Summary:
The president has many official and unofficial roles. The formal powers and duties of the president are outlined in Article II of the Constitution. Although the Constitution grants far fewer explicit powers to the president in Article II than it does to Congress in Article I, the ambiguity and vagueness of Article II have made it possible for presidents to expand their authority greatly beyond that specifically listed in the Constitution. The two passages in the Constitution that have provided the basis for the expansion of presidential authority are Article II, Section 1, which grants “the executive Power” to the president, and Section 3, which makes the president responsible for the enforcement of federal laws: “He shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.” As a result, “unofficial” presidential roles have evolved through both history and tradition. Some of the official and unofficial roles assumed by the president include the following:

Chief of the Federal Bureaucracy: One of the most important administrative powers of the president is to appoint people to fill high-level positions in the administration. Article II, Section 2, gives the president the power to select top officials, subject to Senate approval. The president must also manage the wide variety of departments and agencies in the modern bureaucracy, including approximately 2 million employees.

Chief Diplomat: Although the Constitution does not explicitly grant presidents the power to recognize foreign governments, it is generally accepted that they have this power as a result of their constitutional authority to “send and receive ambassadors.” Because the acts of sending an ambassador to a country and receiving its representative imply recognition of the legitimacy of the foreign government involved, presidents have successfully claimed exclusive authority to decide which foreign governments are recognized by the United States. It follows, then, that they have the power to terminate relations with other nations as well.

Chief of Party: The president is automatically the chief of his party—the leader of the political party that controls the executive branch. Political parties are not mentioned in the Constitution, but they are an important part of presidential governing. Presidents help members of their party get elected or appointed to office, make campaign speeches needed for reelection, head fundraising for the party, and select the party’s national chairperson. The president can also exercise political patronage by rewarding those who support him and his party during the election (i.e., jobs, contracts).

Commander-in-Chief: Reflecting the clear consensus at the Constitutional Convention that the nation’s highest civilian officer should have charge of the military, the Constitution states that the president “shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States.” However, the Constitution does not give the president complete domination over the war-making function. The power to declare war
is reserved for Congress, as is the ability to raise and maintain an army. Nevertheless, presidential use of the power to order U.S. forces into combat without a congressional declaration of war increased greatly during the twentieth century.

**Chief Legislator:** As chief legislator, the president shapes public policy. The Constitution is reticent about the president’s role in legislating, yet the relationship between Congress and the executive is the most important aspect of the U.S. system of government. The president can gather information from the bureaucracy, present a legislative agenda (in his annual “State of the Union” address) to Congress, and go to the American public for support for this legislative agenda. The president may suggest, request, and insist that Congress enact laws he believes are needed. He can attempt to influence Congress through promises of patronage and favors. He stays in touch with Congress formally through written messages and informally through private meetings, parties, and phone calls. When the president receives legislation, he decides whether to veto it, use the pocket veto (this occurs if he does nothing and Congress adjourns within 10 days), do nothing and if Congress is still in session in 10 days it becomes law, or sign it.

**Related Readings:**

1.2 **The Constitution and the Presidency**

   Reading: FindLaw’s annotated version of the United States Constitution’s [Article II](#) and [Amendments XII, XX, XXII, and XXV](#)

1.2.3 **Presidential Powers and the Supreme Court: Foreign and War Powers**


   Reading: University of Virginia’s Miller Center for Public Affairs: Dr. Frederick Schwarz’s, Jr.’s *Unchecked and Unbalanced: Presidential Power in a Time of Terror*

3.5 **The Evolution of the Presidency**

   Reading: Cosmo Learning: Dr. Thomas Woods’s “*The American Presidency: Critical Episodes in its Growth*”: “Part I” (Adobe Flash) and “Part II”; University of Virginia’s Dr. Sidney Milkis’s *Theodore Roosevelt* Lecture
Instructions:
For this assessment, you will provide examples of presidents who have exercised their authority in each of the roles described above. For each role you will need to describe the following: 1) the president and the role, 2) how successful or unsuccessful the president was, 3) what the consequences were of the president’s actions, and 4) how the decisions the president made in this particular role impacted (or may impact) his legacy.

To provide some clarity on “legacy,” oftentimes the ways in which a president carries out a particular role can have a profound impact on his presidency. For example, most believe that President George W. Bush’s legacy will be shaped in large part by the decisions he made as commander-in-chief after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and subsequent invasions of the Middle East.

There are numerous websites focusing on the presidency that can assist you in completing this assessment. One helpful site is History.com’s U.S. Presidents, which provides comprehensive information on the backgrounds, tenures, and policies of the nation’s 44 presidents. The listing of the presidents can be found at the bottom left of the webpage. Be sure to select a different president for each role.