

CHAPTER 1

THE GATHERING STORM

A STORM IS gathering, threatening the celebrations that will surround the inauguration of the President-elect on January 20, 2009. Already, we have begun to see the erosion of America's strategic and financial freedom, the hollowing of its military, and the faltering of its ability to create and lead meaningful alliances. Worse may yet come. The President will inherit a polarized nation and a host of profound challenges at home and abroad. The clouds have been forming for many years; the rain has begun. But deluge is not inevitable. This is no natural storm; it is a creation of man—and man has the power to ward it off. The time for action is now.

When the new President takes office, he or she will face the task of running a country that is the strongest in the world, but, paradoxically, a vulnerable one. There is much good news. We have high productivity, low inflation, and strong economic growth. We produce almost one third of global economic output and own 40 percent of global stock market capitalization. Eighteen of the top twenty universities worldwide are on American soil, and we have led a worldwide

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information revolution. We remain a country of promise and opportunity to people throughout the world. We are a nation of resilient and optimistic people who have come from every corner of the globe. We have faced great adversity before, and we have prevailed.

Yet, the challenges today are daunting. The war in Iraq is only the most obvious—and the most pressing—issue that will face the new President. He or she will assume command of an unfinished mission in Afghanistan and Iraq, a bellicose Iran intent on acquiring nuclear weapons, and restive populations from Cairo to Kashmir. Russia and China—though not formally our enemies—continue to assert their independence from American might. Some say that America has lost its ability to bring out the better natures of people across the world. That is not all. With Islamic fundamentalism on the rise, the threat of another devastating terrorist attack on our homeland remains high. Battered but not beaten in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda has regrouped in the mountains of northwest Pakistan.¹

At home, the financial security of the next generation is imperiled by our addiction to debt, easy credit, the likely insolvency of Social Security, and runaway healthcare costs, which afflicts all citizens and drives many businesses overseas. Politicians in both parties remain timid in the face of these potential catastrophes.* We are overly dependent on foreign oil, and face the long-term challenge of costly adaptations to climate change. Globalization and the information revolution have

* Only the current Comptroller General, David M. Walker, fully sounds the alarm. With his fifteen-year appointment, his comprehensive knowledge, and clear-eyed view of economic trends, he has been a Cassandra about the looming crises in retirement and healthcare, and deserves to be heard. In the same vein is Peter Peterson's national best-seller, *Running on Empty: How the Democratic and Republican Parties are Bankrupting our Future and What Americans Can Do about It* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004).

proven to be double-edged swords, benefiting American commerce, but also pushing American jobs overseas and spawning a protectionist backlash. Our nation's technological preeminence is jeopardized, not by the advances of other nations, but by the failings of our educational system and threats to our research and innovation capabilities. A recent poll has found that over 70 percent of the population believes the country is headed in the wrong direction, and approval ratings for the President and the Congress, at the time of this writing, do not break 30 percent.

If we observe the nation confronting these threats, we find a population increasingly divided along partisan lines. The redrawing of Congressional districts has partitioned America into solid red and blue blocs. Wedge issues distract us from more pressing dangers and opportunities. Increasingly, media outlets cater to the self-defined Right and Left, insulating both groups from ideas that would challenge their complacent assumptions. The motto Benjamin Franklin gave us, *E Pluribus Unum*, "out of many, one," doesn't ring quite as true today as it has in our finer hours. If the nation remains as divided as it is today, the new President, regardless of his or her personal courage, intelligence, or charisma, will face the specter of national decline. America needs a "uniter," not just a "decider," before it is too late.

Of course, talk is cheap. Most Presidents have proclaimed the need for unity, civility, and cooperation. In reality, each has struggled to balance the sometimes conflicting roles of Commander-in-Chief, Chief Executive of the nation, and party leader. But between the familiar extremes of high-minded rhetoric and political

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horse-trading, some Presidents have succeeded in rallying the parties and the nation at crucial points in our history, while others have failed. Too often, Presidents seem ignorant of those who came before them—of the lessons learned, struggles faced, and victories achieved.

In this book, we will make the White House walls talk. We will begin with a survey of instructive tragedies and triumphs of Presidential history. What emerges is a broadly coherent list of the qualities of character and leadership that have allowed Presidents to unite the nation and bring it to new heights. Moving deeper into the links between Presidential past and future, in the second part of this book we will look at the models of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, our two greatest war leaders. Exploring how they led the nation in times of crisis, we will outline a strategy for leading the nation through a struggle against terrorism during a global age in which America's preeminence is increasingly questioned.

Sustaining Success

In 1987, the English historian Paul Kennedy wrote a widely discussed book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*.² He pointedly took his lead from Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.³ The book sparked a spirited debate about whether the United States was dissipating its domestic strength by overcommitting its resources abroad. Kennedy's book was hardly the first to argue that overextended powers face certain decline. Thucydides, nearly 2,500 years before, wrote of how Alcibiades led Athenian forces to military disaster in faraway Sicily during the Peloponnesian Wars, and so precipitated the decline of Athens and the rise of its rival Sparta.⁴

Kennedy's book offered a warning, but it was premature. In the buoyant 1980s, we Americans felt on top of the world.

The fall of the Soviet Union and an economic boom in the 1990s contributed to this sense of American triumph. Foreign interventions—a brilliantly successful Persian Gulf War under President George H. W. Bush, and two NATO-fought Balkan interventions during the Clinton presidency—were coupled with financial surpluses at home.

Today, the picture is different. Along with our persistent trade and budget deficits, America spends over \$12 billion a month on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even if troops are withdrawn from Iraq soon, our financial commitment to those countries will remain staggeringly large. Our military forces are overextended and vulnerable. Shiite Iran is on the rise across the region. A viable peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians remains an unfinished requirement. On our Pacific flank, rising powers could soon herald the Asian century. Reflecting this, Asia is making great strides in education, while our K-12 system continues to fail unacceptably large numbers of students. Global climate change poses a challenge of enormous magnitude, and its costs will be enduring. Paul Kennedy's warning came two decades too early. The next President may arrive in office at the tipping point of American power and influence.

The Lessons of History

Our leaders are fallible, subject to error and hubris, but also capable of great triumphs. Their examples furnish lessons for the next President. Mark Twain observed that "history doesn't repeat itself, but it can rhyme." What will the next President's rhymes be?

This country has survived civil war, two world wars, a protracted nuclear standoff in which the very existence of civilization was threatened, terrorist attacks, and several Presidential assassinations. It has undergone a veritable transformation in

its conception of rights and suffrage, moving from a narrowly defined citizenry to the most diverse and assimilated populace on earth. Its history has not always been noble—it is marked by racism, sexism, abuses of power, and periods of mercenary consumerism, which have threatened the shared values that have made this nation a beacon of freedom and opportunity. But in these darker hours, our best leaders have provided a light. They have done so by drawing upon the American experience, and appealing to our best selves in trying to unify the nation to accomplish these challenges.

When Abraham Lincoln took office, the fate of the nation looked grim. Jefferson Davis had been inaugurated as President of the Confederate States of America two weeks earlier. War pitting brother against brother was at hand. But Lincoln, the green “prairie lawyer” and one-term Congressman, did not flinch. In his stirring First Inaugural, he greeted the prospect of a ruptured union with a combination of remorse and resolve, and with the conviction that his mission—and the mission of this nation—had a moral cast. “The mystic chords of memory,” he said, “stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”⁵

The mystic chords of memory—it was an appeal to history, as much as to the future. The appeal was more than rhetorical. Lincoln, though regarded as provincial and inexperienced when he took office, understood the powerful lessons offered in the history he had studied, for the country he loved. Above all, he knew from history that if he could not prevent a divided union, he must at least lead a

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united North. Indeed, Lincoln's strategy for winning the Civil War involved first uniting the North while dividing the South. By blockading Southern ports and gaining control of the Mississippi River the Confederacy was split in two.

Circumstances are different today than they were 200 years ago, or even 20, but principles of Presidential leadership remain the same. Daunting challenges at home and abroad amount to a crisis as grave as almost any the nation has faced before. But the nation's history offers a rich store of lessons, which any incoming President would be remiss to ignore.

The Center for the Study of the Presidency (CSP) seeks to identify and apply historic lessons to guide the future Presidency in practical ways. Our mission is neither political nor ideological; rather, we seek to preserve and elucidate—for Presidents, their staffs, members of Congress, incumbents, and candidates—the historical memory of Presidential triumphs and tragedies. We believe this counsel must be broader, deeper, and longer range than the advice of policy experts and political consultants who, through no fault of their own, are often distracted by the consuming and corrosive culture of the “permanent campaign.”

In 1999, when it was reestablished and reorganized in Washington, CSP published a series of seventy-six case studies in Presidential history. This earlier book examined the successes and failures of the modern Presidency and was made available to both Presidential candidates prior to the 2000 election and the transition.⁶

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The Center examined all interventions and reconstructions since President Dwight Eisenhower's decision not to intervene in the 1954 Indo-China crisis.^{7*} The Center's report on *Comprehensive Strategic Reform* called for reorganizing and strengthening the entire national security process in order to better anticipate and prepare for contingencies. Another report examined how science and technology should be reorganized to foster greater innovation and national competitiveness.⁸ Around the same time, the United States Commission on National Security released the Hart-Rudman Report, a broad look at strategies for addressing likely political, social, economic, and environmental changes over the next twenty-five years.

This book draws on these and other publications, including *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, the nation's premier journal on the American Presidency, which is edited by forty leading Presidential historians. I will also draw occasionally on my own experiences, particularly in the field of Executive-Legislative relations and from my time leading the CSP and the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

In the coming months, the Center will also supplement the findings and recommendations in this book with focus group discussions, involving leading thinkers and policymakers from in and outside of Washington, on subject areas such as repairing damaged geopolitical relations, rebuilding the military, K-12 education, the Social Security and Medicare crises, runaway healthcare costs, and the need to accelerate investments in science and medicine.

*When CSP provided incoming President George W. Bush's staff with this report, we were told that the new Administration would not be intervening or involved in the kind of "nation-building" seen under the Clinton Administration. September 11 changed these priorities dramatically.

A final note. As someone who came to Washington for graduate work in 1957 but was subsequently in the public policy field in and out of government, writing this book has often been a sensitive task. Many sections deal with still-living individuals and at times cut across past and current friendships. But if this book were not loyal, first and foremost, to the next President and the future success of that office, the effort would lose its integrity. The judgments in this document, of course, are my responsibility alone and not those of the Center as an institution.

For the next President, I would certainly offer the advice Benjamin Franklin gave when he urged his fellow delegates at Philadelphia to ratify the Constitution: "I cannot help expressing a wish that every member of the convention who may still have objections to [the Constitution] would, with me on this occasion doubt a little of his own infallibility. . . ."9 I have certainly doubted my own, on more than one occasion, in preparing this perhaps overly ambitious document.

A House without Memory

For every Administration, on Inauguration Day, the clock of history is reset. The White House has no archives in residence, and the desk drawers are cleaned out for the new Administration. New Presidents are often eager to throw off history and start afresh, rebuilding government and the nation according to promises made on the campaign trail. The White House has always lacked a meaningful institutional memory. I learned this firsthand. In early January 1987, as then-NATO Ambassador, I was suddenly summoned to the White House by President Ronald Reagan to serve for three months as his Special Counselor on the Iran-Contra affair.

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My duties were to report directly to the President, help coordinate the investigations, and restore integrity to the White House. At the same time, President Reagan had also set up an investigative board, led by Senators John Tower and Edmund Muskie and General Brent Scowcroft, to conduct a two-month review of what had gone wrong with the National Security Council process, and to recommend to the President corrective action.

I had something to contribute to their reexamination: a highly relevant past. In the mid-1970s, I spent two years on a blue ribbon Presidential commission chaired by Ambassador Robert Murphy and including Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. The commission focused on, among other things, improving the process of decision-making in the National Security Council, as well as Executive-Legislative branch relations. When the report was delivered to President Gerald R. Ford, I received a letter from him saying how valuable this study would be to future Presidents. In January of 1987, my copy of the report was in storage, so I asked the White House staff for this esteemed Murphy Commission Report. The following day, the word came back: "Don't have it. In fact, never heard of it."

I also wanted to research another relevant Presidential crisis—President John F. Kennedy's role in the Bay of Pigs debacle and how Kennedy rebounded from his dramatic setback. Again, the White House replied they had "no record." Presidents and their staffs *should* have a record of the past. At the very least, it should be accessible, thorough, yet not overly detailed, and not far from their desks. We hope that this book, to some extent, fulfills all of these criteria.