

## STANDING FIRM: A VICE-PRESIDENTIAL MEMOIR

Dan Quayle

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reviewed by VICTOR GOLD

**D**an Quayle is back, but don't call him tanned, rested, and ready. Sure as you do, the smartass who writes joke material for "Crossfire" will have Michael Kinsley asking, "Ready for what—another 18 holes?"

No, what Dan is back for is a rematch with a media which, he claims in this memoir, dealt him "incredible abuse" during his four years as George Bush's vice president. On that point, I give him, as they say in the Indiana outback, half-right. Abuse, yes, but why "incredible"? Nothing in modern American politics is more credible than a Republican vice president's being transmogrified by the national press from the moment he goes on the ticket.

It's *The Treatment*. Nixon got it (the \$18,000 "slush fund"); Agnew got it (the "at Jap" incident); and Quayle got it, even as he stood firm—albeit shirt-sleeved and overheated—on that Spanish Plaza platform in New Orleans, August 1988. Given the *Treatment*, Nixon was transmogrified into the king of knaves; Agnew into half-knave, half-buffoon; and Quayle, with his bright-eyed effervescence, into pure buffoon.

Why did Bush pick him? A year-and-a-half into the Clinton era, it's a question still asked whenever conversation flags at Ripon Society cocoa klatches. There were, in fact, sound political reasons for Bush's choice: Quayle's Midwestern roots, his conservative base, his Senate record on national defense issues. But there were also sound reasons behind Eisenhower's choice of Nixon and Nixon's choice of Agnew, and the same question was asked in those years. Quayle, absorbed

in his own case, puts his finger on the problem:

"There was a hostile edge to the [post-nomination] coverage, and some of it may have sprung from the fact that the press had been caught off-guard," he writes. "I wasn't the choice they were expecting, and some of them sounded as if George Bush had let them down by not picking one of the people they were prepared to talk about in detail."

Exactly. If there's a lesson to be learned by future Republican presidential nominees, it's *Don't surprise the experts*. Put yourself in Cokie Roberts's place: Dining on crawfish *étouffée*, savoring Ramos gin fizz in the French Quarter, on-screen hourly to say it's either Dole or Kemp. And Bush comes up with ... *Quayle*? There must be some mistake. Not Cokie's, of course, but Bush's.

**A**s Dan Quayle looks back, he sees it as all downhill from there, no matter how he performed as a candidate or in office. The general media rule applying to all vice presidents—that they go ignored unless involved in a gaffe or controversy—worked overtime in his case.

"We figured that if I did a good job," writes Quayle of his hopes and those of his wife Marilyn, "then the situation would turn around. . . . We still didn't realize what a vested interest the media had in the caricature they had drawn, and we didn't believe what lengths they would go to, to cement it."

The record shows that Quayle did a "good job," indeed better than good, playing *Avis* to George Bush's *Hertz*. He carried out his official duties, including a few touchy overseas assignments, with skill and (whether his critics believe it or

not) aplomb. He was given a chance to be more than vice presidential potted plantery when key policy and personnel decisions were made in the Bush White House, and he weighed in with, to this reviewer's personal knowledge, sound policy and shrewd political counsel. The Quayle staff was arguably the strongest vice presidential staff ever assembled. And most important to the success of any vice presidency, Quayle gained the confidence of, and was loyal to, the man who picked him.

That he achieved all that and still left office caricatured as a buffoon continues to baffle Dan Quayle. Worse yet, judging from this memoir, it seems to trouble him. He suffers the angst of the gregarious conservative who wants both to stand firm and be *understood*, better still *liked*, by his adversaries. *The National Guard flap? Let me explain. . . . The Murphy Brown speech? Let me explain. . . . The potato(e) gaffe? Let me explain.*

Or is it that Quayle truly believes he's helping his case with the general public by detailing, once again, every gaffe/flap laid against his name during the Bush-Quayle years? If so, to borrow the grinding liberal cliché Quayle himself borrowed during the Murphy Brown flap: he *still* doesn't get it.

**N**or, judging by this memoir, does he seem to have learned a fundamental principle taught in Politics 101—at least, the Politics 101 of my pre-MTV era: You don't score points against your political adversaries by blindsiding your political friends.

What we have here, then, as the author himself made plain in his post-publication tour drumming up sales, is what amounts to your basic memoir-cum-campaign tract, intended not only as a contribution to pop history but as a first cut in what the *Washington Post* sees as the making of a "new Quayle."

I recall—it was also part of my pre-MTV era—publication of the prototype of this genre. It too was written by a national political figure fresh off a campaign whipping. Good book. Recommended reading for any former Republican vice president trying to make a comeback.

It was called *Six Crises*, Dan, not *Twenty-four Gaffes*. □

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## DIPLOMACY

Henry Kissinger

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reviewed by JOSEPH SHATTAN

In 1968, a young and relatively obscure Harvard professor named Henry Kissinger published an essay entitled, "Central Issues in American Foreign Policy." Its basic argument was that the United States had to develop a new conception of its international role that somehow struck a balance between American idealism and European realism. "A sense of mission," Kissinger argued, "is clearly a legacy of American history. . . . But a clearer understanding of our interests can give perspective to our idealism and lead to humane and moderate objectives."

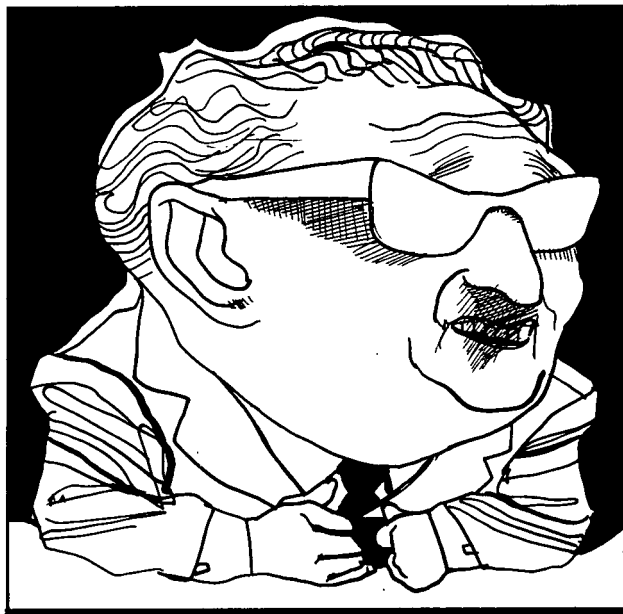
I would like to think that, even back then, Kissinger was planning to expand his essay into a major book. But events, as they say, intervened, and it is only now, a quarter-of-a-century later, that his book has appeared. Covering some three centuries of diplomatic history, *Diplomacy* is a rich and complex work. Its underlying theme, however, is no different from Kissinger's 1968 essay: the need to develop an American diplomatic tradition that is at once idealistic and realistic.

Contrary to his public image, Kissinger is not an advocate of European-style power politics. To be sure, he is a close student and brilliant expositor of Europe's diplomatic history, and he may well harbor a sneaking admiration for the likes of Richelieu, Bismarck, or even Stalin, of whom he writes, "Stalin was indeed a monster; but in the conduct of international relations, he was the supreme realist—patient, shrewd and implacable, the Richelieu of his period." But

when, as Nixon's national security adviser, he met a living representative of Europe's diplomatic tradition, France's President Charles de Gaulle, Kissinger was genuinely taken aback. During the meeting, Nixon asked him to comment on de Gaulle's presentation:

Foolhardily, for de Gaulle did not relish debating with assistants—or, for that matter, being in the presence of assistants—I asked how France proposed to keep Germany from dominating the Europe he had just described. Obviously, de Gaulle did not consider this query to merit an extensive reply. "*Par la guerre* (through war)," he replied curtly—a mere six years after he had signed a treaty of permanent friendship with Adenauer.

This kind of single-minded devotion to the national interest, Kissinger knows, is simply not compatible with America's character and institutions. But there is a



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British variant of European power politics—the balance of power approach—that is considerably more benign than the Richelieu/de Gaulle/Stalin tradition. For the past 300 years, England has identified its own security with the existence of a balance of power on the Continent strong enough to deter—or defeat—any would-be conqueror. To secure the balance, writes Kissinger, "England switched sides or organized new coalitions against erstwhile allies in defense of the equilibrium. Its unsentimental persistence and self-centered determination earned Great Britain the epithet, 'Perfidious Albion.'"

The greatest twentieth century exponent of the British balance of power approach was Winston Churchill—hardly a statesman one thinks of as "perfidious." Yet when he was criticized in the 1930s for being anti-German, Churchill neatly summarized the British balance-of-power tradition when he replied, "If the circumstances were reversed, we could equally be pro-German and anti-French." Kissinger admires Churchill and believes that Britain's self-chosen role of "balancer" did much to preserve Europe's liberties. Nevertheless, he does not think that America could follow in England's footsteps:

The Palmerston/Disraeli method would require a disciplined aloofness from disputes and a ruthless commitment to the equilibrium in the face of threats. Both the disputes and the threats would have to be assessed almost entirely in terms of balance of power. America would find it quite difficult to marshal either the aloofness or the ruthlessness, not to mention the willingness, to interpret international affairs strictly in terms of power.

In ruling out a foreign policy based on *Realpolitik* for America, Kissinger is undoubtedly correct. Reading his account of the crimes and follies committed in its name, I'm reminded of Nick the Greek's description of football: "A game invented by sons-of-bitches for sons-of-bitches." America's Founders had a similarly low opinion of European statecraft.