

# VITAL SPEECHES

OF THE DAY

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# Vital Speeches of the Day

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VOL. LXVIII

FEBRUARY 15, 2002

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## Great War Leaders

### LINCOLN AND ROOSEVELT, OVER BUSH'S SHOULDER

Address by DAVID M. ABSHIRE, *President, Center for the Study of the Presidency*  
*Delivered to the Metropolitan Club of Washington, Washington, D.C., January 30, 2002*

We heard the State of the Union last night from a determined President with the approval of 84% of the country. But now, as a Presidential war leader, George W. Bush must walk in the towering shadows of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt. The nation-defining war that the United States now confronts is in some ways not unlike the struggles that illuminated the Lincoln and Roosevelt legacies. With Bush, it all began with an attack on American soil, not at Fort Sumter or Pearl Harbor, but at the World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan and the Pentagon in Washington.

That sense of a nation fighting an attack on its heart and soul sets this war apart from Polk's Mexican War, McKinley's Spanish-American War, Wilson's World War I, Truman & Eisenhower's Korean War, Kennedy's, Johnson's, and Nixon's Vietnam War, George H.W. Bush's Gulf War, or Clinton's Kosovo War. Those wars were "over there," distant, and limited. This one is here, now, among us.

What characteristics were key to the ultimate success of Lincoln and Roosevelt? How does George W. Bush measure up, and which characteristics of these two great war Presidents can best guide him in the dark months and years ahead? Most difficult, we may yet again wage war with Iraq, and there will no doubt be more terrorist actions on our homeland.

I have chosen six characteristics by which to judge all three wartime Presidents.

The first quality of Lincoln and Roosevelt emerged as soon as the nation was attacked: A decisive response, which built public confidence and strategic direction. No sooner had the very green President, the "prairie lawyer" Abraham Lincoln been inaugurated, than the Confederates demanded the evacuation of Fort Sumter, the "Gibraltar" of Charleston Harbor. Given the Union garrison at Sumter, Lincoln was under pressure to yield in order to avoid a war. In the face of staunch opposition from General Winfield Scott, Secretary of State Seward, and some others in his Cabinet, he made the decision to hold and re-supply the fort before food ran out. When the Confederates forced its surrender, the very next day, Lin-

coln called for the states to supply 75,000 militiamen. He thus decisively galvanized and mobilized the North.

Franklin Roosevelt made a terrible tactical mistake in overruling Admiral Richardson by leaving the fleet at Pearl Harbor, calculating that it would deter a Japanese attack rather than serve as a target for one. After the withering tactical defeat, however, Roosevelt used his dramatic "date that will live in infamy" speech to the Congress to rally an angry nation to the cause.

As for George W. Bush, terrorist strikes against Americans had hung on the horizon for years like smoke from a distant cannon. The World Trade Center was bombed in 1993; the Khobar Towers bombed in Saudi Arabia in 1996; the U.S. embassies in East Africa bombed in 1998; the USS Cole bombed in the summer of 2000. An al-Qaeda intercept about "Hiroshima in America" even foreshadowed the tragic events of September 11, 2001. In fact, a major commission issued a warning about just such escalating terrorist threats in 2000, even calling for the creation of a Homeland Defense Czar.

Despite the warnings, the attacks of September 11 came in a way no expert envisioned. While zig-zagging back to the White House to face the crisis, Bush, with a drawn look, spoke to the nation from an air base in Louisiana. Though stumbling over a word or two he emphatically concluded: "The resolve of our great nation is being tested. But make no mistake: We will show the world that we will pass this test." A stunned and angry nation agreed.

The second great test involves maintaining unity, and this demands good timing and coalition building. In an effort to hold the wavering border states and northern Democrats, Lincoln initially declared preservation of the union as his war goal, not the abolition of slavery. Many criticized the President as hypocritical, immoral, and turning against his own historic "house divided" speech, but his was an important tactical concession to maintain initial unity of effort. President Lincoln saw that this was going to be a long war, with many ups and downs, and it was critical in the early stages to cement the coalition of northern states-where Democrats were opposed to a war against slavery-and to hold the border states.

After the Union victory at Antietam in 1862, Lincoln correctly judged the time was right to broaden the goals of the war. In January 1863, he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. In Europe, this gave him the high moral ground over the confederacy, enabled him to recruit black troops, stirred slaves in the South, and provided much needed motivation for a final push to victory. In essence, he created a new holy war. For with the stroke of a pen, he had completed the second American Revolution.

Similarly, President Franklin Roosevelt used masterful timing to maintain unity. He was far ahead of the nation in recognizing the threat from Hitler and involved himself in both covert and overt efforts to aid the British to survive. Truly, he saved Britain. He also had called together, even before Pearl Harbor, a unity cabinet by appointing two experienced Republicans, Stimson and Knox, to head the War and Navy Departments, and used his past Presidential opponent, Wendell Willkie, as a messenger to Churchill. Roosevelt put it, he moved from "Dr. New Deal" to "Dr. Win the War." Later, he even replaced Henry Wallace, the liberal symbol of the New Deal, with Harry Truman, the war hawk, as his Vice President. As a war leader, FDR knew that the national interest had to trump party interests.

Gaining public support for an uncertain war is never easy, and doubly hard for some. Lincoln came to the Presidency with just under 40% of the popular vote; George W. Bush came to the Presidency without a majority and in the shadow of a disputed election not matched since those of 1824 and 1876. Apart from his tax cut victory, the President encountered a series of difficulties at home and abroad early on, with the economy in decline and his party's unnecessary loss of the Senate majority through a political fumble.

With the disastrous attacks of September 11, there were pressures for immediate retaliatory strikes on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan as President Clinton had done, but in a much more massive way. This risked being indiscriminate, however, and could have played into Osama bin Laden's hands, resulting in a broader Islamic jihad against the United States. Bush recognized that in this new kind of war against worldwide terrorist networks the use of military force was only one arrow in the quiver. The Afghan Northern Alliance needed to be reinvigorated as a partner on the ground. Coalitions needed to be built with Pakistan crucial as a military and intelligence base, and for attacking al-Qaeda's financial networks. Agile and stealthy force had to be carefully deployed only after the President fashioned this grand strategy.

On the night of the attack, the President publicly announced the Bush Doctrine: "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those

who harbor them." He developed an unusually supportive relationship with Russia's Putin, which even withstood his announcement of the U.S. intention to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. Understanding that a critical goal would be avoiding the specter of a war between the West and Islam, Bush very quickly visited a Washington mosque and argued that Osama bin Laden had hijacked a great religion. He praised Muslim Americans and avoided repetition of anti-Japanese American-type antagonisms and actions at the beginning of World War II. The president also reached out with a deft combination of pressure and diplomacy to Islamic countries as partners in the anti-terror coalition. He recognized that a priority on coalitions was essential, even when elements of it might compromise some moral principles as had Roosevelt's alliance with Stalin and Lincoln's initially placing the Union above the elimination of slavery.

Bush also went to Capitol Hill and, following a historic speech, embraced the Democratic Senate Majority Leader and the Democratic House Minority Leader.

As we move into 2002, George W. Bush's challenge will be to maintain this unity, to become like "Dr. Win the War," even while some forces to the right and left in both parties press for a return to their special agendas under pressure of a mixed economy and fast-approaching elections.

Bush's long war poses major challenges on three separate fronts: the global fight overseas, the battle for homeland security, and the problem of reviving an economy that bin Laden drove further into a recessionary swoon, adding to an ominously distressed global economy. Given Bush's early troubles with a disputed election and a lost senate majority, he will have to maintain national and political unity as the fundamental principle of a winning strategy. Disunity will be viewed by our friends and foes alike as a sign of weakness and lack of national resolve, which crippled this country over Vietnam.

The third great test of presidential leadership reveals itself in the contest for hearts and minds, both at home and abroad. It should be remembered that Lincoln's public speaking voice left much to be desired. However, he possessed an unparalleled ability not matched since Shakespeare to both capture the times and speak beyond those times, i.e. "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." In 1863, he wrote personal letters which on purpose became public as part of his own continuing battle for hearts and minds.

Roosevelt mastered the dominant technology of his day, the radio, with fireside chats, and he selected his words like a craftsman of the first order. Moreover, his finger

was on the pulse of the nation. Roosevelt also had a flare for institutional creativity, and he established under Elmer Davis in 1942, the Office of War Information, a forerunner of Eisenhower's U.S. Information Agency in the Cold War.

During the campaign, neither George W. Bush nor Al Gore distinguished himself as a communicator. Yet following September 11th, we saw President Bush gain a quiet determination that began to radiate outward. With plain speak about capturing Osama dead or alive, in his daily statements and, finally, during his first press conference, this young physically fit President earned the respect of the journalists and the American public. Bush grew into a true commander-in-chief, aided by Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld — all of whom had been there before.

What Bush has been late in doing, however, is to institutionally reorganize and coordinate his information campaign, both internally and worldwide. The abolishment of USIA two years earlier by the Congress was a terrible mistake. He must seek a new formulation to draw on the best minds and talents in America to communicate this country's ideals and purpose. The message is that we are a nation of immigrants, religious, but of diverse faiths, with toleration and civility, at least most of the time.

Institutionally, there must be a public or private institution for a new dialogue with the Muslim world. I believe there must be a new Cabinet level official who can marshal the information revolution and is the overall strategist for this creative effort, overarching a range of departments.

The fourth great test of a war president is his command of strategy, not to be confused with tactics or logistics. Lincoln came to office with virtually no military experience other than as a captain in the Black Hawk War, during which he never fired a shot. After the brilliant Robert E. Lee turned down the command of the Union Army, the Union suffered a series of defeats due to second-rate generals. In frustration, Lincoln took from the Library of Congress Clausewitz's *On War*, as well as books on Napoleonic campaigns, which had the objective of decisively defeating the opponent in battle, not just taking cities as General McClellan wanted to do. In time, Lincoln became the best Northern strategist of the war, along with Grant.

Furthermore, Lincoln had a brilliant sense of strategic priorities. When altercations on the high seas arose with the British and members of his cabinet pushed for war against Britain, Lincoln silenced them with this statement: "One war at a time."

Like Lincoln, Roosevelt possessed impeccable timing and a clear ordering of priorities. Unlike Lincoln, he studied war as a teenager, reading Admiral Mahan's great work on naval power, and served as assistant secretary of

the Navy in World War I. Unlike Lincoln, he was able to surround himself with outstanding military leaders as incompetent older ones were quickly pushed aside. George Marshall, who had openly disagreed with Roosevelt in their first meeting, was named chief of staff. Roosevelt clearly decided it was better to be second-guessed than assuaged by a "yes" man.

George W. Bush, like Lincoln, had scant exposure to war before being thrust into the role of commander-in-chief. Bush served in the National Guard as a fighter pilot. Like FDR, who had a role model in his Republican cousin Theodore Roosevelt, George W. had as a model his father, a war hero and successful Gulf War leader.

Like Lincoln, Bush initially resisted advice to simultaneously engage a second enemy, Saddam Hussein. "One war at a time," as Lincoln said. If Bush's war is truly against terrorism, and especially against those who manufacture terrorist weapons of mass destruction, then Saddam Hussein must be brought down by one form of power or another, and this will be Bush's greatest test of coalition building and military and economic strategy.

The fifth characteristic of Lincoln and Roosevelt as successful war Presidents is their ability to fully mobilize the resources of the home front. Lincoln not only called up 75,000 militiamen, he turned the railway system of the North into an instrument of war. He himself took a keen interest in technological developments and met with inventors.

Roosevelt was similarly confronted with conflicts and disorganization on the domestic front, from economic policy to mobilization requirements. He responded by persuading a former Senator, Supreme Court Justice James Byrnes, to become his overall economic czar. Byrnes oversaw price controls while a captain of American industry supervised war production. As to Byrnes' authority, Roosevelt said: "Your decision is my decision and there is no appeal."

Even before the war, Roosevelt had created the National Defense Research Committee under that outstanding scientist-engineer, Vannevar Bush. The Committee borrowed from the British researchers and furthered the development of radar, the proximity fuse, anti-submarine technologies, as well as the atomic bomb, through the Manhattan Project. Nazi Grand Admiral Doenitz later said that his U-boat campaign was rendered ineffective through the application of our superior science.

George Bush's call to mobilize against terrorism at home involves the coordination of 40 agencies and departments involved in Homeland Security, complicated by the oversight of some 40 committees and subcommittees in Capitol Hill. Here, he has not been yet able to do so well. Here, he and Governor Ridge should take a leaf from

Roosevelt's book to refocus and synergize such scientific entities today as the National Academy of Sciences, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Defense Advance Research Projects Agency, the Defense Department's Research and Engineering, the Food and Drug Administration, and the national laboratories. In co-partnership, the private sector must be mobilized through the great research universities of America, relevant American corporations, the nationwide nursing corps and public health specialists. We are throwing more people at the airport security problem, but more science and technology must be applied, for example, in dealing with bioterrorism or seaborne traffic where 90% of incoming cargo is still not inspected.

To develop maximum creativity, the President should convene a public and private sector summit followed by an address to the nation on the role of science, technology, and medicine in the war against terrorism.

The sixth characteristic of Lincoln and Roosevelt was their articulation of a vision of a lasting peace and a reconstructed nation and world. Lincoln, in his second Inaugural Address, laid out his vision of reconstruction, and laid the plans for the North and South to be reconciled, and the 13th Amendment. Roosevelt obtained the agreement of 26 nations to a limited United Nations Declaration. In July 1944, at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, he convened the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, which created the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to rebuild a war-torn world.

To successfully prosecute the worldwide war against terrorism, Bush must offer a higher post-war vision. New institutions may be needed. Certainly, a broad reconstruction for the Middle East will be in order, and an encouragement of tolerance and modernization in the Islamic world as was prevalent in the 12th century. New burden sharing will be required among allies and coalition partners, as well as creative initiatives by the public and private sector. New breakthroughs in science and medicine can reinforce these initiatives.

James MacGregor Burns, in his classic book on leadership, notes two kinds of Presidents: transformational ones, as were Lincoln and Roosevelt, and transactional or mana-

gerial ones. For Bush, merely exercising good management skills will not produce true victory. Had Lincoln or Roosevelt been managerial Presidents, in the first case, the nation would have remained a permanently divided nation, and in the second case, Hitler would have won Europe. As a transformational leader, Bush has the opportunity to pursue — and achieve — extraordinary historical changes at home and abroad.

The transformational opportunities are truly staggering. Furthermore, we now have the political push, not only to move forward with Rumsfeld's transformation of the Pentagon, but also our entire National Security cluster of departments and agencies to be more creative in developing a new world order. While old alliances have been strengthened, new alignments among antagonist have already taken place, and better understanding among the world's three great religious groups can emerge. New opportunities for conflict settlements can be fashioned, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At home, a new civility between the President and the Congressional leaders may lie within their grasp, and even more so a new civility and sympathy among peoples facing catastrophic losses. In his Inaugural, Bush intoned: "Civility is not a tactic or a sentiment. It is a determined choice of trust over cynicism, of community over chaos." Civility does not mean we always agree, but does encompass how we handle our disagreements. Already, everyday men and women have faced unusual tragic circumstances and risen to the occasion: and a new kindness has already emerged.

Rough and possibly divisive times may lie ahead, and certainly George W. Bush has not completed all of his tests. Yet, America and its great wartime leaders have negotiated the valleys and have risen to new heights and achieved great national import. Their words speak to George W. Bush. Roosevelt: "Lives of nations are determined not by count of years, but of the lifetime of the human spirit." And Lincoln: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present." He also told us: "The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew... Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history." Neither can George Walker Bush.

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