

Separatist State Movements

READ TO DISCOVER:

1. What is a separatist state movement (SSM)?
2. Why are SSMs important for the Security Council to discuss?
3. What steps can be taken by the Security Council to address SSMs?

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMITTEE

Under the United Nations Charter, the Security Council is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Complaints regarding breaches of peace are brought before the Council, and the Security Council members will decide how to act, often exploring diplomatic and peaceful alternatives over more aggressive options. In order to more adequately understand the security threat at hand, the Council will initiate fact-finding missions and investigations; the council will also pursue mediation initiatives often augmented by the appointment of special representatives or the recommendation of the Secretary-General to lead such efforts.¹



The United Nations Security Council chambers at UN Headquarters in New York City.

Terms & Concepts

Veto: a special voting power. If any country with a veto votes “no” the resolution will automatically fail.

The Security Council is made up of fifteen member-states of the United Nations. The Council consists of five permanent members, including the People’s Republic of China, France, The Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. These five permanent members hold **veto-power**, which allows them to block the passage of a resolution. In addition to the five permanent members, there are ten non-permanent members, who are elected for two-year terms.



CRITICAL THINKING

Why would nations have interests in SSMs in neighboring countries? What methods, both legal and illegal, can governments use to aid SSMs? Is any action designed to weaken another nation's government illegal?

INTRODUCTION

Separatist state movements (SSMs) represent one of the great challenges to governments across the developing world. **Separatism** is the process whereby a group of citizens of one nation try to separate and form a new nation. This may be done for political, social, economic, ethnic, racial or any number of other reasons.

Governments often battle separatism, as the creation of a new nation tends to lead to loss of land, taxes, resources, power, and security in a region. As such, separatism tends to be met with strong force from sitting governments and militaries. Long and bloody **civil wars** are common with powerful SSMs.

One reason why discussing SSMs is incredibly important for the UN is the belief among many international relations scholars and foreign policy officials that internal, domestic conflicts are representative of wars of the future. Many believe that the days of massive military forces meeting on the fields of battle are gone. Instead, present-day military commanders, political leaders, and civilians alike are far more likely to face internal **insurrection** and **guerilla warfare** for control of domestic political institutions. There are many possible reasons for this shift, but almost all scholars agree that the likelihood of a massive military conflict on the scale of World War II is incredibly unlikely; what is more likely are smaller military conflicts that are quick, relatively bloodless wars between two states or within a state. It is vital that the Security Council establish broad based policy for dealing with SSMs.

Terms & Concepts

Separatism: the desire to separate from the larger group to form a new country.

Guerrilla warfare: fighting that uses small armed groups and deception as opposed to open war.

Civil War: a war between citizens of the same country.

Insurrection: a violent uprising against an authority or government.

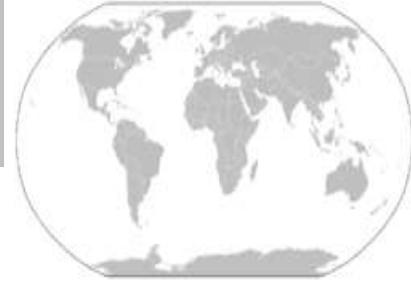


South Yemen Separatists.

Source: www.aolnews.com

BACKGROUND

Historically, SSMs can arise anywhere. Even the United States was the product of a political SSM. SSMs may be known as independence movements, revolutions, self-determination, partition, or de-colonization efforts.²



The founding of the United States, one of the most famous SSMs.

Source: wikicommons

The majority of SSMs are seen in **post-colonial** states. This is because colonial rulers tended to group together historically separate ethnic and social groups under one flag. After the fall of **colonialism**, many nations (Rwanda, Iraq, India, Indonesia, Somalia, Sudan, etc.) were created by combining many different ethnic groups. As these nations embraced **self-determination** and **democracy**, many ethnic and social groups believed they needed their own nation. This yearning for an ethnically defined state, combined with the economic appeal of running one's own nation, has led to a dramatic increase in the number of SSMs over the past 40 years. Currently, almost every nation faces some sort of SSM.

CURRENT SITUATION

There are many good examples of current SSMs across the globe. Included below are highlights of only a few of these; this should not be considered an exhaustive list. Most countries have their own form of an SSM, be it small and academic, a vocal **minority**, or a guerrilla group engaged in an active civil war with the government.

Cyprus

In Cyprus, the Turkish minority (on a Greek majority island) have continually attempted to create their own Turkish enclave in the northeastern part of the country. Historically, Northern Cyprus has been the most well-known example of UN involvement in an SSM. While peace negotiations are almost continually ongoing, a genuine resolution to the conflict has yet to be truly achieved. The only nation in the world to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is Turkey.³

Terms & Concepts

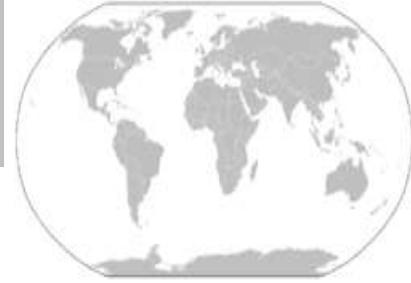
Post-colonial: The period after colonialism marked by many wars and the creation of many new nations.

Colonialism: period where western powers took over land and governed the territories.

Self-determination: the ability of a group of people to determine their own government and nation-status.

Democracy: a political system where citizens vote for their leaders.

Minority: a group smaller than half of the whole.

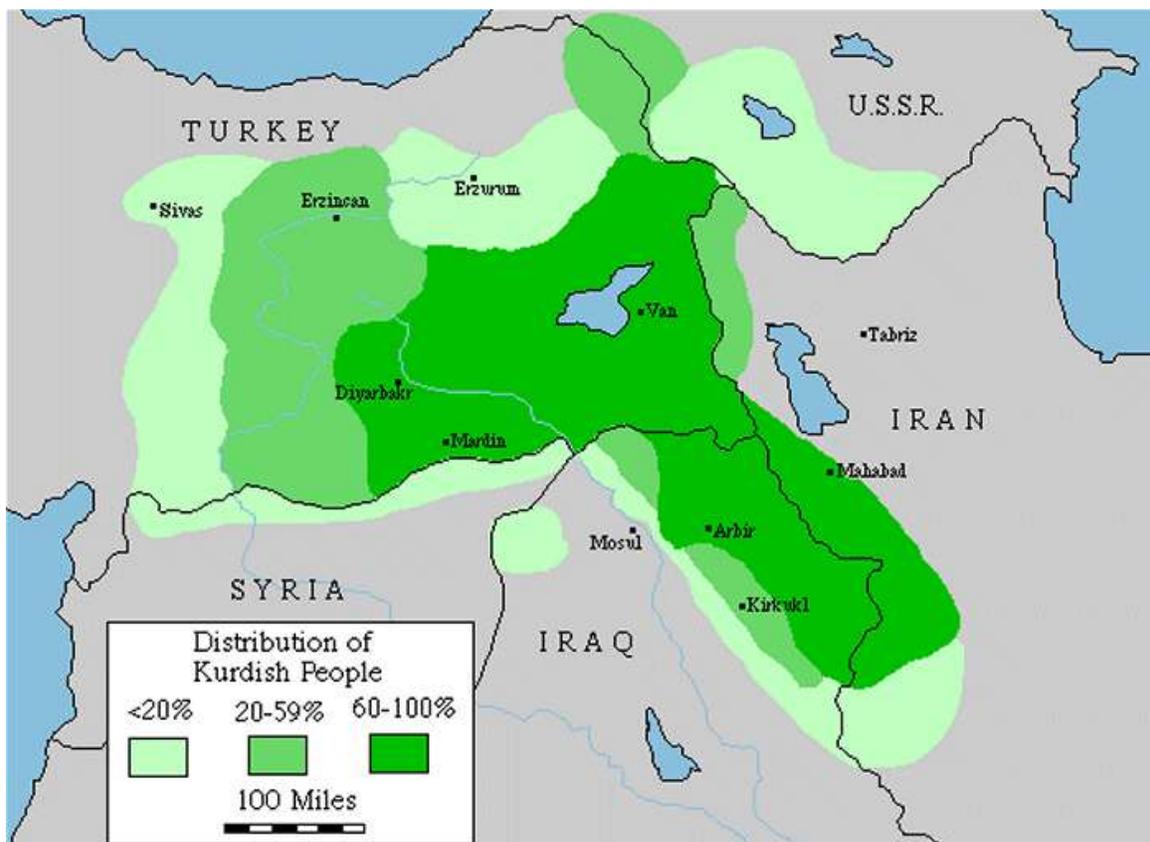


Israel

Perhaps the most famous example of a SSM, the Palestinian people have been engaged in almost constant struggle for the past sixty years to create a homeland separate from the Jewish state of Israel. Legally, there is some doubt as to whether or not this movement counts as an SSM given the status of the Palestinian land (The West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem) as occupied territories rather than true sovereign land. Nevertheless, this remains one of the most pressing issues in the world and one that people in many countries feel very strongly about.

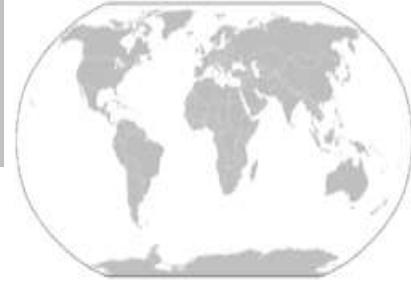
Iraq

Iraq is made up of three main groups – Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims, and Kurds. Before the current American invasion, there was a constant push by the two politically marginalized groups in Iraq (Shiites and Kurds) to create their own nation. The Kurds, the largest ethnic group in the world without their own country, went so far as to create an autonomous republic in the northern reaches of the nation. After the American invasion in 2003, each of the three groups believed that the invasion was their key to receiving their own nation. However, many nations do not want the Kurds to form a separate state, especially Turkey, which has a very large Kurdish population.



Kurds, who live in regions of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, are the largest ethnic group in the world that do not have their own state.

Source: www.globalsecurity.org



CRITICAL THINKING

What lengths would you go to if your people didn't have a homeland? Is it moral or ethical to fight a government that doesn't represent you? What if that government is a democracy, and you were outvoted?

Turkey

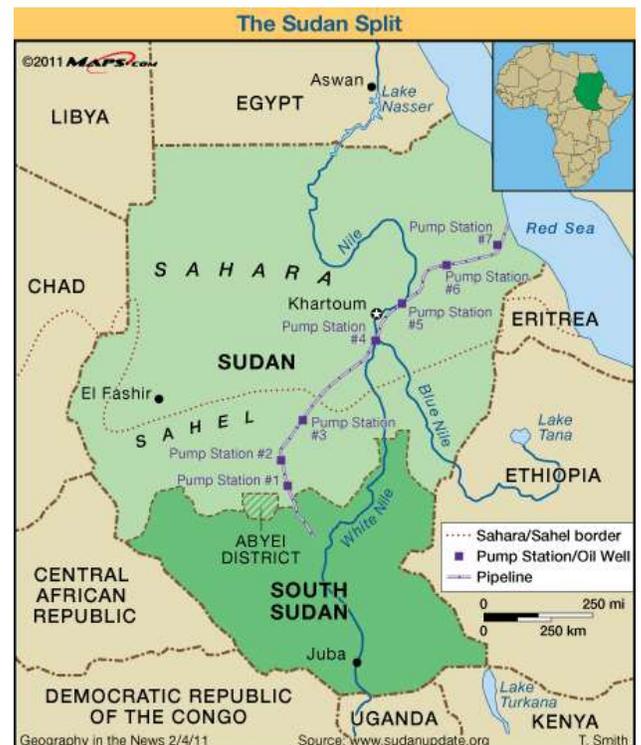
Much like Iraq, Turkey faces a large domestic ethnic Kurdish population. The Kurdish people have long ached for a Kurdistan - a home stretching across the oil-rich Middle East. The Turkish government has gone to great lengths to avoid any steps that would promote a Kurdistan including banning the use of the Kurdish language, and using geopolitics and its strategic location to prevent the promotion of a Kurdish homeland.⁴

Spain

Spain is home to some of the most active SSMs in Western Europe. Many different languages are spoken in Spain and many ethnic groups reside there. Two language groups, the Catalanian and Galician separatists, are relatively peaceful. In contrast, the Basques of Northeastern Spain have led an on-again off-again violent campaign to secure a homeland separate from Spain. In the modern day US led War on Terror, Spain has tried to link the ETA, the militant wing of the Basques, with Al Qaeda and other anti-western groups, though this has not been a popular tactic.⁵

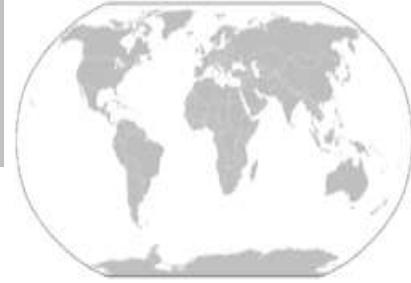
South Sudan

After long periods of civil war among different ethnic groups and regions of Sudan, South Sudan finally achieved independence in July of 2011. An election was held in January 2011 and 98% of the population voted for independence. Though South Sudan is now an independent state and a member of the UN, conflict has not ceased. There are at least seven armed groups fighting to control the government and it does not seem likely that peace is near.



Fighting continues in South Sudan, even after the SSM was successful.

Source: custommaps.wordpress.com



Kosovo

Kosovo recently gained its independence from Serbia in 2008 following a **protracted** SSM in the region. Even though Serbia protested Kosovo's declaration of independence, the International Court of Justice ruled that the declaration was legal and did not break any international laws. The issue of Kosovo is unique in some ways because its independence is still contested by Serbia, but more importantly by Russia, who can block Kosovo from UN membership through Russia's veto power in the Security Council. Some countries fear recognizing Kosovo will encourage other SSMs to make similar official declarations of independence.

Terms & Concepts

Legitimate: lawful, correct, conforming to rules.

Implicit: showed through action but not specifically said.

Protracted: drawn out over a long period of time.

INTERNATIONAL ACTION

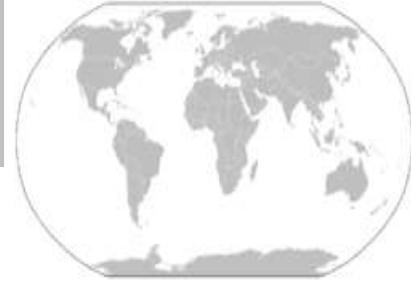
The UN has been very inactive on the issue of SSMs in the past. The legal community has never created a working definition for civil war or SSMs, and the issue of SSMs has only been considered on a case-by-case basis. Traditionally, the UN deals with civil wars as the conflict spills over international boundaries or leads to humanitarian crises. As the situation is addressed, the UN will determine which group is the **legitimate** government in the conflict. This traditional way of dealing with conflict has not led to a situation where the UN can deal with SSMs as they arise – instead, contrary to the UN goal of promoting peace and preventing conflict, the UN must wait for a situation to become bloody before a call for international action.

Though the UN has not dealt with the issue of SSMs on a large scale, it has dealt with SSMs on a case by case basis. The most noteworthy, and continuing, examples are Taiwan and Palestine. In both examples, the governments of the area are not considered legitimate by the UN, and as such, have no voting rights. The UN has therefore **implicitly** categorized the governments of Palestine and Taiwan as SSMs – not the legitimate voice of their people. The UN has granted observer status to both groups, perhaps opening the doors for a legal argument for observer status for SSMs everywhere.



UNSG Ban Ki-moon meets with President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas.

Source: IIN Photo/Mark Garten



However, in recent months, Palestine has been making a greater push for inclusion at the UN. In September of 2011, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas declared a campaign for full recognition of Palestine at the UN. While Abbas says that this is not an official declaration of independence, that having been already issued 20 years prior, UN membership would afford Palestine with rights and privileges that could eventually lead to a resolution of the conflict with Israel.⁶ Palestine has already gained full membership in UNESCO, and is likely to seek full membership in other organizations in the future.

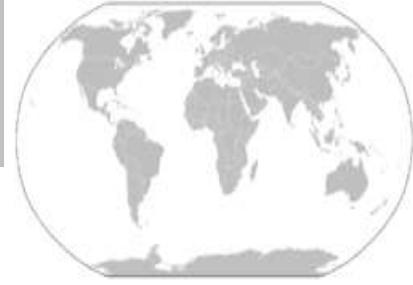
An interesting case arises when comparing Taiwan and Palestine. Though both certainly have differing histories (Palestine never achieved statehood status, while Taiwan lost its permanent seat on the Security Council to the People's Republic of China), they represent what are probably the most well known and organized SSMs. (Of course, neither would claim SSM status, instead stating that they are the true legitimate government of their territory.) Delegates would be wise to consider the seemingly different opinion of the UN on statehood status, with repeated attempts to promote Palestinian statehood, while Taiwanese claims of independence have been muffled throughout the halls of the General Assembly. Many answers, and even more questions, arise when comparing these two cases. Another interesting set of cases are those of Kosovo and Southern Sudan. Both were set against the backdrop of genocide, however while South Sudan was immediately recognized by the UN for membership following independence, Kosovo has been independent for almost 4 years and still has yet to gain full UN support.

Peacekeeping and Peacemaking

Legally and morally, the UN is vested in both interests - trying to promote world peace, and keeping the peace where successful. One key issue concerns UN peacekeepers. These troops are meant to keep peace; they do not make it. It is up to individual nations, with UN assistance, to establish peace *before* peacekeepers arrive. This distinction is important in the realm of SSMs because no matter the decisions of the committee, any discussions involving the use of peacekeepers must acknowledge their inherent limitations. An interesting moral and legal dilemma arises from the conversation of peace: are guidelines for keeping the peace different from those for making peace amongst warring SSMs and official governments?

CRITICAL THINKING

Why is a working definition for SSMs necessary? What conflicts in particular have been made worse by lack of UN involvement? Could these conflicts have been lessened, or all together avoided, had the issue of SSMs been dealt with earlier?



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING A RESOLUTION

The committee needs to act on several questions. First, the committee should decide if an SSM counts as a legal voice, or if the official government is the only true voice of the people at the UN. If the committee decides that other governments can speak, the next step is determining what constitutes a legal SSM. Are some movements legitimate attempts to create a homeland and others simply anti-government actions? A working definition of what exactly qualifies as an SSM should be a high priority. Finally, if the committee decides to give a voice to SSMs, there should be a working definition of civil war. A definition of civil war will allow for better allocation of UN and world resources, as well as leading to better understanding of a given conflict.

Aside from the legal aspect of defining and categorizing SSMs, delegates should also think of the humanitarian consequences of ongoing conflicts. Delegates may want to consider whether the UN should establish a way to decide whether to offer aid to SSMs – political or humanitarian. With these considerations come numerous issues of sovereignty and political influence. Furthermore, the Security Council needs to consider the inherent humanitarian considerations from ongoing conflicts involving SSMs – an issue that may be out of legal jurisdiction, but an issue that needs to be considered nevertheless.

Finally, perhaps the most controversial issue and an issue that goes beyond international diplomacy and touches on what is right and wrong: to what extent should the UN assist SSMs that become the dominant force in their country? Though they may not represent the official government, if an SSM gains power, to what extent and when must the UN offer aid and political recognition? Included in this question is the concern that the UN will begin implicitly encouraging SSMs. Delegates should take care to consider this issue, and develop a clear strategy for UN involvement.

Questions to Consider:

1. Does your nation have any internal SSMs? Do you assist SSMs in any other nations, or assist another nation against their SSM?
2. Was your nation the product of an SSM?
3. What legal rights should SSMs have? Do all people deserve the right to self determine? Do all groups deserve their own homeland?
4. Does your nation think the UN should be promoting SSMs? What actions can the UN take to promote peaceful SSMs?
5. Do certain movements simply get more media coverage, if so, why and how does this impact their bid for independence?



RESEARCH AID

This is the main website for the UN Security Council. Here, you can find information on current and past membership, the agenda, and resolutions.

- **Security Council**, <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/index.html>

For general information about your country and to learn about its government and other important facts The CIA publishes a very helpful listing of each country called the CIA World Factbook.

- **CIA World Factbook**, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

Similar to the CIA World Factbook, the BBC publishes a similar profile of each country called the BBC Country Profile. You can find information about your country here.

- **BBC Country Profile**, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

Though Wikipedia is not a good source of information when looking for specific facts, it can be a great place to get started with some general information. They have a fairly comprehensive list of current SSMs around the world. Look to see if they have any listed in your country, then trying finding out more about those groups elsewhere. Often, the 'External Links' section at the bottom of the page can offer more credible sources of information.

- **List of Active Separatist State Movements**,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_active_separatist_movements



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