Journal of American Studies of Turkey
27 (2008) : 183-184

George C. Edwards III. *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009. 256 pp.

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Presidential power is not the power to persuade, as Presidents cannot reshape the contours of the political landscape to pave the way for change by establishing an agenda and persuading the public, Congress, and others to support their policies. In *The Strategic President*, George C. Edwards III aims at exploring leadership and two categories of leader: the "eventful man" and the "event-making man," as he calls them. In this terminology he is attempting to improve on such worthy predecessors as James M. Burns, who in his 1978 book on leadership makes a distinction between "facilitators" and "directors of change."

"Eventful man" accepts political conditions as given and fashion a campaign and a set of policies best suited to existing conditions. "Event-making man," on the other hand, tries to change the matrix of political forces amid which they operate. The major questions Edwards poses are: What are the essential presidential leadership skills? Under what conditions are they most effective? How can such skills engender change? In addressing these questions, chapters two and four focus on Lincoln, Roosevelt, Johnson and Reagan as political giants, while chapters three and five focus on presidents governing under typical circumstances in an attempt to determine whether those presidents who led fights for the most significant changes in public policy succeeded by persuading others to support their policies or whether their success rested on recognizing and exploiting existing opportunities for change.

This is a well organized and meticulously written overview of recent leadership stories. It contains the clearest and most complete information to be found on the subject. Indeed, the book seems to be written from a very objective perspective: Edwards first discusses whether presidents can persuade the public or not and proceeds to claim that presidents are unlikely to change public opinion; but he asserts that skilled presidents who understand the nature of public opinion may be able to use it as a resource to further their goals. At the core of this strategy is choosing the issues they wish to emphasize and the

manner in which to present their initiatives. From the perspective of the White House, the key to successful advocacy is controlling the public agenda. As a result, it invests substantial amounts of time and energy in focusing the public's attention on issues it wishes to promote, and encouraging the public to see its proposals for dealing with those issues in a positive light. Edwards even suggests that a president may increase his chances of success by framing proposals in such a way as to emphasize their consistency with the public's existing views, clarifying the public's wishes and showing how they are in fact consistent with his policies, and exploiting the fluidity or indifference of public opinion on a given issue.

Each chapter comes complete with a summary of primary points to spur discussion. This intriguing work captures the reader's imagination with memorable adages such as "A statesman cannot create anything himself. He must wait and listen until he hears the steps of God sounding through events;" or "The successful policy entrepreneurs are those who wait for an opportunity and then ride the wind." Whatever your views may be on the question of political leadership, and on whether presidents create opportunities by persuading people to support their policies or whether they facilitate change by recognizing opportunities and fashioning strategies, *The Strategic President* is worth reading. Not only is it entertaining reading by any definition, it is also highly informative.