
Anti-American Terrorism: From Eisenhower to Trump: A Chronicle of the Threat and Response

Volume I: The Eisenhower Through Carter Administrations

Volume II: The Reagan and George H.W. Bush Administrations

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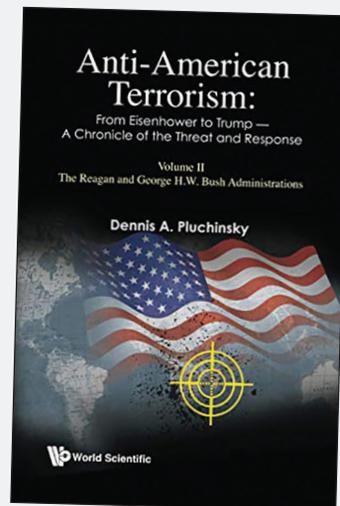
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Reviewed by Aaron Danis

This year (2021) the counterterrorism campaign that started out as the Global War on Terrorism is 20 years old. It has not ended, but with the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011, the operational neutralization of the al-Qaeda core in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, it has moved on to other battlefronts. Although the United States is now focusing on state-centric Great Power Competition, the terrorist fights continue at a lower intensity in the Middle East, Africa, parts of Asia, Europe, and on the American home front (it never really left). It is time for a long-term retrospective and reckoning for the counterterrorism fight. The two volumes reviewed here are the start of that process.

To begin, the three main points readers should take away from these two volumes are those that I emphasize in my terrorism and counterterrorism courses. First, in the era of modern terrorism, the United States has a lot of experience countering an ideologically diverse set of terrorism threats, both



domestically and internationally, but the lessons get lost over time. Second, U.S. counterterrorism policy is evolutionary, not revolutionary, and has gradually built on previous counterterrorism policies, even if the bloodlines are not obvious to the new generation of counterterrorism policymakers. Third, U.S. counterterrorism policy is reactive, not proactive, and tends to ignore emerging threats until they are knocking on the door. The fact that the threat has been so enduring suggests that the United States should stop worrying about “winning” the Global War on Terrorism, but instead manage it.

Mr. Dennis Pluchinsky was a senior terrorism analyst in the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Intelligence and Threat Analysis from 1977 to 2005,¹ and thus was perfectly placed to expound on these three points above.

It is rare that someone points to a book and says it is that author’s life work. I can point to Mr. Pluchinsky’s first two volumes and confidently state that he is well on his way to completing a life’s work on anti-American terrorism threat and counterterrorism policy and operations. There is simply nothing else like it. The first two volumes clock in at over 1,300 pages of text that cover the

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time periods between the 1950s and 1992, with the introductory chapter in the first volume being 65 pages alone. Certainly, one should ask what would possess Mr. Pluchinsky to attempt such an encyclopaedic project?

Mr. Pluchinsky clearly is no stranger to writing on the theme of terrorism, having co-written two seminal books on left-wing terrorist groups in Europe during the Cold War. As he states in his author's note, his goal for this project is for the volumes to become standard references on the topic for future scholars, analysts, and policymakers. This is no mean feat considering the amount of ink spilled on anti-U.S. terrorism since 9/11 alone.

The depth of Pluchinsky's research and historical knowledge is showcased in these volumes. In addition to mining previous books on the topic, he has interviewed participants, requested thousands of government documents through the Freedom of Information Act, and searched the collection of hard-to-find unclassified historical publications that he retained from his career, most of which can now be found in the Naval Postgraduate School Homeland Security Digital Library.

These volumes examine both the threat to the United States and the U.S. policy response. Mr. Pluchinsky has built on work by others, to include Yonah Alexander and Michael B. Kraft, editors of the three-volume set *Evolution of U.S. Counterterrorism Policy*, which holds nearly 1,500 pages of White House, State Department, Department of Defense, and Congressional documents, speeches, and testimony dating from the Nixon administration and ending before the Obama administration. Pluchinsky goes the extra mile to put government documents into context with analysis using interviews and memoirs.

Finally, it is notable that Pluchinsky does not just focus on foreign terrorism; he gives equal weight to the domestic threat (which he labels the "internal threat") and policy, discussing groups such as the

Puerto Rican nationalist groups Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) and the Boricua Popular Army (*Los Macheteros*—The Machete Wielders), both of which were active in the 1970s and 1980s when they tried to force the U.S. government to grant independence to Puerto Rico despite contemporaneous evidence that the island's population preferred Commonwealth status or statehood. For the current generation of would-be terrorist experts who act as if domestic terrorism is a new phenomenon, Pluchinsky discusses right-wing groups like The Order and the Covenant, Sword, and the Arm of the Lord, as well as left-wing groups like the Weather Underground, the Symbionese Liberation Army (famed for kidnapping newspaper heiress Patty Hearst), and the Black Liberation Army, among many others. Seeing that almost all Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents who worked any of these cases are by now retired or close to it, the FBI would do well to buy many copies of these volumes to issue to new agents and analysts to avoid making the mistakes of the 1970s and 1980s over again.

I have a couple of quibbles about the volumes, but they are not showstoppers. The first issue is a result of Pluchinsky's former home agency, the State Department, and future releases in its justifiably slow-moving *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) historical series. State historians are currently working on writing and declassifying the FRUS volumes for the Reagan administration. The two-part terrorism policy volume will span 12 years from the Jimmy Carter to the George H.W. Bush administrations. It is probable that newly declassified revelations from this era await despite Pluchinsky's herculean research and archival efforts here.

The second issue is the lack of a consolidated bibliography. I assume it was not included because it would take another 50-plus pages and would add to the cost of the book. Because the books are so well footnoted, however, it is possible to find source material without a bibliography. Perhaps publisher World

Scientific will compile and post a consolidated bibliography on its website when the project is completed.

In conclusion, anyone who is going to study, assess, publish on, or teach terrorism cannot be without these first two volumes at arms' reach. All academic libraries should have it stocked. Mr. Pluchinsky is diligently working on the final two volumes, to be finished in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Until those are released, U.S. analysts, law enforcement and defense officials, and policymakers have plenty of lessons to mine from these volumes. [PRISM](#)

Notes

¹I have known Dennis Pluchinsky professionally and personally for over 20 years and have been mentioned in the acknowledgment section of each volume.