

“Imperial in foreign affairs, imperilled in others”. How accurate is this view of Presidential power?

I would agree with the view that the President of the United States is imperial in foreign affairs, yet imperilled in others, especially those domestic. The imperilled presidency is a concept put forward by Gerald Ford, who suggested that far from being too powerful, the President is in a constant power struggle. This is because the power of the president is severely constricted by, among other things, a lack of public trust and a dependence on Congress and the Supreme Court in order to pass legislation, especially following the shift in power between the executive and the legislature following the events of Watergate and Vietnam in the 1970s.

I think that the Presidency is imperilled in domestic affairs because he must rely on Congress to pass any bills proposed by him. This is because the balance of powers outlined in the Constitution prevents the executive from being part of the legislature, unlike in the UK. This means that the President, I think, has very little power other than, as Richard Neustadt claims, the power to persuade. I think this is typified by the discrepancy between the power of JFK and Lyndon Johnson. This was characterised by Kennedy failing to pass a great deal of his proposed civil rights legislation due to opposition from Southern Democrat Congressmen while Johnson became renowned for his ability to persuade congressmen to vote in his favour using 'the Johnson treatment'. I would suggest that the President is indeed dependent on Congress.

Following Richard Nixon's involvement in the events of the Watergate scandal and associated 'sleaze' such as the use of slush funds and secretive tapings, the office of the President has become less trusted by the public. I think that this has led to added monitoring and accountability of the President's activities by the public and media and means that any ill-behaved activities on the part of the President will be uncovered. This is compounded, in my view, by strengthening of the Office for Government Accountability in recent years.

In addition, I would suggest that the President of the US is imperilled in domestic affairs because the President has become a small part of a large federal bureaucracy over the last three decades, having little control of segments of the bureaucracy. This has been particularly significant following the events of Watergate in 1972, as the transparency of Presidential activity has been enhanced due to the increased strength of such initiatives as the Congressional Budget Office and transparency rules. I think that this has made the Presidency disadvantaged in terms of power, even directly after inauguration. This is exacerbated by the small numbers of the Executive Office of the President, meaning that the President's office has a

small influence and only makes up a small proportion of the federal bureaucracy as a whole. I think that this means that the President is no longer entrusted with jobs he may have held in the days of such Presidents as Franklin Roosevelt. For example, the President's previous duties of deciding the details of financial and domestic policy mainly falls to subordinates, and I think that this has removed some of the powers of the President.

Some historians, such as Arthur Schlesinger, would disagree with the view that the Presidency is imperilled in domestic affairs. They would argue, for example, that the President is imperial in domestic affairs due to the large amount of advisory committees and agencies that are loyal to the President and unelected by the public, which give the President power that is not accountable to the public. For example, the National Security Council, which offers policy advice to the President, has been unelected and with little accountability since its inception during Truman's presidency. It also makes up part of the Executive Office of the President. In addition, critics such as Schlesinger would argue that because appointments to agencies and committees such as the NSC are not approved by the Senate, this means that the activities of the NSC and such members of the EOP are not accountable to Congress.

I would agree with the quotation's view that the power of the President has become (or remained) imperial concerning foreign policy. I think that this is because of the President's position as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, the president's status as the figurehead of the nation and the President's support from the citizens of America. Critics such as Helen Thomas would agree with this view, suggesting that a recent president, George W. Bush, has acted as an imperial president concerning the Iraq war and Israeli politics by, for example, "telling the Palestinians they cannot vote for Arafat in coming elections". This power, I think, is a continuation of the power that Theodore Roosevelt enjoyed in 1907 when he dispatched the 'Great White Fleet' in order to intimidate countries that he suspected were a 'threat'. The president is able to choose wars, and the fact that no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq is, I think, a good illustration of the president's power as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Some critics, however, may argue otherwise. They may argue that the armed forces are not in fact loyal to the President due to Congress' ability to end military action with a joint declaration of the House and the Senate. Is it possible, then, that the power of the President in foreign affairs is indeed just the power to persuade Congress? I doubt it. This is because, I think, that the President's large amount of party support in Congress as a result of America's two-party system means that Congress will not be willing to contradict the President on such a large scale.

I would also suggest that in recent years the presidency has become increasingly imperial abroad due to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centres in September 2001. This is because these events have led to the American public feeling united against an external threat and feeling more hawkish as a result of a desire to protect American interests. I think that this is characterised by the American

public's willingness to accept wars such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan started by George W. Bush. For example, a 2002 CBS poll found that 60% of Americans would support an invasion of Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power if necessary. This leads me to suggest that the power of the President, especially power in foreign affairs, increases in times of war. For example, Bush's 2004 election campaign centred around the Republican being a 'war president', and in that time where Americans felt threatened they voted for Bush as a result. I would suggest, therefore, that presidential power is cyclical.

To conclude, I would agree with the suggestion that the American President is imperial in foreign affairs and imperilled in domestic affairs. This, I think, is due to the weakening influence of the President as a part of the federal bureaucracy and the increased significance of the President abroad, especially his influence as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.