

Dick Cheney, with Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir*. New York: Threshold Editions, 2011. 568pp.

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As the most controversial – and allegedly most powerful – Vice President in US history,¹ Dick Cheney's memoirs have been keenly anticipated. Those expecting a *mea culpa* will be disappointed. The first thing to say is that his Vice Presidency only accounts for about half of Cheney's memoirs and that the authors have aimed for a genuinely cradle to post-Vice Presidency account of Cheney's life. Indeed, the first chapter is a very well written and interesting account of Cheney's family history detailing the lives of two pioneer families settling in the American West. The account of Cheney's early years is very well written and very evocative of the time and place. It is clear throughout the book that Cheney has a deep and abiding attachment to the American West in general and Wyoming in particular. Cheney's time as Gerald Ford's Chief of Staff and the sole Congressman from Wyoming each get a chapter, and there is an interesting ambiguity between Cheney's clear personal debt to Ford as the man who launched his political career and the fact that Cheney's politics probably sit closer to Ronald Reagan, Ford's challenger in the 1976 Primaries.

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¹ Unlike most Vice Presidents, Cheney has already generated a fairly rich field of biography. See, for example, Lou Dubose and Jake Bernstein, *Vice: Dick Cheney and the Hijacking of the American Presidency* (New York: Random House, 2006), Barton Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), and Shirley Anne Warshaw, *The Co-Presidency of Bush and Cheney* (Stanford: Stanford Politics and Policy, 2009).

The chapter on Cheney's time in Congress, despite the fact that he claims that the "gentleman from Wyoming" was the title he was most proud of holding (124), is a little bit perfunctory. In particular, his role in the Congressional investigation into the Iran Contra Affair could certainly have been talked about in more detail, especially as, by his own account, Cheney was instrumental in the decision of the Republicans on the investigatory committee to issue a minority report. This certainly seems to mirror Cheney's later attitude towards Presidential powers in the field of foreign policy. Cheney quotes from the minority report's conclusion that, "Congress must recognize that an effective foreign policy requires, and the Constitution mandates, the President to be the country's foreign policy leader" (147).

The chapter on Cheney's time as George H. W. Bush's Secretary of Defense adds little to our existing knowledge of the first Gulf War,² although there is value in having certain aspects of US foreign policy confirmed by the Secretary of Defense of the time. More interestingly, his chapter does reveal some of the early roots of the tensions that would one day exist between Vice President Cheney and Secretary of State Colin Powell:

Powell seemed more comfortable talking about poll numbers than he was recommending military options ... I understood where Powell was coming from, but I couldn't accept it. Our responsibility at the Department of Defense was to make sure the president had a full range of options to consider (185).

There is a brief chapter on Cheney's time outside of government between 1993 and 2000. This is almost wholly absorbed with Cheney justifying and trying to disprove any accusations of impropriety over his links to Haliburton. Although his arguments on this score seem reasonably convincing, the rather petulant and defensive attitude with which this section is

² Cheney's account of the Gulf War largely confirms the accounts given in Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), and Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

written suggests that accusations of impropriety from his time at Haliburton really got under Cheney's skin.

The sequence is followed by a brief chapter dealing with Cheney's Vice Presidency pre-9/11, which is extremely short and focuses almost entirely on Cheney's role as a legislator and advisor in securing George W. Bush's controversial tax cuts. However, there is an interesting section discussing the constitutional role of a Vice President as the presiding officer in the Senate. More interestingly, the following series of chapters detail Cheney's role in the US response to 9/11 and the Iraq War. These really constitute the heart of the book. Two things come through clearly. First, that Cheney regarded 9/11 as a symptom of a new kind of terrorism which poses an existential threat to the United States, particularly should terrorists ever get their hands on Weapons of Mass Destruction. Cheney makes this case at length. Indeed, it dominates the entire last third of the book: "We had been attacked by a ruthless enemy willing to slaughter innocents in an effort to bring America to her knees" (329).

Second, this being the case, Cheney does not really engage with the legal and moral arguments that surround the "War on Terror." For Cheney, these arguments miss the fundamental point, that America is under threat and needs to be able to use the methods necessary to defend itself. On Iraq, Cheney manages a fairly breath-taking sleight-of-hand. The book moves straight from the decision to invade Iraq to the decision to surge additional US troops into the country in 2006 without even the briefest mention of the intervening chaos in Iraq. Those looking for any detailed blow-by-blow accounts of the Bush Administration's decision-making as regards Iraq will be sorely disappointed. Indeed, reading this book, one has the uncomfortable sense that, after the invasion of Iraq was completed, Cheney lost interest in the subject entirely.

In My Time is a reasonably well-written attempt to give an overview of one of the more extraordinary careers in American public life. However, those looking for insights as to why Dick Cheney has reached the conclusions he has reached, or those hoping for some particular flashing revelation about the Bush Administration and the “War on Terror” are liable to be disappointed.