

President George H.W. Bush's Last Months in Office

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After losing the election for a second term, President George H.W. Bush finishes business in his final days in office.

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Transcript

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BRYANT GUMBEL, co-host:

As Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter learned the hard way, national rejection is tough to handle, especially when the potential prize was a second term in the White House. NBC's John Cochran has a report on how George Bush is swallowing the very bitter pill that voters prescribed for him.

JOHN COCHRAN reporting:

Is George Bush happy now? Well, maybe happy is not the right word. But he is busy, and that is a change from the early weeks after his election defeat. White House aides complained, then, they could not find enough for him to do, enough to take his mind and their minds off the painful defeat in the election.

Mr. MARLIN FITZWATER, White House Press Secretary: Well, I think that's clearly the case. Of course, right after the election, you suffer from rejection. Rejection is not fun. It's not easy. And nobody likes it. It doesn't matter whether it's your girlfriend or your family or 220 million people. So it takes a little time to adapt to that.

COCHRAN: It not only takes time, it also helps if there is real work to fill up the time. And as it turned out, there was work, after all. First, Somalia.

President GEORGE BUSH: I have given the order to Secretary Cheney to move a substantial American force into Somalia.

COCHRAN: It looked then as though the Somali operation alone might occupy the last weeks of the Bush presidency. But there was more—much more.

December 14--Bush eases economic restrictions on an old enemy: Vietnam.

December 17th--signs the North American Free Trade Agreement.

December 20th--persuades British Prime Minister John Major to join in enforcing a no-fly zone over what used to be Yugoslavia.

December 24th--pardons 24 people, including former defense secretary

Caspar Weinberger and others involved in the Iran-Contra affair.

December 27th--tells Saddam Hussein he should not even think about sending Iraqi warplanes in the no-fly zone over southern Iraq.

New Year's Day--tells American troops in Somalia they saved lives by spending their holidays far from their families.

January 3rd--signs the broadest arms-reduction treaty in history with Boris Yeltsin in Moscow.

Is Bush thinking about his place in history?

Mr. CRAIG FULLER, Former Bush Aide: I'm sure that he's thinking about that, but I honestly don't believe he is conducting himself in--in a way to try to put the final touches on the way history sees him.

COCHRAN: All presidents worry about how they will be viewed by historians. But Bush is also a realist. He knows that, despite his vigorous foreign policy over the past month, world leaders are much more interested in Bill Clinton. So when he met France's President Mitterrand on Sunday, the most important assurance Bush gave was that Clinton is, quote, "a good man." For TODAY, John Cochran, NBC News, the White House.