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**Maria Koinova  
Research Associate  
Dickey Center for International Understanding, Dartmouth College**

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## Conditions and Timing of Moderate and Radical Diaspora Mobilization: Evidence from Conflict-Generated Diasporas

Maria Koinova, Ph.D.

Research Associate, Dickey Center for International Understanding, Dartmouth College

**Abstract:** *Based on extensive research among conflict-generated diasporas — Albanians, Armenians, Lebanese, Serbians, Ukrainians, and Chechens predominantly living in the U.S. — I argue here that academics and policy-makers alike need to revisit the notion that diasporas are not likely agents of moderate transnational politics. Radical and moderate diaspora activities depend on the stages of conflict, on the timing of events relative to developments in the homeland, and on the diaspora initiatives and actions of host-land governments. This paper advances three major arguments: Firstly, large diaspora mobilization in support of homeland conflicts usually takes place after secessionist goals are declared by local authorities, not prior to them. Secondly, diasporas exert radical influences on two major occasions: when moderate actors loose so much of their legitimacy domestically that they are unable to achieve secessionism, and when grave violations of human rights take place in the homeland. And thirdly, when the acute stage of violence in the homeland is over, but the goal of sovereignty has not been achieved, diasporas can still act moderately if they find that the international community could be instrumental in the achievement of their sovereignty goal.*

### INTRODUCTION

Globalization's enhanced communication channels and online simultaneity gives opportunities for diasporas to move beyond a passive role as subjects in need of a citizenship and integration in their host societies to an active role as promoters of various causes in world politics. With email, Internet, and socializing tools such as Facebook and MySpace, diasporas residing in one continent can easily influence events in another. Western Union and online banking make the sending of remittances to families remaining in the homeland easy. Remittances often sustain impoverished economies of weak or failing states, sometimes contributing to 12-18% of the entire GDP per capita. Moreover, diasporas can promote the unseating of communist and authoritarian regimes, such as the Cuban diaspora in the U.S. which has become quite prominent (Shain 1999). In addition, diasporas often perpetuate conflicts in their original homelands, especially if they are refugees traumatized by conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler 2000, Byman et al. 2001, Shain 2002, Sheffer 2003, Fair 2005, Adamson 2006, Lyons 2006). The trauma of displacement becomes "frozen" in their memories, and so makes them reluctant to see the conflict in any other but exclusivist terms, and to resist conflict resolution. Conflict-generated diasporas are often prone to support various warring factions in the homeland with lobbying and fund-raising activities, and by recruiting soldiers from within their own communities. And finally, single diaspora individuals have turned against the Western liberal societies by being part

of global organizations and participating in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the U.S. and the 7/7 bombings in the U.K. Thus, they have given the word “diaspora” a bad name and contributed to law-enforcement institutions regarding diasporas as a growing new “threat from within.”

This paper calls for a careful consideration of transnational diaspora politics in nuanced ways that look beyond diasporas simply as agents that perpetuate conflicts and harbor terrorists, to a deeper understanding of the conditions, mechanisms, and timing of diaspora mobilization for radical or moderate politics.<sup>1</sup> As recent scholarship and policy activities have demonstrated, diasporas can also become promoters of peace initiatives, especially if host-state institutions engage them in constructive dialogue that reframes the conflict and shifts perceptions away from zero-sum-game politics (Lyons 2006, Smith and Stares 2007). Diasporas can act as moderate actors for instrumental reasons, even if they are linked to homelands experiencing limited state sovereignty (Koinova 2009).

The conditions and timing of policies related to diaspora politics in a transnational context is important. Diasporas usually do not cause secessionist conflicts in their homelands, and only become involved in a conflict spiral once the conflict erupts locally. Specific moments in the homeland – related to grave violations of human rights and the loss of legitimacy among moderate actors – enhance the likelihood that diasporas will act in more radical ways. Diasporas also can be moderate actors even if issues of contested state sovereignty are at stake. However, a condition for moderate behavior is that the acute stage of violence in the homeland is over, and that post-conflict reconstruction is taking place.

## **BECOMING PART OF A CONFLICT SPIRAL: MODERATE VS. RADICAL DIASPORA PRACTICES**

Diasporas are not homogeneous entities. They are comprised of different generations of migrants, genders, organizations, and powerful individuals, all of whom often have opposing interests and speak for the diaspora with different voices. At different moments, diasporas can include some individuals or groups that advocate radical activism for the homeland, while others are opposed or ambivalent about it. For example, radical Albanian groups in Western Europe demanded Kosovo’s federalization in former Yugoslavia and a violent revolt in the mid-1980s, but they did not become influential in diaspora circles until the mid-1990s. For scholarly and policy purposes my interest here is to understand the tipping points of a change of heart among larger diaspora circles, and not to focus on the existence of radical individuals.

Although individuals may engage in secessionist conflicts that actively promote secessionism, they are not powerful enough to cause this change without organizational support and transformative events in the homeland that feed on their radicalism. For the former

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms of “radical” and “moderate” politics as the widely accepted terms for two terms in use in the social movements literature, of “contained” vs. “transgressive” contention, specifically used by McAdam et. Al (2001). “Contained contention” entails “well established means of claim making” in episodic, public, and collective interaction with other claim makers. The means of moderate politics are to achieve goals that are peaceful and include non-violent rhetoric, petitions, publications, demonstrations and lobby activities. Politics becomes “transgressive,” or radical, when collective claims expand to include more extreme agendas, as well as verbal and physical violence. Hence, secessionism as a political project does not always belong in the realm of radical politics, unlike the venues and methods with which it is pursued.

communist countries which had major diaspora populations in the West, but were divided from them by the Iron Curtain during the Cold War, locally declared independence needed to take place before gaining full-fledged support among larger diaspora circles. For example, some Ukrainian diaspora individuals actively lobbied the U.S. Congress prior to Ukraine's independence in 1991 and others in the Croatian diaspora inaugurated secret fund-raising campaigns prior to Croatia's independence in 1991. Yet, in both cases locally proclaimed independence created a focal point for further diaspora mobilization, and for expanding support for the secessionist cause among larger diaspora circles.

This mechanism is demonstrated well in the linkages between the Armenian, Albanian, and Chechen diasporas and the secessionist regions of Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh, Kosovo, and Chechnya respectively. In comparison to the Croatian and Ukrainian diasporas, here even less diaspora activism existed prior to the proclamation of independence in 1991. However, once independence was locally proclaimed, the larger diaspora circles focused on it. As Paul Hockenos (2003) pointed out, in Kosovo the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) movement finally said what diaspora circles wanted to hear and the diaspora "flocked to it." In the Armenian diaspora, two competing groups with different stances on Armenia and Karabakh issue united behind a common secessionist stance after both proclaimed independence in 1991. The Chechen diaspora, which is scattered throughout the former Soviet Union, participated in the first local elections in Chechnya as well.

By rendering support to secessionism, these diasporas entered into a conflict spiral, but did not initially engage in violent methods. In the early stages of conflict escalation, the diasporas mostly engaged in economic and political transactions, including fund-raising and lobbying. While the government of Armenia set up the Armenian Fund to collect diaspora contributions, the powerful Armenian lobby in Washington D.C. influenced the passage of two acts by the U.S. Congress in 1992 — the Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act and Section 907 from the Freedom Support Act— which aimed at preventing the U.S. from giving financial assistance to Azerbaijan. The Kosovo Albanians paid a 3% tax on their incomes abroad, and the revenue was used to sponsor the activities of the shadow government. In the Kosovo case, the New York-based Albanian-American Civic League was less successful in its lobby efforts, but it still facilitated contacts between U.S. senators and political figures from Kosovo, Albania and the Albanian parts of Macedonia. Religious charities also became a venue for collecting of funds in the Chechen case.

Diaspora circles transformed from being more moderate, external actors to employing more radical methods, as a result of a transformative event that in each case involved grave violations of human rights in the homeland. The killing of men, children, and the elderly on a massive scale served to change the behavior and politics of those in the diaspora. While theories on the relationship between repression and aggression predict such an outcome in the domestic context, there is a similar effect in transnational politics, even though diasporas do not experience the violence directly, but through the global media. The transformative event for Kosovo was in February 1998 when Serbian military forces massacred an entire extended family related to a militant in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in the Drenica region. In the Chechen case, it was the Russian invasion of 1994, which inflicted massive casualties for the first time. In

the Armenia/Karabakh case, it was the outbreak of the 1991 war combined with the human rights violations in 1992, when the Azeri army still held an upper hand in the conflict.

As a response to these transformative events, radical activities abounded. Albanians in the diaspora increased their support for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) which advocated violent methods to achieve secessionism. The Homeland Calling Fund, a fund set up to collect diaspora contributions, was established in the mid-1990s in Europe and later moved to the U.S. where the diaspora was more affluent and the fund received more donations. The war in Chechnya also mobilized previously inactive diaspora communities in Jordan and Turkey as young men of Caucasian origin were told by their family patriarchs to fight in honor of the “ancestral” homeland and jihadi web-sites started to feature the death of “martyrs” in Chechnya. Unlike the two other cases here, the Armenian diaspora did not send many fighters to the homeland, but some diaspora members sponsored the war effort in 1992, and civilian efforts became more visible, expanding activities to include aid for refugees and increased lobbying activities.

Larger diaspora circles became more radical when relatively moderate homeland political actors lost domestic legitimacy and the conviction that they could achieve the secessionist goal in the eyes of population in the homeland. In Kosovo, the moderate LDK started losing legitimacy after the 1995 Dayton Accords did not consider a resolution for Kosovo, thus undermining the pursuit of a non-violent strategy to achieve secessionism. As LDK’s leadership weakened domestically, a rift developed between Kosovo-based President Rugova and Germany-based Prime Minister Bukoshi, leading to a reduction in financial support from the diaspora. By 1996, radical elements in the diaspora had started consolidating around the KLA and advocating guerilla warfare. Bukoshi suggested that the KLA activists in exile join efforts with the shadow government, but his proposition was rejected. Instead, the KLA built its own networks and converted moderates in the diaspora to support their own radical activities without allying with the shadow government.

Legitimacy, coupled with foreign policy issues, started becoming relevant for the Armenian moderate Armenian National Movement (ANM) government after the 1994 cease-fire between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Although Armenia won that war de facto, Karabakh was neither granted independence, nor did it officially become part of Armenia. In addition, steps taken by the Ter Petrossian government to reach out to Turkey politically, created a negative response in the Armenian diaspora. The diaspora considered that the Armenian government had “abandoned Karabakh” and was engaging with Turkey, which it considered to be the perpetrator of the Armenian genocide. Thus, the diaspora activated its networks to remove the ANM government from power and brought more radical politicians who were from Karabakh or fought in high-ranking military positions during the war in their stead.

In Chechnya, local elites lost legitimacy because of their inability to achieve secessionism after the first Chechen war ended in 1996. The problem was similar to that of Karabakh: although the Chechens de facto defeated Russia, Chechnya was not granted legal independence. As a result, an Islamist opposition formed under Shamil Basayev and picked up the banner of secessionism. By using a religious, rather than ethno-national appeal for affinity-based sympathizers abroad, Basayev attracted a growing body of Wahhabi fighters from Saudi

Arabia, other Middle Eastern countries and Pakistan. Thus, Islamic religious solidarity grew across Russia as well under the influence of imams who studied in Islamic schools abroad.

### **MODERATE DIASPORA POLITICS AND CONTESTED SOVEREIGNTY**

There is a distinction between periods of acute violence and oppression taking place in the homeland, when diasporas are prone to engage in radical activities, and periods of relative peace and post-conflict reconstruction, when other concerns predominate in diaspora circles. In the Kosovo case, after NATO's 1999 military intervention and the establishment of United Nations Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) rule in Kosovo, statehood had not been achieved, but radical diaspora activities drastically subsided. In the words of community leaders, after 1999 the Kosovo Albanian diaspora in both the US and the UK became more concerned with rebuilding their own lives than with achieving statehood. Unlike the shadow government during the pre-1999 period, the local Kosovo government became largely inactive in diaspora circles after the establishment of UNMIK rule, which made the diaspora groups to lose their strategic center for mobilization. In terms of fund-raising, the diaspora also became fearful of embezzlement, thus reducing their financial contributions significantly.

However, the commitment of the diaspora to independence, and the accompanying lobby activities, remained. In the U.S., diaspora lobby groups continued to remind Congress and the Administration that Kosovo's final status needed further consideration and violence could still occur. It would be an exaggeration to claim that diasporic lobbies were as influential in U.S. foreign policy as in the pre-1999 period, but politically active groups nevertheless helped maintain moderate politics. Although some former KLA fighters, especially those based in New York, became more impatient in 2004 and 2005, moderate groups dominated diaspora activism. It was reasoned by the majority in diaspora circles that the overall goal of Kosovo's independence would be best achieved with the help of the international community. As one of my interviewees said, the Albanian diaspora knew that if democratization was the "game in town" that could achieve independence, then it would play that game. Thus, it was not a genuine belief in democratization that drove Albanian diaspora circles to maintain moderate politics towards Kosovo, but a strategic interest to pursue a goal that required a change in course.

One could well argue that the Kosovo case is exceptional, because the U.S. endorsed NATO's 1999 intervention, and was generally supportive of Kosovo and hostile to Milosevic throughout the 1990s. Thus, it was only a matter of time until the Kosovars achieved independence after the 1999 war. While this argument certainly makes sense, the bigger picture is not as simple. Kosovo's independence was taken off of the Western countries' policy agenda after 1999 and support for the democratization of Serbia after Milosevic's downfall from power in 2000 shifted policy attention towards Serbia and away from Kosovo. In 2004, the violence in Kosovo brought attention back to Kosovar independence when Western policy circles realized that concrete steps towards Kosovo's final status were becoming necessary. Diaspora circles did not officially endorse violence but some individuals realized that some violence helped the overall cause of independence.

A similar moderate attitude among diaspora activists on issues of contested sovereignty in the U.S.- Lebanese diaspora took place in 2000-2005. This was a period when U.S. foreign policy was not necessarily pro-Lebanese to the extent it was pro-Kosovar. Sovereignty in Lebanon was contested not on the basis of statehood unrecognized internationally, but due to the Syria's active infringement of Lebanese domestic sovereignty. A Lebanese movement against Syrian occupation began with strong diaspora components from the U.S. and France and became moderate. In approximately 2000, Lebanese diaspora groups, and later influential figures in the Israeli lobby, supported the 2003 Syrian Accountability Act that later became the basis for U.N. Resolution 1559 and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. This unlikely convergence of interests, given the long-standing conflicts between Israel and Lebanon, clearly shows the presence of negotiation and possible moderation in diaspora politics. The actual reason for the success of this act was a shift in the U.S. foreign policy and the Administration's initiation of measures that would weaken Syria, which became supportive of insurgents after the U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003. Nevertheless, the fact that diaspora circles were active prior to the inauguration of this act, and prior to shifts in U.S. foreign policy demonstrates that conflict-generated diasporas do have an interest and a capacity to act with moderation. Shifts in foreign policy in the direction of alignment between foreign policy goals and diaspora stances help sustain initial diaspora moderation.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Moderate and radical mobilization of diasporas are closely linked to the domestic political contexts in the original homeland and relate to periods of sustained violence and post-conflict reconstruction. Rather than conceptualizing diaspora activism as potentially radical because of a conflict-generated identity that favors zero-sum-game politics, a full consideration of this identity and concrete contextualization should be made. To this end, I would like to propose three policy recommendations:

1. When secessionism or other long-term violent oppression takes place in the homeland, policy makers need to pay attention to two specific moments in the conflict spiral: when grave violations of human rights are conducted in the homeland, and when moderate actors start losing legitimacy. At these stages in the conflict spiral most of the attention of policy-makers is focused on how to deal with the developments in that particular country, maintain the power of moderates, accommodate refugees and provide humanitarian aid. Needless to say, while such pro-active policies should continue, policy-makers also need to be aware that diasporas living in their own countries may be starting to become radical simultaneously with the occurrence of these events in the original homelands, and actively sponsor radical elements. Thus, designing policy measures to tackle diaspora activism at such stages in the conflict spiral becomes important.
2. Contested sovereignty in the homeland does not always presuppose radical diaspora mobilization. Diasporas have an incentive to act moderately to achieve the goal of sovereignty if peaceful activities dominate domestic politics. Furthermore, if moderate politics is most likely to achieve sovereignty in the short term, it becomes

- identified and praised as a pragmatic strategy. Moderation, with a pro-sovereignty goal, is a win-win situation: it is less costly, enhances the diaspora's standing in their liberal host-societies, and improves their standing in the homeland. However, if diasporas realize that moderate politics do not achieve sovereignty, they may change their political approach. To prevent radicalism from re-occurring, liberal host governments may seek to adjust their foreign policy measures even though this might not always be feasible, desired, or possible. An alternative for host governments would be working with diaspora groups to fund other policy and program options such as creating businesses, academic exchange programs, monitoring elections, and other pro-democracy related initiatives which could potentially sustain moderate diaspora activism for some time, even if not able to completely transform existing attitudes towards achieving sovereignty.
3. Diasporas are likely agents to support sovereignty goals in the homeland, whether on radical or moderate terms. Thus, the principle conclusion of this paper is that policy-makers need to design conflict-resolution measures with the conflict-region and with, rather than separately, from diaspora politics throughout the different phases of a conflict spiral.

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