



Kosovo: The global significance of independence

Bruce Fein: Independence promotes stability

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Transcript:

BRUCE FEIN, FOUNDER, AMERICAN FREEDOM AGENDA: The reason why the Kosovo independence is so significant is because it addresses an issue that's prevalent throughout the world, for example Sri Lanka, where you have a minority that has been oppressed by the majority. And we've always had rather blurry lines in knowing, well, when does the oppression reach a sufficiently intense and egregious level that you're entitled to walk away from a sovereign and establish your separate statehood? And Kosovo certainly creates a benchmark.

We all saw on TV, you know, ten years ago, the ethnic cleansing of Slobodan Milosevic, all these Kosovar Albanians being deported, if you will, to other neighboring states. We had the beatings of the Kosovar Albanians, the end of their regional autonomy in Serbia, that collection of wrongdoing that ultimately culminated now in an independent state. And now we look at many, many other countries, which are confronting comparable kinds of divisiveness and brutality by the central government. And the question's raised: well, is the United States and the European Union and the world also going to accept statehood demands from minorities that are suffering comparably or greater than Kosovo. There's always a worry that this will perhaps spin out of control and it'll create more convulsions than otherwise. But I think that's the opposite. I think when you force a minority to live under a brutal regime; it continues a convulsed state of affairs.

And with Sri Lanka in particular, with which I'm familiar, we've had almost 50 years of oppressions of a Tamil minority at the hands of a Sinhalese majority. At present there's indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas in the Tamil north of Sri Lanka. You've got the Rajapaksa brothers. They're the ones who run the government at present with a General Fonseka, accused of egregious human rights violations. You can commit crimes against Tamils with virtual impunity. Over decades there's been maybe or two prosecutions for

disappearances for kidnappings, for arbitrary arrests, that sort of thing. They've got preventive detention laws that make it a police state in the north where the Tamils reside. It's almost a black hole. No foreign reporters permitted there. No TV reporters. No UN presence there. No ambassadorial presence there. And the issues are always raised, Well, we cannot authorize, you know, any kind of statehood as in Kosovo, because then it will cause an unraveling of the nation state system.

But I think we need to go back to our own declaration of independence that gave birth to the United States of America. It announced this principle that's been accepted since then: when a government becomes exceptionally oppressive and evinces a design to exercise absolute despotism or tyranny over a minority, there is a right to establish your own separate form of government. And that's what we're seeing in many places of the world, these struggles, and it's too often, in my judgment, that it's power politics rather than a recognition of this natural right to statehood when you're oppressed that takes precedence. A Buddhist in Tibet is not going to receive statehood, because China will never let that happen. The Chechens in Russia will never receive statehood.

Now, you've got a different situation in Sri Lanka and other countries where you've got minorities that are not confronting superpowers. But surely I think the Kosovo independence should shine a spotlight on these areas of the world, because I think in the long run separate statehoods create greater stability. It's not greater convulsions. Think, for example, after the separation of Yugoslavia, where you at one time when you had Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia trying to dominate the other provinces—Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Slovenia. You had constant turmoil and friction. Now, with separate states, it's much more peaceful. The political stability in-ground is much more conducive to human rights and all those aspirations that we hold sacred in the United States.

And I think that we've got to get away from this idea that we need to support the central government everywhere because it's always preferable to have a unified state rather than different ones. And I think that carries also some ramifications for Iraq. Why is it that it has to stay unified? Why not a Kurdish state in the north, a Sunni state in the centre, a Shia state in the south.

Forcing people together when it's shown over a long period of time that they don't have the homogeneity the common DNA to live harmoniously seems to me utter nonsense. It's a formula for disaster. And so the Kosovo, I think, message is we need to look at places like Sri Lanka and Iraq and other places where we've got constant convulsions, to see whether or not it makes sense to redraw boundaries.

And another area where this cries out for attention is in Africa, where perhaps the entire continent is driven by convulsed states because boundaries were drawn arbitrarily without any sense of homogeneity, unity of history, tradition, religion, or otherwise, and we see the result. But there's the anxiety that the sacredness of the boundaries means we can never touch this kind of situation. Now, it wasn't true in Ethiopia. It spun off Eritrea. And so I think the main international ramification from Kosovo to be we need to rethink the customary support we give for unity, and blinding ourselves to the oppression, to the

misery that's inflicted on minorities and creates civil warfare, if you will, as in Sri Lanka, that will persist forever, until there's finally an ability to create a separate statehood that will be able to conduct its own affairs in ways that satisfies its own domestic constituency and is harmonious with its neighbors. It is in the national security interests of the United States to do that.

Take for example in Sri Lanka, where the Tamils have offered with a separate statehood to form an alliance with the United States. They have economic resources. And history teaches that a country doesn't out of spite stop trading or economic relationships, even if they think that they've been unfairly treated. Iraq will sell us oil, no matter who is running it. When Saddam Hussein was there, they'd sell oil to us. You know, Iran will sell oil on the market. It will get to us. Hugo Chavez in Venezuela sells us oil. So I don't think we need to be worried about antagonizing the country that's remaining after there's a separation.

Now, some would say, well, we had our embassy burned in Serbia after the recognition of Kosovo and some other states. But as heinous as that is, these are one-shot affairs. It does--there's no suggestion that Serbia's now going to walk away from the European Union and to give up trade or anything of that sort.

Remember the wisdom of Lord Palmerston: nations don't have permanent friends and enemies; they have permanent interests. And the interests the United States regularly is in recognizing these separatists—if you want to call them separatist moments for statehood, really, because it furthers political stability. And of course when we recognize these new states that subscribe to the principles of democracy and free enterprise, it gives us a new ally.