

Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements

Don H. Doyle, Editor. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press; 2010. Paperback: 392 pages.
ISBN-13: 978-0820337128

Review by Warner "Rocky" D. Farr, MD, MPH

So the American South tried secession in 1860s and it did not go that well, so it is all just ancient history, all already decided, right? But wait, Scotland has just scheduled a secession referendum for 2014?! Don H. Doyle is the McCausland Professor of History at the University of South Carolina and the author or coeditor of several books, including *Nationalism in the New World* and *Nations Divided: America, Italy, and the Southern Question*. This book is a collection of thought-provoking essays that explore the role played by secession in state making and state breaking



in the modern world. About half of today's nation-states originated as some kind of breakaway state. The end of the Cold War has brought resurgence in separatist activity affecting nearly every part of the globe and brought a new view to the study of separatism and secession. This book covers a wide variety from Mexico (the Yucatecan Republic) to the Balkans to the former Soviet Union (Chechnya, Abkhazia, Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh) to the Middle East (the Kurds) and to Africa. The Africa section has a great map showing the 21 separate secessionist activities since World War II.

It appears that nationalism with or without secession constitutes an important present-day global phenomenon, accounting for half of the world's nation-states.

This book is a great contribution to the study of nations and the study of nation making. Since Special Forces has the mission of unconventional warfare, works with indigenous forces, many times ethnic minorities, and travels to all the world's unsettled hot spots, this volume is germane for us to read. While most of the particular instances have been studied, the general historical phenomenon has not been well studied before this book.

It is the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, and this collection of essays views secession within the broader international context. The contributors to this book discuss a wide range of topics related to secession, separatism, and the nationalist passions that drive such conflicts. The first section of the book examines the ethical and moral dimensions of secession, while subsequent sections look at the American Civil War, conflicts in the Gulf of Mexico, European separatism, and elsewhere.

The contributors exhibit no common position advocating or opposing secession in principle or in any particular case. All describe it both as a common feature of the modern world and as a historic phenomenon of international scope. Some propose that political divorce by secession should be subject to arbitration and ethical norms, instead of being decided by insurgency. They will be of great interest to students of nationalism and national identity. For those who think they have heard everything, I recommend the last essay in the book: "Did Abraham Lincoln Oppose Taiwan's Secession from China?"