

Review - After Ethnic Conflict

Written by Siddharth Tripathi

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After Ethnic Conflict: Policy Making in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia

By Cvete Koneska

Abingdon: Routledge, 2014

With the end of Cold War, conflicts have again flared up in many parts of the world. More conflicts have started as compared to those that have ended. From these conflicts, the most virulent of them are notably those in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Myanmar, Indonesia, Rwanda, Syria and Sudan. These new post-modern conflicts have challenged political authority, governance, and the entire social fabric of conflict-torn states more directly than all earlier wars. The unrest in the Balkans in the 1990s constitutes one of the most brutal ethnic conflicts in contemporary history. It not only impacted the former Yugoslav countries, but also had a significant effect on the region and Europe as a whole. It is this legacy and the enduring effects of recent armed conflicts and ethnic cleansing which has critically affected security as well the development efforts. Any progress has been frustrated by a disunited and over-politicised decision-making elite which is further divided along ethnic lines.

After Ethnic Conflict: Policy Making in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia is an insightful account of persisting ethnic divisions in the power-sharing institutions and broader post-conflict political context of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and Macedonia. The central question discussed in the book is: why do political elites in post-conflict ethnically-divided states choose to accommodate or resist each other across ethnic lines? By exploring how power sharing institutions, informal practices, and cross-cutting political identities (p. 19) affect ethnic accommodation, the book also investigates the conditions in which ethnic accommodation is more likely to take place.

This book is neatly organised into four broad parts with nine chapters. Part one provides an overview of the theoretical framework, research question, variables, definitions and methodology. The issue of ethnic accommodation is seen from an institutional perspective following the seminal work *Re-discovering Institutions* by John March and Johan Olsen (New York: The Free Press, 1989: 160). Using process tracing, Koneska has tried to link interaction of political elites and decision making (independent variable) and the variance in policy outcomes (dependent variable). Part two provides a historical narrative of the conflicts in BiH and Macedonia; part three and four deal with the analysis and comparison of the successful and unsuccessful policies in the two cases—the military and police reform in BiH, and decentralisation reforms and minority reforms in Macedonia.

The book offers a comparative analysis of BiH and Macedonia, both of which have witnessed ethnic conflict. Both contexts differ in several aspects, such as conflict history and intensity, international involvement and constitutional structure, yet they display similar outcomes in terms of political elite accommodation and resistance (p. 5). By focussing on the real reasons for cooperation and accommodation among political actors (cross-cutting identities, minority veto powers, territorial autonomy, and informal practices p. 30-32), Koneska has explained the variance in outcomes within the institutions of the same country. In other words, why is there a greater ethnic accommodation over certain policies and continued ethnic resistance over others? For example, in BiH, the military has been successfully centralised (p. 79), however the police are still ethnically divided giving a severe blow to the police reform process (p. 119). Similarly, in Macedonia, the decentralisation reforms have been accepted (p. 97) whereas there is continuous tension over issues of minority education (p. 136).

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There is a crucial linkage between decision-making behaviour and possible outcomes. However, one can argue that human psychology and cognition are too complicated to have just one determining cause. It cannot be said with certainty that certain institutions or ethnicity are the determining factors that influence elites' behaviour entirely. The possibility of such contingent outcomes cannot be easily incorporated into the explanatory framework and hence it lacks the predictive model of the behaviour. Also, the influence of external actors on the elites could have been dealt with in more detail, as they are important factors in post-conflict societies. This is an inherent limitation of not only this account, but any study dealing with the software of decision-making processes in different fields. It has to be said that mapping the field of decision making is a daunting task, and more so in such ethnically diverse contexts.

Nevertheless, these limitations in no way undermine the book's ability to dissect the complicated process of policy making. It can be considered as a genuine attempt to examine the behaviour and role of elites during post-conflict reconciliation and state-building within ethnically fragmented contexts. Its unique selling point lies in the fact that its relevance is not limited to those working or researching on the Balkans but to post-conflict societies in general. The book will be of interest to scholars of international relations, peace and conflict studies and public policy. In particular, it will benefit those who want to attain a deeper understanding of domestic factors which impact decision-making at the state level. Koneska's book is a significant contribution to the complex and labyrinthine 'black box' of decision-making by elites in post-conflict societies.

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