

## BOOK REVIEWS

Oots, Kent Layne. *A Political Organization Approach to Transnational Terrorism*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

*A Political Organization Approach to Transnational Terrorism* is a sober and considered, although somewhat modest, contribution to the burgeoning field of "terrorism studies." Oots begins with the premise that terrorist groups are political organizations (political because they seek to provide public goods) that "are rational actors in the sense that they [will] act in a manner which they believe will maximize their utility...."<sup>1</sup> Oots, of course, is not the first scholar to approach terrorist organizations as rational actors that seek to maximize utility. The strength of this assumption is that it enables students of terrorism to draw upon the insights of two fairly well-developed literatures in political sciences: rational choice and interest group behavior. In doing so, such an assumption counteracts the all too common tendency to dismiss terrorism as too unusual or inappropriate for scholarly inquiry.

Oots is primarily concerned with investigating how two major organizational variables — the size of terrorist groups and the presence of coalitions among them — affect the behavior of terrorist organizations. From those variables, Oots develops a set of hypotheses that he tests against the ITERATE II data base, which contains empirical information on terrorist incidents from 1968 to 1977. As Oots himself notes, his conclusions suffer from infirmities in the data base, infirmities that include incomplete coverage of terrorist incidents in Eastern Europe and perhaps more importantly, coverage of incidents only through 1977.

Even with those limits, Oots' findings must still be regarded as modest. Oots' central hypothesis concerning group size is that "the more difficult [a terrorist] act is logistically, the larger the group required to carry out the act."<sup>2</sup> Coupled with this hypothesis are several others, one of which predicts that large acting groups of terrorists will be less likely than normal or smaller sized groups to commit a successful act. Another proposition is that large group "negotiated" acts (such as kidnappings, barricade and hostage episodes, and hijackings) are more likely to end in violence to people or property than are small group acts.

In general, Oots' data support the first of these hypotheses: more "difficult" acts are more likely to be committed by a larger group. However, there is little or no evidence to support Oots' hypothesis that larger groups meet with less success in completing terrorist acts. Instead, "most terrorist acts are carried to logistical completion regardless of the size of the acting group."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the data only marginally support the hypothesis that large group acts are more likely to result in violence, and instead suggest that violence is more likely to result during or because of acts committed by intermediate sized organizations.

The findings with regard to coalitions among terrorist organizations are more interesting, although once again they are severely limited by the failure of the data base to include terrorist incidents after 1977. As a result, Oots is unable to consider more recent cases of operation, such as the well publicized alliance between the Red Army Faction and Action Directe. Nonetheless, for the period between 1968 and 1977, Oots concludes that operational cooperation among terrorist groups was infrequent, if not rare. Further, although Oots finds that there were "working partnerships" among certain terrorist groups, "Close working partnerships are apparently more frequent among Palestinian groups," he notes that his data does little to support claims that an international terrorist network exists. Those coalitions that did occur were usually of short duration, as Oots predicted. Finally, there is limited evidence to suggest that coalitional acts were more likely to end in violence than single group acts.

In sum, scholars will find this book handicapped by limits inherent in the ITERATE II data base, and the work is perhaps too narrow and technical to interest nonspecialists. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the limited nature of its findings (and tedious first chapter that recounts previous work in the field), the book represents an admirable effort to bring discipline and sophistication to the literature on terrorism.

John E. Finn  
Department of Government  
Wesleyan University

#### Endnotes

1. Kent Layne Oots, *A Political Organization Approach to Transnational Terrorism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 8.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

Adelman, Alan and Reid Reading, eds. *Confrontation in the Caribbean Basin*. Center for Latin American Studies, University of Pittsburgh: 1984.

McMichael, R. Daniel and John D. Paulus, eds. *Western Hemisphere Stability*. World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh: 1983.

The negotiations for the restoration of the Panama Canal Zone to Panama, during the Carter Administration, the victory of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and the long insurrection in El Salvador have all projected studies in Central American politics, economics, sociology and history into the forefront of scholarly activity during the past seven