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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.

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Review by Tony Smith, Tufts University

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

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 20th 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.

Defense Rumsfeld's favorite sayings was that 'weakness is provocative,'" writes Gordon. "But it turns out that toughness can be provocative as well."

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?

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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.

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