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A Review of "Strategic Rebellion: Ethnic Conflict in FYR Macedonia and the Balkans."

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Book Reviews

Pavlos I. Koktsidis, *Strategic Rebellion: Ethnic Conflict in FYR Macedonia and the Balkans*. Nationalisms Across the Globe, Vol. 5; Series editors: Tomasz Kamusella and Krzysztof Jaskulowski. Oxford/Bern/Berlin/New York/Wein: Peter Lang, 2012. Pp. 261. \$55 (pbk); ISBN 978-3-0343-0148-0.

I highly recommend Pavlos Ionnasis Koktsidis' book on the 2001 armed conflict and the Ohrid Peace Accord between ethnic Albanians and Slav Macedonians in the Former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia, with astute observations on the pivotal roles of the National Liberation Army (NLA) in FYR Macedonia and (veterans from) the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). His analysis of the clash between the grievances of the Albanians in FYR Macedonia—poverty, discrimination, language rights, and the call for “constituent nation” status—and the existential fears of the Slav Macedonians—questions about their historical-ethnic identity, ability to attain or maintain security, territorial integrity, ownership of the state and international recognition—is firmly grounded in the theoretical framework of *strategic rebellion*. This framework is in effect a highly innovative “composite theory” that primarily rests on three basic propositions well known in the literatures of social-psychology, armed-conflict, and (inter)national-security studies: relative deprivation, strategic opportunity, and strategic coercion.

*Relative Deprivation*¹ or *Frustration-Aggression*² is experienced by people who feel deprived of the rights, safety, and socioeconomic needs they deem they have a right to (and others have in abundance). This theory is described in Chapter 1 and empirically applied, through detailed analysis of political events and socioeconomic disparities, in Chapter 2 on Yugoslavia, its interethnic strife, and consequent disintegration. The theory is similarly applied in Chapter 3 on FYR Macedonia, its interethnic tensions, and particularly Albanian grievances after 1990, with a structured content analysis of deprivation levels through institutional *misconduct* and *maltreatment* by using the US State Department Human Rights Reports.

Strategic Opportunity examines the cost-benefit calculations³ by armed opposition movements so as to further the interests of themselves or the communities they (claim to) represent. This theory is described in Chapter 1 and empirically applied, through in-depth historical analysis, in Chapter 4 on FYR Macedonia's strategic environment since the early 1990s regarding (a) state-strength and legitimacy vis-à-vis the international community and neighboring states, (b) regional conflict spillovers, particularly from the

Serbo-Albanian conflict in Kosovo and the short-lived Albanian rebellion in southern Serbia (Presevo valley), and (c) rebel resources in terrain opportunities and political-military capabilities. The first part of Chapter 5 on the 2001 insurgency in FYR Macedonia and its aftermath describes the origins and strategic calculations of the National Liberation Army (NLA) in more detail.

*Strategic Coercion*⁴ or *Coercive Diplomacy*⁵ explores how external international actors, through the use of carrots (rights, benefits, status) and sticks (threat of sanctions, isolation, and military intervention), attempt to force one or more of the warring parties to the negotiating table. This theory is described in Chapter 1 and empirically applied in the latter part of Chapter 5: There, it meticulously describes the highly coordinated moves—a typical aspect of strategic coercion—by NATO, the EU, the UN, OSCE, and other international bodies to contain and end the armed clashes between the Macedonian security forces and the NLA insurgents and to compel both parties to reach a compromise by signing the August 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA).

Koktsidis makes a convincing argument that relative deprivation concerns the necessary condition or “root cause” of rebellion, strategic opportunity constitutes the vital sufficient-making condition of rebellion irrespective of individual motives of greed or grievance, and strategic coercion by outsiders forms a central precondition for ending the rebellion. However, as Koktsidis argues so well at the end of Chapter 1 and again at the end of the book (Chapter 6 and the “Conclusion”), strategic coercion is not an effective way to create a durable peace if one of the parties, in this case the Slav Macedonians, feels most unfairly coerced and disadvantaged by the peace agreement, in this case the Ohrid Peace Accord. Indeed, an enforced, “cold” peace established through strategic coercion easily engenders a *backlash effect* of new grievances and desires of retribution, particularly among those who feel (most) humiliated and curtailed by outside intervention. They, in this case the Slav Macedonians, then attempt to constrain or sabotage the privileges awarded to the most advantaged (and once subservient) group, in this case the Albanians living in FYR Macedonia. This in turn may lead to renewed disappointment and potential rebellion among the latter. Koktsidis lucidly exposes this dynamic in Chapter 6, accounting for why the peace in that Balkan country remains so brittle, strained, and incomplete.

Crucially, Koktsidis convincingly shows in Chapter 1 that the so-called *greed* or *depredation* theory⁶ and its “predatory war” variants⁷ at best accounts for secondary causes, processes, and consequences of present-day internal armed conflicts. Thus, they seem to heavily draw on some basic tenets of Ted Robert Gurr’s relative deprivation theory to begin with. Simply put, greed feeds on grievance, that is, depredation is a “free rider” of deprivation. Still, Koktsidis acknowledges that criminal activities by insurgents and other actors tend to accompany and proliferate in violent conflicts, especially “in situations of war and disorder due to an evident lack of the rule of law”⁸ that is, endemic warfare in weakened or failed states. Even in these cases,

however, I hold that insurgents may just as frequently engage in the illicit trade of arms, drugs, and peoples for the sustenance of the armed struggle rather than for personal gain. On the other hand, such activities remain illegal and questionable irrespective of motive (perhaps apart from arms smuggling to defend oneself against tyranny and genocide) and may eventually draw insurgents into the world of organized crime for their own gain.

Koktsidis intriguingly argues that the “idea of treating identities as social constructions, and regard these as the actual sources of confrontations, fails to draw a coherent account on the motivations of conflict.”⁹ Consequently, “constructivists fall into the trap of substituting interest for cultural identity per se,”¹⁰ and that failing to understand that “interests can and do often shape ideological attitudes”¹¹ may lead to armed conflict. I am not sure whether these distinctions between interest and identity are valid, but they certainly provide food for thought.

However, Koktsidis’ call for an alternative diplomatic strategy with less emphasis on the stick, ranging from censure and sanctions to military intervention, and more emphasis on a big carrot for each of the parties that addresses the fears, needs, and aspirations of all parties in equal measure may seem rather ambitious and optimistic. After all, true reconciliation, through peace agreements that are the products of “inter-ethnic consultation, long-term dialogue and mutual incentive”¹² is the holy grail of anyone involved in conflict resolution—a holy grail that to my knowledge remains elusive. True reconciliation seems all but impossible if one needs to square demands of opposing communities that seem irreconcilable, or at least seem unreasonable from the viewpoint of both outsiders or (one of) the communities involved. Certainly the wish of the dominant ethnic group to maintain its privileged status at the expense of the subservient group is not a demand that one reasonably can meet in order to reach a durable and just peace. Neither can one accommodate the secret or not-so-secret wish of the once subservient group to rule over and to repress the once dominant group in a historic act of retribution. Even so, the limitations of strategic coercion as exercised by the “internationals” are real, must be recognized and must be dealt with.

In sum, Koktsidis’ *strategic rebellion* theory will enrich the literature on the psychologies of people involved in confrontation and conflict, on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of political violence and on the (non-)effectiveness of diplomatic and other (military) security policies at home and abroad. It certainly will enrich my own research on the nature and behavior of insurgents and other armed nonstate actors. May it enrich—and enhance—your knowledge, insights, and research undertakings as well.

NOTES

1. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why men rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).
2. John Dollard, Neal E. Miller, Leonard W. Doob, O.H. Mowrer and Robert R. Sears, *Frustration and Aggression* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1944; first published New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939).

3. Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35(1): 27–47 (1993); Laure Paquette, *Strategy and Ethnic Conflict: A Method, Theory and Case Study* (Abingdon, UK/ Santa Barbara, US: Praeger, 2002); Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

4. Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1991); Alexander L. George, *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991); Mark Sullivan, *The Mechanisms for Strategic Coercion: Denial or Second Order Change?* (US Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1995).

5. Peter Viggo Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy after the Cold War: A Challenge for Theory and Practice* (Houndsmill/London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998); Robert J. Art, *United States and Coercive Diplomacy: Past, Present* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2003); M. Berger, "How Resisting Democracies Can Defeat Substate Terrorism: Formulating a Theoretical Framework for Strategic Coercion against Nationalistic Substate Terrorist Organizations" (Doctoral Thesis, St Andrews University, 2009).

6. The literature on "greed" and "depredation" is extensive; here follow just some of the works which Koktsidis has consulted and used: Paul Collier, "Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective," in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, eds., *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, "Understanding Civil War: A New Agenda," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46(1): 3–12 (2002); Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56(4): 563–595 (2004).

7. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge/Oxford: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers, 1999); Stathis N. Kalyvas, "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?," *World Politics* 54(1): 99–118 (2001).

8. Pavlos I. Koktsidis, *Strategic Rebellion: Ethnic Conflict in FYR Macedonia and the Balkans* (Oxford/Bern/Berlin/Bruxelles/Frankfurt am Main/New York/Wien: Peter Lang, 2012), 127.

9. *Ibid.*, 29.

10. *Ibid.*, 29.

11. *Ibid.*, 29.

12. *Ibid.*, 216.

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Cara J. Wong, *Boundaries of Obligation in American Politics: Geographic, National and Racial Communities*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. 264. \$84.00 (hbk); \$25.99 (pbk); ISBN 978-0-521-69184-0.

If politics is what Harold Lasswell describes as "who gets what, when and how," then individual political attitudes and interests document a person's preference structure regarding how to distribute resources to others. As many scholars have shown, individuals are predisposed to fight and protect the interests of one's own group over others but few assess how people conceptualize who and what constitutes as their own group. Individuals are often assumed to rely on basic concepts such as family or ethnicity and the group boundaries they draw are understood to be rigid and inflexible. Cara Wong's *Boundaries of Obligation* intends to challenge past conceptualizations of group formation and posits that Americans can