The Genesis of Secession: Exploring New Causal Relationships in the cases of Abkhazia, Kosovo, and Timor-Leste

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Spring 2009

Advisor: Dr. Thomas Preston
Department of Political Science & Criminal Justice
College of Liberal Arts

Honors Thesis
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PASS WITH DISTINCTION
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Précis

For my thesis, I chose to focus on secession conflicts. More specifically, I wanted to examine the prominent theoretical approaches to explain secession conflicts, and use those theories to frame my own examination of the secession conflicts in Abkhazia, Kosovo, and Timor-Leste. With this in mind, the basic goal of my thesis was to identify factors commonly used to explain the emergence of secessionist movements, and then determine if other explanatory factors might also be applied to secessionist movements. This topic has interested me for sometime. Before settling on this specific focus, I had contemplated focusing on genocide or ethnic violence. Looking into those topics led me to further literature on secession. This, coupled with Kosovo’s declaration of independence in 2008, brought me to my specific topic.

There is a wide variety of research available that focuses on theoretical approaches to explain secession, and it was my initial investigation into this research that helped me frame and focus my final research question. The large body of literature is indicative of the importance of the topic, as clearly, secession conflicts can have very real and lasting negative effects on entire populations. Increasing understanding of this phenomenon will help policymakers anticipate where and when conflicts might become violent, and by doing so, lessen the pain and suffering of many people. Additionally, secession is very interesting from a purely academic standpoint, especially in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the early and mid 1990s. The collapse of these federal socialist republics has led to a plethora of problems in the region, ranging from secession conflicts to economic difficulties.

In designing my study, I followed the example of other comparative studies of political phenomenon by using dependent and independent variables. The emergence of a secessionist movement was my dependent variable, and the causal factors that I was examining, such as
federalism and territory disputes, were the independent variables. I first examined the available literature to determine what the most prominent theoretical approaches to understanding secession were. Then, I examined three variables that were not frequently mentioned in the literature as causal variables: a history of federalism, historical territory disputes, and the possibility of intervention by an international organization such as the UN or NATO. Each case study was examined to see whether it exhibited those variables. In the concluding pages, I synthesized my findings into short summaries for each variable.

In my study, I found that ethnic autonomous regions at the bottom of federal hierarchies are likely to experience secession conflicts if the federal hierarchy under which it exists collapses. This leaves the ethnic region at the mercy of the remaining entity in power. A territory dispute stretching back many years does not seem to be enough to spark a secession conflict, but it does have the ability to push two parties towards open conflict, while inhibiting the ability of negotiations to gain any ground. Similarly, the potential for international intervention is not enough to cause hostilities to openly flare, but is a factor that the seceding party certainly takes into account when making strategic choices. This research process indicates that the study of political phenomena is not a black and white process, in that every case comes from a unique social, cultural, and historical background, making comparisons quite difficult. However, by doing this study, I feel that I have become much better acquainted with research processes in general, and with the very specific political phenomenon of secession.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASDT</td>
<td>Timorese Social Democratic Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPY</td>
<td>Communist Party of Yugoslavia</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSU</td>
<td>Former Soviet Union</td>
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<td>INTERFET</td>
<td>International Force for East Timor</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFRY</td>
<td>Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia</td>
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<tr>
<td>TNI</td>
<td>Indonesian military</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCK</td>
<td>Kosovo Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDT</td>
<td>Timorese Democratic Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAMET</td>
<td>United Nations Mission in East Timor</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNMIK</td>
<td>United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNOMIG</td>
<td>United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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Every case of national liberation struggle has its own particularities, and national liberation struggles as a whole are distinct from any other forms of resistance in the degree to which they are able to mobilize coalitions across class, gender, and sometimes even racial and ethnic lines. Yet precisely because they are a form of broad-based collective action, national liberation struggles...help illustrate important general issues regarding the conditions under which resistance can escalate into something more than opposition and attain major goals of struggle.\(^1\)

Introduction

Secession is a phenomenon that has been part of the political arena since the first days of the modern state. In fact, many of the most important national celebratory traditions of many states are based on calls for secession and independence, such as the US 4\(^{th}\) of July or the Mexican *Fiesta Patria* on September 16\(^{th}\). Today, many ethnic and/or cultural groups scattered across the globe have secessionist tendencies. For those groups seriously entertaining the thought of splitting from a state, seeking secession is a momentous step. However, not all groups reach the point of active secession, whether they are placated by power sharing schemes or simply crushed by the state military and/or state-sponsored militias. The issue of secession is important to study in the sense that although no case is ever exactly the same as another, drawing commonalities and generalizations from different cases can help to better understand and predict the timing and nature of secessionist movements as they arise.

In light of 2008's declaration of independence by Kosovo from Serbia, coupled with Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia after the August 2008 conflict in South Ossetia, it is pertinent to discuss when, why, and how secession occurs. Secession has effects and implications that go far beyond the immediate impact on the location where it occurs. Issues of territorial sovereignty, state recognition, and international relations all come into play when a secession conflict occurs. In addition to these political factors, secession

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movements and the violence typically associated with them have drastic effects on civilians in the affected areas. One need only look at the collapse of Yugoslavia to see how violence stemming from secessionist movements can result in horrifying atrocities. To help better understand this phenomenon, this paper will look at the cases of secession in Abkhazia, Kosovo, and Timor-Leste, examining the history and causal factors of each case in detail.

This paper will attempt to determine what factor or combination of factors caused the emergence and growth of secessionist movements in Abkhazia, Kosovo, and Timor-Leste. This will be done in the context of contemporary comparative studies of secessionist movements. Specifically, it will examine the causal variables commonly used in theories of secession, and then examine other variables that are not commonly employed via the case studies. My hypothesis is that while the variables that are typically used, such as nationalism and ethnic conflict may partially explain why secessionist movements occur, there may be other variables at work, including territory or the involvement of an international organization such as the UN.

Methodology

A major problem for research in political science, and for social sciences in general, is how to conduct research in a way that is consistent with established scientific principles; that is, with the use of hypotheses and independent, dependent, and control variables. In this thesis, a small N research design will be implemented to help maintain consistency and clarity throughout. Clearly, the first, and arguably the most crucial step, is the selection of the case studies themselves. The three cases for this study have been selected primarily because they are similar in many respects, which make them ideal for comparison in a study involving a small number of studies. Choosing cases that share many characteristics allows for a minimal number
of variables, which is ideal when conducting small N research. By having the smallest number of variables possible, it will be easier to identify causal relationship between variables in different cases, whereas having large number of variables would make it difficult to isolate which factor(s) have a causal relationship with the dependent variable.

To determine the cause of secession in these three cases, this study will employ a basic scientific approach to the question of why secession occurred in these three regions. To borrow from language commonly used in the field, this study will employ a positive/explanatory theoretical framework, as opposed to a normative framework. The dependent variable in this study will be the emergence of a secessionist movement that breaks out into open hostility between the parties involved. The independent variables will include the existence of disputes over historical ownership of territory, the possibility of intervention by international organizations (such as the UN or NATO), and a history of federalism. These three variables in particular will be examined, with special emphasis placed on historical territorial disputes. This variable is mentioned in passing throughout the relevant literature, but is not discussed in great detail. My primary interest in exploring this variable is to determine whether historical territorial disputes reaching back into antiquity inhibit peace talks and negotiations, giving rise to situations in which extreme violence, such as genocide or ethnic violence, are likely to occur. These variables are informed by those variables typically used in comparative studies of secession, such as Murinson’s study of the Abkhaz secession examining variables such as imperialism or

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Lustick, Miodownik, and Eidelson’s study of the effect of power sharing and devolution on secession.4

As each case study is presented, it will be shown whether or not such variables are present, and an explanation for the relationship between those variables and the dependent variable will be provided. After each case has been analyzed using the variables that have been chosen, it will be determined whether or not those variables are sufficient to explain the presence of an active secession group. If not, I will attempt to determine if additional independent variables and/or combinations of independent variables are necessary to explain the birth of secessionist movements. In addition, counterfactual analysis, where appropriate, will be used to generate more data to further support the claims made in this study.5 Much of the methodological framework for this research is influenced by anthologies detailing various research methods common to comparative politics and international relations.6

Secession Theory

There is a plethora of research available on secession theory, and because of this, there are a multitude of different approaches utilized for analysis of secession movements. Some deal with secession in the context of underlying motivations and grievances (historic injustices, ethnic conflict, language, etc.), while other theories examine the various components of secession and

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5 To use counterfactual analysis, it is necessary to hypothesize what would have happened had an independent variable been negated. A simple example could be examining possible differences in US foreign policy during World War II (the dependent variable) had Japan not bombed Pearl Harbor (the independent variable).
the more immediate motivations (state repression, increased opportunity for secession, etc.).
However, generating a cohesive theory of secession is quite difficult in the face of many
variables, such as federalism, complicated ethnic/cultural issues, and "whether constitutions
should – in general – include a right to secede."7 In this section, I will synthesize various works
on secession theory in order to form a cohesive representation of the sub-discipline. This
synthesis will then be used to evaluate the cases of Abkhazia, Kosovo, and Timor-Leste.

Some aspects of secession theory research fit under the larger category of state failure
research, which is relevant to this study particularly in the case of Kosovo, which experienced
state failure as part of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Often, the instability generated by state
failure opens the door for secession conflicts to emerge as a manifestation of that instability.
Definitions of the term are varied, but in a review article, Bates provides a detailed definition:

"State failure" refers to the implosion of the state, by which is
meant...the transformation of the state into an instrument of
predation. As states fail, politicians employ political power to levy
resources from those who lack it. Rather than deploying the power
of the state to enhance security, those in power use the state to
promote their own interests, rendering others insecure.8

There are a variety of other definitions of state failure, but most definitions share many of the
same features, such as spread of political and/or ethnic violence, the collapse of central
government, or even genocide. The research on state failure generally focuses on economic

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factors, the interaction of ethnic groups within a state, and the affect of democracy on state failure.\(^9\)

In addition to research on state failure, there is a large body of literature specifically concerning the affects of the formation of minority groups on the political processes of a state. This phenomenon has become more of an issue since the inception of the modern nation-state, as many “states contain several culturally distinct groups whose language, religion, tradition, and historical experiences are not shared and often are at odds with one another.”\(^{10}\) Collective action itself, according to Hechter and Okamoto, “is unlikely to occur in the absence of (a) preexisting social groups formed to provide members with insurance, welfare, and other kinds of private goods, (b) a widespread demand for autonomy or outright independence, and (c) the opportunity to act collectively on behalf of one’s ethnic group.”\(^{11}\)

Of particular importance to this study are the implications of international intervention in secessionist conflicts. While it seems that the possibility of international intervention in any form would severely limit the possibility of ethnic and/or minority mobilization, empirical evidence indicates otherwise:

In their study of ethnic mobilization at the world system level, Olzak & Tsutsui (1998) found that during the 1970s, a state’s membership in international organizations decreased ethnic violence, whereas during the 1980s, ethnic diversity and membership in international organizations increased ethnic protest. The authors argue that these findings support the claim that the

\(^{9}\) Ibid., 3-4.


\(^{11}\) Ibid., 202.
diffusion of global norms about human rights via ties to international organizations constrains violent ethnic activity while encouraging ethnic mobilization and nationalism in dependent, peripheral states.\textsuperscript{12}

Some scholars approach secession from a cost/benefit perspective. A notable example of this is exemplified in \textit{The Dynamic of Secession} by Viva Ona Bartkus.\textsuperscript{13} Here, secession is defined as having “four necessary elements: a “distinct community,” territory, leaders, and discontent.”\textsuperscript{14} It is broken down such that there are separate costs and benefits for membership in the parent state and for seceding from that parent state. The “dynamic” is what occurs when there is a change in one of those categories; that is, (1) a rise in the costs of membership, (2) a reduction in the costs of secession, (3) a reduction in the benefits of membership, or (4) a rise in the benefits of secession. This approach is very useful in the sense that it is easy to apply to cases most of the time. Given a certain case, it is easy to determine what category that particular case fits in, and in that sense, it would not be terribly difficult to determine whether or not other cases might be progressing towards a more aggressive form of secessionism. However, it does not seem to be an incredibly detailed approach, and it is incredibly difficult to predict other factors, such as timing or whether extreme violence will occur, without a more sophisticated level of analysis.

In an introduction to a volume focusing on ethnic conflict in secession in South and Southeast Asia, Carment identifies a variety of theoretical models for interpreting secession

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{13} Viva Ona Bartkus, \textit{The Dynamic of Secession}, Cambridge studies in international relations 64 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 10.
movements (which is, of course, applicable beyond the Asia). One is called primordialism, which focuses on ethnicity and holds that “there is something fundamental about the nature of ethnicity that ties individuals together and provides a sense of bonding lacking in other forms of organisation.” Premdas, in the introduction to a volume on secession theory, identifies five basic types of primordial variables: language, religion, race, values or culture, and territory or homeland. Furthermore, he argues that secession (or any type of conflict) based on primordial elements leads to absolutist arguments. When such bonds are interfered with by the state and deny the ethnic group what it wants and needs, primordialists hold that this is bound to cause conflict, and in some cases lead to secession.

Another approach is the political economy explanation, which holds that a group moving towards secession or some form of conflict is caused by technical limitations, such as the size of the ethnic group and the territory that may be in dispute, strong leaders for the ethnic group, and conflict resolution policies. A third major category is the instrumentalist perspective, which posits that ethnic groups serve as a vehicle for the organization of group actions against the parent state. A combination of these three categories can also be useful; for example, one theoretical approach employs four different factors to determine if an ethnic group will become politically active: (1) disparities in economic and political well-being between the ethnic group and the elite; (2) cohesiveness of ethnic group identity; (3) the level of organization and leadership available; and (4) the level of state reaction to the mobilized ethnic group. A

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16 Ibid., 29.
deficiency in any one of those categories will drastically reduce the chances of mobilization on
the part of the particular ethnic groups, and with that, the chances of viable secession
movement.\textsuperscript{18}

Premdas presents a theoretical framework for how an ethnic group is develops the
capacity for mass action similar to that of Bartkus:

A catalytic factor is required for the transformation process. It is
‘collective consciousness’. When a group of people come to view
themselves consciously as being endowed with a unique language,
race, religion or region and see that this is threatened because of
one of the secondary factors, then and only then, they become a
‘nation’ and ‘an ethnic group’.\textsuperscript{19}

This change is the same ‘dynamic’ that Bartkus presents. Also presented by Premdas are other
causal factors similar to those discussed previously, such as the level organization within the
group and the reactions of the existing state, but he also discusses “the international dimension.”
This factor has become increasingly salient since the end of the Cold War, with the splintering of
the USSR and the fact that ethnic groups do not often fit neatly within the borders of one state,
but often are distributed across the territory of several states.\textsuperscript{20} The UN, clearly one of the most
influential international organization on the world scene, is and has been involved in many
secession movements, including the three case studies included in this paper.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Carment, “Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism in South and Southeast Asia,” 28-32.
\textsuperscript{19} Premdas, “Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective,” 22-23.
\textsuperscript{20} This is true of the Kurds, who occupy territory in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. It is clear that the
ambiguity over how to properly define Kurdistan is the source of much conflict between the
Kurds and the states whose territories they live on.
\textsuperscript{21} To view UN Security Council resolutions, see <http://www.un.org/documents/scres.htm>.
Another approach that has been taken, which is more appropriate for relatively small N-case studies, employs an “index of secessionism.” Giuliano employs this system in his article on secessionism in Russian republics following the collapse of the USSR.\textsuperscript{22} Different factors, such as whether the state had declared sovereignty, whether the state had passed a titular language law, and whether the state had set its own tax policy were employed and used to index republics of the Russian Federation.\textsuperscript{23} This approach requires a great deal of information on all of the states being examined, but is also very useful in examining more precisely what the causes and motivations are for a sustained secessionist movement. And unlike the primordialist approach, with its emphasis on religion, territory disputes, etc., Giuliano focuses on more tangible events to explain why secession occurred in some of the Russian republics and not in others after the USSR collapsed.

As can clearly be seen, the field of secession theory is not cohesive in any sense of the word. There are a variety of theoretical frameworks that scholars have proposed to both understand how secessionist movements come to exist in the first place, how, when and if they will become violent, and what motivates both leaders and average participants in a secession movement. At the macro level, the most common approach to understanding secession is the cost/benefit framework advocated by Bartkus and various other scholars. At the micro level, common factors used to explain the specifics of secession typically include the level of power sharing, economic disparities, high levels of nationalism in both parties, and a cohesive ethnic group identity.

\textsuperscript{22} In this context, “republic” refers to the constituent republics that comprise the Russian Federation, not the Union republics or autonomous republics that comprised the USSR.

"As for various statements by certain Georgian leaders that Abkhazia is next in line, the Georgian leadership has tried to impose order with an iron hand on Abkhazia three times over the last decade. All those attempts ended in a total failure for the Georgian leadership... Our relationship must be built on equal terms, on the basis of mutual recognition." - Sergey Shamba, foreign minister of Abkhazia, May 2004.

Abkhazia: History

Abkhazia is a breakaway region within Georgia named for the Abkhaz, the ethnic group that has historically controlled the territory. In practice, Georgia has no control over the territory. To understand Abkhaz secessionism in the present day, it is relevant to review Abkhaz history, particularly that which relates to Soviet federalism and the Abkhaz relationships with Georgia, Russia, and the former USSR as a whole. The roots of Abkhazia's current status begin with the annexation of Georgia by Russia in the 19th century and the attempted "Russification" of Georgian culture.\textsuperscript{24} It is at this point that one can find the beginnings of the long simmering conflict between Georgia and Russia, which came to a head in the past year with the short war in August 2008 over the independence (or lack thereof) of South Ossetia from Georgia.\textsuperscript{25}

At the turn of the century, socialist groups began to grow in Georgia. On the one hand, the Mensheviks, the more moderate wing of social democracy, formed a government after declaring independence from Tsarist Russia in 1918. However, the Bolsheviks, the more extreme group, advocated a union with the Soviets, leading to the annexation of Georgia into the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (which also included Armenia and Azerbaijan), a part of the Soviet Union. The Transcaucasian Federated Republic collapsed in the


\textsuperscript{25} South Ossetia is a breakaway region in Georgia with a status similar to that of Abkhazia.
mid 1930s, leaving the three states included in it as independent units of the Soviet federal structures, called “union republics.” According to Coppieters, these republics were the basis of the Soviet federal structure, and also contained within them autonomous regions and autonomous republics, with varying levels of power within the federal structure.\textsuperscript{26} This structure, while similar to the US federal system in the employment of vertical divisions of power along the lines of state, county, and local jurisdictions, completely lacked the horizontal distribution of powers found in other federal systems.\textsuperscript{27} An example of horizontal distribution is the US, which is divided into executive, legislative, and judicial branches at the national level and at most of the lower levels as well.

Another important component in the hierarchy of the Soviet federal structure is the ‘titular nation’, which was used as a way of organizing different ethnic groups within the Soviet Union. These groups were attached to a territory and given a designation in the federal hierarchy as a union republic or an autonomous region. This is where the Abkhaz as an ethnic group fit into the federal hierarchy of the Soviet Union. As a titular nation, their territory was afforded the status of an autonomous republic, which was a slight step up from being labeled an autonomous region in the hierarchical scheme of the Soviet federal units. On the other hand, the territory of the Georgian titular nation, Georgia, had more rights (including the right to secede) due to its higher status in the hierarchy of Soviet federalism as a union republic. Both the autonomous republics and regions lacked the formal rights necessary for secession, although these rights were afforded to union republics, including Georgia.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Coppieters, “Europeanization and Conflict Resolution,” 193.
and union republics would constitute a problem between the titular nations of Georgia and Abkhazia:

The subordination of the Abkhaz Autonomous republic to the Georgian Union republic was perceived by the Abkhaz as a form of political discrimination which for decades enabled the Georgian authorities to enforce policies of Georgianization and colonization in Abkhazia. The fact that some leaders - such as Joseph Stalin and Lavrenti Beria - were Georgian nationals has made it difficult to distinguish between Soviet (communist) and Georgian (nationalist) forms of oppression.\(^{29}\)

Compounding this perception of cultural colonization was the high level of immigration into Abkhazia. It is worth noting when the USSR collapsed, the Abkhaz, the titular nation of Abkhazia, made up only about 18 percent of the total population of Abkhazia, while the remainder of the population was composed of Russian, Armenians, and a vast number of Georgians. Based on this, it is no wonder that the Abkhaz may have felt that “outsiders” were overrunning their traditional homeland. These feelings of resentment persisted throughout the 20\(^{th}\) century, particularly in the 1970s with large Abkhaz protests against perceived “Georgianization”, while the Georgians were simultaneously protesting “Russification.”\(^{30}\)

All of these pressures would eventually build to the point where something would have to give. Coppeters identifies these pressures as linked to the subordination of both nations under the Soviet federal system:

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 194.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 194-196.
It may be concluded that, within the Soviet federal structure, both the Abkhaz and the Georgians felt that their culture and national identity were under threat. The Abkhaz national movement protested against Georgianization of their republic and the Georgians mobilized against the russification of their state. These parallel mobilizations fuelled radical and uncompromising views in both republics.\textsuperscript{31}

It is no surprise that these pressures would eventually lead to some form of open conflict. One of the major events that occurred in the run-up to an escalation of tensions was an Abkhaz request to high-level Soviet authorities for Union republic status; that is, status equivalent to Georgia in the Soviet federal hierarchy.\textsuperscript{32} This elicited little response from the Kremlin, but it did attract the attention of Georgian nationalist groups, who viewed Abkhaz nationalism as a direct threat to the territorial integrity of the Georgian republic. This led to many demonstrations and protests, both in Georgia and in Abkhazia itself, against Abkhaz nationalism. Repeated attempts by the Abkhaz to bolster their autonomy were met with stormy indignation by the Georgian leadership. As the USSR began to spiral downward and Soviet communism began to weaken, the Abkhaz national movement lost the ability to appeal to an authority higher than the Georgians. When the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991, the Union republics were essentially left intact but independent, meaning that Abkhazia, as an autonomous republic, remained part of Georgia. Following this, it became clear that Georgia’s leadership had absolutely no intention of granting Abkhazia any form of autonomy within its borders. In response, the Abkhaz leadership reinstated

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 196-197.
the 1925 Abkhaz Constitution in 1992, in which Abkhazia’s status was that of an independent state.\textsuperscript{33}

This move, effectively a declaration of Abkhazia’s independence from Georgia, was not accepted by the Georgians. Georgian forces invaded in August of 1992 under the auspices of regaining control of a key railway. However, the true reason for the invasion was to regain control over Abkhazia, which Georgian authorities still considered to be an integral territorial component of the Georgian republic.\textsuperscript{34} In the end, the Abkhaz forces were able to expel the invading Georgians. This was due to a lack of organization and poor planning by the Georgian military, as well as the geographic advantage the mountainous terrain gave to the Abkhaz fighters. There is also some evidence of Russian assistance to Abkhaz forces during this war, but this is not conclusive.\textsuperscript{35} The war was brutal, generating massive numbers of refugees, particularly ethnic Georgians, many of whom were often summarily expelled from Abkhazia by Abkhaz nationalists. The problem of refugees from the conflict exists to this day, and was a major issue in the recent war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Abkhazia: Analysis}

In the case of Abkhazia, we see a territory with de-facto independence that was once part of a larger socialist federal structure as an autonomous unit within a titular republic, in much the same way as Kosovo. It is clear that the cost/benefit model can be applied to the case of

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\item[34] Ibid., 139-145.
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Abkhazia. As the USSR was crumbling in the early 1990s, two things became clear to the Abkhaz: (1) the benefits of membership within the Georgian republic, independent of the USSR, were likely to decrease without the protection of the central Soviet government, and (2) the costs of secession were reduced due to the lack of organization of the USSR as it was imploding. Clearly, this is sufficient to explain why the Abkhaz jumped at the opportunity to secede, which ended in a victorious war and de-facto independence without international recognition of any sort (until Russia recognized both it and South Ossetia, in August of 2008).

One possibility that seems probable on the basis of this small-scale study is the primordialist view discussed in the secession theory section. Primordial factors, such as language or religion, can be plausibly identified as having a connection with the Abkhaz secessionist movement. One primordial variable that has been mentioned in the literature, but has not been emphasized very strongly, is the importance of historical territorial disputes. According to Coppieters, a significant number of Georgian nationalists “saw the Abkhaz as a minority and not as an autonomous community of Abkhazia. It was their belief that the Abkhaz had migrated a few centuries earlier from the Northern Caucasus to the region of Abkhazia, where exclusively Georgians had been living.”37 As will be seen, the case of the Albanian Kosovars in relation to Serbia is similar in this respect. This, coupled with the violence seen in Abkhazia following the fall of the USSR, seems to point toward the possibility that historical territorial disputes can severely inflame tensions between two ethnic groups. This will be discussed in further detail, both in the analysis of Kosovo’s secessionist movement and in the conclusion.

Another factor that must considered is the relationship of international organizations, such as the UN and NATO to the conflict in Abkhazia. Although Abkhazia does not immediately

37 Coppieters, “Europeanization and Conflict Resolution,” 196.
spring to mind among the violent hot spots of the 1990s in the same manner as Kosovo and Timor-Leste do, it did garner a relatively high amount of attention from the UN Security Council.\textsuperscript{38} While it does not appear that the possibility of international intervention would be enough to cause a secession conflict by itself, it seems that it could possibly be a factor that could push a conflict over the edge and into violence. It is plausible to consider that the Abkhaz independence movement, when contemplating whether or not to respond to Georgian aggression with violence, took into account the possibility of international intervention and conceived of it as a sort of insurance policy in case the armed conflict went poorly for them. As it turned out, the UN did not offer any substantial military support to the Abkhaz. However, as the Abkhaz effectively won the war and gained de-facto independence and self administration, the lack of a UN or NATO intervention seems to be of little import to the final result of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

As has been seen, modern Abkhaz history can largely be framed in terms of Soviet federalism. While Abkhazia was given official status within the federal hierarchy of the USSR, it clearly occupied a place near the bottom of the totem pole. During the Soviet era, much of the energy of the Abkhaz nationalist movement was directed toward obtaining the status of a titular republic, which would have put Abkhazia on equal ground with Georgia and the rest of the titular republics of the USSR. The federal system in the USSR seemed to create an odd dichotomy for the Abkhaz; on the one hand, they were clearly subordinate to most of the rest of the Soviet Union, and this no doubt was the cause of much resentment among the Abkhaz, but on the other hand, the Abkhaz depended on the supranational government of the Soviet Union to protect them from Georgian nationalism and expansionism. However, once the Soviet Union

\textsuperscript{38} Between 1993 and 1995, the UN Security Council issued at least 9 resolutions related to the situation in Abkhazia. (See: http://www.un.org/documents/scres.htm)
collapsed in the early 1990s, it appears that Abkhaz resentment toward the system as a whole, coupled with the loss of the protection of Moscow, allowed nationalist ambitions to break free. The Abkhaz undoubtedly felt that they had no choice other than to defend themselves against aggressive Georgian expansionism. That pressure, coupled with the collapse of the USSR, led to the aggressive expansion of the Abkhaz secessionist movement.

It is also important to note that while Abkhazia had only achieved de-facto independence and was not widely recognized, its sovereignty was recognized by the Russian Federation in August 2008 in the aftermath of the much ballyhooed Russian incursion into South Ossetia, much to the chagrin of Georgia’s Western allies. It seems that the primary justification for the Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been that because the Western powers recognized Kosovo as a sovereign state in the face of Russian protest, Russia maintained the same right of recognizance.

"At the time when this famous historical battle was fought in Kosovo, the people were looking at the stars, expecting aid from them. Now, six centuries later, they are looking at the stars again, waiting to conquer them." - Slobodan Milosevic, former Serbian president, 1989.

Kosovo: History

Kosovo is now a newly declared sovereign state, located in the Balkans within the former Yugoslavia. Historically, it has been part of Serbia, and it is in this relationship that the one can find the impetus for Kosovar secession. Kosovo is now largely populated and controlled by ethnic Albanians, which has been an irritant to many Serbs for years. Kosovo is a case that is very recognizable, especially because of the NATO bombing campaign in 1999, which was intended to quell Serbian aggression against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. This case has many similarities with Abkhazia, and this will be discussed in further detail. The focus of this case
study will be the relationship between the Kosovar Albanians and the Serbs. The decision to include this case as part of this research project was influenced primarily by the existence of an ethnic group within a larger state structure, their struggle for independence, and a history of antagonism between the surrounding ethnic groups. As with the other case studies, it is useful first to discuss some of the relevant history of Kosovo and the surrounding region.

The history of the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo cannot be discussed outside of the context of the Serbs. The conflict between the two can be traced back into the Middle Ages to the Battle of Kosovo. The battle was fought primarily between a Serbian force and the invading Turkish forces of the Ottoman Empire in 1389. While the actual historical details of this event are hazy at best, it has become an important event for Serbian culture couched in quasi-religious terms, symbolizing both their defeat at the hands of the invading Ottomans, who were both ethnically and religiously alien, and the destruction of the Serbian empire. Because of this, Kosovo has come to be viewed by the Serbs as the key to the freedom and salvation of the Serbian culture and way of life. The connection to the conflict today between the Serbs and the Kosovar Albanians is the fact that the Ottoman Turks conquered the Albanians and largely converted to Islam; thus, in the minds of Serbian nationalists, they are associated with the invading Turks of so many years ago. However, there is no historical basis for this connection, as the Albanians were still free of Ottoman rule at the time of the Battle of Kosovo and remained primarily Christian. In fact, a significant number of Albanians fought alongside the Serbian armies to repel the invading Turks. The story has become legend, and twisted by nationalist movements to galvanize anti-Muslim and Albanian attitudes among the Serbian population.39

This long-standing historical enmity serves as the backdrop for the 20th century history of the conflict, which picks up shortly after the Balkan wars with the reordering of state borders. Part of this process included the removal of the Kosovo area from the newly re-bordered Albanian state, and its inclusion in Serbia after the Balkan War that lasted from 1912-13. However, ethnic Albanians were clearly not satisfied with the outcome of this process, which led to instability both within Kosovo and within northern Albania. It was in this context that a new Yugoslav state, called “The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes”, was proclaimed in 1917. The nature of this title, which referred only to the three large Slavic ethnic groups in the new state, set the tone for how ethnic and religious minorities would be treated. While this process was occurring, there was considerable Albanian agitation within Kosovo for reunification with the Albanian state. However, this was not likely to happen, and as far as the international community was concerned, the suffering of the Serbs during World War I seemed to justify their territorial aspirations in Kosovo.

During the Second World War, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) emerged as a strong player within the newly formed Yugoslavia. Led by the charismatic Joseph Tito, they fought against the Chetniks (a group of Serbian soldiers fighting for the interests of Serbia) and the occupying Axis forces. To woo the Kosovar Albanians, vague promises of national self-determination were made by Tito’s CPY. However, as it became clear that the CPY would be the dominant political force in Yugoslavia following the war, Tito realized that the only way to effectively incorporate Serbia into a federal communist state was to grant them jurisdiction over Kosovo. Needless to say, promises were broken, leading to revolt among many of the Albanian

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42 Ibid., 95, 97.
Kosovars. As with before, the main goal of this revolt was to reunify Kosovo with the Albanian state, and it was clearly not successful.\textsuperscript{43}

Following the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1945,\textsuperscript{44} Kosovo was officially incorporated into the federal republic of Serbia. The SFRY was set up as a socialist federation, similar in structure to the USSR. The largest federal units were called republics, and largely corresponded with the dominant ethnic groups in that territory (Serbs in Serbia, Croats in Croatia, etc.). The territories of ethnic minorities, when recognized within the federal structure, were designated as autonomous provinces or regions. In practice, autonomous provinces and regions had many of the same rights and privileges as the republics, but were denied the right to self-determination, which was symbolic even for the federal republics as long as Yugoslavia remained stable.\textsuperscript{45} Kosovo was given the status of Autonomous Territory. With the Yugoslav constitution of 1946, Kosovo was firmly established as a region within the nation-state of Serbia. Yugoslavia was composed of four other republics in addition to Serbia: Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia. Minorities were given some rights, but the ultimate aim was to suppress Albanian nationalism and the nationalistic sentiments of the other minorities. This was also done through executions and “pacification.”\textsuperscript{46} In the 1960s, another Yugoslav constitution was drafted; the primary change relevant to Kosovo was the elimination of autonomous units as building blocks of federal Yugoslavia. The administration of these territories was left to the discretion of the individual republics, who had power to create and dissolve autonomous units. This, coupled with the continuing arrest and prosecution of

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 123-143.
\textsuperscript{44} Bellamy, Kosovo and International Society, xiv.
\textsuperscript{46} Vickers, Between Serb and Albanian, 144-148.
prominent Albanian Kosovars, led to a substantial amount of distrust and enmity between the Albanian Kosovars and the federal security forces in Kosovo. Violent protests erupted in late 1968, spreading through Kosovo to Albanian areas of Macedonia. The conclusion of this particular spate of unrest was Albanian demands for republic status for Kosovo, which was obviously not granted.\(^47\)

Another Yugoslav constitution was passed in 1974, this time giving more power to the autonomous units as well as the republics, effectively putting Kosovo on par with Serbia in many respects. This was not well received by Serbian leaders, as it constituted a loss of direct control over all matters within the territory of Kosovo. However, with the death of Tito in 1980, the whole of Yugoslavia, and particularly Kosovo, was at risk. Tito was able to hold Yugoslavia together seemingly through his will alone, but without him, the fracture of Yugoslavia along ethnic lines seemed imminent. In 1981, massive riots, instigated by Kosovar university students complaining of cramped conditions, ripped through the territory, turning violent and targeting the Serb population in Kosovo.\(^48\) In addition to this very specific grievance, economic conditions had been declining drastically in Kosovo, effecting both the Albanian and Serbian Kosovars.\(^49\) A period of significant unrest followed.

In 1990, martial law had been in effect in Kosovo for a year,\(^50\) and the Serbian government had effectively dissolved Kosovo’s autonomous status, which led the Kosovar legislators to declare independence from Serbia, which led, in turn, to further crackdowns by the Serbian leadership. The Albanian Kosovar leadership began aggressively courting the international community in the following years in order to shore up its status in the face of Serb

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 160-168.  
\(^{48}\) Ibid., 178-179, 194-199.  
\(^{49}\) Bellamy, *Kosovo and International Society*, 5.  
\(^{50}\) Cox, *The History of Serbia*, 165.
aggression. In addition to this, radical elements of the Albanian population in Kosovo began pushing harder for reunification with the Albanian state. These groups were some of the more extreme, both in their rhetoric and in their actions. As economic conditions worsened, conflict became more and more imminent. The end result of this was that by 1996, Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo did not mix and were virtually segregated, and the existence of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) was officially declared. Rising levels of violence perpetrated by the Serbian security forces against the Albanians Kosovars occurred throughout the mid-90s.

The exact chain of events leading up to the outbreak of major hostilities and the intervention of NATO began with Albanian demonstrations over the killing of a young Albanian by a Serb. Revenge killings, as well as the formation and bolstering of paramilitary groups on both sides, quickly followed, as did escalating civil violence. Open military hostilities broke out in 1997, primarily between the Serbian security forces and the UCK. The war caused a massive humanitarian crisis, with many Albanian Kosovars retreating to refugee camps. NATO began threatening the Serbs with action if they did not cease military operations in 1998. Bombing of Serbia by NATO forces began in March of 1999. By June, the Serbs, led by Slobodan Milosevic, had given up and signed a peace deal with NATO and the UCK. As a result of the war, the Serbian government was, for all intensive purposes, expelled from Kosovar territory, and NATO troops numbering nearly 50,000 occupied Kosovo, and over 1 million refugees were allowed to return to their homes. Whatever the implications for international relations and other secession movements, it is indisputable that the NATO military operation was a success.

51 Vickers, Between Serb and Albanian, 244-246, 269-279.
52 Bellamy, Kosovo and International Society, 11.
53 Cox, The History of Serbia, 164-170.
Of the case studies presented in this study, the secessionist movement in Kosovo has clearly been the most successful. On February 17th, 2008, the Assembly of Kosovo issued a declaration of independence from the Serbian Republic stating "the democratically-elected leaders of our people, hereby declare Kosovo to be an independent and sovereign state." This has had implications beyond the Balkans and the periphery of Europe. It was strongly backed by the US and other Western powers, but vocally opposed by the Russian Federation, which has historically been an ally of Serbia. It remains to be seen whether there will be further long-term implications for Western-Russian relations.

Kosovo: Analysis

The case of Kosovo, in terms of secession theory, is quite similar to Abkhazia, but does share some traits with the secessionist movement that occurred in Timor-Leste (along with some differences between Kosovo and the two other cases). The cost/benefit model certainly applies to Kosovo as it did to Abkhazia. However, as the federal Yugoslav state was collapsing in the early 1990s and violence was prevalent in Bosnia, relations between Serbia and Kosovo remained peaceful by comparison with the rest of Yugoslavia. Despite the analogous situation, hostilities directly related to the issue of Kosovar independence did not flare up until nearly ten years later. A closer look at the situation reveals that it still fit nicely into the cost/benefit model:

...Kosovo managed to maintain its relative peace, mainly because of a balance of fear in which the leaders of both the Serb and Albanian communities recognised that any outbreak of hostilities

56 See Bartkus, The Dynamic of Secession.
between them would surpass even the Bosnian war in violence and consequently be fatal to the interests of both nations. Thus in spite of their mutual distrust and profoundly disrupted relations, the Serbs and Albanians of Kosovo took care not to go beyond a point where conflict would inevitably be provoked. Thus the gravest ethnic problem in Yugoslavia escaped from being drawn into the Yugoslav civil war, but relations between the two communities remained frozen in a way seen nowhere else.\(^{57}\)

Clearly, the Albanian Kosovar leaders and public perceived that the cost of a secession movement would be very high, thus inhibiting the movement for several years. It was not until the advent of the UCK in the mid 1990s that the conflict began to spiral out of control. With the increasing aggression of Serbia under Slobodan Milosevic, the costs of membership were significantly raised, and with the attention of the international community and, most importantly, NATO, the perception could have been that the costs of secession were greatly reduced.

As can be seen, there is no lack of enmity, whether historical, modern or otherwise, between the Serbs and the Albanian Kosovars. The Serbs view Kosovo as the cradle of their civilization stretching far back into antiquity, but the fact that Kosovo is politically and economically dominated by ethnic Albanians is viewed as an affront to the Serbs' culture and traditions. There is a perception among Serbian nationalists that the Albanians are an alien ethnic group that has usurped the Serbs rightful possession of Kosovo. As in Abkhazia, I believe that the existence of a historical territorial dispute over the status of Kosovo was capable of creating an atmosphere of hostility in which a violent secession conflict had the potential to occur when

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\(^{57}\) Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian*, 265.
the opportunity presented itself. It would behoove policy-makers, both at the national and international levels, to take note of historical territorial disputes in areas where secessionist tendencies are smoldering.58

The international factor cannot be ignored when analyzing the Kosovar secessionist movement. The intervention in Kosovo in 1999 was the largest operation undertaken by NATO at the time, and it was incredibly effective in quelling the Serbian aggression against the Albanian Kosovars. The previous conflicts in Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s had been the focus of much attention by the international community due to the atrocities committed in the Bosnian war and the generally disorderly manner of Yugoslavia’s dissolution. The Kosovar independence movement had to have known that the world would take notice of extreme violence in the former Yugoslavia, and, if history was any indication, the international community would come down much harder on the Serbian military and government. This is clearly what happened, and it appears that the Kosovar Albanians were able to accurately predict the reaction of the Western international organizations based on history.

On the other hand, in a book dealing with the international aspect of the Kosovo conflict, Bellamy cites three specific reasons that the Western policy makers were motivated to intervene in Kosovo: (1) fear of a repeat of the Srebrenica massacre of Bosnian Muslims by Serbs, (2) fear of a massive flood of refugees from the conflict, and (3) the fear that conflict in Kosovo would spread throughout the Balkans.59 In particular, the fear of atrocities committed by the Serbs is indicative of the shift on the part of Western policy makers towards a more conscious awareness of the implications of extreme violence in the Balkans specifically, and around the world in general.

58 This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion.
59 Bellamy, Kosovo and International Society, 3.
In addition, the role of federalism in the history of Kosovo cannot be set aside. As an autonomous province in the FSRY, Kosovo was essentially under the control of the government of the Republic of Serbia. But it was provided guarantees for limited autonomy, which was actually expanded in constitutional revisions, much to the chagrin of Serbia on several occasions. This was done via the supranational Yugoslav federal government. In much the same way as Abkhazia, the Kosovars felt that their only protection from Serbian aggression came from Belgrade, particularly after these changes had been put into affect. As Yugoslavia imploded in dramatic fashion, Kosovo’s protection from Serbia faded along with it. The only thing preventing the active outbreak of hostilities is illustrated by the quote above; neither side wanted to risk the extreme violence that would certainly be the result of open hostilities between the Serbian nationalists and the Albanian Kosovars. It took a change in the political climate and the willingness to take risks be taken by both sides for violent conflict to break out.

"The main thing is that, as of 1 January 2000, we do not want to be burdened with the problem of East Timor any more." – Indonesian President BJ Habibie, February 1999.

Timor-Leste: History

East Timor, or Timor-Leste as its people know it, has a long and complicated history that is much different than that of Abkhazia or Kosovo. It is bordered by West Timor, which, after obtaining independence from the Dutch colonizers, joined the newly formed state of Indonesia in 1949. It does not share some of the features common to the two other case studies, such as a historical experience of Communist federalism or dominant outside ethnic groups with designs

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60 David Savage, Dancing with the Devil: A Personal Account of Policing the East Timor Vote for Independence, Monash papers on Southeast Asia no. 57 (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 2002), 1.
for territorial conquest based on some (perceived) historical injustice. However, this case will serve as a nice foil in that it did have major UN intervention like Kosovo, but still maintains the aforementioned differences. These factors will be examined in greater detail in the concluding analysis. The story of Timor Leste begins with Portuguese colonialism in the 16th century and ends with a massive invasion and occupation by the Indonesian military (TNI).

The Portuguese landed in Timor-Leste in 1515, and promptly began to export large quantities of indigenous sandalwood, which proved to be very profitable. It was not until the mid 17th century that the Portuguese were able to truly dominate the island and assert their control over trade by conquering the various indigenous kingdoms that had been in place prior to the arrival of the colonizers. Throughout the colonial period, Timor-Leste remained largely underdeveloped for the vast majority of the local inhabitants. The sandalwood trade began to die off by the early 1800s due to over-exploitation by the Portuguese, who then tried various other agricultural endeavors such as coffee plantations, sugar, and cotton. This continued through World War II, during which Timor was invaded and occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to the end of the war in 1945. While the war had a devastating effect on the island, the Portuguese did not enact serious economic development plans until the early 1960s.

The rule of Portugal was seriously disrupted in the mid-1970s, when the governing fascist regime of Portugal was overthrown in a 1974 coup led by democratic forces. This did not go unnoticed in Timor-Leste, and under the new leniency of the democratic Portuguese government,

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63 “Brief History of Timor-Leste: A History.”
new Timor-Lesteese political parties, some of whom advocated independence, began to spring up. Some examples of these groups are the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) and the Timorese Social Democratic Association (ASDT). A major change occurred in the ASDT not long after its inception, when it transformed into the more militant Frente Revolucionaria do Timor Leste Independente (Fretilin).\(^{64}\) The conflicts between these groups, primarily Fretilin and the UDT, have been described as civil war, and resulted in many deaths.\(^{65}\) There is little doubt that the ouster of the Portuguese fascist regime effectively bolstered the Timor-Lesteese nationalism and independence movement. This movement carried over from the transition to independence from Portugal to the fight against Indonesian occupation.\(^{66}\) Following the overthrow of the fascist Portuguese regime, East Timor was scheduled to become independent in 1978, but the Indonesian military under Suharto invaded in 1975 with between 15,000 and 20,000 soldiers.\(^{67}\)

After the invasion, the TNI military and security forces ruled over Timor Leste with an iron fist. Timor-Leste’s integration process into the Indonesian state began almost immediately, but the reality was that the differences between Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule had left a wide gap between the culture of governance in Timor-Leste and Indonesia.\(^{68}\) Many Timor-Lesteese were forcibly relocated following the annexation by Indonesia, and the Indonesian government claimed to have systematically crushed the independence movement, including Fretilin.\(^{69}\) It is estimated that over 200,000 Timor-Lesteese lost their lives due to the occupation. However, Indonesia did invest heavily in the Timor-Lesteese economy, contributing to large economic gains during the occupation. Violent protests broke out in 1991, sparked by the

\(^{64}\) Taylor, *East Timor*, 25-26, 32-33.
\(^{65}\) Savage, *Dancing with the Devil*, 1.
\(^{67}\) Taylor, *East Timor*, 201.
\(^{68}\) Rolls, “Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism in South and Southeast Asia,” 173.
\(^{69}\) Taylor, *East Timor*, 92-95.
shooting death of a young student and the cancellation of a visit by a Portuguese parliamentary delegation. The Indonesian military killed more than 200 people traveling to mourn the murder of the student. It was this event that truly catapulted the plight of the Timor-Lesteese into the international spotlight. When the Suharto regime lost power in 1998, it appeared that Timor Leste might finally have a shot at some sort of self-determination, and pro-independence groups in Timor-Leste began to push aggressively for a referendum to determine whether or not Timor-Leste would remain a constituent of the Indonesian state.71

In early 1999, to the surprise of many, BJ Habibie, the Indonesian president, announced that the Timor-Lesteese would be allowed to vote on a referendum determining whether or not they would stay as a province of Indonesia or have a large degree of autonomy. Essentially, the Timor-Lesteese were given a choice between independence or remaining within the Indonesian state with "special autonomy."72 However, the TNI were strongly opposed to Timor-Lesteese independence for a variety of reasons, such as grudges held against militant independence groups and economic interests in Timor-Leste. A campaign of violence, perpetrated largely by irregular militias organized and financed by the TNI, targeted pro-independence Timor-Lesteese. Around the same time, an agreement was signed between the UN, the Indonesian government, and Portugal supporting the referendum on independence. However, the Indonesian government insisted that any UN soldiers in country not be allowed weapons, effectively guaranteeing the military-organized militias the ability to act with relative impunity.73 A massive campaign of property destruction, murder, and forced resettlement was committed by armed militias under the

70 "Brief History of Timor-Leste: A History."
72 Ibid., 264.
73 Savage, Dancing with the Devil, 3.
auspices of the TNI for weeks until the violence was quelled by a UN peacekeeping expedition.74 Atrocities were committed on a large scale throughout the time surrounding the referendum, as well as all throughout the history of Indonesian control over Timor-Leste.75 This passage from David Savage’s memoirs of his experience as a UN police officer during the referendum is indicative of the brutality of the response to the referendum by the TNI and its militias:

The people were grabbing hold of us, almost willing us to stay and do something, but there wasn’t any thing that we could do. Then an older man came through the crowd. He had only one leg, and was using a stick as a crutch. He also had a very bad cleft palate, a condition that seemed to be quite prevalent in East Timor. The old man pointed to his stump and kept saying something but the only word I could decipher was ‘Indonesian’. He was getting quite agitated and had tears flowing down his face as he spoke. One of the children tried to explain that the Indonesians were responsible for his losing his leg. I was unable to tell if it was in battle or as the result of torture or injury.76

Undoubtedly, the history of atrocities committed by the Indonesian military and security forces that has been demonstrated, both through anecdotal and statistical evidence, was a major factor in calling the world’s attention to the plight of the people of Timor-Leste as they struggled for

76 Savage, Dancing with the Devil, 192.
independence. The UN, in a Security Council resolution dated just weeks after the referendum took place, recognized the plight of the Timor-Lesteese, which authorized

the establishment of a multinational force under a unified command structure, pursuant to the request of the Government of Indonesia conveyed to the Secretary-General on 12 September 1999, with the following tasks: to restore peace and security in East Timor, to protect and support UNAMET in carrying out its tasks and, within force capabilities, to facilitate humanitarian assistance operations, and authorizes the States participating in the multinational force to take all necessary measures to fulfil(l) this mandate.77

Timor-Leste ultimately achieved independence and is now functioning relatively normally, albeit with periodic spurts of violence and civil unrest. It remains to be seen whether the Timor-Lesteese will able to continue as a functioning state, but for the time being, it seems that there are no foreseeable problems for Timor-Leste’s status as a viable state.

Timor-Leste: Analysis

The case of Timor-Leste’s secession movement is a bit more difficult to analyze in the context of this study than the other cases for two reasons: (1) East-Timor is not part of a former federal socialist state that collapsed, and thus lacks the large body of knowledge available on that topic; and (2) both Abkhazia and Kosovo share many of the same traits, making analysis slightly easier. However, like nearly all secessionist movements, it does fit nicely into the cost/benefit

model of secession. With Suharto out of power and the Indonesian government in a period of transition in the late 1990s, the time was ripe for Timor-Lesteese groups to aggressively pursue their pro-independence agenda. And if one goes back even further, the nationalist movement really began in the 1970s after the fascist Portuguese regime was deposed.

The case of Timor-Leste lacks the issue of a historical territorial land dispute in the same sense as in the other two cases. While the Indonesian state certainly had territorial ambitions when they invaded Timor-Leste, there is little evidence to suggest that the Indonesians believed that they were the rightful owners of the territory or that the Timor-Lesteese were an alien race with an illegitimate hold on the territory. It seems that it was more of a power play on the part of the Indonesians, without even paying lip service to some sort of fanciful historical wrong done by the Timor-Lesteese. According to Emmerson, “[t]o the extent that nationhood is the product of a shared past...Indonesia is more Indonesian without East Timor than with it.” However, it should be noted that Timor-Leste, when part of Indonesia, was unique due to the fact that it had never been part of the Dutch East Indies, but had been controlled by the Portuguese. Additionally, as a result of the influence of the Portuguese, the Timor-Lesteese are primarily Catholic, while the rest of Indonesia is primarily Muslim. Clearly, there are major cultural differences between the Timor-Lesteese and the rest of Indonesia, but it does not appear that this had much to do with the motivations of Suharto and the rest of the Indonesia leadership when they invaded Timor-Leste in the mid-1970s.

Another factor that must be considered is that the dramatically violent reaction of the Indonesian military was not directly connected to the reaction of the civilian leadership. Clearly,

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the TNI enjoyed a high level of independence and were pushing for the Timor-Lesteese to vote for autonomy rather than outright independence. According to Glassman,

...the goal of the TNI and its militias – was first to intimidate Timorese into voting for autonomy, failing that to disrupt the entire vote and failing that to cause complete havoc and destruction, perhaps being able to drive most Timorese into the mountains and to draw a new border between East and West Timor, claiming the richest coffee growing lands in the process.79

Economic motivations played a role in motivating the TNI to aggressively repress those seeking independence rather than autonomy. It is plausible that this factor could function in the same way as a historical territory dispute as will be discussed further in the conclusion. In addition, the TNI was also fearful of secessionist tendencies in other parts of Indonesia, and rightfully so. Aceh, another province within Indonesia, set off on the path towards autonomy or independence not long after the Timor-Lesteese referendum, and was no doubt spurred on by Timor-Leste's successes in its battle for independence.80

The issue of international intervention is essential to the case of Timor-Leste. While the UN intervention in 1999 was very visible, international attitudes towards the situation of Timor-Leste had been mixed. When Indonesia invaded the island a quarter of a century earlier, America and her allies had little to say on the subject.81 At the same time, much of the world was supportive of Timor-Leste in its search for independence, and the UN Security Council condemned the invasion and called "upon the Government of Indonesia to withdraw without

80 Rolls, “Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism in South and Southeast Asia,” 183.
81 In this instance, the importance of maintaining good relations with Indonesia almost certainly outweighed the subjugation of a territory with only half a million inhabitants.
further delay all its forces from the Territory” (emphasis in original). The secession movement certainly knew that they had the backing of the UN Security Council, at least in spirit. The NATO campaign against Serbian forces earlier in 1999 could not have failed to attract the attention of the secessionist movement. For Timor-Leste, this was effectively an insurance policy against violent reprisals by pro-Indonesian forces.

The final variable to be examined is federalism. Indonesia’s experience with federalism is limited to some experimentation by the Dutch after World War II in the waning years of their colonial empire. Because of this, “Indonesians still shun the "F word" because it smacks of colonialism.” So, it seems that this is inconclusive in helping to explain the Timor-Lesteese secessionist movement. Counter-factual analysis is of some limited use in this case. Had Indonesia been a federation of sorts, and Timor-Leste been given much wider ranging autonomy, it is possible that they might have been satisfied to remain within the Indonesian state. However, it is difficult to say much more than this based on a counter-factual without a more sophisticated theoretical approach that is beyond the scope of this study.

As was mentioned, the case of Timor-Leste is slightly different that that of Abkhazia or Kosovo. Because of the differences, it illustrates other possible connections between variables, such as the connection between the economic motivations of the TNI and their violent repression of the independence movement. Likewise, the mixed reaction of the international community to Indonesia’s annexation of Timor-Leste is interesting in that it demonstrates how values can be undermined by strategic interests and thereby have a major impact on populations pursuing independence and secession.

83 Emmerson, “Will Indonesia Survive?,” 104.
Analysis & Conclusions

It is always difficult to compare phenomenon of any type at the international level. Secession is no exception, and provides a variety of challenges difficult for any researcher to surmount. That being said, it is possible to take a more focused approach and in doing so, avoid the difficulties of a broader, more general inquiry. With this research study, the goal was to determine the best approach with which to analyze cause and timing of secessionist movement by first surveying the theoretical approaches prominently featured in the relevant literature, and then examining the three selected case studies in that context. It is, in a sense, a plausibility probe for interpretive frameworks of secession.

The most effective framework for theorizing secession is, in the opinion of this author, what can be called the cost/benefit model. Advocated by Bartkus in her book, this framework breaks the causes of secession down into four different dynamic changes: a rise in the costs of membership, a reduction in the costs of secession, a reduction in the benefits of membership, and a rise in the benefits of secession. For this study, the most relevant dynamic change is the first, because it fits well with all three cases. In the case of Kosovo, we see a dramatic rise in the costs of membership with Serbian aggression against ethnic Albanians in the late 1990s. In Abkhazia, there was the steadily increasing flood of Georgian cultural colonization, constituting a cultural threat to the Abkhaz. And in Timor-Leste, there was the history of abuse and long-simmering tensions during the period of Indonesian domination. What this seems to indicate is that while tensions can exist for extended periods of time between parties, a dramatic shift in the manner of treatment of one party by another is enough to trigger a secession crisis. However, one of the

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84 Bartkus, The Dynamic of Secession.
main interests of this study is to shed some light on when independence movements become fully-fledged secession crises.

The variable that was my primary interest at the start of this study was the existence of historical territorial disputes. This interest sprang primarily from initial research on the case of Kosovo. It is well known that the Serbs view Kosovo as the cradle of their culture from long ago, and project blame for the loss of it to the Ottoman Empire onto the largely Muslim Albanians who now control the territory. Abkhazia is similar to Kosovo in this respect, although the Georgians certainly do not have quite so strong an attachment to Abkhaz territory. Timor-Leste is dissimilar to the other two cases, and in fact, members of the Indonesian leadership stated that they would rather be rid of Timor-Leste. However, Indonesia’s violent repression of pro-independence activists and its campaign of intimidation and forced relocation were motivated by grudges stemming from the long running conflict with the pro-independence guerilla groups and economic factors (there are fertile agricultural grounds in Timor-Leste that the TNI leadership hoped to gain control of).

Based on the cases of Abkhazia and Kosovo, it is apparent that the existence of historical territorial dispute has the potential to unleash extreme violence. While a different grievance, such as unfair distribution of tax benefits or unjust representation in a legislature, can be redressed in a relatively simple way (if the opposing party is willing to make concessions), the issue of territory stretching back nearly a millennium cannot be so easily addressed. In Kosovo, the Albanians see themselves as the rightful inhabitants, and the same is true of the ethnic Abkhaz in Abkhazia. They are simply not willing to make the kinds of extreme territorial concessions demanded by

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85 As was discussed, the Albanians had not yet converted to Islam in large numbers at the time of the Battle of Kosovo.
the hard-line nationalists opposing them. It is because of this that this factor renders negotiations and power-sharing schemes nearly useless in some cases. While the results of this study are not entirely conclusive, it would be useful in other studies to search for other cases where territory is one of the main factors provoking a secessionist movement but the opposing parties were able to successfully integrate and form a cohesive state. In regards to the case of Timor-Leste, the existence of economic incentives in Timor-Leste could possibly explain the motivations of the Indonesian military after the referendum in 1999. But again, a search for analogous cases would be needed to confirm such a theory.

The international factor is, in these times of increasing modernization and globalization, essential to understanding nearly any political phenomena. One factor that intrigued me, even before starting this project, was the relationship between the West’s recognition of Kosovo and Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The tension that these dual recognitions produced is indicative of the symbolic power that these territories have. Neither Kosovo nor Abkhazia and South Ossetia are of any tangible strategic interest to either the West or Russia. But for the West, the symbolic importance of supporting minority self-determination and for Russia, standing up to perceived Western incursion into its sphere of influence undeniably outweighed other considerations.

In terms of implications for the actual secessionist movements discussed in this study, I believe that it has been effectively demonstrated, on the basis of those studies, that the potential of support from international organizations galvanizes and accelerates secessionist conflicts. In particular, the Timor-Leste case recognized that a precedent had been set by the NATO bombing campaign against Serbian forces, which had been sparked by the secessionist conflict in Kosovo. It is important to understand that these events that occur thousands of miles away from each
other can have a very close relationship and have huge impacts on one another. All three of the cases that I have discussed in this study are representative of the shift of the UN, NATO, and the entire international community towards a more vigilant attitude regarding extreme violence, particularly when it is set off by a secessionist conflict. While the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict in the 1990s did not attract as much attention, the conflicts in Kosovo and Timor-Leste in the late 1990s had garnered the attention of the entire world. It is plausible that there was a gradually increasing awareness of the plight of minorities in their search for self-determination in the unipolar world that emerged after the implosion of the USSR.

The final major factor that was examined in this study was federalism. While not prominent in the case of Timor-Leste, the issue of federalism, and power sharing in general, is of great import in the cases of Abkhazia and Kosovo. Both of these territories were at the bottom of the federal hierarchy, but at the same time, depended on the top level of that same hierarchy for protection from the territorial and cultural aspirations of the titular republic in which they resided. Once Yugoslavia and the USSR collapsed, that protection was no longer there, and helped accelerate armed conflict between the respective parties. The implications of this for future policies are unclear, because both the Abkhaz and the Kosovar secessionist movements emerged out of the context of a communist federal system that incorporate a large variety of ethnic and cultural groups, and to the knowledge of this author, such a state does not currently exist. The only example that is nearly analogous is the Russian Federation, which is made up of many different groups, some of which have secessionist tendencies. However, there is no supranational government that serves to protect the smaller ethnic groups. Additionally, attempts to devolve power to a group to placate secessionist tendencies are not always effective, as shown when the Timor Lesteese chose independence over special autonomy.
The main purpose of this study has been to explore the plausibility of prominent theories of secession and, where possible, to point out variables that may have not been stressed enough in the literature. In particular, the issue of territory needs to be more heavily emphasized both in research and in the recommendations and decisions that come from policy makers. There are many conflicts around the world, and acknowledging the relationship between historical territorial disputes and extreme violence will help direct the attention of world leaders where it is most needed. Federalism can also fuel separatist tensions if other factors are in place, and the potential for international intervention does seem to fuel the flames of secession as well. Policymakers would do well to take note of these factors when they become apparent, and incorporate that into their decision-making processes. If not, the possibility of extreme violence and political instability cannot be discounted.
Postscript: Implications for Other Secession Conflicts

As long as the state continues to exist in its current form, there were will be secession conflicts. It is simply not possible to supply every unique ethnic or cultural group with its own territory, and because of this, there will always be groups pushing for either more autonomy or outright independence. It is unlikely that policymakers, in either international organizations or states, will ever be able to respond in a substantive way to every secession conflict that becomes violent. However, this study has demonstrated that focusing on a few specific variables may help identify conflicts that have the potential for extreme violence. Territory disputes reaching back into antiquity seems to increase the possibility of extreme violence, often after long-simmering tensions are sparked into open conflict. Likewise, regions at the bottom of a federal structure that are dependent on the federal structure for protection of their autonomy are likely to spiral into violence if a secession conflict arises after that federal structure collapses. This remainder of this section will include a short discussion of a few secession conflicts around the world and what the findings of this study implies for those cases.

Undoubtedly, one of the most prominent secession conflicts is Tibet. This is perhaps the best-known example that shares the variable of a historical territorial dispute with the cases discussed in this study. The Tibetans contend that they were an independent state for thousands of years before the Chinese conquest, while the Chinese maintain that Tibet had been part of China proper for many years before gaining independence. It is not likely that irrefutable evidence supporting one side or the other will appear any time soon, and even if this were to happen, the negatively effected party would likely not accept it. Many parallels can be drawn between the case of Tibet and the case of Kosovo due to the historic nature of the disputes in both cases. In Tibet, there have been minor skirmishes, including the unrest leading up to the
2008 summer Olympics in Beijing, but nothing comparable to the violence in the Kosovo War. The People’s Republic of China enjoys a much higher level of political stability than was found in the former Yugoslavia, and this is a major factor keeping agitation for independence under control. However, I believe that if the People’s Republic of China were to experience any sort of significant political instability, the Tibetan independence movement would capitalize on the perceived weakness of the state and move towards outright independence. Depending on the specific nature of the political situation, it is possible that the Chinese military and security forces would respond with violence in order to avoid the loss of face in the international community that would be associated with Tibetan independence.

The Kurds represent another current secession case, in that they are spread over an area that includes Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. The Kurds have gained a considerable amount of autonomy in recent years, particularly in federal Iraq. This is due primarily to the US invasions in the early 1990s, and early 2000s. The Kurds are the world’s largest nation that lacks any territory of their own. As the majority of Kurds live within Iraq, this section will deal primarily with that population and the associated issues. Federalism is a major concern for the Iraqi Kurds. According to Gunter, there are essentially two types of federalism being put forth in Iraq: “(1) majoritarian (also known as mono-national, nonethnic, territorial, or administrative), and (2) ethnic (also known as multinational or pluralist).” This process is taking place right now, with the recent provincial elections that took place and the general election that is coming later this year. If the Iraqi government does end up leaning towards majoritarian federalism, it seems unlikely that the Kurds will be able to maintain the same level of autonomy that they have

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88 Ibid., 21.
enjoyed over the last two decades. But, if the government were to lean towards ethnic federalism and allot the Kurds a significant amount of autonomy, there will be a reduced chance of a violent secession conflict. An associated issue is the presence of Kurds in the adjoining areas of Turkey and Iran. Any Kurdish state would likely seek to include those areas populated by Kurds outside of Iraq, and this would, in turn, have the potential to create secession conflicts in those states as well. However, the federal structures of the USSR and the SFRY did allot much autonomy to the various minority ethnic groups within their borders, and both of the cases discussed in this study culminated in secession conflicts.

Quebec serves as an example of a conflict where potential secessionist tendencies have been satiated for the most part. As the only primarily French-speaking province in English-speaking Canada, the Quebecois have long felt alienated from the rest of Canadian culture, and there was some push for secession. This push was particularly acute in the 1960s, which saw the rise of radical organizations committed to Quebec's independence. A string of bombings, kidnappings, and other types of violence followed. However, these groups faded away due to public disenchantment with the brutality of their tactics. In this case, two factors that have been heavily emphasized in this study do not have much influence: there has been no significant territorial dispute (this is likely to due to the fact that Canada is a relatively young country) and most of the Quebecois are descendents of relatively recently arrived immigrants. The Quebecois have been allotted a fair level of autonomy, in addition to respect for their culture and their use of the French language. This implies that the lack of these two factors, coupled with relative economic stability, can ease tensions and help to prevent secession conflicts.
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