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NATIONALISM, FEDERALISM AND SELF-DETERMINATION IN A MULTI-POLAR SUDAN

The question of self-determination, along with related issues of devolution of power, cultural and community rights and race relations, is one of the most complex and controversial in Sudan. The challenges of self-determination in Southern Sudan have been addressed elsewhere, and the case of the Nuba and Southern Blue Nile peoples has been presented in another issue paper. This paper is concerned with some of the wider issues that arise in a ‘multi-polar’ Sudan—that is, a Sudan with multiple ethnicities and regions. The main concern is with the North of Sudan, but many of the same considerations apply to the South.

This paper begins with an examination of different concepts of nationhood and self-determination, and continues to address arguments for a federal state, and arguments for a unitary state.

Two Concepts of Nationhood

There is no consensus among Sudanese about what is the authentic Sudanese national movement, when it started, and who are its heroes. The Mahdi is hailed by many—but by no means all—as a nationalist hero. The modern secular nationalist movement began in the 1920s, but there is controversy about the identity of Ali Abdel Latif and whether he has been accorded his true significance. National independence on 1 January 1956 is celebrated by all governments—but it is seen by many Southerners as a moment when a promise was betrayed, and one form of imperial rule was replaced by another. The downfall of President Nimeiri on 6 April 1985 was supported by Sudanese from all parts of the country and all walks of life—but the SPLA did not celebrate, seeing it as just another trick by the ruling elites.

There is not even a consensus among Sudanese about what a truly national movement would look like. As a first step, we can identify two concepts of nationhood, and ask what are their implications in Sudan.

1. Nationhood and nationalism are very old; the nation is inherited from the ancestors and it is the sacred duty of the current generation to hand the nation on to its descendants. Very often, the state and the nation are seen as, if not one and the same, then at least happily married—a natural pairing. Those in control of the state then take on the right to determine what is the nation. But, as in many cases of inheritance, there are likely to be bitter disputes as to who is really entitled to inherit the nation.

2. Nationhood is a common project for all citizens; it is the active creation and re-creation of a common identity that encompasses all and looks to the future. A nation is created when citizens of a certain territory begin to feel that they share a common future, and that they can work collectively towards it. This understanding points towards the fact that most nations are very young, and many (especially in Africa and Asia) were founded by movements that arose among youth. But it is a fortunate country that has a single nationalist movement united around a common, shared vision. Visionaries often fall out with one another. In the case of India, the result of the disputed nationalist vision was the partition of the country and the creation of Pakistan.

Among Sudanese, both concepts of nationhood are to be found, and different visions of a ‘new’ Sudan are to be found. Throughout the 20th century, the hereditary leaders of the Umma and Khatmiya have contested as to who is the rightful ‘inheritor’ of Sudan—while the ‘modern forces’ have claimed that ‘true’ Sudanese nationalism dates to 1923 and is opposed to both sectarian leaderships. Since the 1980s, both the SPLA and NIF have announced a ‘new Sudan’, envisaging a revolutionary transformation of Sudanese society—and Sudanese identity—but in radically different directions.

At the dawn of the 21st century, only one thing is clear: whatever vision of Sudanese nationhood will prevail, can only prevail by agreement and consensus. No individual or movement or constituency can implement their view or their vision by force. Sudan can only be ruled with the consent of all of its citizens.

Two Concepts of Self-Determination

In the Sudanese context—and more widely in post-colonial Africa—the term ‘self-determination’ has become controversial. We can distinguish two main sets of meanings.

1. External self-determination. This refers to the right of the inhabitants of a territory (a people) to set up their own independent state, by lawful means. It is the right that limits the basic principles of territorial integrity and state sovereignty that governs international relations. Excepting the achievement of independence by former colonial territories, cases of the exercise of self-determination are relatively few, and invariably controversial. But the procedures for establishing the right to external self-determination (colonial subjugation of a distinct territory), the mechanism (an internationally-supervised referendum), the boundaries of the territory, etc are relatively straightforward. External self-determination often, but not always, leads to the creation of a separate state.
2. Internal self-determination. This refers to the right of a people to govern themselves. The possibility of state sovereignty is contained within this concept, but it is only a small and remote possibility. Internal self-determination is usually manifest in an autonomous regional government, guarantees on social and cultural rights (especially language rights), and a protected constitutional status within the sovereign state. This is much less controversial than external self-determination as it does not involve breaking up sovereign states. Many countries have allowed this in one form or another. But the mechanisms for establishing the boundaries, the criteria for membership of the entity, etc, are not well established.

All Sudanese political forces have accepted the right of Southern Sudan for external self-determination. That will not be discussed in this paper.

Forms of internal self-determination are an option for addressing the dilemmas of diversity in Sudan, especially northern Sudan. Autonomous areas, federal arrangements, devolution of powers, and federal arrangements are all options. These approaches have been adopted in Ethiopia and Nigeria among others.

An alternative element has been added in South Africa, in order to guarantee the rights of minorities without reverting to the systems of ethnic identification and separation that were used and discredited by the former Apartheid government. The use of proportional representation (PR) for national elections, combined with guaranteed representation in the government of minority parties, has helped to ensure a broad-based government.

The Case for Federalism

The argument presented in this section is closely based on the case for a Sudanese federal state as developed by certain Sudanese political leaders and constituencies, notably the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance.

Sudan has a long history of decentralisation, but not an honourable one. Successive promises of decentralisation and federation have been dishonoured, either immediately or after a short period. Cases include:

1. Southern members of parliament were encouraged to vote for Independence in December 1955 on the basis of a promise that the government would seriously consider a federal system. No action was ever taken.
2. The People's Local Government Act 1971. This was a fine piece of legislation that was never properly implemented. Local government never obtained the financial base to enable it to exercise its duties properly, and rural development remained at such a low level that it was rarely attractive for professional administrators to reside in rural areas.
3. Regional self-government for Southern Region 1972. This was arbitrarily overridden by Nimeiri by decree in 1980, 1981 and 1983.
4. The Regional Government Act 1980. This was scarcely able to become a reality. Within a couple of years, the regional governments of the South and the West were bankrupt, and Khartoum refused to recognise famine in the Western Regions in 1984, effectively undermining what little authority was held in el Fasher and el Obeid.
5. The Federal system of current government. This is little more than a sham, especially in the South. There are 26 States—sixteen in the North and ten in the South—divided into numerous provinces. But in reality centralism remains. The governors and ministers are virtually all loyal NIF cadres, or individuals brought into government through the 'peace from within' programme. There was no national dialogue or consensus on which the current government created a federal system and imposed the current states—instead the whole process was implemented by arbitrary power. The actual powers of state governments, and the revenue base on which they are supposed to operate, are extremely limited. Even the fact that the number of states has proliferated so much reflects the imposition of central dictat—

none of the states was able to develop its own constitutional identity and continuity, and gain legitimacy, before it was broken up into new entities.

This unfortunate history of broken promises suggests that (a) a federal system in Sudan is a necessity if there is to be a workable arrangement that holds the diverse country together, but (b) very strong guarantees on the delegation of powers will be required.

Most large countries and many smaller ones have adopted federal systems for government. A federal structure guarantees, *in the constitution*, authority to regional authorities. It is therefore much stronger in its protection of regional powers than any arrangement based on merely regional autonomy or administrative decentralisation. Many believe that the problems of Sudan require precisely such a constitutional commitment.

There is no single model for division of powers between federal and state governments. A workable federal structure will take account of the historical background of the creation of the federation and the political and economic circumstances of the country. In general, matters of national significance are assigned to the national authorities and other matters, particularly matters of local significance, are left to the States. The balance of these powers between the national authorities and the States authorities is of the first importance.

Sudan needs its own unique constitutional formula. It will be necessary to preserve a strong national government in Sudan to maintain the integrity of the country and to defend it, to ensure stability for both internal reasons and to attract foreign aid, and to deal with the country's development and its economic problems. The national authorities must therefore have sufficient powers for these national purposes. On the other hand, the object of a federal structure will not be achieved unless there is an assignment of real powers to the State authorities, and the local people in each State come to have real control over their affairs.

Four other features found in Constitutions are of significance.

1. The special powers of the national authorities to intervene in State matters to deal with emergencies. On the one hand, the national authorities must be able to act in the interests of the whole country to deal with grave emergencies, and must have all the necessary powers for that purpose. On the other hand, State autonomy will be undermined if, under the pretext of an emergency, the national authorities can simply take over the government of a State, in respect to matters normally within its jurisdiction. The reality has been in Sudan that central government has been too ready to interfere in regional affairs whenever it suits them.
2. The method of the alteration of the Constitution. The division of powers between Federal and State governments is the foundation of the Constitution. If either the Federal or State Governments can alter the Constitution at their will, then the structure will collapse. It follows that any mechanism for altering the Constitution must have adequate consent from both sides, to avoid upsetting the Centre-State balance.
3. The judicial system. Every civil Constitution is founded on the rule of law. Federal systems in particular lay a heavy onus on the rule of law, and there must be courts with the ability and independence to command the confidence of both states and federal government, with the capacity to adjudicate when there is a dispute between the two.

4. Fiscal arrangements between the national and State authorities. Every workable federal constitution depends on both State and Federal governments having a secure revenue base, and neither dominating the other. In the case of a country like Sudan, in which the internal revenue base is weak, and the government depends disproportionately on import tariffs, mineral revenue and foreign aid, finding the appropriate formulae for allocation of revenues is particularly important.

There is a consensus among all political parties in Sudan that some form of devolution of power is essential, and the ruling NIF has in fact created a federal system, although it does not fulfil the criteria for a workable balance between centre and state.

The Case for Self-Determination

The concept of 'self-determination' has entered Sudanese politics and is here to stay. It was introduced from two radically different directions. One was the Southern demand for self-determination for the South, which has been articulated since the 1940s, and was raised again at the 1992 peace talks in Abuja, Nigeria. The other was the Islamist argument for an Islamic State based on the right of 'self-determination' for Sudanese Moslems.

This section will examine the case for self-determination for the marginalised peoples of Northern Sudan. It will summarise, and expand upon, the arguments made in issue paper B4 on the same subject.

The case for self-determination is similar to the case for federalism, but with a stronger conclusion. From the point of view of the marginalised peoples of Northern Sudan, they are denied all major civil and political rights. They have not enjoyed the rights to political power and economic development. They have not had the right to maintain their own languages, their own cultural and religious identities. They have also lost the right to control the natural resources that lie within their own areas. In short, since 1956 they have not enjoyed the fruits of independence.

Important Sudanese political agreements extend the right of self-determination to all peoples of Sudan. The 1994 IGAD Declaration of Principles and the 1995 Asmara Declaration are among these. However these same political agreements only specify that this right should be exercised for Southern Sudan, excluding the marginalised areas such as the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile and the Beja. These areas and their people are awarded the more limited right of internal self-determination. For example the IGAD Declaration of Principles, paragraph 3.3, states that 'extensive rights of self-determination on the basis of federation, autonomy, etc., to the various peoples of the Sudan must be affirmed.'

The marginalised peoples fear that the limited rights of autonomy and even federation represent another attempt by the Khartoum elites to make modest promises that can then be broken. National governments have dishonoured too many agreements for such promises to be taken at face value. In consequence, many marginalised peoples—notably the Nuba and Southern Blue Nile peoples—are seeking stronger guarantees. The prime right that they are seeking is self government, which means autonomy or complete devolution of power. In short, they are seeking self-determination. They stress that they are not seeking separation or an independent statehood, but self-determination within a united Sudan. It is only within the context of self-determination that they will be able to put sufficient pressure on the central government to ensure that their rights are respected.

The marginalised peoples are not seeking independence or statehood. They emphasise that their interests are best served within a united Sudan. They also fear the many problems that would arise should they try to opt for independent statehood. Among these problems are:

1. The uncertain viability of state formation for these small and isolated entities.
2. The problems of setting and demarcating boundaries.
3. Decisions over the status of minorities living within the marginalised areas.
4. The interconnection between ethnic groups within the territories. For example within South Kordofan there are many groups including Nuba, Baggara Arabs and Nilotic Dinka.

These considerations, among others, rule out the option of external self-determination for the marginalised of Northern Sudan, at least for the foreseeable future. However, should the rights of the marginalised be trampled again in the future, the marginalised have learned a hard lesson from their brothers in the South: the recognition of the right of self-determination came only after a very long and continuous struggle. This is the fundamental lesson of the war throughout Sudan: peace, stability and democracy can only be established by respecting the rights of all.

The Case for a Unitary State

For some proponents of a united, unitary Sudan, the argument is based more on faith than reason. The possibility of Sudan 'breaking apart' or 'being dismembered' is simply too horrible to contemplate, and is dismissed as an impossibility. Some have confused, deliberately or otherwise, the ideas of 'self-determination' with 'separation'. The two are not the same. In fact, in a diverse country such as Sudan, devolution of power and the exercise of self-determination are probably the only workable preconditions for unity.

But there are strong arguments in favour of a unitary state that must be put forward and heard. A number of arguments will be examined in this paper. They are strong arguments, but ultimately they are not as strong as the arguments in favour of a federal state with devolved powers.

Federation or self-determination is tantamount to separatism

The concepts of self-determination and separatism are sometimes confused with one another. In fact they are different. A country can only be held together with the consent of its citizens. Self-determination is a mechanism for formalising that process of consent. In Ethiopia, for example, each nationality has the constitutional right of self-determination. When this right was first introduced, many feared that it would be a prelude to separatism and the breakup of the country. In fact, the reverse has happened. For the first time, most of the diverse peoples of Ethiopia have truly felt that they have a stake in the government in Addis Ababa, and have been more nationalist than before.

In Sudan, a greater sense of nationalism is also likely to follow a federal system that recognises the right of self-determination. The marginalised peoples of Sudan do not see themselves as 'Beja nationalists' or 'Masalit nationalists' or 'Ingessena nationalists' or

whatever—they all identify themselves as *Sudanese* but want a fair share in the Sudanese state. The Nuba in the SPLM, for example, are among the strongest advocates for a united Sudan.

Modern Sudanese history demonstrates that in fact it has been the *failure* to implement a genuine devolution of power to the regions that has encouraged separatism. The most pro-unity period in Sudan's history was during the period of implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement, and it was the violation of that agreement that encouraged Southern insurrection, initially under the banner of the separatist Anyanya 2 movement.

Self-determination is imposed by force

The concept of self-determination was introduced into Sudanese political language by the SPLM and has been taken up by the armed opposition, especially parties that are seen to represent ethnic minorities. Many in Northern Sudan, especially those who see themselves as primarily 'Sudanese' and do not stress any tribal identity, are not happy with the concept—they may be ready to accept the rights of Southern Sudanese as a special case, but that is as far as it goes. In short, there is no national consensus behind the assertion of the right of self-determination for all. If the right is exercised by any group, it will be seen to have been exercised at the point of a gun.

If the right of self-determination is based on armed struggle, it follows that groups who feel disadvantaged in a settlement that involves awarding self-determination to some groups, may start armed struggle themselves.

The following points should be borne in mind:

1. Western Sudan is home to many ethnic groups, and self-determination should include rights for them all. The right of self-determination should therefore apply to the whole region, and not solely to one of the ethnic groups that lives there.
2. Any process of self-determination should be entirely peaceful and voluntary. The disarmament of all armed groups in the region should precede any self-determination exercise.

It follows that if self-determination is to be recognised, it must be recognised as a right, and not as the political reward for armed struggle.

On the other hand, the more groups that are entitled to self-determination or their own state within a federation, the more complicated the constitution-building process becomes. If the right is limited just to groups that have fought for it—the Southerners, the Nuba—then it will be easier to find a political settlement.

Sudan will be in the grip of tribalism

This argument is based on the fact that it is the marginalised ethnic groups that are the advocates of self-determination and devolution of power. But if Sudan is to become a federation of ethnic mini-states, this will intensify tribal politics, set back the process of building a nation, and marginalise those who have no tribal identity, or who do not consider their tribal identity

important. In Ethiopia, many educated and urban people strongly opposed the restructuring of the country as an ethnic federation, because they described themselves as ‘Ethiopians’ and resisted being labelled tribally as ‘Amhara’ or ‘Oromo’ or whatever.

This is an important argument. Any radical restructuring of Sudan, such as creating states for certain ethnic groups or awarding self-determination to certain tribes, will certainly create tensions and disputes. Drawing the boundaries of the states or regions, determining the status of cities, awarding rights to minorities and rights to nomads, resolving the status of scattered groups such as the Fellata, determining the residence rights of migrants, will all be major issues to resolve. There will be risks to individuals and communities that find themselves on the ‘wrong side’ of ethnic-administrative boundaries. Any increase in ethnic sentiment has dangers, especially in a country where some tribes are heavily armed.

The ethnic mix of Sudan means that few are ‘pure’. Many are intermarried, and urban populations are large and growing. A geographical division of Sudan into ‘tribal areas’ might have made sense in the distant past, but it is an anomaly now, that would marginalise those who prefer to see their identity as ‘Sudanese’ rather than in tribal terms.

The experience of Yugoslavia provides a grim warning. Before the outbreak of war, most Yugoslavs did not support ethnic-nationalist parties, and wanted the country to remain united. But as soon as ethnic-nationalist leaders began to lead the country towards civil war, almost everyone began to support their particular ethnic-nationalist leader. Many Sudanese fear that, if ethnic self-determination comes to Sudan, then all those people who prefer to be just ‘Sudanese’ will be *forced* to identify with their tribe or region. They may be obliged by law to do so, or they may do so from fear—believing that they will need the protection of their group.

But, unlike Yugoslavia in 1990, Sudan is *already* at war, and the rise in ethnic sentiment is a reality that cannot be ignored. One of the reasons for the war is the justifiable belief among many minorities that they have been repressed, exploited, marginalised and despised. Any settlement to the war means righting these wrongs—not arguing that ethnic rights should be ignored for fear of something even worse happening.

Federalism or self-determination will create new ethnic conflicts, especially in Western Sudan

This argument is a particular version of the ‘tribalism’ argument outlined above. It has been made most forcefully by leaders drawn from the Baggara tribes of Kordofan and Darfur. Their argument has been that:

1. No dividing line can be drawn between different ethnic groups, because they are geographically intermixed and often intermarried;
2. *All* the peoples of these regions are historically marginalised, and creating a federal system would merely change the local balance of power to favour non-Arab groups in these areas.

Historically, the Closed Districts of Sudan have included the Tamas Zone, the Baggara belt. This belt also includes the Nuba Mountains and the ethnic groups that inhabit this area. The whole of Darfur, including the more than forty different ethnic groups in the region, was also a Closed District. During the parliamentary regimes of the 1950s, 1960s and 1980s, South Kordofan and Darfur returned mainly Umma Party MPs to parliament.

One of the continual frustrations of the inhabitants of western Sudan has been that Khartoum governments have successfully used ‘divide and rule’ tactics to keep them weak. After the Addis Ababa Agreement brought the first civil war to an end, many groups in western Sudan felt that they were also entitled to autonomy under the same conditions. This was one of the pressures for the Nuba insurrection that began in the 1980s. Meanwhile, the Baggara tribes, which are split between Kordofan and Darfur, were not able to achieve their proper influence because they were divided between the two regions. The fear felt by Baggara that they might themselves become marginalised in the regional governments in el Fasher and el Obeid contributed to conflict in the regions.

Meanwhile, after the National Reconciliation under President Nimeiri in 1977, many former liberation fighters belonging to the National Front returned to Sudan. In contrast to the Addis Ababa Agreement, these fighters were not recognised as combatants and integrated into the national army. Instead they were demobilised and resettled on agricultural schemes, or left without any employment at all. The frustrations of these former fighters contributed to the feelings of marginalisation in western Sudan.

Western Sudan is an area of ethnic mixtures. There are very few areas that can claim to be ‘purely’ inhabited by one group. In the Nuba Mountains, for examples, for centuries there have been settlements of Arabs, living alongside the Nuba in the valleys and plains. (It is important to note that it is not correct that the Nuba were historically confined to the hills only. This view is advanced by some who wish to claim all the low-lying fertile lands for non-Nuba people. In fact, both Nuba and Arabs historically lived on the lowlands.) A similar story is true for Darfur, which is a patchwork of different groups. Even the Fur-dominated areas around Zalingei are more like a chequerboard, with nomadic Arab herders moving through the forested areas on a seasonal basis. The ethnic geography of the region does not mean that each tribe has its dar or homeland, sealed off from its neighbours, but rather that each one exploits different ecological niches that are spatially overlapping. If the Arab-non Arab mixture is like a chequerboard with white and black squares, what arrangement could make it possible for the black squares to obtain some sort of self-determination, breaking away from the white ones?

This ethnic mixture creates enormous challenges if the concept of regional autonomy or self-determination is to be applied in western Sudan. For example, if Southern Kordofan were to become a Nuba state, it would mean ethnically cleansing large numbers of Arabs. It would be extremely difficult to draw a boundary line that would include all Nuba and exclude all Arabs—and the status of the main towns such as Kadugli would be very problematic.

Dispersal of ethnic groups and nomadism makes ethnic-regions impossible

This argument follows on from the previous one. One part of the argument is that nomadic groups move seasonally over huge areas that are inhabited by others. Nomadic tribes such as the Kababish, Zaghawa, and many others, regularly move through territory inhabited by farmers. Although some conflicts often occur over grass and water, there is no reason why relations between nomads and farmers should not be peaceable. But if the farming groups are awarded their own exclusive region or state, then it is possible that nomads might find their way barred.

A counter-argument is that any regional or federal system could make special provision for the rights of nomads to migrate.

The second part of the argument is that some groups, such as the Fellata, are so geographically dispersed that it does not make sense to award them any form of separate administration, let alone self-determination. The Fellata are found in concentrations as far afield as Tullus in Darfur, Maiurno in Gezira, and near Damazin in Blue Nile. One of the few progressive acts by the NIF government was to award Sudanese citizenship to the Fellata, an act long overdue according to international standards for citizenship laws.

The geographical dispersal of the Fellata makes it impossible for them to have their own administration. Many Fellata will fear that a regionalised or federal structure will return them to second-class citizenship in each region where they are present.

Other cases of widely-dispersed ethnic groups include Zaghawa, Masalit and other groups from Darfur, which have large communities in eastern Sudan. The urban Jellaba are another special case needing consideration. Every Sudanese town is home to people whose ancestors originate from Northern Sudan, but who have often been settled there for generations. Although the Jellaba as a class are normally associated with the ruling elites of Sudan, many of them are modest people, who will have a justifiable fear of their status as a minority group in an ethnically-dominated region.

Sudan needs a strong central government

This argument is that Sudan faces such enormous economic, social and political problems that it needs a powerful central government to meet these challenges. One of the problems of previous democratic governments in Sudan is that they have been too weak to take the necessary measures to enact economic and political reform—and the creation of a federal system would weaken central authority still further.

This argument would be persuasive if strong central governments in Sudan had a history of acting in the interests of the entire country, especially the peripheral regions. But this is not the reality. Most strong central governments have acted in the interest of small cliques within the ruling elite, and have favoured Khartoum and the central regions.

The strength of a future democratic government in Sudan will be founded on the consent that it obtains from all parts of the country. The strength of that government will be shown by its readiness to overrule the special sectional interests of Khartoum and the central regions. The challenge for Sudanese democrats is to build a strong national consensus on the need for a truly representative government, which will then have the legitimacy to act in a determined manner.

A federal system is too complex for a developing country to manage.

The argument here is that a federal system requires a complicated system of checks and balances and division of powers, which is difficult to establish in a developing country. In the long term, constitutional continuity is important for stability and good governance, and for the co-existence of government institutions that act as checks and balances on one another. In particular, both central and state governments will need to respect the rule of law when it comes to the adjudication of disputes by the judiciary. In the short term, there are complex demands associated with setting up a new constitutional system. For example, the task of training new civil servants in the regions/states will also be a challenge.

The complexity of a federal system will certainly be a challenge for Sudan. To date, all attempts at federalism or devolution of power have failed. The reasons for this failure have been political interference rather than technical complexities, so one can argue that there has never been a true test of Sudan's capacity to manage a federal system.

While the federal system of the current government cannot be regarded as a true test of federation in Sudan, it at least has the benefit of introducing the concept into the Sudanese civil service, and creating some history and experience of state and federal systems. This experience can count among the 'lessons learned' of the Sudanese political system in designing a better future.

The difficulties of operating a federal system should not be a decisive argument against adopting one, but a warning that the task must be undertaken seriously, and potential problems addressed in advance. The successes and limitations of federal systems in countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, India and Malaysia may all provide models worth studying closely.

A federal system is too expensive for a poor country.

A federal system replicates institutions at state and central level, and creates a need for coordination between different centres of government. Matters are complicated still further when different states operate in different languages.

But federation does not necessarily involve large and complex institutions. State assemblies and ministries can be kept relatively small and simple. Many administrative and technical services can be shared between states. Meanwhile, large central government institutions can be reduced in size. So the additional costs of a federal system can be minimised.

However, there are some expenditures that cannot be avoided. In the long-term, dispersing legislative and executive powers across the huge country does entail improving communication and transport links between state capitals—or else real power will remain at the centre. If different states use different languages for education or administration, there will be demands for translators' services, for publishing and teaching in different languages, etc., which are all expensive. In the short term, new buildings will be needed (though old ones in Khartoum may become superfluous and can be sold off). One consequence of government restructuring is that civil servants in central government may lose their jobs. They may be unwilling or unable to relocate to regional or state centres—or the states may not be ready to employ them—so that new staff need to be trained, and there is a break in institutional continuity.

Federalism would involve conflicts over resources between Centre and States

A workable federal system requires a relatively harmonious relationship between Federal and State Governments where resources are concerned. In the case of Sudan, that harmony cannot be guaranteed, for several reasons.

1. No formula for allocation of resources is stable. There will always be a contest between different organs of government over control over resources. In the case of Sudan, the narrowness of the resource base, and the location of most resources in relatively small geographical locations, heightens competition. The instability of the Sudanese economy

means that any arrangement made today will be challenged by new circumstances that arise tomorrow.

2. The power of state authorities resides partly in their power of patronage, including giving jobs, awarding contracts etc. If States are given too little authority or too few resources, they will tend to wither, and become supplicants from the Federal Government. If they are given too much, there will be a demand for more and more states: the logic of fragmentation will set in, and no state will remain a stable entity.
3. Sudan is an aid dependent country and donors will probably insist on dealing with a central authority that can impose fiscal and monetary discipline and adhere to agreements, in return for which aid can be provided. Strong state governments will only want to be bound by any international financial agreements, if they themselves have been party to the negotiations. This may make the negotiation process extremely complicated. Weak state governments that have no say in this important negotiating process may find their authority undermined.

Conclusion

The arguments in favour of serious decentralisation of power in Sudan, preferably in the form of federation, are very persuasive. Most political forces in Sudan—including the current government—have accepted the rationale for federalism. But the formal structures of federalism are not adequate for addressing the need for a real devolution of power, as the weak federalism of the current government demonstrates. In addition, there are real weaknesses with any federal system, especially given the ethnic and political complexity of Sudan and the deep economic and political crisis facing the country.

A genuine federalism, that can take full account of the demand for internal self-determination and administrative autonomy among the many peoples of the country, will need a much more substantial political commitment. National unity can be achieved on the basis of recognition of diversity and the rights of all. This implies collective action to respect the rights of all and promote the rights of the marginalised, including power-sharing, equitable development, equal opportunities in education and employment, and recognition of religious, cultural and linguistic rights. On the basis of that commitment, then the dilemmas and challenges of instituting a federation can be addressed.