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LITERATURE REVIEW

Topic: A case study of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the lens of realism vs.
constructivism

The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina is of huge interest to international relations scholars due to its location in Europe, the genocide in Srebrenica, the first NATO's out of area involvement and the largest U.N. humanitarian action in the history. V.P. Gagnon, J is an author of 'Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict' who talks about whether the Yugoslav case could be considered for the future of international relations. The author examines ethnically-mixed regions in the post-Cold War era as inevitable for the future conflicts. The author also examines the danger of these conflicts due to them spilling over into the international arena. To write about the conflict in the Balkans seems like a cliché, but to some never-ending learning challenge due to its constant instability, closeness to the major Cold War powers, and possibility of the violent conflicts in the Western Europe. In this literature review, I will look at the region of the Balkan Peninsula through the lens of two international relations theory constructivism and realism to explain why this region has been prone to wars and to uncover the possible violent future that this region awaits.

Methodology

In the discipline of international relations there are several explanatory schemes for the origins of conflicts and the norms that influence state actors. These school of theories of international relations are critical when policy makers decide on solutions to end conflicts and begin peace building. This paper will analyze two main schools of thought in international relations, constructivism and realism as they have opposing approaches when seeking to explain the Balkan region and the peace building efforts there over the last fifty years.

International Relations Theories

Constructivism is a very popular explanatory theory within international relations that looks at the historic and socially constructed aspects. Constructivism stresses the socially constructed character of states (Betts 2015). Norms of states shape the nature of identities of states which they can reshape and redefine to create new identities. David (2001) defines constructivism as identifying conflicts as the result of an identity crisis. Construction of threats serve to reshape new identities shattering old ones in the process. Peacebuilding missions in the same respect seek to change the identity of states to change the norms built upon in times of conflict.

Realism on the other hand looks at the self-interest of nations viewing global conditions as anarchic in nature. A realist begins with viewing the state of ethnic group as always being fearful of being weakened, marginalized, or destroyed. Without a central government to protect the interests of minority groups and maintain order intra-state or inter-ethnic conflict will result. Realists see anarchy as a natural state and peace as a temporary solution to conflict (Betts 2015). Territorial acquisitions resulting in security of each group are seen as the real solution (David 2001).

Background

The former states of Yugoslavia are situated on the Balkan peninsula. The Balkan peninsula is in the Southern region of Europe surrounding itself with the Adriatic Sea to the west, the Mediterranean Sea to the south, and the Black Sea to the east. Yugoslavia came into existence after World War I on 13 July, 1922 after gaining independence from Austro-Hungary. Yugoslavia consisted primarily of several independent republics with different cultures and religious histories. The most prominent figure in Yugoslavia was its last president Josip Broz Tito. Tito established the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia and ruled it until his death in the 1980's. Once the powerful central figure of Tito vanished Yugoslavia fractured upon ethnic

divisions. Slovenia was the first member state to leave Yugoslavia with others following its lead in subsequent years. Serbian statesmen who controlled the centralized power structures of the Balkans refused to give up their power leading to a series of civil war in the 1990's that lasted until 1995 (Dyker 2014). It was only after major U.N. intervention such as the Dayton Peace Accords that ended the warfare in the region. Currently Yugoslavia is divided among six autonomous countries as well as several autonomous ethnic zones such as Kosovo and the Republic of Srpska.

Analysis of International Relations Theories Approaches

The reason for the breakup of Yugoslavia is different based upon a realist versus constructivist perspective. According to a constructivist theorist Yugoslavia was a socially constructed during Tito's reign. Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic state whose citizens shared various cultural similarities such as language, food, and heritage. Once the powerful central figure of President Tito died regional actors changed the social construct of Yugoslavia focusing more upon the heritage of ethnic groups who shared such traits as religion. This change in the norm changed disrupted the symbiotic relationship of Yugoslavia fracturing it into a dozen entities (David 2001). Realist on the other hand believed that Tito was a central figure that prevented the ethnic and religious groups from fighting amongst each other by instead focusing the attentions of the population on external threats such as Russia and the United States. Once the central figure of Tito was gone the groups felt threatened by others who exerted power causing territorial struggles in such places as Eastern Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo (Doder 1993).

The peace deals struck to end the conflict was seen differently by realist and constructivist. Constructivist saw the Dayton Peace accord which gave equal power to all three ethnic groups in Bosnia as a chance to rewrite the norms of nationalism. It was hoped a new national identity

could be forged where fighting caused deep rifts in society where previous neighbors would not speak to each other due to their ethnicities (David 2001). Realists saw the Dayton Peace Accord as a temporary ceasefire in an ever-ending war that would only be solved when ethnic groups could be territorially divided along ethnic lines (Pepic 2015). In summary constructivists viewed the peace building as a success, while realists viewed the efforts of the United Nations as frivolous and wasteful.

In the two decades since the breakup of Yugoslavia and the subsequent civil wars the peace building efforts and reversal of ethnic nationalist identities of the area are mixed. Many ethnically diverse countries in the area have ineffective governments that barely function. Bosnia with its three presidents has failed to pass laws and govern the area with the autonomous Republic of Srpska functioning as its own de facto entity. Many previously diverse towns and areas are now ethnically the same as minorities left fearing for safety and seeking opportunities elsewhere (Richmond 2009). Studies have shown that individuals in the area have identified more with their religion than ever before. The religious institutions being built with the funding and resources of foreign representatives (Russia – Orthodox Christians, Muslim – Turkey and Saudi Arabia, Christians – Western Europe) create further ethnically divided nationalistic identities. In retrospect as the New York Times editorialist Thomas Friedman mentions the purpose of the Dayton Peace accord was to end the civil war with elections and create a (neoliberal) capitalist economy which has done with great success (Friedman 2001). Due to the country's unpredictable nature, the NATO troops are still present although their presence is barely noticed on the larger scope of the turbulent events in Bosnia (Woehrel 2005).

Conclusion

Only time will tell whether the constructivist approach in predicting the Balkan conflict will prevail and be successful. David in his 2001 Contemporary Security Policy article mentions that the key factors to look for on the success of peace keeping are: 1) Democracy taking hold giving voice and power to minority groups leading to less reason for war and conflict, 2) further arrests and persecution of war criminals and condemnation of their crimes, and 3) further peace-building efforts being done by both the military and civilian personnel (i.e. a common passport, curbing ethnically driven media, adoption of a common currency). As Venneri (2007) suggested Bosnia and Herzegovina and the majority of Balkan countries are still under “ownership” of the international community.

Of the 4.4 million people of Bosnia, one-third were dislocated and one-third fled. In 1998 475,000 refugees returned but only 60,000 returned to areas outside their ethnic control. 90% of Serbs who returned now live in the Serb entity and not their original home. We can hope that a constructivist view of peacemaking can be achieved over the realist view of further partitioning for the security of the ethnic groups however the current rise of nationalism is worrisome. The Balkan region remains a keystone to security and stability of Eastern Europe. There is only hope that theorists such as Samuel P. Huntington are not right. Samuel P. Huntington clearly states in his “The Clash of Civilizations” article that the last phase in evolution of modern conflicts will be the clash of civilizations. Furthermore, he argues that the future of conflicts will not be primarily ideological or economical but rather cultural. Samuel P. Huntington’s claim makes sense, but it brings additional fear for the future of the fractured regions of the Balkans, as well USA and every multi-cultural country across the world. I am a strong believer that the reason for Yugoslavian conflict was the notion of self-identifying with religious groups outside of country rather than people in the country.

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