

# Foreign Policy Marathon: The Emergent Role of Foreign Policy in the Political Career of George H. W. Bush (1971–1989)

*Maratón de política exterior: el papel destacado de la política exterior en la carrera política de George H. W. Bush (1971-1989)*

EBRAHIM DARYAEE MOTLAGH\*

Fecha de recepción: 10/08/2023 Fecha de aceptación: 24/09/2023

*The present article reviews the emergent role of foreign policy in the political career of George H. W. Bush, one of the most influential political figures in the second half of the 20th century. More specifically, the focus of this review is Bush's steady presence in government service and his unique perspective on foreign policy. Since an attempt of this kind has been the goal of previous research, the present article builds on the existing literature with an emphasis on the role of foreign policy in a political trajectory which later came to the fore during his presidency. This review focuses on four administrations and the areas of global change from the time of Bush's entry into world politics up to his successful presidential campaign. In doing so, the study pursues the emergent role of foreign policy within Bush's lifelong pursuit with references to Cold War foreign policy examples. The article demonstrates how this role was subject to individual circumstances, global imperatives and each administration's unique approach to world affairs.*

**Keywords:** *foreign policy, presidency, George H. W. Bush, United States, Cold War.*

El presente artículo repasa el papel destacado de la política exterior en la carrera política de George H. W. Bush, una de las figuras políticas más influyentes de la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Concretamente, esta revisión se centra en la presencia constante de Bush al servicio del gobierno y en su singular perspectiva de la política exterior. Dado que un intento de este tipo ha sido el objetivo de investigaciones anteriores, el presente artículo se basa en la literatura existente haciendo hincapié en el papel de la política exterior en una trayectoria política, que más tarde pasó a primer plano durante su presidencia. Esta revisión se centra en cuatro administraciones y en las áreas de cambio global desde la entrada de Bush en la política mundial hasta su exitosa campaña presidencial. Al hacerlo, el estudio indaga en el papel ascendente de la política exterior dentro de la trayectoria vital de Bush con referencias a ejemplos de política exterior durante la Guerra Fría. El artículo demuestra cómo este papel estuvo sujeto a las circunstancias individuales, a los imperativos globales y al singular enfoque de cada administración sobre los asuntos mundiales.

**Palabras clave:** política exterior, presidencia, George H. W. Bush, Estados Unidos, Guerra Fría.

\* Shahid Beheshti University

<https://doi.org/10.46530/cf.vi36/cnfnns.n36.p72-92>

## INTRODUCTION

George Herbert Walker Bush is generally considered a foreign policy president. His presidency was mainly driven by a number of massive political developments and geopolitical shifts occurring within a short timeline. These momentous events were the reunification of Germany, the end of Apartheid in South Africa, the demise of Cold War, the invasion of Panama, the Gulf War and trade agreements such as NAFTA. However, given the significance of these events, the aim of this study is to review the emergent role of foreign policy in Bush's political career before he became the 41st President of the United States in 1989.

In what follows, this author will argue that this role evolved in an interactive process during many years of government service. To this end, the study employs a chronological and analytical method to examine change, continuity and emerging patterns in Bush's foreign policy career before his presidency. In terms of its underlying theory, the study approaches the subject's foreign policy career with an emphasis on three common levels of analysis in political science, which anticipated political participation early in the Cold War era. These levels are divided into three categories, which are the individual, state and international system. This framework of analysis had its roots in Kenneth Waltz's (1959) classic work entitled *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* and subsequently originated from David Singer's (1961) study of problems in the levels of analysis in international relations. Both authors endeavored to approach the models of political behavior in their own era and highlighted the role of individual circumstances, global imperatives and each state's approach to world affairs. Following this level of analysis, the present study primarily uses the timeline of events and records to examine the development of the subject's foreign policy experience as an individual or political actor. Additionally, the review places this individual focus within the context of US foreign policy and the larger context of Cold War international system. As some theoreticians have discussed, the shared feature in this analysis is the concept of power, aspirations and struggle at individual, state and global levels. Conceptually, the aspiration for power comprises the core of the individual level of analysis whereas power struggles among state actors constitute the state and systemic level of evaluation (see, for more discussion, Nau, 2019).

A great deal of research has focused on Bush's role in foreign policy, but much of this undertaking seems to have considered a distinct aspect of his approach to world affairs. For example, compared to Reagan's vision-based approach, what is seen in Bush's approach is some form of enlightened pragmatism and careful management of the above-mentioned massive events (Greene, pp. 50, 90). In the meantime, some analysts

emphasize the unprecedented nature of the world from 1988 to 1991, and praise the achievements of his administration. For example, Roger Harrison concludes in his review of the administration's foreign policy that "none of this was preordained, and much might have gone wrong without the adept diplomacy and level-headed policy of President Bush and his aides" (Harrison, 2015, p. 144).

While there is still room for dispute over possible foreign policy scenarios and how the Bush administration could act differently, Harrison is not alone in admiring the diplomatic stretch of the Bush administration. In fact, David Rothkopf has given more credit to the administration's foreign policy performance in *The Inside Story of the National Security Council* (2009), indicating that no president or government has been more "thoughtful and well-managed" (p. 261) in American contemporary history in the face of global transformations. In the historiography of this era, the dissolution of the Soviet Union is the most prominent factor in the assessment of Bush's maneuver in diplomatic policy. His interaction with Mikhail Gorbachev is seen positively in the evaluations of some foreign policy experts such as Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbot (1993, pp. 470-472) who published yet another "inside story" of the end of Cold War. With these evaluations, it is small wonder that George Bush has been often called a foreign policy president. To be sure, within the context of these events, his administration's ability to cope with world crises was gravely tested. However, it is difficult to examine the complex dimensions of Bush's foreign policy without a review of his political marathon and the development of his unique worldview.

George Bush began his political career in the early sixties in the state of Texas. The press reports that published party politics in those years show that his potential was well understood early on. For example, the New York Times introduced him as "the Republicans' best prospect in Texas" due to his "personal qualities" among other things (Meacham, 2015, p. 133). Bush was elected to the House of Representatives in 1966. In terms of domestic politics, these years showed a major shift in the status of the Democratic and Republican parties in southern states, including Texas, where political debates about the civil rights movement and racial and gender discrimination had peaked. With regard to foreign policy, what preoccupied the Americans more than anything else were the growing involvement in Vietnam and Cold War rivalries. However, Bush's entry into foreign policy began in 1971 when the Nixon administration appointed him as the US ambassador to the United Nations. The mission to the UN triggered a lifelong exposure to international cases. These cases show an emergent role of foreign policy in George Bush's political career, which was largely driven by personal ambitions in the context of global events and each administration's strategies towards international affairs.

## THE UN JOB: "TREMENDOUSLY EXCITING CHALLENGE"

In the '60s, Bush was able to prove himself as an effective figure in the Republican Party. His endeavors, especially during his two terms in the House of Representatives, caught the attention of Richard Nixon. For practical reasons, Nixon wanted to keep Bush in the government and he made such arrangements after Bush's unsuccessful attempt to join the Senate. However, the position that the president initially intended for him was not related to foreign policy. In a collection of notes and letters entitled "All the Best", Bush recalls that in discussions with the Chief of Staff Bob Halderman and the Secretary of State William Rogers, the possibility of serving at the UN had been raised early on (Bush, 1999, p. 154). Indeed, Bush has devoted a detailed chapter called "International Waters" to this new adventure. On December 9, 1971, in a meeting held at the White House, Halderman informed Bush that he was to serve as an assistant to the president on the White House staff because it was the president's preference (Bush, 1999, p. 154). However, in another meeting that took place in the Oval Office on the same day, Bush expressed his interest in the UN job and managed to convince Nixon that his assignment as ambassador would be more useful to the administration and to the president's style and image. In short, he asserted that he "could really put forward an image there that would be very helpful to the administration" (p. 154). Bush may have been aware of Nixon's problematic attitude towards the United Nations, which had become clear a few years earlier. In July 1967, in his speech at the Bohemian Club in San Francisco, Nixon had described the United Nations (along with NATO, foreign aid and USIA) as an "old institution" that was "obsolete and inadequate". At the time, Nixon thought that these institutions were originally "set up to deal with a world of twenty years ago" (Smith and Herschler, 2003).

Additionally, this foreign policy role was challenging because Bush had little experience in world politics at that point, at least compared to his predecessor, Charles Woodruff Yost, who was a career diplomat. Bush's own words reveal that he was interested in the task because it was a "tremendously exciting challenge". On December 11th, Nixon announced his decision to send Bush to the United Nations, touching on the qualities that would make him the best man for the job including "his enormous interest in the United Nations". As will be discussed further, the main drive for Bush seems to have been a combination of challenge and opportunity within the larger context of government service. After Yost's resignation, Bush served as the permanent representative at the UN from March 1, 1971 until his removal on January 18, 1973.

Perhaps knowingly, Bush had approached an axis consisting of Nixon and two of his confidants namely Henry Kissinger and William Rogers.

These men regarded the United Nations as a public instrument in cases where the organization's decisions were in line with their secret agendas. At other times, they even viewed the UN with some contempt. In other words, the UN filled a minor role in American foreign policy. That said, during the Nixon era, the organization was a battleground for advancing some priorities, especially with regard to the question of Chinese representation and the possible expulsion of Taiwan. Records also show that the organization grappled with new challenges in the early '70s that led to repeated requests for funding and the expansion of its buildings. Therefore, in 1971, it was clear that functioning as an ambassador to the United Nations would be difficult. One can sense the president's aversion in a phone call recorded in the same year. Speaking to Kissinger, Nixon had this to say about the UN:

"Don't get too excited about the UN. We have got Bush there and he's a smart fellow and he's on our side. He is not in love with it [the UN]." (Kissinger, 1971)

In the same phone call, reflecting on the UN's request for funding, Nixon considered supporting the United Nations as "hypocrisy", something his National Security Advisor agreed with. However, in hindsight, Nixon's opinions about old institutions such as the UN and NATO, Bush's enthusiasm about the UN job and his utter loyalty to the Nixon-Kissinger axis were probably wrong. To be sure, the appointment to this post was done at Bush's own insistence (see, Meacham, 2015, pp. 153-154) and the new job allowed him to delve into foreign policy and superpower relations. On another level, the reason for Nixon's hesitation may have been Bush's lack of experience in matters related to the United Nations and the administration's differences with Charles Woodruff Yost, even though the ambassador denied such policy differences.

Yost was an independent and mostly apolitical element that was close to William Rogers. In foreign affairs, however, the closest person to the president was the National Security Advisor. Nixon's notion, and especially that of his security advisor, was that Bush "will be on their side" especially with regard to the irregularities that could arise in the State Department. But Bush's UN reports do not support this assumption. On the contrary, in a conversation about cabinet meetings, when Kissinger confided to Bush that he could go the president directly in urgent matters, Bush made it clear that he did not want to "go around" Secretary Rogers. He insisted that he could "keep a balance" in his communications with the president (Bush, 1999, p. 158). In fact, his later notes show that he gradually got closer to the Secretary of State during his role at the UN. On the other hand, the differences with the National Security Advisor grew stronger especially with regard to the China policy. In one case, Bush has clearly stated his frustration:

Because I felt caught between Rogers and Kissinger, I totally changed my mind about whether the U.N. ambassador should be a member of the President's cabinet. The answer is absolutely not. Except in rare circumstances when the President personally intervenes, the U.N. ambassador must answer to the secretary of state —as do all ambassadors— and therefore should not be on the same cabinet level as the secretary. (Bush, 1999, p. 178)

In order to understand this change, one should consider the significance of this timeline and the growing role of the United Nations in the implementation of superpower diplomacy in the '70s. Arguably, the 1971-1973 period depicts an important Cold War timeline in terms of global developments. The first year marked the Soviet-American foray into the Indian subcontinent that set the pace for Indo-Pakistani relations for decades. On August 9, 1971, the Republic of India and the Soviet Union implemented the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, partly due to the American military-financial support for Pakistan. This particular case was debated widely at the United Nations. Moreover, in the same timeline, the relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China underwent massive changes largely thanks to the Nixon administration's initiatives. At the same time, the occurrence of oil crises sent an unprecedented shock to the American society and government affecting US foreign policy towards the Middle East. In sum, global imperatives led the professional trajectory of political actors in this period and Bush's perspective on foreign policy was partly subject to this Cold War environment and his specific tasks in the government. More notably, his ambassadorship provided him with first-hand experience in foreign policy and international relations. In his writings, Bush mentions a long list of prominent Cold War diplomats whom he had met during his service. A case in point was Yakov Malik, the Soviet ambassador to the UN with whom Bush developed tense but close interactions.

This period also brought about outstanding foreign policy achievements. The US government reached a *détente* with the Soviet Union and a rapprochement with China. In calculated response to the Sino-Soviet split, Nixon's unexpected trip to China in 1972 and his summit meetings with Leonid Brezhnev set the stage for international politics. Additionally, the US-Soviet agreement on the limitation of strategic missiles improved the prospect of world peace. It is therefore conceivable that, due to his close observation of these foreign policy involvements, George Bush developed a consistent attitude towards the Soviet Union and China.

However, in 1971, two sensitive cases emerged at the international level, which highlighted the US foreign policy strategy and Bush's role as ambassador. In one case, with the introduction of Resolution 2758 on

October 25, 1971, the People's Republic of China was recognized as the only representative of China at the UN. Relation with China, which was at the forefront of international politics, was an issue that George Bush monitored closely. Having seen the pro-China atmosphere at the UN, he supported the Nixon-Kissinger China policy, but he regarded their initiatives with disfavor. The goal was to prevent the ejection of Taiwan (that is, the Republic of China) while accepting the People's Republic of China and, up to some point, the ambassador was optimistic that it was feasible. However, the votes brought this goal to a dead end. In his notes, Bush was straight in his blame assignment. He considered the timing of the trip "unfortunate" and believed that Kissinger's visit to China had undermined the US position at the UN. The following statement sums up Bush's opinion:

"I think history will show the Nixon initiative to Peking is the thing that lost the U.N. vote, although maybe there are things we should have done differently here..." (Bush, 1999, p. 176)

The year 1971 also saw the liberation of Bangladesh and the Indo-Pakistani conflict. The US government considered Pakistan an ally especially with respect to the growing role of socialist India, which Richard Nixon had called a "Soviet stooge". In his 1978 memoir, Nixon argued that "by using diplomatic signals and behind-the-scenes pressures we had been able to save West Pakistan from the imminent threat of Indian aggression and domination. We had also once again avoided a major confrontation with the Soviet Union." (Nixon, 1978, p. 530)

One may note that, despite the growing tensions with India and military aid to Pakistan, the Nixon administration did not intend to intervene militarily in the sub-continent. However, due to its close relation with Beijing, Pakistan played a key role in the secret talks between the US and China. Therefore, the administration's position at the United Nations could affect the ongoing crises. Interestingly, Bush's maneuver, his clear support of India at the General Assembly and his criticism of Yahya Khan's government in Pakistan demonstrated that he was willing to take a somewhat different position. In retrospect, Bush may have taken this independent position based on a problematic tradition in American foreign policy, according to which "the human rights question transcended domestic jurisdiction and should be freely debated" (Saunders, 2014, p. 39).

Apart from foreign policy, Bush's ambitious involvement in the Nixon administration left its mark on other areas as well. For instance, as the chair of the Republican National Committee, he gained executive experience in fundraising and candidate recruitment, built new connections and became more familiar with the internal political system. At that time, he was one of the main figures of the Republican Party who often appeared

in the media. But his deep involvement in the Nixon administration left him in an awkward position when the president's role in the Watergate scandal came to light. Bush tried very wisely to distance himself from the growing scandal. As the chair of the Republican National Committee, he called for Nixon's resignation and focused on defending the Republican Party. In general, from 1971 to 1974, his government service involved complex interpersonal connections in the context of a challenging political environment and extraordinary global developments that continued tentatively for two decades.

#### THE CHINA MISSION: "THE PLACE TO BE"

From 1974 to 1977, the Ford administration focused chiefly on maintaining and, where possible, promoting what Nixon's team had achieved internationally. Bush's foreign policy role continued in the new administration as the Chief of the U.S. Elected Liaison Office in China. Once again, George Bush showed initiative in securing a foreign policy assignment. Initially, Ford offered Bush ambassadorship to London or Paris and was surprised to learn that Bush wants the China mission. Later, Bush explained the reasoning behind this choice in the preface to his "China Diary":

My reasoning was actually quite simple: It was obvious then that Asia would rise in importance on the world scene. And it was inevitable that China would eventually become a power broker, not only in the Pacific but in the world. China was, quite simply, the place to be. (Engel, 2011, p. 1).

Presently, China seems to be in a position to act as a "power broker" following a decades-long journey into world politics. However, leading the liaison office, Bush reasoned that the US-China engagement was crucial in creating global stability within a unique historical context. He also thought that the interests of both nations had converged at least with regard to the Sino-Soviet split. Therefore, in his diary, he insisted that "China keeps wanting us to be strong, wanting us to defend Europe, wanting us to increase our defense budgets, etc." (Engel, 2011, p. 356).

Prior to this new mission, Bush's main diplomatic experience was US representation at the United Nations, but he did not need the Senate's approval to serve in the newly established office. He was to replace David Bruce who had an outstanding record in diplomacy, intelligence affairs and government service. Bruce is the only diplomat with records of service as ambassador to the UK, France, and Germany. Once again, compared to



his predecessor, Bush seemed to be at a distinct disadvantage. But as he described later in his diary, he gained firm understanding in foreign policy relations, especially US relations with China and the strategic importance of Asia in world affairs. For the same reason, some have claimed that his calculated reaction to the Tiananmen Square crackdown was influenced by his earlier experience and his faith in China's role in the stability of Asia (Engel, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2003; Skidmore and Gates, 1997; Suettinger, 2004). The student-led protests occurred in Beijing during 1989 and the administration's rather pragmatic, slow and questionable response to the Chinese government's crackdown was perhaps the darkest side of his foreign policy record at the time. However, this response came after meeting with key figures in the administration, namely James Baker and Brent Scowcroft. The administration made it clear that the US government considered the military crackdown unacceptable. In his memoirs, Bush argued that he simply "did not want to break the relationship we had worked so hard to build since 1972" (Bush, 1999, p. 89).

During his mission in China, Bush gained a deep but perhaps incomplete understanding of the political culture of the country. It can even be inferred that this understanding was somewhat influenced by the perceived image of Mao Zedong and Bush's talks with Chinese public officials. As a member of the Nixon and Ford administrations, he was fully aware of the previous efforts to establish a long-term relationship with Beijing and, later as president, he did not want a regression in that direction. Therefore, with the news of China's military crackdown spreading globally, Bush asserted that "it would be a tragedy for all if China were to pull back to its pre-1972 era of isolation and repression (Bush, 1999, p. 90)." In other words, he made it clear that economic or diplomatic relations were not going to be affected by these events. Certainly, this pragmatism can be attributed, among other things, to the emergent understanding of foreign policy that he had acquired in government service.

#### THE CIA JOB: "A GRAVEYARD FOR POLITICS"

However, the peak of Bush's struggles during Ford's presidency was in 1976 when he became the Director of Central Intelligence. The CIA's reputation had been damaged for a variety of reasons, not least the Watergate scandal. In the midst of these scandals, the president asked Bush to restore the status of the American intelligence community. Despite opposition to his appointment, he served as CIA director for a total of 355 days from 1976 to 1977. The reasons for this opposition were the Watergate scandal, Bush's support for Nixon (at least up to some point) and the fact that he had served as the chair of the Republican National Committee.

Therefore, some thought he was too partisan for the job. In fact, the Senate's investigation into the CIA's illegal activities was still underway at the time of Gerald Ford's inauguration and, for practical reasons, he had issued Executive Order 11905, the aim of which was burnishing the image of US intelligence agencies and limiting the scope of their activities, especially against American citizens.

Bush was tasked with reshuffling the agency shortly after the executive order was issued. The new job was not on the same level as his prior duties and government responsibilities. In his memoirs, Bush himself noted that this challenge overshadowed his diplomatic service:

Although I would not become director of the CIA until January, it immediately overwhelmed our lives. Everything else became almost secondary, even finishing my job in China. The CIA was awash in controversy, accused of everything from assassination plots to attempts to overthrow governments. And suddenly, I was to be in charge. (Bush, 1999, p. 258)

Unlike the previous missions at the UN and in Beijing, which he himself had enthusiastically pursued, the CIA job seemed unappealing. However, the challenge was essential if Bush were to play a more central role in the administration. Within this timeframe, the administration was under continuous attack and scrutiny coming from the public and the Congress. On the face of it, the new mission was, in Bush's own words, "a graveyard for politics". In fact, in addition to defending the faltering administration, Bush had to defend his own record to prove that he was ready for the "toughest job in the government". Some considered Bush too partisan to lead the crisis-ridden CIA. This can be inferred from a note that Bush wrote to Jack Marsh on November 7, 1975. Marsh was one of the president's main advisors and an influential figure in his administration. This is an excerpt from the note:

In talking to the Senators you can emphasize for me my total commitment to laying politics totally aside. I have done it at the UN, I have done it in China, and I recognize that it is essential to do that in the new job. It would also be fair to mention, if necessary, that in my two diplomatic jobs I have dealt extensively with the product of the CIA and have a feel for its mission. (Bush, 1999, p. 262)

One should note that, at that time, Bush's image was clearly tied to the Republican Party. In order to take over the nation's most important intelligence agency, he needed to insist that firstly he was not too partisan for this job and, secondly, he had a strong enough background

in intelligence affairs. In the first case, perhaps Bush's claim could be justified despite the fact that he had become almost a fixture in Republican administrations. But in the second case, he was supposed to take the place of William Colby who had spent his entire career in the CIA and, before that, the Office of Strategic Services. Once more, Bush did not appear as a suitable replacement given the experience and expertise of his predecessor. It seems that, to understand this appointment, one should distinguish the two men's personal qualities. Efforts to reform the CIA had begun under Colby's supervision. However, Bush was considered a compliant character, especially when compared to Colby whose fast reforms and his openness to the media and Congress were a matter of concern to the administration. In retrospect, Ford's decision was consistent with what he and other notable figures in the administration such as Henry Kissinger knew about Bush's personality. Simply put, they wanted a reformer at the CIA who would not cause extra trouble for the administration when the agency was under congressional scrutiny.

However, while defending his service record, Bush was also required to defend the performance of the agency in parallel with the general position of the administration. His appointment as the director of central intelligence was brief, during which he was not in charge of any major intelligence operations. One can assume that his new role was more political than operational (see, Meacham, 2015). Therefore, it is rather clear that Bush's mission was to restore the morale of the CIA at its worst state. Under his supervision, the US intelligence service underwent a period of transformation, focusing more on Latin American developments and defending right-wing military figures to prevent the establishment of pro-Soviet regimes in America's backyard. As the only US president to have previously headed the CIA, George Bush was able to gain further experience in foreign policy particularly regarding Latin America (see, for further discussion, Johnson, 1988). In retrospect, therefore, his experience at the helm of the agency complemented his extensive experience at the UN and in Beijing. Moreover, as a director with little experience in intelligence affairs, Bush's attitude towards the US intelligence community changed during this short period. A few years later, in his first memo to president-elect Ronald Reagan, Bush gave the following argument:

"I feel strongly that the Director of Central Intelligence should be a professional — preferably a person coming up through the ranks of CIA. This will do much to restore the confidence in the Agency and in the intelligence community that has been lacking" (Bush, 1999, p. 328).

The victory of the Democrat Jimmy Carter in the 1976 elections attested to the shortcomings of former administrations. As the director of intelligence, Bush was required to report to the president-elect. With the Democratic administration being formed, his public service ended; however, he

retained his membership in the Council on Foreign Relations. The council is primarily non-partisan and focuses on wide-ranging international issues. On February 14, 1977, Bush wrote to Bayless Manning, the first president of the council, and expressed his dismay at being removed from government service (Bush, 1999, p. 292). Nevertheless, his continuous presence in key positions in the Nixon and Ford administrations had doubled Bush's aspirations as he prepared himself for the 1980 presidential campaign.

#### VICE PRESIDENCY: "VISITING 65 FOREIGN COUNTRIES"

In his 1980 presidential campaign, George Bush failed to defeat Ronald Reagan. However, he chose Bush as his running mate even though Bush's campaign had made sharp attacks against him in the primaries. Observers noted that this was because Bush had gained considerable popularity among moderate Republicans and his presence alongside Reagan could boost their chances of defeating Jimmy Carter (Cannon 2003, 2016; Rossinow, 2015; Simpson, 1995). After their victory, George Bush served as vice president from January 20, 1981 to January 20, 1989. Upon closer inspection, Reagan's choice cannot be attributed only to Bush's strong base among a certain group of Republicans. Bush had gained valuable experience in the previous decade, most of which was related to foreign policy and international relations. As discussed above, he had served as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (1971-1973), the Chairman of the Republican National Committee (1973-1974), the Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office in China (1974-1975) and the Director of the CIA (1976-1977). Therefore, apart from Bush's status in the Republican Party, Reagan was also aware of his service record, especially in foreign relations and intelligence affairs, which compensated Reagan's lack of experience.

As vice president, Bush was noticeably cautious and avoided any clash with the White House staff. Furthermore, his well-considered actions and the role he played in the president's absence secured Reagan's complete confidence in him. This was particularly the case after the president was injured in an assassination attempt on March 30, 1981, after which Bush served as the acting president temporarily. Based on the record, Bush and Reagan managed to maintain this instrumental relationship for eight years. With respect to foreign policy, Reagan's colossal project targeted the Soviet Union. It put emphasis on the use of all military, political and economic capabilities to thwart the Communist ideology around the world. In his 1985 State of the Union Address, Reagan famously stated his doctrine:

"We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives — on every continent from Afghanistan to Nicaragua— to defy Soviet-

supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth” (Pach, 2006, p. 75).

This doctrine that enjoyed bipartisan support continued until the Bush administration decided to reduce defense spending after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. From 1981 to 1988, as the President of the Senate, Bush interacted with a wide range of lawmakers, gained more experience within the US political system and carefully monitored international developments and the administration’s approach to them. The most important of these developments was the growing contact between Reagan and the new Kremlin figure, Mikhail Gorbachev that led, among other things, to the conclusion of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty at the 1987 Washington Summit. However, the Reagan administration was not without thorns. When the Iran-Contra scandal was widely debated in the media, the vice president claimed to be unaware of it. Perhaps the Iran-Contra affair can be compared in some ways with the Watergate Scandal, which similarly put Bush in a fragile position. Nonetheless, compared to his more distant role in the Nixon administration, Bush’s position as vice president made him the subject of media debate and investigation. The most serious controversy finally came in 1992 when, as president, Bush pardoned some of Reagan’s men who were found guilty for their role in the affair. The presidential pardon once again highlighted the possibility of Bush’s involvement. Notably, Lawrence Walsh who was the well-known Iran-contra prosecutor, called this pardon an example of “deception and obstruction” on the president’s part (see, Walsh, 1997, p. 290).

This paper has thus far argued that the role of foreign policy in Bush’s political career emerged in an interactive process during years of government service in different administrations. Toward the end of this section, it is necessary to review Bush’s achievements as vice president in general and his limited but key role in foreign policy. As for domestic politics, Bush focused on two bold plans according to the priorities of the administration and perhaps through the president’s arrangements. One task was the administration’s controversial plan for deregulation which aimed at shrinking the size of the government, reducing regulations and relaxing government rules. The other task was the administration’s plan to curb drug smuggling in the so-called War on Drugs. In foreign policy, however, the attention of the Reagan administration was directed towards the Soviet bloc.

Early in his vice presidency, Bush had to undertake many foreign trips on behalf of the president. With his long record in foreign policy positions, one may infer that foreign governments and diplomats already knew George Bush. However, due to his numerous travels abroad, visiting 65 countries throughout the ‘80s, Bush also developed a reputation among the general public around the world. He met with world leaders and attended

a considerable number of funerals which, in his opinion, “often resulted in many useful bilateral meetings with the incoming leaders” (Bush, 1999, p. 343). A review of his notes and letters show that he was indeed pleased with that privilege. A case in point was the funeral of the famous Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, during which Bush met with the new leader, Yuri Andropov. In fact, the Reagan-Bush correspondence during these foreign visits can be of some historical value. For instance, although the vice president has limited authority according to the constitution, Bush’s European tour in 1983 captured the attention of many European observers and political circles in the Soviet Union to such a degree that he became the target of Soviet propaganda. In general, the Soviet news agencies described the vice president’s meetings as a disappointing failure for the US government and its European hosts. Regardless, Bush’s frequent trips to Europe occurred in the context of efforts to convince NATO allies to deploy Pershing missiles in Europe. At this time, Bush’s rationale was consistent with the long-term security visions of the administration. Later, he reflected on these European developments:

“There was a strong antinuclear movement in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, but INF (intermediate range nuclear missiles) deployment was essential to offset the Soviets’ SS-20s, already aimed at Europe. I ran into heavy protests in Germany”. (Bush, 1999, p. 351).

News archives show that the public opinion was divided over such plans and, in some cases, the vice president faced heavy protests. In hindsight, while some Western European governments were skeptical about these deployments, the administration’s efforts were ultimately successful and these tours proved to be conducive (see, for more discussion, Meacham, 2015, pp. 285-287).

On another level, the Soviet-American relations improved after 1985, particularly after the Geneva Summit. In fact, Bush met with Gorbachev as vice president and these occasions played a role in the formation of a good relationship between the two men, one that continued and evolved during Bush’s presidency. As some scholars and presidential historians such as John Robert Greene and Jon Meacham have argued, Bush had apparently reassured Gorbachev that this improved relationship would continue if he were to be elected as the next president. The same scholars also claim that Bush disagreed with Reagan on some foreign and domestic policy issues but, as the records show, he was able to align his words and actions with the foreign policy priorities of Reagan’s staff (Greene, 2015, p. 90; Meacham, 2015, pp. 315-316).

Within the context of previous discussions, the difference in Bush’s approach to the Soviet Union was rooted in three individual factors. First, unlike Reagan who seemed impulsive and insisted on the destruction of communism, Bush took a more moderate stance. His balanced attitude

towards communist counterparts can be traced back to his meetings with officials representing communist regimes, for instance, the USSR ambassador to the UN and several Chinese officials. On the other hand, his meetings with Gorbachev had led him to believe that Gorbachev was truly a reformer who was committed to international peace and stability. More importantly, as discussed earlier, Bush's experience in diplomatic affairs and foreign policy (a factor his predecessors lacked) put him in an ideal position compared to other chief executives. But in retrospect, some scholars have claimed that the scope of his contributions to US foreign policy had been gradually established in previous administrations. In other words, the scope of Bush-Reagan interaction and the vice president's emergent role in foreign policy could be anticipated based on some precedents. For example, Jack Lechelt reviewed the factors involved in Bush's "semi-institutional vice presidency" and attributed this institutional development to the growing complexity in the international affairs, the incremental but steady growth of presidential authority and, more interestingly, "the establishment of precedents between President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale" (Lechelt, 2005, pp. 85-86). Similarly, presidential historians have noted that the Carter-Mondale precedent was crucial in the development of such a role. As vice president, Walter Mondale traveled in the United States and abroad in support of Carter's domestic and foreign policies. His influence was such that he sometimes acted as an advisor to the president and was the first vice president to have an office in the White House. Interestingly, even the tradition of weekly lunches (one that is still in existence) started during the Carter-Mondale era. In this way, as some scholars have argued, Bush's approach to the vice presidency was not formed intrinsically; rather, it was partly based on the Carter-Mondale model (see, for instance, Kengor, 2000, p. 85). As stated previously in this article, Bush's political career and his emergent role in foreign policy can be viewed in the course of a trajectory established partly by contemporary precedents in the American political culture. That said, while the agency of individuals might be minimal in this process, as this paper has argued, the role of individual initiative is still complementary to this process.

#### REALIZATION OF A LIFELONG PURSUIT

During the 1988 presidential campaign, many observers speculated that George Bush would simply continue some of Reagan's foreign policies. Thanks to his experience, he did well in the debates against the Democratic nominee, Michael Dukakis, and came up with the inspiring slogan "Kinder, Gentler Nation" in his campaign. By emphasizing a stronger economy,

tax reforms and reducing urban crime, he managed to project confidence and largely succeeded in portraying his opponent as a liberal elitist who promoted ill-advised ideas. In fact, one of Bush's advantages over his rival was his strong experience in foreign policy. During the debates, Bush tried to show that his opponent was unable to navigate the nation through complex international crises.

The records show that, if elected as president, each nominee could pursue a radically different foreign policy. For example, Dukakis was outspoken in his opposition to imposing the US will on other nations, as he had opposed the invasion of Granada and the unilateral deployment of US warships in the Persian Gulf during the crisis of the '80s. In general, his position on the exercise of military power depended on multinational coalitions (see, for a thorough discussion, Gopoian, 1993; Pitney, 2019). On the other hand, as a close observer of international developments in different administrations, George Bush believed that the United States should not wait for international coalitions in the event of an international crisis, but should act immediately based on its global interests and play a leadership role by taking actions that other nations would follow. This argument shows how Bush's perspective on foreign policy emerged from roles in various administrations. For instance, the biographer, Jon Meacham, has argued that the China mission led Bush to believe that, while the United States must enhance global engagement to ensure the world's security, it must not appear "pushy" or "domineering" (Meacham, 2015, p. 181). In fact, Meacham's argument seems valid, given the abundance of statements and notes that Bush wrote about international events during his diplomatic tasks in China. However, it seems that his views on the use of military force changed while serving in the Reagan's administration. Historical examples are the unilateral acts of the government to tackle the crises in the Persian Gulf and Grenada. In fact, during Bush's presidency, the world saw this strategy first in Panama and then in the American-led coalition to liberate Kuwait in 1991. One should note that the two candidates also disagreed on the US role in South America, particularly regarding the Nicaraguan rebels, and the policy towards the South African government. In the latter case, Bush supported the Reagan administration's "constructive engagement" policy, while Dukakis openly criticized the South African government calling it a terrorist state. As far as foreign policy was concerned, the only common denominator between these two candidates was their approval of the Soviet-American treaties which aimed to limit the intermediate-range nuclear weapons. Interestingly, they were also similar in their opinions regarding Mikhail Gorbachev; they both saw Gorbachev's endeavors as an opportunity for the United States to improve bilateral relations. But even in the case of these similarities, Bush's outlooks differed in the sense that they were based on years of close



observation and interaction with Soviet officials. Dukakis's approval of such foreign policy seemed to be based primarily on principle rather than informed outlook.

Eventually, George Bush led an intensive campaign to fruition. His foreign policy team continued some of the practices of the Reagan administration. Nevertheless, these practices were somewhat different with regard to USSR, particularly in the case of pro-democracy movements in the Eastern bloc and the aforementioned international crises. While discussing these developments is beyond the scope of this study, one may note that even Bush's key foreign policy appointments display the effect of a trajectory which began in 1971. In matters related to international affairs, Bush received advice mainly from two close confidants, namely James Baker as the Secretary of State (and then White House Chief of Staff) and Brent Scowcroft, the National Security Advisor. These men had begun their government service in the early '70s and had continued to operate in the Nixon, Ford and Reagan administrations. Largely, their political careers had formed in the political environment discussed earlier in this article. This environment reacted to the global imperatives that brought change to old regimes and international affairs with an expanded utilization of diplomacy. In his inaugural address, Bush stated his understanding and expectations of world affairs at the end of this process:

I come before you and assume the Presidency at a moment rich with promise. We live in a peaceful, prosperous time, but we can make it better. For a new breeze is blowing, and a world refreshed by freedom seems reborn; for in man's heart, if not in fact, the day of the dictator is over. The totalitarian era is passing, its old ideas blown away like leaves from an ancient, lifeless tree. A new breeze is blowing, and a nation refreshed by freedom stands ready to push on. There is new ground to be broken, and new action to be taken. (Bush, January 20, 1989)

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, George H. W. Bush is often remembered as a 'foreign policy president' due to his administration's successful record in dealing with international crises. But, in retrospect, an investigation of the trajectory in which George Bush acted as an American politician may show that he was an opportunistic albeit moderate and prudent actor. In the American democracy and, especially in Bush's own words, this individual ambition is often displayed under the veneer of public service. With that in mind, the aim of this paper was to revisit the emergent role of foreign

policy in what seems to be a grueling marathon in Bush's political career before he took office as the President of the United States. In this sense, the review of political notes and records suggests that, at the outset, Bush was determined to play a role in American foreign policy. Accordingly, he secured foreign policy missions by choice and even insistence. The review also gives prominence to global strategies in the administrations of Nixon, Ford and Reagan. The 1971-1989 timeline brought about a wide range of foreign policy initiatives to tackle global changes. In response to these critical changes, Bush's perspective in foreign policy was multi-layered, driven in part by the Cold War environment and in part by the availability of opportunities in government service.

In the post-war world order, the United States began to take on a proactive role in international affairs in what is now viewed as a transition from isolationism to interventionism. George Bush's record of government service coincided with such an environment in which the status of foreign policy rose significantly in the public sphere. Therefore, as a public servant, Bush's participation in American politics and his later involvement in Foreign Service can be analyzed as the resultant of personal ambitions, the collective goals of the Republican administrations and global imperatives. As stated earlier, this model of political participation was anticipated by the level of analysis which emerged early in the Cold War era. In this sense, the above review emphasized the interaction between three categories which were the individual, state and international system. The shared feature of this level of analysis was the concept of power struggle among these categories. With respect to the above discussion, the emerging role of foreign policy in Bush's political career can lend itself to this three-level analysis due to multiple instances that highlight the increasing convergence between personal and collective trajectories in his political career. For example, in the case of China business, Bush's reasoning was quite simple. His reasoning was influenced by the general sense that "China was simply the place to be". In other words, while the decision to serve in Beijing can be analyzed as a personal choice in the subject's foreign policy career, it nonetheless calls attention to the emerging position of states in the international system. Hence, it demonstrates the interaction between the individual and the international system in a chronological order. Bush's China Diary and the existing records may show that he was not versed in oriental affairs, but Beijing appeared as the next logical destination as far as the US foreign policy was concerned. Another example that may serve this level of analysis is the CIA mission. With regard to the job at the helm of the CIA, Bush admitted that "everything else became almost secondary, even finishing my job in China" (Bush, 1999, p. 258). In retrospect, one may argue that even the U.N. ambassadorship (1971-1973) fell into the same category because it highlighted global factors that could

not be controlled by Nixon's foreign policy team. Therefore, Bush's foreign policy career also highlights the significance of individuals, alliances and states in shaping the actions of a political actor. Yet another level of analysis focused on how George Bush interacted with and benefited from the state and international system to achieve his own political ends. For instance, in all three cases, Bush replaced men whose experience and records were visibly more distinguished and relevant. Despite this, he had secured step-by-step advances in the government service by establishing himself as a prominent figure in the Republican Party. Hence, to be intelligible, perhaps this marathon should be placed in the context of individual ambitions and expediency in achieving political power. In this sense, Bush's presidency was the realization of a lifelong pursuit.

On an international scale, his presidency was of particular interest in two respects. First, the world saw extraordinary geopolitical developments during his time in the White House. Second, compared to his opponents, Bush had much more experience in government service and especially in foreign policy. Additionally, historians have often evaluated his administration positively with regard to the management of the aforementioned challenges. However, as a conclusion, the above discussions can hardly show an exceptional case. For instance, Bush's support for the Nixon-Kissinger China policy and his objection to its timing were not based on his passion for the administration. Having observed the atmosphere at the UN, the support seemed realistic. Considering the global circumstances, the policy may have appeared as a realistic rather than creative move for the administration. The same logic can be applied to further developments in that timeline. In this way, Bush's foreign policy marathon is a demonstration of three simple factors that generally affect everyone in US politics. As discussed throughout this article, these factors are personal qualities (in this case, the agent's political ambitions, pragmatism or rather opportunism), the general policies of republican administrations and the global trends that operate mostly beyond the control of political actors. Therefore, the case under study cannot be treated as exceptional in the way some biographers and scholars have suggested (see, for instance, Maynard, 2008; Sununu, 2015; Greene, 2015; Meacham, 2015). Nevertheless, in the final analysis, one may also note that the above trajectory shaped Bush's foreign policy decisions in response to extraordinary developments occurring from 1989 to 1993. A comprehensive analysis of US foreign relations during this short but hectic period should thus consider the emergent role of foreign policy in such a trajectory.

## REFERENCES

- Beschloss, M. R. and Talbott S. (1993). *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War*. Little, Brown, and Company.
- Bush, G. H. W. (1999). *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings*. Scribner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (April 20, 2004). *George H. W. Bush's Inaugural Address of January 20, 1989*. The Museum at the George Bush Presidential Library. <https://web.archive.org/web/20040420073736/http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/papers/1989/89012000.html>
- Cannon, L. (2003). *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power*. Public Affairs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2016). *Ronald Reagan: Campaigns and Elections*. Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. <https://millercenter.org/president/reagan/campaigns-and-elections>
- Engel, J. A. (2010) A Better World... but Don't Get Carried Away: The Foreign Policy of George H. W. Bush Twenty Years On. *Diplomatic History*, 34(1), pp. 25-46.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (Ed.) (2011). *The China Diary of George H. W. Bush: The Making of a Global President*. Princeton University Press.
- Gopioian, D. J. (1993). Images and Issues in the 1988 Presidential Election. *The Journal of Politics*, 55(1), 151-166.
- Greene, J. R. (2015). *The Presidency of George Bush*. University Press of Kansas.
- Harrison, R. (2015). Review of *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security*, by Bartholomew H. Sparrow. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 9(2), 142-147.
- Johnson, L. K. (1988). *A Season of Inquiry: Congress and Intelligence*. Dorsey Press.
- Kengor, P. (2000). *Wreath Layer or Policy Player?: The Vice President's Role in Foreign Affairs*. Lexington Books.
- Kissinger, H. (30 March 1971). *Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts*. National Archives and Record Administrations.
- Kurlantzick, J. (2003). The Dragon Still Has Teeth: How the West Winks at Chinese Repression. *World Policy Journal*, 20(1), 49-58.
- Lechelt, J. (2005). George H. W. Bush and the Semi-Institutional Vice Presidency. *Journal of Political Science*, 33(1), 85-122.
- Maynard, C. (2008). *Out of the shadow: George H. W. Bush and the End of the Cold War*. Texas A&M University Press.
- Meacham, J. (2015). *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush*. Random House.
- Nixon, R. M. (1978). *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. Touchstone.
- Nau, H. R. (2019). *Perspectives on International Relations: Power, Institutions and Ideas*. Sage Publications.

- Pach, C. (2006). *The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy*. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36(1), 75-88.
- Pitney, J. J. (2019). *After Reagan: Bush, Dukakis, and the 1988 Election*. University Press of Kansas.
- Rothkopf, D. (2009). *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power*. Public Affairs.
- Rossinow, D. (2015). *The Reagan Era: A History of the 1980s*. Columbia University Press.
- Saunders, H. (2014). What Really Happened in Bangladesh: Washington, Islamabad, and the Genocide in East Pakistan. *Foreign Affairs*, 93(3), 36-42.
- Singer, J. D. (1961). The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations. *World Politics*, 14(1), 77-92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009557>
- Simpson, C. (1995). *National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations: The Declassified History of U.S. Political and Military Policy, 1981-1991*. Routledge.
- Skidmore, D. and Gates, W. (1997). After Tiananmen: The Struggle Over US Policy Toward China in the Bush Administration. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 27(3), 514-39.
- Smith, L. J. and Herscheler, D. H. (2003). *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Vol. I: Foundations of Foreign Policy*. United States Government Printing Office.
- Suettinger, R. (2004). *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of US-China Relations, 1989-2000*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Sununu, J. H. (2015). *The Quiet Man: The Indispensable Presidency of George H. W. Bush*. Broadside Books.
- Waltz, K. (1959). *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. Columbia University Press.
- Walsh, L. E. (1997). *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-up*. Norton & Company.