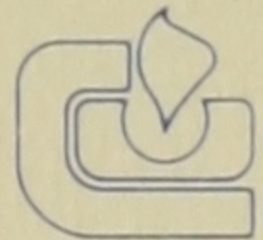


Working Paper Series

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE PRESIDENCY

Admiral Rickover served the United States for

**THE
STROM THURMOND
INSTITUTE**



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Admiral Rickover served the United States from 1943, when he took his oath of office as a midshipman at the Naval Academy, until his retirement in 1961. President Hoover is the thirty-third President under whom Admiral Rickover has served. The Admiral has met and talked with Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan. From his personal observations, conversations, and study, Admiral Rickover has written these thoughts about the Presidency.

by

Admiral Hyman G. Rickover

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192/504K



Journal of the American Political Science Association

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Machiavelli said: "The first opinion which one forms of a prince and of his understanding is by observation and not by his own mind; and when they are capable and faithful, they are always to be considered wise, because he has known how to recognize the capable and to keep them faithful."

Admiral Rickover served the United States from 1918, when he took his oath of office as a midshipman at the Naval Academy, until his retirement in 1982. President Reagan is the thirteenth President under whom Admiral Rickover has served. The Admiral has met and talked with Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan. From his personal observation, conversations, and study, Admiral Rickover has written these thoughts about the Presidency.

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God governs Heaven without counsel, but rulers are men, and all men need counsel.

If a question gets as high as the President, it is likely to be insoluble anyway.

The Staff

In the inner councils of the White House the presence of the President alters other men's words. Some wait to hear what he says, then agree. Others are intimidated and do not say what is on their minds.

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What is required is someone to disturb self-assurance of a staff, someone who will say: "We are getting into a mess!"

It is essential to have an alternative to the official version of things; a rival account of reality, a measure by which to judge the efficacy of officials.

Those outside the inner circle who have your ear but who seldom see fit to question your judgment should also be listened to. Their judgment is what is needed to balance the parochial judgment of your immediate staff, and they should be given a hearing. "The prince often gets to hear what he wants to hear." The atmosphere then becomes that of a court.

One should not discourage interruption of the smooth running of the machinery of the White House, and rely only on those who can stay "cool under pressure."

What Czar Nicholas I said, "Not I but 10,000 clerks rule Russia," should be remembered.

The important officials affected by a decision should be present and hear when the decision is being discussed. Therefore, the decision should be in writing and communicated to all concerned. The result is a trusted and respected President and administrator.

One of the most difficult things for a man is to remove those who have started with him and who have been loyal to him. But the need for removing some men occurs at all times. This is difficult if they are the first incumbents, particularly if they assisted him to achieve office.

When Churchill lost confidence in a subordinate, he removed or assigned him another job. But when there was disagreement with an adviser in whom he retained confidence, however violent the clash of opinion, he gave way. In such circumstances he never overrode technical advice, or undermined the man who gave it.

The President is, in reality, the trustee for the welfare of the State. In this sense he must treat his subordinates in an impersonal manner. He must be loyal only to those who are loyal to his goals, not to their own.

That man who retains subordinates who cannot properly fulfill their duties sins both against God and against the State.

Private Lives

I have always made known to those who worked with me that I would not pry into their private lives, nor require social relationships with them; whatever they did in their private lives was entirely their affair, provided this did not reflect unfavorably on the organization.

Staff members should be as anonymous as possible; they should shun publicity except insofar as it adds to the stature and prestige of their leader and his policies.

They must understand they are trustees for the organization, that anything adverse that comes to public attention can reflect not only on them but also on their leader.

The President

The President should try for a place in history rather than for a second term.

Those who are ambitious to make a place and a name for themselves are nearly always despised and laughed at by lesser souls, and what they do is construed as wrong.

History has the tendency to overlook the faults of men who mattered, just as contemporaries overlook the contributions of men who fail while daring greatly.

Few rulers we now account great, were great or popular in the eyes of contemporaries; the few who were, were admired for reasons which are not ours.

A President has been assigned much authority, yet little power. Power is something acquired, something earned, something developed by an individual's personality and accomplishments. Authority is no match for it.

The most influential leaders are askers of questions, like Socrates and Jesus.

Sweeping and simple views are useful only to those who do not have responsibility.

True leaders look to reason, not to power.

To adhere to one's first principles is not always correct. Principles change with maturity.

It is only the ignorant who attribute the doings of the government to the person of its Head--like the yokel who believed that the Crimean War was ended only when the English Queen captured the Russian Czar.

People do not notice the existence of the best leaders. When such a leader's work is done, they say, "We did it ourselves."

The test of political leadership is not whether the leader has his way; it is whether he makes the most of the existing materials he has to work with, and whether he creates new materials to help him meet his goals.

It is a mistake to attempt to appear as the sort of person one thinks should be the leader, rather than being himself.

It is sometimes necessary at the top of authority to bear with disloyal colleagues, to remain calm when others panic, and to withstand misguided popular outcries.

It is not a credit to have been right when others have been wrong; but this has always been the consolation of dedicated men.

The willingness to reassess and move beyond an earlier formulation is precisely what makes one's actions a model. This testifies to the ability to outgrow parochialism, to move beyond the starting point, to give up the comfort of having a fixed position.

At the very moment when the decision on a basic issue must be made and there is no one to whom you can refer, that is when the full weight of the responsibility of leadership is felt.

When one has responsibility, silence or inaction is also an act--an act of irresolution which can lead to loss

of power. Your situation will be no worse, nor will you find yourself in less credit, had you acted and lost.

In most democracies, the leaders of fixed principles have now departed, leaving their standards to flexible pragmatists preoccupied with the discovery of "consensus," and survival through use of the alluring but dangerous doctrine that a leader can serve a people well by reflecting them.

If you are called a kind President, your rule is a failure.

The Media

In the democratic process we must have leaders, not rulers, even if the quality of that leadership is not perfect in the eyes of the omni-present media. To demand a perfect leader or a perfect society is to give up choosing between better and worse. If the imperfect is defined as evil, then everything becomes evil, since everything is imperfect. The fundamental difference between better and worse has not changed over the years; what has changed is the manner in which the better is ignored and the worse reported incessantly.

Since the events of 1974, the media has been demanding total disclosure from our leaders. The illusion has been created that a cloud of secrecy has been thrown over every act of government to hide dark motives. But not all secrets are evil. The drafting of sensible policies requires candid speech, because only in this way can leaders fully explore various alternatives. Confidentiality is often essential to candor. Otherwise nothing is achieved as rival factions seek media support before a decision is reached.

The framing of our Constitution illustrates this point. Not only was the press barred entirely from all meetings, but also each delegate had to pledge to preserve confidentiality of the discussions. Without obedience to that fundamental rule, the great compromises that lie at the heart of the Constitution's success could never have been achieved. Once agreement was reached, public disclosure of the result and debate properly followed.

No man can be a hero to his valet, since the valet's duties make him see his employer at his most undignified. The news business now seeks the intimacy of the valet. The media peers at you from all angles and at all hours of the day and night; it desires to record all human frailties.

All of us have contradictory elements in our character; it is only when a man becomes eminent that the contradictions become conspicuous.

It is easier to point to the flaws and fallibilities of a great man than to be one.

If you think someone is telling a lie about you, the only way to answer is with the whole truth.

Polls

Polls are ephemeral judgments for specific times and for specific acts; they are quickly forgotten. A man will ultimately be judged by his overall accomplishments, not by a single item or error in judgment. The vast majority rarely remember what was in yesterday's paper or on television.

Advocacy of Freedom Abroad

The United States, from its inception, has been looked upon by people all over the world as the leading exponent of human freedom. This is still a worthy cause, regardless of what other international objectives we may have. Our country is the shining light for all oppressed people. No other country is held in such high regard universally in this respect.

For example, in 1911, President William Howard Taft rebuked the Russian Government when it charged and imprisoned a Jewish citizen for the alleged ritual murder of a child. This was the Mendel Beilis affair. Beilis was eventually freed.

Big Business

The United States, through Congress and through some government officials, is being influenced by big business to a greater extent than ever before in our history. This is done through extensive and increasing lobbying, and by various types of contributions and campaign funds. It is important that appropriate legislation be enacted to limit this.

Those at the head of Government Departments, and their subordinates, can reach fantastic heights of hallucination. They have been encouraged by the almost universal acquiescence of ordinary people, whose penchant for self-deception is great and deep. Government officials and military officers--particularly the higher ones--are prone to vocational inflation and self-deception.

What determines the immediate course of events is not theories or good intentions, but the character of the men in authority. Having been a success in business does not guarantee this. Government is far more difficult than business; it generally requires different qualities.

It is therefore important that men who come into Government from industry work entirely for the best interests of the Government, not for the interests of the companies that have contracts with the Government. I have frequently seen this in the actions of some of these officials. When they were in business, they did all possible to protect their own company. Once in Government, they become arbiters between the Government and business, and take extra-legal actions. At times they give way to "responsible defeatism."

To the contrary, they should just as avidly protect the Government--the one who employs them--as they previously protected their own business. They justify their actions by claiming they are acting for the overall benefit of the United States. But this is the function of Congress, not of appointed officials; these should execute the law.

To maintain the legitimacy of government requires that public officials act like servants of the people, not like kings.

Energy

Until the end of World War II, the United States had nearly adequate natural resources to take care of all our people, and much extra for export. Volume 3--"The Outlook

for Energy Resources"--of the 1952 Resources for Freedom, a report to the President, gave early warning of the energy crisis. But hardly any attention was given to it by the press or by the public. Warnings by myself and others to Congress had no effect.

Today, this situation has caught up with us. Henceforth, we will be in constant difficulty. The energy situation, in particular, is the harbinger. No matter how much we try, how much money we spend, we may be deluding ourselves that we will find a large and cheap new energy source. Instead, we may have to depend largely on coal and wood.

I envision that, sooner or later, this will require us to restructure our way of life. Many will have to be moved from rural areas and suburbs into cities and large towns.

Housing will have to be built in such manner as to service large numbers of people to minimize use of energy. Transportation will have to be modified to achieve this. Railroad systems especially will have to be modernized and expanded. Travel and shipment of goods will, to a far greater extent, have to be by rail than by oil-consuming means.

It is essential that planning and action start now, while we still have time. The grave nature of this crisis must be constantly reiterated. This is an unpopular theme because the vast majority of our people still live in an environment where energy is readily available.

Might it not be wise to start now planning fast-growing trees wherever possible? Would it not be far-sighted

national wisdom to use our unemployed to rebuild our cities and plant trees?

The Present Nature of the Office

Few individuals have the ability to recognize a developing situation. Leaders are nearly always attuned to solving today's problems. Some Members of Congress are attuned to seeking re-election and tend to avoid issues that conflict with this. Even when an issue is clearly seen by Congress and the people, there is no assurance of its solution. There is the attitude: "If we can land on the moon, we can do anything." Few realize that there was no opposition to this venture; that it required only the expansion of existing technology.

The only effective place where such issues can properly be considered is the Presidency.

If war broke out during a President's incumbency, his situation would be drastically improved. All local and parochial interests would be subordinated to waging it.

I doubt Abraham Lincoln would be considered a great President were it not for the Civil War. And I doubt that, other than George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt, any previous President would be considered "great."

The Presidency today is the most difficult one in our history. Further, I believe the next Presidency, and the ones succeeding it, will be successively more difficult-- unless a war or other great crisis intervenes.

Functions of the Presidency

Since Congress is not today amenable to the desires of the President, and since "Congressional government" has, in the main, become government by pressure groups, cooperation can only be obtained by largely acquiescing in measures which serve the individual interests of one or more of its Members. These interests may not necessarily be ultimately best for the United States. A President, therefore, can follow one of two courses:

- a. Decide that certain objectives are so overwhelmingly important that he will compromise or give away other "goods" that will not unduly hurt the United States.
- b. Act as the moral leader of the country, advocating those items he believes in, regardless of Congress, the media, or polls.

The office is a superb opportunity for applying, in new conditions, the simple rules of human conduct to which we always revert.

He can then say, as did Martin Luther, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."

The Presidency is not merely an administrative office; it is predominantly a place for moral leadership.

In my opinion, the second course is far the better because it permits him to be a leader. He can then act the way he believes to be for the true interests of the country. More important, it enables him to act in a consistent manner-- in accordance with principle and conscience.

If we think of happiness in its common human dimensions rather than as an adventure in individual selfishness, the limited things government can do to promote happiness become clear. They are well stated in the Preamble to the Constitution--"establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty."

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