

Tucker, David. Skirmishes at the Edge of Empire: The United States and International Terrorism. Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1997.

Michael M. Gunter

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Tucker, David. *Skirmishes at the Edge of Empire: The United States and International Terrorism.* Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1997.

David Tucker -- the Acting Director of Policy Planning in the Office of the US Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict) has produced a solid review and assessment of the American response to international terrorism into the Clinton administration. He does so by analyzing its recent history, how the United States has defined the concept, the methods used to combat it, and the organization employed. A final chapter dealing with strategy, however, has little to do with terrorism per se and becomes a philosophical essay on what the grand goals of American foreign policy should be. The author concludes that "terrorism is [but] a skirmish at the edge of our empire." (p. 189)

In assessing terrorism, Tucker quickly points out that usually much more important items were on the agenda: the Cold War against the Soviet Union, arms control, China, Vietnam, Watergate, and so forth. He argues that over the years a pattern emerged, "a period of increased terrorist activity followed by a lull." (p. 11) "State support is what makes international terrorism the problem that it is." (p. 17) US Secretary of State George Shultz distinguished between terrorists and freedom fighters by arguing that "democracies, which allowed for peaceful change, were not the legitimate target of political violence, while totalitarian states, which did not, were." (p. 33) After much deliberation concerning exactly what terrorism is Alex Schmid, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide* (1983), counted 140 different definitions "our discussion of terrorism has brought us to the conclusion that it is more than crime and less than war, that it is violence against innocents or noncombatants intended to influence an audience for the sake of some political objective." (p. 69)

Tucker analyzes nine different methods the United States has used to combat terrorism: "international legal conventions, defensive measures, addressing the causes of terrorism, a policy of no concessions, economic sanctions, military retaliation, prosecution (after we have gotten hold of suspects by extradition, rendition or by seizing them overseas and returning them to the United States for trial), preemption, and disruption." (p. 72) He argues that "diplomacy, economic sanctions, and disruption can work against state sponsors, while law enforcement and disruption are likely to be more effective against terrorist organizations, including the new autonomous groups." (p. 188)

Organization to combat terrorism proves difficult because, "according to one count, approximately thirty agencies and organizations make up what is called the counterterrorism community, carrying out more than 150 specific activities to combat terrorism." (p. 129) What is more, "The Departments of State, Justice and Defense, and the CIA, to mention only those agencies most involved in combating terrorism, perform different tasks. The first principally uses persuasion in pursuit of our national objectives, the second force, the third litigation, and the fourth guile." (pp. 112-13) No wonder they sometimes find it difficult to work together!

In his search for a strategy Tucker argues that "to be effective, counterterrorism must be part of a larger strategy." (p. 133) He rejects one of fortress America or global engagement, and opts for selective engagement. "Deterring the North Koreans did not require victory over Aideed in Somalia." (pp. 159-60) The "two principles that should guide" the United States in its "foreign engagements [are] moderation and conservation of resources," while "the two principles that should concern us globally [are] . . . promoting free trade and limiting the spread of WMD [weapons of mass destruction]." (p. 170)

Although "both President Clinton and Vice-President Gore studied and mentioned the article, their senior foreign advisors read it . . . and it was circulated throughout the White House and the National Security and National Economic Councils," Tucker takes Robert Kaplan's article on "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic Monthly*, (February 1994); and book *The Ends of the Earth*, (1996), to task. While Tucker's points concerning Kaplan's over-emphasis of environmental degradation and resulting mass migration seem valid, surely his further criticism of Kaplan that "these ethnopolitical conflicts [which Kaplan stresses] are restricted to 'a few world regions,' such as Africa," (p. 143) is off the mark. Even Tucker himself then mentions the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia; he could also have alluded to the Kurds in the Middle East, Tamils in Sri Lanka, and Basques in Spain, among others to refute himself.

What is more, given the attention he pays to Kaplan, one wonders why Tucker did not list Kaplan's works in his admittedly "selected bibliography." Tucker's index too could have been more extensive. (His copious notes, on the other hand, are welcomed.) Furthermore, the author's point about how the United States has been "historically disdainful of *raison d'etat* and power politics and relatively unpracticed in their use" (p. 135), a point he reiterates several times in explaining why the United States might have difficulties combating terrorism, seems rather trite as it was addressed fifty years ago by George Kennan and since by so many others as to have become a truism.

Nevertheless, this book is an excellent example of how a useful analysis of international terrorism can be based primarily on readily available secondary sources such as newspapers and scholarly articles. (There also were some interviews.) Possibly, of course, the author's adept usage of these secondary sources was guided by his familiarity with relevant classified sources. For the student of international terrorism, Tucker's analysis will be a useful review and judicious assessment.

Michael M. Gunter
Tennessee Technological University