The Power To Lead: The Crisis Of The American Presidency

James MacGregor Burns

The symptoms of this crisis of the American spirit are all around us. For the first time in the history of our country a majority of our people believe that the next five years will be worse than the past five years. Two-thirds of our people do not even vote. We respected the Presidency as a place of honor until the shock of Watergate. We remember when the phrase “sound as a dollar” was an expression of absolute dependability, until ten years of inflation began to shrink our dollar and our savings. We believed that our nation’s resources were limitless until 1973 when we had to face a growing dependence on foreign oil. These wounds are still very deep. I propose the creation of an energy security corporation to lead this effort to replace two and a half million barrels of imported oil per day by 1990. Download Citation on ResearchGate | On Jan 1, 1984, Gaddis Smith and others published The Power to Lead: The Crisis of the American Presidency. James MacGregor Burns (1984), one of this country’s most astute scholars of leadership, begins his book, The Power to Lead, with a description of the inauguration of a new president: After years of witnessing government in the hands often of well-intentioned mediocrities or outright scoundrels, here was a man of fine ethical standards, with a kind of sunny morality. After years of drift and deadlock and delay in government, here was a man of proved competence, tough, demanding, clearheaded who had come from “nowhere” to win the Democratic presidential nomination and then kno
The position of the president dominates American Politics. The president is head of America’s executive; Congress heads America’s legislative and the Supreme Court, America’s judiciary. These three parts of the government, make up the federal structure of politics in America. The president has to seek cooperation but he also has to be seen to be leading the nation. This is one of the great ironies of being 'the most powerful man in the world'. The powers of the Presidency as laid down by the Constitution: The official power of the president can be found in Article II of the Constitution. When read as they are, it becomes obvious why the position of president is such an attractive electoral office. The symptoms of this crisis of the American spirit are all around us. For the first time in the history of our country a majority of our people believe that the next five years will be worse than the past five years. Two-thirds of our people do not even vote. We respected the Presidency as a place of honor until the shock of Watergate. We remember when the phrase 'sound as a dollar' was an expression of absolute dependability, until ten years of inflation began to shrink our dollar and our savings. We believed that our nation’s resources were limitless until 1973 when we had to face a growing dependence on foreign oil. These wounds are still very deep. I propose the creation of an energy security corporation to lead this effort to replace two and a half million barrels of imported oil per day by 1990. The US presidential election of 2016 is the most important American election since 1860, when Abraham Lincoln became president. It is also the most important for world order since the Second World War. For 70 years, the United States has led and sustained a liberal international order. Every president has had a foreign policy consistent with this broad objective. It is widely believed that a Trump presidency would likely lead to a series of rolling international crises as major powers adjust to life after American hegemony. The day after a Trump victory, allies would have to plan for the withdrawal of US security guarantees, rivals would look for ways to exploit the shift in US strategy, and markets would be rocked by the prospect of a new era of protectionism.