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# PROTRACTED CIVIL WAR IN THE SUDAN

## ITS FUTURE AS A MULTI-RELIGIOUS, MULTI-ETHNIC STATE

————— CAROLYN FLUEHR-LOBBAN —————

The modern nation-state of the Sudan presents a challenge. In thirty-four years of independence from English rule, the Sudan has failed to achieve either political unity or modest economic development. These twin failures are related because the independent Sudanese state has been entrenched in a civil war between North and South for twenty-two of those thirty-four years. As well as being politically divisive, this war has systematically drained the country's economic reserves. The conflict is frequently described as a clash between Arab-Muslims of the North and Christians and Animists in the South. However, this religiously based description offers little to explain the Sudan's tragic failure to build national unity. As with other conflicts that are considered religious in nature—in Lebanon or Northern Ireland—more complex social-anthropological, historical, and economic facts that could illuminate the issues are ignored.

Most alarming in the recent round of civil war and renewed militarism is the fact that the central government in Khartoum is openly discussing disintegration of the nation-state which was defined by colonial boundaries in 1898. Moreover, the terms of the conflicting parties—the government in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)—apparently are irreconcilable. All efforts to initiate peace talks (including noble tries by the Organization of African Unity, Jimmy Carter, and even Ted Koppel via a special "Night-line" dialogue between the conflicting parties) have failed.

The past decade of bloodshed has brought death to millions of Southern Sudanese from war or war-induced famine. Hundreds of thousands have been forced into political exile in Ethiopia, Uganda, or Kenya, while others have become economic migrants and are marginally employed or unemployed in Khartoum. The national integrity of the Sudan, with its rich diversity of cultures and languages and its multi-religious character, is in jeopardy. The chronic nature of the conflict between the regions, and the inability to forge a national unity out of the diverse cultures and religions calls for analysis.

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### The Construction of the Sudanese Nation-State

The name, "the Sudan," is derived from an Arabic racial-geographical term, *Bilad as-Sudan*, "the land of the Blacks." For a long time it referred to the Sudanic belt of Saharan West African peoples. Apart from the ancient state of Kush and the Islamic Sultanates of Sinnar and Darfur, no expansive nation-state building occurred in the Sudan until the Ottoman invasions. The Ottomans arrived in 1821 and imposed Turkish rule extending from Nubia in the north to the furthest upper reaches of the Nile, deep into what is now Southern Sudan.

In the nineteenth century, the Ottomans were halted by the *Mahdiyya*, an Islamic fundamentalist movement. This group later arrested British imperialistic interests and headed the Sudan's first indigenous government. The Mahdists reigned over an early Islamic Republic from 1884 to 1898 when the British returned to crush the nascent state and establish the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Building the state upon boundaries established by the Ottomans on the basis of trade or military outposts, the British also fostered an educated elite among the northern riverain peoples—Nubians, Ja'aliyin, and Shayqiya—who were primarily lower-level administrators. The British carefully cultivated the Mahdi family and its direct male descendants to ensure their loyalty to the crown and keep Islamic revivalist tendencies in check. The now-familiar system of land registration and taxation, imposition of Western-derived laws, English language education and selective Christian proselytizing in the South were the essential components of the colonial encounter.

Neither Northerners nor Southerners thought of themselves as "Sudanese." Long after independence, rural people spoke of "going to the Sudan" when they traveled to the capital city Khartoum. In the 1930s, intellectuals planted the nationalist movement in Khartoum which flowered in the 1940s. These peoples of the North possessed a tradition of stratified polities with local sheikhs exercising religious and political control and influence. Not surprisingly, nationalist sentiments were most strongly expressed among these groups. In the immediate pre-independence period, political parties organized in the North came to the forefront of budding Sudanese national politics.

On the eve of Sudanese independence, other important ethnic and regional groups were left out of a political equation that was being formulated. Only a year before the 1956 independence, a rebellion broke out among police militia in the South and spread to the general population. The revolt reflected the region's bitter disappointment at being denied participation in the independence process and not receiving proportional representation in the new National Parliament.

#### *Deeper Historical Roots of the North-South Conflict*

The first outbreak of violence in 1955 was not simply a spontaneous reaction of anger at unfolding events of Sudanese independence. The depth of mistrust between regions and people dates back to Northerners' involvement as middlemen or raiders in the slave trade. The first regular contact between Northerners

and Southerners was through slavery. The human trade that began in the 1830s continued throughout most of the nineteenth century.

Slaves were taken mainly to fill the ranks of the Turco-Egyptian armies, and only secondarily for domestic purposes. They thus became a critical part of the Ottoman Empire. Despite strong abolitionist sentiments in England, the British turned a blind eye. Trade of non-Muslims flourished in the upper reaches of the Nile and the borderlands between North and South—*Bahr al-Arab/Bahr al-Ghazal*—rendering these regions unsafe for non-Muslims. For the free peoples from various acephalous, egalitarian backgrounds, transformation to slavery and vassalage within a hierarchical and alien cultural system represented a calamitous event. Although human trade was abolished in 1900, the psychic and social trauma of this event reverberates in Sudanese society a century later. The modern state perpetuates that painful cultural memory in the political subordination and economic isolation of the South.

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By the 1930s, the British had begun a conscious policy to divide the South from the North. This was pursued not only through Christian missions in the South, but through formal ordinances that prohibited the use of Arabic language and dress. Although commerce was permitted, it was carefully monitored and authorized only through the *Jellaba*, Northern traders who previously had depended on the slave trade for their fortune. The historical background of slavery coupled with limited access between the regions to enforce cultural and racial stereotyping. Northerners viewed the Southerners as inferior beings, naked and lacking religion or civilized ways. Southerners believed the *Jellaba* came only to steal, extract, and exploit. While the British believed that exposure to Christianity and Western life would uplift the more backward Southerners, a comparable paternalistic view emerged among some Northerners. They presumed that conversion to Islam would civilize the South and eventually provide a basis for national unity.

Since independence, Northerners have viewed the South as a problem to be solved. Most of the contact between the two regions has occurred in the context of political crisis or conflict. A rebellion in 1955 escalated into civil war in the immediate post-independence period. This continued until 1964, when a popular revolution overthrew a military dictatorship led by General Ibrahim Abboud, whose solution to the Southern rebellion was to promote Arabic language and Islamization of culture and religion.

In 1965, in the aftermath of the national popular revolt, a historic roundtable conference was held to facilitate a national discussion of the Southern problem. Representatives of separatist rebels, the Anya Nya, were excluded from the dialogue as other Southern and Northern political groups called for the maintenance of the unity and integrity of the Sudan. In spite of this controversy, the conference's message—to build a unified Sudan—survived in the brief period of democracy from 1965 until May 1969 when a second military leader, Jaafar Numieri, seized power and began his "May Revolution."

One of the first tasks of Numieri's government was attending to the South where civil war had continued throughout the 1960s. The concept of regional autonomy seemed a viable solution and in 1972 a negotiated end to the civil war, which granted autonomy to the South, was achieved by the Addis Ababa Agreement. This was hailed throughout the African continent and the world as a triumph of peace and negotiation over the damaging effects of civil war on a developing country. Yet the maintenance of peace and unity stumbled on political corruption and the unfulfilled promise of economic development.

*The Numieri Years, 1969-1985: Raised Expectations and Deepened Distrust*

For Southerners, General Numieri became a national hero. He put the weight of the state apparatus and the military behind the Peace Accords. Under his rule, Southerners experienced security and a measure of participation in national government. This included Southern Vice-President Abel Alier; other high-level cabinet posts; a Ministry of Southern Affairs headed by a Southern minister, Joseph Garang; and significantly, the incorporation of the former rebels into the national Sudan army.

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The good will that developed between North and South expressed itself in political rhetoric that envisaged a "new Sudan" and a "new Sudanese people" with men and women of all regions working together for the nation's political and economic development. Political rallies were attended by large numbers of Southerners who Northern politicians referred to as "brothers and sisters" and "free citizens or fellow countrymen." Initially, genuine enthusiasm brought the people to the rallies; later, busloads of official Southern "supporters" became the norm. When speaking at the rallies, Numieri used a simplified, highly

colloquial version of Arabic. Among the Southerners, only the intellectuals understood English, and few Northern politicians knew any Southern languages (which include among others, Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk). According to the Peace Agreement, Arabic was recognized as the national language with English as the second language. Southern languages were recognized in regional government and primary education.

This interlude of trust and goodwill between North and South disintegrated at the end of the decade. Failure to bring promised economic development to the South eroded the fragile peace. Exploration by the Chevron Oil Company revealed that commercial oil deposits existed in the South only, but the national government in Khartoum determined that a refinery would be placed in the North. The government's decision revived an old pattern of exploiting Southern resources for the benefit of Northern infrastructure and economic development. Southern leaders close to the Numieri government were forced to defend the administration's hollow reassurances that Southern economic development was on track. Separatist sentiments resurfaced as the discontented discussed parallels with a situation in Biafra with its oil wealth and civil war. To solve the dissatisfaction and new dimension to the Southern problem, Numieri resorted to redistricting. This political gerrymandering sapped newly found political potential that the South had gained through regional autonomy, contributing further to the breakdown of peace.

Meanwhile, citizens in the North were growing weary of Numieri's May Revolution. They experienced runaway inflation, large-scale economic corruption, and growth of a new class of multi-millionaires, rising political repression, and the general rightward, repressive turn of the regime. These realities wore away Numieri's support in the North and destabilized the regime.

After repeated coup attempts, Numieri turned increasingly to Islam. Although he claimed to find Islam a source of personal strength, clearly religion became a tool for political manipulation. As in other regimes where Islam has assumed a greater political role, the Muslim Brotherhood began to break out of its isolation as an extremist, sectarian, non-nationalist organization. Since the pre-independence era, the Brotherhood strived to Islamicize the state, law, and society. In particular, they sought to install the *Shari'a* as the sole national law. Efforts in the 1970s to Islamicize certain laws, such as banning alcohol and instituting the *zakat* (a charitable religious tax), were unsuccessful due to Southern opposition in the People's Assembly, Numieri's single party parliament.

In 1983, renewed conflict broke out in the South led by John Garang and the newly created Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA). The movement proclaimed a democratic, secular, and civilian future for the Sudan's underrepresented peoples. Included in this group were peoples of the Western Sudan and the Nuba Mountains who had been left out of national politics. Rising Islamic fundamentalism became a symbol and a rallying cry for the new national movement, the SPLM, based in the South.

Later in 1983, the "September Laws" were enacted, making *Shari'a* law the state law of Sudan. This action was encouraged by the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Turabi, who Numieri had appointed attorney general.

With this change in government structure came a comprehensive criminal and civil code based on the rightist interpretation of Islamic law. New laws in the Sudan now permitted *hudud* punishments—"to the limit"—including amputation of limbs for theft and stoning for adultery. Between September 1983 and April 1985 (when Numieri was overthrown) more than 200 people were subjected to amputations. Many of the victims of Numieri's "Courts of Prompt Justice" were non-Muslim Southerners and nearly all were poor. The culmination of this unusually brutal period in independent Sudan's history was a second popular revolution in April 1985 and intervention by the military which promised to restore civilian rule within a year.

*The Second Period of Democracy and its Collapse, 1986-1992*

The euphoria and unprecedented flourishing of democracy that occurred after sixteen years of military dictatorship stirred traditional political centers in the North. However, the SPLM leaders remained deeply distrustful of the original coup-makers and a democratic coalition government led by Sadig al-Mahdi. He headed the Umma Party and inherited his mantle of authority from the Mahdist religious tradition. A major stumbling block to negotiations between the parties was the al-Mahdi government's failure to remove *Shari'a* as state law, the *sine qua non* for the SPLM to initiate the peace process.

This historically ingrained distrust of Northern politicians proved correct. Despite pro-peace rhetoric from Prime Minister al-Mahdi, no progress toward talks was made under his leadership. New conflicts arose, encouraged by traditional ethnic rivalries between Arab groups and Southerners along the *Bahr al-Arab*. The government fostered the enmity by arming historical enemies of the Dinka tribe which comprised the bulk of the SPLA. Some of these local government-supported militias engaged in raids on animals and people, resurrecting powerfully familiar fears of slavery revived. Some Northern social scientists and an Africa Watch human rights report indicate that slavery, by most accepted definitions, was never fully eradicated in the Sudan.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the deterioration of inter-ethnic and inter-regional relations, the civil war period since 1983 has devastated the South. An estimated one-half million people have perished, mostly through war-related famine. Both the Sadig al-Mahdi regime and the SPLM have hampered international relief efforts. Mounting pressure on al-Mahdi to withdraw the *Shari'a* as state law in exchange for a constitutional process that would open the way for talks with the SPLM/SPLA appeared to be taking effect in 1989. However, on June 30, 1989, the Islamic right staged a preemptive strike to halt this process and toppled the al-Mahdi democratic government.

Sudan began its third period of militarism in 1989 without much optimism. It soon became apparent that General Omar al-Beshir's regime was a transparent front for the National Islamic Front and its fundamentalist, religious-ex-

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1. See Ushari Ahmed Mahmud and Suleyman Ali Baldo, *Al Diein Massacre: Slavery in the Sudan*, (Khartoum: 1987); and "Denying the 'Honor of Living': Sudan a Human Rights Disaster," in *Africa Watch Report* (New York: 1990).

clusivist ideology. Within days after the coup d'état, all political parties and organizations, except avowedly religious ones, were banned. Only three years earlier, more than forty political parties and organizations had participated in the country's first democratic elections since 1965. Within weeks of the June coup, all major media outlets were shut down or brought under direct government control and a number of newspaper editors were arrested. Within months, the regime had arrested scores of intellectuals, scholars, and university professors, human rights activists, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals with ties to democratic movements. Most were detained without trial, and significant numbers have reported being tortured in "safe houses" where standards of prison conduct are not observed. Ironically, some of these safe houses were former headquarters for the democratic and professional associations, such as the Bar Association and Journalists' Club. International protest soared. The Cairo-based Arab Organization for Human Rights blasted the regime for "massive violations of human rights," and Amnesty International and Africa Watch cited the human and civil rights situation as "horrible." In addition, relevant scholarly associations, such as the North American-based Sudan Studies Association and the Middle East Studies Association, have criticized the regime for its repression of scholars.

Al-Beshir reinstated *Shari'a* state law, which was only briefly suspended during the democratic interlude. The *hudud* penalties also were included, although to date the excesses under the September Laws have not been witnessed. The regime's posture regarding the South has become harsher, if that is possible. Advocating a return to a military solution, the government shows no demonstrable interest in peace negotiations. The regime has even made suggestive references about "leaving the South to the separatists" while pursuing discussion of the creation of a homogeneous ethnic-religious state in the North.

The government's policies toward other Islamic states could affect the civil war's duration and outcome. Sudan's relations have tightened with the governments of Iraq and Iran. During the 1990-1991 Gulf war, Sudan sided with Iraq. Briefly, it appeared that Sudan might allow its soil to be used as a staging ground for missile attacks on Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In December 1991, Iranian President Hashimi Rafsanjani arrived in Khartoum with a delegation of 200 advisers and specialists. This visit was clearly a gesture of support for the Sudanese Islamic revolution. Tangible evidence of the strengthening of this relationship includes the shipping of military hardware from Iran to Sudan. The hardware would be difficult for the isolated Sudanese regime to obtain on its own. There also have been reports of Iranian advisers and militia arriving in Sudan to fight against the SPLA in the South.<sup>2</sup> Such alliances will prolong the war by encouraging the Khartoum government to pursue a military victory rather than a negotiated settlement.

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2. Bona Malwal, "Iranian Influence in Sudan and the Regional Balance of Power," *Sudan Democratic Gazette* No. 20 (January 1992).

### Analysis of the Chronic Conflicts Affecting the Sudan

This outline of Sudan's political history and its continuing social problems cries out for further analysis. Particular insights from social science regarding race, ethnicity, regionalism, and culture may clarify some issues, if not suggest solutions as well.

#### *Racism*

Although racism is rarely considered by Western and non-Western scholars studying the Sudan, it is perhaps the most important problem facing the country today. Traditional analysis of intercommunal tensions has focused on ethnicity ("tribalism" to a previous generation of scholars) and language or cultural differences. These appraisals barely arrive at the heart of the issue which is racism steeped in the memory of slavery.

The designation of Southerners as *Abeed* or "slaves" by Northerners is a legacy from the slave era. More disturbing has been the contemporary documentation of slavery or slave-like conditions resurrected in Western Sudan and borderline Southern areas. The controversial issue of slavery was raised in 1987 by Ushari Ahmed Mahmud and Suleyman Ali Baldo, two Sudanese social scientists who interviewed survivors of the Al-Diein massacre in which several thousand Dinka were slain. The survivors verified that kidnapped Dinka were enslaved by the Misseiriya and Rizeigat tribes which had been armed by the government to control the border areas between the North and South.<sup>3</sup> The government responded by silencing the messengers: Baldo was forced into exile; Mahmud was imprisoned by the democratic al-Mahdi government and later held without trial by the al-Beshir government. He has since been released because of intense international pressure from academics and human rights groups.

Much of the tension, prejudice, and repression is due to a lack of understanding between North and South and the vast physical and cultural differences among the peoples of these regions. The Nilotic Southerners, for example, are taller and leaner than the Northern Sudanese and have darker skin that Northerners have described as being eggplant colored. Their distinct appearance is complemented by different languages, religion, culture, and lifestyle. Southern Nilotes speak the major languages of the eastern Sudanic branch of the Nilo-Saharan language family: Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, or dialects of these. The majority hold animistic religious beliefs and practice ancestor veneration; and they are pastoralist, making their living by herding cattle—or come from a pastoralist tradition—and supplement this with farming.

Northern "Arabs," on the other hand, reflect a myriad of different ethnic groups and languages. These include Nubians, eastern Hamitic groups, and Western Fur, who do not speak Arabic as a mother tongue, along with the more culturally dominant riverain groups such as the Shayqiya and Ja'alinin for whom Arabic is a first language. Northerners are less homogeneous and more

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3. Mahmud and Baldo.



racially mixed than the Southern Nilotes. While the Nilotes remained geographically isolated until the nineteenth century, Northern groups have had historical contacts with Egypt and Turkey, and with Ethiopia since Pharaonic times. In addition, they have had continuous exposure to peoples of the Hejaz and West African populations through the Muslim pilgrimage tradition which has continued across the Sudan at least since the tenth century A.D.

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Although Northerners tend to be stereotyped as Arabs, only a minority of those considered to be Northern Sudanese speak Arabic as a first language or consider themselves Arab. The term "Afro-Arab," coined by Northern nationalists in pre-independence times, solves a modern identity crisis for the Northern Sudanese who have been seen by others—colonialist or other Arabic speaking peoples—as neither fully Arab nor completely African. Southern intellectuals have rejected the Afro-Arab label as a national designation, preferring to refer to the Sudan simply as African. By European-derived standards of racial designation, both Northern and Southern Sudanese are regarded as "Black" or African. This has been a more painful lesson for the Northern Arab Sudanese who have traveled outside the country than for the isolated Southerners.

English colonialists enforced regional and racial separation, while cultural practices and the rules of Muslim marriage encouraged class and religious endogamy. However, chronic civil war remains the worst culprit in engendering stereotypes and divisions between North and South, Muslim and non-Muslim. These stereotypes are increasingly racist. The current government's official army publication depicts Southerners with exaggerated "Negroid" features, emphasizing cultural backwardness and savage-like traits. Such flagrantly racist portrayals represent a new dimension in the divisive history of Sudanese politics. Sudanese society must address the issue of racism, both constitutionally and socially, if the nation is to survive intact.

#### *Ethnic Tensions and Cultural Dominance*

Prior to the formation of the nation-state, traditional tensions were common between Sudanese groups competing over regional natural and animal resources. The North-dominated nation-state made a political error in excluding or subjugating the acephalous peoples of the South in the independence. This has incubated a false national consciousness built upon cultural dominance by

the North and notions of Northern superiority. The Sudan has been left without a true national identity. During this time, the economic, cultural, and political control by urban Northern riverain peoples has remained unaltered. These notables, or ruling elite, who come from religious parties or are modern secularists from the army,<sup>4</sup> are almost invariably from the same geographic-cultural region. Their dress, culture, language, and speech are held up as examples of typical Sudanese, while multi-culturalism has faded from political rhetoric. The harmful role of this elite in Sudan's flawed example of nation-building has been painfully drawn by Mansour Khalid, a disaffected notable, in his *The Government They Deserve*. Old tensions are being revived and manipulated rather than being submerged in a healthy developing national awareness. A simplistic ideology of national and cultural unity based in Islam is being fostered to neutralize Northern groups that have been excluded from the traditional ruling elite. They should be natural allies of the Southerners, but race, ethnicity, and religion block any alliance.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Religious Differences and National Culture*

The Sudan is approximately 70 percent Muslim and 30 percent Animist and Christian. The exact percentage of Christians is unclear although it is likely that their small numbers are confined to educated Southerners and a tiny population of Coptic and Eastern Rite Christians from Egypt, Greece, Syria, and Lebanon. Traditionally, religious tolerance was the rule and religious minorities were protected through legal rights in personal status laws. However, with the protracted war, increasing numbers of Southerners have sought refuge in Northern cities where Christian holidays have become a time for agitation for economic and political rights. Northerners view the Christians as a potential threat because of their education and political consciousness.

At independence, a call was made for an Islamic Sudanese law and government. It went unheeded. Military regimes were the rule until the late 1970s when the political forces favoring Islamization began to gain strength. In 1983, the Islamic *Shari'a* became state law by fiat. Southern critics were ignored, while Northern Muslim critics were silenced by imprisonment, exile, or death. In the case of the elderly Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, it was death. His movement, the Republican Brotherhood, is an indigenous reform movement that claims Islamic law is unfit for modern democratic societies because it discriminates against women and non-Muslims. The Republican Brotherhood was isolated from the masses of Muslims when its leaders were declared apostates from Islam. Other critics among the intellectual and professional groups were neu-

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4. The country is witnessing a dangerous combination of the military and religious ruling classes.

5. One promising organizational development is the existence of a unified National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which was set up three months after the Islamic coup. It is comprised of the SPLM, the traditional Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Umma Party, the Communist Party, and a smattering of new political groups founded in the wake of the 1985 popular revolution. According to some observers (Malwal), it has not moved beyond traditional politics to mobilize a unified opposition of Sudanese that would be prepared to restructure the Sudan after its next political crisis.

tralized by being branded anti-Islamic, and therefore, in the current regime, anti-state. Threatened by the hegemonic nature of the present Islamic fundamentalist government, the SPLM/SPLA leadership refuses to negotiate with Khartoum. Meanwhile the al-Beshir government essentially has written off the South and speaks openly of consolidating the Muslim Sudan into an Islamic Republic.

The use of religion as a basis for national unity runs counter to modern global trends of the twentieth century, yet the same century has witnessed religion's power to mobilize nationalist sentiment. An example of this is the close association between Zionism and Judaism, and the powerful relationship between Islam and nationalism in Iran and elsewhere. Rather than being anachronisms, these examples may presage the development of other theocratic states. But the former regime of General Zia al-Haq in Pakistan and the current government of Sudan are examples of the potentially harmful combination of religious fundamentalism and militarism.

### **The Future of this Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious State**

The experience of statehood for former colonial states propagates artificial boundaries drawn with regard to geographical features and competing European interests rather than the integrity of indigenous ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup> When foreign powers performed the initial job of nation building, they tended to pass the reins of power to historically favored minorities. Given such conditions, one might doubt whether a stable state could result. The Sudan tried to resolve its dilemma by instituting a strong central government based in Khartoum controlled primarily by an army comprised of notables. With the wave of independence movements that swept the African continent in the 1950s and 1960s, the Organization of African Unity resolved to respect colonial borders. Ironically, the Southern movement prior to 1972 was dominated by a separatist ideology, but now the SPLM is leading a national and democratic struggle to liberate the entire Sudan from militarism, religious fundamentalism, and its traditional ruling elite.

In August 1991, the SPLM/SPLA underwent an internal split amounting to an attempted coup against John Garang by SPLA officers tired of repeated failures to negotiate peace. The protracted civil war and the SPLM/SPLA's unsuccessful attempts to deal with four separate governments in Khartoum and since 1983, ultimately affected their ability to uphold the banner of national unity that the movement had always espoused. A breakaway group led by senior officer Lam Akol called for a "separate and independent Southern Sudan." Meanwhile, the former Muslim Brother group, the National Islamic Front (NIF) which promotes national unity through Islamization, now speaks

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6. Britain considered making the Southern Sudan part of Uganda or Kenya and the possibility of permanently unifying the Sudan with Egypt remained an option until the eve of independence.

of letting the South go or relegating it to a minor place in a new Sudanese federation.

In the past, the solution applied to the Southern problem was regional autonomy coupled with economic development. This policy failed. Left in the hands of the ruling Northern elites, economic development was funneled northward. Thus, the South is not likely to trust such a solution again. Regional self-rule may answer uneven economic development problems in other multi-ethnic states, but too often in Sudan this results in Southern isolation from the nation-state. The Sudanese example suggests that rhetoric about self-rule must be bolstered by constitutional provisions to protect traditionally subordinate regions from political and cultural control by the nation's more developed districts. Regional economic development and mutually beneficial economic interdependence must be guaranteed by deeds, not merely by words. Only then will decades of deep distrust be reversed.

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Federation implies regional autonomy and self-governance, but given the South's history it also would mean continued economic isolation, rather than incorporation within the nation-state.

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Separation and/or Federation has been advanced as another solution to the Sudanese national problem.<sup>7</sup> First, it must be recognized that the two are related in the Sudan and elsewhere. As mentioned above, the English considered separating the South or attaching it to Uganda or Kenya for convenience in the administration of its empire. Later, failure to incorporate the South into the independent state led to the strong separatist sentiments expressed by Southern rebel groups under Anya-Nya initially, and most recently, by splinter groups of the SPLM/SPLA. Today, the Islamic fundamentalists in power in Khartoum promote a separatist political program couched in terms of a Southern federation with a future Islamic Republic of the Sudan.<sup>8</sup> Federation implies regional autonomy and self-governance, but given the South's history it also would mean continued economic isolation, rather than incorporation within the nation-state. The idea of federation may be fine for political speeches, but it shields a more destabilizing separatist philosophy. Ironically, never have these two diametrically opposed political movements, the NIF and the Southern separatists, been closer in their respective solutions to the chronic crisis in the Sudan.

Theocratic states, whether based on Judaism, Islam or Buddhism, to name a

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7. National Islamic Front, *Sudan Charter, National Unity and Diversity of January 1987*, reprinted in *Management of the Crisis in the Sudan, Proceedings of the Bergen Forum*, Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed and Gunnar Sorbo, eds. (University of Bergen: 1989), 133-144.

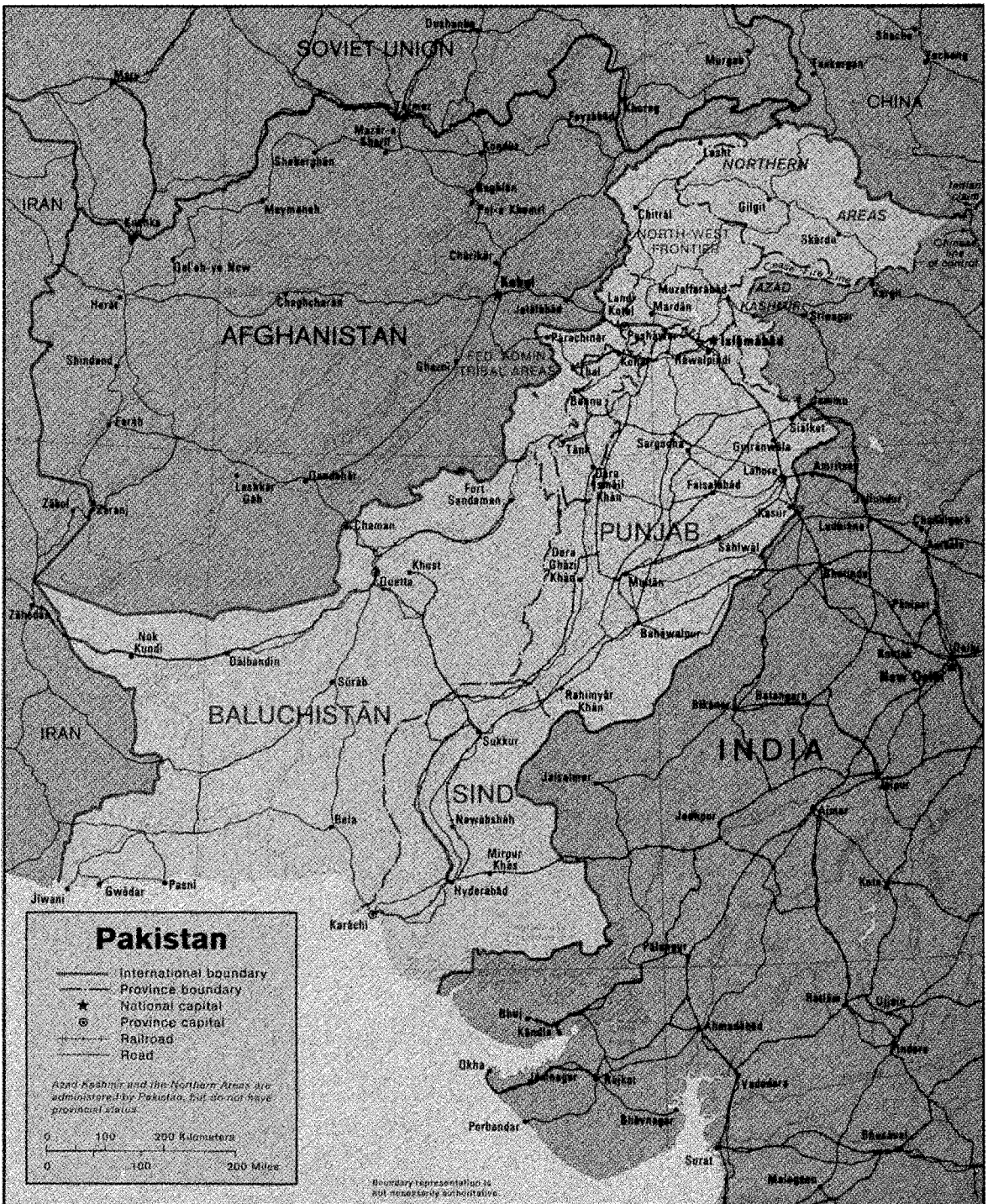
8. National Islamic Front, *Sudan Charter*.

few examples, are advancing rather than retreating in world historical development. The numbers of states claiming to or desiring to found law and government upon Islamic principles are increasing. In Islam, government, religion, and society are ideally blended. Islam has proven to be a powerful mobilizing force for nationalism in standing against Western political and cultural dominance. Is this a progressive or retrogressive trend? Given the evolution of Western society and the ideal separation of religion from state, the West would judge this as a backward trend. But Islamist movements are increasingly taking the democratic role of opposing one-party, secular rule, as in Algeria and Tunisia, and cannot be dismissed as retrogressive.

The Sudan, Africa's largest nation and one of its most diverse, has tried repeatedly but failed to create a stable national entity. This example provides a case for study of multi-ethnic and multi-religious states that hope for some consolidation and national identity. Lacking sufficient capital reserves for economic development, the Sudan's cultural and religious differences have foundered in the bankrupt economy drained of its tiny profits by perpetual war. The political solution, to create a democratic and secular state for the Sudan that would combine regional self-governance with constitutional guarantees of equality, freedom from racial discrimination, and equal economic development, is well-known but far from realized.

To complicate matters, in early March, the Sudanese government launched a major offensive in the South to take advantage of the divided Southern movement and the fall of the Mengistu government in Ethiopia which had aided the SPLA. The Iranian government provided military and personnel assistance for the Northern attack. With nearly all of the South in the hands of liberation forces, the first incursions were not decisive, but the balance of power shifted with the critical advent of Iran's aid. If NIF remains in power, and the Khartoum government militarily secures the South, negotiation for federation/separation of the South probably would result. In this event, it is unlikely that John Garang and the SPLM/SPLA would be the South's major negotiating party. Meanwhile, the future of this particular multi-ethnic and multi-religious state remains in jeopardy.





SOVIET UNION

CHINA

IRAN

AFGHANISTAN

IRAN

BALUCHISTAN

SIND

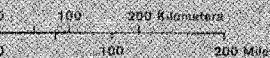
PUNJAB

INDIA

**Pakistan**

- International boundary
- - - Province boundary
- ★ National capital
- ⊙ Province capital
- +— Railroad
- Road

*Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas are administered by Pakistan, but do not have provincial status.*



Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.

