

Kosovo - a road sign for separatists

(B92, Christian Science Monitor) Nov 5, 2007, ARLINGTON - There are more than 50 separatist conflicts across the globe depending on Kosovo, writes Christian Science Monitor.

Echoing countless other US and European officials, Daniel Fried, the US assistant secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, responded to such concerns in February with the following logic:

"Kosovo is a unique situation because NATO was forced to intervene to stop and then reverse ethnic cleansing. The Security Council authorized Kosovo to be ruled effectively by the United Nations, not by Serbia. UN Council Resolution 1244 also stated that Kosovo's final status would be the subject of negotiation. Those conditions do not pertain to any of the conflicts that are usually brought up in this context."

Unfortunately, Washington's "unique" talking points are actually engraving a separatist playbook in stone, blazing a glorious trail that separatists will follow with greater determination, recruits, and (in all likelihood) success.

Separatist regions like the Basque Country or Abkhazia might not resemble Kosovo right now – as Washington is quick to note – but by so explicitly stating the merits of Kosovar self-determination and independence, Washington is essentially creating an innovative code, only to make the cipher publicly available.

Current and future separatists merely have to manufacture the same conditions and sequencing that have compelled the West to embrace an independent Kosovo: terrorize locals, invite government crackdowns, incite a rebellion, and lure in foreign intervention and commitment to rebuild.

Once militants get this far, Kosovo will no longer be unique – even by Washington's peculiar standards – and areas that share Kosovo's characteristics will be equally deserving of independence.

The horrid irony, of course, is that declaring Kosovo's uniqueness has been Washington's deliberate attempt to prevent future separatism, but it is inadvertently teaching militants how to navigate the complex inconsistencies of geopolitics. In fact, the more thorough and persuasive Western governments are about Kosovo's "uniqueness," the more legitimate separatists' ambitions become, if only they follow the Kosovo model.

Not only, then, has Washington had a hard time selling Kosovo's independence to all but its closest allies, but the very basis for that appeal is even more threatening to governments that would face invigorated separatism in the wake of an independent Kosovo – even if that independence is informal and technically illegal.

With the "unique" endorsement, Washington and a few European capitals close even more rhetorical doors that they will need to slip through when the time comes to reject separatist analogies in the future, and our failure to anticipate these complicated roadblocks will cost our allies more than anyone else.