



## Belgian Govt Crisis

However, there is absolutely no historical evidence to support such a claim. For instance, Texas was a separate republic before it chose to join the Union. California, for a briefer and less well-defined period, was a separate nation as well. Hawaii was a kingdom before it became a territory and then a state. The "United States" were held together by a common interest, history, and language.

In our neighbor Canada — a major economic power and an important military factor in the Second World War — nine of its ten provinces (excluding Francophone Quebec) are English-speaking. But would our nation have been better off if Canada had become part of the United States (or, perhaps, the nine English-speaking provinces had become states of our nation)? It is difficult to see how the United States or those nine provinces of Canada would have been happier, safer, freer, or wealthier if united. Yet the obsession with behemoth nations continues.

Sometimes larger nations have even cobbled together "nations" which are not really such at all, except in the maps drawn by Great Powers. The odious Versailles Treaty, for example, invented a nation of the "south Slavs" or Yugoslavia, which united six separate peoples who disliked each other, practiced different religions, and wanted independence, not artificial unity. During the Second World War, hostility was so great among these "Yugoslavs" that much of the most brutal fighting was not against the hated Nazis, but against their fellow "Yugoslavs." There is peace now. Why? Because finally, the dreaded "Balkanization" has broken this hybrid state into its natural national parts.

Czechoslovakia was also spun out of whole cloth at Versailles. The Czechs (citizens of Bohemia and Moravia) were scarcely half of the population; yet in this functioning democracy, the Slovaks, the Sudeten Germans, the Hungarians, Poles and others dumped into this neophyte nation all had grievances against the government in Prague, even though it was otherwise a benign government. Peoples were thrown into "Czecho-Slovakia" (as it was often spelled in the first decade of its existence) simply to make it stronger militarily and economically. The [Velvet Divorce](#) — the separation of that nation into the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic — was the natural desire of both peoples, especially the Slovaks, who were otherwise condemned to second-class political power in their own nation.

Of course different peoples can live together in a single nation, but this is a happy union only when it is also a free and consensual one. The outstanding European example, of course, is the Swiss





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Confederation. Though the cantons have an enormous amount of power in the confederation — more than the central government — yet the system works quite well. Peaceful, free, prosperous, democratic and stable, the Swiss Confederation has stayed out of two world wars and has no history in modern times of domestic insurrection, oppression of racial or religious minorities, or the other horrors we associated with modern history.

Canada, to a large extent, has also been free, prosperous, and democratic. The longest undefended border in the world is between Canada and America. Although Americans may often be piqued at Canadian mushiness on many issues, in the long term this nation — with very robust provincial power, and, like Switzerland, more than one official language — has worked. Part of the reason, surely, is that the right of secession has been real (Quebec threatens continually, but has never seceded; less noticed but very real is the threat of Newfoundland).

But what happens when peoples are placed within the same realm against their will? The Soviets found the “nationality problem” among their most serious in holding together all the countries they had conquered. Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians, Georgians and others objected as much to being serf nationalities within an empire of Great Russia as they did to the formal atheism and compulsory Marxism of the Evil Empire. Likewise, the Irish hated English rule. The Scots and Welsh, to a lesser extent, do also. Irish terrorism about Erie Free State dropped dramatically when the modern State of Ireland was created from the southwest three-quarters of the island.

The ultimate solution to Basque violence may well be the creation of a Basque nation (largely out of Spanish lands, but also partly out of French territory). Today, the problem of national aspirations threatens to unravel another artificial nation — Belgium. In the Congress of Vienna, after the Napoleonic Wars, a “Kingdom of the Netherlands” was invented. The “United Provinces” — the seven largely autonomous provinces of the Netherlands — had been one of the richest, freest, and most peaceful nations in Europe. In Vienna, these seven provinces were combined with the Hapsburg Netherlands or what we call now Belgium, a feudal combination of several territories of the old Hapsburg Empire, into a single nation. Why? Unifying Belgium and the Netherlands created a stronger nation to thwart French or Prussian aggression — never mind what the people in this new country thought. Fairly soon, this “nation” split into the Netherlands and Belgium.

But Belgium itself was just cooked up by the great powers. About half of the nation was Flemish and the other half Walloon. These peoples each lived in their own part of the nation, speaking their own distinct languages, with never any real peace or acceptance of the union. How severe was the division between these two peoples forced to unite? In the Second World War, while the Germans were invading Belgium, the Flemish Belgian troops and the Walloon Belgium troops were firing at each other.

Now, in the midst of a [financial crisis](#) which threatens to unravel all of the European Union, and which is [touching Belgium especially](#), a political impasse in Belgium has for six months prevented the seven political parties from forming a government. The Belgian king, who has only nominal power in the government, has warned that the prolonged crisis — Belgium has taken longer than any other parliamentary system in European history to form a government — will cause a downgrading of government bonds.

The German magazine *Der Spiegel* has recently passed a death notice on the nation: “Belgium no longer works. It is a nation that has failed. Ultimately the Belgian state has no future.” The Flemish in their region of Flanders resent paying taxes to help support Wallonia, the region of the French-speaking Walloons, likening giving money to the Walloons to giving drugs to a junkie.



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Can the nation survive? The interlacing of taxing power with subsidies to favored groups and regions, so common in modern welfare states, complicates matters: If the nation breaks in two, who would collect taxes? Who would be liable for the Belgian national debt? Who would pay those currently supported by the state?

The fact that Brussels is the headquarters of both the European Union and NATO also makes the looming demise of Belgium highly symbolic. Can this centerpiece of European superstatism survive the antagonism of its two constituent nationalities and the ongoing demise of its financial structure? Stay tuned.

*Photo: Belgian flag*



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