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## Separatist Movements

*Should Nations Have  
a Right to Self-Determination?*

Brian Beary



AFP/Getty Images

The American Embassy in Belgrade is set ablaze on Feb. 21 by Serbian nationalists angered by U.S. support for Kosovo's recent secession from Serbia. About 70 separatist movements are under way around the globe, but most are nonviolent. Kosovo is one of seven countries to emerge from the former Yugoslavia and part of a nearly fourfold jump in the number of countries to declare independence since 1945.

From *CQ Global Researcher*,  
April 2008.

**A**ngry protesters hurling rocks at security forces; hotels, shops and restaurants torched; a city choked by teargas. The violent images that began flashing around the world on March 14 could have been from any number of tense places from Africa to the Balkans. But the scene took place high in the Himalayas, in the ancient Tibetan capital of Lhasa. Known for its red-robed Buddhist monks, the legendary city was the latest flashpoint in Tibetan separatists' ongoing frustration over China's continuing occupation of their homeland.<sup>1</sup>

Weeks earlier, thousands of miles away in Belgrade, Serbia, hundreds of thousands of Serbs took to the streets to vent fury over Kosovo's secession on Feb. 17, 2008. Black smoke billowed from the burning U.S. Embassy, set ablaze by Serbs angered by Washington's acceptance of Kosovo's action.<sup>2</sup>

"As long as we live, Kosovo is Serbia," thundered Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica at a rally earlier in the day.<sup>3</sup> Kosovo had been in political limbo since a NATO-led military force wrested the region from Serb hands in 1999 and turned it into an international protectorate after Serbia brutally clamped down on ethnic Albanian separatists. Before the split, about 75 percent of Serbia's population was Serbs, who are mostly Orthodox Christian, and 20 percent were ethnic Albanians, who are Muslim.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, war-torn Iraq witnessed its own separatist-related violence on Feb. 22. Turkish forces launched a major military incursion into northern Iraq — the first big ground offensive in nearly a decade — to root out Kurdish separatist rebels known as

## Separatist Movements Span the Globe

Nearly two dozen separatist movements are active worldwide, concentrated in Europe and Asia. At least seven are violent and reflect ethnic or religious differences with the mother country.

### Selected Separatist Hot Spots



Sources: Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization, [www.unpo.org](http://www.unpo.org); *Political Handbook of the World 2007*, CQ Press

## Ongoing Separatist Movements

### Africa

**Somaliland** — Militants in this northern Somalia territory established an unrecognized de facto state in the 1990s after the government of Somalia collapsed. The area was ruled by the United Kingdom from 1884 to 1960 and then became unified with the former Italian-ruled Somalia from 1960 to 1989.

### Asia/Eurasia

**Abkhazia** — Independent Soviet republic briefly in 1921. Subsequently united with Georgia. Declared independence in 1992; war with Georgia ensued, which the Abkhaz won with Russian support. Since then, a stalemate has persisted. Up to 300,000 Georgians have fled since the 1990s, leaving an estimated 100,000 Abkhaz as the dominant force.

**Aceh** — One of the first places where Islam was established in Southeast Asia. Indonesia annexed the territory in 1949 upon becoming independent. Aceh was granted autonomy in 1959 and declared independence in 1976, with thousands dying in violence since then. A further 100,000 were killed in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. A peace agreement was signed in 2005 granting autonomy.

**Chechnya** — A Muslim region in southern Russia, Chechnya was briefly independent in 1922. It declared independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but Russia opposed the secession and went to war with Chechnya from 1994-1996 and again in 1999. It became an autonomous Russian republic after a 2003 referendum.

**Kurds** — The world's largest ethnic group without its own country resides in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. The Iraqi Kurds have had autonomy since 1991. In Iran and Turkey they have no autonomy but are relatively free to speak Kurdish. The language is banned in Syria.

**Moros** — Muslims in the southern Philippines who live primarily on the island of Mindanao. Migration by Christian Filipinos from the north has diluted the Moro population. A militant Islamic fundamentalist group, Abu Sayyaf, is fighting the government to create a Moro Muslim state. Malaysia has committed the most international peacekeeping forces to stem the violence.

**Nagorno-Karabakh** — Declared independence from Azerbaijan in 1991, followed by a three-year war, during which most of the Azeris fled. A ceasefire has existed since 1994. It is now a de facto independent republic — unrecognized by the international community — populated mostly by ethnic Armenians.

**Palestinian Territories** — Since the largely Jewish state of Israel came into being in 1948, Arabs from the former Palestine have had no country of their own. The Palestinians live mainly in two non-contiguous areas, the Gaza Strip and West Bank, which Israel occupied in 1967 after a war with Egypt, Jordan and Syria. While the Palestinians have their own civilian administration and neither Israel nor neighboring Arab countries claim sovereignty over them, there is no independent Palestinian state yet because the terms cannot be agreed upon. A violent conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has persisted for decades.

**South Ossetia** — This region, which became part of Georgia in 1922, tried to become autonomous in 1989, but Georgia refused. After a war from 1990 to 1992 it became a de facto independent republic. Referenda in 1992 and 2006 confirming independence have not been recognized by any other country. Ossetian towns are governed by the separatist government; Georgian towns are overseen by Georgia.

**Taiwan** — The island off China's southeastern coast was established as a rival Chinese government in 1949 following the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists by Mao Tse-tung's communists. Between 1949 and 1971, it was recognized by most countries as the official government of China, but in 1971 mainland China replaced it as China's representative in the United Nations. In the 1990s, the Taiwanese government started a campaign to become a U.N. member again.

Politics is polarized between those favoring unification with China — who won two recent elections — and those seeking official independence.

**Tamils** — Militant separatists known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have run a de facto state in northern Sri Lanka for many years. The LTTE assassinated Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 for helping Sri Lanka crack down on the Tamils and Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993. A ceasefire was declared in 2002, but violence resumed in 2005. The Tamils are predominantly Hindu whereas the majority-Sinhalese community is Buddhist.

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**Asia/Eurasia (Cont.)**

**Tibet** — China took over the Buddhist region in western China by force in the 1950s. Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, fled in 1959 and set up a government-in-exile in India. Recent separatist violence has been fueled by resentment over Chinese immigration into the autonomous region and the government's continued refusal to grant independence. The violence has prompted the Dalai Lama to consider resigning as the head of the exiled government.

**Xinjiang** — Known as East Turkestan or Chinese Turkistan, this vast region on China's northwest border with Central Asia — which comprises one-sixth of China's land mass — was annexed by China in the 18th century. Its 18 million inhabitants include 47 ethnic groups, including the Turkic-speaking Muslim Uyghurs — who once comprised 90 percent of the population. Today the Uyghurs make up only 40 percent of the inhabitants due to government policies that encourage Han Chinese to migrate there. Although the region has been officially autonomous since 1955, ethnic tensions have escalated in recent years. The U.S. State Department complains of serious human rights abuses against the Uyghurs due to Beijing's efforts to forcibly assimilate them and undermine their culture. China says Uyghur separatists are Islamic terrorists.

**Europe**

**Basque Country** — Basques in northeast Spain and southwest France have been pushing for greater autonomy or independence for more than a century. The militant separatist group ETA has killed about 1,000 people since 1968. Spain has granted its Basques extensive political and cultural autonomy but France has not.

**Flanders** — Flemish nationalism has grown in recent decades in Flanders, the northern part of Belgium where 60 percent of the population lives, most of them Dutch-speaking. Flanders, which has grown wealthier than French-speaking Wallonia to the south, already has extensive autonomy, but most Flemings would like more; many favor full independence.

**Northern Cyprus** — When Cyprus gained independence from British rule in 1960, relations between the Turks and Greeks on the island quickly deteriorated. Turkey's invasion in 1973 led to the Turkish Cypriots creating their own de facto state in the north that is only recognized by Turkey.

**Republika Srpska** — This self-governing territory within Bosnia, created in 1992, is populated mainly by ethnic Serbs who opposed Bosnia's secession from Yugoslavia. Moves to integrate it with the rest of Bosnia have failed so far.

**Scotland and Wales** — Demands by Celtic peoples in the northern and western corners of the United Kingdom for greater control over their affairs resulted in a devolution of power in 1999: A parliament was installed in Scotland and an assembly in Wales.

**Transdniestria** — First became a part of Moldova in 1812 when Russia captured both territories. From 1917 to 1939 it was part of the Soviet Union, while the rest of Moldova was ruled by Romania. From 1945 to 1991 both parts fell under Soviet rule. In 1992, when Moldova became an independent country Transdniestria seceded amid fear that Moldova would unify with Romania. The Moldovan army was repelled with the support of the Russian army. Its secession has not been recognized internationally. The area is dominated by Russian-speakers, with the Russian military also present.

**The Americas (not shown on map)**

**Bolivia** — After Evo Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, proposed changing the constitution last year to share more of the country's natural resources with the nation's indigenous highlanders, the mainly European-descended lowlanders have been threatening to secede.

**Lakota Nation** — This Indian nation of eight tribes living in South Dakota and neighboring states signed a treaty with the United States in 1851 granting them land rights. In 1989 they were awarded \$40 million for losses incurred based on an 1868 land-rights treaty. In December 2007 a group of dissident Lakota delivered a declaration of independence to the State Department, which did not respond.

**Québec** — This majority French-speaking province has been threatening to secede from Canada since the 1960s. In two referenda on independence — in 1980 and 1995 — the Québécois voted to remain part of Canada. Today, they have a large degree of regional autonomy.

Sources: Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization, [www.unpo.org](http://www.unpo.org); *Political Handbook of the World 2007*, CQ Press

the PKK, who have waged a bloody independence campaign against Ankara since 1984.<sup>5</sup>

The three hotspots reflect the same worldwide phenomenon — the almost inevitable conflict caused when a group of people want to separate themselves from a state that refuses to let them go. Despite today's oft-heard mantra that mankind is living in a global community where borders no longer matter, having a homeland of one's own clearly remains a dream for millions.

Out of more than 70 separatist movements around the globe, about two dozen are active, most in Europe and Asia, and seven of them are violent. And since 1990, more than two dozen new countries have emerged from separatist movements, mostly the result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the breaking apart of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup> Almost half of the 25 successful separatist movements were accompanied by some amount of violence, most of it ethnically based. (See map and chart, pp. 28–30.)

In fact, the number of independent countries around the globe has waxed and waned over the past 150 years. During the 19th century, the number declined as the European colonial powers gobbled up territories in Asia and Africa. Then after World War II the number mushroomed as those empires disintegrated. The United Nations has grown from 51 members when it was founded in 1945 to 192 members today (not counting Kosovo).<sup>7</sup> (See graph, p. 39.)

Among the groups fighting for independence today, the Kurds are the largest, with approximately 25 million dispersed in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria.<sup>8</sup> Other separatist movements are microscopic by comparison: The South Ossetians — who have seceded from Georgia and formed a de facto but as-yet-unrecognized government — number just 70,000, for example. Some movements, like the Québécois in Canada and the Scottish in the United Kingdom, have been peaceful, while others, like the Tamils in Sri Lanka and Palestinians in Israel, have been violent. Indonesia has had two separatist movements with very different destinies: East Timor (Timor Leste) on Indonesia's eastern tip became independent in 1999 — although it is still struggling to fend for itself, relying on international aid to make up for its severe food shortages — while Aceh in the west has opted for autonomy within Indonesia.<sup>9</sup>

Separatism often triggers serious rifts between the world's major powers. In the case of Kosovo, the United



AFP/Getty Images/Vano Shitmanov

Protesters at a March rally in Tbilisi, Georgia, want Russia to stop supporting South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two Georgian regions that seceded and formed de facto states. Their placards — which say “Russia! Stop Dealing With the Fates of Small Nations!” — indicate how a separatist movement can become a pawn in a geopolitical tug-of-war. Russia supports the two breakaway states, while most of the international community does not recognize them.

States and its NATO allies — including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Turkey — backed the secession. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried has dubbed it “the last chapter in the dissolution of Yugoslavia,” while acknowledging “many things can go wrong and probably will.”<sup>10</sup> In stark contrast, Russia steadfastly opposes independence for Kosovo and is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with its historical ally, Serbia.

Outgoing Russian President Vladimir Putin has said, “If someone believes that Kosovo should be granted full independence as a state, then why should we deny it to the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians?” According to Matthew J. Bryza, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Russia is covertly providing material support to South Ossetia and Abkhazia — two de facto states that have emerged from within Russia's political foe, the ex-Soviet Republic of Georgia.<sup>11</sup> The United States and the rest of the international community don't recognize the secession of either state.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government opposes the pro-independence movement among the ethnically



## World's Newest Country Remains Divided

*Kosovo is struggling to be recognized.*

**D**elaware-size Kosovo grabbed the world's attention on Feb. 17 when its ethnic Albanian-dominated government declared its independence from Serbia, triggering street protests among some Serb citizens.

Because of fierce opposition from Serbs both inside Kosovo and in Serbia, a large international presence with armies from six "framework" nations keeps an uneasy peace: The United States controls the east, Ireland the center, Turkey and Germany the south, Italy the west and France the north.<sup>1</sup>

"Do not trust the apparent calm, it's the main difficulty of this mission," says Captain Noël Ucheida from the Franco-German brigade of the 16,000-strong NATO force in Kosovo. "It can be calm. But it becomes tense in the morning and ignites in the afternoon."<sup>2</sup>

The spotlight fell on Kosovo in 1999 — several years after the break-up of Yugoslavia — when Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic's brutal campaign to forcibly remove Kosovar Albanians led to NATO having to step in and take the province out of Serb hands. Now Kosovo's 2 million Albanians seem determined to open a new chapter in their history by implementing a U.N. plan granting them internationally supervised independence. Not for the first time, the world's leading powers are divided over a conflict in the Balkans. The United States, Germany, United Kingdom, France and Italy back independence while Serbia, Russia and China oppose it.

Further complicating the issue are the 100,000 Serbs living in Kosovo, including 40,000 concentrated in a zone north of the Ibar River; the remainder are dispersed throughout the south. Just as Kosovo's Albanians fought tooth and

nail to free themselves from Serb rule, so the Serbs in north Kosovo are equally resolved to be free of Albanian rule. "They already run their own de facto state," says Nicolas Gros-Verheyde, a French journalist who toured Kosovo just before the declaration of independence. "They are heavily subsidized by the Serbian government in Belgrade, which tops up the salaries of local police officers and supplies the electricity and mobile phone network."

The Ibar River is fast becoming yet another border in the Balkans. "Cars in the north have different registration plates. When Kosovar Serbs drive south, they remove them to avoid being attacked. Our translator, who was Serbian, would not even get out of the car," says Gros-Verheyde. He notes there was much greater contact between the Serb and Albanian communities during his previous visit to Kosovo in 1990, when the Serbian military patrolled the province. "But 15 years of ethnic conflict has bred mistrust and hatred," says Gros-Verheyde.

Daniel Serwer, vice president of the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), feels Serbia only has itself to blame for losing Kosovo. It drove the Kosovar Albanians to secede by excluding them from the Serbian government, he argues. "If Kosovars had been included — for example by being offered the presidency of Serbia — it might not have seceded. The Serbs want sovereignty over the territory of Kosovo, but they could not care less about the people," he says.

The economy of Kosovo has suffered terribly from two decades of strife throughout the region. With unemployment

Turkic Uyghur people, who live in the western Chinese autonomous region of Xinjiang. China has tried to stifle separatism in its western provinces by promoting mass migration of ethnic Chinese to both Tibet and Xinjiang to dilute the indigenous population. Critics say China used the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States as a pretext for clamping down on the Uyghurs, who are Muslim, by claiming they were linked to Islamic terrorist movements like al Qaeda.<sup>12</sup>

China's separatist woes are an embarrassment just four months before the start of the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing — China's chance to shine on the

world stage. The Chinese call the Tibetan protests a "grave violent crime involving beating, smashing, looting and burning" orchestrated by the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan leader-in-exile.<sup>13</sup> But Western leaders are not buying Beijing's line. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, traveled to India to meet with the Dalai Lama on March 21 and declared the Tibet situation "a challenge to the conscience of the world."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the international condemnation of China's treatment of the Tibetans, however, the international community and the United Nations (U.N.) — which in 1945 enshrined the right to self-determination in its

at 50 percent, thousands have migrated to Western Europe and the United States, sending money back to their families. Much of the country's income is derived from trafficking in drugs, weapons and women, claims Gros-Verheyde. Roads are dilapidated, and electricity is cut off several times a week.

Meanwhile, the international community is ever-present: The mobile phone network for Kosovar Albanians is provided by the principality of Monaco, the euro is the local currency and NATO soldiers' frequent the hotels and restaurants.

"The Albanian part is livelier than the Serbian," says Gros-Verheyde. "The birth rate among the Albanians is very high. They want to increase their population to ensure they are not wiped out."

Kosovo's future remains uncertain. Most of the world's nations have not yet recognized it as an independent country, and many are unlikely to do so, including Spain, Slovakia and Romania, which fear potential secessionist movements of their own.<sup>3</sup> Internally, tensions between the Albanian and Serb communities are unlikely to simply melt away. In fact, relations could further deteriorate over how to divide up the country's mineral resources, most of which lie in the Serb-controlled northern part.

Meanwhile, the world will keep a watchful eye and presence. The European Union (EU) is in the process of deploying a 1,900-strong police and rule-of-law mission to replace a U.N. police force.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many observers think the EU may hold out the best hope of salvation: Under a plan proposed by the European Commission — and supported virtually across the board in Europe — all Balkan nations would be integrated into the EU, ultimately diminishing the significance of borders and smoothing out ethnic tensions.



AP Photo/Samir Dacic

Ethnic Albanians celebrate Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia on Feb. 17, 2008. The new state is backed by the United States and key European allies but bitterly contested by Serbia and Russia.

In the meantime, NATO holds the fort with a "high-visibility, low-profile" doctrine. "The soldiers have bullet-proof vests but keep them in the vehicles," says Gros-Verheyde. "They carry machine guns on their back but do not walk through villages with a weapon at their hip. A soldier told me the only exception to this was the American soldiers who have been traumatized by Iraq."

<sup>1</sup> Nicolas Gros-Verheyde, "One eye on Belgrade, the other on Pristina," *Europolitics*, (EU affairs subscription-based news service), Jan. 22, 2008, [www.europolitics.info/xg/europolitique/politiquessectorielles/defense/217304?highlight=true&searchlink=true](http://www.europolitics.info/xg/europolitique/politiquessectorielles/defense/217304?highlight=true&searchlink=true).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Joanna Boguslawska, *Europolitics*, Dec. 14, 2007, [www.europolitics.info/xg/europolitique/politiquesexternes/relationsexterieur/215424?highlight=true&searchlink=true](http://www.europolitics.info/xg/europolitique/politiquesexternes/relationsexterieur/215424?highlight=true&searchlink=true).

<sup>4</sup> For details, see Web sites of NATO and U.N. forces, respectively, at [www.nato.int/KFOR](http://www.nato.int/KFOR) and [www.unmikonline.org](http://www.unmikonline.org).

founding charter — have provided little support to recent separatist movements. Many countries are wary of incurring the wrath of economic giants like China, and international law on separatism is ambiguous, leading to an inconsistent and non-uniform global reaction to separatist movements.

Though several international conventions reaffirm the right to self-determination, they also pledge to uphold the "principle of territorial integrity" — the right of existing states to prevent regions from seceding. "International law grows by practice," says Thomas Grant, a senior fellow and legal scholar at the United

States Institute of Peace (USIP), an independent institution established and funded by the U.S. Congress that tries to resolve international conflicts. "The legal situation adapts itself to the factual situation." (*See box, p. 44.*)

Consequently, the international community's response to de facto separatist states varies widely. For example, most of the world refuses to deal with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which has been punished with an economic embargo since 1973, when Turkish troops invaded Cyprus and permanently occupied the north, creating a Turkish-dominated de facto state there. Somaliland — which established a de facto state in

northwestern Somalia in 1991 after the government in Mogadishu collapsed — has been largely ignored by the world community despite being a relative beacon of stability in the otherwise unstable horn of Africa.<sup>15</sup> The Tamils' campaign to gain independence from Sri Lanka attracts relatively little international diplomatic attention these days, in part, some say, because the area is not considered critical by the major powers.

Meanwhile, the island nation of Taiwan, off the coast of mainland China, is accepted as a global trading partner — the United States alone has 140 trade agreements with the Taiwanese — but not as an independent country. Few countries are willing to challenge Beijing's "one-China" policy, which denies any province the right to secede and sees Taiwan as its 23rd province.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the world has done nothing — apart from occasionally condemning human rights violations — to prevent Russia from brutally repressing Chechnya's attempt to secede. While separatists there largely succeeded in creating their own state in the 1990s, Moscow has since regained control of it, although an insurgency continues.

The U.N. has no specific unit looking at separatism as a phenomenon. Instead, it usually waits for a conflict to break out and then considers sending a peacekeeping mission to restore law and order.

"U.N. member states are likely to be wary of separatism because of the knock-on effects it can have on themselves," says Jared Kotler, communications officer at the U.N.'s Department of Political Affairs. "Member states are very aware how one movement can encourage another — possibly in their own country."

"Thus far, territorial integrity has always won the debate," says Hurst Hannum, a professor of international law at Tufts University in Medford, Mass., and a specialist in self-determination theory. "This is why Kosovo will be an important precedent despite statements by all concerned that it should not be seen as such."

In Latin America, where most countries won wars of independence in the early 1800s, separatist movements are rare today, although one recently sprang up in Bolivia. Bolivians living in the lowlands, who are mostly of European ancestry, are threatening to secede to prevent the government from redistributing the profits from the nation's oil and gas reserves to the mainly indigenous highlanders. In North America, the United States has

not experienced a serious separatist threat since 1861 when 11 Southern states seceded, provoking the Civil War. And while few predict an imminent resurgence of such movements in the United States, diverse secessionist groups are beginning to coordinate their efforts.<sup>17</sup> (See *At Issue*, p. 49.)

Some separatist movements have been highly successful. For example, since declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, Lithuania has liberalized and grown its economy, consolidated democracy and joined the European Union (EU) and NATO.

Seth D. Kaplan, a foreign policy analyst and author of the forthcoming book *Fixing Fragile States*, has some advice for countries struggling to put out secessionist fires. "Countries that can foster sufficient social cohesion and a common identity while minimizing horizontal inequities are the most likely to stay whole," he says. "Those that don't and have obvious identity cleavages are likely to ignite secessionist movements."

While the world confronts growing separatism, here are some key questions being asked:

### **Should there be a right of self-determination?**

"In principle, yes," says Daniel Serwer, vice president of the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations at the United States Institute of Peace. "But the real question is: What form should self-determination take?"

Self-determination is often interpreted to mean the right to secede and declare independence. But it can take other forms, too, such as local autonomy, similar to what Canada has granted to Québec, or a federal system with a strong central government that protects minority rights.

"In Kosovo, after nine years under U.N. control, young people expected independence," says Serwer. But other minorities have chosen a different path, he adds. For instance, "the Kurds in Iraq were thrown out of their homes" by Saddam Hussein. "They were even gassed. But so far they have not chosen the route of independence."

Gene Martin, executive director of the Philippine Facilitation Project at USIP, notes, "Local autonomy may not be enough for some people, who feel they just do not belong to a country." Plus, he adds, the government's ability or willingness to relinquish its authority also affects whether a minority will push for local autonomy or for full independence. Martin has been involved



in brokering peace between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which has for decades fought for an independent state for the Moros, a Muslim people living in southern Philippines.

Marino Busdachin — general secretary of the Hague-based Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), which represents 70 nonviolent movements pushing for self-determination — rails against the U.N. for not upholding that right. “Self-determination exists on paper only. It is a trap,” he says. “We cannot apply to anyone for it. The U.N. member states block us.”

Moreover, he says, seeking self-determination should not be confused with demanding the right to secede. “Ninety percent of our members are not looking for independence,” he says.

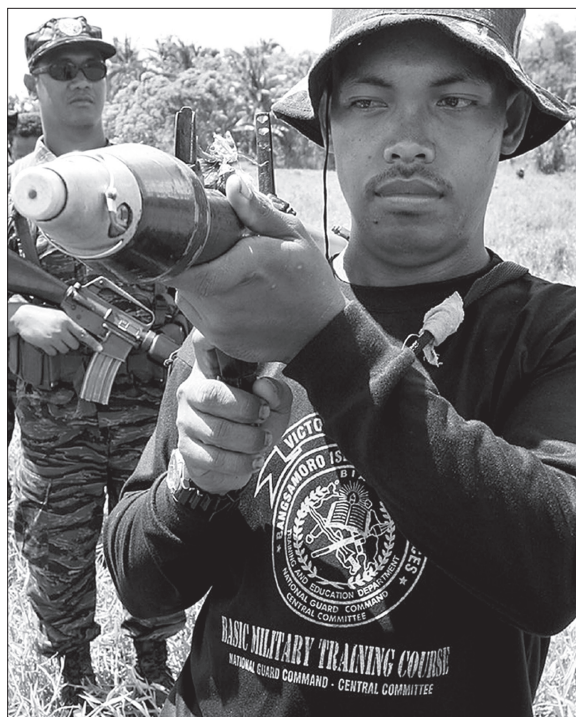
That’s a significant distinction, according to Diane Orentlicher, a professor of international law at American University in Washington, D.C. Although the U.N. has enshrined the right to self-determination, it has never endorsed a right of secession, and no state recognizes such a right. Such a step would be dangerous, she writes, because it would allow minorities to subvert the will of the majority. “Minorities could distort the outcome of political processes by threatening to secede if their views do not prevail,” she writes.<sup>18</sup>

Dmitry Rogozin, Russia’s ambassador to NATO, shares that view. “If the majority wants to live in a shared state, why does the minority have the right to break away?” he has asked.<sup>19</sup> “Look at Berlin. You could say it’s the third-largest Turkish city [because of the large number of people of Turkish origin living there]. If tomorrow the Turks living in Berlin want to create a national state in the city, who can be against it?”

“The challenge for the West in Kosovo,” says self-determination legal expert Hannum at Tufts, is to recognize its independence without implicitly recognizing its right to secede — just as “the West pretended that the former Yugoslavia ‘dissolved’ as opposed to recognizing the secession of its various parts.”

The State Department’s Bryza, who deals with conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, a separatist enclave in Azerbaijan, agrees. “It is unreasonable to have self-determination as the only guiding principle,” he says. “If we did, the world would live in utter barbarity.”

*Fixing Fragile States* author Kaplan believes separatism makes sense in a few cases, such as Kosovo and



AP Photo/AJ Jacinto

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front — which for decades has fought for an independent state for the Moros, a Muslim group living in the south of the predominantly Catholic Philippines — are negotiating with the government to peacefully settle the dispute.

Somaliland. “But, generally, the international community is right to initially oppose separatism,” he says.

So when should a group have the right to secede? “When you are deprived of the right to participate in government, and there are serious violations of human rights, such as genocide,” says the USIP’s Grant. “The bar is placed very high because you want to preserve the state, as that is the mechanism you use to claim your right of secession.”

This is why, argues Serwer, ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, which borders Kosovo, do not have the right to secede. “If they called for independence — and I don’t think they want this — I would say ‘nonsense,’ because they have their rights respected. It is only when other forms of self-determination — like local autonomy — are blocked that secession becomes inevitable.”

Meto Koloski — the president of United Macedonian Diaspora, which campaigns for the rights of Macedonian minorities in Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia and

## More Than Two Dozen New Nations Since 1990

Since 1990, 26 new countries have declared independence — 15 of them the result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia has separated into seven new states, the last one, Kosovo, declaring its independence in February.

### Successful Separatist Movements Since 1990

#### ***Emerged from Ethiopia (1993)***

*Eritrea*

#### ***Emerged from Indonesia (2002)***

*Timor Leste*

#### ***Emerged from the Soviet Union (1991)***

<i>Armenia</i>	<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Russia</i>
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Tajikistan</i>
<i>Belarus</i>	<i>Latvia</i>	<i>Turkmenistan</i>
<i>Estonia</i>	<i>Lithuania</i>	<i>Ukraine</i>
<i>Georgia</i>	<i>Moldova</i>	<i>Uzbekistan</i>

#### ***Emerged from Czechoslovakia in 1993***

*Czech Republic*  
*Slovakia*

#### ***Emerged from Yugoslavia***

*Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992)*  
*Croatia (1991)*  
*Kosovo (2008, from Serbia)*  
*Macedonia (1991)*  
*Montenegro (2006)\**  
*Serbia (2006)\**  
*Slovenia (1991)*

\* For three years, Serbia and Montenegro existed as a confederation called Serbia & Montenegro, and then split into separate countries.

Sources: Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organization, [www.unpo.org](http://www.unpo.org); *Political Handbook of the World 2007*, CQ Press, 2007; Tibet Government-in-exile, [www.tibet.com](http://www.tibet.com).

Kosovo — says, “Everyone should have a right to self-determination, their own identity, language and culture but not to their own state.”

Secession also is problematic — even if backed by a clear majority of those in the seceding region — because the minority opposed to secession could end up being oppressed. “Secession does not create the homogeneous successor states its proponents often assume,” writes Donald Horowitz, a professor of law and political science at Duke University in Durham, N.C. “Guarantees of minority protection in secessionist regions are likely to be illusory; indeed, many secessionist movements have as one of their aims the expulsion or subordination of minorities in the secessionist regions.”<sup>20</sup>

“There is an inevitable trade-off between encouraging participation in the undivided state and legitimating exit from it,” he continued. “The former will inevitably produce imperfect results, but the latter is downright dangerous.”<sup>21</sup>

Some would argue that certain separatist movements have no legal basis because the people concerned already exercised their right of self-determination when their

country was first founded. “The whole self-determination theology is very slippery,” says a U.S. government official with extensive knowledge of the separatist conflict in Aceh, Indonesia. “We support the territorial integrity of Indonesia. We never concluded that the human rights situation in Aceh was intolerable.”

Jerry Hyman, governance advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, highlights an often-overlooked point: “We have to ask how economically and politically viable are states like Transnistria? If you apply this [right to secede] to Africa, it could explode. At best, Africa is a stained-glass window.” Economic viability tends to be ignored when assessing separatist claims, he says, because the “we’re special” argument usually prevails.

“If they are not viable, they will end up like East Timor, relying on the international community financially,” he says.

### Are globalization and regional integration fueling separatism?

Several organizations and treaties have emerged in recent years to encourage more regional integration and cross-border trade. The EU is the oldest and largest, but newer arrivals include the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the African Union (AU), the Latin American trading blocks ANDEAN and MERCOSUR and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In addition, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is working to abolish trade barriers globally. Experts differ over whether these organizations promote or discourage separatism.

The Peace Institute’s Grant believes they can encourage it. “What are the political impediments to independence?” he asks. The new states are not sustainable as a small unit, he says, adding, “If you reduce the significance of national borders and improve the free movement of people, goods and capital, you remove that impediment.”

For instance, the possibility of being part of the EU's single market makes an independent Kosovo a more viable option and has seemingly suppressed Albania's desire to merge with the Albanians in Kosovo to create a Greater Albania. Asked if Albania had a plan to establish a Greater Albania, Foreign Minister Lulzim Basha said, "Yes, we do. It has a blue flag and gold stars on it," describing the EU flag. "Today's only goal is integration into NATO and the EU as soon as possible."<sup>22</sup>

Günter Dauwen, a Flemish nationalist who is director of the European Free Alliance political party in the European Parliament, says the EU fuels separatism by not adequately ensuring respect for regions. Dauwen is campaigning for more autonomy and possibly independence for Flanders, the mostly Dutch-speaking northern half of Belgium that already has a large degree of self-government. "The national capitals control the EU. They decide where funds for regional development go. This creates terrible tension."

Over-centralization of decision-making is particularly acute in Spain, he says, where it has triggered separatism in the region of Catalonia in the northeast and Galicia in the northwest. In addition, France suppresses regionalist parties in Brittany, Savoy and the French Basque country, he says. "When we complain to the EU, its stock answer is that only nation states can devolve power to the regions."

Dauwen points out that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has condemned countries for not respecting the rights of ethnic minorities, but the EU doesn't force its members to comply with those rulings. For instance, he says, the ECHR condemned the Bulgarians for not allowing ethnic Macedonians to form their own political party. But the EU did nothing to force Bulgaria to abide by the ruling, further fueling the desire for separatism.

The State Department's Bryza disagrees. "The opposite works in my experience," he says. "As Hungary and Slovakia have deepened their integration into the EU, the desire of ethnic Hungarians who live in countries neighboring Hungary to become independent is receding. And the possibility for Turkish Cypriots in northern Cyprus [whose de facto state is only recognized by Turkey] to be part of the EU gives them an incentive to rejoin the Greek Cypriot government in the south, which is already in the EU."



AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe

Female Tamil Tiger fighters undergo training at a hideout deep in Tiger-controlled territory northeast of Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 2007. The Tamils, who comprise 18 percent of Sri Lanka's population, began fighting for independence in 1983 — a struggle that has resulted in the deaths of some 70,000 people. Tamils now control large swathes of the country.

Likewise, Ekaterina Pischalnikova — special assistant to the special representative of the secretary-general at the U.N. observer mission in Georgia, which is trying to resolve the Georgia-Abkhaz conflict — says EU regional integration has helped to "mitigate rather than fuel separatist movements."

Busdachin of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization says the EU "is helping to resolve separatist conflicts in many cases because it has the most advanced regime for protecting minorities." For example, the EU has consistently pressured Turkey, which wants to join the union, to grant the Kurds the right to express their

language and culture more freely. Such a move could quell some Kurds' desire for full independence, he says, adding that he would like to see ASEAN, MERCOSUR and other regional organizations follow the EU model.

Author Kaplan — who has lived in Turkey, Nigeria, China and Japan — says regional integration “is only promoting separatism in the EU. Europe is peaceful and prosperous so there is no real need for states. But when you get into the wild jungle, the state is more important.” For instance, he explains, “states in Africa and Central America do not want to give up their power, even though they would benefit the most from regionalism.”

In Asia, ASEAN has no clearly defined policy on separatism, leaving it up to national governments to decide how to deal with separatist movements. The Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO) — set up in 2001 by Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to combat separatism, terrorism and extremism — strongly opposes separatist movements like that of China's Uyghurs.<sup>23</sup>

Ironically, separatism also can fuel regional integration. Many of the countries that have recently joined the EU or intend to do so — Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Macedonia — were formed from separatist movements. Too small to be economically self-sufficient, they see integration into the EU market as the only way to ensure continued prosperity and stability.

### **Does separatism lead to more violent conflict?**

The recent developments in the Balkans provide strong evidence that separatism can provoke violent conflict — especially when countries divide along ethnic lines, as the former Yugoslavia has done.

Serbia's festering rage over Kosovo's declaration of independence is a prime example. “If this act of secession for ethnic reasons is not a mistake, then nothing is a mistake,” said Serbia's Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, adding, “Serbia will not go quietly. We will fight, and we will not tolerate this secession.”<sup>24</sup>

Serwer at the United States Institute for Peace says, “If you partition a state along ethnic lines, this almost inevitably leads to long-term conflict,” especially if the central government resists the separatist movement.

“Secession converts a domestic ethnic dispute into a more dangerous one,” according to Duke's Horowitz. “The recurrent temptation to create a multitude of homogeneous mini-states, even if it could be realized,

might well increase the sum total of warfare rather than reduce it.”<sup>25</sup>

The State Department's Bryza says separatism doesn't have to lead to violence “if leaders of national groups exert wise leadership and temper the ambitions of nationalist groups.”

The campaign by Taiwanese separatists to obtain a seat for Taiwan at the U.N. — a March 22 referendum calling for this failed — shows how even nonviolent separatism can trigger conflict. “Bizarre as it may seem, a peaceful referendum in Taiwan may portend war,” according to John J. Tkacik, a policy expert at the Heritage Foundation in Washington. He predicted China would invoke a 2005 anti-secession law to justify using “non-peaceful” means to counter Taiwanese separatism.<sup>26</sup> Fear of provoking a war with China is probably the main reason there is so little international support for the Taiwan independence movement.

As former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert B. Zoellick said in 2006, “We want to be supportive of Taiwan, while we are not encouraging those that try to move toward independence. Because I am being very clear: Independence means war. And that means American soldiers.”<sup>27</sup>

But independence does not always mean war. With a broadly homogeneous population, its own currency, flag, army, government and airline, Somaliland is an example of how a people can effectively secede without causing chaos and violence. Somaliland's isolation from the international community has not hindered its development — indeed it has helped, argues author Kaplan.

“The dearth of external involvement has kept foreign interference to a minimum while spurring self-reliance and self-belief,” he says.

Martin at the Peace Institute points out that since the end of the Cold War, “most wars have been intra-state. Sometimes borders can be shifted to solve the problem and actually prevent war.”

But separatist movements also are frequently manipulated by external powers as part of a geopolitical chess game that can become violent. “People want independence because of ethnic hatred and because it is in their economic interests to separate. But outside powers help separatists, too,” says Koloski, of the United Macedonian Diaspora. For example, the United States, Britain and France support Kosovo's independence because they believe this will help stabilize the region, while Russia and China support Serbia's



opposition because they fear it will encourage separatist movements elsewhere, including in their territories.

In some cases — notably Québec, Flanders, Wales and Scotland — separatist movements have not boiled over into violent conflict. In each, the central government granted some self-rule to the separatist region, preventing the situation from turning violent.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the movements were able to argue their case through elected political representatives in a functioning democratic system, which also reduces the likelihood of violence.

“When a country is too centralized and non-democratic, this produces separatist movements that can become violent,” says Busdachin at the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization. “The responsibility is 50-50.”

But democracy does not always prevent separatism from escalating into conflict. From the 1960s to the '90s, extreme Irish Catholic nationalists in Northern Ireland waged a violent campaign to secure independence from the U.K., all the while maintaining a political party with elected representatives.

How the global community responds to one separatist movement can affect whether a movement elsewhere triggers a war. “Violence is not inevitable,” says Flemish nationalist Dauwen. “But ethnic minorities do get frustrated when they get nowhere through peaceful means, and they see those who use violence — for example the Basque separatist movement ETA in Spain — attracting all the headlines.”

As a Tamil activist notes, “Whatever we have achieved so far, we have got by force.”

## BACKGROUND

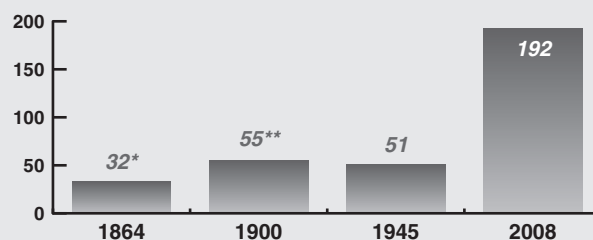
### Emerging Nations

Throughout history separatism has manifested itself in various forms as groups grew dissatisfied with their

## Number of Countries Reaches All-time High

The number of countries in the world has increased sixfold since the 1800s, when European colonization was at its peak. The greatest jump occurred after World War II, when Europe gave up its colonies amid a worldwide movement for independence. The United Nations, which includes nearly all of the world's countries, now has 192 members. The U.N. has not yet recognized Kosovo, which declared its independence in February.

### Number of Countries Recognized Worldwide, 1864-2008



\* Includes several states in Australia and New Zealand that were part of the British Empire; Finland and Poland were considered part of Russia; Africa is omitted entirely, since its interior was largely unmapped at that time. Since the U.S. Civil War was in progress, the Confederate States were counted as a separate country.

\*\* The British Empire is counted as a single country, as are the French, German and Dutch empires; Austria-Hungary is considered one country and includes both Liechtenstein and Bosnia-Herzegovina; Finland and several Asian dependencies are counted as part of Russia; Turkey includes five states.

Sources: *The Statesman's Year Book*, 1864 and 1900; United Nations

governments. Even the Roman Empire — which was synonymous with order, peace and civilization in most of its conquered territories — had its Celtic resisters, the Britons and Gauls.<sup>29</sup>

In medieval Europe, the discontented sought to extricate themselves from kingdoms, feudal domains and churches. In the 18th and 19th centuries European colonies in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand began splitting off from the “mother” countries. By the 19th century, with the Hapsburg, Romanov and Ottoman empires on the decline, groups united by ethnicity, language or culture began to cast off their imperial shackles. Then in the late 1800s and early 20th century the major European powers — and the United States — began acquiring and consolidating colonies or territories.

Just three decades after its own war for independence from Great Britain, the United States had to weather its own secessionist storms. In 1814 a handful of New



## C H R O N O L O G Y

**1776-1944** *Nation states gradually eclipse multi-ethnic empires as the dominant form of government.*

**1776** Britain's American colonies declare independence, triggering war.

**Early 1800s** Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Latin America become independent.

**1861** Eleven Southern U.S. states secede, sparking Civil War. After four years of bitter fighting, the South loses and is reintegrated into the union.

**1918** At the end of World War I new European states are created from the ashes of the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires.

**1919** U.S. President Woodrow Wilson champions the "right of self-determination" but fails to get it adopted by the League of Nations.

**1939** World War II breaks out. Borders shift as Germany, Japan and Italy occupy neighboring countries before being defeated by the Allies.

**1945-1989** *More new states emerge as colonies gain independence, but borders are left largely intact.*

**1945** U.N. charter includes the right of self-determination.

**1949** China invades and occupies Tibet.

**1960** U.N. General Assembly proclaims a Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, heralding the end of the colonial era.

**1967** Biafra secedes from Nigeria; is reintegrated after a three-year war.

**1975** World's leading powers sign the Helsinki Final Act, guaranteeing peoples the right of self-determination.

**1984** A new, violent Kurdish separatist revolt breaks out in Turkey.

**1990-2008** *Twenty-six new countries are created after the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia break apart.*

**1990** Soviet republics begin resisting Moscow's central control. Lithuania on March 11 becomes the first republic to declare its independence, setting off a chain reaction that leads to the dissolution of the U.S.S.R.

**1991** Slovenia and Croatia split from Yugoslavia, accompanied by violence, especially in Croatia. . . . New states emerge from the Soviet Union, as do unrecognized breakaway republics in Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transdniestria. . . . In Africa, Somaliland separates itself from rapidly disintegrating Somalia.

**1992** Bosnia splits from Yugoslavia, provoking a three-year war.

**1993** Czechoslovakia splits peacefully into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. . . . Eritrea secedes from Ethiopia after a U.N.-monitored referendum.

**1995** A referendum in Québec advocating secession from Canada is rejected by 50.6 percent of Québécois.

**1999** North Atlantic Treaty Organization seizes Kosovo from Serbia in response to Serbia's persecution of Kosovar Albanians. . . . East Timor declares independence from Indonesia after 25 years of violence.

**2004** The separatist region of Aceh is granted autonomy from Indonesia after a devastating Dec. 26 Indian Ocean tsunami creates a feeling of solidarity between Aceh's separatists and the Indonesian authorities.

**2005** Chinese authorize use of force to prevent Taiwan from seceding.

**2007** Belgium edges closer to disintegration. . . . In Bolivia, people of European descent threaten to secede in response to fears of losing control over the country's gas reserves.

**2008** Taiwanese separatists are defeated in parliamentary elections on Jan. 12. . . . Kosovo declares independence from Serbia on Feb. 17, triggering violent protests among Serbs in Belgrade. Separatist protests in Tibet turn violent on March 14; Chinese send in troops to put down the rebellion.

England states opposed to the federal government's anti-foreign-trade policies and the War of 1812 organized a convention in Hartford, Conn., and produced a report spelling out the conditions under which they would remain part of the United States. The U.S. victory against the British in 1815 took the wind out of the initiative's sails, however, and secession negotiations never actually took place.

Then in 1861, largely in response to U.S. government efforts to outlaw slavery, 11 Southern states tried to secede from the union to form their own country. After a bloody, four-year civil war, the South was forcibly reintegrated into the United States in 1865.<sup>30</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court cemented the union with a ruling in 1869 (*Texas v. White*) that effectively barred states from unilaterally seceding.<sup>31</sup>

In 1914 nationalist opposition to imperialist expansionism in Europe sparked World War I. Aggrieved at the Austro-Hungarian Empire's annexation of Bosnia, home to many Serbs, 19-year-old Serbian Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the imperial throne. Many of the new countries created in the post-war territorial division, such as Lithuania and Poland, were constructed along broadly ethnic lines. At the same time the concept of "self-determination" — the right of a nation to determine how it should be governed — emerged, championed by President Woodrow Wilson.<sup>32</sup>

Wilson's effort to enshrine self-determination in the founding statute of the newly created League of Nations was defeated. The idea of holding a referendum to determine who should govern a disputed territory gained support in this period, too. And when the league set up a commission to determine the status of the Åland Islands (it determined Finnish sovereignty), the concept was developed that a people might have the right to secede when the state they belonged to did not respect their fundamental rights.<sup>33</sup>

One group, the Kurds, fared badly in the post-war territorial settlements. Emerging without a state of their own, Kurds repeatedly staged uprisings in Iraq, Iran and Turkey but were suppressed each time. The most recent and bloody of these has occurred in Turkey, where 40,000 people have been killed in an ongoing conflict that began in 1984. The Kurds in northern Iraq also suffered widespread massacres and expulsions in the late 1980s under Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, but when the United States and its allies defeated Saddam in the 1991 Gulf

War, Iraqi Kurds effectively gained self-rule after the U.N. forced Saddam to withdraw from the region.<sup>34</sup>

The Palestinians were also dealt a poor hand in 1948 after their homeland became part of the new state of Israel, populated mainly by Jews fleeing post-war Europe. After winning the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel occupied Palestinian lands on the western bank of the Jordan River and in a narrow strip of land called Gaza. Ever since then, the Palestinians have been fighting to have a country of their own.<sup>35</sup>

## Decolonization

The 20th century saw the number of independent countries around the globe more than triple — from the approximately 55 that existed in 1900 to the 192 that make up the United Nations today.<sup>36</sup> Most of the new nations were created in the post-World War II era, as the European powers shed their colonies in Africa and Asia. To ensure that the decolonization process was peaceful and orderly, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in 1960.<sup>37</sup>

But in practice the emergence of new states was often far from peaceful. Hundreds of thousands of people died in outbreaks of violence during the August 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, which within months went to war with each other over the disputed territory of Kashmir. In 1967 the Igbo people of Biafra tried to secede from Nigeria, triggering a devastating war and famine. Three years later the region was forcefully rejoined to Nigeria. Despite accusations that Nigeria was committing genocide on the Biafrans, the international community did not back Biafra's independence.

The former British colony of Somaliland in the horn of Africa became momentarily independent in 1960 but immediately chose to unite with its fellow Somalis in the newly constituted state of Somalia to the south created from Italy's former colony. When Somalia collapsed into violent anarchy in 1991, Somaliland seceded, and separatist militants installed a civil administration. In northern Ethiopia, Eritrea's 31-year secession struggle finally ended in independence in 1993 after passage of a U.N.-monitored referendum.

In Sri Lanka, which is dominated by Sinhalese people, the minority Tamils — who make up about 18 percent of the population — have been pushing for independence since the 1970s.<sup>38</sup> The Tamils had wielded considerable

## Bye-Bye Belgium?

*More prosperous Flanders wants autonomy.*

Belgium experienced a surreal moment in December 2006 when a spoof news program on a French-speaking TV channel announced that Flanders, the country's Dutch-speaking region, had seceded. Footage of the king and queen of Belgium hastily boarding an airplane interspersed with shocked reactions from politicians convinced many viewers that their country was no more. Some even took to the streets to spontaneously rally for the Belgian cause.

But Dutch-speaking Flemings (as those who live in Flanders are called) were offended at how quickly their francophone compatriots (called the Walloons) believed Flanders had seceded. The incident triggered months of national soul-searching about the future of the country.

Fast-forward to the June 2007 general election, when the separatist-leaning Flemish Christian Democrats won the most seats in parliament and demanded that the constitution be amended to devolve more power to the regions, escalating an ongoing dispute between French and Dutch-speaking parties. The controversy became so fierce it took six months to form a government, and even then, it was only provisional, aimed at keeping the country united until the French- and Dutch-speaking communities could agree on a more long-term program. While a coalition pact was finally approved on March 18, bringing an end to the country's nine-month political limbo, the pact says nothing about devolution of powers, so the real battle has still to be fought.<sup>1</sup>

"If the French do not give us more autonomy, it's bye-bye Belgium," says Flemish nationalist Gunter Dauwen, director of the European Free Alliance, a political group that represents 35 nationalist parties in Europe.

Dauwen's party, Spirit, is demanding that unemployment benefits be paid for by the regional governments rather than the federal government. The jobless rate is higher in French-speaking Wallonia. Under Dauwen's plan,

the Flemish would not have to subsidize the unemployed Walloons as they do now.

But such a lack of solidarity irks the Francophones. "We are a small country. We should all get the same benefits," says Raphael Hora, an unemployed Walloon. "You can't have a guy in Charleroi (Wallonia) getting less than a guy in Antwerp (Flanders)."

There is also a growing cultural chasm between Flemings and Walloons, he says. "I speak English, Italian, Spanish, Norwegian, German and Polish — but not Dutch. My father never wanted me to learn it."

Roughly 60 percent of Belgians speak Dutch, 39 percent speak French and the remaining 1 percent speak German. The Belgian constitutional system is Byzantine in its complexity, with powers dispersed between governments organized along municipal, linguistic, provincial, regional and national lines.

Hora, who recently moved to Berlin, sees Belgium's breakup as inevitable: "When it happens, I'll come back to Belgium and campaign for Wallonia to rejoin France. We'll be stronger then."

Dauwen insists independence for Flanders is not the goal for now. "My party is not campaigning for independence yet but for a confederation." Contrary to the widespread perception of Flemings as rampant separatists, Dauwen says, "We are all peaceful and not extreme." Flanders' largest pro-independence party, Vlaams Belang, actually lost support in last June's elections, although it remains a major force, garnering about 20 percent of Flemish voters.

According to Jérémie Rossignon, a landscape gardener from Wallonia living in Brussels, "Belgians are not very proud of being Belgian. They do not boast about their achievements and culture." He feels this is a pity, because Belgium has much to be proud of — from its world-renowned beers, chocolates and restaurants to its sports stars like tennis champ

influence when the island belonged to the British Empire but felt increasingly discriminated against after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948. In the late 1970s and early '80s, when Indira Gandhi was India's prime minister, India — which is home to 70 million Tamils — supported the separatist "Tamil Tigers." But in the late 1980s her son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, dispatched Indian troops to

clamp down on the Tigers. He was later assassinated by a female Tamil suicide bomber, Thenmuli Rajaratnam.

Hopes of reconciliation were raised when Sinhalese and Tamil authorities agreed to rebuild areas devastated by the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which killed some 35,000 Sri Lankans. But the Sri Lankan Supreme Court struck down the agreement.

Justine Henin and the funky fashion designers of Antwerp to the eclectic euro-village that is Brussels.

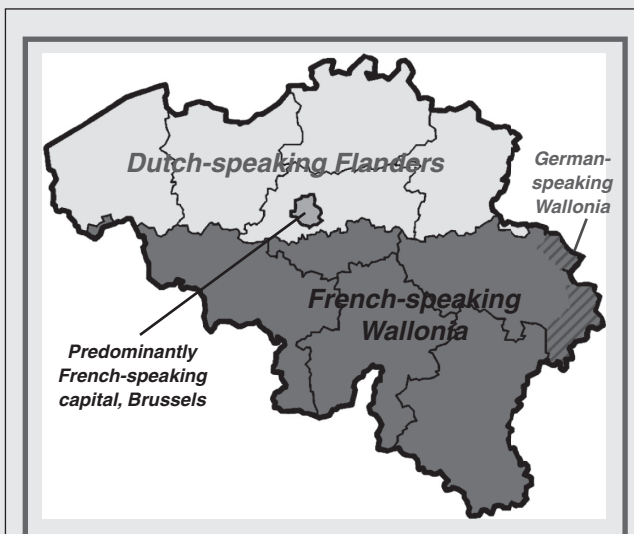
“There is not much communication between the Francophones and Flemings any more,” he continues. “Young Flemings speak English, not French, whereas their parents can speak French.”

Meanwhile, he admits, the Francophones “are useless at foreign languages.” Foreign-language movies and TV programs are dubbed into French, whereas in Flanders they are subtitled, he notes. The mostly French-speaking monarchy, which is supposed to unify the country, has become another cause of division. Belgium’s Italian-born Queen Paola cannot speak Dutch, the language of 60 percent of her subjects, while Crown Prince Philippe has publicly slammed Flemish separatism.

Belgium’s predominantly French-speaking capital, Brussels, is located in Flanders, and is seen alternately as a glue holding the country together or an obstacle preventing it from splitting apart. “The Walloons are trying to annex Brussels” by moving to the small strip of land in Flanders that separates Brussels from Wallonia, according to Dauwen. Elected representatives and residents in these municipalities squabble over which language should be used on official documents and street signs. And once a year the Flemings organize a bike ride — known as *Het Gordeel* (the belt) — around Brussels to send a symbolic message that Brussels must not extend itself further into Flanders.

The Francophones feel equally passionately. “The Romans conquered Brussels before the Germans did so we should stay French,” says Marie-Paul Clarisse, a lifelong Bruxelloise, who works for an EU-affairs newspaper.

One compromise being floated would turn Brussels into Europe’s Washington, D.C., and have it run by the EU, which is based in the city. An even wilder solution calls for tiny Luxembourg to annex Brussels and Wallonia.<sup>2</sup> And



### Belgians Speak Three Languages

The Dutch-speaking portion of Belgium is called Flanders. The southern portion, Wallonia, includes both Francophones and German-speaking citizens. French is the predominant language of Brussels, the capital.

as if things were not complicated enough, Belgium also has an autonomous German-speaking community living in Wallonia. No one is quite sure what they want.

Even Rossignon, an ardent defender of Belgium, doubts its future: “The separatists will win out,” he predicts, and the new government “will regionalize our country even more than it already is.”

<sup>1</sup> “New Belgian Coalition Government Reaches Agreement,” Agence France-Presse, March 18, 2008, <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jhowU7jkHEsJRFNHhaSlnCb8-Zig>.

<sup>2</sup> Laurent Lintermans, “Un Etat fédéral avec le Luxembourg?” *La Libre Belgique*, Aug. 18, 2007, [www.lalibre.be/index.php?view=article&cart\\_id=364931](http://www.lalibre.be/index.php?view=article&cart_id=364931).

Dispersed across a vast plateau in the Himalayan mountains, Tibetans are a mostly Buddhist people with a 2,000-year written history and their own language, Tibetan, which is related to Burmese. China claims ownership of the region based on historical links with Tibetan leaders, which were especially strong in the 18th century. The Tibetans refute this claim and insist the

region was never an integral part of China and that from 1913 until 1949 Tibet existed as an independent state.

China invaded Tibet in 1949 and 1950, annexed it in 1951 and in 1965 created the Tibet Autonomous Region — a territory less than half the size of the region Tibetans consider their homeland.

## Laws Are Ambiguous on Self-Determination

The right to self-determination — which allows people to secede from a mother state if they so choose — appears in various international conventions, including the founding document of the United Nations. But the international documents are ambiguous, because they also espouse the importance of “territorial integrity”— the right of countries not to have their territory dismembered.

### International Texts Dealing with Self-determination and Territorial Integrity

#### ***U.N. Founding Charter (Article 1) — 1945***

- One purpose of the United Nations is “to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.”

#### ***U.N. Resolution 2625 — 1970***

- “Every State has the duty to refrain from any forcible action which deprives peoples referred to in the elaboration of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of their right to self-determination and freedom and independence.”
- “Nothing in the foregoing paragraphs shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember, or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent states conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction to race, creed or color.”

#### ***African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Article 20) — 1981***

- “All peoples shall have . . . the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination. They shall freely determine their political status and shall pursue their economic development according to the policy they have freely chosen.”

#### ***Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe’s Charter of Paris for a New Europe — 1990***

- “We affirm that the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities will be protected.”
- “We reaffirm the equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and with the relevant norms of international law, including those related to territorial integrity of states.”

#### ***Vienna Declaration and Program of Action adopted by World Conference of Human Rights — 1993***

- The conference recognizes “the right of peoples to take any legitimate action, in accordance with the Charter of the U.N., to realize their inalienable right of self-determination.”

*Sources:* Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, United Nations, University of Hong Kong, University of New Mexico, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

Over the past 60 years, according to the Tibetan government-in-exile, China has brutally repressed the Tibetans, killing 87,000 during the 1959 uprising against Chinese rule and destroying or closing down nearly all of the region’s 6,259 monasteries by 1962. China unleashed more death and destruction against the Tibetans in 1966 during the Cultural Revolution, the Tibetans claim.<sup>39</sup>

In other regions, movements to allow ethnic minorities to express their cultures and govern their own affairs have flourished since the 1960s. Such efforts have succeeded among the Welsh in Scotland and the Basques in Spain. In Belgium divisions between Dutch-speakers in Flanders,

who make up roughly 60 percent of the population, and the French-speakers of Wallonia widened as more power devolved from the central government to the regions. In Canada separatist aspirations among French-speakers, who make up about 80 percent of the population in the province of Québec, culminated in a 1980 referendum on independence that was rejected by 60 percent of the voters. A subsequent referendum in October 1995 failed by a smaller margin, with 50.6 percent voting No and 49.4 percent Yes.<sup>40</sup>

During the Cold War, the United States, the Soviet Union and others signed the Helsinki Final Act of 1975,



which established, among other things, the principle of “equal rights and self-determination of peoples.” Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia would later use this to justify seceding from the Soviet Union, according to a U.S. government official involved in overseeing implementation of the act. The 1977 Soviet constitution gave the constituent republics the right to leave the U.S.S.R., but the right was not exercised for fear of reprisals from Moscow.<sup>41</sup>

Mikhail Gorbachev — the Soviet leader from 1985 to 1991 whose “glasnost” policy of greater openness to the West proved to be a catalyst for the break-up the U.S.S.R. — had his doubts about self-determination. In his memoirs, he wrote that “the application by a community of its right to self-determination leads regularly to a corresponding attack on the other community. . . . It is obvious that the recognition of the rights of peoples to self-determination should not be absolute.”<sup>42</sup>

### Ethno-centrism Surges

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early '90s unleashed a wave of nationalist sentiment that destroyed the two largest multi-ethnic states in the region — Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Lithuania got the ball rolling, declaring independence from the Soviets in March 1990. Within two years, 15 new states had emerged from the former Soviet Union and another four in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>43</sup>

Soon several of the new states were experiencing their own secession movements. Russia fought fiercely and successfully to suppress the independence aspirations of the Chechens, a Muslim people with a long history of resisting subjugation by Moscow. Largely Romanian-speaking Moldova saw its Russian-dominated Transnistria region morph into a de facto yet unrecognized state with the help of the Russian military. Ethnic Armenians in Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region set up their own

### Yugoslavia Yields Seven New Nations

The former Yugoslavia has broken into seven new countries since 1991, and at least one additional province — the self-governing Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina — is threatening to secede. Kosovo, on Serbia's southern border, declared its independence in February. The northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, populated by many Hungarians — is autonomous.



state in 1991, provoking a three-year war during which thousands of Azeris fled. Two regions — South Ossetia and Abkhazia — seceded from Georgia but have yet to be recognized by the international community.

Yugoslavia was torn asunder — eventually into seven new countries — due to the aggressive policies of nationalist leaders like Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic (1989-1997) and Croatia's president, Franjo Tudjman (1990-1999). The republics of Slovenia and Croatia in the northwest seceded in 1991, followed by Macedonia in the south and the triangular-shaped Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. The tiny republic of Montenegro seceded from Serbia in 2006. The province of Vojvodina in northern Serbia, populated by a substantial number of Hungarians, is autonomous but still part of Serbia.

Montenegro and Macedonia's splits were bloodless and Slovenia's relatively peaceful, but in Croatia and Bosnia



AP Photo/Yehiya Ahmed

In northern Iraq's Qandil Mountains, recruits for a splinter group of the militant Kurdish PKK separatists are training to fight government troops across the border in Iran. Some 16-28 million Kurds are dispersed in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, making them the world's largest nation without its own country. The PKK wants a single Kurdish state; other Kurds seek either greater autonomy or independence from the countries where they live.

hundreds of thousands were either killed, fled persecution or were expelled, leading to the term "ethnic cleansing." NATO helped to take Kosovo, a province in Serbia whose autonomy was withdrawn in 1989, away from the Serbs in 1999 after Milosevic brutally cracked down on Kosovo Albanian separatists. Kosovo remained an international protectorate for the next nine years.

The Yugoslav experience highlighted the danger of using referenda to determine the status of territories. The Serbs living in Bosnia, who made up about a third of the population, did not want to secede from Yugoslavia so they boycotted the 1992 plebiscite. When it passed with the overwhelming support of the Bosnian Muslims and Croats, the Bosnian Serbs violently resisted integration into Bosnia, and a three-year war ensued. The EU had helped to trigger the referendum by imposing a deadline on the Yugoslav republics to request recognition as independent countries.<sup>44</sup>

In 1993, Czechoslovakia split into the Czech and Slovak republics even though no referendum was held, and opinion polls indicated most citizens wanted to keep the country together.<sup>45</sup> The split came about because the leading politicians decided in 1992 that a peaceful divorce was easier than negotiating a new constitution with the Czechs favoring a more centralized state and the Slovaks wanting more autonomy.

In August 1999 East Timor seceded from Indonesia after a U.N.-supervised referendum. East Timor's annexation by Indonesia in 1975 had never been recognized by the U.N., and the East Timorese were Catholic, unlike the predominantly Muslim Indonesians, since the area had been colonized by Portugal.

The path to independence was a bloody one. The Indonesian military supported anti-independence militias who killed some 1,400 Timorese, causing 300,000 to flee, and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure. Australian-led international peacekeepers helped restore order in September 1999, and Timor Leste became a U.N. member on Sept. 27, 2002.<sup>46</sup>

By contrast, the separatist movement in Aceh has never succeeded in gaining independence, despite a decades-long struggle. Instead, the Free Aceh Movement and the Indonesian government signed a peace treaty in 2005, granting Aceh autonomy. The rapprochement was facilitated by a feeling of solidarity that grew out of the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which killed more than 130,000 people in Aceh.

## CURRENT SITUATION

### Balkan Pandora's Box

The shock waves emanating from Kosovo's Feb. 17 declaration of independence show that separatism remains an explosive issue. For Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi, a former separatist guerrilla, "independence is everything for our country and our people. We sacrificed, we deserve independence, and independence of Kosovo is our life, it's our future."<sup>47</sup>

The Kosovars waited until Serbia's presidential elections were over before seceding in order to deny the more nationalistic Serb candidate, Tomislav Nikolic, the chance to make political hay out of the declaration. On Feb. 3, Nikolic narrowly lost to his more moderate opponent, Boris Tadić. Kosovo also deliberately made its declaration before Russia assumed the presidency of the U.N. Security Council on March 1, knowing that Moscow opposes its independence.

At this stage, few expect Serbia to launch a military offensive to take back Kosovo, given the strong NATO presence in the region. The Serbs instead are vowing to diplomatically freeze out any countries that recognize

Kosovo. Russia's ambassador to the EU, Vladimir Chizhov, warned in February that such recognition would be "a thorn in our political dialogue."<sup>48</sup> This has not prevented more than 30 countries so far from endorsing Kosovo's independence, including the United States, Canada, Australia and much of Europe.

Some fear that recognizing Kosovo will open a Pandora's box of ethnically motivated separatism. For example, the ethnic Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who have already largely separated themselves from the rest of Bosnia by creating Republika Srpska, on Feb. 21 pledged to hold a referendum on secession. But the republic's chances of gaining acceptance as an independent country are slimmer than Kosovo's, because both the EU and the United States firmly oppose it.

Romania and Slovakia worry that their large Hungarian minorities could feel emboldened to demand more autonomy or even unification with Hungary. Hungarians in the Romanian region of Transylvania are already demanding that Romanian law recognize their ethnically based autonomy.<sup>49</sup>

### Frozen Conflicts

Russia's heavy clampdown on separatists in Chechnya serves as a stark warning to other ethnic groups in the region with separatist leanings not to push for independence. The predominantly Muslim Chechens had managed to gain de facto independence from Moscow in their 1994-1996 war, but Russia recaptured the territory in 1999. Tens of thousands have been killed in these conflicts and hundreds of thousands displaced.

Ethnic violence has also spread to other neighboring republics in the North Caucasus like Dagestan, North Ossetia and Ingushetiya, where disparate rebel groups are fighting for more autonomy or independence. To prevent the Balkanization of Russia, the Putin government cracked down hard on the violence.

Meanwhile, the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan no longer are as economically integrated as they were during the Soviet era, fueling corruption. Reportedly officials

## What Is a Nation?

*The words nation, state and country are often used — incorrectly — as if they are interchangeable. But international law and usage today make clear distinctions in the concepts, as set out by U.S. lawyer and diplomat Henry Wheaton in his 1836 text Elements of International Law.*

*A "nation," he wrote, implies "a community of race, which is generally shown by community of language, manners and customs."*

*A country — or "state" — refers to "the union of a number of individuals in a fixed territory, and under one central authority," Wheaton explained. Thus a state "may be composed of different races of men" while a nation or people "may be subject to several states."*

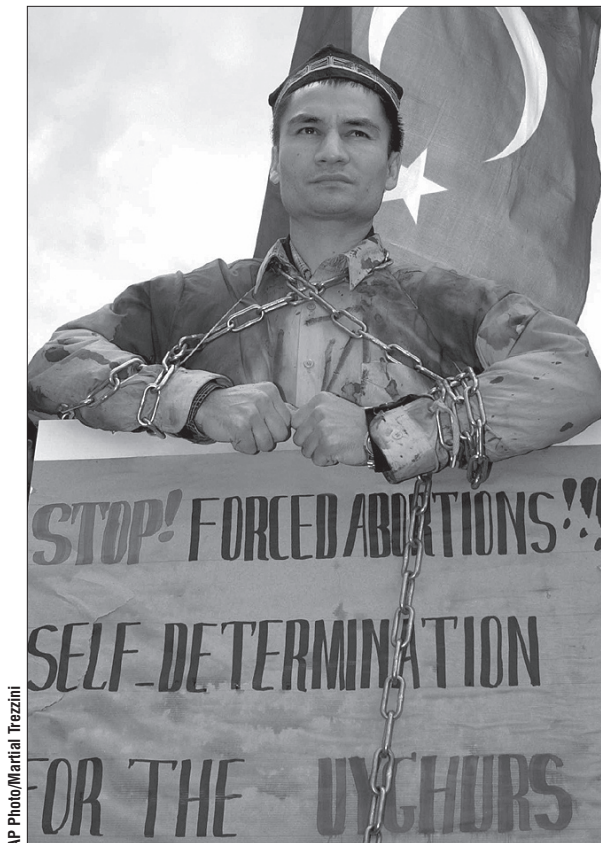
*Wheaton noted that in ancient Rome, the philosopher and orator Cicero defined a state as "a body politic, or society of men, united together for the purpose of promoting their mutual safety and advantage by their combined strength."*

*Source: Henry Wheaton, Elements of International Law, 1836.*

routinely demand bribes from traders and workers seeking to move goods or personnel across the new borders.<sup>50</sup> Some of the new states, like Kyrgyzstan, are weak and at risk of fragmenting or being subsumed by their neighbors.<sup>51</sup>

Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain unrecognized de facto states, since Moldova, Azerbaijan and Georgia all lack the military or economic strength to recapture the four breakaway territories. The long, narrow valley of Transnistria — which has a population of Russians, Moldovans and Ukrainians — is "like a Brezhnev museum," according to a U.S. government official involved in reconciliation efforts there, referring to the Soviet leader from 1964 to 1982 whose regime was characterized by stagnation and repression. "It is a nasty place: the rulers repress the Moldovan language, and the economy is largely black market." And Georgia's two secessionist regions — South Ossetia and Abkhazia — are egged on by Russia, according to the State Department's Bryza.

These so-called frozen conflicts have produced "an impasse of volatile stability [where] nobody is happy but nobody is terribly unhappy either, and life goes on, as neither central state nor de facto states have collapsed," writes Dov Lynch, author of a book on the conflicts and director of the U.S. Institute for Peace project. Up to a million people have been displaced, standards of living have dropped as economies barely function, organized



Wearing symbolic chains, a Uyghur protester in Geneva demands self-rule for the predominantly Muslim, ethnically Turkic Uyghurs in China's autonomous western region of Xinjiang. He also opposes China's one-child policy, which human rights advocates say forces some pregnant mothers to get abortions. China says recent separatist unrest in Tibet has triggered protests in Xinjiang, where some 500 Uyghurs held a demonstration in Khotan on March 23.

crime flourishes and a “profound sense of psychological isolation” prevails.<sup>52</sup>

In one of those ongoing conflicts, the militant Kurdish separatist organization, the PKK, has stepped up its violent campaign against Turkey, which has responded with a military strike into the PKK's base in northern Iraq.<sup>53</sup> The Kurds in northern Iraq already govern themselves. Some pragmatic Kurdish leaders feel their best solution would be to replicate this model in Iran, Syria and Turkey — where they do not have autonomy — instead of pushing for a single Kurdish state.

Meanwhile, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems to be edging towards a “two-state solution” under which the Palestinians would be given a state of their own in the West Bank and Gaza in exchange for acknowledgment of Israel's right to exist. However, the region's ongoing violence makes reaching a final agreement problematic.

In Africa, Somaliland looks to be creeping towards acceptance as a state, too. An African Union mission in 2005 concluded that Somaliland's case for statehood was “unique and self-justified” and not likely to “open a Pandora's box.” Nevertheless, its neighbors continue to oppose recognizing it formally.<sup>54</sup>

### Asian Disputes

The separatist movement in Sri Lanka remains strong. The Tamil Tigers run a de facto state in the northeast and are fiercely fighting the Sri Lankan government, which wants to regain control of the whole country. On Feb. 4 — the 60th anniversary of the country's independence — Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa affirmed his commitment to “go forward as a single, unitary state.”<sup>55</sup>

According to a Tamil activist who asked not to be identified, Sri Lanka is squeezing the Tamil-controlled area with an economic embargo and preventing international aid organizations from providing humanitarian supplies. Though Pakistan, India and China are helping the Sri Lankan government, the Tamils are holding onto their territory, he says, with the help of Tamils who have fled the country and are dispersed throughout the world. This “diaspora” community is providing funds for weapons that the guerrillas buy covertly from Asian governments, he says.

In Aceh, the 2005 self-rule pact with Indonesia “is working to some extent,” according to a U.S. official in Indonesia. With rising crime, high unemployment, little trade with the outside world and little experience in spending public money, “the challenge for the ex-rebels is to become good governors. They need help from the international community,” the official says.

Separatism in Taiwan received a blow in the January 2008 parliamentary and March 2008 presidential elections when the Kuomintang Party, which supports reunification with mainland China, trounced the separatist Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which seeks U.N. membership for Taiwan.<sup>56</sup>

For its part, the United States continues to sit on the fence, reflecting the international community's ambivalence



## A T I S S U E

## Could separatism spread to the United States?

**YES****Kyle Ellis**  
*Founder, Californians  
for Independence**Written for CQ Global Researcher, March 2008*

Asking whether separatism will spread to the United States is a bit of an odd question to pose in a nation founded through an act of secession from the British Empire.

Secession is at the very foundation of what it means to be American, and over the years since the country was founded many secessionist organizations and movements have kept this American tradition alive.

If you think the Civil War ended the question of secession in the United States, any Internet search you run will show just how wrong you are. Dozens of groups in various states are organizing and agitating for secession.

These groups are getting larger, and more serious ones are being founded all the time. As the leader and founder of one of these new organizations, I would like to offer a little insight as to why I believe the idea of secession will become a lot more popular in the years to come.

Here in California, there is much resentment toward the federal government. People don't like how politicians who live thousands of miles away are able to involve themselves in the creation of California's laws and the allocation of local resources, not to mention the billions of tax dollars sent away each year that are never to be seen again.

Other states have other reasons for wanting independence: Vermonters see the federal government as fundamentally out of touch with their way of life; the Southern states believe their unique culture is being systematically destroyed by the actions of the federal government; and Alaska and Hawaii view the circumstances surrounding their admittance into the Union as being suspect, if not downright undemocratic.

All of these groups view the federal government as broken in such a way that it cannot be fixed from within the system — a valid view considering it is run by two political parties that are fundamentally statist in nature. The two-party system is not even democratic (as we know from the 2000 elections), because it effectively disenfranchises millions of third-party voters due to the winner-take-all nature of political contests.

The federal government also continues to encroach upon individual rights and liberties.

It is natural that marginalized and disenfranchised people will seek to break away from a system they are not a part of, just as the founders of the United States sought to break away from Britain.

**NO****Seth D. Kaplan**  
*Foreign Policy Analyst and Business Consultant  
Author, Fixing Fragile States: A New  
Paradigm for Development**Written for CQ Global Researcher, March 2008*

Separatism requires a cohesive minority group that dominates a well-defined geographical area and possesses a strong sense of grievance against the central government. All three of these ingredients were present when the United States had its own encounter with separatism: the Confederacy's bid for independence in the 1860s. Southern whites possessed a unique identity, dominated a contiguous territory and were so aggrieved at the federal government that they were prepared to take up arms.

In recent decades, another disaffected and socioculturally distinct group in North America has waged a potent — but in this case nonviolent — campaign for independence: Canada's Québécois. Within the United States, however, no such groups exist today, and none seems likely to emerge in the foreseeable future. Puerto Rico does have a separatist movement, but Puerto Rico is already semi-autonomous and, more to the point, is only an unincorporated organized territory of the United States — not a full-fledged state. Some argue that California is close to reaching a level of economic self-sufficiency that would enable it to survive as an independent state. However, even if California could afford to be independent, neither its sense of difference nor of grievance seems likely to become strong enough to form the basis for a separatist movement.

Some Native American tribes, discontented with their circumscribed sovereignty, might wish to separate but — even if Washington raised no objections — their small populations, weak economies and unfavorable locations (inland, distant from other markets) would not make them viable as independent states.

The cohesiveness of the United States stands in marked contrast to most of the world's large, populous states. China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan all contend with separatist movements today.

Why has the United States escaped this danger? The answer lies in the impartiality of its institutions, the mobility of its people and the brevity of its history. Its robust and impartial institutions do not provide ethnic or religious groups with a strong enough sense of discrimination to ignite separatist passions. Its citizens migrate within the country at an unprecedented rate, ensuring a constant remixing of its population and tempering any geographically focused sense of difference. And its history as a relatively young, immigrant country — where people focus on the future far more than the past — means that few are fiercely loyal to any particular area.



toward Taiwan. According to Susan Bremner, the State Department's deputy Taiwan coordinating adviser, the United States has "not formally recognized Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan and [has] not made any determination as to Taiwan's political status."<sup>57</sup> In the past, however, the United States has said that if China were to bomb or invade Taiwan, it would help defend the island.<sup>58</sup>

In western China, the Uyghurs continue to see their proportion of the population decline as more ethnic Chinese migrate there. Chinese tourists are flooding in, too, as visiting EU official Fearghas O'Beara recently discovered in Kashgar. "The city was as foreign to the Chinese as it was to me," he said. "At times I felt a bit uneasy as well-to-do Chinese people took copious photos of the 'natives' with their quaint habits and clothing."<sup>59</sup>

Eclipsing all these movements are the newest round of protests by Tibetans that began in March, the 49th anniversary of a failed uprising against Chinese rule in Tibet. Protesters in Lhasa on March 14 burned, vandalized and looted businesses of ethnic Chinese immigrants, venting their seething resentment over the wave of immigration that has turned Tibetans into a minority in their capital city.<sup>60</sup> The Tibetans say 99 people were killed, but the Chinese put the figure at 22.<sup>61</sup> Though the Chinese riot police were initially slow to respond, Beijing is now cracking down hard on the protesters. It also is keeping monks elsewhere confined to their monasteries and forcing them to denounce the Dalai Lama. China accuses the exiled leader of orchestrating the violence — calling him "a vicious devil" and a "beast in human form" — even though he has condemned the violence and advocates autonomy rather than outright independence for Tibet.<sup>62</sup>

Before the outbreak of violence, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman had urged the Dalai Lama to drop his "splittist" efforts to attain "Tibetan independence" and do more for average Tibetans. "The Dalai clique repeatedly talks about Tibetan culture and the environment being ruined. But in fact, the Tibetan society, economy and culture have prospered," said spokesman Qin Gang. "The only thing destroyed was the cruel and dark serfdom rule, which the Dalai clique wanted to restore."<sup>63</sup>

The 72-year-old Dalai Lama, Tibet's leader for 68 years, commands enormous respect around the world, as evidenced by U.S. President George W. Bush's decision to telephone China's President Hu Jintao on March 26

to urge the Chinese government "to engage in substantive dialogue" with the Dalai Lama.<sup>64</sup>

Tension over China's suppression of the Tibetans is mounting as some countries consider calling for a boycott of the Beijing Olympics in August to show solidarity with the Tibetans. European foreign ministers, meeting in Brdo, Slovenia, on March 28-29, came out against an outright boycott of the games, although the leaders of France and the Czech Republic are threatening to boycott the opening ceremony. And on April 1, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., urged President Bush to reconsider his plans to attend the opening ceremony if China continues to refuse talks with the Dalai Lama.

But Bush at the time was becoming entangled in yet another separatist controversy. Stopping in Ukraine on his way to a NATO summit in Romania, Bush said he supports Georgia's entry into NATO, which Russia opposes. If Georgia were to join the alliance, the NATO allies could be forced to support any future Georgian military efforts to re-take South Ossetia and Abkhazia — also strongly opposed by Russia. That would put Georgia in the middle of the same geopolitical chess game that Kosovo found itself in.<sup>65</sup>

### Secession in the Americas

Across the Americas, separatist movements are scarcer and weaker than in Europe, Africa and Asia. Perhaps the most significant is the recent flare-up in Bolivia, where the mainly European-descended lowlanders are pushing for greater regional autonomy and are even threatening secession.<sup>66</sup> They are wealthier than the mostly indigenous highlanders and fear that the centralization efforts of indigenous President Evo Morales will loosen the lowlanders' grip on Bolivia's natural resources. Already, Morales has proposed amending the constitution so that oil and gas revenues would be shared evenly across the country.<sup>67</sup>

There are also plans to redistribute a huge portion of Bolivia's land — beginning with its forests — to indigenous communities. Vice Minister of Lands Alejandro Almaraz, who is implementing the project, said recently the tension with the lowlanders was "very painful" and warned that "the east of Bolivia is ready to secede and cause a civil war" to thwart the government's redistribution plans.<sup>68</sup>

In the United States, separatism remains a marginal force, though the movement has never been more visible.

“There are 36 secessionist organizations now at work,” including in New Hampshire, Vermont, California, Washington state, Oregon and South Carolina, says Kirkpatrick Sale, director of the Middlebury Institute, a think tank on secessionism that he established in 2004.

In Texas, Larry Kilgore — a Christian-orientated secessionist who wants to enact biblical law — won 225,783 votes or 18.5 percent in the March 4 primary for Republican candidate to the U.S. Senate.<sup>69</sup> “If the United States is for Kosovo’s independence, there is no reason why we should not be for Vermont’s independence,” says Sale. “The American Empire is collapsing. It is too big, corrupt and unequal to survive.”

Some Native American tribes with limited self-government continue to push for more autonomy. For example, a group of dissident Lakota Indians traveled to Washington in December 2007 to deliver a declaration of independence to the State Department, which did not respond.<sup>70</sup>

## OUTLOOK

### Ethnocentric Separatism

The growing tendency to construct states along ethnic lines does not necessarily bode well for the future. French philosopher Ernest Renan’s warning, delivered in the era of empires and grand alliances, has as much resonance today as it did in 1882: “Be on your guard, for this ethnographic politics is in no way a stable thing and, if today you use it against others, tomorrow you may see it turned against yourselves.”<sup>71</sup>

“The Kosovo case is not unique despite the many claims to that effect by European and American diplomats,” says Serwer at the United States Institute for Peace. “If people worry about it being a precedent, they should have ensured its future was decided by the U.N. Security Council. That would have created a good precedent for deciding such things.”<sup>72</sup>

Though some might support the creation of a U.N. body for assessing separatist claims, U.N. member states would most likely fear it would only serve to give more publicity to separatist causes, writes American University self-determination expert Orentlicher.<sup>73</sup>

The two Western European regions most likely to become independent within the next 10 years are Scotland and Flanders, says Flemish nationalist Dauwen. As for

Transdnistria, “the more time that passes, the more likely it will become independent, because the military will resist rejoining Moldova,” says a U.S. official working to promote peace in Eastern Europe. The passage of time usually increases the survival odds of unrecognized states, because entrenched elites who profit from their existence fight to preserve them regardless of how politically or economically viable the states are.<sup>74</sup>

The probability of separatist movements morphing into new states also depends on who opposes them. Nagorno-Karabakh, for instance, is more likely to gain independence from Azerbaijan than Chechnya is from Russia because the Azeris are weaker than the Russians.

Political leadership is another factor. When hardliners and extremists rise to power it triggers separatist movements, while the emergence of moderates willing to share power can entice separatist regions to be peacefully and consensually reintegrated into the mother country.

Ethnocentric separatism may also fuel irredentism — annexation of a territory on the basis of common ethnicity. For instance, the Albanians in Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania may push to form a single, unitary state. Ethnic Hungarians living in Romania, Serbia and Slovakia may seek to forge closer links with Hungary; Somalis scattered across Somaliland, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti might decide to form a “Greater Somalia.”

“The goal of attaining recognition is the glue holding it together,” a State Department official said about Somaliland. “If recognized, I fear that outside powers will interfere more, and it could split.”

Likewise, Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria could rise up and push for a “Greater Kurdistan” encompassing all Kurds. While some countries might support the creation of a Kurdish state in theory, they would be reticent, too, knowing how much it could destabilize the Middle East.

In Southeast Asia, Myanmar (formerly Burma), Thailand and the Philippines are potential separatist hotbeds as tensions persist between the many different ethnic groups, with religious differences further aggravating the situation.<sup>75</sup> “If something moves in the region, it could have a tsunami effect, as happened in Eastern Europe in 1989,” says Busdachin at the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization. He adds that most of these groups are seeking autonomy, not independence.

Yet a U.S. official in Indonesia says of Aceh: “I would be very surprised if we would have a new country in

15 years. I don't see that dynamic. Things are moving in the other direction."

And in Taiwan, any push for U.N. membership would worry trading partners like the European Union and the United States, which are keen to maintain good relations with the island but reluctant to anger China.

As for the United States, the strong federal government that emerged during the Great Depression seems to be on the wane as state and local governments increasingly assert their powers. Yet the nation remains well-integrated, and outright secession of a state or group of states seems unlikely. Smaller changes are possible, however, such as the splitting of California into northern and southern states or the evolution of the U.S.-governed Puerto Rico into a new U.S. state or independent country.

In the long term, separatism will fade, author Kaplan believes. "Separatism always appears on the rise when new states are born because such entities do not have the deep loyalties of their people typical of older, successful countries," he says. But as states mature, he notes, the number of separatist movements usually declines.

A starkly different prediction is made by Jerry Z. Muller, history professor at The Catholic University of America in Washington. "Increased urbanization, literacy and political mobilization; differences in the fertility rates and economic performance of various ethnic groups and immigration will challenge the internal structure of states as well as their borders," he wrote. "Whether politically correct or not, ethnonationalism will continue to shape the world in the 21st century." Globalization will lead to greater wealth disparities and deeper social cleavages, he continues, and "wealthier and higher-achieving regions might try to separate themselves from poorer and lower-achieving ones." Rather than fight the separatist trend, Muller argues, "partition may be the most humane lasting solution."<sup>76</sup>

## NOTES

1. For detailed accounts of the protests, see *The Economist*, "Trashing the Beijing Road," March 19, 2008, [www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=10875823](http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10875823) and Tini Tran, "Tibetan Protests Escalate into Violence," *The Associated Press*, March 14, 2008, [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080314/ap\\_on\\_re\\_as/china\\_tibet](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080314/ap_on_re_as/china_tibet).
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5. Selcan Hacaoglu and Christopher Torchi, "Turkey launches ground incursion into Iraq," *The Associated Press*, Feb. 22, 2008, [www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080222/FOREIGN/297026899/1001](http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080222/FOREIGN/297026899/1001).
6. For list of current U.N. member states, see the U.N.'s Web site, [www.un.org/members/list.shtml](http://www.un.org/members/list.shtml).
7. To see growth in U.N. membership, go to [www.un.org/members/growth.shtml](http://www.un.org/members/growth.shtml).
8. See "Kurdistan — Kurdish Conflict," *globalsecurity.org*, [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/kurdistan.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/kurdistan.htm).
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## For More Information

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**Centre for the Study of Civil War**, P.O. Box 9229, Gronland NO-0134, Oslo, Norway; +47 22 54 77 00; [www.prio.no/cscw](http://www.prio.no/cscw). An autonomous center within the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, that studies why civil wars break out, how they are sustained and what it takes to end them.

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