

Is Self-determination Enough? Sudan, the Horn of Africa and the Challenge of Interdependence

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The present paper aims at analyzing the dynamics of interaction between self-determination and fragmentation, inter-dependence and integration in the geopolitical context of the “enlarged” Horn of Africa, taking the Sudan as a case study and a starting point for a wider reflection on the region.

Sudan is passing through a crucial phase of its history, which is very likely to witness the partition of the country into two distinct entities as a result of the exercise of the right to self-determination by the population of Southern Sudan. Self-determination is a contested issue in the Horn of Africa, which has witnessed the first – and up to now, only – exception to the principle of the sanctity of colonial boundaries (Eritrea), and it’s still waiting to see the outcome of an unaccomplished process of secession (Somaliland) as well as of a number of autonomist claims by historically marginalized populations (i.e. the Oromo in Ethiopia and the Acholi in Uganda).

Although the right to self-determination should be recognized and guaranteed as an inalienable right for all peoples, its unconditional affirmation risks leading to the formation of state entities unable to play a meaningful role in a globalized political and economic environment. The present paper argues that, in order to avoid it becoming a source of political irrelevance, when not of external exploitation or internal fragmentation, self-determination has to be complemented by a discourse centered on the key concept of interdependence.

The concept on interdependence has been studied by political scientists in mainly economic terms. Our thesis is that interdependence should be conceived in broader terms, encompassing geopolitical as well as socio-cultural factors.

Taking the Sudanese case as a starting point, our paper will try to develop lines of interpretations and analyses aimed at giving a reply to the following questions: what are the main factors creating relations of interdependence within and between political entities in the region? What are the conditions under which these very factors become source of conflict rather than stability? How do self-determination and interdependence have been dealt with in constitution-making and internal administrative reforms in the countries of the region? How does processes of supra-national integration can be instrumental in affirming the stabilizing role of interdependence? How does interdependence has been dealt with in the framework of peace-building processes in the region?