

Richard neustadt

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Richard Neustadt: Presidential Power and the Modern Presidency Writing in 1960, Richard Neustadt is an important political theorist focusing on the US Presidency. Neustadt's work was a reaction to the "old institutionalism" represented by writers like Edwin Corwin. Neustadt takes a behaviorist approach to understanding presidential power, and argues that the real functional power of the US president arises from his "power to persuade".

Neustadt acknowledges that the formal power of the US president is spelled out in the US Constitution but he argues that these formal powers do not adequately describe the real functional power of the president. For Neustadt the key to presidential power is the president's ability to persuade other important actors to carry out what he wants done.

Neustadt views the presidency as at the apex of a pyramid of governing power that provides the president with unique leverage and vantage points to bargain with and persuade others on implementing governing policy and direction. These other actors include cabinet officers and senior government bureaucrats, the congress, military leaders, leaders of state governments, party leaders, business leaders and even foreign leaders. Neustadt does not see the US government as one of "separated power" under the Constitution.

Instead he claims that the Constitution actually "created a government of separated institutions sharing powers." These separated institutions include the congress, federalism itself, the bill of rights and perhaps even the press as a fourth branch of government. Neustadt sees the formal powers of the president and congress as very intertwined such that neither can accomplish very much without the acquiescence of the other; and, that what one branch demands the other can resist.

Neustadt notes, for example that Eisenhower claimed that the presidency was part of the legislative process, since he had the authority to veto or sign bills, etc. But Neustadt notes that when a president tries to command rather than persuade, such as when Truman nationalized the steel mills or fired MacArthur, or when Eisenhower sent the troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce desegregation court orders, that there can be blowback that can neutralize presidential fiat and, ultimately, render presidential action inconclusive or ineffective.

Neustadt sees relationships of mutual dependence between the various stakeholders and that the president depends upon the persons whom he would persuade. He notes a particular success story of persuasion when Truman worked with Republican senator Vandenberg to create the Marshall plan to rebuild Europe after WWII. That effort depended on mutual understanding, trust and a commitment to shared endeavor without which Vandenberg may have decided to wait for a Republican president to create a major new direction in US foreign policy.

Neustadt sums up by arguing that for a president to have effective influence he must: (1) use the bargaining advantage that he has by virtue of his office to persuade other men that what he wants them to do is what their own responsibilities require of them (persuade them that his goals should be their own goals), 2) maintain a professional reputation in the minds of other men such that they respect his authority and ability, and (3) maintain his popular prestige such that those he bargains with believes that the public will view them favorably if they do what the president wants.

In short, the president's " power is the product of his vantage points in government, together with his reputation in the Washington community and his prestige outside. " Neustadt goes on to argue a presidents has to make proper choices and decisions, so as to preserve his reputation and prestige, or he will squander his ability to lead by losing his ability to persuade.