CHAPTER SEVEN

BEYOND NEGOTIATING A MULTIPOLAR WORLD: SUDAN’S NON-WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION ALTERNATIVE

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Abstract

Sudan’s prolonged conflicts (South, East and West) have produced several enduring trajectories that have already shaped its present and will likely shape its future developments. Paradoxically, despite the tenacity of the conflicts and their colossal human and material cost – putting large parts of the country out of food and export crops production – Sudan has been able to maintain steady GDP growth for more than a decade.

The stark contrast between the devastation of war and the steady economic growth involves more than Sudan negotiating a multipolar world order. In fact, Sudan has engaged a reconfigured post-Communism unipolar world order, which until the rise of China, India and Brazil was dominated by the United States. The classic notion of bipolarity has given way to an emergent multipolarity, in which non-Western countries (for example, China, India and Brazil) have gained considerable economic leverage. These raw materials-, oil- and minerals-hungry economies have made their presence felt in Africa, in general and in particular Sudan. This has fundamentally changed the geopolitics in which Sudan operates and has led to the operation of fundamentally different trade, economic relations and political cooperation.

This chapter argues that while resource-rich economies such as Sudan could have been crippled by economic sanctions imposed under the unipolar world order dominated by the US, this scenario is most unlikely under the current multipolar world order. Sudan, therefore, is reaping the economic opportunities provided by engaging non-Western development cooperation partners, while steadily moving away from negotiating with the West.
Introduction

Sudan is a member of the group of former British colonies (Nigeria, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Somalia) which experienced various episodes of destructive civil wars at various stages of their post independence development. Certainly, Sudan’s independence was consummated in bloodshed, with the South Sudan rebellion erupting in August 1955 even before the British left in January 1956. In a country that has not enjoyed two consecutive decades without war since independence and that was governed by quasi-democratic regimes for less than only 15 years during its 55 years of assumption of self-rule, Sudan’s post-independence history is messy, wanting, bloody and – to some extent – a source of shame to its ruling elite and Western foes and friends alike.

In addition, in common with other former British colonies, Sudan’s independence period has been characteristically that of development into a neocolonial state, whose trade orientation – indeed, its economy and foreign policy – orbited in the periphery of the previous coloniser, with a short-lived and largely failed experience with socialism.\(^1\) Similarly, and no differently from many other African countries, Sudan became heavily indebted to the West and therefore received dictates rather than being able to negotiate or even make policy choices of its own.\(^2\) What was left of Sudan’s economic sovereignty was not only compromised but also ceded to the IMF and the World Bank, under the aegis of the ill-fated Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs).\(^3\)

If configured alongside a theme of negotiating multipolarity, Sudan has passed through three stages of International Relation (IR) regimes: bipolarity during the Cold War, unipolarity during the first decade after the end of the Cold War, and the current multipolarity. Typically, during the Cold War, developing countries such as Sudan played or were forced by circumstances to play the game of international diplomacy and choose (for genuine geopolitical considerations, ideological expediency or economic necessity) between Western and Eastern blocs. It was in this game that Sudan changed hands from the West, particularly when Sudan was ruled by quasi-democratic regimes (1955-8, 1964-9, 1986-9), to the East, when it was

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\(^1\) Niblock 1987; Khalid 1985.
\(^3\) Ibid. and World Bank 1990 and 2003.