Conclusion

Security and Separatism in the Contemporary World

The Minsk agreements strain to contain violence in eastern Ukraine between Russia-backed separatists and government forces; Malay-Muslims in southern Thailand continue their armed struggle for independence, often enjoying sanctuary in Malaysia, Chinese leaders sternly warn a novice American president against even hinting at U.S. support for Taiwanese statehood; and against all odds, the Palestinians persist in their fight to win a state. Nationalist movements aimed at independence, and states' often-violent suppression of such efforts, continue to be a regular feature of international politics. Interestingly, not all secessionist demands lead to violence—as evinced by the Velvet Divorce separating the Czech Republic from Slovakia, or the dissolution of the Scandinavian union between Norway and Sweden in 1905. Governments sometimes respond to separatism with negotiations and political concessions, even if they do not grant outright independence, avoiding the untold human suffering of civil war. At other times, they may resort to violence, but calibrate it to relatively low levels. At yet other times, states respond to separatism with genocidal repression.

Two decades after scholars, impelled by the horrors of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, first began devoting systematic attention to secessionist ethnic conflict, I remained deeply curious: what explains separatist violence? Why do some separatist movements encounter a state prepared to concede territory, while others result in them fighting tooth and nail? To address this puzzle, I focused on the state more than the secessionists, since the former's material capabilities, and attendant leeway for action, is significantly wider than the latter's. I have argued that when confronted by an ethnic group seeking independence, a state's response is determined by the external security implications of secessionism.

Specifically, whether a state coerces separatists rests on whether it foresees war after the prospective border change, either against the newly

seceded state or existing rivals. In turn, whether a state fears future war depends on the identity relations between it and the seceding ethnic group, which guide its estimate of whether the new state will fight it after independence, as well as war proneness of the regional environment, which helps it assess whether it will face predation from existing states. The possibility of future war worries states because they would face it as a relatively weaker actor; secession would have adversely affected its position in the international balance of power. The balance with respect to the ethnic group would shift against the state because of the military, economic, demographic, and institutional benefits of statehood that would accrue to the separatists. The balance with respect to existing rivals would shift against the state because of its loss of territory and population. Such shifts render secession unpalatable from the state's perspective, impelling it to coerce the separatists. Conversely, a confidence that it will be free from interstate conflict is a necessary condition for the state to adopt concessions, up to and including the granting of full independence. Such sanguinity about its security frees the state from conceptualizing border changes in wary or apocalyptic terms, and opens up the possibility for it dealing with the separatist movement peacefully.

If a state decides that it will use coercion, we are still left with the question of how much violence the state employs. "Coercion," after all, can mean anything from beating protestors with clubs to mass rapes and ethnic cleansing. In my argument, third-party support for the separatists determines the precise level of coercion, for both material and emotional reasons. The transfer of the "technologies of rebellion," especially the provision of military aid, training, and fighters, appreciably changes the capabilities of the separatist movement, forcing the state to escalate in its attempt to defeat it. Moreover, when separatists become tied to external rivals of states, they become susceptible to pathological levels of violence, fueled by a sense of collective betrayal among both leaders and security forces.

External security, then, drives whether, and how much, states coerce separatists. Such an argument stands in direct contrast to existing scholarship on the question of separatist violence, which exclusively focuses on factors within the state, such as its political institutions or demographic profile. In turn, shining this light on the geopolitical implications of secessionism can prove useful to policymakers keen on avoiding, or at least mitigating, the gruesome violence that often accompanies the separation, or attempted separation, of states. Indeed, properly understanding the factors that cause some governments to address secessionist demands on the battlefield, as opposed to the negotiating table, is crucial to peace building. Such an understanding would allow interested parties to pursue strategies designed to keep the peace between ethnic groups in a state, and promote stability more generally.

Policy Implications of an External Security Theory of Separatist Conflict

Although the international community is often reluctant to interfere in civil conflicts because of concerns about political and legal sovereignty,[1] my research suggests that the roots of fighting within countries often lie outside their borders. This implies that the international community can play a significant role in these conflicts by allaying the fears of states facing separatist movements and reassuring them of their security.

For instance, the international community can make the shift in the balance of power attendant with secessionism more palatable to the rump state by providing it defensive guarantees and pledging protection from its military rivals in the future. If the potential for external attack is what truly motivates decisions to react violently against secessionists, ameliorating such fears could translate to less violence and fewer deaths. The international community can tie the promise of security guarantees to good behavior in its dealings with the minority, as part of an explicit quid pro quo. For instance, if the United States had promised Pakistan considerable military aid and a security partnership in 1971 to help it ward off the threat it perceived from India in return for a more measured and less violent policy against the Bengalis, we may never have witnessed the genocide that we did. Of course, counterfactuals are fraught with analytical danger, but the example is meant to be illustrative rather than conclusive: the impulse should be directed toward assuaging the fears of the state experiencing secessionism. Along those lines, a further implication is that as a secessionist conflict brews in a particular country, the international community must restrain that state's geopolitical rivals. These rivals must be encouraged to make explicit and credible guarantees that they will not join forces with the secessionists in any meaningful way, either today or in the near future. This will aid in placating the state and make it less fearful of "encirclement," which often drives the most vicious of responses. It helps the Scots, for instance, that their secessionist moment has arrived at a time of historically unprecedented geopolitical calm for Britain, and that they are not explicitly allied to any of its rivals, such as Russia or China.[2]

My research, then, is highly relevant to policymakers who wish to curtail civil violence. In a nutshell, I suggest that the international community must leverage the externally fueled motivations of central governments repressing secessionists.[3] It also implies that, as with most conflicts, the time to contain the violence is before it actually erupts: by guaranteeing the security of the state in the future, the international community can protect the potential victims of the state in the present. Indeed, diplomacy can often move slowly—too slowly—once a conflict has broken out to do much good in the short term. The Rwandan genocide famously lasted only ten weeks. More perversely, any hint of help from the outside world during a conflict

can, rather than help, ramp up the deadly violence a population faces, as chapters 2–5 showed. Outside intervention aimed at reducing violence has to walk a tightrope: it must be targeted at the state's leaders, without giving the impression that it "sides" with the secessionists. Such a fine balance is easier struck before hostilities have commenced.

The overarching lesson of my work is: third-party involvement would be most useful in separatist conflicts if it is (a) early, before hostilities have taken place; (b) made contingent, such that exhortations for better treatment of ethnic minorities goes hand in hand with security (and possibly other) cooperation with the host state, and (c) aimed at dissuading support for the movement by global or regional rivals of the host state.

Unfortunately, it is unlikely policies based on such analysis will be instituted. First and most obviously, states intervening in separatist conflicts have relatively little to gain by expending political, economic, or military capital for humanitarian ends. Conversely, states which intervene for irredentist or opportunistic reasons have plenty to gain: the dismemberment of a rival and possibly the aggrandizement of territory. As such, if intervention does arise in separatist disputes, it is unlikely to be aimed at the safety and security of the minority at risk; rather, it is more likely to be precisely the type of intervention that intensifies violence.

Second, even if the international community could be convinced to intervene on behalf a separatist minority at risk for purely humanitarian reasons, it would be difficult to convince it to promise benefits for, rather than threaten action against, the states poised to coerce the movement. Providing security guarantees or military aid to such states could easily be perceived as being held for ransom, with the state holding a metaphorical gun to its minority's collective head, demanding alliance benefits in return for not shooting. Why reward such behavior? On the other hand, recent research has demonstrated the benefits of outsider powers paying interstate rivals to stop fighting;[4] if the peace between Israel and Egypt is largely held together by the diplomatic equivalent of bribes, it is at least conceivable for such measures to succeed in civil conflicts.

Overall, then, separatist minorities are likely to have their troubles exacerbated, not mitigated, by outside powers. Contemporary South Asia, where half this book's empirical material was drawn from, serves as an example. Two of the disputes discussed in chapters 2 and 3 have heated up recently: Kashmir and Balochistan. Kashmir has been site of widespread mobilization since 2009, reflecting a groundswell of dissatisfaction with the Indian state that, for many locals and observers, recalls the mood in the late 1980s. Tensions escalated further still in the summer of 2016, when Indian security forces killed Burhan Wani, a Hizbul Mujahideen "commander" known more for his social media presence than any military exploits. The resulting rallies and protests have seen the heavy deployment of pellet guns by Indian security forces, killing more than a hundred Kashmiris and

blinding over a thousand.[5] Newspapers have been shut down. Kashmir seems primed for exploding, leaving behind the relative two-decade calm brought by India's brutal counterinsurgency from 1991 to 1995. Most damagingly from the perspective of my argument, Pakistan's desire to wrest control of it shows little abating. Pakistan's support of militant groups such as Laskhar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad, as well as incidents of cross-border terrorism in Mumbai in 2008, or Pathankot and Uri in 2016, signals to the Indian state that in Jammu and Kashmir, it is not just facing a separatist movement, but also a long-running interstate conflict. In other words, the toxic mix of a separatist dispute supported by "high" third-party support appears a distinct, and worrying, possibility.

Balochistan, meanwhile, continues to see a simmering low-level war, featuring the Pakistani state's security forces and intelligence agencies against Baloch nationalist groups, such as the BLA. Recent developments are foreboding. The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has publicly stated that his country will begin to support the Baloch movement more heavily, marking a significant shift in their relationship (previously, most of the Baloch foreign support emanated from Afghanistan or, some allege, the Soviet Union). An Indian national, which India claims is a retired naval officer but Pakistan alleges is a spy working for India's Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), was recently arrested in Balochistan. One vivid illustration of India's increasing forthrightness in the province is its granting Brahumdagh Bugti, an exiled leader of a Baloch nationalist organization, a passport and possible asylum. Such increased support spells trouble for Baloch nationalists as well as the Baloch population more generally, at least insofar as the heavy hand of the Pakistani state is concerned. Human rights activists and Baloch leaders might justifiably claim that Pakistan is already quite vicious toward its Baloch citizens. My only point is that it could assuredly get a lot worse—just ask the Bengalis—and indeed will most likely do so, at least if the present trajectory of Baloch-Indian bonhomie continues.

Flaws of an External Security Theory of Separatist Conflict

Few scholars or writers are ever completely satisfied with their work. I am no different: this book and the arguments contained within it suffer from some important flaws. Theoretically, my argument has a perilous dependence on the plausibility of the claim that meaningful concessions, in the form of significant autonomy, will hurt the state because the minority, rather than being satisfied with its gains in self-government, will keep demanding more. A skeptical reader may believe instead that far-reaching reforms could successfully "buy off" the ethnic group to the extent that it never advances further claims. In such a world, my argument that coercion

is "rational" in the face of externally threatening secessionists breaks down. Under these circumstances, it would be less costly to transfer meaningful power to the separatists, short of independence, wash one's hands of the problem, and obviate the considerable costs of repression—costs especially relating to popularity and legitimacy in the eyes of the restive ethnic group. While I believe that my claim that minorities will only use autonomy to press their case harder in the future has sound theoretical and empirical basis,[6] I can concede that not all readers will find such a logic compelling.

A second drawback to the argument is that it proposes fears of future war as only a sufficient condition for states violently blocking separatists. Since external security concerns are not a necessary condition for state coercion, there exist other pathways to violence, possibly many of them, which lie outside the bounds of the theory. My argument would be consistent with a separatist movement being treated with violence for reasons other than external security; an observer might find such a consistency dissatisfying. My rejoinder to such concerns would be to point out the cumulative and slow-moving nature of scholarship. I aim to shed light on separatist violence but I cannot, and do not, claim to provide all the answers. Important research before mine has specified certain mechanisms through which we witness separatist violence, and given the significance of the topic, scholars will continue to chart how the outbreak of secessionism leads to death and destruction. My goal is, at best, to be part of this conversation; if future work theorizes separatist violence in ways that can comprehensively account for all or even almost all of its cases, I would be thrilled.

It would be less cause for celebration if my argument was falsified. The most direct evidence that would contradict my argument would be significant concessions granted to separatists by a state in a war-prone region of the world or by a state that has a deep antipathy toward the seceding ethnic group (or both). Given I argue that a rough neighborhood or opposed identity relations are sufficient conditions for coercion, peaceful concessions in the presence of either factor would be an unequivocal falsification of my theory. A minority rising against the state and securing, without a fight, significant autonomy or perhaps independence in regions such as contemporary Asia, Africa, or the Middle East would constitute such falsifying evidence. For example, if the autonomous region of Puntland declared independence from Somalia without inviting a violent response—such as that faced by Somalilanders in their bid to secede from Somalia decades ago—my argument would be flatly contradicted.

Less damaging for the argument in a technical sense, but still cause for concern, would be a secure state, confident in its belief of future invulnerability, disallowing major reforms toward autonomy or independence. Such an occurrence would not technically falsify the theory since I claim only that sanguinity about the future is a necessary, not sufficient, condition for

peaceful measures. A state resisting separatism for reasons other than external security is consistent with my argument. Still, it would raise questions for my theory if, for example, Spain continues on its trajectory of denying Catalan independence. As a wealthy country embedded in the most peaceful web of institutions in interstate history—the European Union and NATO—Spain has absolutely no reason to fear a border change: its neighborhood is secure, and its relations with the Catalans, while not cordial, hardly feature the deep divisions that foretell future war. Spanish violence against a Catalan movement aimed at independence would be especially surprising from my perspective. On the other hand, the Spain-Catalan case is an awkward one: it is not clear that Catalonia has even had a secessionist "moment," in that the desire for separatism has been inferred from an election with murky, ambiguous results,[7] a far cry from, say, the Awami League's performance in the 1971 elections. More important, the case is relatively idiosyncratic because Catalonia has been granted so much autonomy previously—thanks to policies in the post-Franco era more consistent with my argument—that there is not much autonomy left to give: there are few viable concessions other than independence.[8] Perhaps if there was still some institutional "slack" left between autonomy and independence, the Spanish state could offer it, and the Catalans could accept—an equilibrium my theory would expect. Absent that slack, which would make the issue "divisible," the situation between the Catalans and the Spanish state seems at an impasse: Catalonia is not satisfied with the Spanish state but also does not seem eager to press its case for full independence, while Spain appears intransigent even if such an unequivocal demand was forthcoming. Regardless, the case is an interesting one for various theories of separatist conflict to contend with.

Extensions of an External Security Theory of Separatist War

How might the arguments contained in this book be extended? The most obvious arena that might be illuminated by my theory is the phenomenon of ideological civil wars. Such civil wars do not feature actors disputing the boundaries of the state, as their secessionist cousins do. Rather, ideological civil wars pit one group or organization against another that disagree intensely about who should be in power in the state, or what direction the state should take—secular versus theocratic or right wing versus left wing, say. The central distinction lies in border changes not being implied in ideological civil wars, while such cartographic adjustments are intrinsic to separatist demands and their ensuing violence. Indeed, that border changes are inherent to separatist civil wars, but not ideological civil wars, is what originally convinced me that there is necessarily a geopolitical component to the former that requires theorizing.

Of course, ideological civil wars do not exist in a geopolitical vacuum either, but I believe the interaction of external concerns and state strategy in ideological civil wars is hazier. From the perspective of a government facing them, the most important difference between ideological and separatist movements is that making significant concessions to the latter necessarily weakens the state, imperiling its future security. By contrast, ideological movements' goals are not zero-sum with the security of the state. It is perfectly plausible for a right-wing government to concede to left-wing mobilization and for the state's material capabilities to remain unaffected, or even increase. As such, if one is chiefly concerned with maintaining the security of the state as a unit in the international relations system, the choice of concessions versus coercion when dealing with ideological movements is not as cut-and-dried as it is in the case of separatist wars.

Things become slightly clearer if one examines the question not from the perspective of "the state" at large, but rather a specific regime. Abandoning the unitary-actor assumption provides an analytical prism through which one can see a closer facsimile of my logic at work in ideological wars. For instance, a right-wing government facing left-wing demands might see concessions in similar, apocalyptic terms that a state sees border changes: their very existence could be threatened.[9] Perhaps conceding to ideological opponents sows the seeds of one's own demise by bestowing on them important resources, à la the commitment problem. What if a left-wing movement takes the inch of concessions I give them as a right-wing government and transforms it into a mile, in a process that ultimately ends with my head on a stake? Such fears are much more likely to be prevalent in authoritarian states, where being in, and then losing, power can be a life-and-death issue. In constitutionally democratic states, by contrast, a secular government, say, is unlikely to consider concessions to a religious movement as threatening its very physical existence.

The upshot is that if one is to gingerly and carefully extend to ideological conflicts my fundamental logic that the fear of the future drives coercion in the present, the extension should be restricted to authoritarian states. For Bashar-al-Assad, concessions to opponents probably do result in a slippery slope ending with his death, while Barack Obama's concessions to congressional Republicans need not be seen in such weighty terms. We should, then, see authoritarian states react "disproportionately" to the demand for ideological reforms, echoing how separatist-wary states behave in my theory.[10]

What about the second leg of my argument, concerning third-party support? The effect of this variable should work in largely similar ways across both separatist and ideological civil wars. Certainly the materialist implications of foreign backing for rebels should be consistent to both types of civil wars: the transfer of "technologies of rebellion" makes the rebel movement stronger, in turn driving up the violence required to defeat it.

However, the "transferability" of the emotional effects of third-party support are more questionable than its materialist implications. There is no doubt that regardless of ethnic or identity attachment, leaders and security forces do not take kindly to insiders seeking and receiving support from the state's rivals. On the surface, then, a left-wing government taking on right-wing rebels should be as offended by third-party support as a state dealing with separatists would. Nevertheless, I maintain that there is a subtle yet seminal difference in how the suspicion of third-party support manifests itself on the ground in war zones and even the halls of power during separatist conflicts. Simply put, there is no ideological equivalent for racism—specifically the racism that conflates domestic citizens with foreigners based on ascriptive characteristics. Racism allows for leaders and security forces to see particular populations, say Christian Armenians or Kashmiri Muslims, as congenitally tied to neighboring or regional states, fueling the view that "they are all the same"—a belief that often results in gruesome violence. It is harder, though not impossible, to generate such essentialist beliefs in ideological conflicts. Note that this does not necessarily imply the expectation that separatist civil wars will feature more brutal violence than ideological ones more generally.[11] A right-wing government may well commit horrific violence against a left-wing movement, as dictators in Latin America did throughout the Cold War, but for distinct reasons than "betrayed" states in my theory. I claim only that if third-party support is forthcoming in either type of war, it is likely to result in more extreme brutality in a separatist war than in an ideological one.

In addition to ideological civil wars, my argument can be extended to the issue of state-minority relations more generally. As other scholars have pointed out, groups deemed an "internal enemy" in a larger fight against external forces are often vulnerable to state repression.[12] Recent events even in ostensibly liberal democracies, from Brexit to the election of Donald Trump, to say nothing of the fate of sectarian minorities in places such as Syria, have demonstrated the latent and actual dangers posed to ethnic minorities in a time of global tensions. When states convince themselves that they are in the midst of a civilizational fight to the death, as several states have in the aftermath of 9/11, large groups of their citizens caught on "the wrong side" of those battles are uniquely vulnerable. It is revealing, for instance, that even the putatively progressive candidate in the U.S. election, Hillary Clinton, only considered two roles for American Muslims in her public rhetoric: possible terrorism suspects or potential informants against terrorism suspects. Groups that are "securitized" in this way can become potential targets for state coercion. From the perspective of my argument, it would not be surprising to see Western states take even more stringent measures against their Muslim populations in the coming decade, especially given the congealment of an us-against-them view of Islam and Muslims in the West.

Directions for Future Research

I hope that writing this book opens up several avenues for further inquiry on separatist conflict, civil war, and ethno-national violence. First, theories of secessionist violence explain the phenomenon with reference to state-level variables, such as national demography, institutions, or security threats. What such a lens occludes is the consideration of microlevel processes, such as why one neighborhood may suffer more violence than another in the same city, or why rebel commanders in similar villages with similar backgrounds may behave differently. While civil war research more generally has moved in asking such microlevel questions, scholarship specifically focused on separatist violence could benefit from such attention.

Second, future research could examine the importance of what I call "ethnic hostages." All states and geographic regions contain ethnically mixed populations. Often, two states (or two regions within a state) will each host groups that the other feels some attachment to or responsibility for. For example, Slovakia may care deeply about the fate of ethnic Slovaks in Hungary, while a Hungarian leader could evince a similar concern with her coethnics in Slovakia. Research for this book has convinced me that such enclaves play an underappreciated role in secessionist conflict, especially if they are similarly sized. Primarily, they seem to serve a deterrence function, similar to nuclear weapons: I will refrain from victimizing your people in my country if you do the same with my people in yours. Such ethnic hostages can therefore help keep the peace between regions and states during crises. The corollary is that if such a "balance of ethnic hostages" is threatened, say by large-scale migration in one of the regions, conflict may become more likely. Carefully and precisely charting the systematic effects of ethnic hostages, before and during secessionist conflict, should be of interest to scholars of separatism and ethno-national politics more generally.

Third, and building off my perspective that "basic" IR principles such as the balance of power and the commitment problem need to be imported into studies of separatism, I would be curious to learn about the alliance strategies of separatists in ethnically heterogeneous states. To what extent, and under what circumstances, should one expect coordination, cooperation, or competition between different ethnic communities demanding independence from the same state? The long tradition of alliance politics has recently made its way into the study of civil war more generally;[13] a further step along these lines would be to examine patterns of alliance making by groups in multiethnic states facing the same "enemy": the central government.

Fourth, and most ambitiously, it would be a unique achievement if a scholar could aggregate various levels of analysis into a comprehensive explanation of ethno-nationalist violence. At present, studies of ethnic

violence exist, broadly speaking, at three levels: communal and local violence, civil war, and interstate war. The explanatory variables emphasized by these families of theories depends on the corresponding arena: scholars of communal violence focus on electoral incentives or the relative abundance of civic organizations;[14] civil war researchers highlight state-level variables, such as its physical or political geography, institutions, or demographic profile;[15] and scholars working on interstate violence point to the importance of macrohistorical ideologies, such as nationalism.[16] Is there a common process at play across these arenas? Or is it a bridge too far for any one theory to account for ethno-nationalist violence in such varied contexts? Perhaps it is, but enterprising scholars should attempt to do so regardless, given the potential analytical payoff.