Forging Two Nations
Insights on Sudan and South Sudan

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Sudan after South Sudan's independence: Breaking up or holding together

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In the 1950s, when the overwhelming voices of the nationalist movement clamored for independence of Sudan from Anglo-Egyptian rule, some less vocal voices—most of them from southern Sudan—claimed that another independence (of southern Sudan from the rest of Sudan) was still needed. On 9 July 2011, at midnight local time, the dream of the bearers of these voices came true and South Sudan became an independent state, following a referendum in which more than ninety percent of the voters opted for independence from the rest of Sudan. Some voices are now saying that still another independence—that of Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile—is needed. Should this continue, Sudan will be at risk of breaking up into even more parts.

With the still unresolved conflict in Darfur, and the recurrence of war in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, the ring of armed conflicts now stretches along the western and southern to the eastern edges and peripheries of the country. Given governance issues like the absence of democracy, uneven development, and the marginalization of many groups from the center of wealth and power, this paper argues that the current violent conflicts in Sudan are all part of only one web of conflict, circled around the center of power in Khartoum rather than unrelated regional conflicts. It also argues that the continuation of this webbed cycle of conflict is due to the domination of what we will call “Break-up Strategy” (BUS), and the fading out of a “Holding Together Strategy” (HTS). The BUS culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in January 2005. The CPA was a piecemeal and elite-pact approach of conflict resolution—with neither genuine representation nor inclusiveness.

The HTS is the negation of the BUS. It was advocated in the Egyptian-Libyan initiative for peace in Sudan, in the idea of an all-parties constitutional conference, and in the SPLM/A leader John Garang’s vision of a ‘New Sudan’, as will be shown below. This strategy’s conflict resolution is characterized by three related features. First, it is holistic and national in the sense that it looks at Sudan’s conflicts as one single web of conflict caused by lack of democratic governance and equal development. Second, it strives for comprehensive, inclusive, participatory, and consultative conflict transformation. Third, it addresses the root causes of the conflicts.

It is critically important to insist that the BUS is structurally entrenched in Sudanese politics and not a matter of national, regional, or international conspiracy. If the HTS is not activated, the BUS will continue and lead to the fragmentation of the country or its gradual dissolution. This paper aims to show entry points for a HTS. For this purpose, it provides a historical analysis in four steps. First, it presents a conflict analysis showing that the conflicts in Sudan are in fact one complex web of conflict. Second, it documents how the BUS dominates the conflict resolution process. In a third step, it examines the BUS in the process of Sudan’s state formation, in the socio-economic formation related to it, and in the management of the socio-cultural diversity of the country. Finally, the paper proposes a process of “democratization of peace-building” as a step towards bringing back the HTS.

Sudan’s complex web of conflicts

Conflicts in Sudan are complex, interrelated, intertwined, complement each other, and correspond to the politics from Khartoum. Hence, they form a web of conflict rather than constituting different unrelated conflicts. The complexity of conflict in Sudan has been overlooked by national, regional, and international researchers and peace-builders. This has led to piece by piece, part by part, pact by pact and piecemeal approaches of ‘conflict resolution’ in the search for peace in Sudan, and the fading out of holistic, comprehensive, participatory and consultative approaches of ‘conflict transformation’.

For a clear understanding of conflicts in Sudan, three types are distinguished here—also taking into account their inextricable linkages: Communal conflicts, center-periphery conflicts and Cross-border conflicts. Communal conflicts are conflicts between community-based groups (tribal or ethnic groups) over natural resources (water, land, or pasture) or local politics mainly in rural areas. Center-periphery conflicts
are conflicts between armed groups in regions or peripheries and the central government in Khartoum over political power and national wealth, triggered by cultural and ethnic marginalization. Cross-border conflicts are mainly those conflicts or indeed war between Sudan and South Sudan over borders with direct involvement by the military or through indirect proxy war involving militias. Causes of these conflicts are many and interlinked, and regionally related to “the three, ever active, protracted African conflict systems: The Greater Lakes conflict system, the Horn of Africa conflict system and the west of Sudan conflict system” (Ateya 2011, 17). They are also linked with the international level. They are complex in terms of speed of interaction, multiplication of linkages, cross-level drivers, and feedback loops operating over a range of spatial and temporal scales.

For an articulated analysis, the conflicts in Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur will be presented.

*Conflicts in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile*

Conflicts in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states are not only between community-based groups (tribal or ethnic groups) over natural resources or local politics, but also between armed groups and the central government in Khartoum over political power and national wealth. Southern Kordofan is located in Sudan’s most critical zone of ethnic interaction between Arab tribes (mainly Misseriya and Hawazma) and the Nuba people. Communal conflict over ownership and access to natural resources, grazing and farm land, water, local borders, and local politics, aggravated by environmental degradation and central government neglect, has been part of the history of the area.

Blue Nile state borders Ethiopia and has critical Nile dams. Due to its strategic and economic importance, this state has been the focus of a struggle for political control between the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A since 1997. Similar to Southern Kordofan, the situation in the state is characterized by ethno-cultural and religious diversities and political polarization between the National Congress Party (NCP) and the SPLM-North. During the civil war, the inhabitants of the two states were mobilized by the opposing parties and, despite the CPA, remained deeply affected by that conflict, polarized and fragmented along political and tribal affiliations.

The CPA marked the fate not only of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states, but of the whole country. A special protocol for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States intended to resolve the conflict in the two states. The residents were scheduled to hold an ill-defined ‘popular consultation’ to determine the constitutional future of the two states and express their long-standing demands. The protocol was, as will be shown later, a work plan for conflict resolution rather than a final settlement for peace-building. It failed to satisfy the aspirations of the people of the two states, which included a long-standing demand for self-determination to protect their society and culture and reverse decades of marginalization and discrimination.

During the interim period following the CPA (2005–2011), many contested issues of this protocol were deferred to an uncertain future. When the interim period reached its end, the measures for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile (and Abyei) were well behind schedule and again postponed. The inadequate implementation of the protocol and frustration in society about the failure to create peace dividends led to growing dissatisfaction, insecurity, and, finally, a renewed outbreak of war between the by then banned SPLM/A-North and the government of Sudan. This war erupted in Southern Kordofan in May 2011 and in Blue Nile three months later. In its core it is about the region’s ethnic divides and has been escalating ever since.

What makes this war fatal is the attempt of the SPLM/A-North and its allies to create a new ‘South of Sudan’ and fight for the ethnically, economically, and religiously marginalized peripheries. The conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states is inextricably linked with conflicts between Sudan and South Sudan, so that a proxy war is evident. Peace between the two countries may arguably lead to peace in the two states.

The fate of peace-building in these front-line states will tell much about the viability of Sudan’s entire peace process and anticipate whether the remaining Sudan will stay as one country or disintegrate into more parts.

*Conflict in Darfur: A mixture of highly politicized disputes*

The conflict in Darfur is a clear manifestation of the complexity of Sudanese conflicts. Labeling the conflict in the region as a struggle of African or black groups against Arab or white groups, or only as a struggle of Darfuri elites against the central government is an oversimplification (DCHR 1993; El-Tom and Mohamed Salih 2003; Suliman 1994).
In 2003, the conflict, which had been smoldering due to political, economic, and cultural marginalization since the annexation of the region to Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1916, finally became violent. Communal conflicts between different ethnic groups not only occurred over access to land, water, boundaries, and local politics, aggravated by environmental degradation and climate change, as in other parts of the Sahel, but also due to neglect by the government. The communal conflicts were interwoven with conflicts between Darfurian groups and the central government over political representation, economic development, and cultural recognition. These in turn were interlinked with the regional African conflict system involving Chad, the north-eastern Central African Republic, and Libya, and also had an international dimension. Cross-border identities, trans-border ethnic communities, trans-border trade and migration, but also state deficiency, regional instability because of hostile regional alliances, cross-border movement of armed groups and proxy wars characterized this system of conflict (Lake and Morgan 1997; Buza and Waever 2003).

Darfur and the neighboring regions were and still are entangled in "regional conflict complexes", characterized by "situations where neighboring countries experience internal or interstate conflicts, and with significant links between the conflicts" (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1998, 623).

The international perception of the conflict in Darfur culminated in the verdict of the US administration that Darfur was the site of an ongoing genocide. The chain of events leading to Washington's proclamation began with 'a genocide alert' from the Management Committee of the Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum; according to the Jerusalem Post, the alert was 'the first ever of its kind, issued by the US Holocaust Museum (Mamdani 2007, 2).

Naming the conflict in Darfur genocide "has become a label to be stuck on your worst enemy, a perverse version of the Nobel Prize, part of a rhetorical arsenal that helps you vilify your adversaries while ensuring impunity for your allies" (ibid). Save Darfur Coalition—an alliance of more than 500 faith-based organizations—were leading bodies in this politicization of the

1 Among them the American Jewish World Service, the American Society for Muslim Advancement, the National Association of Evangelicals, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the American Anti-Slavery Group, Amnesty International, Christian Solidarity International, Physicians for Human Rights and the National Black Church Initiative.

Darfur conflict. Subsequently, the United Nations Security Council labeled Darfur "a threat to peace and international security" (ibid.) and mandated peacekeeping forces and a criminal investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Peace-building process: The dominance of the break-up strategy

Considering the history of conflict in Sudan, this paper argues that the conflict resolution processes employed are not compatible with the complex web of conflict described above. Attempts to resolve the conflicts—by Sudanese stakeholders and the International Community—were characterized by three related deficiencies. First, these attempts were fragmented, geographically circumscribed, anchored in particular areas, and made independently of each other. Second, they took place exclusively among the elites, lacking genuine inclusiveness and representation, and thus failed to buy-in a wide range of the population directly affected. Third, these attempts overlooked the root causes of the conflict and addressed, by and large, the concerns of the signatories of subsequent ceasefire and peace agreements.

Since the onset of conflict in Sudan, there have been numerous attempts for peace. Many initiatives from national, regional, international, formal, and informal bodies were delivered and many agreements were signed, but few have been fulfilled. The formal ones were the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement 1972, Koka Dam Agreement 1986, Abuja Peace Conference, and Peace from Within Talks 1992, Khartoum Peace Agreement, Nuba Mountains Peace Agreement, and Fashoda Peace Agreement 1997, N'Djamena Talks (Chad) 2003–2004, Cairo Agreement and Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) 2005, Darfur Peace Agreement and Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) 2006, and Doha Peace Agreement 2011 (Simmons and Dixon 2006).

Informal initiatives of non-governmental and civil society organizations are often not well documented. Upon initiative of the University of Khartoum Staff Union and the Trade Union Association, talks in Ambo, Ethiopia, took place; the first peace talks after the eruption of war in 1983 between the southern armed resistance groups and Sudan Armed Forces. After that, many initiatives for peace came from civil society organizations (CSOs). Sudan First, Nadwat El-Ameed of the Ahfad University for Women
in Omdurman, the Group of Ten, and the Women’s Peace Network Initiative were the most famous among many other CSOs’ peace initiatives, which also came from the Carter Center, Concordis International, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (Geneva), and Justice Africa (Abdel Ati 2006). CSOs initiated peace talks, but were excluded in the formal agreements. Only after international actors’ pressure and at a very late stage did the GoS and the SPLM/A negotiate the formal peace agreements.

Of the above peace initiatives and agreements, only the CPA, the Doha Agreement, and the ESPA were either fulfilled or are still in the process while the others were either violated, just faded out, or were replaced by another agreement. The CPA treated Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile as special regions, which were given special consideration and special protocols. These protocols stipulated that popular consultations should be held under the supervision of the national government before the end of the interim period of the CPA in July 2011. Chapter V of the CPA (on the resolution of the conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states) defined popular consultation as a “democratic right and mechanism to ascertain the views of the people of Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile States on the comprehensive agreement reached by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement” (UNMIS 2005). If these views suggest that citizens of either state see shortcomings in the CPA, the relevant state legislature shall engage in negotiations with the National Government with the view of rectifying these shortcomings” (UNMIS 2005). Popular consultation started smoothly in Blue Nile State with citizens’ hearings, but was delayed in Southern Kordofan. Other substantial issues such as establishing Land Commissions which were to solve land disputes, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants of the SPLA into the civil administration of Southern Kordofan, in the police, or in the Sudan Armed Forces did not take place.

Unlike the right of self-determination given to the people of South Sudan by the CPA, the popular consultations did not give decision-making power to the populace, but to the parliaments of the states, which could choose between accepting or amending the CPA. Popular consultations thus were to be carried out through the parliament and not directly by the people. Therefore, the election at state level was crucial for the NCP and the SPLM. It became the last peaceful struggle between NCP and SPLM. After the election, armed conflict recurred in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states as a result of the BUS pursued on the basis of the CPA Protocols for the Three Areas.

In August 2011, only a few weeks following the government’s rejection of the Addis Ababa Agreement of 28 June 2011, shortly after it had been negotiated, the SPLM-North together with Darfuri resistance groups—the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) factions of Abdul Wahid and Mini Minawi and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)—announced the formation of the Sudan Revolutionary Front that was to unite political and military efforts of the “New South of the North” to change the regime in Khartoum.

Despite the jam of peace initiatives and agreements, armed conflicts are still being fought in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile states at the three levels: communal, center–periphery, and cross-border. For ten years, the numerous attempts to achieve lasting peace for Darfur have failed, and war has not stopped despite the Doha Agreement of 2011. Besides the main issues of wealth and power sharing and the re-definition of Darfur (either one region or divided into three regions), issues such as land disputes, insecurity, displacement, and claims for compensation are still pending. Hence, the analysis has revealed so far that the CPA and the Doha Agreement are manifestations of the BUS. Creating a “New South of the North” after the secession of South Sudan recycles the history of conflict in Sudan, as it had started in its inception in 1955. The “New South” is a reinvention of the north–south divide with its racial and cultural perceptions; a roll-back of Sudan to old history and upholds the BUS.

State administration, socio-economic formation, and managing cultural diversity: Breaking up from the very beginning

The BUS has not only shaped conflict management in Sudan, but also structured Sudanese state formation and the socio-economic formation related to it.

The components of the modern Sudanese state were ‘pulled together’, if not ‘forced together’ by the Turko–Egyptian (1821–1881) and Anglo–Egyptian rule (1898–1956) through an obliteration of the territories of the indigenous kingdoms (of Sinnar, Darfur, etc.) through border demarcation and loose annexation, inclusion and exclusion of different groups of people, and through imposing central rule in Khartoum. Since then, “the
Sudanese state has never become a ‘nation-state’ in the classical sense or a state that represents its different regions. It is actually the state of the center (Eltahir 2010, 63). Looking at the combined socio-economic and regional dimension, the socio-economic elites of the center arguably have been dominating the state throughout Sudanese history, as the following chronology shows.

From 1956, the date of independence, to the military coup on 25 May 1969, the Sudanese state can be classified as a traditional elite state. After 1969, the modern elite state emerged, taking two different forms: The first was the bourgeois–bureaucratic state, which was established in 1972 and lasted throughout the ‘May Regime’ until 1985 (Niblock 1991). The second form of the modern elite state is the bourgeois–Islamic state, which followed the military coup of 30 June 1989. With a liberalization of the economy, the privatization of state companies, a commercialization and liquidation of large parts of the public sector, along with the ideological control over the state by the National Islamic Front, the economic policies reflected only the interests of the new elites.

The elites of the center have thus dominated the Sudanese state since its independence. This analysis is complemented by a chronology from a different angle, focusing on the state administration.

Under the condominium, the state administration was structured under a “paternalistic relationship” (Abdel Samad 1995, 218), where the central government had a strong grip on the lower units of the provinces and local governments, which were forced to rigidly comply with the directions of the center. After independence, the state administration remained almost entirely the same. The difference was a replacement of the paternalistic style by a “Big Brother” (Abdel Samad 1995, 218) style, especially under the three short-lived democratic regimes.

The May Regime (1969–1985) established regional governments throughout the state territory—for the first time in Sudan’s administration. However, the political practice of the regime made devolution turn out to the contrary (Abdel Samad 1995).

The regime of Al-Imam (since 1989) has exercised almost the same paternalist style of state administration. At the technical and structural level, it adopted, for the first time, a federal system of state administration. But the political mechanism, executed by the presidency and the ruling party NCP, created a paternalistic state administration.

Hence, the state administration in Sudan has remained centralized, in spite of its movement from a unitary state to a federal state, from a central state with de-concentration to decentralization and devolution of power and regionalism.

The BUS has also been incorporated in the management of socio-cultural diversity in Sudan, which includes the degree and quality of power sharing, the extent to which economic development is geographically distributed, and in the policies of accommodating ethnic and cultural diversity. A quick historical survey sheds light on the predominance of the BUS in this field.

The Turko–Egyptian conquest of Sudan interrupted the gradual indigenous state formation and imposed, instead, a colonial state, which brought the country under one central authority. By this strong centralization, the Turko–Egyptian rule reinforced Arab–Islamic cultural domination of the social, economic, and political stage in the northern, central, and eastern parts of Sudan (Harir 1994).

During the Mahdist revolution in the early 1880s, the need to unite the country from the foreign powers planted the first seeds of the “Holding Together Strategy”, because it brought a sense of national inter-ethnic cohesion. However, as soon as the Mahdist State had established itself, the first seeds of the “Breaking-up Strategy” replaced the “Holding Together Strategy”. Ethnic conflicts rose between those who called themselves Awdal Al-Balad (Arabic for indigenous people) and the Awdal Al-Gharib (Arabic for “foreigners”, denoting the people who came from the western part of the country).

The Anglo–Egyptian state “enhanced ethnicities and provided it with significant political and social dimension by establishing the ethnic groups as the administration units” (Hurreiz 1989, 89) through the Native Administration Ordinances, isolated non-Arabized and non-Islamized parts of the country by the Closed Districts Ordinance and the Southern Polices (Beshir 1968).

At the time of independence and within the national movement toward it, there were strong drives towards the HTS especially in the north, and strong feelings that ethnicity and tribalism were a real threat to national cohesion. The military government of General Abboud (1958–1964) pursued an Arabo–Islamic policy with regard to southern Sudan to step up “the spread of Arabic and Islamization, in the belief that this was the only way to achieve unity in the future” (Beshir 1968, 81). The second
democracy (1964–1969) was a period of elaborate, democratic, and formal dialogue on the issues of national integration. Due to open debate between the different ideologies and political parties, formally at the Round Table Conference (March 1965)—which reached a deadlock and concluded with the establishment of a twelve-man committee—this period, witnessed another attempt to realize the BUS.

While the May regime (1964–1969) applied a policy of HTS culture in the north, it applied a BUS policy in the south—through Islamization and sharia laws.

Since then, the BUS has prevailed. The transitional period of the government of Suwar Al-Dahab (1985–1986) and the third democracy (1986–1989) were steps in the escalation of this strategy—the ‘National Salvation’ regime with its Islamization policies and the Civilizational Project represents its most extreme form.

**Outlook: Democratization of peace-building**

How to bring back the HTS is the main question that results from this analysis. It is a long route to go when we consider the history of state formation and management of diversity, but, as this analysis showed, to democratize the process of peace-building could be the key to turn away from the BUS.

Lack of democracy accompanied the predominance of the BUS, thus constituting the structural constraint to a democratization of the peace process. The paper has shown that the continuation of civil war in Sudan despite the long search for peace that resulted in so many peace agreements is due to the dominance of a piec-by-piece and elitist approach to conflict resolution. It lacks real representation and participation and a broad-based, participatory, and consultative approach to conflict transformation. The partners of the CPA had agreed to take this partial approach, because otherwise, they would have had to totally restructure the distribution of power which at last would negate their existence in power. Furthermore, space for civil society remained limited throughout the peace process, so that it could not benefit from the constructive role CSOs can take in reconciliation, trust-building, the socialization of a culture of peace, family reunification, and cross-cultural dialogue, let alone in protecting and monitoring peace.

CSOs can ensure some kind of balance between central authority and social networks, mediate between citizens and the state, mobilize, and convey citizens’ interest to state institutions. In CSOs, people, especially youth, learn how to express, defend, and execute their rights, because CSOs give them a room for debate and democratic decision-making, where they acquire the capacity of being citizens (Eltahir 2012, 17).

The popular consultation processes in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states and the peace process in Darfur have been identified as examples of the BUS fragmentation of Sudan’s problems along geographic lines. These processes are critically important and should continue, but they should be subordinated to a single national and comprehensive process, aiming to conclude with the development of an improved system of governance captured by a new constitution. The repeated call by the opposition parties for a constitutional review conference suggests a way forward. Such a conference can become an extensive national consultative process to accommodate the popular consultations. If processes of popular consultation run separately, they will not lead to political stability and lasting peace. Lasting peace in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile states will lead to peace all over the country, if conducted as a national and comprehensive democratic process.

**References**


