

Review - No Higher Honour

Written by Stephen McGlinchey

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STEPHEN MCGLINCHEY, DEC 22 2011

Following the high profile memoir releases by George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice's **No Higher Honour** rounds out the last significant personal account from the Bush administration cabinet. Serving first as National Security Adviser during Bush's first term before replacing Powell as Secretary of State for the administration's second term – Rice was a central and ever-present figure in the major developments and decisions that shaped the post 9-11 world.

The overall style of the book is shaped by a largely chronological narrative that often incorporates a series of recreations, which place the reader in the centre of selected high-octane situations. It is in the latter category that the book delivers its best moments – such as the heated cabinet deliberations over whether to send more troops to Iraq as the country spiralled into civil war – known thereafter as *the surge* – which Rice opposed.

Once moving past the obligatory childhood, personal history, and early career sections – political enthusiasts and researchers will find a decent spattering of anecdotes – the most memorable concerning ex Libyan leader Gaddafi who apparently had a special interest in Miss Rice. During a visit to Tripoli, Rice was played a video dedicated to her, set to a specially commissioned song *Black Flower in the White House*. In Rice's words, 'It was weird, but at least it wasn't raunchy' (pp. 702-703).

Rice also serves up personal rivalries, particularly with Vice President Dick Cheney who comes across as an arrogant Machiavellian operator, keen to bypass procedure and steal the attention of the President. To a lesser extent Rice also aims at Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, whose domineering and controlling disposition frequently clashed with Rice – albeit in a strictly professional, not personal sense (pp. 18-19). Interestingly (unknown to this reader) Rice reveals it was her who introduced Rumsfeld to Bush and she who pressed for his recommendation for the role of Secretary of Defense.

Beyond the expected coverage of big-ticket foreign policy issues such as Israel-Palestine and the War on Terror, the book also incorporates chapters on Hurricane Katrina and Rice's subsequent fears of racism, the Financial Crisis, observations on China and Russia, and coverage of Bush's often overlooked Africa policies. That being said, the War on Terror, and particularly Iraq, are never far from the next turn of page.

Rice's tenure as Secretary of State accounts for a disproportionately large coverage in the book, over 30 chapters, and addresses a very clear desire on the part of the author to emphasize the multilateral persuasion of the Bush administration that became evident from 2006 onwards – as opposed to the deeply unpopular unilateral bent of the administration during its early years. In this sense, Rice is keen to establish a narrative of triumphant diplomacy during her tenure at the State Department. Her account revolves around significant steps to multilaterally press two nuclear proliferation threats; Iran and North Korea. It is clear that negotiation with Iran particularly reached a notable juncture as during its second term the Bush administration opened a diplomatic channel to the Islamic Republic for the first time since 1980. However, both Iran and North Korea remain largely unphased in their proliferation dispositions to this day, despite the pressure and sanctions that the diplomatic attention Rice's renewed efforts levied on both.

Those seeking wholly new insights into the Bush administration era are likely to leave the book disappointed. While

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Rice frequently exercises her right to settle scores and set the record straight as she sees it, there is no *mea culpa* over Iraq or Guantanamo Bay, and no surprising reversals or revisions of the controversial foreign policy record of the Bush years. Despite the aforementioned, Rice does bring a refreshing perspective to certain interpersonal battles and refocuses attention on some often overlooked issues, but her accounts are largely complimentary with what has already been published rather than revelatory. Still, the book is well written and generally retains its interest throughout its 760 pages. It is the certainly most detailed of the memoirs from the Bush team so far – though not quite on a Kissingerian scale.

About the author:

Dr Stephen McGlinchey is the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of E-International Relations and Senior Lecturer of International Relations at UWE Bristol. His publications include *Foundations of International Relations* (Bloomsbury 2022), *International Relations* (2017), *International Relations Theory* (2017) and *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran* (Routledge 2021, 2014). You can find him on twitter @mcglincheyst or LinkedIn.