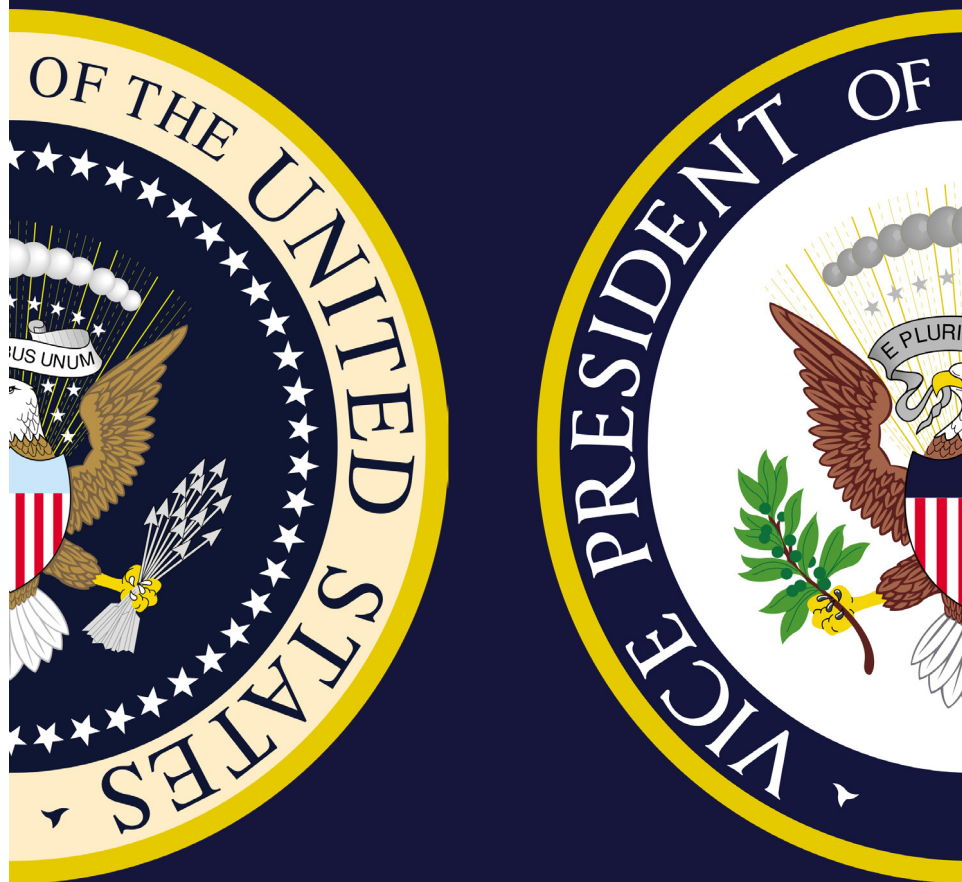


Picking the Vice President



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Introduction

Throughout history, the vice president has been a pretty forlorn character, not unlike the fictional vice president Julia Louis-Dreyfus plays in the HBO series *VEEP*. In the first episode, Vice President Selina Meyer keeps asking her secretary whether the president has called. He hasn't. She then walks into a U.S. senator's office and asks of her old colleague, "What have I been missing here?" Without looking up from her computer, the senator responds, "Power."

Until recently, vice presidents were not very interesting nor was the relationship between presidents and their vice presidents very consequential—and for good reason. Historically, vice presidents have been understudies, have often been disliked or even despised by the president they served, and have been used by political parties, derided by journalists, and ridiculed by the public. The job of vice president has been so peripheral that VPs themselves have even made fun of the office.

That's because from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the last decade of the twentieth century, most vice presidents were chosen to "balance" the ticket. The balance in question could be geographic—a northern presidential candidate like John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts picked a southerner like Lyndon B. Johnson—or it could be ideological *and* geographic—Governor Jimmy Carter, a Southern conservative, picked Walter Mondale, a Northern liberal; Senator Bob Dole picked conservative Congressman Jack Kemp to woo the tax-cutting supply-side faction of the Republican Party.

Sometimes, as with Carter and Mondale, these marriages of convenience worked. But often they did not. All too often the dynamic between the president and vice president ran the gamut from cold and distantly cordial to outright hostile. The result was vice presidents who were cut out of the action, relegated to trivial duties, or dispatched to attend funerals in

foreign countries or to take part in other, largely ceremonial roles. If balance was the criterion for selection, it all but guaranteed that the office itself would be pretty uneventful. Formerly powerful senators suffered this fate. Harry Truman became a power in the Senate by taking on profiteering by defense contractors as America got ready for World War II.¹ He gave up that key position for the vice presidency, a role in which he was kept so far out of the loop that he didn't even know about the project to build the atom bomb until President Roosevelt died and Truman became president. Lyndon Johnson, the powerful Majority Leader of the Senate, found himself suffering one slight after another at the hands of Attorney General Bobby Kennedy, kid brother of the president.

All of that changed dramatically when candidate Bill Clinton selected Senator Al Gore as his running mate and the model changed from “balance” to “partnership.” In the modern era, the office of vice president has developed its own importance and influence, beginning with Al Gore and increasing with Dick Cheney. It is not an exaggeration to say that these two probably exerted more influence on policy than all prior vice presidents combined. The partnership model has been the norm in every vice presidency since Gore's selection. Unlike the fictional Selina Meyer, Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump *did call* their VPs. They also delegated substantial power to them and treated vice-presidential projects as *presidential* projects. Recent vice presidents have reshaped the office and the expectations Americans have for the office.

What made this change possible was not so much the personal characteristics of Gore or Cheney—although they both were powerful and experienced men. As we will see, the office has been occupied by many accomplished and once powerful former governors and legislators. What changed the relationship between presidents and their vice presidents has its roots in the nomination process. Changes in the nomination process itself have diminished the importance of balance on the ticket and increased the importance of partnership.

1. See David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), chapter 7.

1

The Balancing Model

The Vice Presidency as an “Arranged Marriage”

Arranged marriages are not always all bad. Sometimes they grow into love and evolve into a relationship of warm civility kept alive by mutual concern over the children and respect for the traditions at the heart of why a couple were set up in the first place.

So too the traditional marriage between a president and his vice president. Sometimes a close and personal relationship develops between the two. But more often than not the relationship has been reminiscent of an arranged marriage—put together by political expediency. In many of those matches the relationship was cool and distant if not downright hostile.

The complexities of this relationship are evident in the very first pairing of President George Washington and John Adams, his vice president. Washington, the father of the young country, held a revered place in the politics of his day and hoped, against hope, to forestall the emergence of political parties. And yet all of the tensions that were to form the basis of the first American party system emerged during his presidency. Washington’s unique position allowed him to remain largely above the emerging fray. Adams, on the other hand, was not so lucky. One of his biographers, Page Smith, explains that Adams felt he had become a scapegoat for all of Washington’s unpopular decisions.² Although Adams attended few cabinet meetings,

2. Page Smith, *John Adams* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962).

he did carry the president's water in the Senate, where he cast twenty-nine tie-breaking votes, a record to this day.³

By the time Adams became president the first party system was taking shape. In the early days of the Republic the vice presidency went to the person with the second-highest votes for president. The Founding Generation hoped that this system would, somehow, create unity in the government and allow the new nation to avoid the "mischiefs of faction"—eighteenth-century jargon for political parties. Wise and prescient in many of their decisions, the Founding Fathers blew it when it came to this early conception of the vice presidency. As soon became apparent, democracies without political parties are a virtual impossibility. The original structure of the selection process resulted in the first of many pairs of presidents and vice presidents that worked, not together, but at cross-purposes.

When the second American president, John Adams of Massachusetts, was elected, the second-place finisher, Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, became vice president. Not only did the two men come from the two most powerful and most different states in the new country (one agrarian and slaveholding, the other commercial and nonslaveholding), they were also from different political parties—the only time in American history that has happened. Jefferson quickly defined the role of vice president as a legislative function, refusing to assist President Adams in his job. Furthermore, he was the first, but not the last, vice president who spent his time in office actively working to undermine his president and build up his own political fortunes.

Jefferson ran against President John Adams in 1800 and won. By then it was evident that having the president and vice president be from different political parties was not a very good idea. And so Congress passed the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, which provided that "The Electors shall meet in their respective states and vote by ballot for President and Vice-President . . .," meaning, in practice, that the president and vice president would form a ticket and that both men would be from the same political party.

But adoption of the Twelfth Amendment did not end hostility between presidents and their vice presidents. As political parties formed, the nomination of the presidential candidate moved from the congressional caucus to national conventions of party leaders elected in state conventions. The first national convention was held in 1831 by the Anti-Masonic party, followed by the National Republicans in 1832 and then later the Democratic Republicans in 1832. We have held national conventions to nominate presidential candidates ever since. But the dynamics of those conventions have changed greatly in the years since 1972. Unless a popular incumbent president was running for renomination, in the old days delegates arrived

3. Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2003), p. 426.

at the conventions having some idea of who the leading candidates for president were but needing days of intense bargaining before they could decide on a candidate. Multiple ballots were often needed to come to a consensus on a nominee. As part of the complex bargaining the vice-presidential candidate was the most important bargaining chip and was often chosen to placate the region of the country or the faction of the party that did not win the presidential nomination. Hence “balancing the ticket” became the dominant strategic imperative for choosing the vice president.

Not surprisingly, the balancing model continued to produce pairs of presidents and vice presidents who disliked and distrusted each other. Presidents tried, as much as possible, to ignore their vice presidents. They did not include them in the decisions of government, let alone assign them important responsibilities.

The most common balancing was geographic. According to political scientist Jody C. Baumgartner, in the years between 1804 and 1896 only five presidential tickets were not regionally balanced.⁴ Balance can be ideological as well as geographic. Geographic balance, especially between North and South, has been synonymous with ideological balance for much of American history. For instance, in the elections leading up to the Civil War, winning tickets included a southerner and a northerner. When the Whig Party convention nominated Senator William Henry Harrison from Ohio to be their presidential nominee, they looked to fill the vice-presidential slot with someone from a slave state. Thus John Tyler, a Senator from Virginia, was nominated. (Harrison died in office after only thirty-two days and Tyler became president.)

Given that the geographically balanced ticket was often also ideologically balanced, it is not surprising that when the ticket won it proved to be highly dysfunctional in government.

Perhaps one of the most disastrous balanced tickets ever was the result of Abraham Lincoln’s decision to dump his first vice president, Hannibal Hamlin, and to replace him with Andrew Johnson. Lincoln was afraid of losing the election of 1864 and thus the chance to reconstruct the Union. So instead of directing the delegates to renominate Hamlin, a former Senator from Maine who was staunchly antislavery, Lincoln, without Hamlin’s knowledge, directed the delegates to nominate Senator Andrew Johnson from Tennessee. Johnson was a supporter of slavery but the only Senator from a slave state who voted against seceding from the Union.⁵ Perhaps had Lincoln lived, the inclusion of a southerner and former Democrat in the government may have helped to create a smooth Reconstruction period. As we know from

4. Jody C. Baumgartner, *The American Vice Presidency Reconsidered* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), p. 18.

5. See David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), chapter 18.

Doris Kearns Goodwin's famous book on Lincoln, *Team of Rivals*, Lincoln believed he could manage disagreement in government.⁶

As president, Johnson proved to be a lopsided supporter of the former Confederates and a firm opponent of rights for freed slaves. His positions so enraged the Republican Party that he was impeached and missed being convicted by only one vote. Johnson was not renominated by the Republican Party nor did he win the nomination of the Democratic Party, whose positions he espoused.

An especially dysfunctional pair was formed at the turn of the century in the case of “the Hot Tamale and the Indiana Icicle”—one wit's description of the Republican presidential ticket of 1904. In order to please the Republican Party's conservative wing, which was not at all happy with the radical reformist politics of Teddy Roosevelt, that year's convention forced Senator Charles Fairbanks (R-Ind.) upon him as his running mate. Fairbanks was as different from Roosevelt as possible: He was cold and distant, in marked contrast to Roosevelt's famous ebullience; he was heir to the old-guard McKinley faction within the Republican Party, in contrast to Roosevelt's more modern aspirations for his party; and he was from the Midwest, whereas Roosevelt hailed from New York City. Roosevelt's true love was a Congressman named Robert R. Hitt of Illinois. But getting Hitt on the ticket would have meant a fight between Roosevelt and the convention bosses. In the end, the vice presidency was not significant enough for Roosevelt to fight over and he accepted Fairbanks.⁷

Hence one of many loveless matches. Fairbanks was relegated to obscurity almost immediately, perhaps because he publicly opposed many of Roosevelt's more progressive programs, such as the Square Deal. Fairbanks was so out of the loop that when Roosevelt left town important tasks were given to William Howard Taft, his Secretary of War and anointed successor. Having nothing to do in the executive branch, Fairbanks took seriously his job of presiding over the Senate, where he occupied himself by leading convoluted schemes against Roosevelt's initiatives. Like Thomas Jefferson before him, Fairbanks spent much of his vice presidency running for president—but unlike Jefferson, he did not succeed. Roosevelt threw his popularity behind Taft when his term ended. Taft beat Fairbanks at the 1908 Republican convention by a comfortable margin.

It is well known that Theodore Roosevelt's cousin, Franklin, had a less-than-passionate marriage to his wife Eleanor. So too with Franklin's first vice president, who was chosen as the result of a political deal. This “arranged” vice presidency ended up being his second loveless marriage.

6. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

7. See Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, 2001).

Speaker of the House John Nance Garner from Texas ran for president against Roosevelt in 1932. On the first ballot at the Chicago convention Nance came in third with a mere 90 votes to Roosevelt's 666 votes. But in those days, it took winning two-thirds of the votes cast at the convention to choose a nominee. In spite of Roosevelt's impressive first ballot showing, the expected stampede to Roosevelt was so slow to materialize that it caused panic among his floor leaders. Finally, after much bargaining, Texas moved to Roosevelt and the nomination was his, but at a cost—in the deal, Garner was placed on the ticket as vice president.

The convention deal was the beginning of this ultimately failed relationship. While Garner started out as a loyal member of the team, by the second term he came to disagree with just about everything Roosevelt did, especially his plans to pack the courts and his policies toward labor. Moreover, he let people know it. The official Senate history of Garner includes the following anecdote around the plans to pack the courts:

While never issuing a public statement against the bill, Garner demonstrated his disapproval with two symbolic gestures. First, he held his nose and gave an emphatic “thumbs-down” sign as the bill was introduced on the floor of the Senate. Then, during the subsequent congressional debate, Garner suddenly departed from the Capital in June to return to Texas. It was the first time he had left Washington while Congress was in session.⁸

By the end of Roosevelt's second term, Garner, like other vice presidents before him, was openly running for president, expecting that Roosevelt would abide by the then unwritten rule that presidents only serve two terms. And yet, even when Roosevelt made it clear that he would go for a third term, Garner stayed in the race. Not surprisingly, he was replaced as vice president and retired from politics in 1941 after serving two not very happy terms. Perhaps Garner's most significant contribution to the vice presidency was his famous declaration that the office was “not worth a warm bucket of piss.” (The quote has been cleaned up from time to time to read “not worth a warm bucket of spit,” but the essential meaning has lived on.)

Even when presidents themselves were publicly respectful of their vice presidents (many of whom represented a different faction of their party), the same rules didn't apply to their staffs. Kennedy's staff, especially his brother and Attorney General Robert Kennedy, was well known for their nonstop derision of Vice President Lyndon Johnson. To many on the Kennedy staff Johnson was an affront to Camelot, someone they tried to ignore as much

8. United States Senate website, “John Nance Garner, 32nd Vice President (1933–1941),” www.senate.gov/about/officers-staff/vice-president/VP_John_Garner.htm.

as possible and who they secretly referred to as Uncle Cornpone.⁹ In the White House real estate is everything and the closer to the Oval Office the better the real estate. Johnson's vice-presidential office was in the Old Executive Office building—outdoors and across the driveway from the Oval Office. In other words, it was about as far away as one can get from the Oval Office and still be in the compound. And his attempts to be read into important information in the White House were frequently rebuffed.¹⁰

In a pattern that psychologists will recognize from case histories of family abuse, where the abused child becomes an abusing parent, Lyndon Johnson, formerly the all-powerful Majority Leader of the Senate, became an abused and neutered vice president who went on to do the same to his own vice president, Hubert Humphrey. Humphrey's list of projects included a wide variety of second-class assignments, such as chairing the President's Council on Youth and Opportunity, presiding over the Council on Marine Resources and Engineering, and heading a task force on Native American opportunity, another on recreation and natural beauty, and another on promoting tourism.

When Johnson decided not to run for president again in 1968, Vietnam War protests were at their peak and Humphrey was under pressure to break with Johnson. Early on in his vice presidency he had argued in a cabinet meeting and in a subsequent private memo against the bombing of North Vietnam in response to the bombing of an American base in Pleiku. The result was that he was left out of all subsequent discussions on the topic. Johnson and his staff took their revenge on Humphrey. Johnson cut off his privileges, reduced his staff, censored his speeches, tapped his phones, and ordered his own staff not to speak to him.¹¹ Later on, Humphrey was quoted as saying: "Anyone who thinks that the vice president can take a position independent of the president of his administration simply has no knowledge of politics or government. You are his choice in a political marriage, and he expects your absolute loyalty."¹²

To his dismay, Hubert Humphrey had ended up, like so many others, a loyal vice president in an old-fashioned arranged marriage.

Given that the rule for selecting a vice president was that he be from a *different* place and/or espouse a *different* philosophy, it's almost a miracle that these relationships functioned at

9. United States Senate website, "Lyndon Baines Johnson, 37th Vice President (1961–1963)," www.senate.gov/about/officers-staff/vice-president/VP_Lyndon_Johnson.htm.

10. For a longer description of this relationship, see Jeff Shesol, *Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy and the Feud that Defined a Decade* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

11. PBS Documentary, *Hubert Humphrey: The Art of the Possible*, October 3, 2010.

12. Bill Hall, *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, July 11, 1992, editorial, p. 10A.

all. Professor Joel Goldstein writes that Walter Mondale was the nation's first modern vice president. He served with President Jimmy Carter in a relationship that was genuinely warm and respectful. In negotiating how that relationship would work, Carter and Mondale set the stage for subsequent vice presidents. According to Goldstein,

These included the West Wing Office, regular meetings with the president, the right to participate in important meetings, access to information and paper and responsiveness of personnel, placement of Mondale aides in significant White House positions and sufficient staff support.¹³

The list above is still a good description of what is minimally needed to be “in the loop,” a status that very few vice presidents before Mondale had. But while the protocols Carter and Mondale had negotiated were historic, lasting, and invaluable in reducing the tension between subsequent presidents and their vice presidents, their success as a team had more to do with the fundamental decency of these two individuals than with the conscious adoption of a different partnership model. Carter and Mondale were, after all, a classically balanced ticket: Carter, a conservative southern Democrat who worried about balancing the budget, and Mondale, a midwestern, New Deal liberal. In fact, with the possible exception of Senator John Glenn of Ohio, all of the other potential running mates Carter interviewed at his home in Georgia were traditional liberals from other parts of the country who were very much a part of the liberal Democratic establishment. While Jimmy Carter was respectful and inclusive of his vice president, it's not as if they had a lot in common. In an interview, Hamilton Jordan, Carter's chief of staff, describes just how different Jimmy Carter was from much of the rest of the Democratic Party:

Carter had a different sense of what the Democratic Party was all about. I can remember in '74 and '75 going to 88 conferences around the country. They had these God awful forums with 99.9% screaming, unrealistic, doctrine liberals. Mo [Morris] Udall and Birch Bayh would stand up and give the traditional meaning of the Democratic Party. Jimmy Carter would stand up and talk about trying to balance the budget, we've got to be Democrats and we can't forsake our traditions and our principles.¹⁴

13. Joel K. Goldstein, “The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3, September 2008, p. 379.

14. University of Virginia, Miller Center, Presidential Oral Histories, “Hamilton Jordan Oral History,” <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/hamilton-jordan-oral-history>.

The close personal relationship between the two men never really went away, but it frayed when Carter, at the insistence of his pollster Pat Caddell, gave what has become known as the “malaise speech,” and Carter’s presidency sank to new lows. Carter lost to Ronald Reagan in a landslide, as did Mondale four years later.

Mondale was followed by two Republican vice presidents, George H. W. Bush and Dan Quayle, both of whom were chosen for the purpose of balancing the ticket. In 1980, Ronald Reagan, representing the new conservative wing of the Republican Party, needed a moderate Republican on the ticket. After weeks of trying to cajole former President Gerald Ford to join him on the ticket, Reagan and Ford agreed that a “co-presidency” could not work. At the last minute Reagan turned to Bush, a moderate Republican who had run against Reagan in the primaries. Bush was a loyal vice president in a White House filled with powerful men, but the relationship between president and vice president was not a particularly close one. George and Barbara Bush were invited into the private White House quarters of the Reagans only once or twice in eight years.¹⁵

When George Bush won the 1988 Republican nomination, he chose Dan Quayle, a young Senator from Indiana, as his running mate—to the surprise of many of his advisers. Bush was attracted to Quayle’s youth (he was 45 when he was chosen). Quayle’s shortcomings as a vice president were immediately apparent. He was known as a lightweight, and that perception of him stuck (although many think it was an unfair caricature). Given Bush’s mastery of international affairs, Quayle was relegated to keeping the conservatives in Congress happy and trying to cut regulations. He was gaffe-prone and some urged Bush to replace him on the ticket in 1992, but Bush kept him on.

Thus to sum up, in the old system of arranged marriages, when vice presidents were chosen for their differences from, not their similarities to, the presidential candidate, the VPs have rarely had important roles to play. It is no wonder that Vice President John Adams’s lament has echoed down through the ages: “My country has contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived. . . . I can do neither good nor evil.”¹⁶

15. Susan Page, *The Matriarch: Barbara Bush and the Making of an American Dynasty* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2019), p. 138.

16. The White House website, “John Adams,” www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/john-adams/.

2

Breaking the Mold

From Arranged Marriages to Love Matches

When Bill Clinton called Al Gore at his home in Tennessee on July 9, 1992, asking him to join the ticket, the modern vice presidency was born. There wasn't even a whiff of balance about the Clinton-Gore ticket. Like Clinton (age 45 at the time of the Democratic National Convention), Gore was also young (age 44). Like Clinton, Gore was a southerner with an Ivy League pedigree. Like Clinton, Gore came from the more conservative wing of the Democratic Party that had recently morphed into the New Democrat movement. Some headlines from July 1992 tell the story: "Gore is a smart echo of the guy who chose him";¹⁷ "Clinton Picks Gore as Running Mate in Break with Tradition. Democrats: Arkansas governor rejects geographical balance in choosing the Tennessee senator. Strategists believe his moderate positions can help unite divided party."¹⁸

All through Clinton's long and drama-filled race for the nomination, the assumption of the political class had been that New York Governor Mario Cuomo would be chosen as his VP. Known as the "Hamlet on the Hudson" for his on-again, off-again flirtation with a presidential run, Cuomo eventually bowed out of the race, thus becoming the presumptive VP pick. The preoccupation with Cuomo was obvious—he fit the traditional bill. He was a northeasterner and an enthusiastic liberal, balancing out both Clinton's southern roots and his

17. *Hotline*, July 9, 1992.

18. David Lauter, "Clinton Picks Gore as Running Mate in Break with Tradition," *Los Angeles Times*, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-07-10-mn-1845-story.html.

New Democrat ideology that, in many ways, was a challenge to the traditional liberal base of the party. (The other frequently mentioned vice-presidential choice was Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey, who was also a balancer, albeit with a somewhat more modern liberal persona than Cuomo.) In the old style of picking a vice president, Cuomo was a shoo-in, so much so that in the summer of 1992 sitting Vice President Dan Quayle publicly asserted that he was ready to do combat with Cuomo.

But Clinton surprised everyone. Choosing Gore stemmed from how Clinton had doped out the presidential race. Reinforcing his message was more important than balancing the ticket. In Clinton's biography, he states:

His selection defied the conventional wisdom that the vice-presidential candidates should provide political and geographic balance: We were from neighboring states. He was even younger than I was. And he, too, was identified with the New Democrat wing of the party. I believed his selection would work precisely because it didn't have the traditional kind of balance.¹⁹

Since 1992, when Clinton broke the mold, the balancing model has given way to a newer partnership model. This was primarily due to the fact that, by 1992, the new system for nominating presidents had been firmly established. Before 1992 no nominating convention since the 1950s, in either party, had gone beyond a first ballot. Because of reforms enacted between 1968 and 1972, the power to nominate a presidential candidate had passed from the party leaders and elected officials who became convention delegates to voters in a long sequence of primaries. The conventions had become a spectacle to be captured on television cameras in prime time and not the arena for serious political negotiations. And aside from the occasional fight over platform or party rules, the quadrennial party conventions did little business. Thus the biggest bargaining chip in the old-fashioned conventions—the vice presidency—stopped being needed.

This is not to say that the vice presidency as bargaining chip is completely gone. It is always possible that a future primary season will result in two or three strong presidential candidates coming into their convention more or less evenly matched in delegates. If that happens, the vice presidency would, once more, become the biggest bargaining chip when the dealmaking ensues. But in the modern nomination system, primary voters tend to whittle down the field

19. Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), p. 414.

of presidential candidate choices and the likelihood of an old-fashioned convention is small and has been for some time.²⁰

These changes in the nominating system have allowed for a new model for choosing a vice president. In fact, every vice president since Al Gore has been chosen more for their ability to help the president do his job than for their ability to balance the ticket. In 2000, Bush chose Dick Cheney, a fellow Texan. It was clear that Bush would win Texas; he didn't need someone from Texas, where Cheney had been living. Nor did he need anyone from Wyoming, the state Cheney had to claim residency in to meet the constitutional requirement that the president and vice president cannot come from the same state. Wyoming, a very small state with only three electoral votes, was also very likely to vote Republican in the fall of 2000. In 2008, Barack Obama chose Senator Joe Biden from Delaware. Like Wyoming, Delaware is a small state and one that was not a swing state in the general election—it was almost as likely to go Democratic in the fall of 2008 as Wyoming was to go Republican in the fall of 2000. And in 2016, Donald Trump chose Governor Mike Pence of Indiana as his running mate. In the presidential elections since 1900 Indiana has only voted for a Democrat five times: for Woodrow Wilson in 1912; for Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 and 1936 and Lyndon Johnson in 1964, all three of which were national landslides; and in 2008 for Barack Obama, who won the state by one percentage point. Trump didn't need Pence to win Indiana.

Not only did the three winning tickets of 2000, 2008, and 2016 lack geographic balance, they also lacked ideological balance. Cheney, like Bush, was a business-minded conservative. Biden, like Obama, was left of center, but not a far left-wing Democrat. Pence was clearly a staunch conservative and evangelical Christian, providing a link to an important part of the Republican coalition. But it's hard to say whether Pence was chosen for ideological balance since Trump had no fixed ideological positions within the Republican Party. In fact, he was once a Democrat. In that phase of his life he had supported abortion rights, a stance anathema to the evangelical community that Pence represents.

But what the three vice presidents did bring to their tickets was deep experience in governing and a recognition on the part of the presidential candidate that their particular experience was needed. Al Gore brought Bill Clinton twenty years of national-level experience, during which he had acquired substantial knowledge in foreign policy and science and technology policy. Dick Cheney brought George W. Bush twenty-one years of national-level experience not only in Congress but also in the executive branch, where he served as White House chief of staff to President Gerald Ford and as secretary of defense under Bush's father. Joe Biden

20. For a more complete discussion of the changes in the presidential nomination system, see Elaine C. Kamarck, *Primary Politics: Everything You Need to Know About How America Nominates Its Presidential Candidates* (Brookings Press, 2016).

brought thirty-six years of experience in the U.S. Senate and significant experience in foreign policy to Barack Obama, who at the time of his nomination was a first-term Senator with little prior governmental experience who would be inheriting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And Mike Pence brought Donald Trump a wealth of experience. He served twelve years as a congressman from Indiana, rising to a leadership position in his caucus, and then served a full term as governor of Indiana. Pence brought international and domestic policy experience to the first presidential candidate in American history to have neither.

One indication that the partnership model is likely to replace the balancing model is that since 1992 it has been used in almost every vice-presidential choice.

In 2000, which turned out to be the closest election in U.S. history, both party's nominees abandoned the traditional model and went with the new model. Gore had played an important and substantive role in the Clinton White House and he took seriously the need to have a vice president who would be ready to step into presidential shoes at a moment's notice. Thus Gore passed up Senator John Edwards of North Carolina in favor of Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut. Lieberman came from the solidly Democratic state of Connecticut and echoed Gore's intensely pro-Israel foreign policy as well as his moderate Democratic approach to domestic policy. The fact that Lieberman was the first Jewish nominee of a major political party got some attention, but Jews are less than 10 percent of the population and heavily concentrated in New York and the District of Columbia, two solidly Democratic jurisdictions.²¹ Gore's attraction to Lieberman had everything to do with his readiness to be president. Referring to Edwards, who his political advisers had pushed, Gore later said to me, "Can you imagine that guy being ready to be president?"²²

The two exceptions to the partnership model happened in 2004 on the Democratic side and in 2008 on the Republican side.

In 2004, the Democratic nominee John Kerry did end up choosing the young, handsome, North Carolina Senator John Edwards as his running mate. It was a classic balancing choice: the New England aristocrat paired with the southerner who had pulled himself up from his bootstraps. But it soon became clear that Edwards brought little to the ticket. He did not add gravitas; his experience, as Gore realized when he passed over Edwards in 2000, was simply too thin to be taken seriously. By 2004, gravitas was beginning to be an important part of the equation in choosing a VP. The American public expected and wanted more.

21. Jewish Virtual Library, "Jewish Population in the United States by State, 1899–Present," www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-population-in-the-united-states-by-state.

22. The author was a senior official in the Gore 2000 presidential campaign and this was said to her directly.

Unlike earlier arranged pairs, Kerry and Edwards didn't wait until they were in office to let their relationship disintegrate. Instead it degenerated during their very first interview, during which the two wives took an instant dislike to each other, and continued from there as the campaign wore on. The Kerry staff treated the Edwards staff with disdain. They made it clear that they didn't even expect Edwards to deliver his home state of North Carolina. To Edwards's great disappointment, he was relegated to lesser campaign duties in what surely would have been a harbinger of things to come had the ticket been successful.

The vice-presidential choice in 2008 also ended up illustrating how important the partner model had become in modern politics. Senator John McCain's first choice was Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman. Even though Lieberman was a Democrat, he was on the conservative edge of the party and the two men had a close relationship. But as Lieberman's name was floated, it became clear that it would be tough to get him the votes needed in a Republican National Convention. And so, in a last-minute search, the nod went to Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska.

The choice of Sarah Palin was a classic balancing act. Palin, an ultra-conservative, was a hero to the base of the Republican Party—a base that wasn't exactly wild about some of McCain's more unorthodox positions on issues like campaign finance. And, of course, she was a woman—the first female vice-presidential candidate since Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro was chosen as Walter Mondale's running mate in 1984. At first the choice looked like a wise one: at the Republican National Convention, Palin proved herself to be a great political performer who connected to the hard-core, Second Amendment faction of the Republican Party. But as the campaign wore on, it became clear that whatever she brought to the table in terms of ideological balance was overwhelmed by the perception that she was not up to the job. In fact, as the campaign moved into the fall, Palin's favorability ratings went down.²³ It was clear that she cost McCain votes. In a documentary on his life made just before his death, McCain admitted that he had regret about not choosing Lieberman over Palin.²⁴

In the twenty-four years between Vice President Gore and Vice President Pence, the American public has come to expect a partner from the vice presidency. When the presidential candidate is elderly, as with John McCain (age 72 in 2008 and with a history of cancer), the ability of a vice president to step into the role of president becomes even more important.

23. Philip Bump, "Sarah Palin Cost John McCain 2 million Votes in 2008, According to a Study," January 19, 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/01/19/sarah-palin-cost-john-mccain-2-million-votes-in-2008/.

24. Ed Pilkington, "John McCain: Film Portrait of an 'American Hero' Skirts Hard Questions," May 24, 2018, www.theguardian.com/film/2018/may/24/john-mccain-hbo-documentary-for-whom-bell-tolls.

This change in the way we pick vice presidents has already had profound consequences for governing—to which we turn.

3

The Partnership Model in Action

This is not your grandfather's vice presidency. This office now matters. Once the selection process moved from balance to partnership, the office was bound to change. Moreover, the modern presidents and vice presidents who have inhabited the office have continued traditions inherited from Mondale—from the weekly private lunch to access to all communications to a say in personnel decisions—that are likely to endure. Given that these traditions are well established, future vice presidents may negotiate extra institutional touch points that will make them part of the decision loop. And future presidents will continue to look for experienced partners who can help them navigate the increasing complexity of the job of being president of the United States.

Al Gore

As we've seen throughout history, most vice presidents have struggled and failed to be in the loop. The loop is wherever the president is. As the victorious Clinton-Gore campaign ended and returned to Little Rock, Arkansas, the newly elected vice president discovered that, for all the camaraderie on the campaign trail, there was one loop he couldn't get into—the one in Bill Clinton's bedroom.

While Gore may have been the first vice president chosen using the partnership model, he was also the first vice president to have to serve with a First Lady who had a professional career *and* a substantial policy background. He soon discovered that there was another vice president—Hillary Clinton. And so during those early days Gore found himself locked in a hotel room in Little Rock doing the political equivalent of hand-to-hand combat with the

First Lady. Once the campaign ended and Hillary Clinton stopped playing the adoring wife who baked cookies, she stepped in determined to be an equal partner in the presidency of her husband. To the dismay of the Gore confidants stuck down in Little Rock with him, there were to be three, not two, principals in Bill Clinton's administration. Hillary Clinton was determined to carve out large areas of responsibility for herself and her people. She would not be relegated to the East Wing of the White House, the traditional place for the office of the First Lady, the social secretary, and so forth. Hillary Clinton wanted a West Wing office and a West Wing portfolio—and so did Al Gore.

Al Gore was not nearly the seducer, of women or voters, that Bill Clinton was. But Gore had grown up close to power in Washington and he understood from the beginning that trust in politics bred access and that access was everything. He also understood that there were institutional points of access quite apart from the personal and so, during the tough and lonely days of the transition in Little Rock, Gore built his relationship with the president one appointment, one point of access, and one assignment at a time.

The easiest place for Gore to gain the President's trust was in foreign policy. Clinton, having been a governor, had little first-hand experience. And back then Hillary Clinton, ironically from today's vantage point, had little interest in foreign policy. One key to Gore's success was getting one of his right-hand men, Leon Fuerth, into the foreign policy decisionmaking loop.

Fuerth was an experienced former foreign service officer who had served as Gore's most senior foreign policy aide in the Senate. In a White House known for its youthfulness, Fuerth was decidedly not. His hair was grey, his physique overweight, and his overall demeanor—distinctly frumpy. But he was both brilliant and experienced, and he was low key enough to not threaten the president's foreign policy team. Gore negotiated for Fuerth to have a seat on the powerful Deputies Committee, which was established in 1989 by George H. W. Bush and consists of deputies to the senior cabinet members of the National Security Council. In short, the Deputies Committee runs the day-to-day foreign policy of the United States. A vice-presidential representative on the committee was unprecedented but also immensely valuable to Al Gore.²⁵

Gore also reached an agreement with Tony Lake, Clinton's first national security adviser, that granted Fuerth access to the highly classified information that the rest of the foreign policy team had. Gore began his tenure in the administration by bringing Fuerth to the president's daily intelligence briefings. By the second term of the administration, Fuerth was a full member of the Principals Committee, which is the cabinet-level senior interagency forum and includes the secretaries of state and defense and the joint chiefs of staff of the

25. One example of the power and authority of the Principals Committee is that they laid out the options that led President Obama to decide to go after Osama bin Laden.

military, among others. The Principals Committee is responsible for all major foreign policy decisions. Fuerth's job was to keep Gore aware of what was happening, but, crucially, he was instructed not to approach these meetings with a vice-presidential perspective. Gore's insight was to assiduously avoid the perception that the vice president had interests that were separate from the interests of the president. As Fuerth put it in an interview with me, these arrangements, put in place early on in the administration, kept Clinton and Gore from having to run internal "espionage" nets on each other. Their staffs trusted one another, which allowed for an integrated decisionmaking process, a process that very often resulted in foreign policy options memos coming back from the president with "What does Al think?" scrawled in the margins in Clinton's unique rounded penmanship.

In April of 1993, Clinton hosted the new Russian President Boris Yeltsin for the first summit between the new U.S. president and the Russian president. At the summit, they announced that the ongoing work between the two countries would be conducted via the U.S.–Russian Joint Commission on Economic and Technological Cooperation, with Vice President Al Gore chairing the summit for the American side and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin chairing the Russian side. In more than twenty meetings over the course of the Clinton administration, the commission became the critical diplomatic path for working out a large array of issues, the most important of which dealt with space, technology, and nuclear proliferation between the United States and post-Soviet Russia. The careful and methodical diplomacy that Gore undertook on Clinton's behalf built strong ties between the administration and the Yeltsin government. Like many of the chores delegated to the vice president, meetings of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission rarely made front-page headlines, but they were often critical to the overall objectives of the president.

This was a major delegation of authority from the president to the vice president. Even in the post-Cold War era, managing the evolution of Russia, with their huge stockpile of nuclear weapons, was not the kind of second-class assignment that had humiliated previous vice presidents. Gore's careful cultivation of Chernomyrdin bore fruit a few years later. In 1999, Clinton's air war against the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic was having little impact on Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Clinton, having initially indicated that he would not send troops to the Balkans, began to hint that he might need to change strategy. Tensions rose as the United States prepared to put boots on the ground. In May 1999, Moscow sent Chernomyrdin to Washington to see if the Clinton administration would "cut Milosovic some slack."²⁶ It fell to Gore to convince Milosovic that this was not in the cards and that the United States was serious about forcing him out. As the United States was drawing up plans for the deployment of 100,000 troops to the Balkans, Chernomyrdin, under orders from

26. Author interview with Leon Fuerth, September 23, 2005.

President Boris Yeltsin, negotiated the details of an ultimatum that was presented to Serbia. The withdrawal of Russian support was the last straw for Milosovic, who buckled to NATO demands. Gore's diplomacy had kept the United States from a potentially costly ground war in the Balkans.

This was partnership at its best. The president delegated the development of a crucial relationship to his vice president and the work paid off. As the above anecdote illustrates, for an activist president with a large agenda, choosing a vice president who shares your philosophy is a huge advantage. Trust allows a president to delegate entire policy portfolios to the vice president, which in turn hugely expands the president's power and influence. This is what Clinton did with Gore. He delegated large pieces of policy to Gore (telecommunications reform, the environment, government reform) and, remarkably, not once in eight years did Clinton override his vice president's decisions in those areas.

In a Washington accustomed to weak vice presidents, many lobbyists tried to go around Gore to the president. A large number of powerful interests had stakes in the outcome of what became the Telecommunications Act of 1996. It was the first major overhaul of telecommunications policy in sixty years and there were billions of dollars at stake as the administration and Congress set out to modernize the law. As Greg Simon, the vice president's lead on this issue, recalls: "They were always trying to get around us, thinking if only they could get to the President he would overrule us."²⁷ Those who sought to go around the vice president found that on this issue, as on others, the decisionmaking had been delegated. When the evolving bill failed to contain the e-rate and some other items the vice president wanted, President Clinton issued a veto threat upon Gore's request—and the bill got back on track.

The biggest area where Clinton delegated policy to Gore was, of course, the environment. Before being chosen as vice president, Gore had authored a best-selling book, *Earth in the Balance*, which laid out the stakes for the nation and the world for ignoring what were at that time emerging environmental issues, such as global warming and bio-diversity.

With Clinton's blessing, Gore became the unchallenged leader of the set of executive agencies that had primary responsibility over the environment. He placed two long-time associates in key environmental positions. Carol Browner was made head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Katie McGinty was chosen to head the Council on Environmental Quality. Gore also created a new group, the President's Council on Sustainable Development, to try and move the United States toward the goals of the 1992 Kyoto Protocol. While he never did succeed in getting cabinet-level status for the EPA, Carol Browner had a seat at the table for all of the administration cabinet meetings. The final member of Gore's environmental

27. Author interview with Greg Simon.

troika was Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, a former governor of Arizona whose environmental credentials were, like Gore's, impeccable.

Gore understood that telecommunications, space, and the environment were his because he had a specific expertise that President Clinton needed. But to be a lead player in the new administration, Gore needed to lead one of the initiatives that had defined Clinton as a New Democrat. Two issues had been especially important in the 1992 campaign—welfare reform and reinventing government. A third, universal healthcare reform, has been a perennial favorite of Democratic presidents ever since Franklin Roosevelt dropped the initiative from the 1936 Social Security Act.

First Lady Hillary Clinton wanted to head up the healthcare reform task force, which left the vice president with welfare reform or reinventing government. He ended up with reinventing government and when I went to work for him, my job was to help him create and manage the National Performance Review, a six-month examination of federal agencies that focused on how government should work, not on what it should do. As was the case with other policy areas, like the environment, space, and telecommunications, there were no presidential staff assigned to focus on reinventing government. It was totally under the control of Vice President Gore and his staff. Reporting on issues and options went from the “REGO” staff (the White House’s shorthand for “reinventing government”) to the vice president to the president. The reinventing government role lasted for the entire eight years of the Clinton administration. The president was also able to use Gore’s expertise in government operations in a wide variety of crises from backlogs at the Immigration and Naturalization Service to Federal Aviation Administration reform after the crash of TWA 800.

Thus for President Clinton his choice of Gore was a valuable innovation: by delegating to his vice president, Clinton had not two but four hands. And if you add in the important roles played by Hillary Clinton, President Clinton had, through delegation, not two but six hands to help him in an enormous job.

The Clinton-Gore love affair did not have a happy ending. In early 1998, the Clinton White House found itself in the midst of a scandal involving inappropriate sexual behavior between the president and a young intern named Monica Lewinsky. Initially Vice President Gore took the entire scandal in stride, unlike Tipper Gore, who was so furious with the president that she refused, for a period of time, to even be in the same room with him. But as time wore on, the scandal took its toll on the relationship between the president and the vice president.

Clinton’s betrayal took a severe toll on what had been, in the first term, a real friendship. To handle the scandal, the White House set up what was essentially a parallel universe, with its own lawyers, strategists, pollsters, and press persons. Everything else went on as if nothing had happened. By the time it was over, Gore was running for President full time, which meant

he was often out of the White House. But the strain in the relationship showed in Gore's campaign. He had a hard time talking about what had been a very successful partnership. His ambivalence about Clinton hung over the campaign like a cloud. And for his own vice-presidential running mate he chose Senator Joe Lieberman, one of the Democrats who had been most critical of Clinton's behavior.

Following the election, tensions exploded in an Oval Office meeting, making it clear that, in some ways, the vice president had had a hard time recovering from Clinton's betrayal. Clinton was furious at Gore for distancing himself from the Clinton-Gore record. Gore was furious at Clinton for his behavior. The affair ultimately broke up their relationship, as is the case in even the best of marriages.

Dick Cheney

By the end of the Clinton presidency, there was little doubt that Al Gore was the most powerful vice president in U.S. history. He had taken on major foreign policy assignments for the president and had been given sole authority to make policy in other areas. But in the first term of the next president, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney became perhaps the most powerful vice president before or since. Early on in the Bush administration, former Vice President Dan Quayle went to visit Cheney, intending to help him understand the job he was about to take on. Quayle warned that there would be a lot of travel. As vice president, Quayle had taken 19 trips to 42 countries, although none of them were trips requiring diplomacy on important matters.²⁸ Cheney listened politely and then told Quayle that he and the president had "a different understanding" of the job. There would be no foreign trips and no special projects—neither insignificant ones, as with previous vice presidents, nor significant ones, as with Gore's trips and projects.

There were two critical differences between Cheney's relationship with Bush and Gore's relationship with Clinton. Even though Clinton and Gore had a great deal of policy experience, neither one of them had had any prior experience with the vast and complex federal government they were about to lead. In contrast Cheney, by virtue of having been President Gerald Ford's chief of staff and secretary of defense, had vast executive branch experience. And he served a president whose only experience had been state government and whose policy credentials were weak, with the exception of education and immigration, two issues he'd taken an interest in as governor of Texas. Add to that the fact that Bush had a

28. Baumgartner, *The American Vice Presidency Reconsidered*, p. 122.

hands-off management style and lack of curiosity that allowed Cheney free reign to craft the choices that the president would make.

Second, unlike almost every other vice president in history, Cheney came into office with no intention of running for president. And that freedom allowed him to take on so many roles that in the first term at least, the presidency of George Bush seemed to be run by the vice presidency of Dick Cheney. His depth of knowledge exceeded that of the president he served and his disinterest in running for president gave him plenty of time in which to devote himself full time to the central issues of the government.

The Bush-Cheney transition was shorter than most, given that the formal transition didn't begin until the Supreme Court had ruled on the contested Bush-Gore race. But that didn't stop Cheney, who understood the points of access he wanted to dominate. For instance, unlike Gore, Cheney was not content to put his top staff person on the Deputies Committee of the NSC. In an unprecedented move, and one that was deeply disturbing to National Security Advisor Condi Rice, Cheney placed *himself* on the Principals Committee and was thereafter the first among equals in the creation of all foreign policy options. He also went to the Wednesday lunches held by the economic team in the White House mess. He was a regular participant in the Republican caucus meetings in the Senate. And, since tax legislation originates in the House and not the Senate, he even went so far as to get himself a hideaway office in the House of Representatives (in addition to his Senate office) so that he could be close to the action on the 2001 and 2003 tax bills. In other words, Cheney's experience allowed him to be wherever the president's policy options were formulated.

Cheney had two skills that were perhaps unmatched by any vice president before or since: he understood the value of placing in key positions like-minded personnel of whom no one had ever heard, and he understood the value of formulating presidential options. Cheney's vision was of an expansive presidency with enormous latitude in the powers that could be used in the name of national security. It was reinforced by a network of like-minded operatives and spread strategically throughout the bureaucracy. Among those like-minded loyalists was John C. Yoo.

Yoo was just a thirty-four-year-old law professor from the University of California, Berkeley. When Cheney brought him into the Justice Department, it was because Yoo's legal philosophy, especially his expansive view of the powers of the presidency, matched his own. Yoo was placed in the Office of Legal Counsel, where Cheney could be sure that when the question was asked "Is it legal? Can we do it?" the answer would be yes. After 9/11, Cheney was even more convinced of the need for an expansive understanding of presidential power, and Yoo was the man to advance that understanding. He was to write the famous (or infamous, depending on your politics) memos that created the legal framework for the post-9/11 world

and the justifications to move to war with Iraq. Among these were the memos providing the legal background for torture.

Cheney's other great skill was creating and limiting the options put before the president. Barton Gellman's Pulitzer Prize-winning book on Cheney describes how the vice president, with his deep experience in government, was able to control the options presented to the president. For instance, unlike any prior vice president Cheney reviewed the president's daily CIA briefing before Bush did.²⁹

Cheney's ability to devote full time to government, his deep experience in the executive branch, his network of loyalists, and his position in the formulation of presidential options allowed him to transcend the new partnership model and become, for a time at least, the most powerful vice president ever.

With 20-20 hindsight it is tempting to speculate whether Cheney would have been as powerful without the dramatic attacks on the U.S. homeland that took place on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. We tend to forget that by August 2001 the Bush presidency had taken on a fairly unfocused and lethargic air, which even their friends on the op-ed pages of the *Wall Street Journal* had noticed and commented on. Before the attacks Cheney had taken the unprecedented step of moving into an office in the House of Representatives and had carved out the tax debate for himself. But the 9/11 attacks made it crystal clear what the priorities of the new administration would be—countering the terrorist threat posed by the attacks. This set of issues played right into Cheney's strengths and Bush's weaknesses.

The photos from that horrible day said it all. Bush was in a classroom in Florida reading to little children. Cheney was in the White House bunker making decisions. In the cleaned-up versions of history, Cheney is getting his orders from Bush. There are doubts about some of this but even if Bush did check the boxes, it is clear that on that fateful morning Cheney, not Bush, was in charge.

Three days later, on Friday, September 14, President Bush went to the still-burning site of the World Trade Center in New York City, took a bullhorn in hand, and made a stirring pledge to the nation. Less noticed was the fact that five days later, on Sunday, September 16, the vice president went on *Meet the Press* and in an hour-long, nearly uninterrupted interview laid out the United States's response to the attacks. At the time, the vice president's appearance passed without much comment. The nation was shell-shocked and not in a mood to question its leaders. But, in retrospect, the interview showed a vice president who was exercising presidential leadership. Not only did Cheney introduce the nation to the heretofore shadowy group known as al-Qaida and its leader Osama bin Laden, he described who they were, what they believed, and how the United States would respond.

29. Barton Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

The *Meet the Press* interview took place weeks before the United States launched cruise missiles against Afghanistan (October 7, 2001). But during the interview, the vice president of the United States, not the president, offered the first full articulation of U.S. policy in the post-9/11 world:

If you've got a nation out there now that has provided a base, training facilities, a sanctuary, as has been true, for example, in this case, probably with Afghanistan, then they have to understand, and others like them around the world have to understand, that if you provide sanctuary to terrorists, you face the full wrath of the United States of America. And that we will, in fact, aggressively go after these nations to make certain that they cease and desist from providing support for these kinds of organizations.

Nearly a year later, on August 26, 2002, Cheney went to a Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in Nashville, Tennessee, and talked about the links between Saddam Hussein in Iraq and nuclear weapons. Again, the vice president, not the president, seemed to have the job of articulating foreign policy on issues of paramount importance such as war and peace.

But Cheney was much more than a spokesman. When it came to the most important issues of the day, it was clear that Cheney was driving the ship of state. In the harried days immediately after 9/11, Cheney often contradicted the president and steered the conversation in meetings. In the spring of 2002, Bush "asked Cheney to pull back a little at big meetings, to give the President more room to move, to take charge. Bush asked Cheney not to offer him advice in crowded rooms. Do that privately. Cheney did."³⁰

Cheney's oversized vice-presidential power lasted, however, for only one term. By the second term both elite and public opinion on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had soured. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Cheney's long-time friend and ally, had been forced out. The profound delegation of authority that had allowed Cheney to operate with impunity began to be pulled back. And Condi Rice, whose relationship with Bush had survived the first term, was now secretary of state.

The turning point in the Bush-Cheney relationship appears to have been Hurricane Katrina. As it became apparent that the botched federal response to the hurricane was going to be a major political issue for the second term, Bush asked Cheney, "the master of disaster," to lead a cabinet-level task force to review what had happened. Cheney declined, apparently not wanting to be a figurehead. And Bush was apoplectic. Not only was Bush paying for Cheney's single-mindedness in Iraq and Afghanistan, Cheney was now refusing to help a president in trouble.

30. Ron Susskind, *The One Percent Doctrine* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 79.

And then nine months later came the Supreme Court's decision in *Hamdam v. Rumsfeld*. The implications of the case were clear to most of the administration. The legal infrastructure that Cheney had carefully built to prosecute the Iraq War and deal with terrorism had not survived the highest court in the land and the public was growing war-weary. The relationship had cooled, and the most powerful vice president ever was suddenly not so powerful.

Joe Biden

By the time of the Obama-Biden transition, President Bush, the country, and Democrats especially had soured on Dick Cheney (who had come to be called Darth Vader) and his model of the vice presidency. In the early days of Joe Biden's vice presidency, he and his staff sought to distinguish Biden from his predecessor. Like Cheney, Biden was primarily interested in foreign policy and like Cheney he maintained he had no plans to run for president in 2016, when he would be 74 years old.³¹ (Famous last words!)

And so, in one of Joe Biden's first lengthy interviews before the inauguration, he seemed to indicate, in response to a question from ABC journalist George Stephanopoulos, that the Bush-Cheney model was lacking in balance, presumably between the president and the vice president. He defined the role as follows:

I think we should restore the balance here. The role of the vice president of the United States as I see it is to give the president of the United States the best, sagest, most accurate, most insightful advice and recommendations he or she can make to a president to help them make some of the very, very important decisions that have to be made.³²

Ron Klain, Biden's chief of staff, was more explicit in expressing that Biden wanted to "normalize" the office. "He [Cheney] was his own separate branch of government," Klain said in a *New York Times* interview. "He took the office of the vice president out of the White House phone directory, and out of the White House budget."³³

In spite of these criticisms, as the Obama-Biden administration began, the partnership model was well established, along with the routines that buttressed it. Biden and Obama had

31. Peter Baker, "Biden Outlines Plans to Do More with Less Power," *New York Times*, January 14, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/01/15/us/politics/15biden.html.

32. ABC News, "*This Week* Transcript: VP-Elect Joe Biden," December 7, 2007, <https://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/story?id=6499340&page=1>.

33. Baker, "Biden Outlines Plans to Do More with Less Power."

a private weekly meeting with no aides in attendance. Biden, following in Cheney's footsteps, was now a regular at the all-important foreign policy meeting of "the Principals." But while the architecture of the office was important, the role of the vice president was still dependent on the development of personal ties between the two. Unlike Clinton and Gore, two southern moderates, or Bush and Cheney, two Texas conservatives, Obama and Biden came from different worlds. First of all, they were nearly two decades apart in age. When Biden was elected to the Senate, Obama was in junior high school. Biden represented a Washington, D.C., that Obama never knew and one in which he did not seem to be especially comfortable. Biden was an old-fashioned politician, fond of talking and touching. Obama was famously cool and distant. During their years in the Senate together, Obama once remarked, after listening to Biden, that Biden was "a decent guy" but "Man, that guy can just talk and talk."³⁴ And Biden had run against Obama in the 2008 primaries, at one point calling Obama "clean and articulate," a comment redolent of racial stereotyping and something that could have soured the relationship. He also had less-than-kind words to say about Obama's experience, calling him a "foreign policy neophyte."³⁵

Biden was also notorious for "Joe bombs"—off-the-cuff remarks that invariably got him into trouble. The most famous one occurred toward the end of the first term during a May 6, 2012, appearance on *Meet the Press*, when Biden announced his support of gay marriage ahead of the president. This forced Obama to scramble and announce his own support—and it also resulted in an apology from the vice president to the president.

Nonetheless, Obama and Biden developed a real warmth for each other—a "bromance," in the words of one journalist.³⁶ And Biden continued in the steps of his predecessors—always being in the room but also taking on major projects.

The first big responsibility delegated to Biden was to oversee implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the \$787 billion stimulus package passed in response to the Great Recession. With all that money flowing out of Washington quickly, the possibilities for waste, fraud, and abuse were enormous. But Biden slogged through the boring but essential work of oversight, spending hours on the phone with governors and mayors, wading into the details of tens of thousands of projects, demanding transparency and accountability. In the end the record was admirable. With the sole exception of the Solyndra

34. Steven Levingston, *Barack and Joe: The Making of an Extraordinary Partnership* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2019), p. 5.

35. James Traub, "After Cheney," *New York Times*, November 24, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/11/29/magazine/29Biden-t.html.

36. Michael Eric Dyson, foreword to Levingston, *Barack and Joe*.

corporation, which received a loan and later went bankrupt, the process was remarkably scandal free—especially given the enormous amount of money involved.

Biden's next big assignment was participation in the Afghan Review, the first major foreign policy review of the Obama administration. One of the main reasons to put Biden on the ticket was his deep foreign policy experience in the Senate as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Along with the late Leslie Gelb, Biden had developed a comprehensive plan for dealing with Iraq. In spite of wishing to distance himself from the Cheney vice presidency, expectations were high that Biden, like Cheney, would have a large role in Obama's foreign policy. Shortly before the inauguration, Obama sent Biden to the region to see what was happening in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, compared Biden's role to Cheney's in a 2009 interview with the *New York Times*:

There are some ironic similarities to Cheney's definition of the job and Biden's in one sense. They're both people who are not hobbled by their own ambitions, they're both experienced national security hands, and it freed up Cheney and it frees up Biden to give an honest take.³⁷

The Afghan Review went on for months and during that time Biden found himself consistently at odds with those who advocated a troop surge, especially General Stanley McChrystal. Biden constantly argued for a narrower approach, one focused on countering terrorism, while the generals, McChrystal especially, argued for a larger troop presence in an effort to win or degrade the Taliban. Biden used his position to write separate private memos to President Obama before each meeting, outlining his thoughts.³⁸

But as it turned out, there was one major difference between the first-term Biden and the first-term Cheney—in the end President Obama did not side with Biden, instead choosing to adopt the surge option advocated by the generals. In retrospect, Biden was right. In fact, when the Afghanistan Papers were released by the *Washington Post* in 2019, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, not an ally of Biden's, reluctantly admitted that Biden was right: "Biden really

37. Peter Baker, "Biden No Longer a Lone Voice on Afghanistan," *New York Times*, October 13, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/10/14/world/14biden.html?mtrref=undefined.

38. Peter Baker, "How Obama Came to Plan for 'Surge' in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, December 5, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/world/asia/06reconstruct.html.

loudly opposed, visibly opposed, in the review, the surge . . . I'm certainly willing to give him that he got Afghanistan right.”³⁹

We don't yet have a complete historical record on Joe Biden's vice presidency and given his run for the presidency in 2020, it may be years before we get past the first draft of history. But we do know that Biden played an important role in the Obama administration until the end. He led budget negotiations with Republicans in Congress, many of whom he knew well, and he led the development of gun control measures after the tragic shooting of children at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Obama came to see the wisdom of Biden's judgment on Afghanistan. Their friendship deepened as time went on. Unlike Gore and Cheney there was no second-term cooling of the love affair—quite the contrary. Their relationship seemed to deepen as time went on. The Biden vice presidency, like the vice presidencies of Gore and Cheney, was central to Barack Obama's presidency.

39. Peter Spiegel, “‘Afghanistan Papers’ Shed Light on Biden's Role in America's Longest War,” *Financial Times*, December 23, 2019, www.ft.com/content/0c3a069c-2245-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b.

4

Conclusion

As of this writing, Vice President Mike Pence is heading President Donald Trump's Coronavirus Task Force—responding to a threat to the United States almost as serious as any war we've ever engaged in. It is way too early to assess Pence's influence in the current White House, a task that will be difficult given the highly unorthodox nature of Trump's presidency. But even before the pandemic we knew that Pence, like his predecessors, had not been relegated to the back benches. He clearly has access to the president and he has been in the middle of the administration's major initiatives: coordinating the foreign policy team at the Munich Security Conference in 2017, shepherding the massive tax bill through Congress in 2018, and now directing the coronavirus task force.

As we've seen, modern vice presidents don't always win their internal battles over policy or personnel. Mondale was not supportive of Jimmy Carter's famous "malaise" speech, but it happened anyway; Gore had to give up involvement in healthcare policy to First Lady Hillary Clinton; and Biden lost out on the Afghan Review. But, unlike many of their predecessors, these modern vice presidents have been at the table and in the fight. They are usually the most important voices in the fight (except for the First Lady when she wants to intervene). That stems primarily from changes in the nomination system that have substantially reduced the need for last-minute dealmaking that puts opposites together with the expectation that they will run an effective White House. But it also comes from the realization that the job of president in this day and age is simply too big for one person alone. As in life, a trusted partner in the Oval Office is a valuable asset.

Thus the twentieth century will have at least two models for the vice presidency—the balancing model and the partnership model. Recently the partnership model seems ascendant, but will that continue?

The answer depends in part on whether the presidential nominee sees a clear electoral advantage in using one model or the other. The four most recent presidential candidates to win—Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump—made no attempt to balance their tickets. This has given rise to a new conventional wisdom among politicians that the vice-presidential candidate can't really help the ticket to win. And yet in an era of polarized politics there are only a handful or more of truly swing states where the general election is fought. A presidential candidate might conclude that the vice presidency should be used to clinch one or more of those states.

Balance can be demographic as well as geographic. The Trump years have seen a sharp continuation of a trend that has been around for a while—the tendency of women to identify and to vote more with the Democratic Party than with the Republican Party. In previous years, however, women's preferences for Democrats have been balanced out by men's preferences for Republicans. But that seems to be changing, with women preferring Democrats by large margins, large enough to overwhelm men's preferences for Republicans. These trends have led two scholars, Morley Winograd and Mike Hais, to argue that the twenty-first century will see the nation's first "gender realignment."⁴⁰ The emerging power of women as a critical voting block within the Democratic Party led Joe Biden to announce, shortly after it was clear that he would win the nomination, that he would put a woman on the ticket as the vice president. Hence a form of balancing that the machine bosses a century ago could not have imagined. And, of course, given the loyalty of Black voters to the Democratic Party, and the weeks of protests that arose over lethal police brutality against Black people, the African American population can't be left out of the balancing equation, which means that the search is on for a Black woman to balance the ticket.

While the balancing model may still have political utility, its primary weakness remains—the possibility that the president and the vice president may not see eye to eye on important matters, thus creating confusion and even hostility at the top of the executive branch. That weakness is magnified if, as was the case in the selection of Dan Quayle and Sarah Palin, the vice president is perceived to be "not ready for prime time." The importance of the vice president's readiness to be president is, obviously, related to the age of the president himself

40. Michael Hais and Morley Winograd, "The Future Is Female: How the Growing Political Power of Women Will Remake American Politics," *FixGov* (blog), February 19, 2020, www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/02/19/the-future-is-female-how-the-growing-political-power-of-women-will-remake-american-politics/.

or herself, which is why the choice of Palin by McCain (age 72 and with a history of cancer) was so much more serious than the choice of Quayle by Bush (age 64 and healthy).

In an ideal world presidential candidates would not have to choose between the balancing model and the partnership model. And in an ideal world the vice-presidential candidate would be a person who could help the ticket to win *and* help the president to govern *and* be ready to step into the office should something happen to the president. But in the real world finding the perfect combination may be impossible. While it is too early to bury the balancing model, the emergence of a different model for picking the vice president—one based on competence—is the sign of a fundamental change in an office that has long been the butt of jokes. The balancing model is not dead, but in the future vice presidents will be expected to do more to help the president—they will be expected to be a partner.

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