Presidents’ Day, 3rd Monday in February

GEORGE WASHINGTON’S BIRTHDAY FEB. 22.

Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace, Justice, and Ecology.

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What’s at Stake: Vice-president Dick Cheney’s entire political life was devoted to strengthening the presidency.

The Tea Party right-wing Republican Congress members’ extreme hatred against government regulation of business and taxes of corporations and the wealthy made the Obama presidency seem weak and Congress strong. Then the alliance of President Trump with the Republican-controlled Congress revealed a President triumphant, possessing the power of kingly rule. Now in 2019 the House has returned to the Democratic Party, and some control over presidential absolutism has returned. But as the books and articles cited below show, we cannot think the danger of an unchecked president is over.

Particularly, expect no reversal of the power accumulated by the Commander in Chief in foreign affairs, since it was granted by bipartisan decisions during the past. The US has some 800 foreign military bases and 10 carrier battle groups (US bases in motion!) the president, the Pentagon, and Congress consider US territory not to be surrendered to anybody, including the few peace makers in Congress!

These newsletters show circumstantially the steady increase of presidential power, particularly in foreign policy (accelerating during wars, which have become permanent). In foreign affairs particularly the acceptance of the President as Commander-in-Chief will continue to move the country toward totalitarian rule.

OMNI
Presidents' Day NEWSLETTER #1. April 5, 2015.
U. S. CONGRESS, the MONEY/CORPORATE/CONGRESSIONAL/MEDIA
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2015/04/congress-newsletter-1.html

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Rise of Presidential Power as Congress Declines
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FINE-TUNING TREATY POWER: Theodore Roosevelt and George Bush and their Congresses
International Commitments in an Era of Unilateral Presidential Power
A Comparison of the Treaties and Executive Agreements Negotiated by the Administrations of George W. Bush and Theodore Roosevelt by Brandon C. Prins Texas Tech University & Bryan W. Marshall Miami University


Treaty-making involves the constitutional struggle for policy control. Both Congress and the president are defined as official actors in the making of international commitments, and both closely guard their constitutionally defined roles. Yet extant scholarship generally concludes Congress rarely matters in establishing U.S. formal commitments abroad. Indeed, it is frequently pointed out that only 21 treaties have been voted down by the U.S. Senate in its 230 year existence. While true, such a figure presents an incomplete picture of congressional influence. Presidents may covet greater institutional capacity to direct unilaterally U.S. foreign policy, but opposition in both the House and Senate frequently reins in an uncompromising White House. In this paper we compare the international commitments made by Presidents George W. Bush (2001-2004) and Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909). We find the Senate’s role in influencing and/or altering treaties has been under-estimated in most analyses. While the Senate rarely rejects a treaty negotiated by the president with a recorded floor vote, the Senate can and does attach amendments and reservations to treaties that affect U.S. obligations and responsibilities. More importantly, though, and even less recognized are treaties killed by the Senate through inaction. At least 21 treaties during Roosevelt’s administration were rejected by the Senate, none of them by a formal floor vote. By ignoring Senate influence before an official floor vote risks under-estimating the influence the Senate has on U.S. commitments abroad. This paper also explores the domestic political authority under which presidents negotiate international agreements. Most scholars conclude that international agreements signal unilateral presidential power. Yet, many are negotiated pursuant to congressional statutes or previously ratified treaties. In both cases, Congress maintains influence over the process.

Woodrow Wilson, the Presidency, and WWI
Hold Your Labels
BY H.W. BRANDS, BLOOMBERG NEWS. February 3, 2011 at 3:28 a.m.

The man who tried to save the world from tyranny is now being excoriated as a liberal fascist by the likes of Glenn Beck, Jonah Goldberg, and other conservatives. This story is only available from the archives. Click here to contact the online desk. Editorial, Pages 14 on 02/03/2011. Part of the article explains the increase of presidential/administrative power during WWI and during wars in general.

Dick Cheney Vice President of the United States under George W. Bush championed "unitary executive" to expand power

Cheney concentrated on efforts to strengthen and expand the powers of the
presidency--and his own great influence within the George W. Bush administration. As described in Barton Gellman's account of the Cheney vice presidency, "Angler," he not only deftly maneuvered the vice presidential nomination for himself but went on to shape the office of the vice presidency into an unprecedented power center in its own right. Cheney championed the theory of the "unitary executive," holding that the Constitution bestowed total power upon the president as commander in chief of the armed forces in wartime. In the process, he embraced and stoutly defended administration legal positions justifying extreme practices in foreign and domestic intelligence surveillance that dismayed civil liberties defenders. Joe Biden labeled Cheney as the most dangerous vice president in the history of the Republic.

Source: A Life of Trial & Redemption, by Jules Witcover, p.402, Oct 5, 2010

From Truman to Obama

Interv. Democracy Now (7-2-10).

Regardless of the president or party, the basic edifice of the U.S. National Security State (NSS) has remained unchanged: 1) a worldwide military presence; 2) armed forces not for defense but for dominance; and 3) intervention in other nations from influencing elections to military invasion (over 40 since 1945 according to William Blum in Killing Hope and Rogue State). From Harry Truman to Barack Obama, these 3 principles have remained sacrosanct. The result has been over 60 years of war. What is most extraordinary is that the consensus has existed so long despite a record of recurring failure the consequences of which have been disastrous to the U.S. and to the world. A new national security policy is possible--that rejects militarism and foreign aggression and their enormous waste of lives and resources without producing “national security,” and that embraces a policy of helping humans in the U.S. and then abroad. Bacevich does not discuss climate change, but its certain global disruptions reinforce his arguments for seeking a new National Security before anarchy commences. -- Dick.

From Publishers Weekly

U.S. Army colonel turned academic, Bacevich (The Limits of Power Main Library JK271 .B24 2008) offers an unsparing, cogent, and important critique of assumptions guiding American military policy. These central tenets, the "Washington rules"--such as the belief that the world order depends on America maintaining a massive military capable of rapid and forceful interventions anywhere in the world--have dominated national security policy since the start of the cold war and have condemned the U.S. to "insolvency and perpetual war." Despite such disasters as America's defeat in Vietnam and the Cuban missile crisis, the self-perpetuating
policy is so entrenched that no president or influential critic has been able to alter it. Bacevich argues that while the Washington rules found their most pernicious expression in the Bush doctrine of preventive war, Barack Obama's expansion of the Afghan War is also cause for pessimism: "We should be grateful to him for making at least one thing unmistakably clear: to imagine that Washington will ever tolerate second thoughts about the Washington rules is to engage in willful self-deception. Washington itself has too much to lose."

Also see his The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War in UAF's Mullins Annex.

**Nuclear Weapons and Presidential Power**


Gary Wills begins his provocative account of the atomic bomb's impact on the republic with a high-detonation assertion. *"The Bomb," he writes, "altered our subsequent history down to its deepest constitutional roots," redefining the presidency in ways that the Constitution does not intend. "It fostered an anxiety of continuing crisis, so that society was pervasively militarized. It redefined the government as a National Security State, with an apparatus of secrecy and executive control. It redefined Congress, as an executor of the executive."*

*Book review: 'Bomb Power' by Garry Wills*

From Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Garry Wills, a groundbreaking examination of how the atomic bomb profoundly altered the nature of American democracy and has left us in a state of war alert ever since.

In *Bomb Power*, Garry Wills reveals how the atomic bomb transformed our nation down to its deepest constitutional roots-by dramatically increasing the power of the modern presidency and redefining the government as a national security state-in ways still felt today. A masterful reckoning from one of America's preeminent historians, *Bomb Power* draws a direct line from the Manhattan Project to the usurpations of George W. Bush.

The invention of the atomic bomb was a triumph of official secrecy and military discipline—the project was covertly funded at the behest of the
president and, despite its massive scale, never discovered by Congress or the press. This concealment was perhaps to be expected in wartime, but Wills persuasively argues that the Manhattan Project then became a model for the covert operations and overt authority that have defined the presidency in the nuclear era. The wartime emergency put in place during World War II extended into the Cold War and finally the war on terror, leaving us in a state of continuous war alert for sixty-eight years and counting.

The bomb forever changed the institution of the presidency since only the president controls "the button" and, by extension, the fate of the world. Wills underscores how radical a break this was from the division of powers established by our founding fathers and how it in turn has enfeebled Congress and the courts. The bomb also placed new emphasis on the president's military role, creating a cult around the commander in chief. The tendency of modern presidents to flaunt military airs, Wills points out, is entirely a post-
bomb phenomenon. Finally, the Manhattan Project inspired the vast secretive apparatus of the national security state, including intelligence agencies such as the CIA and NSA, which remain largely unaccountable to Congress and the American people.

Wills recounts how, following World War II, presidential power increased decade by decade until reaching its stunning apogee with the Bush administration. Both provocative and illuminating, Bomb Power casts the history of the postwar period in a new light and sounds an alarm about the continued threat to our Constitution.

State Secrecy Privilege

The Supreme Court upheld in United States v. Reynolds (1953) a new precedent, allowing the executive branch to assert an all-encompassing “state secret privilege” as a basis for withholding information from public scrutiny.

See Fisher’s books in Mullins.
PRESIDENTS’ SECRET GOVERNMENT and WARS

Fred Branfman. *The US Indo-China War and Rise of Presidential Power under Secrecy and the Guise of National Security*

Fred Branfman, one of the nation’s leading experts on U.S. Executive Branch Secret War since revealing the U.S. Secret War in Laos to the world in 1969, will be speaking in Tulsa at the Tulsa Community College on March 4, 2014 at 11 A.M.. and at the University of Tulsa, Chapman Lecture Hall at 7 p.m. on March 5.

"Americans need to understand the phenomenon of 'U.S. Executive Secret War' both because it is becoming the dominant mode of U.S. warmaking abroad, and our Executive Secret Government is coming home in the form of surveillance and a variety of other activities which create the potential for a domestic police state," he stated.

Branfman is the author of "*Presidential War in Laos: 1964-70*" and compiled *Voices From the Plain of Jars: Life Under An Air War*, recently reissued by the University of Wisconsin Press. It is the only book to emerge from the Indochina War written by the peasants who comprised 95% of the population, suffered most, but were heard from least. His work has appeared in *The New York Times, Washington Post, Harper's, The New Republic, Nation*, and many other publications.

Most recently he has published over 20 articles on the Executive Branch's "National Counterterrorism Strategy" throughout the Muslim World, and Executive surveillance and other police activities in the United States.

"Although the U.S. Executive justifies its warmaking by claiming it does so to enhance national security, it has in fact weakened U.S. national security as never before. As a result of its drone and ground assassination strategy its foes have vastly gained in strength, most seriously in nuclear-armed Pakistan where U.S. policy has strengthened our enemies, weakened our allies and, according to the former U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson, made it far more likely that nuclear materials will fall into U.S. foes' hands.

"The U.S. Executive Branch, without informing let alone obtaining the consent of Congress or the American people, dropped 2 million tons of bombs on Laos, as much as was dropped on all of Europe and the Pacific in WWII. But it still lost, just as it is losing in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the Muslim world after wasting $4 trillion that could have been used to create jobs at home," he stated. And the human cost -- over 20 million civilians killed, wounded and made homeless by the U.S. Executive in Iraq and Indochina alone -- has been staggering."
COMPETITION FROM THE PENTAGON: MILITARIZATION DURING AFGHAN AND IRAQ WARS

Jonathan Stevenson. “ Owned by the Army: Has the President Lost Control of His Generals?” Harper’s Magazine (May 2011). A quick history of the growing power of the Pentagon, presidents’ struggles with high officers, and the extraordinary power of General Petraeus: the “compromise of civilian control….the logical outcome of a national policy based on endless war.” The disaster to our democracy by the ascendency of military power has resulted in “a civilian leadership increasingly likely to internalize military priorities and attitudes.” [Stevenson’s defense of a civilian president’s control of the military seems undermined by his own argument.] --Dick

OBAMA and Drones


Publisher’s Summary:

FROM THE “DEVASTATINGLY EFFECTIVE” (ANDREW BACEVICH) CHRONICLER OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, A SCATHING NEW ASSESSMENT OF THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY AND U.S. GLOBAL POWER

Thomas E. Donilon, the national security advisor, remarked that what surprised him the most about Obama in office was: “He’s a president who is quite comfortable with the use of force on behalf of the United States.” —FROM KILLING MACHINE

With Obama’s election to the presidency in 2008, many believed the United States had entered a new era: Obama came into office with high expectations that he would end the war in Iraq and initiate a new foreign policy that would reestablish American values and the United States’ leadership role in the world.

In this shattering new assessment, historian Lloyd C. Gardner argues that, despite cosmetic changes, Obama has simply built on the expanding power base of presidential power that reaches back across decades and through multiple administrations. The new president ended the “enhanced interrogation” policy of the Bush administration but did not abandon the concept of preemption. Obama withdrew from Iraq but has institutionalized drone warfare—including the White House’s central role in selecting targets. What has come into view, Gardner argues, is the new face of American presidential power: high-tech, secretive, global, and lethal.
Killing Machine skillfully narrates the drawdown in Iraq, the counterinsurgency warfare in Afghanistan, the rise of the use of drones, and targeted assassinations from al-Awlaki to Bin Laden—drawing from the words of key players in these actions as well as their major public critics. With unparalleled historical perspective, Gardner’s book is the new touchstone for understanding not only the Obama administration but the American presidency itself.

Praise for Killing Machine:

“Gardner delivers an engrossing blow-by-blow account of a decade of fierce debates and painful events that offer excruciating parallels with the Vietnam War.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY (STARRED REVIEW)

Lloyd C. Gardner is Professor Emeritus of History at Rutgers University and the author or editor of more than a dozen books, including The Long Road to Baghdad and Three Kings (both from The New Press).

(Feeble) RESISTANCE 2014

Global Network [globalnet@mindspring.com]


February 12, 2014, 03:53 pm

Lawmakers want to see the ‘black budget’

By Julian Hattem

Dozens of House lawmakers want the Obama administration to release the secret “black budget” used to fund intelligence agencies.

A bipartisan group of 62 members of Congress wrote President Obama a letter on Wednesday asking him to release the fiscal 2015 spending levels for 16 federal spy agencies when he delivers the rest of his budget to Congress on March 4.
“The current practice of providing no specificity whatsoever regarding the overall budget requests for each intelligence agency falls woefully short of basic accountability requirements,” the legislators wrote.

“As you develop your fiscal year 2015 budget, we strongly urge you to take a simple step toward much needed transparency by including the total amount requested for each of the sixteen intelligence agencies. We believe the top line number for each agency should be made public, with no risk to national security, for comparative purposes across all federal government agencies.”

Wednesday’s request was led by Reps. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.), who last month introduced the Intelligence Budget Transparency Act. The bill would require the administration to release basic details about the spy agencies’ budgets.

The federal government has disclosed the overall amount of money spent to fund the intelligence community since 2007, but has kept classified more specific details about the individual budgets of agencies like the CIA, FBI and National Security Agency (NSA).

Documents released by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden last year showed that the CIA has grown to eat up about 28 percent of the $52.6 billion spent in 2013. The $14.7 billion it received was about 50 percent more than the NSA’s funding.

The White House did not immediately respond to an inquiry from The Hill about the lawmakers’ request.

Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space
PO Box 652
Brunswick, ME 04011
(207) 443-9502
globalnet@mindspring.com
www.space4peace.org
http://space4peace.blogspot.com/ (blog)

A Little More Grit from the House 2020

thanks and contribution to Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., who sponsored the measure repealing the 2002 war authorization. “It is time to end giving blank checks to any president to wage endless wars.” House Republican #2 Rep. Scalise denounced the bill, for restricting the president’s “ability to protect our nation.” The bill was not expected to pass the Republican-controlled Senate or President Trump’s veto.

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http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2013/02/presidents-day-newsletter-1.html

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Wills: Presidential Bomb Power

Conason: It Is Happening

Mayer: War on Terror = War on US

Scheer: “Defense” (= War) Hawks and 9-11

Daniel Ellsberg, Interview: Presidential Unconstitutional Abuse of War Power

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Separation of Powers, umkc.edu/faculty/projects

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California AG

*The Progressive Magazine*

ACLU

WWW

AFSC

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**CONTEXTS**

President Trump, Congress, and the Wall

Fram, Lucey, and Miller, AP Summary of Present Situation


Balance of Powers Failing: History of Weakening Congress

Mann, Thomas and Norman Ornstein. *The Broken Branch: How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track*

Presidential Power Increasing

Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency*

Crenson, Matthew and Benjamin Ginsberg. *Presidential Power: Unchecked & Unbalanced.*

Congress’s National Emergency Act

Todd Miller, *Storming the Wall*
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