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Rentier States and International Terrorism in Ecological Focus

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From 1981 to 2001, more than 9,500 acts of international terrorism were committed, killing almost 18,000 people. Explanations for this political violence have been varied. Some argue that rapid development creates social disorganization, thereby encouraging conflict. Others say states that exhibit partial repression and fiscal weakness foster violence by stoking discontent but not snuffing it out or providing a legitimate outlet.

Studies that test these different theories have produced mixed results at best. In this project, Crenshaw and Jenkins hope to articulate a more unified theory that links political economy with international terrorism. To do this, they examine "rentier states," or states that rely on extraction and export of natural resources such as oil for revenue.

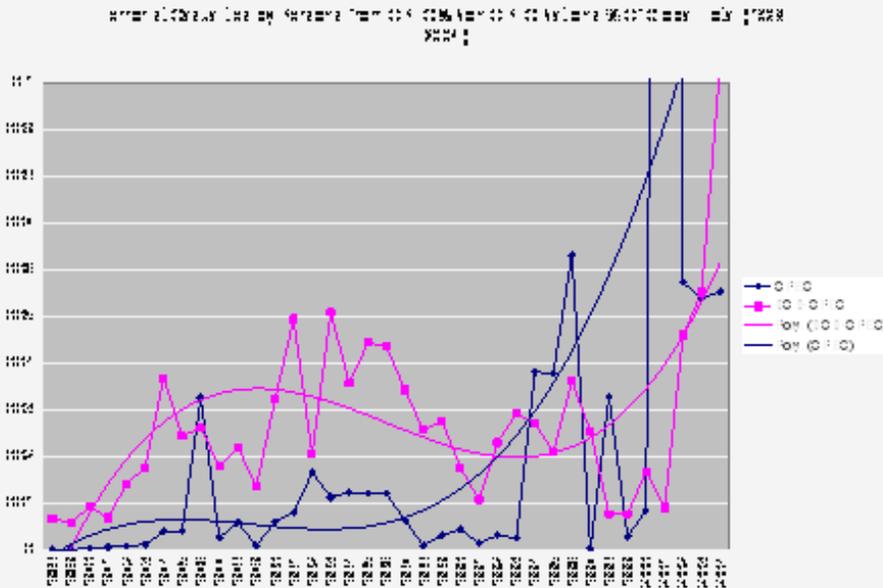
Preliminary evidence shows that rentier states are prone to producing international terrorism. Using OPEC nations as a rough proxy for rentier states, one can compare the number of terrorist casualties caused by perpetrators from OPEC and non-OPEC nations. Since 1968, the share of OPEC-originated casualties has increased substantially.



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To test this hypothesis, Crenshaw and Jenkins are conducting two sets of analyses. First, they are creating an index of rentier states using data about extractive exports, public ownership, and type of industry (oil, coal, aluminum, etc.). These data are available from entities such as the World Bank, polity datasets and industry publications.

Next, they are using the International Terrorism, or ITERATE, database, to determine the share of international terrorist acts and their lethality caused by actors from rentier states. This database provides information on the nationality of attackers, number of casualties, nationality of targets, and location of all international terrorist attacks from 1968 to 2003.

While Crenshaw and Jenkins do not expect to find a direct causal relationship between rentier states and international terrorism, they do anticipate mediated effects through such variables as a centralized state economy and state repression and militarization. Information from this study can be used to shape U.S. diplomatic and military strategies.

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