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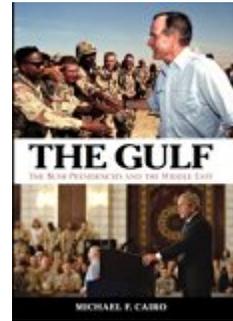
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Michael F. Cairo. *The Gulf: The Bush Presidencies and the Middle East*. Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy and Peace Series. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012. 232 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-3672-1.

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Michael F. Cairo's slender volume, *The Gulf: The Bush Presidencies and the Middle East*, provides a clever juxtaposition of the two Bush presidencies. The "Gulf," as he notes, refers not only to the region of the world in which the two presidents faced their most important foreign policy tests, but also to the yawning chasm between their personalities, worldviews, and policies. After a review of the formative life experiences of each president, Cairo explores the impact of their different worldviews through three key junctures in each administration: the decision to go to war with Iraq, the ending of that war, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Cairo's ultimate goal is to argue that, in contrast to many institutional or rational-analytic theories of foreign policymaking, presidential beliefs and personality matter a great deal. To this end, there could hardly be a more provocative test of this than to be able to study a father and son, separated only by eight years in the White House, both of whom went to war with Iraq.

At the heart of Cairo's explanation of the two presidents' approaches to the Gulf is his assessment of their foreign policy logics. Cairo argues that George H. W. Bush is best described as an "enlightened realist," one who relied on a pragmatic rather than ideological approach to foreign affairs, as well as one who was tempered by experience (p. 4). Moreover, as a realist, George H. W. was cautious about the limits of U.S. foreign policy and its ability to affect geopolitical outcomes via regime change. In contrast, Cairo argues that George W. Bush best fits what he calls a "cowboy liberal," exhibiting an ideological rigidity that encouraged certainty rather than compromise and led to a strong preference for unilateral foreign policy in pursuit of a messianic vision of the U.S.

role in the world (ibid.). In contrast with his father, these views led George W. to adopt regime change as the central component of his strategy toward Iraq.

The central contribution of Cairo's volume is his rigorous exploration of how the two presidents' beliefs and worldviews produced different results in the three case study chapters. For those familiar with the history of these episodes, none of the material or arguments will be new. Much of the case study chapters take the form of Cairo contrasting George W. Bush's Manichean response to 9/11 and his unilateral instincts with the elder Bush's flexibility and pragmatism. The juxtaposition of the two approaches to the region and to waging war, however, serves to underline just how different from his father George W. Bush was and how radical a departure the 2003 war was from conventional U.S. practice.

In his concluding chapter, Cairo offers what he believes are generalizable observations about the importance of presidential personality and worldview. His first conclusion is that some presidential worldviews are better suited to foreign policymaking than others. The senior Bush's enlightened realism, he argues, delivered better results than the younger Bush's cowboy liberalism. The second conclusion is that experience matters; more is better as experience helps to temper ideological zeal and extreme views. Finally, Cairo argues that multilateralism is a better approach than unilateralism in foreign policy.

Cairo argues that, on the one hand, it was George H. W. Bush's flexibility and the ability to work with other nations that allowed him to succeed in building a functional coalition and generate global support for a success-

ful war in 1990-91. On the other hand, Cairo sees the younger Bush's ideological inflexibility as a central driver behind the decision to launch an unnecessary war with a poorly conceived exit strategy. Making things worse was George W.'s lack of experience, which enabled his advisors with more extreme views (Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, e.g.) to dominate debate within the White House with negative consequences. George W.'s unilateral and U.S.-first worldview also contributed, in Cairo's view, to the lack of international support for the war.

Hard-core realists, of course, will object in the typical fashion to Cairo's efforts: the international system, not domestic politics and policy processes, help explain the lion's share of important actions taken by states. I believe, in contrast, that Cairo is correct to challenge this perspective and right in arguing that presidential worldviews matter to foreign policymaking. The trick, however, is making the case in a way that convinces not only those who already believe that individuals matter, but also realists and other doubters. And on this score, many readers will have at least one of three problems with Cairo's argument. First, for those who believe that the second Iraq War was a necessary one that delivered tangible benefits, the conclusion about presidential worldviews will ring hollow at best. Additionally, George W. Bush frequently talked about how 9/11 changed things and made it impossible for the White House to pursue the conventional realist-approved practice of containment. Thus, rather than looking at George W.'s approach to the Iraq War as evidence of ideological inflexibility, one can argue that it instead reflected a great deal of adaptation to the new strategic environment.

Second, even for those who agree that the Gulf War was a more successful policy than the Iraq War, it seems a stretch to conclude that a particular worldview was the main cause of the outcomes. Cairo argues that "much of the difference between the policy and the conduct of the two wars can be attributed to the worldviews of George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush; the outcomes in each war were more than a matter of process" (p. 146). But again, many reasonable observers might argue that the outcomes differed dramatically primarily because the tasks that each president faced were entirely different.

The senior Bush faced a situation in which pushing to Baghdad would have been a very difficult proposition to sell internationally. As a result, taking the safer political road also led to a much easier and easier-to-support policy. George W. Bush, in contrast, had to fight a war that would end in regime change—a task that no president, regardless of worldview, has ever managed to accomplish in a reasonable manner.

Finally, as with all qualitative studies, we must be careful before generalizing too widely from Cairo's cases. Not only is it a stretch to conclude from a study of two presidents that worldview matters or that a particular worldview produces certain outcomes, but it is also a stretch to argue that George H. W. Bush's foreign policies were always wise or effective ones. In particular, Cairo's focus on the Gulf region elides a critical foreign policy case from the senior Bush's resume—namely, the invasion of Panama. Cairo expresses due admiration for Bush's handling of the Gulf War—his multilateral ethos, his judicious and cautious approach to the scope of the war, his determination to get UN and congressional support, etc. The Panama case, however, exhibits almost the complete opposite indicators on every score. In going after General Manuel Noriega, George H. W. scorned international law, purposely kept both the Congress and the U.S. public in the dark, and applied an overzealous use of military force to solve a "problem" that was even less necessary to solve than the one his son later manufactured in Iraq. In short, the Panama invasion does not fit well with Cairo's assessment of the impact of presidential worldview on Bush senior's foreign policymaking.

These challenges, however, are not meant to detract from the project, merely to note that this work, like any work, will produce debate. And in sum, I would certainly recommend Cairo's book for undergraduate and graduate courses in history and political science and for those seeking an introduction to either president's efforts in the Middle East. And though it is ultimately limited by its clever but somewhat arbitrary focus on the two Bushes, Cairo's work also provides a thought-provoking analysis that will be cited by many scholars seeking to advance the study of the making of U.S. foreign policy.

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