



Center for Conflict Analysis  
and Resolution

Working Paper 3

# Conflict Resolution and Civil War: Reflections on the Sudanese Settlement of 1972

by

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of

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## About the Author

Christopher R. Mitchell is professor of Conflict Resolution and International Relations at George Mason University, and a core faculty member of the Center. He is an international expert on third-party involvement in international disputes and the author of such works as *The Structure of International Conflict* (1981), *Peacemaking and the Consultant's Role* (1981), and *New Approaches to International Mediation* (co-edited with Keith Webb, 1988), and articles on the theory of de-escalation and conciliation in *International Studies Quarterly*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Peace Research* and the *Yearbook of World Affairs*.

Mitchell was educated at University College, London, with his PhD. dissertation focussing on Kenyan political conflicts. He was previously professor of International Relations at the City University, London, Visiting Fellow at the University of Maryland, College Park, Visiting Lecturer at the University of Southern California and at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Mitchell also served as a consultant to the BBC crisis simulation program, "A Game of War," and is honorary treasurer of the South Atlantic Council. He is a member of the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict, University of Kent, Canterbury, England.

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## About The Center

The Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University has as its principal mission to advance the understanding and resolution of significant and persistent human conflicts among individuals, groups, communities, identity groups, and nations. To fulfill this mission, the center works in four areas: academic programs consisting of a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Conflict Analysis and Resolution and a Master of Science (M.S.) in Conflict Management; research and publication; a clinical service program offered through the Conflict Clinic, Inc., center faculty, and senior associates; and public education.

Associated with the center are three major organizations that promote and apply conflict resolution principles. These are the Conflict Clinic, Inc., mentioned above; the Consortium on Peace Research, Education and Development (COPRED), a network organization; and the National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (NCPCR), offering conferences and workshops.

Major research interests include the study of deep-rooted conflicts and their resolution; the exploration of conditions attracting parties to the negotiation table; the role of third parties in dispute resolution; and the testing of a variety of conflict intervention methods in a range of community, national and international settings.

Outreach to the community is accomplished through the publication of books and articles, public lectures, conferences, and special briefings on the theory and practice of conflict resolution. As part of this effort, the center's Working Papers offer both the public at large and professionals in the field access to critical thinking flowing from faculty, staff, and students at the center. The Working Papers are presented to stimulate critical consideration and discussion of important questions in the study of human conflict.

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## Foreword

Christopher R. Mitchell's "Conflict Resolution and Civil War: The Sudanese Settlement of 1972" is the third in a series of Working Papers reflecting the research interests and findings of the Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. In the first paper, John Burton sets out a theoretical framework for "Conflict Resolution as a Political System." In the second, "Group Rebellion in America," I discuss the causes and nature of civil violence in the United States. And in this study, Professor Mitchell explores a relatively successful settlement of a serious, protracted conflict—the Sudanese civil war—in order to discover conditions for and methods of successful conflict resolution.

The thread uniting these papers is the George Mason Center's mission to develop methods of understanding and resolving deep-rooted conflict. Deep-rooted conflicts, whether between persons, ethni or national groups, classes, or multinational blocs, are those whose intensity and duration imply a serious mismatch between persons and the institutions that attempt to organize their activity. The parties to such conflicts are driven, consciously or not, by imperative and ineluctable demands that certain basic needs be satisfied, certain fundamental values realized, and certain non-bargainable interests protected. The institutional system that embraces them frequently requires restructuring if these basic demands are to be met. *Resolving* such conflicts, as opposed to settling them temporarily, requires change both in the parties' consciousness and in institutional arrangements—a tall order, but one that is necessary and possible if analysts and resolvers of conflict do their jobs.

Christopher Mitchell's paper focuses on an agreement that produced ten years of peace in a nation wracked by civil war. Given the enormous difficulty of settling such conflicts even on a temporary basis, this relatively long-lasting peace, involving significant institutional changes, rightfully attracts his attention. What in the substance of the agreement produced such a result? What did the process by which the agreement was secured have to do with this content? By answering such questions, this paper contributes to the theory of conflict resolution. By illuminating the causes of the Sudanese civil war and the processes used to settle it in 1972, it assists those interested in working to resolve the renewed strife in that country. And by giving a detailed, politically knowledgeable account of these processes, it enriches our understanding of the practical dimensions of effective conflict intervention.

July, 1989

Richard E. Rubenstein  
Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

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## **Conflict Resolution And Civil War: Reflections On The Sudanese Settlement Of 1972**

### **Abstract**

In 1972 representatives of the parties to the ten-year old Sudanese civil war met in Addis Ababa and, with the aid of third-party facilitators, entered into an agreement ending that bitter and costly war. Eleven years later, civil war broke out again in the Sudan; it rages even as this working paper goes to press. Nevertheless, there are important aspects in which the settlement of 1972, which brought a decade of peace to the people of the Sudan, can be considered a model for the resolution of civil wars involving demands by large minority groups for autonomy or independence from a central government. Both the process by which the 1972 agreement was arrived at and the content of that agreement merit careful study.

### **The 1972 Agreement: A Model Settlement**

One of the most interesting examples of recent international conflict management was the process which led to the signing of a peace agreement at Addis Ababa in February 1972. This settlement was made between representatives of the Sudanese government and of the South Sudanese Liberation Movement (SSLM), itself representing an amalgamation of smaller secessionist and guerrilla movements from the southernmost three provinces of that country.

The Agreement brought to a halt complicated, sporadic, but increasingly bitter civil war between "Arab" northerners and "African" southerners (although many southerners had remained part of the northern dominated political regime in Khartoum). It established a considerable degree of regional autonomy for the south, made arrangements for southerners to have continued representation in central government institutions in Khartoum, and established terms for economic assistance from the north to the traditionally impoverished and underdeveloped south. The Agreement also made arrangements for a ceasefire and a subsequent integration of the military wing of the SSLM (the Anya Nya) into the Peoples' Armed Forces (PAF) of the Sudan. It proved to be one of the main foundations of Sudanese President Ja'afar al Nimiery's regime during the following decade and of that decade's peace and stability between the northern and southern regions of the Sudan. This stability lasted

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\*This paper originated as part of a study of conflict termination processes carried out by the Conflict Management Research Group at The City University, London. I am very grateful for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper by Dr. Peter Woodward of the University of Reading and Dr. Hezekiah Assefa, and for other research help by Katherine Kennedy at City University and Jack Hope at the Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University.

until the terms and the spirit of the Agreement were unilaterally undermined by Nimiery, one of its main architects, and war broke out again in the mid-1980s.

Civil wars and secessionist struggles are the most notoriously difficult of all forms of large scale, violent human conflict to terminate successfully, short of outright "victory" for one side or the other.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the Addis Ababa Agreement is a relative rarity: a negotiated settlement of a major case of "civil strife." Aside from this atypical success, the settlement negotiated at Addis Ababa in early 1972 was unusual in four other respects.

For one thing, it represented a successful solution to a conflict in which the main issue increasingly became the survival of an existing political system, or its division into two separate systems via the secession of a part of the geographical "periphery." This type of domestic dispute is particularly intractable to any form of management. Usually, "solutions" involve the outright victory of the status quo party and the preservation of unity (as in the case of Nigeria or Katanga) or, less frequently, the victory of the revisionist party and the final splitting up of the system (as in the civil war between West and East Pakistan). Resistance to compromise and the pursuit of all or nothing solutions are particularly the case when the previous behavior of the adversaries has been as violent, widespread, and long-lasting as was the case in the Sudan.

Second, the process of arriving at a final agreement involved a successful mediation by a number of external organizations and governments, all of which helped (in a variety of ways) to bring about the final meetings and the eventual settlement. The successful involvement of outsiders in high-level civil strife is also a rarity. Such disputes are normally highly resistant to outside peacemaking, if only because of the barriers posed by doctrines of state sovereignty or non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries. Such doctrines are usually employed by political incumbents to avoid conferring any recognition or status on "rebel" movements, no matter how well supported they are.

Third, the conventional wisdom about leaders who make peace usually being new replacements for those who have initiated and conducted the war does not seem to hold good in the Sudanese case. It could be argued that the regime of President Nimiery had only been in power since the military coup of May 1969, and was thus in a position to repudiate earlier failures and repression, especially that carried out under the previous military government of General Abboud. However, examination of the final peacemaking process does reveal clearly that it represented a major switch of policy from that pursued by the Nimiery regime between May 1969 and July 1971.

Finally, there is the familiar argument that a successful negotiation or compromise must rest on the unquestioned ability of the leadership of both adversaries to conclude an agreement that can be sold to their supporters (and forced upon any dissident elements), and that this, in turn, depends upon firm control of their organizations and on an unchallenged position of predominance by both leaderships.





















































































