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Trends. Kosovo and Angola: The Enemy of My Enemy as Friend or Enemy?

Editor

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A time-honored contribution of social psychology is that of balance theories applied to interpersonal configurations. Popularized by psychologist Fritz Heider, balance theories often are constructed to predict changes in attitudes among a discrete number of social actors sharing a social situation. One of many hypotheses of balance theories is that one's attitudes towards a social actor who becomes an enemy of one's enemy may become more positive. Another hypothesis from balance theories and from intersecting lines of research on attitude-behavior consistency is that attitudes may often beget congruent behaviors. Integrating the above hypotheses and empirical research on them and generalizing from the laboratory to the so-called "real world"--e.g., of warfare--one may surmise that in certain situations one might more likely initiate or maintain a ceasefire or lowering of violence between combatants by working towards them sharing a common enemy.

At least two ongoing civil wars are providing data on such a surmise. In Kosovo, the roles of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have interchangeably been viewed as positive or negative by the combatants: forces of the Serbian government and those of the Kosovo Liberation Army. For example, NATO has threatened to bomb Serbian government military assets and also to stop money and weapons from reaching the KLA. The OSCE has sought to deter and minimize violence through monitoring of both sides to the conflict and currently is viewed as very negative by the Serbian government because it has publicly blamed the government for a recent massacre. Once NATO and the OSCE are simultaneously viewed with very jaundiced eye by both sides to the conflict, data can be observed that may at least partially support or disconfirm the prediction of violence reduction or cessation.

Angola, Heider, Kosovo, NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, Serbia, UN, United Nations.)