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Overview

In its half century of independent statehood, Sudan has only rarely and briefly been at peace. From the eve of independence until 1972, a separatist rebellion in the South caused hundreds of thousands of deaths. Peace in the South coincided with an on-off civil war in the North between a secular leftist government and conservative sectarian forces. "National reconciliation" between the Northern foes in 1977 prompted a slow slide into renewed war in the South, which crystallised into all-out rebellion in 1983 and the spreading of the conflict to adjoining areas in the North in 1985 and to eastern Sudan in 1994. Intermittent low-level conflicts in Darfur from 1987 exploded into full-scale insurrection in 2003, just as efforts to conclude the Southern war were leading towards a landmark peace agreement.

Is Sudan fated to experience perpetual instability and a constant round of bloody provincial conflicts? Does the intractability of these wars portend a collapse of the state? Or is there a possibility of a new political dispensation that deals with both the "root" and "brute" causes of Sudan's wars?

The major part of this paper consists of five hypotheses, drawn from the social and political science literature on Sudan, which can account for the outbreak and continuation of conflicts in the country. These are:

1. Clash of identities and its variant, the fruitless search for a cohesive identity;
2. Centre-periphery inequality and economic exploitation;
3. Conflict over scarce resources and the breakdown of governance in Sudan's rural areas;
4. Intra-elite competition at the centre and the struggle to consolidate the state;
5. "Brute causes": criminality, individual agency and the perpetuation of a cycle of violence.

Each of these hypotheses has much explanatory power. A combination of hypotheses two and four allows for the development of a model of political bargaining in Sudan that explains the instability at the centre and the protracted, cyclical conflicts in the peripheries. Three general conclusions emerge:

1. Sudan's conflict is over-determined. Each of the different hypotheses has some traction. The multiplicity of causes of the crisis makes Sudan's conflicts peculiarly intractable;
2. The dominant elite, though unable to resolve its internal differences and establish a consolidated state, can continue to survive and even prosper amid disorder and crisis in the peripheries;
3. The road to stability lies through Khartoum. Stability at the centre is the key if progress is to be made on all the other issues facing Sudan. The promise of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is national democratic transformation, but its sequence of elections-

referendum-forging of national identity appears to be a recipe for instability, and its power-sharing formula appears to be likely to result in deadlock.

This analysis differs from most journalistic analysis of Sudan's crisis in presenting the ethnic and ideological factors as products of other processes, notably the strategies adopted by successive governments for managing the peripheries and the militarisation of society. It differs from many scholarly analyses in its emphasis on the importance of failed consolidation at the centre of power. The implication of the analysis is that Sudan faces possibly insuperable challenges in attempting to achieve democracy and a fair distribution of national wealth and power, and that the hopes raised by the 2005 CPA between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) for national unity and democracy are fading.

The most likely scenario is that the structure of political power in Sudan remains unchanged. We must face the probability of continued turbulence and paralysis in Sudan—a political process marked by constant motion but no forward movement. There is a real danger of continued, indeed intensified, violence.

Hypothesis One: A Clash of Identities

The first and most common view of the Sudanese civil war is that it is an identity conflict. During the long years of North-South war, it was characterised as the Arab, Islamic north against the African, Christian or animist south. The Darfur conflict cannot be characterised in religious terms but colour-based and Arab-African labels have been widely used, not least by the belligerents themselves. Folk descriptions, which possess much political force, combine race and religion, primordial and constructed identities, and normative and descriptive ascriptions of identity, in a potent mix. While the country's rulers tend to see the nation normatively as an unproblematic sovereign inheritance contested by ungrateful troublemakers, intellectuals from the peripheries prefer to see national identity as work in progress - or to be precise, work that should be in progress but isn't.

Is Sudan (normatively) one country or two? Even those who argue that Sudan is - or should be - one country, often make their case by implicitly admitting that it is two countries and that each is enriched by the other. In 1967, Khartoum University history department held a pioneering conference, "Sudan in Africa" (Hasan 1971). The naming of this conference was itself a provocation to the Khartoum intelligentsia who saw the country as an Arab country accidentally (mis-)placed on the African continent. The conference gave rise to a political slogan that Sudan should be a "bridge" between the African and the Arab worlds, a concept embraced by secularist politicians who feared that too close an alignment with the Arab world left the country vulnerable to conservative Islamism.

There is much folk wisdom in Sudan in support of the ethnic, racial and religious explanation for the war. Skin colour plays an important role in Sudanese social attitudes. There is no doubt at all that there is a racism deeply embedded in northern Sudanese elite culture (Abdel Salam 2000). The history of slavery and exploitation is felt consciously by many Sudanese in their day to day interactions. The government has declared *jihad* on several occasions and while official pronouncements (especially in English) have downplayed the racial bigotry and religious

intolerance implicit in such announcements, less sophisticated provincial clerics and administrators have not hesitated to express racist sentiments in all their ugliness.[1] Meanwhile, the Southern resistance has appealed to eastern and southern Africa and to Christian churches for solidarity.

With such divergent concepts of what it is to be Sudanese, is there any chance that the country could remain together? Was not North-South civil war inevitable? Many analysts have propounded versions of this story (Ruay 1994; Lesch 1999), often gamely arguing that the effort to create a united country remains worthwhile (Deng 1995). Sudanese identity is indeed extraordinarily rich and complex and the kinds of nuanced understanding presented by, for example Francis Deng, are essential to an appreciation of the Sudanese plight. Any history of Sudan must acknowledge that the 19th century was marked by the extraordinarily violent depredations of Khartoum traders and mercenaries in Southern Sudan, representing the apogee of a long and dismal history of desert-edge and riverine states enslaving their southern neighbours. The post-colonial period began inauspiciously with the "Sudanisation" of the public service representing, for Southerners, merely the replacement of the British with Northern Sudanese, followed by a betrayed commitment to adopt a federal constitution that would provide the South with autonomy. This legacy of racial subjugation and broken promises leaves Sudanese nationalism with an immense debt of suspicion to be paid off before any collective capital can be accumulated (Alier 1990; Jok 2001).

One consequence of this is that Sudan lacks unifying national symbols. The nineteenth century Mahdi[2] is remembered as hero and villain in equal measure, depending on one's political affiliation. The independence Prime Minister, Ismail al Azhari, is recalled as a man who promised "Unity of the Nile Valley" to the Egyptians, sovereign independence to the nationalists, and federation to the Southerners. Independence day (1 January 1956) is commemorated by Southerners as a day of hollow promise.

Sudan's governments have treated identity very differently. The British were casually racist, asserting the innate racial superiority of the Arabs and seeking to protect "backward" tribes from their destabilising impact through the Closed Districts policy, which restricted entry by outsiders (MacMichael 1923). As a means of cheap pacification and administration, as well as building up a counter-weight to the educated, nationalist class, the British regularised tribal authority and ruled through "Native Administration." The first independent governments were equally unreflective in promoting Arab-Islamic values. Only under President Jaafar Nimeiri in the years after the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement with the Southern separatist rebels[3] brought an end to the first civil war, was there an attempt to build a secular nationalism.[4] The Islamist government in

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[1] See for example the April 1992 el Obeid *fatwa* that legitimised the *jihad* in the Nuba Mountains, analysed in de Waal and Abdel Salam 2004.

[2] Mohamed Ahmed "al Mahdi" led a millenarian insurrection that expelled the Egyptians and their British allies from Sudan in 1883-5. Shortly after defeating the colonial powers and setting up an Islamic state, the Mahdi died of an illness and was succeeded by his deputy, the Khalifa Abdullahi al Taaishi, a Darfurian Arab, who ruled over Sudan until he was defeated by the British army in 1898.

[3] The Anyanya rebels demanded independence but settled for an autonomous region of South Sudan at talks hosted by the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie in 1972.

[4] One of its most progressive elements was the recognition of equal status to "noble spiritual beliefs" in the 1973 constitution.

the 1990s developed policies with echoes of the British: a "civilisation project" to promote Arab-Islamic identity, and a "return to the roots" policy to seek legitimacy in custom and tribal identities. While primarily aimed at bringing Arab-Islamic traditions into the schoolroom, "return to the roots" was interpreted by many non-Arabs (especially Southerners and Nuba) as a charter for exploring their distinct "African" heritage. Meanwhile, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which mounted a rebellion in Southern Sudan in 1983, shifted from an early agenda of socialist transformation, that sought not so much to ignore as to obliterate ethnic identities (as well as organised religion of all kinds), to a tactical embrace of traditional chiefly authority alongside an open door to Christian solidarity groups, since many Southerners had converted to a religion that they saw as potentially a powerful bulwark against militant Islamism, as well as a source of solace and support in times of extreme distress.

The North-South axis of Sudanese identity has obscured a significant West-East axis, that distinguishes the riverine groups - which have dominated the state since Sudan achieved approximately its present shape in 1874 - and the Darfurians. In the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, the sultanate of Dar Fur was at least as powerful as its rivals on the Nile (principally the Funj kingdom), but Darfur's distinct and complex identities were absorbed as an afterthought into "Northern" Sudan in the colonial era (de Waal 2005). Since the British conquest in 1916, Darfurian identity has been vestigial and prone to division into tribalism, such as a Fur *revanchism* and a pan-Arab solidarity. Darfurian identity has expressed itself primarily as a critique of the centre and the way in which Khartoum has marginalised the region (see below). One aspect of the Darfur war has been a polarisation around the labels "Arab" and "African" that have been imported from the North-South polarities of the Nile and neighbouring Chad, which would until the 1980s have been considered quite alien to Darfur.

Sudan's identities are internationally-embedded. The dominant racial categories used by the elite are derived in part from the experience of Egyptian colonisation (1821-85) and the continuing influence of Egyptian media (Troutt-Powell 2003). The radical Islamism of the National Islamic Front[5] owed much to its international Arab-Islamic linkages, especially its parent the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, although it was subject to an attempt to "Africanise" Islam by accommodating Sufiism and especially the piety of West African pilgrim-immigrants in Sudan. Arab supremacism has entered Sudan both as the racial-civilisational reflex of the Egyptian-oriented elite, and also as a progeny of the Libyan project for pan-Arab solidarity across the Sahara; the latter providing the immediate ideological underpinnings for the Janjaweed agenda in Chad and Darfur. Political Africanism also owes much to the regional context, drawing on John Garang's pan-Africanist background in Dar es Salaam and his friendship with Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni. The massive expansion of Christianity in Southern Sudan is associated with the global links and resources provided by Christian NGOs and missionaries.

A variant of the Arab-African, Islam-non-Islam divide is the thesis that local tribal identities have been the motivating factor for conflicts across Sudan, and tribal rivalries have fuelled the war.

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[5] The political party set up by Hassan al Turabi in 1985, successor to the Islamic Charter Front of the 1960s, formally dissolved in 1989 but the de facto ruling party of Sudan in the 1990s, from 1996 under the name of the National Congress Party. In 2000 it split into the NCP (headed by President Omer al Bashir) and the Popular Congress Party (headed by Turabi).

Versions of this thesis have been applied to both Southern Sudan and Darfur, principally by ideological fellow-travellers of and apologists for the Sudan government (Hoile 2005).

A second, somewhat eclectic variant of this hypothesis is that while identity conflict may not have caused the war, the war itself has forged polarized identities. This is an interesting view that has not been properly articulated in the academic literature on the Sudanese war. However, it is striking that Islamic extremism flourished during the war, and Christianity spread widely at the same time. The view that conflict creates identity, rather than the other way round, is frequently found in anthropological studies of war. In the case of Darfur there is an interesting variant on this principle (Abdul-Jalil 1984), namely that the institutions of post-conflict settlement and reconciliation themselves cement tribal identities. The argument here is that insofar as conflicts are resolved through inter-tribal mediation, and reconciliation is achieved through the collective payment of <u>diya</u> (blood-money), the very process of ending the conflict defines it as a tribal conflict and compels individuals to identify with tribes.

Hypothesis Two: Centre-Periphery

Sudan is one of the most unequal countries in the world. National economic statistics are unreliable but the best estimates are that about half the nation's income and assets are in the capital, as well as about 75% of the country's health professionals. The country consists of a middle-income capital city and immediate surroundings, with a hinterland that would qualify as a "least developed country" were it not for the fact that it is actually becoming poorer. Sudan's impressive GDP growth rates arise in part from the rapid expansion of the oil sector after 1999 and in part from the profitability of the economy of the centre.

The most influential exponent of the view that the war in Sudan was a matter of unequal distribution of power between centre and periphery was the late John Garang. This view was common among leftist Sudanese intellectuals in the 1970s and has received articulate analysis, especially by Sudanese political economists and anthropologists. Some of these, for example Ahmed Diraige, Taisir Ahmed, Malik Agar and Sharif Harir, have themselves gone on to become opposition leaders and guerrilla commanders. Some of the finest economic analyses of Sudan explore this paradigm.

The stronger version of this hypothesis is that there exists a deliberate and consistent conspiracy by an administrative, military and commercial elite to exploit the provinces. The country's wars are a logical continuation of historic processes of asset stripping and proletarianisation of the rural populace which began in the nineteenth century and which has continued during war and peace alike. War is but a continuation of primary accumulation and displacement through other means.

The weaker version argues that extreme centre-periphery inequalities are the logical outcome of the historic imbalance of power and wealth in the country, inherited from colonial times. There is no conspiracy as such, but rather the operation of merchant capital according to its own iron laws, which mean that those who already have accumulated capital will continue to do so, at the expense of those who have only their labour to rely on, lacking even recognised title to their own lands.

Fatima Babiker (1984) has explored how Sudan's merchant classes (commonly known as *Jellaba*) function, extracting profits from the peripheries and investing them in the centre. Tony Barnett and Abbas Abdelkarim (1988) analyse the extreme disparities in investment and wealth between Khartoum and its environs (roughly including the Gezira, the White Nile to Kosti, the Gedaref mechanised farming schemes, the Nile to Atbara, and the towns of el Obeid, Kassala and Port Sudan) and the rest of the country. Mohamed Salih (1999) has studied the expanding frontier of mechanised farming and its role in generating further inequality through the expropriation of smallholder farmers and pastoralists to make way for agricultural "mining" of the central rangelands and other ecological niches. He shows how customary land tenure systems are brushed aside by land laws that benefit the elites. Mustafa Babiker Ahmed's research comes to similar conclusions (1988). The same is true for pastoral areas especially in eastern Sudan (Morton 1993). Mark Duffield's (2001, chapters 8 and 9) analysis of the labour market, and specifically the need of the Gezira scheme and mechanised farms for a large supply of workers at less-than-subsistence rates, concludes with demonstrating how war-related displacement and modest humanitarian assistance has further entrenched this pattern (see also Alsikainga 1996).

The migration of much of Sudan's professional class to the Gulf states from the 1970s onwards has accentuated inequality. By the late 1980s, the earnings of those expatriates were equivalent to more than half of Sudan's GDP and remittances from expatriate workers (mostly outside the official banking system and unrecorded) were by far the largest source of foreign exchange (Brown 1992). This inflow of hard currency financed a real estate and consumer boom in the major towns of Northern Sudan and generated considerable profits for those traders able to supply these new demands. Given that most expatriates hailed from the existing elites, remittances from the Gulf further exacerbated regional inequalities.

The economic hyper-dominance of the centre has far-reaching social, cultural and political implications. The social values prevailing in Khartoum are the standard for the rest of the country. All the leading educational and cultural institutions and all the country's electronic and print media are Khartoum-based. Provincial universities (with the exception of Gezira) and radio stations are pale echoes of their Khartoum counterparts. Only the national capital has the infrastructure to support a modern political party.

Centre-periphery political-economic analyses note the changing nature of the interests of the centre and the controlling elites, but tend not to theorise the divisions within those ruling elites. These disputes over who controls state power and the associated ability to dispense patronage are regarded as internal squabbles within an elite that remains essentially cohesive. The core of the hypothesis is that the central elite seeks control over the resources of the country by exploiting the natural resources of the periphery (farmland, oil) and the labour of its inhabitants, also gaining profits from trade in the provinces, while investing its capital only in the centre.

Under this account, the war began with, and has been sustained by, violent mechanisms of seizing assets (particularly land) and gaining control of a labour force, subjugating communities by destroying their capacity for independent organisation and, ultimately, their distinct ethnic identities. Land expropriation and forced displacement are the key drivers of this process. While this may be applicable to the "inner periphery" in which such expropriation has taken place, does

it apply to the more remote regions which are characterized more by neglect and migrant labour? Darfur, for example, has not been marked by expropriation of smallholders for commercial farming, and the Jellaba have faced fierce competition from a growing Zaghawa mercantile class and wealthier smallholder-entrepreneurs in the diesel-pump irrigation sector (mainly ethnic Fur). The main economic problem in Darfur has historically been neglect, not exploitation. Some of this neglect has been deliberate, insofar as the labour-hungry sectors have historically relied on recruiting Darfurian migrants. Economic inequality and neglect was used by Darfur's rebels as a justification for their rebellion, but the engine of that insurrection was local strife, albeit some of it encouraged by Khartoum.

The centre-periphery dynamic produces some interesting tensions within the Sudanese system. The most significant of these surrounds migration. When it depended primarily on agriculture, the economy of the centre relied on cheap migrant labour. The cost of labour was kept down by withholding full citizenship rights from Nigerian-origin labourers and withholding full land tenure rights from all migrants. Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees and displaced Southerners augmented this labour force in the 1970s and 1980s. By this time, the main demand for cheap labour was in the towns, especially the fast-expanding capital. While benefiting from their presence, the government saw migrants as a security threat and a burden on services (Karadawi 1999). However, the scale of migration was such that it was becoming increasingly hard to manage and the 1990s witnessed titanic urban re-planning and relocation schemes, intended to resolve this tension. These have worked up to a point: Khartoum remains a remarkably orderly and calm city. But it is vast and, as the riots following the death of Garang showed, potentially unruly. Government leaders speak fearfully of the "black belt" that surrounds the city and the threat this demographic majority may pose in times of conflict or democratic elections.

The centre-periphery paradigm takes the asymmetric political and economic relations between Khartoum and its surroundings, and the rest of the country, as its starting point. It reduces cultural and identity issues to secondary importance. However, it does not neglect them. Paul Doornbos's 1988 essay "On becoming Sudanese," documents the process of cultural change in two small towns in western Darfur, as the mores of the dominant Sudanese elite penetrate and take over local cultural traditions. Doornbos was concerned with a peaceful period in which the main mechanisms for cultural change were the intrusion of the market economy (and associated tastes in food and clothing) and the attempts by itinerant neo-fundamentalist preachers to cultivate an Islamic "orthodoxy" among rural people who were devout and tolerant followers of Sufi tradition. The centre-periphery framework sees Arabisation and Islamisation as mechanisms that have been intensified during the war for enforcing political-economic dominance and military control. For example, "peace camps" in which youth are inculcated with the Islamist values of the regime, losing their prior identities, are both an instrument of militant mobilisation and cultural change. The "Black Book" published by dissident Islamists in 2000[6] documents the domination of central government by people from the riverine tribes. It is both a centre-periphery analysis and a racial analysis, arguing not only that the northern elite has dominated the state, but that Darfurians are "too black" to be regarded as equals in the Islamist project.[7] Possibly, the reverse "Africanisation" of greater Khartoum may yet bring about different patterns of socio-cultural change at the heart of modern Sudan.

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[6] See *www.sudanjem.com*
[7] The phrase is from Abdullahi el Tom.

Hypothesis Three: Local Struggles and a Breakdown of Local Governance

There is a rich tradition in Sudanese writing that focuses on the fragility of the country's ecology and the eruption of disputes over resources including farmland, pasture and water. Mohamed Salih (1999) is one of a number of Sudanese academics to have written widely on this. The simplistic version of this argument is neo-Malthusian, claiming that drought, overpopulation and growing population pressure has led to conflicts between different rural groups, especially between herders and farmers. No scholar who has done empirical research in Sudan subscribes to this hypothesis. But many have documented how ecological degradation has contributed to conflict.

For Mohamed Salih, Mustafa Babiker Ahmed and others, one of the major reasons for ecological degradation has been the encroachment of mechanised farming into land that was formerly managed by smallholders and pastoralists. Thus, they argue, it is the power of the centre to impose its will on the periphery that has contributed to much of the environmental crisis and resulting conflicts. This explanation is persuasive in those areas where mechanised farming is indeed widespread, such as much of Kordofan, eastern Sudan, Blue Nile and the northern parts of Upper Nile.

But further afield, notably in Darfur, where there is little mechanised agriculture, other explanations must be sought. Here, the driving force for local resource conflict has been land hunger by camel-herding Arab groups in North Darfur and of Chadian origin. Their weak claims to both rangeland and farmland derive from the historical anomaly that the sultans of Dar Fur did not award them land grants in the eighteenth century and from the relatively recent arrival of the Chadians. Disputes over pasture and pastoral migration routes arise from a number of causes, including increased competition for a small number of migration corridors ill-supplied with water, the growth of irrigated agriculture along seasonal rivers that blocks migration routes, the southward drift of camel-herders following the ecological degradation of the desert edge, and the determination of recent Chadian immigrants to open up new pastoral migration routes. Disputes over farmland arise in part because impoverished former nomads looking for land to cultivate find that all the best land is already taken (Tubiana 2007).

Much is known about how traditional conflict prevention, management and resolution systems at the local level have broken down, either because the government has deliberately dismantled them, or because of an inflow of automatic weapons that mean that young men are freed from the social control of their elders. A number of Sudanese writers including Adam Azzain Mohammed (2007) and Musa Abdul-Jalil (1984) have documented this. James Morton (1994) argues that the dismantling of the system of tribal authority, known as Native Administration, by the central government in the 1970s was a direct cause of lawlessness and conflict. He argues that rural Sudan faces a choice between Native Administration and no administration. Other writers have also dealt with this topic, sometimes within the framework of centre-periphery relations (Harir 1994) or the counter-insurgency strategy of arming militia (de Waal 1994, Salih and Harir 1994). Sharon Hutchinson (1996) gives the most nuanced account of how conflict and modern weaponry have wrought far-reaching changes on society.

Less analysed has been the way in which local government structures have become politicised and militarised. It was always thus: those who try to hark back to a golden era in which tribal authority was fully accepted and pacific are overlooking the long and sorry history of how local authority was constituted and manipulated from time immemorial. However, under the current government, the militarisation of local authority has reached new heights. In the Nuba Mountains, chiefs were given *Jihad*ist military titles in 1992, and some of them came to operate private police forces and prisons. In the segmentary lineage systems of the Nilotic areas, chiefly authority was always contested but corporate action based on lineage solidarity could readily be mobilised. After more than two decades of conflict, authority has passed in large measure to war leaders. In Darfur, the rebel movements similarly built their mobilising structures around local *aga'id* (village defence leaders), marginalising the chiefs. In the case of the Janjaweed, military organisation and lineage authority began to fuse as early as the late 1980s, not least because the structure of peace talks and compensation payments identified lineages as the responsible entities. Since 2003, the government's mobilisation in Darfur has militarised most tribal authority structures.

Any attempt to explore the resource conflict and local governance hypothesis leads us directly into the question of how identity conflict and centre-periphery conflict are manifest at local level. Some identity clash theorists argue that traditional mechanisms can achieve peace, stability and reconciliation.[8] Adherents of the centre-periphery paradigm argue that the central government has deliberately or inadvertently undermined the mechanisms that provided for effective provincial governance, leaving these peripheries weak, fragmented, and open to exploitation and manipulation.[9]

Hypothesis Four: Consolidating the State

The fourth hypothesis that seeks to explain the Sudanese wars focuses on Khartoum's ruling elites themselves. This argues that it is the failure of any one of several contending elites to take effective control of the state that has rendered Sudan chronically unstable and prone to intractable conflict. According to this framework, the problems of identity, of centre-periphery, and of local governance are all secondary to the more fundamental problem of a state that is struggling to be financial viable and politically cohesive. Indeed, it argues, the very brutality of the war is a product of the inability of the state to maintain effective control of the means of violence.

The most important exponent of the competing elites view is Peter Woodward (1990). Building on Woodward, five central elites can be identified throughout the ninety years preceding Bashir's coup of June 1989. The first two are the two dominant sectarian parties. One is the Mahdist movement and its associated Umma Party, traditionally linked to landowning interests on the River Nile and the rural aristocracy of western Sudan, and the other is the Khatmiyya sect and the Unionist Party, associated with trade interests and the rural aristocracy of the northern and eastern regions. These two elites dominated each of Sudan's parliamentary periods (1953-58, 1964-69 and 1985-89). Another pair includes the "modern" forces: the administrative elite including the military, and the trade unions, professional associations, and the Communist Party, historically aligned with the left. Members of these elites are drawn from the same social strata as the

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[8] E.g. James Morton, 1994, pp. 228-9, for a sophisticated version of this.
[9] E.g. Sharif Harir, 1994.

traditional sectarian elites (especially the Khatmiyya) and have overlapping interests and loyalties. Lastly, the Islamists emerged as an elite group themselves in the late 1970s. The Islamists drew their membership from each of the above groups, their finance from the diaspora and the associated remittance-driven consumer sector and Islamic financial institutions and their clients, and their ideology from a project of national socio-political transformation.

None of these groups managed to consolidate their control of the government, and in turn the state never managed to consolidate itself. The 1989 Islamist coup marked the most ambitious attempt to overcome this elite fragmentation. The succeeding years have not seen the kinds of revolving doors in and out of government notable under the previous regimes. In the early 1990s, the regime embarked upon an ambitious revolutionary project, displaying determination and energy that surpassed its predecessors. There has been remarkable continuity among the senior members of the ruling group and a collective determination to hold on to power. A policy known as *tamkiin* intended to secure the dominance of Islamists in the country's administrative institutions has been pursued. But this appearance of cohesion masks ongoing internal fractiousness, albeit in a different key. Consistently, throughout the entire period of the Islamist government, the most important politics for the regime have been the internal tussles for power, between the security apparatus and the civilian cadres, and between different leading individuals in the government. Competing power centres existed from the very beginning, coalescing around the military clique headed by President Omer al Bashir and the civilian party elite headed by the visionary Islamist Hassan al Turabi. Internal divisions were highlighted in August 1990 when President Bashir promised the Kuwaitis, Egyptians and Saudis that Sudan would stand with them against Iraq, only to be countermanded by Turabi's declaration of support for Saddam Hussein. Turabi thereby showed his hand as the most powerful member of the government, despite the fact that he held no formal post. The next major crisis occurred in June 1995 when a militant group present in Sudan tried to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, without the knowledge of Bashir. Turabi also disavowed prior knowledge of the plot, thereby demonstrating the extent to which the regime had multiple centres of decision-making, some of them clandestine and answerable to no-one.

Finally, the rifts became unbridgeable in 1999. Under the guidance of Turabi (a lawyer as well as an Islamist theoretician) the regime tried to adopt a civilian and constitutional identity. This internal transition also served as a mechanism whereby Turabi sought to concentrate power in his own hands, leaving Bashir as a figurehead. As this consolidation approached its *dénouement,* Bashir struck back, using his power to declare a state of emergency to dismiss Turabi and later imprison him. But although Bashir decisively won that round, he is still fearful of the potential for an Islamist coalition to unseat him. This fear partly accounts for the ferocity of the offensives in Darfur following the formation of the Justice and Equality Movement, which has links to prominent Islamists aligned against Bashir. The National Congress Party (NCP) leadership is cohesive only in its resolve to stay in power, and its skill in pursuing that in the face of its internal fluidity.

Symptomatic of the failure to consolidate the state has been the unpopularity and lack of respect for Sudan's rulers. For this reason, they have sought to find legitimacy in various forms of populist mobilisation and particularly in invoking Islam. Within a system that has been unable to develop its own enforceable rules for political bargains, Islam has the attraction of providing a set

of pre-ordained and blessed rules and procedures. In addition, once a political actor has taken a step towards adopting political Islam, it is remarkably difficult for his successors to reverse it. Each of the most important steps down the road of Islamisation was taken principally for tactical reasons but then became set in stone.[10] According to this framework, the embrace of political Islam is less a cause of the conflict than a consequence of an underlying structural weakness that left Sudan vulnerable to conflict.

Woodward's analysis is primarily a classic political science account of state politics but an equally important dimension to this is the analysis of state finance. Since the late 1970s, Sudanese governments have faced a permanent financial crisis. In both peace and war the problem is essentially similar: how to pay for the military and grease the wheels of a patronage machine. Nimeiri's solution had three elements. First, he extracted money from the USA by playing the Cold War card. This strategy ran out of road in April 1985 when the IMF and the US Treasury baulked at paying the amounts demanded. However, his successors continued to play this game, "managing the unmanageable" with considerable tactical adroitness (Brown 1992; African Rights 1997, chapter 2). Second, he allowed army officers to move into commerce, setting up the Military Economic Board in 1982 and handing over ownership of a number of companies to the army. Although Nimeiri reversed this under pressure from the World Bank, the principle of military-commercial partnerships continued. Third, he indulged the Muslim Brothers, whose Islamic banks were busy capturing a substantial part of the remittance flows from the Gulf.

When the war broke out, the financial crisis escalated, but the strategies remained the same under Nimeiri and his successors. The privatisation of war financing included: an "oilfields special force", support from Islamic banks and charities, the use of self-provisioning militia, and local merchant-officer partnerships to finance specific operations. The latter two methods combined to create a local dynamic to war in which militia leaders, merchants and military officers worked together to profit from the war, by raiding cattle, selling timber, smuggling ivory, and making windfall returns from the inflated price of grain and other essentials in garrison towns.

The cost of the war, both in terms of military expenditure and in terms of revenues foregone (especially in the oil sector) should, logically, have impelled the government to seek peace. But instead, the privatisation of war finance made the war more difficult to resolve. Arming militia leaves the dynamics of conflict outside the control of central government. Using certain subgroups of the elite - such as merchant-officer partnerships in the war zones - to control sectors of the war also allowed these local coalitions to pursue their own political and economic interests in sustaining local war economies, even overruling the central government in that locality. Over the years, these strategies have created an unmanageable set of problems in the peripheries and have deepened antagonisms to such an extent that reaching any political settlement becomes hugely more complicated.

The military coup of 1989 and especially Turabi's support for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait ruled out the possibility of international finance for the foreseeable future. The government came to

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[10] This includes the entry of the Islamists into government in 1977, the setting up of Islamic banks in 1978, the adoption of Islamic law in 1983, the embrace of international Islamist militants in 1990, the adoption of the "Comprehensive Call" in 1992, the declaration of *jihad* in the Nuba Mountains in 1992, and the adoption of an Islamic constitution in 1998.

rely much more heavily on Islamic finance, including opening its doors to militant *jihad*-ists such as Usama bin Ladin. Those funds did not pass through state coffers but were used to directly supply the army, the Popular Defence Force and militants from neighbouring countries, using Military Intelligence, specialised security agencies and international Islamic charities as intermediaries. The party, as opposed to the state, had much more control over how this money was directed. By the end of the 1990s, the official budget of Sudan had shrunk to a mere $880 million.

The fallout between Bashir and Turabi in 1999 was closely linked to a series of corruption scandals in Islamic banks and to the executive's attempt to wrest much economic control back to the government and away from autonomous Islamic financial institutions.

Since 1999, the budget of the state has expanded immensely due not only to oil revenues but also to the economic boom in Khartoum and the central parts of the country and to the ability to borrow from China. This growth has been astonishing: by 2007 the World Bank was estimating that the national budget would reach $11.7 billion. This probably represents an overreach and the budget will need to be cut, but it is still an extraordinary increase compared to the stringency of the 1990s.

Hypothesis 2x4: "Centre-Periphery" meets "Consolidating the Centre"

The "consolidating the state" hypothesis is strongest when it is linked to the centre-periphery analysis. This allows us to construct a model of political bargaining that explains Sudan's peculiar and chronic combination of political instability at the centre, extreme inequality, and violent turbulence in the peripheries. We can dub this "retail politics."

We must note how the hyper-concentration of economic, social and cultural resources in the centre means that the centre can sustain not one but multiple elites. Another by-product of the over-concentration of power and wealth in a middle-income enclave is that it supports an intermittently liberal political culture. During Sudan's parliamentary periods, each elite group can sustain its own party infrastructure, its own media, and its own constituencies complete with business interests, fully in the open. During periods of repression, those elite blocs that are in opposition operate semi-clandestinely, but are too powerful to be crushed. Sooner or later they re-emerge.

By contrast, the provincial elites between them cannot muster sufficient economic, cultural and social resources to form a bloc that can mount a serious challenge for power at the centre. The Southerners, united by race and anti-Islamism, have a head start on the elites from Darfur, Kordofan and the East, but the level of economic development and infrastructure in the South is a fraction of what is available to even one of Khartoum's elite groups.

The central elites need the provincial elites for two things: votes and militia. Although economically insignificant, the provinces command the numerical majority, and their votes are needed. Failing to generate support on account of welfare or development, votes are sought through sectarian and ethnic loyalties. The low-cost means of policing the peripheries and mounting counter-insurgency is through tribal militia. In both instances, a loyal, or at least

dependable, provincial leader is required as the intermediary. The position of the provincial elites is strengthened because the contending central elites are competing for votes and, to a lesser extent, for militia. Yet the ability of the central executive to dismiss tribal chiefs and replace them with more pliable alternatives means that few can consider their positions secure. Few provincial leaders can obtain sufficient private means to secure their own autonomy, though most aspire to do this—usually at the expense of provincial development funds.

Southerners, and more recently Darfurians, have aspired to establish a centre of administration and finance in their own region that can be the basis for forming an autonomous elite. The SPLM critique of the autonomous status for the South under the Addis Ababa agreement was precisely that it did not provide sufficient control over finance to allow this to happen, leaving the Southern politicians wide open to manipulation from Khartoum. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed in January 2005 to bring to an end the war between North and South, provides a much more robust basis for such a centre of quasi-state formation that could, in principle, allow for the SPLM to emerge as a cohesive provincial elite on a par with the Northern blocs. The SPLM leader John Garang always insisted that the South could only win its fair share of power if it were properly represented at the centre while <u>also</u> having autonomy. Since his death, the SPLM has put the emphasis back on Southern autonomy, neglecting the centre.

The Darfur rebels have sought to replicate this in Darfur, demanding an autonomous region and also a fair representation of power at the centre. Distrustful of the promises of democratisation in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), they want their demands translated into concrete constitutional commitments without delay.

Meanwhile, what strategies have been followed by provincial elites? The leaders of provincial parties, or rural blocs within national parties, repeatedly call for a grand union of the marginalised. Each time there is a democratic uprising, there is a brief flare-up of provincial solidarity, with the Beja, Nuba, Darfurians, Ingessena and Southerners making common cause. In 1985 this was called Rural Solidarity. Yet within a few months the coalition crumbles. In place of this recurrent and ever-unrealised vision, provincial elites follow two strategies. By far the most common is to attach oneself to part of the central elite, cutting a deal in which votes and/or militia are delivered in return for a place in the administration and/or commercial opportunities. Following the career of a provincial leader it is common to see him attaching himself to a succession of elite blocs, looking for the best deal. Darfurians have bounced from the Umma Party to the army to the Islamists, in different sequence, and occasionally have also attached themselves to the Unionist bloc, the "modern forces," and the SPLM. Easterners have aligned themselves with all of the above.

In parallel to this, members of the rural aristocracy have obtained an education and thereby become assimilated into the central elite (Ahmed 2002). Organised politically by the sectarian parties and the Native Administration system, they have not asserted themselves as a distinct bloc. Members of this group of the elite enjoy a more stable position than radical members of the provincial elites. However, their rural power base remains dependent on the patronage of the centre with respect to a "tribal" system in the provinces. The rivalry between the radical provincial leaders and rural aristocrats creates further divisions which the central government has

proven adept in exploiting. The common outcome is that ambitious members of the provincial elite fail to organise a common platform, become corrupt and become politically discredited.

The second strategy for provincial elites, used chiefly during war, is to seek the sponsorship of an external state. (Note that the central blocs also do this: Libya has often supported the Umma, Egypt the Unionists, and Saudi Arabia the Islamists.) Thus the SPLM has been backed at different times by Ethiopia, Uganda, Eritrea and the USA and the Darfurian rebels have obtained support from Chad, Libya and Eritrea, with the latter initially using the SPLM as an intermediary, and the SPLM itself acting as a quasi-state actor in extending support to the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) in 2003. This strategy also has the disadvantage that it severely compromises the autonomy of the client elite. The SPLM was badly burned through its over-reliance on Ethiopia in 1991 and sought to diversify its foreign patronage thereafter. The Beja Congress/Eastern Front are deeply vulnerable to the political calculations of Eritrea. The Darfur rebels have more options, but for several factions their freedom of political manoeuvre is circumscribed by Chad.

Centre-periphery patterns of political bargaining are similar during peace and war. The pattern can be described as the circulation of provincial elites (Bayart 1993), or as a "divide and rule" strategy by the government, or as opportunistic political survival strategies by fragmented and dependent rural elites. It also has neo-patrimonial characteristics (Schatzberg 2001) and is quite consistent with the hypothesis that African states instrumentalise disorder (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Each of these descriptions is equally accurate and each of them applies during both peace and war. Any description is, of course, incomplete without also referring to the shifting coalitions within the centre. This combination of instability in the central elite coalition and dependence among the provincial elites creates the flux and indeterminacy for which Sudanese politics is famous. Literally, nobody is in control. This has many consequences, but one is particularly grave: it is almost impossible to make peace.

The peacemaking process to end a Sudanese provincial conflict does not resemble the standard negotiating forum, with a cohesive government on one side and a cohesive rebel group on the other. Rather, it takes the form of a series of overlapping political bargaining sessions, with each faction within the government trying to locate its preferred client among the rebels, and the rebels trying to maximise their chances with the different central blocs, while keeping an eye on their provincial rivals to make sure they are not outflanked. In short, peace negotiations are a continuation of the patterns of political bargaining outlined above, marked by fluidity and second-guessing. In order to cut any final peace deal, it is not sufficient for the leader of the country to make a decision. It is necessary to negotiate painstakingly to obtain the consent of not only the different elite blocs at the centre, but also to neutralise potential spoilers in the provinces. Meanwhile, the provincial rebels will want to hold out for as long as possible because the configuration of power at the centre may shift, either offering them a better deal or leaving them stranded if they have made an alliance with the wrong elite bloc. If the provincial rebels have foreign patronage, they may also hope for a new regional dynamic that will boost that patronage and give them a more powerful bargaining position.

This particular configuration of explanations has the special attraction that it explains a persistent feature of Sudanese political life, namely that everything is always up for negotiation, and that the leaders who have risen to the top are uniquely skilled in manipulation. Sudanese governments

are routinely accused of perfidy and bad faith. This should not be taken as a judgement about the character of the individuals who rule Sudan: it is a structural condition of Sudanese governance.

Hypothesis Five: "Brute Causes"

Political scientists naturally tend to favour structural explanations for conflict—"root causes" (cf. Johnson 2003). Those who are close to the action tend to focus on the decisions made by individuals. The "brute causes" hypothesis originated as a riposte to the focus on root causes and an argument that, to the contrary, contingency and individual decision—especially bad individual decision—can play a major role in creating conflict. The "brute causes" approach also focuses on how and why political and social conflict becomes violent. Hypotheses one-to-four, above, are excellent at explaining the source of conflict, but do not necessarily explain why that conflict is armed, and why the violence is so often so extreme.

There are three main variants to the "brute causes" hypothesis. The first is that those who run the country are brutish: they are criminals and necessarily behave as such. According to this framework, President Bashir and select members of his inner circle, most of them generals and security officers but including some civilians too, long ago hatched a plan for the ruthless consolidation of power and the waging of war on all who stood in their way. They are cast as irredeemable criminals who cannot be reformed, intent on genocide, enslavement and other crimes against humanity. Such explanations fit the Manichean worldview of some campaigners. Human rights organisations (and latterly the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court) professionally focus upon individual accountability for actions, and hope that an end to impunity for such crimes will help resolve Sudan's crisis. "Bad men do bad things" is an attractive theory of crisis for some human rights activists (and also some diplomats) but does not go far in political science.

There is a less judgemental variant to the "brute causes" hypothesis, which emphasises the role of individual agency but points to the structural and cultural determinants of the choices that individuals make. The focus shifts to the decisions made to initiate, escalate or prolong a war. In the Sudanese case, the core argument would be that because of the difficulty in obtaining a consensus for any policy that is proactive and constructive, the default option prevails, which is to allow those groups within the power structure that are ready to act, to have a free hand to deal with the immediate manifestations of the problem without regard to the long-term consequences. This structural feature of Sudanese governance would then lead to a pattern whereby the most ruthless and/or opportunistic individuals repeatedly hold the initiative. Although the majority can see the folly of their ways, they are unable to muster the means to bring it to an end. One might call it the "rampage of folly" (cf. Tuchman 1984).

Thus, for example, the decision to formalise the militia strategy in South Kordofan and South Darfur in July 1985 had very far-reaching consequences for how the war was fought. It was an opportunistic action taken in the heat of circumstance, under a government that had no plan longer than a few months hence. In a different way, the personality of John Garang had a very powerful impact on the SPLA, including its decision to support the unity of Sudan, its very close alliance with the Ethiopian government of Mengistu Haile Mariam. His concerns over maintaining personal supremacy within the SPLA contributed to some critical military decisions

during the course of the conflict, for example the decision not to press home the near-victorious assault on Juba in July 1992. If we consider the war in Darfur, several key personalities and events stand out. The death of the first commander in chief of the rebel Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), Abdalla Abbaker, and his replacement by Minni Minawi, may have been the single most important factor leading the SLA towards splitting. Moreover, the erratic personality of Abdel Wahid Nur may have been the single most important handicap on the SLA developing into a coherent organisation.

There is no doubt that the war has allowed violent and ruthless individuals to rise to political prominence. Sudan may not possess more individuals with a tendency to extreme violence than other countries but the conditions that have prevailed over the last 25 years have given plentiful opportunity for such people to exercise their grisly talents and gain reward and recognition. Sudan's political culture has meanwhile become militarised, from the level of communities up to the national leadership and the media. At the apex of political power in Khartoum are men who would find it difficult to survive, let alone thrive, in a transparent and democratic system.

Under "brute causes" we can also include the hypothesis that war creates war. It does so both on the supply side and the demand side. Wars result in plentiful availability of small arms and established markets and supply routes for weaponry. Probably more significantly, every war creates a supply of men trained in the use of weapons, at least some of whom have gained some personal satisfaction and material gain from the professional use of organised violence. Post-war programmes for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration rarely cater adequately for more than a fraction of these men, who are left with their frustrations and grievances. As well as "war before", there is the "war next door" factor: armed conflict in an adjoining country provides a nearby supply of weaponry and soldiers.

On the demand side, previous wars and nearby wars create motives for armed conflict. Every war and every peace deal leaves a legacy of unresolved grievance. A next-door war generates motives for both insurgents and counter-insurgents to involve the country across the border. In Sudan's case, the second civil war was clearly related to the failures to implement the peace agreement ending the first, and the militia strategy was related to the failure to properly demobilise the fighters of the National Front[11] after their failed invasion of Sudan in 1976. The wars in next-door Eritrea/Ethiopia, Uganda and Libya/Chad also contributed hugely to the outbreak and recurrence of wars in various parts of the country. The 1990s Islamist insurgency in Egypt contributed to Sudan taking on the role of sponsor of al Qa'ida. If Ethiopia had been at peace in 1983, it is unlikely that its government would have supported the SPLA, which it did in retribution for Sudanese backing for Ethiopian and Eritrean insurgents. In the opposite direction, the war in Southern Sudan has contributed to conflict in northern Uganda, and the Darfur war has contributed to the escalation of conflict in Chad and Central African Republic.

Most potent of all is the interaction between demand and supply. A military entrepreneur in a powerful position can create the demand for and manage supply of the means of violence, gaining political clout and material benefit. The threshold for initiating armed conflict is lowered. The privatisation of security in rural Sudan means that local administrators, chiefs and army

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[11] The National Front was a coalition of conservative sectarian parties and the Muslim Brothers that established a rebel army at camps in Libya in the early 1970s, to fight against the Nimeiri regime.

officers serve both as servants of the state, and individuals who can pursue private material interests through the use of violence. They are able to demand the ability to organise a militia or a military operation and profit from it when it happens. Insurgents are in a similar position, albeit with fewer resources at their disposal and facing greater risks.

The "brute causes" hypothesis is testable only in the most simplistic sense that an empirical correlation between wars today and wars before/wars next door could be calculated. More importantly, it points to the likely intractability of war in Sudan. The Sudanese people may be exhausted by war and long for peace, but with the supply and demand for organised violence both so strong, it seems likely that those men who do the organising will continue to remain in business.

Conclusion One: An Over-Determined Crisis

The five hypotheses outlined above can make for an interesting intellectual exercise whereby a class of students can examine the very real differences between competing political science explanations for Sudan's conflicts. But the reality is that all the explanations hold water, albeit to varying degrees. Historians may debate the original causes and political scientists may dispute the underlying drivers, but each of the hypotheses points to factors that are really present in Sudan today and which need to be addressed if there is to be a solution to the crisis.

Our first conclusion, therefore, is that Sudan's crisis is over-determined. Just one of the five sets of factors is, on its own, sufficient to cause a conflict and for that conflict to be violent. Taken all together, they present a depressing picture of interminable complexity and intractability. The challenges of solving the crisis are enormous. Every one of the different factors needs to be addressed, across the country and simultaneously, with neighbouring countries also brought into the equation, if Sudan is to resolve its crisis. If one set of factors remains unresolved, that will be sufficient to plunge the country into another round of war, and as that war begins and escalates, all the other factors will come to play a role too.

All the problems outlined in the five hypotheses are common to many countries. Most of them will persist for the foreseeable future: ethnic and religious cleavages will not end, the peripheries will not become prosperous and fairly represented at the centre, and there will be no DDR programmes that satisfy every man who is carrying a gun.

This first conclusion begins to read as a counsel of despair. Can we fasten onto a core concern that, if well handled, can at least provide a platform for dealing with the other issues? Before that, however, we should note that some groups in Sudan are doing well at managing atop the country's chronic turbulence.

Conclusion Two: The Central Elites Can Survive

Disorder in the peripheries is not a threat, either economically or politically, to the class that prospers at the centre of Sudan. The country possesses a deep historical pattern, which reached its extreme in the mid nineteenth century but which has older roots and newer manifestations, in which the Sudanese state has a dynamic but factionalised core, an inner periphery of relative

stability but highly exploitative relations of production, and an outer periphery or frontier marked by extreme violence. This pattern has proved durable: it has succeeded in managing (though not resolving) its problems of intra-elite competition and financial crisis without collapsing. Whatever coalition of central elites happens to be running the country, there is a class of merchants, soldiers and administrators that prospers. It has a cultural cohesion that belies its political fragmentation. For this group, Sudan's crisis is a way of life. Doubtless they would prefer peace and stability, but the existing configuration remains manageable - and with the current astonishing boom in Khartoum, there are immense profits to be made.

Sudan's elite is expert at managing multiple crises. This is its *modus operandi*. It managed bankruptcy and debt, war and international isolation. It innovated important mechanisms for doing this, which have not gained sufficient recognition in the literature. It is facing new challenges that it has not yet learned how to manage, such as the huge number of provincial migrants at the centre, the unintended consequence of its ravaging of the marchlands. If greater Khartoum is unable to sustain its prosperity and relative social peace, the chickens will have come home to roost but this has not happened yet, and the government is working on the problem. Short of urban armed conflict, it is difficult to see how the central elites can be seriously threatened by any continuing disorder and conflict in the peripheries.

There are no new sanctions that hold much fear for a government that has lived with various forms of sanctions for eighteen years. Khartoum knows that threats of a non-consensual deployment of international troops are empty sabre-rattling. Indictments by the International Criminal Court will be a source of embarrassment and tension between Sudan and its aid donors, but the fallout from that can also be managed, especially if the government is ready to sacrifice some individuals.

Even the separation of the South, though humiliating and disadvantageous, will not threaten the existence of the central elite and its hold on power and wealth. Sudan's peripheries extend beyond its sovereign frontiers: the reach of its clientelism extends deep into Chad and the Central African Republic is now expanding to include Eritrea and its influence will continue to be felt in an independent Southern Sudan. None of Southern Sudan's southern neighbours and aid donors can match the resources available to the Northern elite blocs, and with the oil pipeline flowing north, numerous Southern groups with links to the North, and millions of Southerners living and working in the North, the North's ability to play politics in the South will continue.

The ruling elites are vulnerable to military reverses and are especially fearful of a coalition between an insurrection in a Northern periphery and a competing elite group in Khartoum, especially if it has the sponsorship of a neighbouring state. This helps explain the savagery of the response to the Darfur rebellion, the continuing heavy investment in the army and security services, the combination of repression and accommodation of the closest adversaries (Turabi's followers) and the anxieties over neighbouring states supporting insurgents. A military takeover could create immense turmoil and bloodshed including at the centre. But it is improbable that any military coup could be mounted that did not involve powerful elements from within the central elite factions, and so it is unlikely that it could change the fundamental elements of Khartoum's rule.

Although neither powerful by international standards, nor internally united, the groups that have ruled Sudan since its inception one hundred and fifty years ago will continue to dominate the state for the foreseeable future. The Sudanese state has sat atop turbulence at the centre and profound, violent and intractable conflicts in its peripheries since its inception, and has learned to live with these realities. It has passed through the worst and now faces a much more favourable economic and political environment. It can continue to manage for a lot longer.

Conclusion Three: The Route to Stability Lies through Khartoum

The analysis of this paper points to one particular conjunction of factors as being the key to Sudan's chronic instability and inability to achieve peace. This is the "2x4" hypothesis: that the combination of instability at the centre and centre-periphery inequity creates a state of perpetual turbulence, in which it is almost impossible to obtain the configuration necessary to resolve conflicts. This is the phenomenon of constant motion without forward movement—turbulence and paralysis. Justice and equity demand that there should be a long-term effort to provide social, economic and political infrastructure to the provinces, to reshape the country's imbalances of power. The immediate imperative of stability demands that stability be established at the centre. It is only with stability at the centre that the crises in the peripheries can be tackled.

Four times in Sudan's post-colonial history, a military leader has tried to establish a hegemonic despotism.[12] None has succeeded. It is likely that senior security officers will be tempted to try again, but even if they overthrow the existing government, it is certain that they will not be able to rule Sudan as an effective dictatorship. The alternative path, which is democratisation, is mapped out by the CPA. This is also perilous: democratic elections have not led to stability in the past and are unlikely to do so in the future. In fact (as discussed below) free elections under the CPA formula could be a recipe for polarisation, instability and even violence.

How can a cohesive centre be established? The most important aspects to this are finance and security. Regime finances (that is, financial flows controlled by the government, the ruling parties and their commercial and security organs) have to be centralised. They should be transparent to the country's president and first vice-president (and preferably to the parliament too). The strategy (or rather, habit) of sponsoring militias and setting up parallel security agencies should be reversed, so that the president and first vice-president have direct command and control over the organised armed forces in the country. Given that the regime's parallel and off-budget channels for financial support are under the control of security agencies, the two issues are closely linked.

While centralisation of power over money and the use of force might seem to be an attractive option for Sudan's rulers, there are good reasons for the leaders of both North and South to prefer to retain elements of the existing system. The main reason for this is that centralisation implies transparency which in turn places limits on the plans that each leader can make. The leaders of the NCP and SPLM are paying lip service to common objectives in the Government of National Unity while preparing their semi-secret fall-back options in case of a new war or an attempt to remove them from office. There is a fundamental lack of trust within the government which

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[12] The first three occasions were the military coups of 1958, 1969 and 1989. The fourth occasion was Bashir's internal coup against Turabi in December 1999.

means that the problem of multiple power centres will continue. The CPA has not overcome this axis of distrust.

One factor may, however, work in favour of cohesion: the sheer scale of the economic boom at the centre. Were they a sovereign territory, Khartoum and the nearby regions would qualify as a middle-income country.[13] The national budget has expanded more than tenfold in eight years. Potentially, the state is not only solvent but affluent, its resources far surpassing all parallel financial channels. Bold leadership in Khartoum could break the habits of the past and establish a new political dispensation based on these resources. More likely, however, is a scenario in which the scale of resources available at the centre merely intensifies competition for control and leads to a better-financed continuation of existing practices. One reason for the latter is the absence of any plan for demilitarising the Sudanese peripheries so as to establish a monopoly on the use of force by the central government. The militia strategy, both in the provinces and across Sudan's frontiers, has gone too far to be readily reversed. Moreover, it has proved its value in managing Southern Sudan and other peripheries.

The CPA is a Gamble

The 2005 CPA is the most sustained attempt to resolve Sudan's structural crisis since independence. It is a bold attempt to square several circles at the same time. It tries to balance the SPLM's demand for a "New Sudan"- a project to replace the polarised identities of the Sudanese with a common commitment to a national project of equality and democracy - with the NCP's insistence on retaining Islamic law in the North. It tries to balance the Southerners' demand for self-determination and its half-way house, a "one country, two systems" approach to rule with the NCP's core demand for a united Sudan. It also bravely assumes that democratic elections will produce an outcome that consolidates all these goals. The CPA is also the outcome of a long and tortuous process of negotiations between the NCP and the SPLM, which resulted in an extremely complex and ambitious set of proposals for the country. It locked Sudan into a six-year timetable of institution-building, elections and referenda. Although the spirit of the early negotiations was to find Sudanese solutions that involved a minimum of foreign engagement, the outcome has included a powerful and intrusive role for the UN and for foreign governments, who act as the guarantors of large parts of the process.

The CPA schedules elections for 2008-09.[14] Previous democratic elections have never produced stability in Sudan. On no occasion has one party commanded an absolute majority in parliament, and no coalition has lasted longer than two years. There is no reason to suspect that the forthcoming elections will be any different. On the contrary, while previous elections vested power in four main blocs (Umma, DUP, Islamists and Southern groups), any fair future elections are likely to witness the erosion in the support of each of these blocs. Informal opinion polling by Sudanese parties suggests that no party would gain more than 20% of the vote in a fair election. Such an outcome will make every single party, as such, dispensable. The NCP will be especially worried by a potential alliance between the Umma and the Popular Congress Party, while the

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[13] Sudan's GDP is about $35 billion. If we conservatively estimate that two thirds of this accrues to the "centre" which contains about 10 million people this implies regional income per capita of over $2000.
[14] The text of the CPA is in fact slightly ambiguous regarding the date. It could, perhaps, be postponed with the consent of the NCP and SPLM.

majority of the civilian parties will be worried that an NCP-SPLM diarchy will continue to rule. But neither of these two coalitions is likely to gain a majority. A large number of permutations is possible, and there is no sign that any post-election government will avoid the semi-paralysis of previous democratic interludes.

The ruling parties have good reason to fear fair elections and to prevent them from proceeding. Other possibilities include militarised elections and elections whose outcome is disputed, due to allegations of fraud, the inability to hold elections in some constituencies (e.g. in Darfur), lack of consensus on population figures from the census, or perceived illegitimacy of the outcome because of an opposition boycott. Two of the major contesting parties—the Umma Party and PCP—have made it clear that they oppose some of the basic provisions of the CPA such as self-determination for the South, and may refuse to register under the recent party law that requires political parties to declare their support for the CPA.

However, the option of postponing the election would be a signal that the CPA is in danger. The one element of the CPA which commands true popular legitimacy across Sudan is the national elections, and to postpone or tamper with them would further erode the legitimacy of the government. Possible outcomes would include further violence in the North, and even a unilateral attempt at secession by Southerners. The structure could collapse with violent outcomes considerably worse than today.

Sudan's transition is overburdened. A divided government with weak state institutions is expected to take the country through major changes that are certain to be traumatic. Not only are there multiple transitions—from war to peace, from dictatorship to democracy, from relief to development—but the key steps are sequenced in such a way as to exacerbate the existing tendencies towards turbulence and uncertainty. In the CPA, the sequence is: national elections, referendum on self-determination, then finally working out the permanent status and identity of the country. Elections can work only if there is a basic consensus among the parties contesting the vote on the legitimacy of the state and on fundamental issues of national identity (cf. Rustow 1996; Mansfield and Snyder 2005). Take away that consensus and elections are likely to be the flashpoint for violent conflict. A referendum on self-determination is certain to be extremely violent and disruptive if there is no prior consensus on its legitimacy and the acceptability of the outcome either way. With stability in mind, a more logical sequence would have been a national dialogue on the long-term future of the country first, a referendum next, and contested elections last.

An alternative reading of the CPA is that democracy is secondary to a new NCP-SPLM diarchy. Neither of the parties is committed to democracy: they want power for themselves. An indefinite share-out between the two is a logical option, and the formula for the Government of National Unity reflects this: the NCP takes 52% and the SPLM 28%, with the SPLM dominating the South. When the CPA was signed, this was envisioned as only an interim arrangement pending the 2008-09 elections. At that time, each had several options that it was keeping open. The NCP was creating a new alliance with the SPLM while still retaining its old allies in the South. It was buying off factions of each of the Northern parties while also keeping lines open to its former comrades in the PCP, in the hope of someday reuniting the Islamist movement. Meanwhile Garang was simultaneously canvassing three options: a diarchy with the NCP, a revival of the

alliance with the sectarian parties that dominated the NDA, and a grand union of the marginalised that would bring in (among others) the Beja, the Nuba and the Darfurians. For each, the CPA was the foundation for a new political struggle. The fact that both the NCP and the SPLM had made incompatible promises to different constituencies meant that, sooner or later, the power-sharing formula of the CPA was sure to run into a crisis. The death of John Garang and the subsequent political eclipse of Ali Osman Taha obscured this inevitability: the political problems inherent in the CPA have merely surfaced earlier than would otherwise have occurred.

For both the NCP and SPLM, one logical response to the likely scenarios of destabilisation is that they embrace each other more tightly and continue a distrustful, semi-paralysed diarchy. This is a formula for deadlock: the power-sharing formula will allow either or both of the parties to use its veto power to paralyse the democratisation process (cf. Roeder and Rothchild 2005). The conditions for a democratic transformation beyond the "interim" CPA power-sharing formula do not exist: neither of the principal parties is sufficiently internally consolidated to be able to strike the compromises needed to move the democratisation process forward; there is no culture of accommodation or flexibility between them; neither is sincere about allowing the will of the people to be expressed; and the state institutions necessary to oversee transformation with stability do not exist. While the party law implies continued NCP-SPLM rule, most Sudanese see elections as an opportunity to vote out the NCP. While the NCP sees a "secession" vote in the Southern referendum (should it be held) as the beginning of a long process of negotiated separation, Southerners would see such a vote as a charter for immediate independence.

Sudan's western donors see themselves as custodians of the CPA. They also see the agreement as the only game in town and fear that abandoning it - or even substantially revising it - would open the floodgates of instability. They may be correct on both counts. But it is important to adopt the correct analysis of the CPA and recognise that many of the problems that arise are inherent to the agreement itself and are not merely shortcomings of its implementation.

The CPA is a gamble. It is not a solution to Sudan's structural problems but rather the last chance for the Sudanese political elites to find a solution for how to share power. The first gamble was that the first part of the interim period (until the elections) would be sufficiently peaceful and prosperous that the electorate would vote in a government committed to completing the process. The second gamble was that the interim period as a whole (until the 2011 referendum on self-determination in the South) would make unity sufficiently attractive to Southerners that they would vote for the *status quo*—a united Sudan with two systems of rule. From the outset, the odds against each gamble succeeding were high. The intervening two years have lengthened the odds still further. The single most important reason for this has been the war in Darfur, which has shattered the Southerners' fragile confidence in Khartoum's goodwill. Meanwhile the Darfurians fear that the Southerners are about to betray their hopes for a democratic united Sudan by voting for secession.

The downside of the gamble is that should it fail, the renewed crisis has every potential to be more violent and destructive than its predecessor. A new war would begin in the cities between the regular forces and paramilitaries of the North and South, plus their proxies, and the war aims would be to achieve or contest the partition of Sudan. It could be very ugly indeed, with displaced populations especially vulnerable. Contested partitions tend to involve large scale

violence against civilians and forced displacement. Most probably, the CPA gamble has already been lost, and the challenge is how to manage the imminent break-up of Sudan in such a way that the bigger aim of peace is not also lost.

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper is consonant with most scholarly analysis of Sudan's crisis in presenting the ethnic and ideological factors as products of other processes, notably the strategies adopted by successive governments for managing the peripheries, and the militarisation of society. It differs from most analyses in its emphasis on the importance of failed consolidation of state power. However, the inability of any single elite group, or coalition of such groups, to consolidate its control over the state has not challenged the social, economic, cultural and political dominance of a class of people drawn from a small section of Sudan's national population. Not only has this class been able to survive amid the turbulence of Sudan's national life, but they have become adept at exploiting the weakness of the state so as to be able to prosper. Meanwhile, state managers have become extremely skilled at navigating uncertainty and managing multiple crises.

The vision of a "New Sudan" articulated by the late John Garang went some way towards addressing this structural condition. The "New Sudan" project was, however, too poorly institutionalised and too weakly political constructed to have much chance of success, even before the death of its exponent. The CPA is Garang's legacy but should also not be fetishised. It was never going to be a panacea for the country's multiple challenges. It gambled that the hardest political questions could be kicked down the road, giving the country enough time to recover from the war and discover the benefits of living together in peace. Two years after the signing of the CPA, it is clear that the gamble is unlikely to pay off. We are witnessing a continuation of retail politics by the competing power centres of the NCP and security services, both among themselves and with respect to the provincial elites.

Sudan's political geometry appears constructed so as to be insoluble. The probable outcome of the North-South peace agreement is the separation of the South. It would seem sensible to begin to plan for that now, to ensure that secession is conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner and that the legitimate interests of the North in the South, and the South in the North, would be protected after partition. That is difficult enough to achieve given the sensibilities of the NCP and most international organisations and foreign governments over even talking openly about separation. When the Darfur conflict is added to the picture, the outcome appears beyond obvious solution. The Darfurians are fervent unionists and their war becomes harder and harder to settle the more imminent a division of the country becomes. Meanwhile the ongoing war in Darfur both justifies Southern scepticism about Northern intentions and also provides a pretext for the NCP to remain on a war footing. The only consolation is that a sound analysis, however pessimistic, allows us better to prepare for the challenges ahead.

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