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I am honored that my three interlocutors accepted the invitation to this Central Asian Affairs roundtable and offered such thoughtful responses to my work.¹ My comments herein are devoted mostly to providing clarifications on points where the four of us may not see eye-to-eye. Kupertadze's essay seems to be addressed directly to me; he asks clarifying questions. The questions in Finel and Marten's essays seem more rhetorical and more calibrated to an imagined third-party audience. I will respond reciprocally.

My book presents a bottom-up account of the settlement of the post-Soviet wars. For several years I lived in Georgia and Tajikistan, both of which experienced violent state failure in the early 1990s. Both states shared many institutional, geopolitical and structural characteristics. Both countries' wars came to a relatively quick end despite the fact that none of the fundamental grievances that motivated fighters to take up arms in the first place were resolved. I provide an account in which Georgians and Tajiks, rather than external (Russian) military professionals, were the heroes and villains. I use an analytic model that gives local actors substantial agency – most importantly, the ability to switch sides between incumbent and insurgent (42-43, 154, 160, 163). Finel's contribution to this volume summarizes my argument efficiently and eloquently.

In my theoretical apparatus, the president is installed (or not) by a coalition of warlords. The civilian government, once installed, is an agent of these warlords. But the civilian-operated regulatory and security apparatus of the state also becomes a focal point for international aid efforts ("capacity building") and commercial investment. Warlords are well-positioned to siphon off these rents, and they never disarm. Instead, they retain the ability to coordinate together to punish the president if he misbehaves by instigating a coup. In essence, militia captains literally shaved their beards, put on suits, and became ministers, and then merged the rank-and-file of their memberships with the state security forces. The civilian government, flush with foreign aid and investment (v^*), was gradually able to bribe additional warlords into joining the state. These new warlords changed the governing coalition and made divide-and-rule easier.

In this account, warlords are functionally interchangeable: A figurehead president needs many former militia leaders in his coalition to create basic order, which is necessary to open the airport, secure downtown property so that foreign governments can open embassies, to allow for foreign aid and assistance. He needs *some* of the former militia leaders in the coalition in the long term, so he bribes them with ministry appointments and de-facto autonomy over their fiefdoms. But the president does not (usually) *need* any *particular* one of them. Warlords, knowing this, engage in what amounts to a violent game of musical chairs. In an urban setting, where divide-and-rule politics are fluid and a security state saturated with criminals is obviously emergent, no external actor can credibly commit to enforcing liberal outcomes, providing the kinds of security guarantees that militia leaders would have needed to disarm their private armies, or even keeping track of the kinds of property rights that are the real stuff most people are actually fighting over (11). A practical observable implication of my theory is that the laws

¹ I am also grateful to Erica Marat and Central Asian Affairs for volunteering to organize and publish this roundtable. Unless otherwise noted, any page numbers embedded in this essay reference WARLORDS AND COALITION POLITICS IN POST-SOVIET STATES..

and institutions of the state, including property rights enforcement and import-export-banking laws, would have to be set up to the benefit of warlords in order to prevent a violent palace coup.

Kupatadze interrogates the fit between some of the model's key assumptions and reality. Were warlords *really* sophisticated enough to gauge the foreign aid flows (v^*) and anticipate that they would be able to access payoffs via extortion down the road? Were Georgian and Tajik warlords *actually* interchangeable, as the simplified model suggests, or would further investigation into variables like professionalism or urban- vs. rural- social bases produce a more textured picture? What about factors outside the ken of rational choice modeling – like blood feuds? And is it *really* appropriate to think of the president as an agent of the warlords, given the overwhelming structural power of the office of the president (especially when the seat was filled with a larger-than-life character like Shevardnadze)?

Importantly, it is not only indirect taxes on the aid and foreign investment (v^*) that the warlords expect to acquire if they win in the long term. Foreign money is like icing on the cake; the cake itself is regulatory control over import and export of pretty much *everything* in the polity (the parameter in the model that I call v) (128-9). Whether or not they anticipated that indirect taxes on the salaries foreign embassy workers, consultants and NGO workers would come to provide state liquidity in a manner analogous to the budget subsidies from the Soviet center is irrelevant: In the most violent stages of the war, which I describe in the third and fourth chapter of my book, the *kto kogo* (“who gets what”), question referred to the division of casinos, banks, car bazaars, aluminum factories, lucrative drug routes (153-7, 165-66), resorts (179), and downtown real estate (116). In my account, foreign aid has perverse effects, provided a (slightly) larger set of spoils to fight over (181). It is valuable to consider the possibility that foreign aid programs are divisible spoils that accrue to the winners of an extremely violent urban tournament, and the formal theoretical exercise was meant to make this point explicit.²

Could all this have been anticipated *ex ante* by the warlords, though? How savvy were the warlords about international affairs? Based on my interactions with them, the most prominent Georgian and Tajik warlords were extremely sophisticated about geopolitics and the political economy of aid. Tengiz Kitovani and Jabba Ioseliani both understood that a disadvantage of bringing back Shevardnadze was that he was a peerless coalition-manipulator, likely to run the table on them. They took a calculated gamble anyway, inviting him back because of his unique ability attract foreign aid and investment (88). Rural Kulobi Tajiks understood if their country ended up aligned with Iran or Afghanistan, Tajikistan would become isolated from the global economy (77).

Were warlords really interchangeable? In the moment, and from the viewpoint of recruits deciding to join up, no – there's only one Shah Massoud, only one Tengiz Kitovani. Statistically speaking, however, the answer is less clear (159-166, 213-8). I would not want to have had the job of sorting the “good apples” from the sociopaths in either the Georgian or Tajik Ministry of the Interior in the mid-1990s (190). A variety of anecdotal evidence scattered through the book

² Explicit, that is, to the relatively small sub-community of political scientists who happen to find mathematical models aesthetically attractive or intrinsically valuable. See Powell (1999).

suggests to me that militia members sometimes followed their commanders because of, not in spite of, their lack of professionalism. And while I do not think liberal humanitarians should discontinue providing assistance (175-6), exporting military and police professionalism is hard.

What about blood ties? Some, but not all, *avlod* and ethnic bonds predict longevity for warlords in the Tajik state. I probably do not devote enough attention to the specifics of either blood feuds or cross-clan predatory coalitions. I could not document these dynamics without also documenting specific kinship geologies, and doing so would violate the letter and spirit of the anonymity promises that anchored my relationship with my human subjects (20-3, 219).³

Kupatadze also asks whether the president is really an agent of the warlords (44). I say yes. Warlords can, and in both Tajikistan and Georgia did, force the head of state to resign at gunpoint (69, 75, 80, 121-3). In Chapter 5 I explain how Rakhmon and Shevarnadze used a weak set of incentives to *construct* the power that Kupatadze attributes to them. Hobbes would have called this power “awe.” I show how Shevardnadze and Rakhmon used different tactics, but similar strategies, to make themselves indispensable. Both men rehabilitated certain Soviet institutions and placed themselves at the center of a very opaque favor economy. The basic problem from the point of view of warlords is that they would have had to work together to replace the president, but he could distribute ministry positions (“divide the pie”) to split the warlord coalition, selectively purge warlords one at a time, and assemble different overlapping support coalitions, to minimize (but never fully remove) the threat of a coup (129-31, 210). Shevardnadze excelled with these tactics. I agree that Shevardnadze never seems like much of a puppet, –especially not compared to Rakhmonov in his early years in office. But he too learned how to divide and rule the warlord coalitions. By 1996 – many years before Emomali Rakhmonov transitioned to “Rakhmon” – even the most brazen kinds of extortion did not include demands for him to step down from power (155). In both cases, executive power is Hobbesian, based on recognition that the alternative to personalist rule is anarchy, and that the presidents are placeholders (agent) for violence specialists behind the throne.

With that said, it would be completely valid to contemplate the reverse, and set up a model in which the head of state is the principal and the warlords are the agents. After all, is it not somewhat plausible that shadowy political actors in Washington D.C. or Moscow ought to be considered the terminal principal, and various warlords who reside in the developing world their agents?⁴ For some warlords, this may raise a problem of multiple potential principals — perhaps

³ Without getting into specifics, I can affirm what every anthropology undergraduate already knows about blood feuds (108): A murder, rape, or vicious maiming can practically ensure retaliation from a family member. If these norms are functioning, taking a retaliation-provoking action anyway to intentionally escalate matters and to demonstrate a group’s serious intent and ability to absorb the retaliating punishment, may, actually, be the point. None of this is captured in the model, of course, which assumes fully rational actors responding to material incentives.

⁴ See Marten (2011), 30. I enjoyed this text and referred to it often: See 43, fn 11, 52, fn12, 178, fn 7. Based on my reading of Marten (2004), I suspect that the two of us are dedicated to subtly different intellectual projects that reside in different quadrants of Figure 1.1 of my book (3). If I am correct about this, then a degree of cordial aesthetic disagreement is healthy and inevitable.

a principal in Tbilisi and a principal abroad (creating dynamics that are analogous, in some ways, to the role that would be played by a very high reservation value (r) in my model (39, 178, 210-11)). A theoretical framework in which the great powers are principals and warlords are agents illuminates certain facets of political life in poorly-governed parts of the world that are sometimes uncomfortable. But other dynamics are obscured. The point is not that one model is right and the other is wrong – the point is simply that all social scientific observation is theory laden (2, fn2). There is a lot of potential complementarity in considering politics in weak states from both points of view. If warlords are bad agents, it is puzzling why states do not disarm warlords more often. If warlords are principals and presidents are agents, it is puzzling how post-conflict states develop laws and institutions that are not rigged to the warlords' benefit.

I genuinely appreciate that Marten used this roundtable to position my book in the political science canon. It is true that my bibliography skews towards the monographs of scholars who dedicated significant portions of their lives getting the facts right in Georgia and Tajikistan. I could never have written what I did if not for the virtuous labor of area experts like Kathleen Collins, Shirin Akiner, Stina Torjensen, Monica Whitlock, Kirill Nourzhanov, Georgi Derluguian, Anna Matveeva, Larry Markowitz, Steven Jones, Pauline Jones-Luong, Serei Gretskey, David Darchiashvili, Oliver Roy, Stephane Dudoignon, and Muriel Atkin. I am of course indebted to Venkatesh and de Mesquita, and could have done more to acknowledge them (and I hope to improve my index in future reprinting).⁵ Ultimately I hope that this is a book will be valued by an audience of area specialists – and, if I am lucky, citizens of Central Asian states.

The disadvantage, as Finel wryly points out in the conclusion of his generous essay, is that an argument calibrated to an area studies audience may be locally valid but not travel very well beyond the post-Soviet space. I agree. As Kupatadze points out, there really is something about the weight of pre-Soviet history and Soviet institution-building that stacks the deck in favor of centralized executive power. These states were “born strong” in many important respects (4, 23, 125, especially fn4). The fact that the wars of the 1990s took place within Russia's uncontested sphere of influence meant that proxy-war dynamics were muted (8-10). How is this relevant to the contemporary Middle East, for example, where proxy-war dynamics are pretty much the entire story? One answer, which I hint at in the conclusion (178) and in the “coda for v^* ” subsection (166-72), is that *partial incorporation* may be the new normal in some places. Georgia is probably not the last place we will see *de facto* secessionist states that survive for decades without *de jure* recognition. When the great powers, especially the P-5 of the United Nations Security Council, agree on the desired outcome, like in Tajikistan, *full incorporation* is easier to engineer. But the process of getting to peace is not pretty.

I am afraid that there is also a somewhat discouraging bottom-line for area specialists who seek validation for their labor in the form of policy influence. The Russian experience in both Georgia and Tajikistan suggests, at least to me, is that attempts to pick sides an ongoing war of attrition, when coalitions are changing all the time, can easily backfire (18 fn31, 194-6). This can be the case even if the intervener has not only staying power but also the kind of extremely good humint that you can only acquire over a century of imperial rule. CIS interveners spoke the

⁵ As for Reno (1998), see page 173-4, footnote 3.

languages, knew the relevant local history, and, in general, were well-equipped to distill something actionable from the vapor of cultural nuance. But in the end all of this just made many of them really cynical (83-4, 194). Sometimes the best of many bad options for a retreating empire may be to just sit on the sidelines and let ugly local politics play out. After all, as Fanon (1963) observed, decolonization is a violent psychological process. This does not mean that providing public goods to civilians in war zones is folly; indeed, it is sometimes hard to see what else the intervener ought to be doing. But based on my research, Russian military professionals resigned themselves early to the sobering conclusion that they would be the villains in the story told by future nationalist historians pretty much no matter what they did, no matter which coalition emerged in possession of the symbols of state power in Tbilisi and Dushanbe. As United States policymakers consider humanitarian interventions in complex civil wars in places like Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, it would be prudent to keep Russia's experience in mind.

Additional Citations (not listing citations redundant with the Marten essay):

Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Translated by Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press. 1963.

Kimberly Marten, *Enforcing the Peace: Lessons from the Imperial Past*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Robert Powell, "The Modeling Enterprise and Security Studies," *International Security*, 24:2 (Fall 1999). Reprinted in *Rational Choice and Security Studies: Stephen Walt and His Critics*, an *International Security* Reader, Edited by Michael E. Brown. Owen R. Cote, Jr. Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000. Pages 86-95.