

# 2008



## H-Diplo Roundtable Reviews

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**Philip Gordon.** *Winning the Right War: The Path to Security for America and the World.* New York: Times Books, 2007. \$24.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978 0-8050-8657-9.

Roundtable Editor: Thomas Maddux

Reviewers: James Goldgeier, Michael Mazarr, Tony Smith, Nicholas Thompson

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**Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge**

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**A**fter the Super Tuesday primaries in February, a number of the Republican and Democrat candidates will have some time to reflect before they launch their campaigns for 2012 and plan a return to the scenic byways, cafes, meeting halls, and homes of Iowa and New Hampshire. It would be profitable for them and the country if they and the candidates still standing read some of the recent literature on international relations and U.S. strategy. H-Diplo stands ready to assist them with recent and forthcoming roundtables by international relations specialists, political scientists, and even historians who do live in the present and peak at the future. Some recent examples include Tony Smith's *A Pact With The Devil: Washington's Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of American Promise* and Michael Hunt's *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained & Wielded Global Dominance*.<sup>1</sup> H-Diplo will also have forthcoming roundtables on Ian Shapiro's *Containment: Rebuilding A Strategy against Global Terror* and Tom Nichols' *Eve of Destruction: The Coming Age of Preventive War*.

Philip Gordon has good timing with the publication of his study which joins the many critiques of the Bush administration's "War on Terror" with its preoccupation with the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq and continuing pacification problems in Iraq. Gordon is critical of the implementation, focus and priorities, and rhetoric of Bush's policies and offers Cold War containment as an alternative model with a greater promise for enduring success. The reviewers do not challenge Gordon's assessment of the implementation mistakes by President Bush and his advisers, but they do raise questions about the applicability of the containment strategy and the realism of Gordon's solutions to a number of problems. Gordon responds to these questions in his response.

1.) An initial question is whether Gordon correctly presents the nature of Bush's policies and problems in design and implementation. Although most of the reviewers vote "yes" on this question, Tony Smith has reservations as to whether Gordon really believes that the Bush strategy as articulated in the Bush doctrine is flawed or he views just the implementation as inept. In his book Smith critiques the Bush doctrine as fundamentally flawed in its emphasis on the necessity for preemption to address security threats, the necessity for unilateralism to meet challenges, the importance of hegemony to maintain American security, and the related emphasis on democracy as the best long-range solution to the challenges faced by the U.S. Smith also critically identified Republican neoconservatives and Democrat neoliberals who endorsed the war on Iraq and remains concerned that Gordon could shift back to support of the Iraq war if the military and political situation improved in Iraq.

2.) How valuable is containment as an alternative model to the Bush strategy in dealing with the problems of radical Islamism and Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and

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<sup>1</sup> The H-Diplo roundtables on Tony Smith, *A Pact With the Devil* and Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy*, are available at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/>.

elsewhere? The reviewers have reservations about Gordon's recommendation that the Bush strategy be replaced by an updated containment strategy from the Cold War. To the extent that Cold War strategy relied on restraint as opposed to the Bush doctrine and the launching of the Iraq war, rejected a monolithic view of the communist adversaries, and focused on strengthening the U.S. traditions as noted by Nicholas Thompson, the reviewers endorse Gordon's suggestions. However, as Gordon notes and the reviewers agree, there were significant exceptions such as Vietnam, and James Goldgeier points out that the U.S. was "slow to recognize the Sino-Soviet split and failed to understand the nationalist aspirations of leaders assumed to be marching in lockstep with Moscow." Michael Mazarr also questions the validity of the parallel between Cold War communism and religious radicalism: "communism was a state-bound movement by the Cold War years, something we could deter in conventional ways; it was not trying to implant terrorist agents in our midst, ready to destroy themselves in self-immolating violence. The level of fanaticism in the two movements, the sort of otherworldly visionary aspect seems entirely different." Tony Smith notes that containment produced "ill-fated American interventions in Guatemala, Iran, and Southeast Asia ..., [and] unless one is careful, that is, containment can morph back into the Bush Doctrine."

3.) In chapter four, Gordon proposes "A New Deal for Middle East" that would include a withdrawal from Iraq, pacification in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, negotiations to establish a viable Palestinian state, containment of Iran with negotiations, and general engagement across the Middle East. The reviews raise questions about the realism of Gordon's agenda and its priorities. As Gordon notes the Bush administration has shifted somewhat in the direction of Gordon's recommendations with the exodus of leading neoconservatives and under the initiatives of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. As Goldgeier suggests, however, a strategy toward Iran of containment and engagement faces some of the same challenges as the Cold War strategy of détente by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, which ended up being abandoned by almost everyone but Kissinger. Smith also suggests that the U.S. should consider devoting more attention in the next administration to Russia and China, the domestic economy, and the environment, and less to the Middle East.

4.) Since the Cold War did come to a surprisingly successful end from the U.S. perspective, Gordon suggestively considers "What Victory Will Look Like" in chapter five. Instead of a "big bang" conclusion with the domino-like collapse of the Soviet empire and regime, Gordon suggests a more gradual, less dramatic demise of Al-Qaeda and its leaders with Osama bin Laden's vision being viewed as a failure, an erosion of support for terrorism, the decline of fundamentalist Islamism, and the emergence of new leaders in the Middle East. Gordon envisions this as a gradual process similar to the impact of containment on the Kremlin's leaders until the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev. Goldgeier is less optimistic, noting Cold War crises that could have been even more destructive than they were, and that another September 11<sup>th</sup> like attack on the U.S. could bring further escalation of U.S. involvement in the Middle East with escalating costs. Mazarr suggests an alternative strategy to ending the preoccupation with terrorism as the "predominant paradigm for U.S. foreign policy." Mazarr recommends that we keep our intelligence and special forces in hot

pursuit of terrorists such as Al-Qaeda but that we move forward to new issues in our speeches, policies, and application of resources.

Participants:

**Philip H. Gordon** received a Ph.D. in 1991 from Johns Hopkins University, SAIS. He is currently Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution. He served as Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council. He is the author and co-author of ten books, including *Crescent of Crisis: U.S.-European Strategy for the Greater Middle East* (2006); *Allies at War: America, Europe and the Crisis Over Iraq* (2004); *Iraq: The Transatlantic Debate* (2002); *The French Challenge: Adapting to Globalization* (2001); and *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Diplomacy and Nuclear Weapons since 1945* (1999). His recent articles include "The Bush Doctrine," *Commentary* (September 2006); and "The End of the Bush Revolution," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2006).

**James Goldgeier** is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He previously taught at Cornell University, and he has been a visiting scholar at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation, the Brookings Institution, the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In 1995-96, he was a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow serving at the State Department and on the National Security Council staff. From 2001-2005, he directed George Washington University's Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies. He is the co-author (with Michael McFaul) of *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War*, which received the 2004 Georgetown University Leggold Book Prize in international relations, and he is the author of *Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* and *Leadership Style and Soviet Foreign Policy*, winner of the 1995 Edgar S. Furniss Book Award in national and international security. His new book, *America between the Wars: From 11/9-9/11* (with Derek Chollet), is scheduled to be released by PublicAffairs in June 2008.

**Michael Mazarr** holds a Ph.D. in public policy from the University of Maryland, is professor of national security strategy at the U.S. National War College in Washington, D.C., an adjunct professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, and a nonresident adjunct fellow with the American Security Project. He has authored ten books, edited five anthologies, and published numerous articles, most on various aspects of U.S. defense policy and international security. His most recent book is *Unmodern Men in the Modern World: Radical Islam, Terrorism, and the War on Modernity* (Cambridge, 2007). He has also authored *Information Technology and World Politics* (2002); *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation* (1997); and *Turning Point: The Gulf War and U.S. Military Strategy* (1995).

**Tony Smith** earned a B.A. at the University of Texas, an M.A. from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1965, received his doctorate in political science from Harvard University in 1971 and has been a Senior Fellow at the Center for European Studies at Harvard since 1979. He is the Cornelia M. Jackson Professor of Political Science at Tufts

University where these days he gives courses on U.S. Foreign Policy. He is the author of five books, including *The French Stake in Algeria* (1978), *The Pattern of Imperialism* (1981), *Thinking Like a Communist* (1987), *America's Mission: The U.S. and the Global Struggle for Democracy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1994), *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy*, (2000); and *A Pact With The Devil: Washington's Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of American Promise* (2007). Smith has also published a dozen articles on the history of Wilsonianism, understood as a perspective making the promotion of democratic government abroad a central focus of American foreign policy.

**Nicholas Thompson**, a fellow at the New America Foundation and a Senior Editor at *Wired*, is writing a book about George Kennan and Paul Nitze.

Review by James Goldgeier, George Washington University/Council on Foreign Relations

Phil Gordon has provided an admirably clear statement of what in essence is the Democratic critique of George Bush's War on Terror. Rather than waging an almost exclusively military campaign against Islamic extremism, America, argues Gordon, needs a multifaceted approach to win hearts and minds. In the process, he articulates the rationale for working more closely with allies, providing economic assistance to the region, and energetically working toward a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict among other sensible policies.

In a startling comparison of military and non-military efforts, Gordon writes that American spending on the Iraq war averaged well over \$2 billion dollars per week; for much less, he writes, the United States could have funded "the entire budget of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (around \$100 million), the entire public diplomacy budget for the Muslim world (\$150 million), an expansion of the Peace Corps by some 10,000 volunteers (around \$400 million), the opening of a new American cultural center in every Arab capital (\$400 million), and scholarships to American universities for 10,000 students from the Middle East (\$400 million)." (p. 86).

*James Goldgeier is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He previously taught at Cornell University, and he has been a visiting scholar at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation, the Brookings Institution, the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In 1995-96, he was a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow serving at the State Department and on the National Security Council staff. From 2001-2005, he directed George Washington University's Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies. He is the co-author (with Michael McFaul) of Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War, which received the 2004 Georgetown University Leggold Book Prize in international relations, and he is the author of Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO and Leadership Style and Soviet Foreign Policy, winner of the 1995 Edgar S. Furniss Book Award in national and international security. His new book, America between the Wars: From 11/9-9/11 (with Derek Chollet), is scheduled to be released by PublicAffairs in June 2008.*

Gordon suggests that we look back at the West's ultimate victory in the Cold War to find lessons for combating Islamic extremists today. Using analogies from the past to guide policy can be tricky, and there is much about the Cold War that does not seem particularly relevant for our current predicament. After all, the Soviet Union was a major industrial power with enormous economic and military might; Al Qaeda and other extremist groups present a very different type of non-state challenge. And in the Soviet case, a visionary leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, who possessed a radically different understanding of world affairs, transformed the U.S.-Soviet relationship by abandoning the competition with the West. Can any single leadership change among America's enemies today provide such a transformative effect?

Nevertheless, Gordon's focus on the lessons of containment does serve a useful purpose. Containment was an alternative to total war on the one hand or appeasement on the other.

And it required patience – Americans could not know how long it might be before the USSR “mellowed” from within as the architect of the policy, George Kennan, predicted it would.

Gordon also usefully reminds us that in the struggle against communism, America made some mistakes, particularly the conflation of different types of threats, which the Bush administration has repeated. During the Cold War, we were slow to recognize the Sino-Soviet split and failed to understand the nationalist aspirations of leaders assumed to be marching in lockstep with Moscow, just as the United States now lumps together a variety of extremist groups and Arab states, seeing them as a monolithic group sharing the same goals.

Gordon views Iran as ripe for a mix of containment and engagement. Although elsewhere in the book he criticizes détente for its resigned acceptance to an indefinite Cold War, his policy prescriptions for Iran sound a lot like the Nixon-Kissinger approach to the Soviet Union. He argues against what others have called a “grand bargain” for Iran, instead offering a “gradual bargain,” which includes sanctions to weaken the regime but also inducements for Iran to abandon its nuclear program as well as support for terrorist groups.

Détente, however, was difficult to carry out. It was hard to ensure popular support for engagement with a country that continued to work to undermine American interests, but that is the nature of a “gradual” bargain – the behavior one is trying to change isn’t transformed overnight. And the linkage policy that Nixon and Kissinger pursued required extraordinary control over multiple agencies of the executive branch as well as Congress, which in many instances was not achieved. The Jackson-Vanik amendment tying trade to human rights, for example, was a policy that infuriated Kissinger but which he was helpless to prevent.

The end of the Cold War and the Soviet collapse lead Gordon to an optimistic conclusion regarding the war on terror. The ideology of the Soviet Union finally proved bankrupt, and so, says Gordon, will that of Al Qaeda. It offers little to Muslim populations hoping for a more prosperous future, as public opinion polls throughout the region demonstrate. What frustrates Gordon about the Bush administration are policies – on Iran, Palestine-Israel, Afghanistan, and Iraq as well as with respect to torture and civil liberties – that he believes drive Muslim youth toward further extremism rather than toward the West.

The United States did not know in 1947 that it would take four decades applying containment before the Soviet Union abandoned its anti-Western ideology. Gordon is counseling patience in combating Islamic extremism, but the nature of the struggle may make that more challenging. Even the Cuban Missile Crisis, as dangerous as it was, did not lead to American civilian deaths, and mutual assured destruction while terrifying did not produce mass casualties. If there is another attack on American soil similar to or even worse in magnitude than a 9/11, a patient strategy that accepts risks as a fact of life may prove unacceptable to the American public.

Combating the Soviets in places like Angola and Nicaragua was controversial, to say nothing of attempting to stem communism's advance in Vietnam; after all, even Kennan criticized the way containment was implemented. During the 1970s, the right was angry about détente; the following decade, the left was furious with Reagan's interventions in Latin America. Gordon looks back at the struggle against communism to consider how to build a nuanced strategy for combating a multifaceted threat while upholding rather than trampling American values, but it wasn't so easy then, and it won't be easy now – on Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and Al Qaeda. Still, his book offers a very helpful guide for responding to many of America's most significant foreign policy challenges.



The most important thing about Phil Gordon's *Winning the Right War* is that it gets the basic judgments—about the errors of Bush administration foreign policy and the best ways to right those wrongs—exactly right. Gordon's analysis of the essential flaws of current U.S. approaches to radical Islamism and Islamic terrorism is spot on, and his suggested policy changes make eminent sense. As a book to recommend to an interested nonspecialist to understand why the current approach to the inaptly named "war on terror" isn't working (and what alternative strategy might work), one could hardly do better.

Note the qualification about the book's audience: It is obviously not intended for specialists who, apart from the occasional sterling insight and not-before-seen quote, won't necessarily find themselves educated in new ways by the book. Some (like this reviewer) will turn the pages smiling, impressed with Gordon's style, judgment, and precise ways of saying exactly what needs to be said about U.S. strategy; others of a different strategic bent will find much to disagree with. But the book is clearly written for a non-expert audience and ought to be judged on that basis; as such, it is an ideal primer on the requirements for a new strategic posture, because it is, to put it simply, right.

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The central leitmotif of the book is a parallelism and contrast between the Terror War and the Cold War, and the comparison is not kind to the Bush administration's approach to the current challenge. Within that larger concept, a number of Gordon's subsidiary themes are absolutely on target, specifically:

The overemphasis on military tools of statecraft and "tough talk" when things like diplomacy, development, intelligence, and winning the information war are really decisive in such long struggles for the allegiance of masses of people;

A crude unilateralism and belligerence when legitimacy and a certain degree of popularity are essential to building the global coalitions necessary to succeed; and

The risk that the current approach focuses "on a tactic, terrorism, when the real issue is how to address the political, diplomatic, social, and economic factors that lead people to use that tactic" (xiii-xiv).

“Put most simply,” Gordon concludes, “the administration is fighting the ‘war on terror’ like a traditional, hot war—taking the offensive militarily, aiming to destroy a fixed enemy, expanding executive authority, and downplaying the importance of legitimacy—when something more akin to the Cold War—a long, patient, moral struggle against a hostile ideology—is required. Until America’s leaders learn to think differently about the new war, they will continue to lose it.”(xiv)

Reading such passages, one wants to holler in agreement and find a way to broadcast them directly into the subconscious of everyone running for president today. Of course, many of those same candidates seem to believe the direct opposite of all of this, or at a minimum feel unwilling to say it out loud for fear of appearing “weak”—which makes Gordon’s enterprise, bringing this sensible message to a quasi-mainstream audience, all the more important.

The book has other strengths. His analysis of the origins of the terrorist threat, while brief, places attention on just the right psycho-social factors and correctly. His suggestions for the elements of the “right war” to fight—restore our moral authority, improve the practice of homeland defense, create new momentum for social development in the Middle East, promote Israeli-Palestinian peace and so on—are all very good ideas and add up to a strong, pragmatic, sensible strategy that a new administration could do a lot worse than merely to pick up and implement.

There are a few passages that raised questions for me. Gordon, as do many analysis of the war on terror, calls for “A dramatic reduction in America’s dependence on imported oil.”(xvi) But in a world of interconnected webs of oil supply and demand, merely substituting Chinese yuan or Japanese yen for American dollars in the purchase of Saudi or Kuwaiti oil—a process already well underway—is not going to affect the socioeconomic dynamic in the Middle East, or the larger phenomenon of radical Islamism. Nor will it insulate America from dramatic oil price spikes if Middle Eastern oil production is severely affected by some regional disaster. Meanwhile, his specific mechanisms to address the issue—a gas tax and an oil price floor—have been perennial political losers here at home, and he doesn’t explain how to alter that equation.

Referring to counterproductive U.S. policies in the war on terror, Gordon writes that “it would be hard to think of a greater gift that could have been given to al Qaeda recruiters who prey on Muslim perceptions of bias and mistreatment.”(22) True enough, our error-prone policies of the last six years can’t have helped; but much bigger socioeconomic causes are at work in prompting radicalism—long-term social malaise, governmental decrepitude, the presence and behavior of Israel. I wonder about the relative role of U.S. policies; take them entirely off the board and we would still have radicalism to combat. The emphasis needs to be not so much on eliminating negative U.S. policies but on putting in place positive ones, ones likely to work to alleviate the grievances that already exist—and Gordon suggests many such positive approaches.

The modest length of the book—just 162 pages of text (and modest pages, too; the book is a smallish folio, about five by seven inches, and the pages are not densely packed with text)—demands very brief treatments of very complex issues. Thus in a mere eight of these modest pages, Gordon has to lay out and defend his proposal to set a date-certain for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq; he has to make the case for a new policy of engaging (while containing) Iran in less than ten. These mini-policy essays are exceptionally well done, but inevitably they leave out numerous potential qualifications, complaints, and counter-arguments. I suppose they are probably pitched at just the right length for the intended audience, which isn't interested in an exhaustive treatment of any one issue. But there were times when I longed for answers to one or two obvious potential problems with the proposed solutions.

Some of my most substantial questions surround the Cold War comparison itself. Gordon puts it straight: In his view, “it is the Cold War—far more than World War II or any other traditional war—that provides the most instructive metaphor for the struggle against Islamic terrorism today.”(41) That means, to him, a struggle based around deterrence and containment rather than military aggression, a struggle waged primarily with nonmilitary instruments, and a struggle that will be won, if it is won, in the minds of the publics—European then, Muslim today—trying to choose between competing value systems. Gordon is also a committed advocate of patience and an opponent of feverish urgency; we don't need to preempt people, the Cold War taught us—we could live with Communist Chinese and Stalinist bombs then, and we can patiently wait out aggressors today, confident that our value system will prevail. Communism collapsed of its own contradictions, “and there is every reason to believe today that the extremist ideology America faces will also fail and die of its own contradictions.”(49)

Precisely. And even one very strongly in agreement with Gordon's sentiments must ask: Is the parallel really that exact? Is there something about the threat today that makes it different from Cold War communism? Is there something in religious radicalism that gives it a different flavor than purely political extremism? Was the Soviet Union circa 1950 really an extremist phenomenon at all?

I agree broadly with the parallel, with the need for patience and faith in our values, and in the idea that the radicalism being peddled by the extremists today will die off. On the other hand, communism was a state-bound movement by the Cold War years, something we could deter in conventional ways; it was not trying to implant terrorist agents in our midst, ready to destroy themselves in self-immolating violence. The level of fantasism in the two movements, the sort of otherworldly visionary aspect, seems entirely different.

A strong comparison can be made between some of the utopian-fantasia founders of the Russian revolutionary movement, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century forward, and the core members of al Qaeda. By the time we get to Stalin and Khrushchev, though, we are dealing with an entirely different sort of guy—more amendable to the patient wait-and-seeism of deterrence and containment. How can we possibly adopt the same approach now, when the furiously plotting radicals of today's extremist fringes ready themselves to smash

modern society from the inside, using everything from pipe bombs to cyberwarfare to (if they could get them) nuclear weapons?

That, anyway, is what Dick Cheney might say to Gordon's Cold War analogy. And while I think the complaint might be exaggerated, there is probably something to it, and Gordon could perhaps have defended his Cold War comparison with a bit more detail and qualification. No analogy is perfect, and I'm sure he recognizes these potential flaws in the one he places at the center of this fine book; a bit more discussion of its possible pitfalls would have balanced the very persuasive presentation of its strengths.

Finally, when I got to page 154 and saw that he explained that only when we *reached victory* in the "right" war would "the nation's priorities" come "back into balance. Preventing terrorism will remain an important goal, but it will no longer have to be the predominant paradigm for U.S. foreign policy. Instead, it will take its place as just one of several concerns for American citizens, alongside health care, the environment, education, and the economy." Yet—and here's the surprising part—we are, as Phil Gordon concludes, "a long way from this world."

But are we? Need we be? Has Phil Gordon, in this judgment, concurred more with the assumptions of today's misguided policies than he needs to do? Is not the assessment of the feverish urgency of the extremist threat, and its priority among the nation's other business, the place where we started to go off track? Has the time not arrived to say that—while we will keep our intelligence and special forces capabilities hard on the heels of terrorists, and enhance our homeland security protections every day—it's time for presidents to stop making every national speech about war, terror, and fear? Couldn't we make the sort of announcement he describes (ending the paradigm of "war on terror") today, this very moment, and move forward as a nation?

I think we could. I think, in fact, that much of the argument in Gordon's fine book would support such a contention. As a result I'm not sure why he seems to think that the terrorist threat looms so large that we have to keep the war concept at the forefront of our national consciousness for a long time yet to come.

These, though, are small quibbles. Phil Gordon has written an exemplary volume about what is wrong with U.S. foreign policy, and how to fix it. The more people who read and are persuaded by his book, the better off the country will be as we head into an election with crucial implications for the future of our role in the world and our success in the struggle to combat violent extremism.

Review by Tony Smith, Tufts University

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Philip Gordon's *Winning the Right War: The Path to Security for America and the World* sets out a list of reasons the Bush administration's policy in the Middle East has been disastrously executed (chapter 1), then suggests how a different approach to a wide set of issues centered on the Muslim world might yield a better outcome for the war on terror (chapters 3-4). The heart of the book theoretically links the first to the second part, claiming that we can learn from containment doctrine as practiced during the Cold War how best to serve the national interest (chapter 2). The short book concludes with a fifth chapter entitled "what victory will look like."

Among the reasons Gordon discusses for America's disastrous Middle East policy in his first chapter entitled "the wrong war" are the Bush administration's failure to understand the emotions giving rise to terrorism in the Muslim world; its failure to distinguish among our enemies there, so taking everyone on at once; its alienation of our natural allies in NATO; and its loss of legitimacy for American conduct by a series of acts from its misrepresentation of the threat Saddam posed to the United States with his weapons of mass destruction to the treatment of captives from Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo. "One of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's favorite sayings was that 'weakness is provocative,'" writes Gordon. "But it turns out that toughness can be provocative as well."

**Tony Smith** earned a B.A. at the University of Texas, an M.A. from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1965, received his doctorate in political science from Harvard University in 1971 and has been a Senior Fellow at the Center for European Studies at Harvard since 1979. He is the Cornelia M. Jackson Professor of Political Science at Tufts University where these days he gives courses on U.S. Foreign Policy. He is the author of five books, including *The French Stake in Algeria* (1978), *The Pattern of Imperialism* (1981), *Thinking Like a Communist* (1987), *America's Mission: The U.S. and the Global Struggle for Democracy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1994), *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy*, (2000); and *A Pact With The Devil: Washington's Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of American Promise* (2007). Smith has also published a dozen articles on the history of Wilsonianism, understood as a perspective making the promotion of democratic government abroad a central focus of American foreign policy.

Among the ingredients for a more successful policy in fighting the war on terror, Gordon would reduce our dependence on imported energy; work with our allies in Europe and through NATO on a range of mutual interests; see to a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that involves bringing pressure on Jerusalem to permit the creation of a viable Palestinian state; cooperate with international organizations beginning with the United Nations and including the IAEA; "contain and engage" Iran but not attack it militarily; and "restore our moral authority" abroad by such measures as recognizing the evils of torture committed by the United States with respect to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Here are the ingredients for "the right war," as he entitles his third chapter, one which allows him to imagine what "victory will look like."

What gives Gordon confidence that the apparent American defeat in Iraq can be turned in to victory in the long run rests on his second chapter, “how we won the Cold War.” Here, Gordon evokes the thinking of George Kennan and the logic of containment. Despite the serious threat posed by Soviet power and ideology, the United States effectively managed to preserve its values and defend its interests. Although the country understood the need for military preparedness, including the possible use of nuclear weapons, America did not become a garrison state, did not enshrine an imperial president, and did not run roughshod over its allies in NATO in the prolonged and multi-faceted struggle that it finally won.

“To win the right war,” Gordon warns against a military, frontal assault on any part of the Muslim world. “The administration is failing because it is fighting the wrong war,” he writes, for it is thinking in terms of “a traditional hot war—taking the offensive militarily, aiming to destroy a fixed enemy, expanding executive authority, and downplaying the importance of legitimacy.” What the nation should be doing instead is something “more akin to the Cold War—a long, patient, moral struggle against a hostile ideology.”

At first reading, Gordon’s book seems common sense. I agree with his litany of shortcomings of Bush administration policy and many of the recommendations he has for change. But the major question about the book is whether the logic of containment could work as well in the future as in the past.

An obvious problem is the utility of historical comparisons, in this case making containment a good template on which to think about current affairs. We should not suppose that the guidance offered by the history or theory of containment is totally clear, or that to the extent we can come to an agreement on its tenets such reflections can work other than by analogy in today’s world. Nor was containment without its failures. Gordon omits discussion of American policy during the Cold War from Indochina to Guatemala and Iran, although he does comment on the mistake of seeing the communist threat as “monolithic” for over two decades. Still, the recommendations of prudence, patience, the resolve to use force when necessary combined with the willingness to show restraint when possible, and a recognition of the need for allies and of the virtues of multilateralism—all these time-honored observations on world affairs might serve us well once again and have been notably lacking during the Bush years.

The notion that the logic of containment provides wise guidance for our current dilemmas has also recently appeared in Ian Shapiro’s *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy against Global Terror* (Princeton UP, 2007). Like Gordon, Shapiro sees the invasion of Iraq as having been an unmitigated disaster, but by working in terms of the logic of containment as authored by Kennan, he too feels the United States has some prospect for exercising an effective role in world affairs.

Nonetheless, there is a critical difference between the two books. The superiority to my mind of Shapiro’s book over Gordon’s is that it is far more detailed on what Kennan meant by containment and, more importantly, it reviews at length the Bush Doctrine in terms of its departure from America’s Cold War strategy. The result is a more deep-seated and telling attack on the Bush administration than Gordon offers. The nub of the matter is that

Shapiro sees the ideas of the Bush Doctrine as deeply flawed conceptually (Shapiro 16ff)—far more so than Gordon, who is uncertain as to whether the Doctrine offered a mistaken vision for American foreign policy or whether the essential problem was its execution at the hands of the Pentagon (Gordon, 33f, 100f).

The danger of Gordon's position is that his failure to attack the Bush Doctrine directly with the logic of containment means he has not driven a stake through the heart of the world view current in Washington for some seven years now. True, he invokes containment as an alternative to the way policy has been made during the Bush years, but by failing to spell out just where the differences lie, Gordon leaves the tenets of the Bush Doctrine on hold ready to step forward on another day to guide the nation's destinies. After all, if containment provided for Vietnam what might it not provide for in the future?

This danger is most apparent in Gordon's chapter four, "A New Deal for the Middle East." Its ingredients would include "getting out of Iraq" (but with some reservations); founding an Israeli-Arab understanding based on the creation of a viable Palestinian state; establishing a modus vivendi with Iran; preventing a Taliban/Al-Qaeda victory in Afghanistan; finding a way to work positively with Pakistan; and "winning back" Turkey. (Briefer positions are advanced with respect to Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and political movements such as Hezbollah.) "The decisive terrain for the struggle is the hearts, minds, and souls of a billion individuals across the greater Middle East, South and Southeast Asia and Western Europe," Gordon writes in terms reminiscent of the Bush Doctrine. Hence in "providing hopes and dreams," he addresses "bringing about the conditions in which democracy could ultimately be created and sustained by the Arabs themselves."

Gordon's "New Deal" is a tall agenda. How realistic is such an ambition? Surely most of these goals are wills-of-the-wisp. How useful is it to invoke containment confronted with the challenges posed in the region? And what of China or Russia at a time when America is weakened by its Middle East policies? What of the tribulations of the domestic American economy or the ruin being wrecked on the environment? On these matters Gordon says not a word, as if the war on terrorism should be the lodestar of American foreign policy with scant regard for other priorities.

In Gordon's hands "containment" works as something of a magic wand—wave it and apparently insurmountable obstacles will be overcome. Yes, he does indicate that none of these matters is open to easy or quick resolution. Yet because he has not put clear distance between himself and the Bush Doctrine, as his heady words on what he would hope America could accomplish with a "New Deal" in the Muslim world attest, might he not endorse an enlightened reaffirmation of the Bush Doctrine? And just how useful is thinking in terms of the logic of containment in any case? Ill-fated American interventions in Guatemala, Iran, and Southeast Asia all occurred under its terms, points Gordon conveniently forgets to mention. Unless one is careful, that is, containment can morph back in to the Bush Doctrine.

The problem is all the more concerning because of Gordon's affiliation with the hawkish Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) run under the auspices of the Democratic Leadership

Council (DLC). It was standard fare for the PPI to criticize the Bush administration for its failure to prosecute the invasion of Iraq more effectively—but not for its initial decision to undertake this misbegotten venture. The essential PPI argument amounted to “we Democrats could do it better.” Gordon also signed at least two statements issued by the neoconservative Project for the New American Century. And on occasion, he used his post at Brookings to call for NATO’s support for the American conquest of Iraq and to threaten Iran.

The relevance of Gordon’s background to the book in question is that it underscores his ambivalence to Bush administration policy. The litmus test for bringing forth the notion of containment as a guide to current policy should be whether and how it is clearly understood to replace the Bush Doctrine. Gordon fails the test in this book, first by understating the difficulties of making containment work in today’s world, and second by using the logic of containment to criticize the execution of American policy in the Middle East, but not the framework from which policy was drawn.

If a Democratic administration takes office in January 2009, Gordon can be all things to all people—loyal to the view of American primacy through promotion of “market democracy” as the Bush Doctrine and his comrades in the PPI and the former PNAC would still have it, or more moderate in keeping with those who suspect that the basic concepts of the Bush years were mistaken and so who prefer to hear talk of a happier time when the logic of containment was in vogue. On the basis of such a smooth appeal, high policy advisors are far too often selected.

What Gordon’s book suggests is the way leading elements of the Democratic Party will define its foreign policy outlook for the 2008 election. Can the Party do what its popular base seems to want and break with the notion of American supremacy in world affairs, or will it repackage the major arguments of the Bush Doctrine into a more prudent form, for example by invoking the legacy of containment?

If Democratic leaders still agree with Madeleine Albright that the United States is “the indispensable country,” then Gordon’s “how to,” “can do” approach will suit their purpose. Whatever my own reservations about the book, I suspect it will gain a wide reading in Democratic leadership circles.



Review by Nicholas Thompson, New America Foundation

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Imagine that George W. Bush had been president during the Korean War. He would have reacted angrily and pridefully to the initial attack. He would have demanded that Douglas MacArthur carry the battle beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. He would have been aggressive in every way, linking the local threat to the existential menace of Communism.

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And what would have happened after November 1950? Of course, one can't be sure. But Bush would likely have bombed China, and he might have sent MacArthur across the Yalu. He would probably have exaggerated (both to himself and to the nation) the influence that the Soviets were exercising in the battle. Truman hid the evidence that America fighter jets were engaging with Soviet MIGs; Bush would likely have reveled in it. He might have brought out our nuclear arsenal, arguing that since the enemy started the fight, there was no limit upon our ending it.

Historical counterfactuals taken too far become silly. But there's an important lesson here. One of the central policies in the Cold War was restraint. Even at the hottest moments---Korea, Vietnam, Berlin---America chose to limit the odds of conflagration.

This is one the central points in Philip Gordon's strident, clear, and important new book, *Winning The Right War: The Path to Security for America and the World*. Gordon argues that the Bush administration is fighting the wrong war against the wrong people in the wrong way. We should be engaging in a battle of ideas with Al Qaeda and its potential recruits; not a battle of Kalashnikovs and UAVs against everyone we don't like in the Middle East. The results, Gordon argues, have been disastrous for this country. George W. Bush has been a uniter, not a divider, in only one way: he's taken a part of the world long engulfed with tension and rivalry, and begun uniting ancient enemies in their opposition to us.

To Gordon, the proper response to September 11<sup>th</sup> would have been to pull out and retune the theory of containment that George Kennan articulated in 1947. Obviously, there are vast differences between fighting an imminently nuclear Soviet Union and a shadowy world of men with TNT strapped to their chests---much as there's a difference between fighting a raging bull and a swarm of insects. But as Gordon shows, there are also very useful things to learn from the old fight.

For starters, we didn't need to attack the Soviet Union to rid ourselves of our threat. We just had to keep it in its place and wait for it to self-destruct. Kennan's wrote that communism "bears within it the seeds of its own decay."<sup>2</sup> Gordon argues that: "With time

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<sup>2</sup> "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, (The "X" Article), July 1947, Vol. XXV. P.566-582. Accessed at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19470701faessay25403/x/the-sources-of-soviet-conduct.html> on December 11, 2007.

and experience---and if we make the right choices---Muslims will turn against the extremists in their midst." (p. 162)

There are other parallels between the two men's arguments. Kennan argued relentlessly that communism wasn't monolithic. Tito wasn't Stalin, and Stalin wasn't Mao. Likewise, Gordon argues forcefully that the Bush administration has done a disservice by lumping so many different threats in the Middle East together. Bin Laden isn't Ahmadinejad, and Ahmadinejad isn't Nasrallah.

Kennan and Gordon both focus on the need to make America strong at home--- morally, economically, socially---to set an example for the rest of the world. "The issue of Soviet-American relations is in essence a test of the overall worth of the United States," Kennan wrote in the X article. "To avoid destruction the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation." Gordon argues passionately that the loosening of civil liberties at home, and America's torture scandals abroad, have been a great gift to the nation's enemies.

Gordon's whole argument isn't reflective of Kennan's. The so-called war on terror (nomenclature the author finds wholly misleading, but no longer worth arguing about) offers dramatic differences from the Cold War. One of the more interesting is that it's hard to see how it will end. A peaceful endgame to the Cold War may have seemed highly unlikely, but at least it was conceivable that a friendly government would gain power in Moscow. But what will the end of the GWOT look like? To Gordon, it will be when terrorism is a nuisance, not an obsession. He makes an interesting parallel to crime in New York. No, it will never go away. It's a heck of a lot better though now than 20 years ago. If we do the same thing with terror, then it's time to pop the champagne corks.

This smart and clear book has two weaknesses. The first is that it can seem partisan. Gordon worked in the Bill Clinton administration and at times he takes his arguments one step too far---into the realm of Harry Reid more than George Kennan. For example, at one point he argues that the Bush administration isn't adequately funding the war in Iraq. But, if one buys the rest of his arguments, this doesn't follow. It's rarely better to throw two \$20 bills, not one, into a fire engulfing your neighborhood.

Second, and relatedly, *Winning the Right War* can sometimes read like a campaign book. It's short and covers lots of ground; the strength is breadth and brevity, not depth and surprise. By the second-to-last chapter, we're skipping over the course of 10 pages from meta political recommendations for Iran, then for Pakistan, then for Turkey. One wonders whether the prime target of this book isn't Barack Obama's briefcase.

That may be a slightly frustrating feature for readers, but it wouldn't be such a bad thing for the country. Gordon's got a set of smart ideas that he's articulated well, and he grounds them solidly in our history. If the next president follows Gordon's advice, America will take a turn in the right direction---toward the sensible set of policies and values that got us through the Cold War and that could well guide us through the foreign policy troubles of today.

Author's Response by Philip Gordon, Brookings Institution

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I am grateful to my four distinguished colleagues for their thoughtful and stimulating responses to *Winning the Right War*. I am delighted that they found many of the arguments convincing and thank them for the provocative and challenging questions about those they did not. All of the reviewers clearly read the book carefully and, I think, fairly represented my thesis in their summaries—except in a few cases I’ll address below I certainly cannot claim to have been misunderstood or misconstrued. My only major disagreements are with Tony Smith, whose review, I think, says as much about the prism through which he sees the current U.S. foreign policy debate as it does about my book, an issue that I will also discuss below.

Let me start, however, by addressing a central issue that more or less all the reviewers brought up, which is the relevance of the Cold War “containment” analogy for our current situation. Mazarr suggests that the threat today is “different from Cold War communism,” Goldgeier and Thompson point out that the Soviet state was a very different actor from al Qaeda, and Smith notes that Cold War containment also involved failures (like Vietnam) and wonders whether its logic “could work as well in the future as in the past.” To all this, I can only emphasize a point that I made in the book: I do not argue that containment is either a perfect analogy (no such thing exists) or a perfect strategy (ditto), simply that it is a better analogy and strategy than all the others, which is about all that anyone can ask for.

**Philip H. Gordon** received a Ph.D. in 1991 from Johns Hopkins University, SAIS. He is currently Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution. He served as Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council. He is the author and co-author of ten books, including *Crescent of Crisis: U.S.-European Strategy for the Greater Middle East* (2006); *Allies at War: America, Europe and the Crisis Over Iraq* (2004); *Iraq: The Transatlantic Debate* (2002); *The French Challenge: Adapting to Globalization* (2001); and *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Diplomacy and Nuclear Weapons since 1945* (1999). His recent articles include “The Bush Doctrine,” *Commentary* (September 2006); and “The End of the Bush Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2006).

The differences between the “war on terror” and the Cold War are numerous and outlined well by all the respondents. What is important, however—and what makes the analogy useful—is the essential point that neither was/is a traditional war that could/can be won on the battlefield. We could not win the Cold War by invading and occupying the Kremlin any more than we can win the war on terror by force of arms today. Kennan’s great insights in 1947 were that we needed an alternative to both World War III and capitulation to the Communists, and that, contrary to conventional wisdom at the time, the long-term trends were in our favor. Those two basic truths, I think, also apply to our strategic situation today, and—equally importantly—remain underappreciated, including in the White House. I call the Bush administration’s “war on terror” the “wrong war” not only because we’re fighting the wrong way but because we’re *thinking about it* the wrong way. And for all the obvious differences between Islamist extremism and Communism, the

essential similarity—that neither can be defeated on the battlefield but only discredited in the minds of potential adherents—is very much worth keeping in mind.

To the point that the Soviet Union was led by cautious, deterrable leaders while al Qaeda is led by fanatics trying to kill Americans every day I would agree but also offer several responses to put it in perspective. First, while it's easy now to look back at the failed Communist experiment and argue that it was always a containable, deterrable threat, we certainly did not know that at the time. As Kennan pointed out, the Soviet Union's leaders were "committed fanatically to the belief that with [the United States] there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken." Yet Kennan still argued that the right strategy consisted in containing this threat by maintaining a vigorous defense, applying counterpressure, and making efforts to win over the world's population—and eventually the Soviets themselves—to our side. Postwar Americans had to accept living with risks of subversion, invasion, or even nuclear war, yet still concluded, rightly I think, that containment was the best way to go.

Second, while the risk of actual attack from today's terrorists is higher than it was from Communists decades ago, the scope and magnitude of the latter threat were far greater. The threat from terrorism today is a serious one, but it simply does not compare with that from a nuclear-armed industrial state whose ideology at one point had supporters and admirers all around the world, from Vietnam to Guatemala, Cuba, Indonesia, and Egypt, let alone in Western Europe and even the United States itself. As I point out in *Winning the Right War* (p. 81, borrowing from terrorism expert Brian Jenkins and others), the risk to an average American of dying from a terrorist attack is over fifty times less than the risk of being murdered and over one hundred times less than dying in an automobile accident—yet some argue that this degree of risk cannot be "contained" and instead requires a sort of foreign policy revolution. America should not allow a real but limited risk of terrorist attack to provoke them into counterproductive actions any more than they allowed the far more grave risk of Soviet subversion or worse to do so.

Finally, the reason a containment strategy is advisable today despite our inability to deter suicide bombers is that—just like containment during the Cold War—it is simply a better approach than the alternatives. For what, exactly, is the policy recommendation that emerges from the critique that containment cannot deter al Qaeda? That we should preemptively detain all potential terrorists? That we should invade major Middle Eastern countries, arrest their militants, and seek to democratize them by force to dry up the sources of the terrorist threat? That we should seal America's borders to keep out potential terrorists or their weapons? In the book I propose a number of active measures the United States should undertake to accompany containment—from restoring its tarnished moral authority abroad to resolving diplomatic sources of frustration in Middle East and reducing U.S. dependence on oil. Containment does not have to mean passivity. But it does mean accepting the Hippocratic recommendation to "first, do no harm," and it certainly means avoiding a counterproductive approach—based on repression or military force—that would only play into the terrorists' hands.

If it sounds like I'm used to defending my argument from critics on the Right it's because I am—proponents of "World War III" have, not surprisingly, attacked me for being too passive in the face of the terrorist threat. The originality in Tony Smith's critique is that he attacks me from the Left, for what he alleges is ambivalence about the Bush administration's strategy. Whereas other reviewers, I think, have perceptively dissected my argument (whether they entirely agree with it or not), I have to admit some puzzlement at Smith's conclusion that I'm "uncertain as to whether the [Bush] Doctrine offered a mistaken vision for American foreign policy." The first 35 pages of the book consist of an argument that Bush has misunderstood the origins of the terrorist threat; overemphasized military force and tough talk; squandered American moral authority; conflated a diverse set of threats; gratuitously alienated key allies; and failed to match his strategy's ends with its means. I return to similar criticisms throughout the book and sum it all up again at the end. In a separate review, former White House official Peter Wehner called my assessment a "one-sided...ideological, legal brief" that failed to recognize any merit to the Bush case. He apparently failed to detect the alleged ambivalence.

Distancing myself from the Bush administration, of course, was not the point of the exercise, yet it seems to be the criterion by which Smith wants to judge its merit. He apparently believes that the "litmus test" for foreign policy strategy should be based on the degree to which it drives a "stake through the heart" of the Bush doctrine, and that any association with anyone who ever supported that doctrine constitutes a sort of "pact with the Devil" (the title of Smith's own recent book). That seems to me an unnecessarily Manichean—and certainly counterproductive—way to view U.S. foreign policy. As my book makes clear, I have fundamental differences with the way the Bush administration has conceptualized and conducted the "war on terror." But I also refuse to accept that these are simple issues, that there is no merit whatever to the case made by those I disagree with, and that political opponents cannot occasionally find common ground. Smith rejects both containment and the Bush Doctrine as guidelines for policy, but if the alternative to them means essentially getting the United States out of world affairs I think that cure would be worse than the disease. Whatever my complaints about the Bush administration's overestimation of America's ability to reshape the world, I also think it is possible to err on the other side—leaving a security vacuum that would hardly make the world a safer place.

The various respondents raised a number of other important issues that deserve more extensive discussion than I can provide here. Mazarr, for example, makes the important point that however great the U.S. role in dealing with the issue of terrorism there are "much bigger socioeconomic causes at work" and therefore limits to what the United States can do. I agree with that and develop that argument in the book—ultimately Muslims, and not outsiders, will decide the fate of their societies. That said, our own policies are all we have to control, and their indirect influence on the "socioeconomic causes" in question (let alone the diplomatic and psychological ones) should not be underestimated. I also take Mazarr's related point on the narrower issue of energy dependence that the United States cannot act alone, since the global energy market is so interconnected and oil is a fungible product. Again, true, but it's also true that the United States still consumes almost a quarter of the

world's oil, and that U.S. leadership in this area—in reducing global demand, in setting an example for others, and in developing the technologies that will help everyone move away from oil—would be a critical step forward.

Let me conclude by addressing the question of the target audience for this book, an issue raised by both Mazarr and Thompson. Mazarr notes that it seems targeted at nonexperts, while Thompson more specifically wonders “whether the prime target of this book isn’t Barack Obama’s briefcase.” I will not deny that I deliberately wrote a short, jargon-free book that I hoped would be accessible to the wider public and yes, even presidential candidates during an election year. I hope to have done so in a serious way that places current foreign policy debates in the context of recent U.S. history, carefully explores the merits of the analogy with the Cold War, discusses the psychological, sociological and diplomatic roots of Islamist terrorism, and proposes and defends clear policy alternatives. If my call to re-think the way we are approaching the “war on terror” manages to persuade a major political leader—or frankly even a handful of university students somewhere—it will have served at least some of its purpose.

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