

## THE POTUS PARADOX

It's a question never asked on the campaign trail: "HOW DO YOU RECONCILE THE CALL TO LEAD THIS COUNTRY WITH THE CERTAINTY THAT YOU WILL END A LIFE?" Or perhaps some variation would suffice. Whatever the case, our nation's paid inquisitors never pose the query, and our would-be Commander in Chief forever escapes answering this all-important conundrum.

Make no mistake, whether the term is four or eight years, the President of these United States will decide the fate of at least one person's existence. More likely the fate of many. The ever-iconic presidential crew bomber MA1 flight jacket will be donned (the very one available for \$118.00 via the White House Gift Shop), POTUS will be summoned into a cramped room lousy with advisors, and decisions to end lives will be sanctioned. Drone strikes against enemies halfway around the globe will be authorized. Covert operations to extinguish anti-American militants will be administered. Or even a full-on martial directive of our armed forces will receive presidential approval. After all, what good would a certified Air Force One MA1 flight jacket be to the White House Gift Shop if the president only ever wore one because it was a little chilly outside?

The economy, immigration, foreign affairs, and a litany of other topics are fired off at our potential leader in rapid succession, but never specifically the topic of knowingly taking a job where they will be asked to end lives. Sure, abortion, gun rights, and nuclear armament find their way into town halls and national debates, but those topics do not foster specificity about in-the-moment decision making to kill another human being. Why are we never asking this question?

On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1988, in a nationally televised debate with George H.W. Bush, the Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis was asked by moderator Bernard Shaw: "Governor, if Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?" Dukakis responded: "No, I don't, and I think you know that I've opposed the death penalty for all my life." One loaded inquiry and one insufficient answer for a bloodthirsty populace later, Dukakis slipped further behind Bush in the polls, ultimately losing the presidential election less than a month later by a decisive margin. And though Shaw's question did shine some light on a nominee's stance on death, the question itself was still broad in nature, even if Dukakis's rightful reply was not.

Bill Clinton did not serve in the military. George W. Bush was a National Guardsman, never coming close to seeing live action. Barack Obama and Donald Trump? No military service between them. It seems fair to think that those who had served might be better prepared to face the morality that comes with ordering the expiration of another, but this has not been the case of our ultimate decision makers for over twenty-five years. Then again, even though prior military service seemed so important for a candidate to win office before these last four held the job, that was not always the case either. Between 1913 and 1945, five consecutive presidents (Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, and Franklin D. Roosevelt) all held the office without ever having served.

By nature, the President's job is a paradox. Care for the well being of the population while protecting it at all costs. You could argue said job sounds like that of a parent, except most parents are private citizens who will never have to order a lethal carpet bombing. Not so of our president. They are absolutely going to order that bombing at some point. Or drone strike. Or full-blown militaristic

response. Shouldn't we all want to know what that means to them? Or more specifically, why they are so eager to take the job knowing full well these deadly decisions are in their inevitable future?

Perhaps we just assume our candidates know death is on the docket, so we don't need to broach the subject with them. Although, this line of thinking then foists the paradox back onto our ourselves. Not specifically because we assume our leader will someday adjure a death, but that we take for granted this is simply part of the job and that such a mandate is some sort of badge of honor. A badge, so to speak, that might be perceived as a little too badass when sewn onto one very specific flight jacket.

Death is apolitical. The reasoning behind why a death occurred may be smudged with the hoofprints of a donkey or toeprints of an elephant, but the absolution of death itself carries no political burden. The burden lies in understanding why we ourselves as a society are so accepting that death and the presidency go hand in hand. This should then be followed by uncovering how our candidates are going to face this relationship, further followed by why they would ever want to.

The impunity that the oval office has enjoyed regarding such matters is over. Democracy must demand a better way forward, or we will forever recycle a vicious paradox that keeps us in the dark about ourselves. Because there is far too much light shining elsewhere to tolerate any further darkness. Progressivism and humanism are the world edicts now, and Draconian law is such a thing of the past that any form of Draconian thinking need be too, lest we continue proliferating any form of authoritarian mindset. Truly, authoritarianism blossoms when death is an afterthought.

As this new campaign season unfolds let's hold our candidates responsible for their call to kill. Even our sitting one. Especially our sitting one. Let's find out who really understands what it means to carry the burden of extinguishing another human's life. Let's do better with our questions. Let's hold their feet to the fire about what it is to snuff out the soul of another instead of just rallying around them after they do. All souls are at stake here. POTUS, our own, and those that will inevitably be terminated.