



Dick Cheney: Lessons for the next US Presidency (book review)

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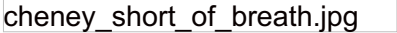
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As financial chaos engulfs the final days of the Bush/Cheney administration it is difficult to remember that this team was once seen as not only uniquely ideologically-driven, but also exceptionally powerful. Somehow they had overridden electoral mishaps, legal objections,  administrative scandal and the disdain of much of the world to bring about major acts of policy: tax cuts for the rich, withdrawal from various global agreements and, of course, the war in Iraq. 

The conventional liberal caricature of this duo is of a Presidential buffoon manipulated by cunning Cheney, the Neo-Con war monger. A new book, [Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency](#) by Washington Post journalist Barton Gellman presents a much more subtle portrait of the vice-president. In some ways it is more disturbing than the Left's idea of a evil ideologue.

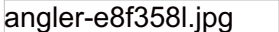
Gellman [speaks](#) at the LSE on October 27th.G

Gellman's critical but balanced study of Cheney will disappoint those who see the VP as from 'the dark side', a moniker that the VP himself embraced. It has to be said that Cheney's self-depiction as Darth Vader showed a rare moment of humour and self deprecation in a consummate politician who was generally in deadly earnest.

Gellman shows that Cheney did not always have George W Bush in the palm of his hand. He details how Cheney had profound doubts about the war. He was not an instinctive tax-cutter. He was not a neo-Con. It's just that a lot of his friends and associates were. However, there is plenty left on the charge sheet to show someone who pushed ethical and legal restraint aside in pursuit of the  'war on terror'. Cheney had walked the corridors of power for so long that the light of day did not shine upon his actions. Remember this was a man who worked in the Oval Office under President Ford as well as Bush Senior. And the lessons he drew from experience were all about expediency.

Perhaps the most interesting charge in Gellman's lucid and unpretentious narrative is that Cheney re-invented the role of the VP in a way that created an unprecedented and unaccountable powerbase in the White House. Gellman describes it as a 'shadow presidency' and a lot of unpleasant things happened in those shadows.

Even before they assumed power while the courts debated the hanging chads in 2000, Gellman shows how Cheney prepared for power – his own. When American was attacked in 2001 Cheney began planning the new world order from the White House bunker. And it is only recently that he appears to have accepted that an attack on Iran is now against even George W Bush's wishes.

American democracy only works when the checks and balances built in to the system are allowed to operate freely. Too much constitutional conflict creates log-jams and inertia. But if a major player short-circuits the due political process then the administration is prone to abuse power and make major errors. This is what Cheney's Vice-Presidency contributed to these last eight disastrous, wasted years for America and the world. Come and hear Barton Gellman [speak](#) at the LSE on Monday October 27th at 6.30pm in the beautiful  Sheikh Zayed Theatre in the New Academic Building.

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