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Baylouny, Anne Marie

Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

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Introduction to the Special Issue: Social Mobilization Theory From Bosnia to Bolivia

Strategic Insights, Volume IV, Issue 5 (May 2005)

by [Anne Marie Baylouny](#)

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Introduction

This special issue of *Strategic Insights* is devoted to investigating the applicability of social movement or mobilization theory to the study of groups using violence. The articles originated in my upper-level seminar, Social Mobilization in the Middle East, in the National Security Affairs department at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS.) All should prove invaluable to policy-makers, since they, like NPS itself, straddle the academic and military fields. By applying the latest academic studies and theories to real-world issues of concern, the analyses here contain new insights to invigorate the policy field. All combine theory development with concrete application to cases, and take seriously the dictum to understand the subject being studied prior to formulating policies.

The use of social movement theory to Middle Eastern groups is relatively new. Fewer still have tackled the use of violence through this perspective. Yet once applied to violent groups and social movements of policy concern, the theoretical framework of social mobilization studies proves superior to other analytical schools, explaining a wide range of phenomena until now resistant to social scientific explanation. Further, the dynamic relation of the approach, entailing an appreciation of strategic interaction effects among the players, corresponds more closely to reality. The approach is multi-faceted, focusing on the interacting and strategic elements of a group's appeal and mobilization. This incorporates factors such as ideology and rhetoric, for example, as elements of the group's profile, without singling out one as holding the key to the nature of the group. In some cases, the group actions belie ideological statements, and the group's entrenched interests and organizational components exist in tension with continuing radical appeals. To accept the ideological statements for such a group at face value would provide a skewed analysis of their likely future trajectory.

Maj. Jennifer Chandler's article ("[The Explanatory Value of Social Movement Theory](#)") starts the issue with a delineation of social movement theory, arguing that it holds powerful explanatory potential outflanking other theoretical approaches. Chandler presents the historical evolution of social movement approaches, and the deficiencies of prior explanatory frameworks. After delineating the main elements of social movement theory, political opportunity, mobilization structures, and framing, she proceeds to demonstrate the workings of these mechanisms using

the first Palestinian *intifada*. Chandler is able to answer important questions about the Palestinian *intifada* through social movement analyses. She concludes by highlighting some of the recent research trends in social movement theory.

What of the use of violence? Terrorist use of extreme violence is the central question of Maj. Jaime Gomez's article ("[Terrorist Motivations for the Use of Extreme Violence.](#)") Given the recent concern regarding weapons of mass destruction, he tackles the issue of whether their use by terrorists is likely. To analyze the likelihood of WMD use by al Qaeda, Gomez compares the movement with the Japanese terrorist and apocalyptic group Aum Shinrikyo. He concludes that given what we know of terrorist motivations for using violence, we have reason to doubt their turn to such complete destructive tactics. Gomez determines that unlike the Japanese terrorist group, al Qaeda's trajectory reflects an instrumental approach. While the use of WMDs by terrorist groups has not occurred and according to this analysis, may be unlikely, he cautions, potential access to the elements and plans for WMDs should be restricted.

Middle East

The Middle East section of this issue deals with Lebanon, Iraq, and Israel. Maj. William Casebeer's and Maj. Timothy Kraner's article ("[Stories, Stakeholder Expansion, and Surrogate Consciousness: Using Innovations in Social Movement Theory to Understand and Influence Hizballah's Developmental Trajectory](#)") develops theories regarding individual identification with an aggrieved population and applies that to the development of the Lebanese Hizbullah. They further proceed to outline probable trajectories for this Islamist group, drawn from lessons and cases of social movement theory. As has been witnessed in other movements, the IRA for example, individuals who themselves did not suffer can identify strongly with the aggrieved, joining them in their struggle. This surrogate consciousness is distinct from oppositional consciousness, shown to be crucial in forming a basis for individuals to protest against a grievance. Oppositional consciousness occurs to the aggrieved individuals; surrogate consciousness is an identification process by others with them. This explains Hizbullah's emphasis on Palestine and the plight of the Palestinians, and the prominent position of Palestinian fighters on the organization's television station. Casebeer and Kraner then proceed to discuss possible future scenarios for the group, and what role the United States could play, a section of crucial interest for policy analysts. Their suggestions are practical and specific, and take into consideration the reality of Hizbullah on the ground, understood through examining the mobilizing structures, ideological frames and political context in Lebanon.

Moving to Iraq, Maj. Timothy Haugh ("[The Sadr II Movement: An Organizational Fight for Legitimacy within the Iraqi Shi'a Community](#)") deciphers the Sadr Movement. How can we classify this movement? Was it the work of a single individual, or does it represent a larger trend in the Shi'a community? Haugh outlines the history of Muqtada al-Sadr, and its initial moves after the start of hostilities in Iraq. Sadr brilliantly created a political opportunity for himself, providing a set of alternative services and law and order policing. Looking below the aggregate level of the movement, Haugh identifies fights within over framing and ideological appeals. He shows the interaction of Sadr and Sistani, and the benefits accrued to the latter due to the former's movement.

And, regarding opposition within predominantly Sunni areas, Maj. Haugh states ("[Analysis of Sunni-Based Opposition in Iraq](#)") that while actions take place in Sunni territory they are not characteristically "Sunni" in the religious or ethnic sense. A plethora of groups are acting in these areas, confounding a simple analysis by utilizing tribal, religious, territorial, and oppositional idioms. Haugh takes the example of Falluja to demonstrate some of the mechanisms which benefited the opposition. A prime opportunity was the absence of coalition forces in the city, allowing uncontested dominance by the opposition.

Capt. Nicole Harris' piece ("[Framing the Zionist Movement: The Effects of Zionist Discourse on the Arab-Israeli Peace Process](#)") disaggregates Zionism as containing differing meanings and frames through time. At the start of the modern Zionist movement, understandings of the term had to be reworked to allow for a nationalist and secular movement culminating in the founding of Israel. Framing changes did not stop then, but continued up to the present. Harris delineates practical Zionism, revisionist Zionism, new Zionism, and finally post-Zionism. Importantly, she links the messages of the different forms of Zionism to relations with the Palestinians, demonstrating how some are less accommodating to peaceful coexistence than others.

International Movements

The Middle East is the main focus of a democratization campaign by the United States, which can be construed as an international movement. In "[Development of the 'American' Democracy Transnational Social Movement](#)," Capt. M. Elizabeth Smith argues that typical explanations for the lack of democracy in the Middle East cannot account for reactions in the region to the United States' promotion of democracy. To elucidate the dynamics of democracy promotion and counter movements, she uses the novel approach of considering American democracy as a social movement. This approach usefully encapsulates the various organs involved in the spread of democracy worldwide—institutions, public relations, and media messages. While clearly unorthodox in terms of social movement theory, since social movements by definition take place in opposition or outside of the normal institutional channels, and American democracy promotion is institutionalized in U.S. government itself, from the perspective of Middle Easterners it is a social movement. Recipients experience American democracy promotion as the advent of alternative institutions, frames, and mobilizing forms which bypass not only existing institutions but often the domestic society itself. Importantly, analyzing American democracy promotion as a social movement places Middle Easterners at the center of the analysis, attempting to view developments from their standpoint. This approach has the potential to explain the advent of counter movements in part as competition and opposition to the original movement, as witnessed in social movement experiences in other regions. Considering U.S. advocacy of democracy as a social movement accounts for outcomes other than democracy, attributable to dynamics separate from the hackneyed stereotype that Arabs do not want democracy.

In another attempt to understand international processes and effects on Middle Easterners themselves, Maj. Tara Leweling ("[Exploring Muslim Diaspora Communities in Europe through a Social Movement Lens: Some Initial Thoughts](#)") addresses the important phenomena of Muslim identity in the diaspora or outside of their home countries. In addition to developing theoretical approaches to diasporas using social movement theory, she identifies processes within the host countries that can create an alternative, supra-national (pan-ethnic) identity. Religious identity is not approached here as a given, but a result of diaspora processes and alternative institutional creation. Marginalization from both the home and new country is one factor identified as mitigating against integration to the new culture. The increasing inclusivity of social movements has occurred in other places, when the movement seeks to broaden its appeal and its base. A change of identity scale is used, from local to national for example, by linking with others sharing similar grievances. This is an important dynamic, as demonstrated in the case of the Arab Afghans who became isolated from their home countries and thus bonded together.

Given the increasing interest in identifying Islamism in Europe, CPT Velko Atanasoff ("[Bosnia and Herzegovina—Islamic Revival, International Advocacy Networks and Islamic Terrorism](#)") discusses Islam in Bosnia. What is the potential for a radical Islamist movement there? Is it a gateway for terrorism as some have claimed? In answering these questions, Atanasoff discusses and develops the theory of a social base as distinct from general religious revivalism. Such a distinction is crucial, since social movement analyses show the dangerous effects of over-reacting to an alleged threat—a process which itself enhances the level of violence used by groups and increases their membership. An Islamic religious revival is definitely occurring to some extent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this does not necessarily equate to a transnational

or terrorist Islamic movement. This case shows that foreign promotion of institutions on the ground can increase the potential for a movement to occur, but cannot create one. Indeed, all the conditions were ripe for an Islamist movement in Bosnia, but—as yet—the situation there is more aptly characterized as increased religious feeling on a personal or identity level without a concomitant movement.

One of the problems in analyzing social mobilization in the Middle East and the Muslim diaspora is the paucity of data. In "[Harvesting the Past: The Social Mobilization of Bolivia's Indigenous Peoples](#)," Maj. R. J. Schmidt analyzes another type of identity movement: indigenous groups in Bolivia. While these have often been viewed through the perspective of perennial identities, sometimes interpreted as a cultural clash, Schmidt answers the question of "why now." Indeed, if identities are *a priori*, why only now did they become politically relevant? This question goes to the heart of current identity politics. Schmidt unravels the puzzle of Bolivian indigenous mobilizing, arguing that their arrival as powerful players on the political scene can only be understood through a combined political economy and social movement lens. He demonstrates the variable nature of "Bolivian indigenous" identity, subsuming competing and alternative identities, and the contingent nature of organizing, dependent upon particular opportunities and resources. Today Bolivian indigenous groups are powerful political actors with veto leverage against the state.

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