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# Gerald Ford: Beginning with a Clean Slate

Post 8/20/74

One temptation in having a new President who steps with a bang into the office is to create instant stereotypes. There he is, the honest guy from Michigan, cooking his own breakfast, swimming 18 laps in his pool, speaking to Congress in the simple idiom that Congress understands, with a straightforward quality too long lacking in the chief executive.

Boxing in the men with these stereotypes, inevitable in our cult of personality, does less than justice to the President. His background is more complicated than that. As one of his friends pointed out the other day, he is the only President in this century to earn an advanced degree from an Ivy League school. In the top third of his class at Yale Law School, he was something of a swinger, even though he devoted part of his time to coaching freshman football.

He helped to get the Powers model agency started in New York as one of his extracurricular activities. When her professional dancing failed to meet the rent bill, his wife-to-be went to work as a model for Powers. This was a long way from Grand Rapids, yet in his approach to his future he was never far from that midwestern background.

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For the President a greater hazard of stereotyping is to be boxed in by his 25-year record in Congress. In this difficult moment of transition, he needs all the flexibility, the calm, cool, dispassionate judgment not weighted by the past, if he is to follow through successfully on the foreign policy initiatives of the Nixon administration.

Ford was a hard-liner from the start of his congressional career to his appointment as Vice President. As compiled by the Center of Defense Information, he voted with a few small exceptions for big military appropriations and for keeping the armed services at home and abroad at current strength. From 1966 through 1973 he voted first to support President Johnson and then President Nixon on the Vietnam war.

In 1968 he voted for an additional \$6 billion for the war, bringing the total

Vietnam budget for fiscal 1968 to \$27 billion. That was the high point of the Johnson escalation. After the shaky peace agreement in 1973, Ford's votes were consistent in military support of South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

He was equally consistent in voting, with one exception in 1963 when he favored cutting \$636 million from the defense department's \$15.9 billion research and procurement allocation, to kill all efforts to pare military spending. Out of his long experience on the Armed Services Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, which he shared with Melvin Laird, Ford could be counted on to carry the ball for the Pentagon. It was an invaluable service when he became minority leader.

That was the past. The President who spoke to the Congress was the bright hope of the future. With the

enormous sense of relief that came with the change, it was a speech that won almost universal approval.

But that record is being studied both at home and abroad for clues to what it may mean for the future. Will the stereotype of the hard-line Ford carry into the present when so much turns on the chief executive's decisions? Above all, the Soviets are pondering the answer to this question. Having given their assurance of continued cooperation, they are said to be uneasy over a possible return to an unhibited nuclear arms race and the rigors of the cold war.

His speech gave only the most general perspective on future policy. The rhetoric was familiar—"A strong defense is the surest way to peace. Weakness invites war as my generation knows from bitter experience." For the incoming President that may have been no more than obeisance from the new helmsman to the conventional wisdom of the patriots.

Today the slate is clean. Whatever the past may have shown, President Ford is free to write his own page. That is what millions of Americans hope that he will do.