

The Foreign Policy of the Clinton Administration: Chief Architect or General Contractor?

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When formulating foreign policy presidents have to decide just what their approach should be. For example, should the president serve as a chief architect in formulating foreign policy? A lot depends upon the time within which the administration is serving and the various issues of the day. For example, President Truman found himself confronted with a new world after World War II. He seized the initiative and along with his advisors formulated the foreign policy of Containment of Communism based upon economic (the Marshall Plan) and military (Mutual Assured Destruction) foundations.

Other presidents may function as general contractors. They have an idea or mission for American foreign policy and they take the initiative with gusto but they move in synch with other allies who they have contracted for a specific purpose. In other words, there is a deal for acting in consort. The Gulf War in the first Bush Administration would fit this pattern. Other nations were contracted to participate or pay for parts of this war in the grandest coalition of forces since World War II.

Still other presidents have been reluctant home re-modelers. These presidents are content to work within the framework of a previous chief architect type of president perhaps changing the carpeting or painting a few walls. This is akin to adding their nuances to the established foreign policy. President Eisenhower may have engaged in this type of behavior.

These various metaphors are not necessarily exclusive to certain presidential administrations. In fact many administrations can adopt various elements of these metaphors. For example a single administration can evolve from say a reluctant home re-modeler metaphor to a general contractor metaphor or even a chief architect metaphor. Evolution along these lines depends upon the original agenda of the president and any subsequent changes in this agenda due to events, political circumstances, original intentions, presidential power conceptions, political difficulties, education and presidential outlook. In short presidencies are in flux.

We are proposing to assess the foreign policy of the William Jefferson Clinton Administration along the lines of this metaphor. We envision the article to be an overview of President Clinton's foreign policy. As such it will incorporate many of the foreign policy topics listed in the "call for papers."

We have just published a special issue of White House Studies which incorporates this theme although it is not specifically applied to the Clinton Administration. Work on the metaphor is already done and the application to the Clinton Administration will proceed throughout the fall.