Review Essays

American Choices in the 'War on Terror'

Philip H. Gordon

Winning Modern Wars: Iraq, Terrorism and the American Empire
Wesley K. Clark. New York: Public Affairs, 2003.

An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror
David Frum and Richard Perle. New York: Random House, 2003.

The massive destruction and emotional trauma caused by the 11 September attacks on the United States, unprecedented in US history, made President George W. Bush's declaration of war almost a political and psychological necessity. Almost immediately, Americans across the political spectrum accepted and internalised the notion that the United States was indeed at war. What remains contested is just who the United States is at war against. Is the enemy al-Qaeda, the organisation that planned and carried out the attacks? Is it the state sponsors and supporters of terrorist groups? Is it governments whose mistreatment of their own people create the climate in which terrorism breeds? Or is the United States fighting an even broader war against terrorism itself, the technique of warfare that on 11 September gave just a glimpse of its capacity to visit destruction on the American populace?

The answers to these questions define the US strategy in the war on terrorism. In the frightening days after 11 September, the Bush administration answered them rapidly and forcefully. It began the war with an effort to find and punish those responsible for 11 September – al-Qaeda and its Taliban hosts in Afghanistan. But a second phase followed before the first had even finished. In the second phase, the United States made clear it would not tolerate a world marked by the unholy trinity of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and rogue regimes. The administration wrapped the invasion of Iraq in the mantle of this wider war on terrorism and continues to hint that other states that support terrorists or develop weapons of mass destruction risk similar treatment.

Philip H. Gordon is a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution and the author (with Jeremy Shapiro) of *Allies at War: America, Europe and the Crisis over Iraq* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004). He served on the US National Security Council staff during the second Clinton administration

Now, with a presidential election campaign underway and in the difficult aftermath of the controversial decision to invade Iraq, the president's approach to the war on terror is coming under considerable scrutiny. Two recent books – *Winning Modern Wars* by General Wesley K. Clark, and *An End to Evil*, by David Frum and Richard Perle – help to frame the choices with which Americans are faced. Clark, the retired NATO Supreme Allied Commander who published his book before announcing a decision to run for the Democratic nomination for president last year, takes what might be called the 'targeted' approach to the terrorism problem. His central argument is that the war in Iraq was a strategic error and that the US focus should have been, and should now be, on the al-Qaeda network and its supporters. Like many Democrats, Clark also denounces the Bush administration for alienating key American allies and for failing to take advantage of international institutions like the UN and NATO to build legitimacy for the war against and occupation of Iraq. He criticises the administration for infringing on civil liberties in its approach to holding terrorist suspects without trial and its investigation of American Muslims, and fears these measures will create more problems than they solve. In short, *Winning Modern Wars* is a sweeping case that the Bush administration, by widening the war on terror, is leading the United States down a path toward isolation and insecurity.

Frum and Perle have a sharply different view. Frum is the former White House speechwriter who famously helped coin the phrase 'axis of evil' in the president's 2003 State of the Union address. He left the White House last year after his wife committed the unpardonable Washington sin of revealing her husband's authorship of the line, thus stealing the president's thunder. Perle is a well-known neo-conservative thinker and former Reagan administration official who until recently chaired the Bush administration's Defense Policy Board and now (like Frum) is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative Washington think tank. Frum and Perle not only defend the Bush administration's vigorous pursuit of the 'war on terror'; they argue that it has been too passive. In contrast to Clark's 'targeted' approach, Frum and Perle call for an expansive approach that defines the war on terror in the widest conceivable terms. They argue that the threat of terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction requires a fundamental reorientation of US foreign policy, bureaucratic structures and domestic security practices. The United States must mount an implacable campaign to oppose terrorists and terrorism of any nature anywhere in the world. 'When it is in our power and our interest', they write, 'we should toss dictators aside with no more compunction than a police sharpshooter feels when he downs a hostage-taker' (p. 114).

These two books, of course, do not define the precise contours of the US foreign policy debate. Clark has taken a more dovish position, at least on Iraq, than many leading Democrats, while Frum and Perle are more hawkish than even the Bush administration hardliners. But the two books together do tend to define the alternative ends of the mainstream US debate about the war on terror and usefully challenge readers to think about options for confronting the terrorist threat. Will America be safer if it focuses narrowly on al-Qaeda, works cooperatively with allies and international institutions, and acknowledges trade-offs between civil liberties and security at home and abroad? Or is the new threat so potentially devastating that a powerful but vulnerable United States has no option but to mount an aggressive campaign to confront terrorism everywhere, even if that means using military force to challenge foreign regimes and defying the will of the international community?

To begin with both sides' Exhibit A – Iraq – Clark makes a plausible case that the invasion was a mistake. His argument that the threat was not imminent seems more persuasive by the day, as the administration's two main justifications – Saddam's alleged weapons of mass destruction programmes and his alleged links with al-Qaeda – turn out to have been highly exaggerated. This strengthens Clark's argument that whatever the benefits of ending Saddam's dictatorship (and there were many), the opportunity costs of doing so – in terms of military forces overstretched, allies alienated and intelligence assets misallocated – may have been too high.

At a minimum, the failure to find either weapons of mass destruction or convincing proof of Saddam's cooperation with al-Qaeda means that the invasion and occupation of Iraq will only prove to have been worthwhile if a viable political structure can be put in place. It is possible that Iraq will, within a few years, emerge as a relatively humane, stable semi-democracy, with legitimate institutions and a real prospect for future prosperity and freedom. If so, that would certainly take some of the thunder away from the Islamic extremists who exploited arguments that the United States was causing Muslim suffering by imposing sanctions on Iraq and leaving a ruthless, secular dictator in place. If that enormous political challenge cannot be met, however, and Iraq requires indefinite American occupation – or worse, disintegrates into violence among its rival ethnic groups – the invasion will have proved not only unnecessary but counterproductive. The ultimate irony would be if Iraqis tire of the US occupation and eventually fall under the grip of an authoritarian – or perhaps even Islamist – leader determined to build the weapons of mass destruction that Saddam did not have and to work with al-Qaeda as Saddam never did. But even if Iraqi democracy does succeed, the costs of the invasion and occupation

already raise serious questions about how often the United States will really be able to – and how often it will want to – turn to preventive war as a foreign policy tool.

Clark also plausibly challenges the assertion – central to the hardliners' case for overthrowing Saddam – that victory in Iraq will help deal with terrorism through its positive spillover effects on other states. The evidence, so far, is mixed. The Bush doctrine of using or threatening force against rogue regimes – strongly reinforced by the sight of Saddam Hussein being pulled out of a hole – may well have had a salutary effect on the leaders of Iran, Syria and Libya. Fear of US power probably contributed at least in part to some recent positive steps in the region, such as Iran's agreement to freeze its uranium enrichment and reprocessing programme, Libya's agreement to give up its weapons of mass destruction programmes and Syria's proposals for talks with Israel.

But it can also be argued that the costly American occupation of Iraq actually makes military threats against other regimes less rather than more credible. In Iran – three times as populous as Iraq and historically averse to American intervention – leaders must feel reasonably confident that the United States will not soon seriously contemplate 'Operation Iranian Freedom' followed by a US-led occupation. Nor, tragically, has the invasion of Iraq 'set in motion progress towards a truly democratic Palestinian state', as Bush argued just before the start of the war.[1] The thesis that the road to Jerusalem would pass through Baghdad has, at least so far, been proven well off the mark. Further afield, North Korea seems to have seen the American military distraction in Iraq as an opportunity to proceed with its own nuclear weapons programme, in an effort to build a deterrent before it is too late. Pyongyang, moreover, seems all too well aware that its geography (thousands of artillery tubes within 40km of the South Korean capital Seoul) and suspected nuclear-weapons capability makes a US attack highly unlikely, especially when the US military has its hands full in Iraq.

Many of the recent positive changes in the Middle East, in fact, seem to be the result more of regional leaders' desperate desire to overcome international isolation than of fear of a US attack. Certainly Libya's WMD decision is the result of a process that began well before Bush took office – after long negotiations with the Clinton administration, Muammar Gadaffi handed over the suspected Lockerbie bombers in 1999 in an attempt to get UN sanctions on Libya lifted. Similarly, Iran seems to have cut its nuclear deal – the suspension of its uranium enrichment

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1 See Bush's speech to the American Enterprise Institute, 'President Discusses the Future of Iraq', Washington Hilton Hotel, 26 February 2003.

programme – with Britain, France and Germany last autumn because of the credible threat of EU trade and diplomatic sanctions. The EU is Iran's leading trading partner, and the unpopular mullahs who run Iran know that their burgeoning youth population would in the long run not tolerate isolation from Europe and a failing economy.

Proponents of the expansive approach, of course, disagree with all of this, and they are right to stress that removing Saddam from power was a good thing even if it does not prove to have all the strategic benefits they predicted. But their rebuttal of the case against the Iraq war also includes the argument that *opposing* something is not in itself a strategy. Indeed, Frum and Perle specifically contend that 'the advocates of a strong policy against terror … have offered concrete recommendations equal to the seriousness of the threat, and the soft-liners have not' (p. 9). This argument is almost certain to be a critical component of Bush's 2004 re-election campaign, which will seek to contrast his activist approach with an allegedly complacent Democratic alternative. Already in his January 2004 State of the Union address, Bush claimed that Americans were confronted with a choice: 'we can go forward with confidence and resolve, or we can turn back to the dangerous illusion that terrorists are not plotting and outlaw regimes are no threat to us'.[2]

Is the targeted approach really only an excuse for inaction? Clark succeeds at least partly in demonstrating that the alternative to the expansive agenda is not merely a resigned acceptance that nothing can be done. He argues persuasively, for example, that the United States would be better off significantly increasing the resources devoted to stabilising Afghanistan, including more US troops, and hunting for al-Qaeda within its borders. He supports enhancing US intelligence-gathering capabilities, more US public diplomacy in the Middle East, efforts to help Russia secure its 'loose nukes' and greater counter-terrorism cooperation with allies like Turkey. He would invest more heavily in US port and cyber security and increase funding for domestic police, firefighters and other first responders. Clark also calls for greater efforts to cut the terrorist lifeline to funding sources in places like Saudi Arabia and more support for public education in the Middle East as an alternative to the Islamist madrassas that spew anti-Semitism and hate.

None of these measures are nearly as dramatic or concrete as confronting rogue regimes with threats of force, and Clark and other Democrats will have to flesh out such proposals to demonstrate that they are not, in fact, for 'the weaker line'. Their agenda should also include

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[2] George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, 20 January 2004.

more active engagement to try to bring about Israeli–Palestinian peace; measures to promote democracy and human rights in the Middle East (including the creation of an 'Organisation for Security and Cooperation' in the Middle East); revisions of the nuclear and biological non-proliferation regimes; and more support for economic development in the Islamic world to give its growing youth population an alternative to the despair and humiliation that makes it susceptible to political Islam. And the targeted agenda should also include the willingness to use military force to overthrow foreign regimes as the United States did against the Taliban. If Saddam Hussein had been in cahoots with al-Qaeda, the invasion of Iraq would have been unambiguously necessary. But Clark has at least made a start toward outlining a serious counter-terrorism strategy that consists of more than just complaining about the invasion of Iraq.

Clark wrote his book before announcing his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president and states in the introduction that his political ambitions had 'no bearing on [his] analysis'. Maybe so, but the book is not entirely non-partisan and it does seem to have been written with Clark's political aspirations at least in the back of his mind. In his many public statements about Iraq before the war, Clark showed himself to be sceptical about the need to invade Iraq, but willing to recognise that Saddam Hussein was a threat that had to be dealt with. In congressional testimony and a large number of newspaper articles, Clark was suitably cautious about the risks and benefits of a potential war. But – unlike other retired generals like former CENTCOM commander Anthony Zinni or former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft – Clark never argued that invasion would be a major error. *Winning Modern Wars*, however, refuses even to acknowledge the seriousness of the administration's case for regime change in Iraq. In his zeal to indict the Bush administration (and perhaps to set himself up as a viable presidential candidate – the four-star dove?), Clark fails to acknowledge the benefits as well as the costs of getting rid of Saddam. He could have done so without undermining his overall argument, but that might not have served his political purposes, at least as he saw them at the time.

Clark's political aspirations also seem to peek through when he attributes responsibility for 11 September directly to the man whose job he decided to seek. Whereas Frum and Perle and many other Republicans have tried to lay blame for the failure to prevent those attacks at the door of the Clinton administration, Clark turns that accusation around. While 'more could have been done' under Clinton, he says, 'on September 11, 2001 the Bush administration had not yet approved a counterterrorist campaign' (p. 117). There was thus 'no doubt where the ultimate responsibility rested. This was a national security problem … and the responsibility lay at the top, with the

president as commander in chief' (p. 117). That charge would come to feature more in Clark's campaign for the Democratic nomination than in any of the other leading candidate's platforms.

If Clark is more partisan than he acknowledges, Frum and Perle do not have that problem – because they would admit quite freely that they see the Democrats as weak on national security and the war on terror. The condemnation of the Clinton administration for not taking terrorism seriously – and of contemporary Democrats for the same – is harsh. This is not to say that Frum and Perle agree with everything the Bush administration has done; indeed while supportive overall of the Bush approach, they clearly find it a bit soft. Their book can be seen as an appeal to their fellow hardliners not to 'go wobbly', as Margaret Thatcher famously advised the father of the current American president after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

If Clark's partisanship is mostly hidden, Frum and Perle's is unabashed. For example, they write that:

> The people who governed America in the 1990s now tell us that they were obsessed with the terrorist danger. At the time, they always seemed to have higher priorities. Yes, they wanted to prevent hijackings. But they wanted even more to protect the privacy rights of the likes of Zacarias Moussaoui (p. 194)

The problem is that the allegedly scandalously complacent reaction of the FBI cited by Frum and Perle took place not 'in the 1990s' but, as they write, 'in the summer of 2001', that is, seven months into the Bush administration. This does not necessarily substantiate Clark's assertion that Bush should be held personally responsible for failing to prevent the 11 September attacks, but neither can it be said that the dividing line on taking terrorism seriously was a partisan one that can be drawn at the time of Bush's inauguration. Prior to 11 September, Bush had taken no serious action to better protect the United States from terrorist attacks.

The targets of Frum and Perle's considerable venom, in any case, include not only Democrats (and Europeans), but most of the officials, and certainly the career officials, of George W. Bush's own State Department. The authors would seem to agree with Margaret Thatcher's quip years ago that in her experience the Trade Ministry looks after trade, the Finance Ministry looks after Finance and the Foreign Office looks after foreigners. Frum and Perle's attack on the State Department follows up on a campaign launched last year by their American Enterprise Institute colleague, and former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich. Without a hint of irony, Gingrich actually denounced the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) for concluding that 'liberal democracy will be difficult to achieve in Iraq' – despite the fact that it was the

president's stated policy to do so.[3] (Presumably Gingrich would also have castigated INR for concluding that Iraq did not have WMD stockpiles when it was the president's stated policy that it did.) Frum and Perle, in the wake of credible accusations that the Bush administration politicised intelligence during the Iraq debate, fortunately avoid such a line of attack. But their impatience with the department's alleged unwillingness to implement the president's policies – which they believe are closer to their own recommendations than to those of the Secretary of State – is palpable. They want the career diplomats – and for that matter Colin Powell himself – to get on board or to get out of the way.

Many critics, especially outside the United States, will dismiss the Frum and Perle agenda as extreme, but it would be a great mistake not to take it seriously. This is true first of all because the authors are right that the potential combination of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction does require a fundamental rethinking of conventional wisdom in foreign policy. Frum and Perle thus perform a useful service by trying to shake people and bureaucracies out of their natural complacency; this book is not a mere provocation and it is perhaps unfortunate that the authors' swaggering and polemical tone may lead some readers to think that it is. The book should also be taken seriously because the basic assumptions behind it are widely shared by influential members of the Bush administration, including the president. No one can exclude the possibility that in a second Bush term at least some of its policy recommendations would be implemented.

That said, many of the key judgments of *An End to Evil* are flawed, and even dangerous. The very title of the book is an indication of the problem. Ending evil is an impossible goal, and the policies that would be necessary to reach that nirvana – like US occupation of the entire Middle East, if not the entire world – risk producing outcomes that are far worse than the risks of the status quo. Indeed, the very notion of 'winning' the war on terror – as if it were the equivalent of the Second World War and that it could be 'won' in the same way – is simply misguided. By setting up the problem as a false choice between 'victory or holocaust' (p. 9), the authors imply that anything less than total and immediate eradication of all of America's adversaries means the end of our civilisation, and therefore that all measures to confront terrorism are by definition worthwhile. That flawed assumption can lead to a serious misallocation of resources and policies that create more problems than they solve.

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[3] See Newt Gingrich, 'Rogue State Department', *Foreign Policy*, July/August, 2003.

Misled by their basic assumptions, Frum and Perle thus miss points that are obvious, fortunately, even to much of the Bush administration. The authors do not seem to acknowledge even the intended costs or consequences of their approach, let alone the unintended ones that would almost certainly accompany it. Would, for example, a policy of fomenting revolution in Iran, blockading North Korea, encouraging the disintegration of Saudi Arabia, occupying Iraq and refusing Palestinian statehood (to cite just a few of their policy recommendations) really be a better way to enhance US security than the narrow focus on al-Qaeda that Clark proposes? Frum and Perle would no doubt argue that they do not actually propose to do all of these things immediately, but rather, that simply preparing or credibly threatening to do them would suffice to induce better behaviour from America's enemies abroad. One should be as sceptical of such promises as of the hawks' (including Perle's) earlier suggestions that the Iraqi regime would collapse if only we gave more backing to the ragtag Iraqi opposition. Or that a stable and democratic Iraq would quickly emerge after regime change without the necessity for a significant number of US troops. Or that once the US government showed its determination to pursue regime change in Iraq most of the world would meekly follow along. Past US policies such as military support for the mujahedeen – including Osama bin Laden – in Afghanistan or the 1953 CIA-sponsored coup in Iran also seemed like good ideas at the time, but they later had devastating consequences. Many of the specific policy suggestions in *An End to Evil* would likely do more harm than good.

Another enormous blind spot in the approach outlined in the book is the unwillingness to recognise America's need for allies in the war on terror. Frum and Perle seem to assume either that allies are not necessary to a powerful United States or that countries will have little choice but to support the United States because of its immense power. Both of those assumptions proved wrong in Iraq, and they could prove even more devastatingly wrong in the war on terrorism if US policies so alienate potential allies that they discover an interest in countering American power rather than supporting it. In Iraq, the United States has borne more than 90% of the costs and 90% of the casualties, and despite the administration's coalition it is still providing 80% of the troops. In North Korea, the US cannot implement a comprehensive blockade to bring the regime to its knees without the cooperation of South Korea and China.

President Bush's assertion in the 2004 State of Union speech that 'America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country' is a truism that Frum and Perle would doubtless applaud. But is it necessary, or smart, to talk that way? The United States prevailed in

the Cold War not only because it was powerful but also, and in large part, because it managed its alliances in an enlightened way that lent legitimacy to its leadership. The US Cold War 'empire', if there was one, was what historian Geir Lundestad called an 'empire by invitation' – the US was the leader of the free world because others wanted it to be. The risk of exercising US leadership along the lines proposed by Frum and Perle would be to turn that equation around. The Bush Doctrine would become the Brezhnev Doctrine, and NATO would end up more like the Warsaw Pact – an alliance dominated by its most powerful member but lacking in legitimacy and support from its members.

Frum and Perle point out, quite rightly, that 'the terrorists are cruel, but they are not aimless' (p. 9). But they seem oblivious to the risk that some of their policies could help bin Laden and his associates achieve their aims. Appearing insensitive to the rights of Muslim Americans (and other Muslims around the world), occupying Iraq and destabilising the Saudi and Iranian regimes risks producing support for, rather than undermining, the Islamist case against the United States. The United States does need to get on the right side of history and support Muslim peoples' liberation from the misrule of so many of their current leaders. But in the end, that emancipation will have to come from the Muslims themselves – with America, and hopefully Europe, nudging it along with moral support, pressure on autocratic leaders, encouragement of free elections, support for economic and educational reform, and political and economic rewards for democratisation.

The 2004 US presidential election will be the first in nearly 25 years in which foreign and defence policy will play a crucial, if not the decisive, role. Since 11 September 2001, Bush has made the vigorous prosecution of the war on terror the centrepiece of his foreign policy. He has massively increased defence spending, used US military forces to overthrow two foreign governments and demonstrated that the United States will take preventive and, if necessary, unilateral military action to prevent dangerous adversaries from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. He has significantly expanded the government's ability to aggressively investigate potential terrorists within America's borders, held hundreds of enemy combatants outside the established procedures of US or international law, and dramatically toughened US immigration standards.

In November 2004, Bush will ask the American people to ratify this set of policies against a Democratic challenger likely to present an alternative vision for keeping America safe. How stark the choice for voters will be depends on which of the Democratic challengers emerges from the primary process – unclear as of this writing. However, all the major candidates for the Democratic nomination, have, like Clark,

challenged some if not all of the premises of the Bush approach. And regardless of their campaign rhetoric, if a Democrat does win, once in office he will be obliged to decide in practice how much of the Bush agenda to preserve as he seeks to protect an American public that feels more vulnerable than it has for decades.

The debate between proponents of a targeted approach to confronting terrorism and proponents of the broad approach is thus a healthy and important one. These are serious issues and both approaches entail genuine risks and genuine benefits. In the American political context, the trauma of 11 September has produced an inclination to favour the more aggressive approach. As former President Clinton has pointed out, when Americans feel insecure they will always be tempted to support policies that are 'strong and wrong rather than weak and right'. The challenge to the next US administration – indeed, to the United States and its allies – is to conceive and implement policies that are both strong, and right.

End of the European Idea?

Erik Jones

A Certain Idea of Europe

Craig Parsons. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. £25.50. 256pp

The collapse of constitutional talks in Brussels on 13 December 2003 marks a turning point for European integration. The intergovernmental conference (IGC) will continue and, eventually, the heads of state and government of the European Union will agree on a constitutional treaty. They may even succeed in getting the treaty ratified by each of the 25 EU member states. Yet European integration has become much more difficult. The question is why.

An economic explanation would centre on bargaining and self-interest. The EU has at last reached a stage where the differences between the member states are too great to bridge. The resulting conflict between large and small, rich and poor, has shattered consensus on the basic rules for decision making. This argument is pessimistic, and yet not fatalistic. Bargaining is an ongoing process and self-interest springs

Erik Jones is Resident Associate Professor of European Studies at the SAIS Bologna Center of the Johns Hopkins University.