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# Kosovo Effect

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Would Kosovo independence affect other conflicts across the globe? What would be the future international order as other disgruntled regions in different parts of the world aspire for independent status? The emerging scenario aftermath of the Kosovo independence in February 2008 has raised such issues. The ripple effect seems to have already felt in different parts of the world as the conflict zones such as Abkhazia in the Caucasus have reiterated their right to self-determination.

Two issues need to be looked seriously in the above context. First, whether federalism is still a plausible and workable framework for distinct units in a multi-ethnic, pluralistic society to work together? Or every distinct unit in a federation must enjoy the right to have self-determination at will?

This is a matter of common concern for all pluralistic countries, as the domino-effect of secession in societies like India, Russia, China can well be imagined in which the violence-ridden regions like Kashmir (India), Chechnya (Russia), Xinjiang (China) have already undergone violent turmoil.

Second, how can the differences between the Centre and unit be resolved amicably in a federation without pulling the relations in opposite direction beyond adjustable limits? Arend Lijphart's 'consociational model' can be considered a just device to bring different units on a platform to work under certain commonly agreed principles. Former Russian President Boris Yeltsin's attempt as reflected in the Union Treaty of 1992 somehow endeavoured to achieve this goal. But, it is true that there can not be any fixed formula as every situation has its own dynamics. As the theory of cultural relativism holds, it is not only precarious but also disastrous to apply a particular set of principles to resolve all the conflicts.

The Kosovo problem came to limelight since the Balkan crisis that gained momentum in the 1990s. The Milosevic regime's course might have exaggerated the crisis, but it is more power politics between regional and global powers that led to further aggravation of the situation. Russia's desire to maintain the unity of Serbia is not only characterised by its Slavic attachment to the region but also due to fear of ripple effect of independence to its neighbourhood. President Putin's statement "Kosovo is a terrible precedent, and it breaks up the entire system of international relations that existed for decades and even centuries" appears cogent as the spiralling effect of the emerging situation might affect the structure of international relations, if not properly balanced.

So far Kosovo has been recognised by few countries. Till the end of February only thirty states have recognized its independence. Countries like the US, UK, France, Germany and Turkey have supported the independence where as countries like Russia, China, Spain, Georgia, and Greece have opposed the move. Among the former Soviet republics, the Baltic States have expressed their support where as countries like Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have declared their opposition to recognize Serbia's breakaway region.

The sudden impact of Kosovo independence on the Caucasian region has already been felt as Abkhazia the breakaway of region of Georgia has demanded recognition of its independence. Georgia is afraid that any recognition of Kosovo independence may fuel similar sentiments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Similarly the Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian complained of international double standard, arguing "Granting independence to Kosovo,

the international community violated the legal norms but forgot Karabakh." It can be mentioned that both Armenia and Azerbaijan have conflicting interests in Nagorno-Karabakh and the developments in Kosovo would likely to be interpreted differently by both these countries.

Azerbaijan has already declared the independence of Kosovo 'illegal'. The Central Asian states like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have expressed opposition against the declaration of independence.

India too has expressed reservation over this issue as any recognition of independent Kosovo might encourage separatists in Kashmir to raise their demands more violently. This region in the past has witnessed much bloodshed and now it may prove difficult for India to risk siding with Kosovo.

Similarly, Russia's problem in its southern part such as Chechnya and Dagestan is well known. The debilitating potentials of Kosovo developments in fomenting religious fundamentalism and terrorism in the guise of self-determination cannot be ruled out. The Chechen radical leader Doku Umarov has already revealed his vision of a Caucasian caliphate and he may well use the Kosovo incident to further his activities in the region.

Both India along with Russia had signed in 1994 the declaration on the protection of interests of multiethnic and pluralistic societies. Hence, in this background the Kosovo crisis needs to be seen as a factor in the evolving order of international relations as a challenge (as well as opportunity) to multiethnic and pluralistic societies. It is true that right to self determination is a noble principle recognised by international law, but its misinterpretation and misapplication may bring devastating consequences in an age in which religion and ethnicity based violence is a common norm. Hence, at the present juncture it would be difficult to say whether Kosovo independence would bring stability in the Balkans or lead to a flurry of such movements in other parts of the world. However, the Kosovo independence would likely affect the evolving international scenario especially in the Eurasian region in which the changing contours of power politics have thrown up new power alignments driven by great power ambitions.

The author is a research faculty at Centre for Central Eurasian Studies, University of Mumbai, India.

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