

## The Role of the President in the Politics of Disclosure - Part I: The Decline of the Executive

Written by Stephen Bassett  
Thursday, 04 May 2000 06:00 -

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One of the most important political trends in the second half of the 20th Century is the weakening of the American presidency - important because of its role in the intricate, constitutionally structured checks and balance system mentioned in the first column in this series. (See The Role of the People in the Politics of Disclosure.)

The principal targets of this counter force are the congress and the military. The judiciary is rarely in polarity with the executive largely because top judges are appointed by the president and each party knows they will get their turn. Abuse of influence would only result in retribution at a later time. It is worth noting here that the power and prestige of the Supreme Court has remained in tact during the decline of the executive office.

Congressional hyperventilation and malfeasance are restrained by the presidential veto forcing a two-thirds vote to override. This check is well known to the public. The check on the military rests in two principal areas. First, the president was installed as the Commander in Chief atop the chain of command. Second, the president can bring power to bear quickly utilizing executive orders, nationalizing the guards, etc. These checks are less understood by the general public and often questioned. Nevertheless they are essential to the thwarting of a military coup or draconian act by a rogue officer, an event virtually unheard of in the United States yet commonplace elsewhere throughout the world.

As the presidency has declined in power, prestige and public esteem, its relationship to congress has been modestly affected. It is the balance between it and the military, and by extension the intelligence agencies, that has been warped to the threshold of danger. It is at this point the politics of UFOs/disclosure comes into play. But first, why the decline?

The temptation has always been to lay the weakening of the American executive off on the flaws in the character of certain modern presidents. This misses the mark. The overwhelming influence has been the rise of a comprehensive, even ubiquitous, news media. Intense coverage of any national leader to ever deeper levels of the personal breeds contempt. (This principle has worked in spectacular fashion as regards the British monarchy.)

Very large books have been written about this media effect. Let's sum them all up – the President of United States lives with news media. The White House is the home office of the first family. A significant portion of the west wing of that home office has been converted into a

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press facility. Hundreds of correspondents, photographers and video technicians come and go every day. They operate, with benefit of tolerance and courtesy, in a beehive atmosphere in which dozens of tiny cubicles are crammed into little space, some of which once held the pool water. They are literally working in the deep end.

Want to get away? Out on the White House lawn are permanent camera platforms set up for correspondents to give commentary with the White House as background. Plans to move the media to new facilities outside the White House grounds with a secure, underground connection to the press offices have been floated. Not surprisingly, the press is reluctant to give up such extraordinary access.

To this author's knowledge no other leader in any country anywhere in the world lives with the press operating permanently within the residence/office itself. In order to truly appreciate this setup, you have to be there – it's quite amazing.

The great irony is that all of this access to the executive has reduced the power and influence of the office and made the access all that less valuable. As the scrutiny grows, substantive press conferences become scarce. We seem to learn more and more about less and less.

Presidents have become just another character in a soap opera, stand up comedians delivering expected shtick at roasts, press dinners and talk show appearances. We want them to have the power to launch civilization-ending war but tell us their underwear preference on demand.

There is now a fundamental rule in American life that operates with increasing consistency – when any aspect of our society is not working to our satisfaction, we demand television and movies in which it does work to our satisfaction. Crime on the rise and punishment/justice problematic? – TV and movie screens fill with police dramas with desirable outcomes. The presidency is losing influence and respect? – movies and programs about the office pour forth.

When one part of the larger system loses power, another gains. This power didn't go to the judiciary or legislature, it flowed to the military/intelligence complex. The mechanism of this transference – secrecy.

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Open, accountable government became vaudeville in the case of the executive. While the presidents and vice presidents (and for that matter the candidates) were coming under ever increasing scrutiny, the military/intelligence complex slipped behind the secrecy curtain, dropped off the oversight radars, and merged into the background. Its programs and agendas were not going to be picked apart by the press, its member's private lives untouched, its actions unjudged, and its victims unknown.

If the military/intelligence complex does not give up this power, the executive branch must take it back. This will be difficult without substantial media and citizen support, and there are important governing limitations.

First and foremost, we do not have whistle-blowing presidents. Huh? Presidents do not leave office and blow the whistle on people, agencies and programs. If they did, they would be a legal activist gold mine. Writing as a strong proponent of open government and secrecy reform, it is still not hard to endorse this practice. If a president acted in such a fashion, the consequences would be grave. Access to information for future presidents would be substantially impacted – the office would lose even more power and become little but a figurehead.

Consequently, if presidents are faced with a major internal reform issue, they have to address it while they are in office. The UFO/ET cover-up fully qualifies as a major internal issue, but a sitting president takes that one on at extreme risk to short term political capital, future electability and to the party.

But, an issue of such magnitude is exactly the kind of measure that would pull power back from the military/intelligence complex to the executive. It may be the only lever big enough to do the job.

Which brings forward the obvious question, which of the two remaining candidates for President of the United States with legitimate prospects of winning, will be more or less likely to take on the UFO/ET cover-up, the decline of presidential power, and secrecy reform – Bush or Gore.

Next week:

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The Role of the President in the Politics of Disclosure  
Part II: The Case for and against Bush

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