



Bruce L. R. Smith. *Lincoln Gordon: Architect of Cold War Foreign Policy.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015. 536 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-6120-4.

Reviewed by Mark Battjes (University of Texas Austin)

Published on H-War (October, 2015)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Bruce Smith's biography of Lincoln Gordon chronicles the life of a man whose career in and out of public service spanned nearly seven decades. Although his subject is a decidedly minor player in the policymaking apparatus of a growing government for most of this time, Smith anchors his narrative by elucidating Gordon's role in a number of major events and policies to include his wartime service with the War Production Board, his postwar association with the Marshall Plan and NATO, his service as ambassador to Brazil during the 1964 coup, and his time as a one of the "wise men" of the senior review panel at the CIA in the Carter and Reagan administrations. In addition to these anchor points, Smith faithfully performs the duty of a biographer and recounts the other details of Gordon's life: his childhood, his education at Harvard and Oxford, and his family life.

Following the same arc as his subject, Smith leads the reader through Gordon's career both inside and outside government. He demonstrates how Gordon, like many men and women of his generation, was initially attracted to government service by the outbreak of the Second World War. Smith then describes how this initial attraction, and the opportunity to serve leaders such as General George Marshall, Averell Harriman, and President John F. Kennedy, blossomed into a lengthy

career of service interrupted only briefly by returns to the academy. In this way, Gordon serves as a cypher, a representative for the countless professional men and women who served the US government not as full-time civil servants but as part-time experts to support specific endeavors.

Smith does well throughout to explain Gordon's contributions without exaggerating his importance. For example, Smith notes that Gordon spent a large amount of time preparing background information and supporting documents for Secretary of State Marshall's January 1948 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the European Recovery Program. Yet, Smith also highlights the fact that Marshall never called on Gordon to assist him during his testimony. Whether this says more about Marshall's diligence or Gordon's is left for the reader to decide. Similarly, Smith explains Gordon's intimate connection with the Alliance for Progress as first an adviser to the newly elected Kennedy, then as ambassador to Brazil, and finally as assistant secretary of state. However, Smith never asserts that the idea for the program was solely Gordon's or that he was primarily responsible for its birth, troubled life, and ultimate demise.

Unfortunately, Smith's circumspection is also a major weakness of the book for scholars of American foreign policy. Gordon's contributions

were below the policy level. They were important to transforming policy into concrete programs and actions, but they did not influence the overall direction of the foreign policy of the United States or its impact on the world. Moreover, Gordon's own decision not to continue his unfinished memoirs into his years as an ambassador and assistant secretary of state deprived Smith of a rich source that might have shed more light on the events that Gordon witnessed and influenced in those positions. A deeper examination of Gordon's service in Brazil and as an assistant secretary of state would have been useful, particularly to scholars interested in US policy in Latin America during a period of time when attention was almost solely focused on Vietnam.

Smith also missed an opportunity to use Gordon's service in government and the academy to examine the intellectual evolution that took place within the professional and academic milieu of which Gordon was a part. Smith contends that as early as 1954, Gordon and some of his contemporaries began to look beyond their Atlanticist leanings and sought to focus policy attention on the developing world. Furthermore, he notes Gordon's familiarity and connection with the theories of development that were being articulated at the time by Walt Rostow and others at MIT and Harvard. These two intellectual evolutions--development theory and a focus on the developing world--had a major influence on US foreign policy beginning in the second Eisenhower administration and continuing through the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. An examination of how this evolution came about and why it was attractive to Lincoln Gordon and his milieu would have considerably increased our understanding of the direction of US policy during these crucial years.

These critiques notwithstanding, Smith has produced a deeply researched, well-written account of the life of a dedicated public servant. His exploration of Gordon's life does indeed shed light on the contributions of those near to, but not quite

at, the highest levels of the US government. He has also illuminated the work that occurs below the policy levels to make ideas become concrete realities. Finally, Smith has given voice to a generation of part-time public servants who answered the nation's call during war and continued to serve it well beyond the war's end. It is this voice and this story that are Smith's most important contributions.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Mark Battjes. Review of Smith, Bruce L. R. *Lincoln Gordon: Architect of Cold War Foreign Policy*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. October, 2015.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=44296>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.