

Should We Abolish the Presidency?

by Barbara Tuchman

Owing to the steady accretion of power in the executive over the last forty years, the institution of the Presidency is not now functioning as the Constitution intended, and this malfunction has become perilous to the state. What needs to be abolished, or fundamentally modified, I believe, is not the executive power as such but the executive power as exercised by a single individual.

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... stemming perhaps from the age of television, is the growing tendency of the Chief Executive to form policy as a reflection of his personality and ego needs. Because his image can be projected before fifty or sixty or 100 million people, the image takes over; it becomes an obsession. He must appear firm, he must appear dominant, he must never on any account appear "soft" and by some magic transformation which he has come to believe in, he must make history's list of "great Presidents."

While I have no pretensions to being a psychohistorian, even an ordinary citizen can see the symptoms of this disease in the White House since 1960, and its latest example in the Christmas bombing of North Vietnam. That disproportionate use of lethal force becomes less puzzling if it is seen as a gesture to exhibit the Commander in Chief ending the war with a bang, not a whimper.

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