

# The Dis-united States of America - could it happen?

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## **Abstract**

Secession has been part of the national discourse from revolutionary times. Grounds for separating from the Union are based on perceived government breach of constitutional principles. The dominant motivations for secession are economic and ideological, with the aim of restoring the balance that was lost as a result of the government breach. A national currency, national debt and deficits, both fiscal and trade, complicate any prospect for secession. Culturally, the pioneering American spirit sets the stage for bold discussion, while economic prospects work in favor of the status quo. Potential fallout in international markets and military splintering bring enormous risk to any secession scenario.

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# 1 Introduction

Secession in the United States is possible, but very improbable. Arguments that the government has failed in its constitutional duties and secession is the most logical course fail to capture the most likely outcome: increased economic hardship and decreased opportunity in a shrinking global economy. The economic costs and risk of global fallout is so high that a rift is unlikely to occur until conditions domestically deteriorate to a point that a significant proportion of the population believes there is no possible way to reform the existing government. Historically two very strong precedents for secession include the American Revolution and the Civil War. In both cases, economic duress was the dominant driver leading up to the conflict that brought secession. Secondary ideological divisions, of liberty in the revolutionary conflict and slavery leading up to the Civil War, compounded economic pressure, but were not sufficient on their own to lead to secession.

## 1.1 Historical Precedent for Secession

There are strong historical precedents for secession in American history. The Declaration of Independence, dating back to 1776, may be the most persuasive argument ever in favor of secession. It first establishes that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” [1]

“...whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their

duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.” [1]

In that pivotal document is set forth the argument that government derives its power from the people and exists for the sole purpose of ensuring these objectives.

## **1.2 Restore Economic Balance**

Balance is “a condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions.” [Google Dictionary] Economic imbalance can occur when the proportion of taxes to wages or wages to buying power are perceived to have incorrect proportions. When economic imbalance occurs, a natural human tendency is to restore balance. This can be seen in principles like reciprocity. When a person receives a gift, that creates an imbalance which can be restored by giving a reciprocal gift. [2] If the economy fails, and the government is seen as the cause of its failure, secession becomes one of the most human, most natural and most patriotic avenues available. The main objective of secession is to restore balance.

## **1.3 Breach of Constitutional Duties**

Breach of contract is one way to cause imbalance. There are times when the government is seen as negligent or in breach of Constitutional duties which results in economic hardship. Secession becomes justifiable when the government is considered to be in breach of its duties and obligations under the Constitution.

## **1.4 Economic Pressure**

Cultural biases in America work both for and against secession. A pioneering heritage with promise of reward for risk and a capitalistic, free market economy, make the American people sensitive to government overreach. Perceptions of power and authority combine with constitutionally protected free speech to embolden the people to argue for change, and even secession. Economic dominance globally and increasingly international organizations provide motivation to preserve the status quo. From a standpoint of corporate stability and ongoing growth, there is pressure against secession.

The global impact of secession would affect international financial markets in devastating ways. Secession would result in loss of trust, decreased credit rating, risk of default on debt and many other downsides which would have a lasting negative impact on the economy.

The downsides are so significant and risky that most Americans are still “disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.” [1]

## 2 Secession

Secession is a natural consequence of perceived breaches of constitutional obligations. The aim of secession is to restore balance that was lost due to the breach. The breach may be specific and technical or a matter of interpretation. Above all, secessionists consider their actions to be patriotic.

People’s views change over time, even with respect to promises they’ve made. Every day our courts of law are full of parties to contracts who haven’t satisfied the terms they agreed to fulfill. There are many arguments used to justify breach of contract. Some of these arguments include fairness, changes in circumstances, non-conformance by the other party and even something as simple as a change of opinion. [3]

From an objective position it may be tempting to argue that many breaches are trivial, and that the contracts themselves are trivial to begin with. That doesn’t change the fact that a contract can be deeply personal and significant to the parties who originally entered into it. It’s also important to recognize that the courts are also busy from morning until night dealing with breaches of implicit contracts. These negligent claims stem from socially perceived “duties to care” which are generally accepted. This largely comes from common law. [3]

The Constitution of the United States of America is an established contract which binds all citizens. The powers of the states and the powers of the federal government are defined, including methods for amendment. The roles of each of the three bodies of government are explained, including the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The constitution

also defines the methods by which representatives and executives are elected, and judges are appointed. [1]

One of the most prevalent arguments for secession is that the government is in breach of the Constitutional contract.

## **2.1 A Broken Contract**

Some justifications used by parties to a contract to justify non-conformance include an imbalance of fairness, change in circumstance, breach by the other party, change of opinion, disagreement about the intention or meaning of the wording, ambiguity with respect to the terms, etc. It may be true that much of this confusion and disagreement could be avoided with increased clarity in the original contract. [3]

With the objective of increased clarity lawyers create contracts that are many pages long, spanning hundreds of pages in some cases. Despite these efforts at precision, the number of court cases has increased, and in many instances, the complexity and duration of prosecution has also increased [4]. The laws we establish under the Constitution have also grown in complexity and scope to the point that many of them are comprised of thousands of pages or more. One notable example is our modern tax law [5].

The relative simplicity of the Constitution, compared to laws and contracts written today, has not reduced the number of pundits ready to provide their expert view on the meaning and intention of the instrument. With a more literate population [6], there are more pundits than ever, which leads to ongoing debate regarding the same types of differences that motivate people to challenge contracts they've already committed to.

### **2.1.1 Changing Opinion and Circumstance**

Social values have changed since the Constitution was written. More than two centuries now separate us from the agricultural and impoverished circumstances of the founding fathers. Contemporary vocabulary has shifted in meaning [7]. Words have been associated with causes and lifestyles throughout the intervening years. Popular opinion has undergone drastic shifts [8]. Fundamental values and standards have morphed and adapted to a changing world in which everything from professional opportunities to family structure have been redefined.

Changing opinions have been influential as grounds for reevaluating or abandoning the Constitution [9]. The extreme nature of these changes is used to justify at least a review, if not a wholesale rewrite of the Constitution. Why should laws and structures that pre-date electricity, telephones, television and the Internet still be considered relevant today? Some argue, If the founding fathers were alive today, they would do things very differently. Arguments like that highlight the potential for ambiguity.

Others argue that the core values that guided the creation of the Constitution haven't changed, or shouldn't change. From this perspective, every judicial ruling, law or other government action that isn't strictly sanctioned by the Constitution is a breach of it. Claims of Constitutional abandonment come from both sides of the political field and from all walks of life [10] [11]. Main points of debate often include gun rights, free speech, womens rights, size of government and national debt.

### **2.1.2 Constitutional Ambiguity**

To make arguments about what a man who lived in another time would think or do if he were somehow brought to this time is impossible, and probably futile. This doesn't quell the human tendency to speak on behalf of the founding fathers. It may even seem natural to assume that if the founding fathers lived in the twenty first century, they would have had values and objectives similar to what is prevalent today. In spite of the futility of the exercise, it's all too easy to project on to those men, ideas and visions that they never had. [12] [13] [14]

## **2.2 The Government is in Breach**

A secessionist may find fault with the Constitution by approaching any of the Articles I, II or III, which establish the legislative, executive or judicial branches of government respectively. He might also appeal to the sovereignty of the state, which is established in Article IV. In the present analysis, it's not necessary to go beyond the preamble to begin to search for fault. The preamble reads:

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence,

promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” [1]

Contained in that small paragraph are references to a “perfect Union”, “Justice”, “domestic Tranquility”. These concepts are often referred to collectively as the American way of life. They represent an ideology which defines the character of a people. For many Americans these tenets are held extremely sacred and echo the sentiment expressed in the Declaration of Independence that they are “inalienable Rights”. In some regions of the country there is a growing sense that these rights are being set aside by an increasingly aggressive federal government. In other words, there exists a perception among some that the government is in breach of the Constitution. [1]

## **2.3 Secession is Patriotic**

Patriotism is highly regarded in America and suggests that the same determination which burned in the hearts of the founding fathers is still burning today. In the mind and heart of the secessionist one might expect to find the same conflicted passions that existed in the revolutionary mind and heart.

In March of 1775, Patrick Henry appealed to the Virginia Convention “that the Colony be immediately put into a posture of defense.” Sometime later William Wirt wrote:

“Gentlemen may cry Peace, Peace, but there is no peace. The war is actually begun. The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle?” [1]

Despite the relevance of those words, and the fact that the news of Lexington and Concord followed shortly after, there would be a number of armed conflicts and political entreaties made before public sentiment in America turned against the homeland. The men and women who rebelled against their mother country did so as a last resort, after they felt they had exhausted every peaceful option at their disposal. [1]

In a similar way many have labored for their desired outcomes across many election cycles and through the passing of many new laws. They have watched the realignment of Congress and the White House from one party to another and even shifts within parties that reflected the changing views of the people [15]. They may have even participated in the constitutional amendment process which has occurred several times in the current generation [16]. If what they perceive is a departure from their deeply held constitutional rights, they may consider themselves the most patriotic of citizens to explore the possibility of seceding from the Union.

## **2.4 Secession to Restore Balance**

Ultimately, the desired outcome of secession is to restore balance. While one side argues that secession is a breach of the constitutional contract, the other side argues that the only way to honor the Constitution is through secession. The perception is that by leaving the union which corruptly interprets the Constitution, there is only then the opportunity to fully accept and live according to the Constitution.

As with any contract, there is often a great deal at stake in the event of a breach. For example, a marriage contract implies shared property, custody and an obligation to provide for one another. In a similar way, any individual or state that currently belongs to the union has interest in common infrastructure, natural resources and military personnel and equipment. They are invested in the economy and party to international treaties and debt obligations. [3]

The nature of secession is extremely complicated. Given the character and breadth of common interests, any secession effort will struggle to achieve the balance that would be its objective (see section 3).

## **3 Motivation**

In section 2, grounds were established on which an individual or state might desire to secede from the Union. In that section, the basis for secession is disagreement about the character of the Constitution or an ideological shift away from its relevance given contemporary circumstances. The objective of secession is to restore economic and social balance. [1]

The differences that could be so acute that they would drive a group of people to sever ties with their mother country is primarily economic, but can have strong ideological underpinnings. When men feel that their ability to provide for themselves and their family and to live according to their conscience is in jeopardy, they are much more likely to resort to extreme measures. We see this clearly in two major conflicts in American history. First is the Revolutionary War, which was a successful secession from British authority. The second, the American Civil War, was an unsuccessful attempt to secede from the Union.

The drivers in both of these conflicts were economic and ideological. Religious and ethnic tensions played a part in both conflicts, but a careful historical review provides much more evidence that economic motives held greater influence than ideology motives in each conflict.

### **3.1 The American Revolution**

In his later years, John Adam's sent a letter to Mr. Hezekiah Niles [17], which later took on the title "What is meant by American Revolution". In this letter he asks the question "what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American War? The Revolution was effected before the War commenced." He goes on to argue that it is in the interest of humanity to understand how the revolution in the hearts and minds of the people was brought about:

"By what means this great and important alteration in the religious, moral, political, and social character of the people of thirteen colonies, all distinct, unconnected, and independent of each other, was begun, pursued, and accomplished, it is surely interesting to humanity to investigate and perpetuate to posterity." [1]

It's interesting to note that before the "shot heard 'round the world" was fired in 1775, there was nearly a decade of escalation. It may even be possible to view the French and Indian War, beginning in 1754, as the beginning of the revolution. [18]

Some of the most notable events that brought about this change include the Sugar Act [19], Currency Act [20], which lead to the Stamp Act in 1765 [21]. Through these acts, the seeds of the American Revolution began to sprout and grow in the hearts of the people.

Rhetoric quickly escalated, as can be heard in Patrick Henry’s address to the House of Burgesses in May, 1765 where he was interrupted with a cry of treason.

The economic circumstances of Britain give insight into why they issued the royal mandates and legislation that they did. Due in part to the Seven Years War, debt had risen from 72,289,673 in 1755 to 129,586,789 in 1764 [21]. The burden of taxes on the citizens of Britain was already extreme. The King and the Lords were quickly approaching desperation. The Government had overextended. The people were beginning to feel the burden. Leaving aside, for the moment, the more visible events leading up to the revolution, like the Boston Tea Party, the economic pressure resulting from choices made by the few at the top were being felt by the many at the bottom. The result was a quickly growing divide between monarch and subject, a divide which would later lead to secession.

### **3.2 The Abolition of Slavery & The Civil War**

It may be tempting to argue that the Civil War [18] was ideologically motivated. Undoubtedly there were starkly contrasting ideologies, many of which were present in revolutionary times. The moral conflict represented in the practice of slavery played a significant and formative role in the drafting of the Constitution, such as the threat made by the delegates of South Carolina and Georgia that they would not join the Union if the importation of slaves was banned under the new constitution. Through this posture these southern states won the concession that the slave trade could not be restricted for twenty years after ratification [22]. Some would argue that the “equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle” men, mentioned in the Declaration of Independence, and the assertion that “all men are created equal”, which also references a Creator, are as much intended to characterize the colony’s relationship with their mother country as the relationship of men, black and white, to one another. [1]

However deep these ideological differences might have been, they alone did not prevent colonial unity during the revolutionary period. They also were not the primary driver behind conflict. In this case, as in the case of the Revolution, economics played the more influential role. The tensions that threatened to split the budding nation apart were those born of economic conditions. While not a surprise, the twenty year window closed with legislation

outlawing the importation of new slaves into the United States in 1807 (effective January 1, 1808). In 1828, the Tariff of Abominations [23] was passed which was intended to protect the northern economy, but which was damaging to the southern agricultural economy. Note that there was nothing patently related to slavery in this legislation.

The first threats of secession came four years after the Tariff of Abominations was passed. The Tariff Act of 1832, which reduced duties, still wasn't sufficient for the South and the first threats of secession began. South Carolina's legislature organized an army and formally annulled the tariffs. At this time the slave population in South Carolina was around 54%, based on data gathered during the 1830 census [18]. While the anti-slavery movement had started during this period, it was the economic burden related to the tariff acts that prompted the initial cries for secession.

From the southern perspective, the issue of slavery wasn't overtly ideological. After the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, South Carolina declared secession. In this declaration, they refer to the ideological differences that exist related to slavery, but only after arguing that the Government itself has been destructive of the ends for which it was created, which was to ensure the rights of property owners as defined in the Constitution. [18]

“We affirm that these ends for which this Government was instituted have been defeated, and the Government itself has been made destructive of them by the action of the non-slaveholding States. Those States have assume the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions; and have denied the rights of property established in fifteen of the States and recognized by the Constitution; they have denounced as sinful the institution of slavery; they have permitted open establishment among them of societies, whose avowed object is to disturb the peace and to eloign the property of the citizens of other States. They have encouraged and assisted thousands of our slaves to leave their homes; and those who remain, have been incited by emissaries, books and pictures to servile insurrection.” [18]

In further reference to the economic nature of the tensions driving the Civil War conflict is the wording of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address.

“Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” [1]

Purported ambiguity in the Constitution and the burden of economic uncertainty again led to a significant division between members of the same nation. Ideological differences exacerbated the already heightened economic tensions.

### **3.3 Standard of Living**

Whether considering George Washington and the Virginia planter class during the pre-revolutionary period or the slave owners of the southern states prior to the Civil War, the stakes at risk related to their way of life [24]. The human tendency to maintain the status quo intensifies the effects of changes in economic situation. The skyrocketing debt in Britain followed by increased taxes and less influence in the markets where the colonial products were traded threatened the economic prospects for multiple classes within pre-revolutionary America. The threat of emancipation put the majority of the agricultural workforce of the southern states at risk. Without a workforce, or with a mandatory wage increase (from zero) to the existing workforce, the southern states would have been severely crippled economically.

Another way of referring to a way of life is to discuss a standard of living. The modern industrial complex has enabled unprecedented leaps in standard of living through the consumption of various forms of energy [25]. Luxuries that were unknown to previous generations, such as air conditioning, access to automobiles, well stocked grocery stores with year round fresh fruit and even internet and mobile communication, are ubiquitous today. There is also a growing sense of entitlement surrounding these luxuries that hasn’t even been presumed for necessities like food and shelter in the past. The result is a generation at high risk of a decreasing standard of living.

### **3.4 Modern Corollaries for Debt and Economic Opportunity**

Armed conflict between the United States and other world players over the past decade alone has substantially increased the debt burden of the states [26]. In recent years a flagging economy has combined with legislation, most notably the health care legislation [27], to put pressure on the creation of American jobs. Despite job growth, the jobs that are being added to the economy are part time and pay less. American workers compete on an increasingly global stage for wages, which drives down opportunity in America.

Natural resources and energy sources such as oil, natural gas, rivers and waterways, are increasingly scarce and more highly regulated [25]. Pressure from unions to drive up wages and benefits clash with the interests of the stockholders in many companies [28]. The relationship between Corporate America and government officials is complex. All of these factors combine to make opportunity for economic growth is elusive.

Perhaps most significant among all these issues is the fact that the Social Security program, intended to provide for an unprecedented number of retirees, is in danger. The Annual Report from the Board of Trustees for 2013 [29] calls on lawmakers to “address the financial challenges facing Social Security and Medicare as soon as possible”.

America currently has a high debt load. The job outlook is poor for high paying, permanent jobs, which means lower wages for workers. There is increasing uncertainty about the future of social programs such as Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid. This all combines with the prospect of higher taxes on the wealthy to pay to maintain this standard of living for everyone, regardless of their contribution [30].

Debt, deficits, social programs, military operations, quantitative easing and many other economic pressures burden the United States of America today.

## **4 Economic Considerations**

Ideological differences related to taxation and government spending have been prominent in political and social debate for years. Some have argued that the Constitution is a financial instrument [31]; it’s purpose is to ensure property rights and free commerce, while defining government processes related to appropriations and expenditures. The Constitution does

not provide guidance related to what constitutes acceptable expenditures. It is also silent regarding how high or low taxes should be [1]. The role and scope of government, relationships between citizens and socially accepted duties to care for one another all influence individual perception of acceptable expenditure and taxation levels. America is increasingly divided on these points, and those disagreements run deep.

## 4.1 Ideological Friction

Economic friction related to ideological differences can be a powerful motivation for secession. Just as the Confederate South justified secession on economic grounds, there are many today who base their desire to secede on the current tax rate or types of expenditures [32]. With expenditures, some want increases while others want decreases. Some spending certain categories tend to negatively correlate, such as social programs vs. military spending. Others expenditures generally have consensus, such as education and infrastructure.

Expenditures that cause division include social programs, such as Social Security, food stamps and unemployment. Other controversial programs relate to health care, such as Medicare, Medicaid and most recently the Affordable Care Act [27]. Often there is disagreement about whether the government should enter into an industry that was previously private. Creating a welfare state and providing for people that should be capable of providing for themselves is another common concern [33].

Economic policy, which affects currency practices such as quantitative easing [34], printing money and bailouts. also factor into ideological differences. A growing income gap [35], high cost and decreasing benefit of education and a perceived declines in employment opportunities also provide grounds for disagreement [36]. These issues represent a small sampling of the many differences heard in the political rhetoric of our day, including rhetoric related to secession.

## 4.2 Complexities of Secession

Risks to the stability of the overall economy increase when decisions related to currency combine with high debt and deficit spending. Deficit spending is, in principle, unsustainable. The costs to maintain current standards of living, including government sponsored social

programs, is jeopardized as deficits mount and debt increases. Deficits combined with growing debt make the prospect of secession extremely complicated. Wealth and infrastructure further complicate matters.

### **4.3 Currency**

Currency is a sophisticated and complicated trade mechanism. For years the value of currency was linked to something that was universally considered to have high value, namely gold. During the time period when currency was tied to gold, economic stability prevailed. As countries left the gold standard in pursuit of the flexibility to more strategically manage the relative value of their currency, a great deal of instability was introduced into global currency markets. [37]

Any secession would necessarily include currency issues. Would the new separate countries have a shared currency? Would the federal reserve continue to function, as it does today, for the currency. Who would set monetary policy related to the currency? Europe has spent the last few decades attempting to unite their currency across national boundaries to promote economic stability, growth and synergy between European members [38]. For a new American country, freshly seceded from the United States, establishment of a new currency would be an enormous challenge.

Animosity between the United States and the new country would likely escalate into currency warfare. Valuation, liquidity, among other factors, would influence the choice of currency. High levels of interstate trade would become international trade and efforts to manipulate the value of currency to favor exports across that new international boundary represent high risk for a new currency. [37]

#### **4.3.1 National Debt**

National debt is an economic burden shared by all American citizens [39]. Secession would bring the debt into play as an obligation tied equally to the seceding members. It's reasonable to acknowledge that those who secede have benefited to some extent from the expenses related to infrastructure and social programs that have contributed to the national debt.

Dividing up the national debt between groups in the event of secession would amplify the ideological differences mentioned above [40]. Methods for dividing up existing debt may include attempting to calculate the proportion of the debt represented by expenditures to which a given group was opposed. In this scenario, seceding groups could argue that they opposed those programs from the beginning and should have no part of the representative debt. Arguments favoring a per capita distribution would likely lead to disagreements related to urban vs. rural, political party alignment and other population parameters.

### **4.3.2 Wealth and Infrastructure**

Banks, corporations and other national and natural resources cross many geographic boundaries today without issue. These organizations and resources include the interstate freeway system, national corporations, transmission lines and waterways. [41] Trade is free and constant among the various states. Banks hold currency which enables that trade. Current holdings within those banks, which traverse the new borders separating the seceded country from the United States, would require reconciliation and incorporate the complexities of currency mentioned above.

If the country were divided, all wealth and infrastructure would be at risk and the subject of contention in any negotiated secession, including existing savings, investments, laws, prisons, military bases and resources, ports, natural resources, rivers and all other common infrastructure. This includes social mechanisms that many would think about, such as the emergency 911.

The complexity associated with a negotiated secession would be as challenging as attempting to create two living creatures out of one, assigning each new creature half of each necessary organ. It would quickly descend into war.

## **5 Cultural Considerations**

### **5.1 Pioneering**

America has a deep pioneering heritage, from the first colonists up to present day. Many children grow up hearing that in America, anything is possible. Even someone born into poor

circumstances can accomplish great things in America. If something isn't working right, a common inclination in America is to change it, fix it, adjust it or even rebuild it.

America's pioneering spirit has motivated many men and women to enter politics and business. Rhetoric of secession is a reflection of that same pioneering spirit. While the fear of the unknown may be a deterrent in some cultures, in America, uncertainty and risk may encourage action [42].

## 5.2 Power and Influence

American history demonstrates that anyone can rise to fame, fortune or positions of power if he has determination and grit. Contemporary America is saturated with examples of people who started poor and rose to positions of wealth or influence within the political arena. The ability of Americans to rise to power fuels the pioneering inclination.

Warren Buffet started his career with \$9,800 [43] and became one of the wealthiest men in the world. Abraham Lincoln started his life in a poor cabin and self educated eventually became one of the most influential Presidents in the history of the country. Neil Armstrong and his crew set foot on the moon [44] and NASA has sent robot explorers and satellites to various planets in the solar system, especially Mars [45].

A willingness to work with and even challenge existing authority figures is another facet of the perception of power within American culture [42]. It's common place to argue superior understanding. Cultural openness to different opinions, which is a result of Constitutionally protected free speech, makes it easy to find an audience. Persuasive arguments and charismatic communicators can move the hearts of the people.

Constitutional protection of free speech, freedom of religion, freedom from illegal search and seizure, etc. produce an environment where open discussion of secession can take place anywhere, even in very public forums, like broadcast radio and TV. Petitions with sufficient signatures in a specific period of time have the promise of review by the White House [46], which further encourages open debate about the direction of the government.

### 5.3 Polarization and Balance

America is increasingly polarized, politically and ideologically. The American pioneering tendency and access to power and influence have emboldened today's leaders to assume increasingly extreme postures with respect to many issues under debate today, such as income inequality and social programs. Much of this polarization is creating a feedback loop wherein the each interaction feeds into a counteraction intended to maintain balance. The problem is that with each cycle through this feedback loop, the prospects for reconciliation are more distant. [47]

Fluctuation in the national dialog shifts over time with changing values and social views. Issues that may be unpopular can become popular, such as the discussion of slavery which led to the civil war and eventually to the civil rights movement. The heightened polarization in America is working against reconciliation, which would seem to explain what appears to be an increase in dialog related to secession [46]. Some are giving up hope of finding a compromise that is viewed as acceptable.

### 5.4 Socialism vs. Capitalism

As discussed in section 4, much of the economic friction today is ideological. Culturally, much of this friction relates back to the concepts discussed above. Capitalism is a dominant facet of American character: one that is consistent with a pioneering heritage and perceptions of power. Socialism, often associated with communism, runs counter to America's self image. However, when viewed in isolation, there are many socialistic promises that appeal to the general population [48].

In section 2, secession was argued to be a potential remedy to a breach of constitutional contract, real or perceived. Many Americans consider the move toward socialism to be inconsistent with purpose of the constitution. Any move toward socialism is a move away from the constitution and limits freedom to pioneer or rise to power.

Increasing government regulation and some subsidies may have the appearance of movement toward socialism and communism. While regulation and subsidies are well within the defined role and powers of government under the Constitution, it's the public's perception of these actions, and the resulting burden on the economy, that cause popular discontent. [49]

## 5.5 Divergence

As a people, Americans appear to be diverging. A proportion of the population has always been in favor of socialism or regulation or subsidies, albeit a small proportion. That number is growing and the positions are more extreme on both sides. As these concepts coalesce into more concrete ideologies their reach will expand, their divisions will grow sharper, which may increase talk of secession.

This would look like the emergence of multiple cultures, each with a different perception of power, individualism and the role of government in America [42].

## 6 Global Considerations

America's influence globally is enormous. Economically, the US dollar is considered the safe haven for investment [37]. American citizens are strong global consumers [50]. The US military is one of the strongest and most technically sophisticated in the world [6]. Secession would threaten the economic and military standing of the United States with respect to world.

### 6.1 International Markets

International markets would experience an immediate impact as a result of any serious threat of secession. Outstanding value of foreign investment in Treasury Bills and Notes would come into question. The ability of the US government to repay its outstanding debt would be questioned. The ability of American companies to deliver consistent profits and continued innovation would come into question. Secession would only need to be a threat in order to introduce panic and chaos into international financial markets. The government shutdown of October 2013 gives a glimpse into the relationship of the US economy to the rest of the world, and especially Asia, with strong debt and export interests tied to the US [51].

Credit ratings for US debt would have an immediate impact on business domestically. Increased interest rates may decrease liquidity. Access to capital would be strained, which could cause decreased investment in new products. Existing debt could diminish operating margins for existing businesses. The effects of a decreased credit rating on government pro-

grams would be equally severe. Higher interest rates would put pressure on the government, which could significantly curtail spending on social and military programs. Efforts to save those social and military programs might be passed on to the taxpayer, further straining an already weakened economy. [37]

## 6.2 Military Splintering

Economic and ideological considerations have been put forth as the dominant factors motivating and influencing secession. One of the biggest deterrents to secession may be the mature military establishment of the United States of America. America's well integrated armed forces are comprised of an Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force and Marines, as well as specialized units within each branch. It commands an impressive array of infrastructure which includes aircraft, naval ships, ports, bases, weapons arsenals, including nuclear devices, etc. Each state also has Guard forces, which are under the direction of the Governor, who is the commander and chief. These Guard forces act as an extension of the federal military branches under certain circumstances. [52]

In the event of secession, the military may encounter splintering, where the allegiance of individual service members is swayed by their relationship to the seceding region. The extent of the splintering would be expected to track with the size of the secession. If a single state seceded, the splintering could be minor. However, if the secession involved many states, especially states with large populations and large military enlistment, the splintering could be severe. National Guard troops, which are under the command of the Governor, further complicate any military options on the part of the Union when looking at ways to respond to secession. [2]

Every aspect of military involvement in secession is frightening.

Manufacture and design of military equipment, such as weapons, ships, aircraft and other infrastructure, represent the potential economic fallout in a secession scenario. The manufacture of these goods occurs in various states. If the seceding states host the manufacturing facilities and workers for a particular piece of military equipment, that could become a point of economic tension. This is especially true if the goods are required for ongoing maintenance of existing infrastructure, which potentially cripples some military functions if those goods

are no longer freely available or if favorable terms cannot be found to accommodate trade. In the US, military expenditure accounts for over 4% of GDP. [6]

## 7 Conclusion

The Constitution of the United States of America exists “in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” It derives its power and authority from the people, making the American republic distinct from many other forms of government. [1]

When the aims for which the government was established are no longer accomplished, it then is the prerogative of the governed, by virtue of their authority, to form a new government. Economic factors weigh heavily on any decision related to secession with ideological factors coming in a close second. The negative economic effects of secession are likely to be so severe that conditions would have to be extremely bad before secession could be expected to restore balance.

The cultural makeup of America provides for inclinations in favor of and opposed to secession. Economic risk and global balance related to business interests are the biggest factors working against secession. The global impact of secession would include loss of trust, decreased credit ratings and default on debt.

Secession in the United States is possible, but very improbable. Arguments that the government is failing in its constitutional duties and that secession is the most logical course under represent the possibility of increasing economic hardship and decreasing opportunity in a shrinking global economy. The potential economic and global fallout is so high that a separation is unlikely to occur until conditions domestically have deteriorated to a point that a significant proportion of the population believes there is no possible way to reform the existing government. Historically there are two very strong precedents for secession: the American Revolution and the Civil War. In both cases, economic duress was the dominant driver leading up to the conflict that brought secession. Secondary ideological divisions, such as life and liberty in the revolutionary conflict and slavery leading up to the Civil War,

compound economic pressure, but were not sufficient on their own to lead to secession. It's unlikely that routine disagreement between political parties about taxation and expenditure policies will be enough to cause secession, but it does continue to add to the growing divide in America [9].

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