

Federal system of government appropriate for South Sudan

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February 2013 - A federal system of government appropriate for South Sudan is a view that is hoped to increase understanding. There is already an expressed fear of a federal system of government for South Sudan as too fragmenting. The fear is that South Sudanese will be compartmentalized into tribal homelands with the resultant increase in insecurity. Another fear is that the economic cost of maintaining a federal system will be very high. However, a close observation of a federal system may show that the fear is paranoia or likely as a mask of a hidden agenda.

The fear of a federal system of government for South Sudan may be an anxiety of how people with vested interest will fare. It has hardly anything to do with the benefits of a federal system. People may be paranoid of a federal system probably because of perceived deprivation of power and privileges, and perceived insecurity. The fear is also that of being uprooted from where one calls home. What this fear does is to make people very rigid in their stand against any mention of a federal system. Flexibility is seen as subscribing to the fragmentation of South Sudan. This was precisely what the Sudanese Arabs did when the South demanded a federal system of government for sustainable national unity of the Sudan they rigidly refused.

The consequence of the rigidity of the Arabs was the unfortunate breakup of Sudan. Eritrea had also demanded a federal system for Ethiopia but the brutal imposition of a unitary system ultimately caused the breakup of Ethiopia with Eritrea becoming independent. Hopefully, South Sudanese will be much wiser. People do not need to invent the wheel and they do not need to copy and paste either. They only need to be creative and pragmatic in developing an original approach in addressing challenges.

Systems of government

There are various systems of government in the world. However, for simplicity concentration will be on two systems, unitary and federal. In a unitary system powers are vested in the central government which may operate unhindered by local governments. In theory, distribution of resources from rich to poor areas and from the haves and have-nots needs a powerful central government that a unitary system is seen to offer. However, in practice a unitary system is not that effective in addressing regional imbalances. There are also ethnic issues that a unitary system may fall short of addressing.

According to one author of a book, American Politics & Society, central governments have been criticized as insensitive and federalism cited as a compromise solution to the claims by increasing number of regions and ethnic minorities in a variety of countries for more autonomy. After all it was the centralized power of England that had prompted the revolt of its American colonies.

Regions of South Sudan

Until the introduction of Turkiya in Northern Sudan little was known about Southern Sudan in the way of documentation for its history. The southern provinces of Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile were organized, garrisoned and administered separately equivalent to colonies under the Turco-Egyptian Sudan (1821-85). In the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1955) the three southern provinces were also administered separately by governors answerable to the central government in the North. From 1956 to 1972 the North treated the southern provinces as colonies and administered them separately. However, the southern provinces shared one destiny as they had been sources of slaves to the North with the subsequent gross marginalisation.

Irrespective of provincial and ethnic lines the people of the three southern provinces pulled their human resources together to confront the evil of gross marginalization by the North. In recognition of their similar aspirations, in 1972 the North granted local autonomy to the three southern provinces which became known as the southern region. However, in 1983 the southern region was turned back to its original status of three provinces of Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile but instead of being called provinces was then called regions. So the regions of South Sudan should be Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile but not in any other way.

Unitary system

Views for a unitary system for South Sudan have been expressed strongly. In the enthusiasm for a unitary system bizarre proposals could be made. For example, one bizarre proposal was to reorganise regions in South Sudan as eastern, central and western. The proposal was made as an individual expressed opinion in an SPLM training workshop in Home and Away Business Centre in Juba.

The eastern region was proposed to comprise Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei and Upper Nile while the central region to consist of

Central Equatoria, Lakes, Warrap, Unity and possibly Abyei. The western region was proposed to comprise Western Equatoria, Western and Northern Bahr el Ghazal. It was not clear how the reorganisation of the regions in South Sudan could promote unity if not to create the greatest confusion in the history of South Sudan.

Another proposal by an enthusiast of a unitary system was the centralization of employment from grade 9 to 1. This means the employment of graduates should only be the prerogative of the central government. This should be one of the serious disadvantages of an imposed unitary system. It could be problematic as tribalism and nepotism might encourage semi-literate, inexperienced and ignorant people employed and deployed to the frustration of effective service delivery in the regions. The outcome could be disunity instead. Further proposal was the centralization of education where boarding schools would be established and mixed intake received from all over South Sudan. In theory this sounds reasonable in promoting unity. In practice, however, it would be a mammoth task as corruption seems to be rampant.

Contractors would be needed to transport and feed students. Given poor investment in infrastructures a unitary system which is likely to be distant from the people would hardly be efficient. Already the centralization of organized forces such as the police, prisons, wildlife and the fire brigade does not make a unitary system attractive. Over-representation of some ethnic groups in key positions and in deployment can be perceived as the promotion of marginalization of others hence disunity is instead promoted. This does not bode well for a unitary system. An imposed unitary system in a country as diverse as South Sudan is unlikely to cope well.

Federal system

It has been seen that South Sudan was administered as three separate provinces since the Turkiya and the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule. In modern times it was administered as one and then as three regions. The propagated concept that when there is a federal system in South Sudan then the people will be divided is too simplistic. First of all the people of South Sudan had fought against gross marginalization as people of one destiny although they were from different regions and tribes. Arguably a federal system unites people but an imposed unitary system disunites.

In a federal system the government is closer to people and understands local issues better in putting mechanisms in place for efficient and effective provision of services to the people. In contrast in a unitary system the preoccupation is how to dominate and marginalize those who are not of the same feather. It is to protect narrow interest precisely as did the Arabs before the breakup of the Sudan. A federal system in South Sudan will more likely reduce rampant tribalism, nepotism, corruption, insecurity and discrimination or marginalization for sustainable national unity. In addition it will accelerate development for the benefit of the vast majority of people who are mostly in the rural areas.

A federal system unites people in that diversities are recognized and respected. The executive, judiciary and the legislature will effectively address issues at the grassroots with no one is seen above the law. The notorious criminal land grabbers and their sympathizers will be consigned to the dustbin of history. Cattle rustling in the way it is experienced today will most likely be a thing of the past because of the local concentration to address the problem. Inter-regional trade is likely to flourish, promoting interaction among people thereby bringing them closer for sustainable unity. The fear that in a federal system people will be discouraged to interact because they are already divided is false. It should be understood clearly that a federal system is not compartmentalization of people into tribal homelands. It is rather the administrative division of power and wealth for the benefit of the people where no power and wealth are concentrated in the hands of the few.

To win over the best brains and skilled manpower to one's region, the region must provide an attractive package. This means any South Sudanese can be employed and work in any region attracted by all the necessary benefits and incentives that go with the job. What should not happen is for the central government to impose the deployment of personnel on the regions.

Only central government specialised personnel may be deployed in consultation with the regions. Ordinary people can choose where to live and work in the regions. After all any South Sudanese has the right to live and work anywhere in the country as a law abiding citizen.

Cost of maintaining federal system

The fear expressed of the high cost of maintaining a federal system is debatable. First of all the federal government has the ability to levy taxes. Also the regions will make contributions to the federal government. For example, a region that produces oil must provide, say, 20 per cent of the oil revenue to the federal government. This means the region keeps the remaining 80 per cent for its development and security. Any region that has no oil must find alternative sources of revenue and must provide the federal government with a percentage of the revenue. This arrangement is likely to make the regions in the federation self-reliant.

The federal government will only be a skeleton but not a duplication of the governments in the regions. This is because it is the regions that will carry the massive burden of development of South Sudan. The federal government is expected to act like a referee. In this case the federal system will not be more of a burden than a unitary system. After all the regions must have the power to levy taxes to generate their own revenues for development and security, and to deliver services to the people.

In a federal system people are likely to be more united than in an oppressive unitary system.

The lukewarm reception of the concept of a federal system of government for South Sudan or outright rejection is not based

on sound objective analysis but is subjective and tribally motivated. It is evidently the protection of narrow interest.

South Sudanese will never be divided by a federal system of government because in the first place they had liberated themselves from Arab colonialism as people of one destiny although they were from different regions and tribes. How on earth will a federal system managed by South Sudanese divide them? What is being propagated against a federal system is sadly a combination of insensitivity and a mask of ulterior motives.

In conclusion, South Sudanese will always remain as people of one destiny. This is because they are acutely aware of Arab's designs to make South Sudan a failed state by all means. However, South Sudanese will ultimately be responsible for a designated failed status when they miserably fail to listen to the inner voice of reason for a better choice to be made between an oppressive unitary system and a federal system of equitable sharing of power and wealth for the common good of the country.

It can be observed that the decentralized system in South Sudan is in theory when in practice many aspects of governance are centralized with all the accompanying challenges.

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