iran-Contra. Ultimately, President Reagan was able to survive the crisis and complete his term, though he was considerably diminished in power and public prestige. (See essay 3.1 on the stress presidents face in office and the toll it takes on them.)

Iran-Contra demonstrates that Reagan also was a president willing to exercise prerogative government in support of foreign policy goals that he deemed vital. Like Nixon before him, he acted as if the political environment had not changed since the 1950s. He felt that the president, as commander in chief, possessed the same right as presidents before him during the earlier cold war—to conduct U.S. foreign policy as he saw fit. As long as the operations involving Nicaragua and Iran remained covert or were kept off the public agenda, Reagan was a formidable president. However, once the stories broke, Reagan experienced a crisis of governance that damaged both his professional reputation and public prestige. Unlike Nixon, Reagan's presidential abuse of power was not considered as severe, limited as it was to the conduct of foreign policy, and his high level of public prestige allowed him to weather the political storm and leave office with a general reputation as a successful president.

## THE STRESS AND TOLL OF THE OFFICE

Modern presidents have experienced considerable problems in governing and leading the country. Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and the younger Bush all experienced a crisis of governance in foreign policy that gave rise to a major political crisis. In fact, the crises became so severe that each president became overwhelmed by them. Each found little time and energy to respond to other issues and presidential responsibilities, which were either put on hold or carried out by subordinates with little presidential supervision. Clearly, the stress and toll of the office is immense, causing many presidents to noticeably age during their presidencies.

President Johnson was constantly preoccupied by the Vietnam quagmire during the last three years of his administration, to the point that it was difficult for his advisers and staff to get his attention on other matters. As President Nixon's cover-up of Watergate unraveled, he devoted himself to "damage control." As Congress came closer to impeaching him, his moods would swing from tenacious defense of his office to incredible despair, hopelessness, and obsession with little else but the future of his presidency (to the point that Henry Kissinger, who now enjoyed the roles of both national security adviser and secretary of state, was virtually in charge of U.S. foreign policy). Jimmy Carter became preoccupied with the release of the hostages. For one year the Monica Lewinsky affair dominated Clinton's presidency and all of American politics. And the Iraq War overwhelmed much of the agenda within the George W. Bush White House.

In some ways, Ronald Reagan may have been affected the most by his political crisis. Reagan was completely "shocked" by the political damage that the Iran-Contra revelations produced. Here was an individual who had beat the odds all his life—first as an actor in Hollywood, then in the California governorship, and finally with the U.S. presidency. Even though he was heavily criticized throughout his tenure, President Reagan was extremely popular with the American people, was very successful in exercising power, and won a landslide reelection in 1984.

Then, all of a sudden, the world turned upside down. Such is the contemporary nature of presidential politics. When Americans learned that President Reagan had sold arms to and negotiated with the Khomeini regime, they couldn't believe it. When Reagan denied any involvement, his credibility was questioned for the first time, and the so-called "Teflon" presidency collapsed. And when it was learned that some of the money received in the arms-for-hostages deals had gone to the Contras, in direct opposition to a congressional ban on all Contra aid, congressional investigations were triggered to examine Iran-Contra and determine whether the president had abused the powers of his office.

President Reagan, who had appeared at the height of his power, was now on the defensive, trying to minimize the political damage. Reagan, never one to be too heavily involved in the day-to-day details of governing, was so badly shaken that for a time he became virtually paralyzed as president. It was reported that the situation became so bad at one point that his advisers began to discuss seriously whether they should invoke the Twenty-Fifth Amendment, which allows the vice president to temporarily act as president if the sitting president becomes physically or emotionally disabled. Although badly shaken and damaged politically, Reagan ultimately survived and recovered, although much weaker and older to complete his term of office (see Mayer and McManus 1988).

## POST–COLD WAR OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

The end of the cold war created new opportunities for U.S. foreign policy, but it also exacerbated the difficulties that a president faces in exercising power in general and in the area of foreign policy. It is very difficult for post–cold war presidents to govern foreign policy, lead the country, and manage the executive branch to produce a consistent and coherent foreign policy in both national security and economic affairs. In short, lack of consensus on foreign policy, more diffuse international security risks, and an interdependent world economy seem to have combined to increase the constraints and challenges facing presidents. The cold war and the existence of a permanent crisis state was an anomaly in the history of U.S.

foreign policy after all. Certainly, this sense of permanent crisis declined with the tragedy of Vietnam and disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the cold war.

Crises still occur and allow presidents to be extremely powerful, but this tends to be only temporary and for limited foreign-policy scope. This is certainly what President George H.W. Bush experienced with the Persian Gulf War—all-time highest public approval ratings in 1991 only to be defeated for reelection in 1992. Similarly, the terrorist attacks of September 11 created a new period of crisis and national emergency which made President George W. Bush supreme in the making of foreign policy like former cold war presidents. However, as time passed from the crisis, and Bush's policies began to suffer from various setbacks, the initially overwhelming political support he experienced began to decline. In particular, the increasingly costly war in Iraq produced serious fissures in congressional and public support for the president—even within his own party.

*The collapse of the cold war has produced an interesting paradox for presidential leadership relative to the future of U.S. foreign policy:* It gives the president great opportunities but also creates great risks. Unlike those of the cold war era, contemporary presidents are no longer driven to pursue only an anticommunist containment policy. They now have more flexibility to pursue a wider range of foreign policy options abroad. At the same time, strong and judicious presidential leadership has become increasingly important for it is unclear how far a president may go in pursuing any policy before losing public and governmental support (Hastedt and Eksterowicz 1993; Mann 1990a; Rosati 1992, 1997; Scott 1998; Skowronek 2008).

Clearly, presidential reputation, public prestige, and presidential choices, including the resort to prerogative government, are necessary for presidents to successfully govern in the post–cold war era. Yet, regardless of what the president has promised in either domestic or foreign policy, he usually is unable to fulfill expectations for long. The complexity of the domestic environment, reinforced by the complexity of the global system, with increasing economic interdependence and globalization, simply no longer allows much latitude for presidential success. This has been reinforced by the complex and multifaceted nature of contemporary foreign policy as the differences between foreign and domestic policy are less clear and the issue agenda less obviously dominated by security concerns. The net result of this crisis of leadership has been that with each new administration, as well as over the course of the same administration, U.S. foreign policy has tended to become increasingly "reactive"—as opposed to "proactive"—as U.S. behavior during the administrations of the elder Bush, Clinton, the younger Bush, and Obama indicate. This is likely to continue, making it very difficult for the United States to exercise the kind of sustained global leadership that so many seem to hope for or fear.

## The George H.W. Bush Presidency

George H.W. Bush became president just before the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism in Eastern Europe and was widely considered to be a strong president in the realm of foreign policy. Nevertheless, he was unable to take advantage of the favorable post–cold war environment and a tremendously successful and popular war in the Persian Gulf, and lost his bid for reelection in 1992.

Bush entered office pledging to use his considerable governmental experience to continue most of the policies of his predecessor, but with a "kinder and gentler" style. Bush's leadership style was quite different from Reagan's: more informal and low-keyed, more active and hands-on, less ideological, and more politically sensitive. The most common criticisms

of Bush were that he attempted to govern without a vision or an agenda, that his presidency was too reactive and cautious, and that he was too sensitive to public relations and politics. Yet early on, Bush's leadership style paid off. His public approval ratings into his third year were over 70 percent, then an all-time high for post–World War II presidents.

However, as we have learned, to begin office strong is not unusual. Although his public approval was high, Bush, unlike Reagan and many of his predecessors, lacked truly strong political support. Also, he was not a particularly good public speaker and, moreover, did not develop an active domestic agenda and faced an economic recession. Nor did he inspire confidence in a foreign policy based on a realpolitik vision of the world, in which his administration was highly reactive to events and initiatives taken by others, such as Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

There is no doubt that Bush was shocked to discover that, despite his great victory in the Persian Gulf War and public approval ratings approaching 90 percent, he was soon voted out of office, largely due to perceptions that he did little to address the nation's domestic ills. Bush clearly made the crucial mistake of underestimating the softness of presidential support and the volatility of the domestic political environment since the Vietnam War.

## The Clinton Presidency

President Bill Clinton experienced considerable difficulty in governing throughout his tenure both at home and abroad. Yet Clinton managed to escape the presidential life cycle, won reelection against a weak Republican candidate, and completed his second term of office with more popularity—despite the Monica Lewinsky affair—than he enjoyed when he started his first term. In fact, he is the first Democratic president to be reelected since FDR, over fifty years ago.

Bill Clinton appears to be a very complex man who seemed to have contradictory leadership styles. On one hand, he had a strong interest and concern for both policy and politics. His verbal facility and intelligence is formidable, and he brought energy and optimism to the White House. In the words of Jack Watson (1993:431), a former White House chief of staff, he was "exuberant, informal, interactive, nonhierarchical, and indefatigable." On the other hand, Clinton often got himself into trouble by lacking self-discipline and not focusing on a set of specific goals. He was amiable to the point of being ingratiating with friends as well as foes. He was very articulate, but his ability to communicate in public was counteracted by his tendency to become too long-winded and mired in detailed lists (see Greenstein 1994).

Clinton suffered early political defeats, such as with appointments and, in particular, over his effort to legitimize "gays in the military"—which hurt his public prestige and professional reputation. Commonly perceived as trying to do too much too quickly, during his first two years he failed even to get major parts of his legislative program (such as his first budget and his major initiative to reform health care) through a Congress controlled by his own party. And then, in 1994, the Democratic Party suffered a huge electoral defeat, with the Republican Party gaining control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives—for the first time since 1954—producing divided government once again. But he was able to rebound politically when he won a major showdown with the Republican-led Congress in late 1995 and early 1996 over the budget—which included two government shutdowns.

President Clinton was also accused of considerable vacillation and hesitancy in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, especially in his first term. Highly publicized failures in Somalia and what appeared to be a two-year equivocation on the crisis in the former Yugoslavia were

among the early setbacks stemming in part from efforts to promote a more multilateral foreign policy. As his first term wound on, however, President Clinton did manage to initiate several significant foreign policy actions such as the military interventions in Haiti and Kosovo as well as the bailouts of the Mexican peso and Asian financial crisis, in which he exercised a certain amount of prerogative government. In each case the administration was faced with considerable public and congressional opposition to each initiative and proceeded nonetheless. In each case there were many in Congress who argued that the president did not have the authority to act alone, and yet he did so. Furthermore, each of these instances of prerogative government occurred in the absence of any semblance of national emergency in the post–cold war environment. And yet in none of the cases did the Clinton administration suffer from "backlash" or "overshoot and collapse." Thus, major foreign policy failures were avoided while the administration chose to emphasize domestic policy and international economics. Most prominent in this regard were passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); the Uruguay round of the GATT, producing the World Trade Organization; the expansion of NATO; and normalized trade relations with China.

Clinton very easily could have been another failed president, a victim of a year-long crisis of governance over the Monica Lewinsky affair—involving the president's sexual relations with a former White House intern. Against the wishes of a majority of the American public (who opposed Clinton's personal behavior but deemed it to be more of a private matter), a Republican special prosecutor and Congress conducted numerous and intensive investigations of the Clintons, eventually voting articles of impeachment for presidential abuse of power. The articles of impeachment were voted down in the Senate on a highly politicized and partisan vote (all Democrats voting against impeachment, almost all Republicans voting in favor). Clinton not only survived politically but was able to maintain an active agenda until the end of his term.

In fact, he left office with greater public approval than when he entered. Bill Clinton's political success may have been in part due to most Americans' lowered expectations, at least relative to him and his presidency. Also, he was the beneficiary of an economy that not only avoided going into recession but actually grew strongly throughout his presidency. Bill Clinton demonstrated throughout his political career that he was a political survivor. Back in the 1992 presidential campaign, he was often referred to as "Slick Willy" and the "comeback kid" because he was able to rebound when he appeared close to defeat, and he has had the uncanny ability to occupy the political center. Somewhat like Ronald Reagan's Teflon presidency, but for very different reasons, nothing seemed to politically damage Clinton too much or for too long (see Harris 2005; Maranis 1995; Renshon 2000).

## The George W. Bush Presidency

George W. Bush had a very inauspicious beginning as president. He was elected in 2000 with a smaller popular vote than Al Gore, the Democratic candidate. The electoral votes and Electoral College were under challenge, especially in Florida, where Bush's brother was governor. And ultimately his election as the forty-third president of the United States was decided by a 5–4 U.S. Supreme Court decision. So President Bush began his term of office with a rather low sense of national legitimacy. Moreover, as former Bush speechwriter David Frum (quoted in Lindsay 2003:537) observed, "On September 10, 2001, George Bush was not on his way to a very successful presidency."

Although Bush was previously governor of Texas and ran for president as a "compassionate conservative," he was not widely respected or admired for his political focus, background,

or knowledge—especially in the area of foreign policy. The conventional wisdom was that he picked a seasoned foreign policy team that would make up for what he lacked in knowledge about U.S. foreign policy and world politics. No grand vision was initially offered and his first few months in office were rather uneventful. Most of the president's focus seemed to be on domestic politics—in particular, successfully passing a large tax cut.

And then came September 11, 2001. In addition to the thousands of dead and wounded, prominent American symbols on United States soil were attacked, and most Americans were in a state of shock and disbelief. Quickly reacting to the disaster and ensuing crisis, President Bush seemed to become a new man and a new president over the course of the next few weeks. The immediate response was that the country (and much of the world) rallied around the flag and the president. For the next few months, public approval of presidential behavior surged to around 90 percent. Overnight, George W. Bush had become the war president whose principal focus would be to fight the global war on terrorism (see Conley 2004; Renshon 2004).

According to the Bush administration, the United States had entered a new era of national emergency and permanent crisis, similar to what President Truman faced following World War II, in which the United States would have to respond with all its energy and might to eradicate the new global threat. The Bush administration proclaimed a new vision of a "unitary executive" in which the presidency was once again supreme in foreign policy with virtually unlimited ability to exercise prerogative government. In fact, as one reporter noted, "on a wide variety of fronts, the administration . . . moved to seize power that it has shared with other branches of government" (Milbank 2001:A1; see also Daalder and Lindsay 2003; Fisher 2007; Yoo 1996, 2005).

This was perhaps best symbolized by Bush's State of the Union address on January 29, 2002—what has also been referred to as his Axis of Evil speech. The speech promoted and reinforced evil images of the enemy—which were automatically conjured up in the minds of most Americans at the mere mention of the names Osama Bin Laden or Saddam Hussein or the countries Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Somewhat reminiscent of John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961 focusing on the cold war, President Bush's speech called Americans to a war on terrorism, to patriotism, and to duty, and reminded them of their innocence and exceptionalism. The speech ended: "Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom's price. We have shown freedom's power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom's victory."

Bush immediately set about refocusing his administration to engage in a global war on terrorism, beginning with Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban and turning to Iraq to depose Saddam Hussein. No issue seemed to be more central to the administration than Iraq. Galvanized by the desire to be aggressive in its global war on terror, the administration had barely completed its successful invasion in Afghanistan before it began to lay the groundwork for an invasion of Iraq. In spite of international resistance and some internal disagreement, once Bush decided to use force to remove Hussein from power, administration officials and the president himself forcefully advanced the case that Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and ties to al-Qaeda required assertive military action (see Woodward 2004). After securing congressional support and despite resistance from much of the international community, especially France, Russia, and China on the UN Security Council, the administration, in concert with a "coalition of the willing" composed chiefly of Great Britain and a few other countries, invaded Iraq in 2003. By May, U.S. military forces had captured Baghdad and forced the Hussein regime out, and President Bush officially declared "mission accomplished" on May 2, 2003.

The public and Congress initially rallied around the military action (note the spike in public approval at the time of the invasion, as shown in figure 3.3). However, with the initial military campaign over, the more difficult task of rebuilding the Iraqi government and nation-building ensued. Resistance to the American occupation soon grew and violence seemed to increase daily. Moreover, the weapons of mass destruction that Iraq was alleged to possess were never found, and the American-led search units soon officially concluded that they had never been there. Nor were any ties to al-Qaeda discovered, although al-Qaeda soon became active in the insurgency against the U.S. forces and the Iraqi regime that the U.S. sought to empower. Indeed, far from justifying the president's decision, post-war events cast doubt on the administration's prewar claims and justifications (see Cirincione, Mathews, Perkovitch, and Orton 2004; Powers 2003).

With the costs of the war thus spiraling upward, Bush began to face increased unrest and challenges, and his public approval began to steadily decline. While he managed to secure a victory in the bitterly contested and narrowly won the 2004 presidential election over John Kerry, Bush' popularity continued to decline soon after. Distance from the 9/11 attacks, coupled with increasing costs in Iraq, persistent questions about the success of his global war on terrorism, and lingering concerns about the administration's use (or misuse) of intelligence (and other national security powers) combined with natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and a collapsing economy continued to erode Bush's support and exacerbate his lame duck status to the point that he was essentially ineffective by the end of his term in office. In fact, his presidency was effectively crippled in November 2006, when the Democrats seized control of both houses of Congress in a stunning political backlash against Bush.

Hence, what initially appeared to be a time of permanent national emergency and a renewed supremacy in presidential power unraveled into a more complicated and now-familiar post–cold war scenario. The changing sense of threat, coupled with declining policy success, led to increased criticism even within the Republican-led Congress. Bush's inability to prevail on a variety of policy initiatives in his second term, the increasing opposition to his signature policies on the global war on terror, and concerns over his relative neglect of other domestic and foreign policy issues provide ample evidence that *a weakened post-Vietnam and post–cold war presidency is still quite applicable, even in a political environment in which the president was able to exercise considerable prerogative government for awhile.*

## The Obama Presidency

The presidency of Barack Obama is of great significance for many reasons. This is the first time the country has nominated and elected a "black" (or African-American or biracial) man as president of the United States in its history, just 45 years after Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Second, Obama entered office inheriting an (American and global) economy on the verge of a collapse often compared to the Great Depression. Third, numerous national security issues had to be faced, including potential nuclear proliferation in North Korea and Iran, the withdrawal of American troops and "Iraqification" of the war in Iraq, and an escalation in the war on terrorism in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Finally, the presidential campaign of 2008 raised incredibly difficult issues with significant implications for the United States and the world, including reforming health care, the need for alternative energy policies, the perpetual conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors, especially the Palestinians, and global warming. This was clearly not "the best of times" for becoming president regardless of who became president.

President Obama entered office determined to break with the policies of his predecessor and chart a new course. In a flurry of activity, the Obama Administration has attempted to take advantage of the honeymoon period to advance an ambitious agenda somewhat reminiscent of the FDR administration and its "first 100 days." Although the problems Obama faced as he began his efforts were not as dramatic as those of the economic depression and global war of the 1930s and 1940s, few presidents since World War II have faced such a daunting array of challenges. In addition to contending with the legacy of the Iraq invasion, Obama faced challenges stemming from the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan (where the Taliban and al-Qaeda had reemerged as viable opponents), a severe global economic crisis, urgent environmental and energy policy issues, and regional security and nonproliferation challenges in North Korea and Iran, among other problems. Obama also faced a political environment in Washington D.C. more divided along partisan lines than ever before in recent memory. Therefore, although the times and the initial honeymoon help to strengthen presidential power, the successful exercise of prerogative government cannot safely be assumed and presidential leadership is as crucial as ever.

Beginning with his November 2008 election victory, Barack Obama developed and led an activist presidency and administration. In addition to having a full political agenda, in just the first 6 months he took numerous international trips, visiting many countries and many more political leaders in efforts to address a multitude of national security, diplomatic, and economic issues (see table 3.1). He also took up health care reform and energy policy (promoting greater fossil fuel efficiency as well as alternative sources) in his first year. This is a an expansive presidential agenda (in part reactive, in part proactive).

President Obama's leadership style seems to resonate with much of the American people (and throughout much of the world). From the start, he appeared active, calm and patient, bright and articulate, thoughtful, politically astute, tireless, friendly, having a sense of self-deprecation and humility, and a powerful communicator—a potentially impressive package of personal characteristics that helped to maximize his presidential leadership and power of persuasion. In the language of James MacGregor Burns (1978), Obama displayed what he calls "transformational" leadership (more strategic and long-term oriented that may profoundly affect future policies and the future of the country), as opposed to the "transactional" leadership (more short-term and politically motivated–oriented) that one commonly tends to see.

President Obama also took advantage of his initial honeymoon period and initial strengths in the presidential life cycle. At least initially, he maintained significant public approval, although his support fell from highs in the 60–70 percent range to the mid–50 percent range by the fall (see figure 3.1). Much of the public appeared to like and be impressed by, if not enamored with, Barack Obama, the first lady Michelle Obama, and the Obama family in the White House. In addition to high levels of public prestige, he also demonstrated a high level of professional reputation in moving so boldly and quickly on so many fronts, dominating the policy agenda, refocusing U.S. foreign policy by breaking with past actions, and getting important legislation through Congress. His critics voiced strong verbal opposition, but were less successful in making impact. And Obama exerted much prerogative government, both in national security affairs and, maybe more importantly, in addressing the economic meltdown (especially at home but also abroad).

With respect to the American and global economy, he promoted and adapted a strong set of policies in an effort to prevent further economic collapse and hopefully stimulate economic recovery. His administration helped to restore confidence in the credit and financial markets as well as the economy in general. Governmental spending, governmental debt, and governmental involvement in the economy reached levels not seen since the 1930s or the 1960s, given the severity of the economic meltdown. And yet the administration's policies

Table 3.1 President Obama's Travels Abroad, January to June 2009

| Trip | Start | End | Location | Event | Meetings and Speeches | Days |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | February 19 | February 19 | Ottawa, Canada | Bilateral Talks | Governor General Michaëlle Jean<br>Prime Minister Stepehn Harper<br>Opposition Leader Michael Ignateiff | 1 |
| 2 | March 31 | April 2 | London, England | G20 Summit | Queen Elizabeth II<br>Prime Minster Gordon Brown (UK)<br>President Dmitry Medvedev (Russia)<br>President Hu Jintao (China)<br>Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (India)<br>President Lee Myung-bak (South Korea)<br>King Abdullah (Saudi Arabia)<br>Opposition Leader David Cameron (UK) | 9 |
| | April 3 | April 4 | Strasbourg, Germany | NATO Summit | President Nicolas Sarkozy (France)<br>Chancellor Angela Merkel (Germany) | |
| | April 4 | April 5 | Prague, Czech Republic | EU Summit | President Václav Klaus (Czech Republic)<br>Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek (Czech Republic)<br>President José Barroso (European Commission)<br>President José Zapatero (Spain)<br>Major Address on Proliferation | |
| | April 5 | April 6 | Ankara, Turkey | Bilateral Talks | President Abdulla Gül<br>Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan<br>Major Address in Ankara<br>Attended Cultural Event in Istanbul | |
| | April 6 | April 8 | Baghdad, Iraq | Unannounced Visit | Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki<br>Speech to Soldiers | |
| 3 | April 16 | April 17 | Mexico City, Mexico | Bilateral Talks | President Felipe Calderón | 4 |
| | April 17 | April 19 | Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago | Summit of the Americas | Prime Minister Patrick Manning (T&T)<br>CARICOM and UNASUR<br>President René Préval (Haiti)<br>President Michelle Bachelet (Chile) | |
| 4 | June 3 | June 3 | Saudi Arabia | Bilateral Talks | King Abdullah | 5 |
| | June 4 | June 5 | Egypt | Bilateral Talks | President Hosni Mubarak<br>Major Address in Cairo | |
| | June 5 | June 6 | Germany | Bilateral Talks | Chancellor Angela Merkel<br>Tour of Buchenwald<br>Visit Military Hospital in Landstuhl | |
| | June 6 | June 7 | France | Bilateral Talks | President Nicolas Sarkozy<br>Normandy Invasion Anniversary Ceremony | |

have received considerable public support thus far, but also severe political criticism, especially from conservatives and the Republican Party. Given the controversial nature of the policy problems to which he has devoted his attention, such criticism was inevitable. It remains to be seen if Obama can convert his political capital to results in these controversial arena before the patterns of the presidential life cycle and American electoral politics erode his opportunities and support, such as over health care reform.

In national security affairs, the Obama administration initiated efforts to withdraw American troops from Iraq by 2010 while trying to maintain the country's stability. President Obama also made early decisions to intensify the American "footprint" in Afghanistan and Pakistan, dispatching an additional 21,000 troops in early 2009 in an effort to prevent their further destabilization, with more troops being recommended by the military—not a great omen given the difficulty outside powers have had controlling Afghanistan throughout its long and violent history. For the most part, these policies have received initial political support, but they also have been overshadowed by the focus on the economy and health care.

To what extent will President Obama and his administration fall prey to the paradox of presidential power, to the presidential life cycle, and to the crisis of leadership that seems to eventually prevail since the Vietnam War and the end of the cold war? Obviously, much depends on the level of success in the Obama administrations policies, especially as seen through the eyes of Americans. Should the American and global economy recover, this could strengthen President Obama's ability to lead and to govern. The outcome of the controversy over health care will impact the future of Obama's presidential power. And should Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to deteriorate, they could become "Obama's Wars" and be his Achilles heel. Obviously, much depends upon the future outcomes and how they are perceived within the American political system.

## SUMMARY AND CHALLENGES OF THE POST–COLD WAR WORLD

This chapter *provides an overview of the politics of U.S. foreign policy.* We found that, while most Americans have high expectations of presidential power, in reality, there is a paradox of presidential power. Although presidents possess significant constitutional roles and strengths, they also face important constraints and uncertainties. Presidents usually go through a presidential life cycle in which they leave office much weaker than they were when they entered and often experience a crisis of leadership (or governance), making it difficult for any president to govern successfully and lead the country in a direction consistent with his beliefs. Although these patterns of presidential power are strongest in the area of domestic policy, they have also impacted foreign policy in the years since the Vietnam War and the end of the cold war. Therefore, the two presidencies thesis of the cold war years appears to no longer operate in a political environment where presidential leadership is more important then ever.

The discussion of presidential power and governance provides an initial *overview of the three foreign policymaking themes*—the president's ability to govern, continuity and change, and the tension between democracy and national security—addressed throughout this book. First, presidents have had a much more difficult time governing and leading the nation since the end of the Vietnam War and the cold war, even in the area of foreign policy, making presidential leadership skills much more important. Second, the foreign policy process has become more complex because of the changes that have occurred in the wake of the Vietnam War and the end of the cold war where Presidents now face more constraints and opposition throughout government, society, and the global environment in the conduct of foreign policy. Third, whenever presidents have exerted prerogative government and pressed assertive foreign policies since the Vietnam War, tensions between democracy and national security, peaking initially during Watergate, destroying President Nixon, and damaging the presidency. Tension rose again during the Iran-Contra affair, but President Reagan and his presidency survived. And tensions have also arisen due to President George W. Bush's war on terrorism abroad and at home.

In sum, presidents must realize that they can no longer exercise power and prerogative government in the name of national security as commonly occurred during the cold war without risking considerable political backlash and possible overshoot and collapse. Not even Ronald Reagan, with his tremendous symbolic skills and prestige with the American people, was able to rise above the paradox of presidential power. And if Reagan was unable to avoid a crisis of governance and the presidential life cycle, what is the omen for presidents with lesser leadership skills?

What about the implications of the end of the cold war and of September 11? On one hand, they provide unique opportunities for more foreign policy change away from the cold war policies of the past; on the other hand, the events have also further weakened the president's ability to govern foreign policy into the future. After all, it was the sense of national emergency associated with the cold war during the 1950s and 1960s that was the ultimate source of presidential power and American global leadership following World War II. This means that the fragmented and pluralist political environment that has prevailed since the Vietnam War will likely continue in the post–cold war future, posing greater foreign policy opportunities and political risks for presidents and American leadership abroad. Much will depend on the perceptions Americans have of threat in the world, a president's policies, leadership skills, and of their relative success at home and abroad.

For a short time after 9/11, it appeared that President George W. Bush's war on terrorism would resonate throughout the international community, the domestic political environment, and the American people, producing a new permanent crisis and sense of national emergency, only to produce another failed presidency. Clearly, the end of the cold war means that the quality of leadership remains consequential with respect to the president's ability to govern and how the future will unfold. President Obama thus far has displayed unique leadership skills not often seen, but he may experience the fate of other post-Vietnam and post–cold war presidents given the challenges he faces in the national security and economic arenas and in the savagely partisan atmosphere of Washington, D.C. In order to get a stronger understanding, we now turn to one of the most significant sources that a president has to exercise leadership and power—his efforts to manage the executive branch and the foreign policy bureaucracy.

## SUGGESTED SOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## KEY CONCEPTS

crisis of leadership (and governance)
electoral mandate
honeymoon
imperial presidency
intermestic issues
issue area
lame duck
model presidential leader
paradox of presidential power
power
power to persuade
prerogative government
presidential choices
presidential leadership
presidential life cycle
professional reputation
public prestige
two presidencies thesis
unitary executive
war president

## OTHER KEY TERMS

Axis of Evil speech
ex-Presidents
Iran hostage crisis
Iran-Contra affair
Monica Lewinsky affair
Teflon presidency
Tet offensive
Twenty-Fifth Amendment
Twenty-Second Amendment
Watergate