

The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States*

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The study of quasi-states has been marred by an unfortunate terminological confusion. Sometimes, this term is taken to mean recognized states that fail to develop the necessary state structures to function as fully fledged, 'real' states. At other times, 'quasi-states' is a designation given to regions that secede from another state, gain de facto control over the territory they lay claim to, but fail to achieve international recognition. The author proposes that, in order to clear up this confusion, recognized but ineffectual states ought to be referred as 'failed states', while the term 'quasi-states' ought to be reserved for unrecognized, de facto states. Since quasi-states are not supported by international recognition, they must be sustained by something else. In contrast to researchers who maintain that the majority of these quasi-states are quite strong, this article argues that their modal tendency is weak economy and weak state structures. The main reasons why these states nevertheless have not collapsed seem to be that they have managed to build up internal support from the local population through propaganda and identity-building; channel a disproportionately large part of their meager resources into military defense; enjoy the support of a strong patron; and, in most cases, have seceded from a state that is itself very weak.

Introduction

Scattered around the world are a number of states and statelets that have declared independence but are not recognized by other states. These political entities are referred to by various names: 'de facto states', 'unrecognized states', 'para-states', 'pseudo-states', and 'quasi-states'. Since their existence is not supported by international recognition, they must be sustained by something else. In contrast to researchers who maintain that the majority of these quasi-states are quite strong, this article argues that their modal tendency is weak economy and weak state structures. The main reasons why these states nevertheless have not collapsed

seem to be that they have managed to build up internal support from the local population through propaganda and identity-building; channel a disproportionately large part of their meager resources into military defense; and enjoy the support of a strong patron.

None of these circumstances, however, is likely to secure the unrecognized quasi-states lasting life. Unless they achieve international recognition or are united with their patron state – both of which in most cases are unlikely outcomes – they will eventually be reabsorbed into the parent state or agree to an autonomous status within the parent state in a federal arrangement. This last outcome is the preferred option of the international community.

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There Are Quasi-States and Quasi-States

The international system is made up of (nation-)states. Territorial-political entities such as colonies, protectorates, mandates, and other kinds of overseas territories that covered so much of the earth in earlier centuries have, for all practical purposes, disappeared. Contemporary nation-states enjoy double sovereignty: internally, vis-à-vis their own citizens, and externally, vis-à-vis other states. Internally, state authorities have a monopoly on collecting taxes from the inhabitants of the country and, in return, provide basic services to the population, such as welfare and security; externally, they are recognized as the sole representative of the nation in international fora.

However, two types of territorial-political entities do not fit this basic description of the nation-state in today's world. Some would-be states lack internal sovereignty: in these cases, the state authorities, while internationally recognized as the sole representative of the state, nevertheless fail to fulfill the basic tasks required of them with regard to provision of services to and protection of their citizens. In other cases, the state as such is not accepted by the international community as legitimate. This denial is not based on any assessment of their internal sovereignty, which may or may not be deficient. The reason, instead, is that the would-be state has seceded from a recognized state that does not accept this loss of territory. Such secessionist states can be said to lack external sovereignty.

It is immediately clear that in important respects these two deviations from the normal nation-state model are very different. Even so, these two phenomena are often described with the same appellation: *quasi-states*. Such terminological confusion is clearly undesirable and ought to be eliminated. In this article, however, I will make use of this ter-

minological coincidence to highlight the particularity of unrecognized quasi-states by pointing out the similarities and differences with the other type of quasi-states.

Quasi-States as States with External Sovereignty Only

In his seminal book *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, Jackson (1993) pointed out that most European colonies in Africa that achieved independence in the 1950s and 1960s were ill prepared for sovereign statehood. They had been ruled like British counties or French *départements* and lacked even the most basic infrastructure of government. They had no elites with sufficient professional training and social responsibility to take over the reins of the state.

In the past, states were created through war and diplomacy, and states that could not fend for themselves disintegrated and disappeared from the map. The post-colonial states, however, continue to exist even in the absence of the basic qualities that in the past were deemed indispensable for statehood. The post-World War II state system extends recognition to states on a purely formal basis. The result has been the emergence of a qualitatively new type of state, the *quasi-state*, Jackson claimed. Quasi-states are kept from collapsing by leaning on an external scaffolding of international recognition, rather than by any internal structure of institutions and laws. Being protected by international law against external intrusions, quasi-states possess only *external* or *negative* sovereignty.

State leaders of such quasi-states often receive the bulk of their revenues not from the taxation of their own population but from international donors and through the exploitation of the country's exportable natural resources. Most of the money finds its way into the pockets of the power-holders and is not invested in projects to strengthen the

state or improve conditions for the population. The leaders of the quasi-state do not depend on support from below in order to survive in office. Instead, competing elites vie with each other for control of the 'state' – or rather for the right to present themselves abroad as the representatives of this virtually non-existent entity, since this badge carries with it the possibility of manipulating external donors and extracting internal resources.

Jackson's book triggered a wide debate on the nature of post-colonial states. He has been criticized for tarring all Third World countries with the same brush (see e.g. Haynes, 1994), and clearly, there are vast differences in state capacity and state structure between them. Even so, Jackson alerted us to an important and serious problem in international relations. While his book was highly influential, his key terminology was unfortunate and failed to establish itself. It is still being used in some specialized academic literature, but in journalism and political jargon other terms are used to describe the same or virtually the same phenomena as what Jackson referred to as quasi-states. Most commonly used is 'failed states',¹ while some authors write about 'weak states' and 'shadow states' to describe states that lack internal sovereignty (e.g. Beissinger & Young, 2002).

At the same time, we can note that the term 'quasi-state' is increasingly used about the opposite phenomenon of less-than-real statehood: about states that lack international recognition. Lapidus (2002: 341), for instance, writes that politically and militarily frozen conflicts in post-Soviet Eurasia 'have resulted in the creation of several quasi-states [that have] de facto control over their own territory but are unlikely to be recognized by the international community'. Numerous other examples of a similar use of the term could be cited (Baev, 1998; Bridge, 2004; Cornell, 2003).

¹ A Google search (May 2005) gave 120,000 hits for 'failed states' and only 6,200 for 'quasi-states'.

To be sure, 'quasi-states' is not the only term used about states that wish for but are denied a seat in the UN General Assembly. Some authors prefer the term 'de facto states', others 'unrecognized states', 'para-states', or 'pseudo-states' (Pegg, 1998; Lynch, 2002; King, 2001; Kolossov & O'Loughlin, 1999). Some of these terms are not particularly felicitous. For instance, as *pseudos* means 'a lie' in Greek, the term 'pseudo-states' seems to imply an unnecessary value judgment. When I in this article stick to the term 'quasi-states' for states without external sovereignty, it is for two reasons: first, it underscores – in spite of the significant differences – some striking similarities between the two types of quasi-states, those lacking internal sovereignty and those lacking international recognition. Both categories are located at the margins of the international system of states and challenge basic assumptions of this system. Furthermore, they are quite often found on the same territory and relate to each other as parent state and secessionist region. Entities of both kinds tend to be hot spots in international politics. Finally, there are strong reasons to believe that, if any of the unrecognized quasi-states of today's world should succeed in achieving international recognition, most of them will end up not as 'normal' or fully fledged states but instead transmute into recognized quasi-states of the Jacksonian variety.

Only by pointing out the confusion in the use of the term quasi-states is it possible to eliminate it. In line with current trends in both journalism and research literature, I propose that Jacksonian-type quasi-states are henceforth referred to as 'failed states' while the term quasi-states is reserved for unrecognized states only.

Quasi-States: A Brief Survey

To be classified as a quasi-state in this article, a political entity must fulfill three criteria. Its leadership must be in control of (most of)

the territory it lays claim to, and it must have sought but not achieved international recognition as an independent state. Finally, to eliminate a whole spate of ephemeral political contraptions, I exclude those that have persisted in this state of non-recognition for less than two years.

Not so many entities fulfill all of these criteria. Even so, we find, in the post-World War II period, quasi-states in Europe, Asia, and Africa; some of them have been eliminated, while others are still with us. Since the end of the Cold War, there has clearly been a higher than average incidence of such entities in the former Soviet Union and in former Yugoslavia – that is, in two recently disintegrated multinational communist federations. In the former Soviet republic of Moldova, we find the Dniester Moldovan Republic (DMR); and in Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). Georgia has the dubious distinction of being the home of two quasi-states: Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Republika Srpska in Bosnia was a quasi-state until it was recognized as an entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina after the signing of the Dayton agreement in 1995. In the same year, Republika Srpska Krajina in eastern Croatia, established in 1991, could be removed from the inventory of quasi-states in former Yugoslavia when it was overrun by Croatian forces under Operation Storm.

On the border between Europe and Asia, there is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Africa has had at least four quasi-states since decolonization, one of which (Eritrea) has achieved international recognition, while two (Katanga 1960–63 and Biafra 1967–70) have been eliminated, and one (Somaliland) continues as an unrecognized entity. In Sri Lanka, we find another such state, Tamil Eelam, proclaimed by the LTTE (the ‘Tamil Tigers’) in 1977.

In addition to these clearcut cases, there

are a number of borderline cases where the political entity in question fulfills wholly or partially some but not all of the three criteria listed above. When the Spanish colonial power withdrew from West Sahara in 1976, the Polisario liberation movement established the Saharan Democratic Arab Republic, but controls today less than one-third of the territory of West Sahara. The rest is under the control of Morocco. An independent Chechen republic of Ichkeria was proclaimed in 1990, but controls today only part of the countryside in this Russian republic, mostly in the high mountain valleys. Only in the period between the first and the second Chechen wars (1996–99) may Chechnya be said to have enjoyed ‘real quasi-statehood’, if such an oxymoron may be allowed.

Kosovo enjoys today *de facto* independence from its parent state Serbia, and all Albanian Kosovar political parties aim for international recognition for the region. Officially, however, the Assembly of Kosovo has not proclaimed independence. Between the first and second Gulf Wars, Kurdish-populated Northern Iraq enjoyed a similar *de facto* independence without officially declaring independence. Finally, Taiwan, recognized by 28 countries, can be said to be in a category of its own and occupy an intermediate position between a recognized state and a quasi-state.

In this article, I do not address the question of how or under what conditions quasi-states emerge. A serious inquiry into that issue would require systematic comparisons between quasi-states and disgruntled regions that, under conditions similar to the ones we find in a quasi-state, nevertheless failed to proclaim independence and did not develop quasi-statehood. To identify these never-to-become quasi-states would be a well-nigh impossible task. Instead, what I will do below is to take the existence of quasi-states as the starting point and ask how and

why they survive and why some survive longer than others.

In the modern world, the sanctions against encroachment on the territorial integrity of all recognized states are so powerful that even the weakest are guaranteed a continued life. In the anarchic international system, states play hardball for power and influence, but they do not try to eliminate each other. Iraq's botched attempt to gobble up Kuwait in 1990 is just the example that proves the rule.

But this begs the question: if international recognition is the magic trick that keeps weak states from sinking into non-existence in the modern world, how can unrecognized quasi-states exist without it? As we shall see, the answer cannot be state strength, since many of these unrecognized quasi-states are, in fact, quite weak by any standard.

Previous Research

Little attention has been paid to unrecognized quasi-states. My attempt to find theoretical or comparative literature on these unruly political creatures yielded a meager catch. Only one monograph and a smattering of specialized articles dealing with unrecognized quasi-states fit the bill. Among them, Pegg, in his otherwise quite comprehensive study *International Society and the de Facto State* (1998), virtually ignores the post-Soviet space, while articles by Kolossov & O'Loughlin, King, and Lynch focus almost exclusively on quasi-states in the post-Soviet space. This geographical difference in their scholarly attention often leads them towards diverging conclusions, but on one crucial point all but one of them agree: unrecognized quasi-states are remarkably robust, state-like entities (Pegg, 1998: 28; Kolossov & O'Loughlin, 1999: 167). King (2001: 525) regards most of the quasi-states on the territory of the former Soviet Union as 'sur-

prisingly strong'. 'The territorial separatists of the 1990s have become state builders in the early 2000s, creating de facto countries whose ability to field armies, control their own territory, educate their children, and maintain local economies is about as well developed as that of the recognized states of which they are still notionally a part'. This ability of post-Soviet ethnic separatists to build reasonably well-functioning states is seen by King as a crucial reason behind their survival.

In contrast to these views, Lynch (2002: 841) sees the de facto states as failing: 'They have the institutional fixtures of statehood, but they are not able to provide for its substance.' Fairbanks (2002: 141) shares this view and expresses the failure of quasi-states in ever stronger terms as 'the weakest of the weak'.

Evaluations of strength and weakness are inevitably relative, and the concepts of 'state strength' and 'state weakness' must be defined in order to be operationalized. A working definition of strong states is provided by Nodia (2002: 415) as 'states that are capable of carrying out functions that they themselves claim and that they are reasonably expected by their populations to carry out'. Building on Nodia's definition, Young (2002: 446) defines the opposite phenomenon of a 'weak state' as a state that 'meets minimum Weberian definitions of institutions of rule and is able to carry out some basic functions but is far from performing according to domestic and international expectations of a "normal" state'.

Using these definitions, I will argue that the modal tendency of quasi-states is deficient state-building. Furthermore, as I explain below, there are strong structural reasons why this should be the case. Perhaps only a few quasi-states may be counted among 'the weakest of the weak', as Fairbanks calls them, but in very few of them is

successful state-building what keeps them from collapsing. This means that we must look elsewhere for an answer to my initial question: how are quasi-states sustained?

Undermining Sustainability by Deficient State-Building

A few quasi-states operate reasonably well. In addition to the extreme success story of Taiwan and the relatively well-functioning Kurdish-dominated northern part of Iraq, both of them borderline cases, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is performing relatively well. But also, TRNC has serious economic problems, and Greek Cypriots have a per capita income that is three to four times as high as that of the citizens of TRNC.

Some quasi-states have been given rather conflicting assessments. Somaliland has been characterized both as having 'comparatively strong democratic credentials and functional effectiveness' (Pegg, 1998: 11) and as 'a pirate state based on criminal-terrorist activities' (Kolossoff & O'Loughlin, 1999: 155). Also with regard to DMR, opinions vary widely. Kolossoff & O'Loughlin (1999: 167) claim that 'Eight years after the declaration of sovereignty, [DMR] has all the attributes of a normal state, except for international recognition.' Other observers, however, point out that the Dniester republic has a thoroughly criminalized economy, based on smuggling and the fake brand industry. The republic has also been accused of being a free haven for fugitive gangsters and former KGB officials in hiding (see King, 2001; Duplain, 1995: 13).

State weakness may be the result of deficient capabilities or deficient will. The economic resources of most quasi-states are clearly small. Kosovo was the poorest region in Tito's Yugoslavia, and Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and South Ossetia were all very backward regions in the Soviet Union. The situation of Abkhazia and the DMR is different. In the Soviet period, both

of these regions fared better than most other parts of their respective parent republics, Georgia and Moldova. Srpska Krajina occupied an intermediate position: it included very backward regions, in Krajina proper, as well as some rather well-to-do, oil-rich regions in eastern Slavonia. In Africa, Biafra was a resource-rich region that failed to establish itself as an independent state – in spite of substantial Western sympathy – while poverty-stricken and unknown Somaliland still has not been reunited with its challenger state, Somalia.

At the same time, state weakness is often a result not only of few resources but also of bad policies and lack of leadership. Tishkov (2004) describes Chechnya between the first and the second Chechen wars as a society on the brink of complete anarchy. The state institutions were pure fiction, communications were erratic at best, schools closed, stores empty, and production had ground to a halt. The only thriving businesses were smuggling, looting, and hostage-taking. People were killed for a trifle, or for no reason at all, and there was no one to deter the perpetrators.

Chechnya may be an extreme case, and Tishkov's picture may be painted in excessively dark colors. Even so, reports from other quasi-states are often almost as bleak. In Abkhazia, Lynch (2002: 836) reports, the government 'maintains the daily operations of legislative, executive and judicial institutions, but performs very few services for the population. . . . Moreover the state is unable to provide for law and order across its claimed territory'. In the NKR, the inhabitants eke out a living by smuggling, drug-trafficking, and selling timber to Iran and other countries. Living conditions in South Ossetia are just as bad, if not worse. Kosovo has been characterized as a place with 'no rule of law, no ethnic tolerance, no human rights. Not even an economy, except foreign aid and organized crime' (Pascali, 2001).

There are several reasons why quasi-states fail to develop well-ordered economies. One is war damage. Secession has normally been won through a civil war that was fought mostly or entirely on the territory of the quasi-state. The length and ferocity of these wars have varied, but often they led to the destruction of entire villages and even towns. Another reason is what Pegg (1998: 43) has called 'the economic cost of non-recognition'. Foreign firms are wary of investing in a quasi-state since legal contracts might not be internationally binding there. Investors may also be afraid of offending the parent state, lest they be barred from trade with its normally larger market.

While status as a quasi-state puts a damper on normal legal trade with the outside world, it encourages *illegal* business. As already indicated, virtually all quasi-states have a large shadow economy, often with intimate links to top state leaders. Local officials and authorities profit from this business through cuts and kickbacks, but the quasi-state as such derives no benefit from it. The 'revenue' collected in this way goes into private pockets and not to the state exchequer. While this phenomenon is of course present in other countries, including some in the Western world, certain circumstances conspire to aggravate the problem in quasi-states. One is the civil war that in most cases preceded the establishment of the quasi-state. In times of war, not only are buildings destroyed, but also civil and legal structures are disrupted and illegal activities easily go unchecked. As Eide (1999) has remarked with regard to Kosovo, 'While wars, blockades and exceptional situations are devastating for the majority, they create breeding ground for certain types of economic activity that proves particularly effective in the absence of order. The people that benefit from such activities see few reasons to support the re-establishment of effective public control.'

If the war experience were the only problem, criminal activity would conceivably gradually diminish after peace, but certain qualities inherent in quasi-states are conducive to a criminalization of the economy, irrespective of the war factor. Since these states are not recognized, no international conventions can be applied, and no effective monitoring by international organizations is possible. The resulting lack of transparency in these states is extremely attractive for criminal and other shady businesses. As de Waal (2003: 246) has argued with regard to the quasi-state he has studied, 'internationally, Nagorny Karabakh remained as much an outlaw as Chechnya. None of its laws or institutions were valid outside its own borders, and no foreign diplomats, apart from peace negotiators, set foot there. That was virtually an invitation to become a rogue state' (see also Cornell, 2003: 218).

Circumstances Sustaining Quasi-States

Most quasi-states, then, lack not only international recognition but also strong state structures, and yet they exist. At least five factors can be identified that contribute to the viability of unrecognized quasi-states: symbolic nation-building; militarization of society; the weakness of the parent state; support from an external patron; and lack of involvement on the part of the international community. The sections below present these factors separately and then discuss how alterations in the character and the relative weight of each of them may lead to different ends to quasi-states.

Nation-Building

A distinction can be made between state-building and nation-building. State-building, as discussed above, pertains to the institutional, economic, and military groundwork of functional states, the 'hard'

aspects of state construction, as it were. Nation-building, on the other hand, concerns the 'soft' aspects of state consolidation, such as the development of a common national identity among the inhabitants through symbols, propaganda, history writing, and the cultivation and 'invention' of traditions and national customs. Nationhood and national identity are not inherent qualities of a state's population, but are developed and sustained through nation-building.

All nations in today's world are proclaimed as nation-states. Rightly or wrongly, state leaders invariably claim to represent their 'nation'. In a similar way, the leaders of quasi-states speak on behalf of the Ossetian nation, the Somaliland people, the people of Dniestria, and so on. Like other states, they strenuously try to foster a sense of common identity and destiny among the inhabitants of the territory they control. Through nation-building, the quasi-state leaders seek to muster backing from within, from the local population, to create or prop up its internal sovereignty.

Normally, successful nation-building to a large degree depends upon successful state-building. Through nation-building, the state authorities are, as it were, asking the population to attach their allegiance to this particular state by identifying with it. Before the citizens decide to do so, they are prone to ask, 'What do I get in return?' The standard answer to that question is 'security and welfare services'. A state that cannot deliver the basic services expected of it will find it much harder to win the loyalty of its denizens than a state that can. Even so, I will argue that, even in the absence of effective state-building, most quasi-states have succeeded reasonably well in their nation-building efforts. The available evidence suggests that the population of most quasi-states shares a high degree of common identity as a nation. There are mainly three reasons for this.

First, quasi-state nation-builders can draw upon the memory of the civil war through which the quasi-state was established. The fact that all quasi-states – by continuing to exist – can claim to have won the civil war increases the possibilities of exploiting war memories for nation-building purposes. War memorials are constructed and days of victory instituted. DMR has published a number of booklets and brochures on the 1992 war, including a memorial book with pictures and names of all 457 Dniestrans who died (*Kniga Pamiati . . .*, 1995). Nagorno-Karabakh and other quasi-states have introduced a series of medals and orders for valor and service to the Fatherland (NKR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005).

Second, quasi-state authorities can cultivate the image of the 'common external enemy'. Even if the civil war is a thing of the past, the challenger state – the parent state – continues to exist and to claim jurisdiction over the breakaway region. Like other states, many quasi-states are riven by strong regional, ideological, and other divisions, but the image of the common external enemy serves as a powerful motor for national unification. In this way, the challenger states, in spite of themselves, contribute to the consolidation of nations they deny the existence of.²

Finally, the population of the quasi-state has been homogenized through population exchanges and ethnic cleansing that preceded or accompanied the secession. The part of the population that sympathized with the parent state for ideological reasons or identified with it on ethnic grounds has in many cases been induced to flee, often with quite coercive methods. Conversely, many supporters of the secessionist cause who formerly lived outside the breakaway region will have taken up residence in the unrecognized quasi-state. Also,

² Some are willing to concede that the population of the breakaway area represents a regional or ethnic subgroup but not a distinct and separate nation.

this reverse population movement is often the result of forced expulsions. In this way, Nagorno-Karabakh was cleansed of virtually its entire Azeri population in 1988–91, while ethnic Armenians living in other parts of Azerbaijan fled to Armenia en masse. Prior to the 1974 war, Turkish Cypriots had been living scattered around the entire island of Cyprus, while the territory of what is now TRNC had a Greek-Cypriot majority. The present population pattern, then, with a virtually 100% Turkish-populated Northern Cyprus, has been achieved through fear-induced flights in both directions.

In some instances, with DMR as the best example, a separate identity for the population of the rebellious region has been achieved without any ethnic cleansing. Ethnic Moldovans make up roughly 40% of DMR's population, and while many of them sympathize with the Chisinau regime, a large number clearly share in the common supra-ethnic Dniester identity fostered by the Tiraspol leadership. This identity is based not on ethnicity, but on a common language – Russian – a separate history, and a certain Soviet nostalgia (Kolstø & Malgin, 1998).

All quasi-states have adopted a state flag, a national anthem, a state coat of arms, new national holidays, and other symbolic attributes of statehood. They also build museums, erect statues, rename streets, and frequently create a cult of personality around their leader in order to inculcate in the population a sense of common past and common allegiance to the same state. All states, both old and new, engage in such symbolic nation-building, but for newly established states – quasi-states as well as recognized states – such endeavors are particularly important. The more tenuous the claim to separate nationhood, the more effort and ingenuity the state authorities must employ to convince the population of its reality (Kolstø, 2000).

There are no objective criteria that can be

applied to all quasi-states by which one may assess to what degree their nation-building is a success or failure. Many quasi-states have an authoritarian regime in which election results must be treated with great care as indicators of popular attitudes. Through various methods, however, popular support for the quasi-state's statehood may nevertheless be gauged. An opinion poll in DMR in 1998 showed that residents in the Tiraspol-controlled region of Moldova did indeed dissociate themselves from the Moldovan nation-building project and to a large degree identified with the DMR state (Kolstø, 2002: 31–70). Such data will always be subject to interpretation, and those who dispute them may claim that the respondents have been coerced by local authorities or manipulated by secessionist propaganda. (I note, however, that if people support the state as a result of propaganda, this simply means that nation-building efforts are bearing fruit – that the propaganda is effective.)

Military Power

'Soft power' in the shape of internal support from the population, however, is not enough to secure quasi-states' continued existence. The quasi-states were created by military means and must be maintained by the same means. As political entities that are not protected by the international system of mutual recognition, they are thrown back into the Hobbesian jungle, and more than other states they must rely on brute force in order to survive. Their armed forces, however, do not have to be very large. King (2001: 535) has estimated the armed forces of the quasi-states of the former Soviet Union to be 15,000 to 20,000 in Nagorno-Karabakh; 5,000 to 10,000 in DMR; 2,000 in South Ossetia; and 5,000 in Abkhazia. Compared to the size of the national army in most states, these are not large numbers, but relative to the size of the total population in the statelet, they are considerable.

For the quasi-states, the need for a strong military capability means that they must devote a disproportionately large part of the resources of the state to defense of the country. This leaves fewer resources for civilian purposes and contributes to the weak development of welfare, educational facilities, and the building of infrastructure. Even if the authorities in quasi-states have the will to develop strong civilian state structures – and, as argued above, in many cases there is reason to suspect that this will is quite weak – they would normally not have the capacity for it.

The crucial role of the armed forces for the survival of the quasi-states further leads to a militarization of society. In many quasi-states, military leaders have been able to transform their influence into political and economic power. In Kosovo, former KLA officers today control shady business structures as well as local political bodies (Pascali, 2001). Another example is DMR. For many years, the strongman of DMR was the interior minister, Vadim Shevtsov, alias Antiuf'ev, a former KGB general who is wanted in Latvia for his activities during Latvia's liberation struggle (Bowers, 1994: 562). In NKR, a certain Samvel Babayan made a name for himself during the war with Azerbaijan and was skyrocketed into the position of Minister of Defense. He used that position to line his pockets and terrorize the local population until he fell out with the president of the quasi-state and was arrested in March 2000 (de Waal, 2003: 241–243).

The Weakness of the Parent State

Military strength and military weakness are of course relative measures. It is enough for the quasi-state to be sufficiently strong to keep at bay the parent state from which it has seceded. And in fact, the parent state of most quasi-states is a weak state, in political and institutional as well as in military terms.

Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova were not only economically and politically weak in the first years after independence, but also riven by severe internal conflicts. Moldovans were deeply divided on the issue of unification with Romania, while Azerbaijan went through several coups d'état and regime changes before Geidar Aliev managed to install himself, and later his son, in power. Georgia fared worst of all, as the country in 1992 descended into a civil war in which Georgians confronted Georgians, a war that ran partly parallel with the military campaigns against the separatists. In the early to mid-1990s, Georgia clearly qualified as 'failed state' (Nodia, 2002).

To be sure, not all Soviet successor states were equally weak. The largest by far, Russia, was clearly in a much better position to defend its territory, although the economic transition also hit this country hard. Russia could take over the organs of administration of the central Soviet state, as well as the lion's share of the former Soviet Army units and their equipment. Still, even Russia has not been able to establish full control over all parts of its breakaway region, Chechnya.

Like the Soviet quasi-states, Katanga was proclaimed when its parent state, Congo, had just been established. The former colonial power, Belgium, was notorious for its failure to build up any infrastructure or state apparatus, or to provide for the education of an indigenous elite capable of taking over after independence. The two parent states on Africa's Horn are likewise extremely weak. Somalia was and still is a paradigmatic case of a failed state, with no functioning state authorities, while Ethiopia in 1991 was defeated on the battlefield by the Eritrean separatists.

As long as the parent state is mired in political chaos and economic misery, it is not only prevented from launching a new war to recapture the lost territory but also fails to attract the population of the breakaway

region. Even those citizens of the quasi-state who are thoroughly disgusted with their self-proclaimed leaders have few reasons to wish for reunification with a miserable parent state.

External Patron

However, not all parent states are as weak as the ones described above. Some quasi-states must defend themselves against states with a well-functioning state apparatus, a solid economy, and good defense capabilities. Most quasi-states, even those that face weak parent states, are therefore dependent upon support from an external patron. Such a patron may be said to fulfill the same role as the international community does vis-à-vis failed states. In such cases, the role of international society as guarantor of continued existence for weak states has been privatized, as it were.

With a powerful patron, a quasi-state may be able to hold out even against a relatively strong challenger state. Taiwan is a strong state for its size, not only economically, but also militarily. Like most other quasi-states, Taiwan was established when the parent state, the People's Republic of China, was weak, torn apart by a protracted civil war. Today, however, China is a formidable military power that could (and no doubt would) overrun Taiwan were it not for Taiwan's external patron, the United States.

The Dniester Republic, Ossetia, and Abkhazia all enjoy the support of Russia, while Northern Cyprus has another powerful patron, Turkey. In the post-Soviet cases, this patronage is unofficial: Russia has not recognized any of its client states, but without the involvement of the Russian Fourteenth Army in the Moldovan civil war in 1992, the Dniester statelet would most probably have disappeared from the map. Also, the Russian military played a crucial role in the wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In the case of the TRNC, the

patronage has been quite open and explicit: Turkey has been the only country in the world to extend official recognition to its Cypriot offspring republic and also supplies most of its military defense.

A major reason why Republika Srpska Krajina and Republika Srpska in Bosnia managed to break away from Croatia and Bosnia, respectively, was surreptitious military support from the Yugoslav army and Serbian authorities. Armenia, the patron state of Nagorno-Karabakh, is itself a weak state with a tottering economy. Even so, it is the lifeline to Armenia that keeps Nagorno-Karabakh ticking. A clear illustration of the intimate links between the two states is the fact that the current president of Armenia, Robert Kocharian, hails from Nagorno-Karabakh and has previously been its president. Every year, Armenia provides NKR with an interstate loan that covers 75–80% of its budget (Lynch, 2002: 847). Nonetheless, Armenia has not officially recognized the political independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Some observers surmise that the quasi-states serve as political instruments which the patron states use to put pressure on the parent states and, generally, to project power into the region. No doubt, patron states often do have such designs, but experience has time and again shown that most quasi-states are not pliant clients doing their master's bidding. The leadership of DMR, for instance, openly supported the political enemies of President Yeltsin during the 1993 power struggle in Moscow (Socor, 1993). Quasi-states have agendas of their own and have occasionally even been able to wag the dog, as when NKR in 1998 was instrumental in toppling president Levon Ter-Petrossian in Armenia, whom they regarded as too accommodating towards Azerbaijani demands (de Waal, 2003: 256–261). Even so, for most quasi-states, the support from an external patron is crucially important, and their

survival chances would be drastically reduced should it be withdrawn.

The Role of the International Community

International organizations such as the UN, OSCE, and NATO have played several roles in the conflicts between quasi-states and their parent states. Denying the quasi-states entrance into the international state system has frustrated their aspirations to graduate into 'real' statehood. At the same time, such organizations have, in a few instances, functioned as a collective external patron of a quasi-state. Finally, these organizations have engaged in negotiations and peacekeeping missions in quasi-state conflicts. While the international community (IC) is clearly in favor of peaceful, negotiated settlements to these conflicts, it seems fair to conclude that its involvement, in most instances, has had a quite different effect and inadvertently contributed to the prolonged existence of the quasi-states.

The two cases where international organizations may be said to have functioned as the external patron of a quasi-state are Kosovo and the Kurdish-controlled territories in Northern Iraq between the first and second Gulf wars. The degree of active involvement in these cases differs. In Northern Iraq, it was a matter of denying the parent state the possibility of recapturing control of the area while leaving administration in the hands of the local population. In Kosovo, by contrast, the United Nations and NATO through KFOR and UNMIK have virtually taken over the military defense as well as direct oversight of the civilian administration. Kosovo is today, for all practical purposes, run as an international protectorate.

More commonly, international organizations have engaged in quasi-state conflicts by offering their good services as facilitator and arbiter at the negotiating table. Typical

cases are the OSCE-sponsored negotiations in the DMR conflict, the so-called Minsk process to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – also OSCE-sponsored – and the UN-facilitated negotiations for Cyprus. Sometimes, such negotiation efforts have been accompanied by a deployment of peacekeeping forces.

The problem with the involvement of the IC in quasi-state conflicts is indecision and inconsistency. The lack of vigor and determination in these efforts clearly reflects the low priority these conflicts have in Western capitals. This has made it possible for regional actors with a stronger interest in the conflict to interfere in the process and pursue their own agendas. This happened, for instance, when Russia – a member of the Minsk group – in 1994 launched its own parallel initiative in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, highjacked the negotiations, and imposed a lasting ceasefire – but no peace – on its own terms (de Waal, 2003: 237–240; Baev, 1998).

Rather than resolve conflicts, stalled negotiations freeze them and perpetuate the status quo. In this way, they contribute to the prolonged existence of the quasi-states. The same may be said about most peacekeeping missions. The party most likely to renew hostilities in these conflicts is the parent state, since it wants to regain lost territory. The unrecognized quasi-state is normally satisfied with holding on to the territory it has control over. For these reasons, the international peacekeepers deployed between the warring parties for all practical purposes function as additional border guard units for the quasi-state, behind which it may pursue its nation-building and other activities.

Possible Ends to Quasi-States

The combination of factors identified in the article – nation-building, military power, the weakness of the parent state, support from an

external patron, and the tepid engagement of the IC – have secured some quasi-states an impressive longevity. Even so, they are regarded as essentially transient phenomena, and it is generally expected that they will sooner or later disappear. Theoretically, this may happen in one of four ways: they may be included into the external patron state; be reabsorbed into the parent state; unite with the parent state in a federal arrangement; or achieve international recognition as an independent state.

The likelihood that one or another of these four outcomes will come to pass will increase or decrease with changes in the political climate. It depends, to a large extent, upon shifts and developments in the factors that now sustain the quasi-states. Thus, for instance, a quasi-state may increase its chances of achieving political recognition if it manages to build strong state structures and eliminate the most blatant criminal activities on its territory. Conversely, a parent state may be able to reabsorb the secessionist territory by force if it manages to muster a strong army, or by peaceful means if it succeeds in building effective state structures and a better economy than the quasi-state, thus holding out a promise of a higher standard of living for the quasi-state population in case of reunification.

The chances for negotiated federal settlements will improve should the international society decide to play a more active role in any of these conflicts, especially if the involvement is backed by credible threats of economic and/or military sanctions against non-compliant parties. The likelihood of this outcome will increase further if the external patron is persuaded to drop or reduce its patronage of the quasi-state.

Any settlement of a quasi-state conflict will have repercussions for the remaining cases. If a parent state manages to regain control over a lost territory by military means, this will obviously encourage other

state leaders to try the same solution. Conversely, the granting of international recognition to one quasi-state, even if presented as an 'exceptional case', will embolden other quasi-state leaders and make them even less amenable to compromise solutions than before. Below, these four possible scenarios will be discussed in the order in which they, in my judgment, represent probable outcomes to these conflicts, starting with the least likely ones.

Inclusion into the External Patron State

While political leaders in both Nagorno-Karabakh and Northern Cyprus, as well as in their respective patron states, aver that unification is not what they are aiming for, it seems reasonably clear that, for these quasi-state leaders, this represents the optimal solution. The inhabitants of Abkhazia and South Ossetia already enjoy a special visa regime with Russia not granted to citizens of their parent state, Georgia, and, for political leaders in South Ossetia, inclusion into the Russian Federation is obviously what they hope for. Also, certain groups in the DMR are pushing for unification with Russia, even though this quasi-state does not have a common border with Russia. They point to the Kaliningrad oblast as a precedent for such exclave status,³ but this argument is not likely to receive wide support, either in Russia or in the Western world. So far, there are no examples of successful inclusion into the external patron state, unless we count Nagorno-Karabakh as such a case. The fact that even in Nagorno-Karabakh the de facto inclusion is not officially acknowledged is an indication of the weak support this solution enjoys internationally. The NKR case will not influence the thinking and priorities in other states.

³ Author's interviews with DMR parliament deputy speaker Anna Volkova and DMR 'foreign minister' Valery Litskai, in Tiraspol, May 1992 and May 1995.

Full Independence

Full independence and international recognition clearly remain the ultimate goal for most secessionist groups. However, in the post-World War II period, the unwritten rules of international relations have contained extremely strong restrictions against the creation of new states (Österud, 1997). While the principle of the self-determination of peoples is enshrined in the UN Charter, this right is interpreted as pertaining to the entire population of a state only, not to any of its territorial or cultural subgroups. It gives the citizens a right to elect their own state leaders, but not to opt out of the state altogether. The community of recognized states has thus, in principle, been closed at both ends. While no members are thrown out, the entrance gate has been strictly guarded and new applicants are routinely turned away.

To be sure, this restrictive policy has not prevented a veritable explosion of the membership of the United Nations – from the original 51 signatory states to its present 191 members. Most of the new entrants were admitted in one of two periods: between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, a host of former colonies in Africa and Asia were granted membership of the UN, and, in the 1990s, the same happened to former republics of the three dissolved communist federations in Europe and Central Asia.

All 15 republics in the USSR had a constitutional right to secede, and, in 1991, the Soviet republics were only exercising a right granted to them by the communist leaders themselves, it was argued. In addition, the dissolution was basically peaceful: even if the Soviet leadership under Mikhail Gorbachev opposed state dissolution, the Soviet republics granted each other mutual recognition. In the Yugoslav case, the argument was slightly different. In the summer of 1992, the Badinter Arbitration Commission presented a report that concluded that the

Yugoslav state was already ‘in the process of dissolution’ (Welhengama, 2000: 250). This view was accepted by the EU and the UN, and, on that basis, the former Yugoslav republics were recognized one by one.

Today’s quasi-state leaders draw parallels to both these periods of state creation in order to justify their cause. Depending on the circumstances, they present their independence struggle as one of decolonization and/or decommunization (see e.g. ‘Chechens Appeal . . .’, 2001; Armenian Center for National and International Studies, 1997). Like the former Soviet republics that today are independent states, most current quasi-states in post-Soviet Eurasia were also formerly federal units of the Soviet Union, but on a lower level. The IC, however, has so far refused to accept status as a former autonomous unit on a lower level in the Soviet or the Yugoslav state as legitimate ground for independent statehood.

Conceivably, the sympathies of the international community could change once again, as happened during decolonization and during the dissolution of communist multinational states, and allow for a third wave of entries into the international state-system. One possible scenario would be recognition of non-Islamicist secessionist regions in Muslim states, such as the Kurdish parts of Iraq, or – if the peace agreement in Khartoum collapses – to South Sudan, in order to use these regions as bridgeheads for ‘the civilized world’ in ‘the war against terror.’ Another, and perhaps more probable, scenario would be independence for Kosovo. In fall 2005, the UN Security Council decided to open negotiations on the future status of Kosovo, and, although the Contact Group⁴ has stated that full independence is

⁴ The ‘Contact Group’ includes the USA, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia and coordinates Kosovo policy with the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

out of the question, some observers nevertheless advocate some kind of 'qualified independence' as the only workable solution (Meurs & Weiss, 2005: 9).

If international recognition is extended to any of the world's current quasi-states, this will not automatically turn them into functioning, 'normal' states. As pointed out above, many quasi-states have an economy and institutional structures that strongly resemble those of failed states. There is every reason to believe that, if these states are granted international recognition simply as a reward for perseverance in the liberation struggle, or in sympathy with their sufferings at the hands of the challenger state, many of them will end up not as functioning or strong states, but instead as failed states. Unless recognition is followed up by massive financial support and strict monitoring for an extended period of time, they may all too easily come to repeat the unfortunate experience of former European colonies in Africa.

Reabsorption in the Parent State

Reabsorption happened to Katanga in 1965, Biafra in 1970, and Krajina in 1995. In the latter case, the Tadjman regime had quietly built up a strong army with offensive capacities and launched a surprise attack, Operation Storm. Western criticism of this operation was remarkably muted, in spite of the fact that it produced a fear-induced mass exodus of the local Serb population, similar in many ways to the flight of Palestinians from Israeli-controlled regions of Palestine in 1948.⁵ The subdued reaction to Operation Storm may encourage other parent states to attempt a military solution to their secession problem when they feel they are strong enough.

⁵ An important reason behind the Western reaction was vexation with the Serbs, caused by the massacres in Srebrenica two months earlier, that made any defeat for Serbs seem acceptable.

This suggests that two factors, in particular, will influence the likelihood of this scenario: the economic and political strength of the parent state and the reaction of the outside world. Should a parent state achieve both state consolidation and support from strong international actors, they may attempt this outcome.

Inclusion into the Parent State as a Separate Entity

A parent state that has used force to reabsorb a quasi-state may still accept a federated or confederate arrangement for the recovered territory. Having been (incompletely) reincorporated into the Russian state, Chechnya today enjoys the same republican status as other ethnically defined republics in the country, with the same formal rights and prerogatives under the Russian constitution.⁶

When reunification is the result of negotiated peaceful settlements, a federal solution is an even more probable outcome. In negotiations between a parent state and a break-away region, this solution is often, in principle, accepted by both parties, but many observers suspect that one or both parties are only pretending to accept a federal arrangement. In the cases of DMR, Abkhazia, and Northern Cyprus, the break-away regions have been accused of feigning support for a special-status-in-a-common-state solution as a smokescreen to create the false impression that they are engaged in real negotiations. While the separatist leaders regard the current unrecognized status of their state as inferior to full independence, they see it as clearly preferable to a status as merely an autonomous unit within another state. As King (2001: 55) has rhetorically asked, 'why be mayor of a small city if you can be president of a country? Why be

⁶ In practice, these rights have often been violated, for instance through centrally orchestrated fraudulent elections.

lieutenant in somebody else's army if you can be a general in your own?' It is, therefore, unlikely that movement in the direction of a negotiated federal solution will come from the quasi-state leaders. An impetus towards this outcome must come from the international community. Moreover, pressure must be put not only on the local parties but also on the external patron state.

In one instance in recent years, the IC has dramatically stepped up its involvement in the efforts to resolve a quasi-state conflict. In fall 2003, the UN, with direct involvement of General Secretary Kofi Annan, took an initiative for a voluntary unification between TRNC and the Greek-dominated part of the island. The Annan plan was linked to the EU enlargement process: a window of opportunity had opened up, it was hoped, as both Cyprus and Turkey eagerly wanted to join the European Union. Turkey reacted by forcing its client state TRNC into a more conciliatory position, but the plan nevertheless foundered in spring 2004, when it was voted down by the Greek Cypriots in a referendum. A serious problem with the plan was that it gave the Greek Cypriots a virtual veto right but few incentives to support it, since the Greek part of the island would be included in the EU even in the absence of reunification.⁷ Furthermore, during the final elaboration of the plan, a number of changes were made in the draft, to make it more acceptable to the Turkish side, that by the same token made it less palatable to the Greeks.⁸ The failure of the Annan plan was a major setback for international mediation and may discourage the IC from similar initiatives in the near future. Even so, it showed that external patron states, and through

them also their client states, may be nudged towards compromise positions, given the right inducements. As a kind of consolation prize for their support of the peace plan, Northern Cyprus has, after the referendum, been given several UN grants for development works and projects for cultural heritage preservation. Information about the UN sponsorship of these projects is displayed prominently in the landscape and leaves the paradoxical impression that this unrecognized quasi-state has received a UN quasi-recognition.

In another case from recent years, Republika Srpska was established as a separate 'entity' of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1995 Dayton settlement as a result of active international engagement. In this case, not the carrot but a huge stick – air bombing – was used to force the quasi-state leaders into pliability. Indicatively, in this case the solution was reached over the head of the quasi-state leaders themselves, by inviting only Slobodan Milosevic, the leader of the patron state, to the Dayton negotiations.

The Bosnian solution can hardly be called a success story, at least not yet. The Republika Srpska leaders obstruct as much cooperation and contact with the other entity of the Bosnian state, the Muslim-Croat federation, as they dare. Still, there are signs of a gradual normalization of the relationship between the two parts of the country.⁹

While the record is certainly mixed, a negotiated, federal settlement nevertheless is the solution that creates the lowest number of people who are so disgruntled that they will work actively to overturn it. In addition, the factors that militate against the alternative outcomes are clearly stronger. On balance, therefore, this compromise solution must be regarded as the most likely end to most unrecognized quasi-states.

⁷ Author's interview with Kudret Akay, adviser to the TRNC foreign minister, Lefkosia, November 2005.

⁸ Author's interview with Yiouli Taki, Greek activist for the Annan plan, Nicosia, November 2005. For a short description of the Annan plan, see PRIO (2003). (This booklet describes Annan 3, while the referendum was based on a later version, Annan 5.)

⁹ Author's interviews in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, May 2002 and November 2003.

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