
The Contemporary Relevance of Federalism RONALD L. WATTS

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In the contemporary world, federalism has become increasingly important. This has arisen from the potential of the federal idea as a way of peacefully reconciling unity and diversity within a single political system. The essential notion of the federal concept, the combining of "shared rule" for some specified purposes and regional "self rule" for others, has been applied to different situations in a variety of pragmatic institutional forms. Among recent trends in the application of the federal idea have been the adoption of hybrid forms of institutions incorporating some confederal or unitary elements within essentially federal structures, the acceptance of constitutional asymmetry in the relation of member- units to federations in order to facilitate political integration, and the multi- level inclusion of federations within even wider federations or supra-national organizations. Nevertheless, contemporary federations in their operation continue to face a wide range of issues. The experience of existing federations points to some lessons that can be learned about the potential benefits and limits of federal solutions in the contemporary world.

The Apparent Popularity of Federalism

In the early years of the 21st century, federalism as a form of political organization appears to have gained increasing popularity. This arises from its potential as a way of peacefully reconciling unity and diversity within a single political system. As a consequence, there are in the world today some two dozen countries that are essentially federal in their character, claim to be federal or exhibit the characteristics typical of federations. Indeed some 40% of the world's population today inhabits countries that can be considered, or claim to be federations, many of which are multicultural or even multinational in their composition. Among the examples are: in North America: the United States, Canada and Mexico; in South America: Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela; in the Caribbean: St. Kitts-Nevis; in Europe: Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Spain and Belgium; in the Middle East: the United Arab Emirates; in Eurasia: Russia; in Asia: India, Pakistan and Malaysia; in Africa: Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa; in the Pacific: Australia; and in the Indian and Pacific Oceans: the island archipelagos constituting the

micro-federations of Comoros, Micronesia and Belau. In addition there are the as yet to be consolidated post-conflict federal experiments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Federalism is also under active consideration in a number of countries such as Nepal, and the Philippines. Furthermore devolutionary processes incorporating some, but not all, the features of a full-fledged federation are occurring in such countries as the United Kingdom, Italy, and China. The European Union (EU), while adding new member states and adapting to financial crises has been in the process of evolving its own unique hybrid of confederal and federal institutions. Thus, with changing world conditions, federal political systems and hybrids with federal features have continued to evolve, often with innovative variations.

Reasons for the Apparent Current Popularity

The reasons for this apparent popularity of the federal idea can be found in developments in the world today that are accentuating simultaneous pressures for both larger and smaller political states. Contemporary developments in transportation, technology, industrial organization, social communications, knowledge-based and hence learning societies, have all contributed to this global trend. Consequently, there have developed two powerful, interdependent but often opposed motivations: the desire to build dynamic and efficient national or even supra-national modern states, and the search for distinct political identities in smaller political units. The former is generated by a desire for progress, a rising standard of living, social justice, influence in international relations, and participation in the global economic networks. The latter has arisen from the desire for smaller, directly accountable, self-governing political units more responsive to the individual citizen, and from the desire to give expressions to such primary group attachments as linguistic and cultural ties, religious connections, historical traditions and social practices because these provide the distinctive basis for a community's sense of identity and yearning for self-determination.

Given these dual parallel pressures, on one hand for larger political units able to foster economic development and improved security and, on the other, for smaller political units expressing distinctiveness, federal solutions have had an increasing appeal throughout the world. Federalism provides a technique of constitutional organization that permits action by a common government for certain specified shared purposes in a larger political unit, combined with autonomous action by smaller constituent units of government for other specified ethnic, economic and social purposes. Thus federal solutions have provided a practical way of organizing the sharing and distribution of political powers in a way that enables the common needs of people to be achieved, while accommodating the diversity of their circumstances and preferences.

What is Federalism?

Over the years definitions of federalism have varied from broad inclusive ones to narrow restrictive ones. Daniel Elazar (1987) has appropriately described the basic essence of federalism as a constitutional arrangement involving two or more orders of government combining elements of “shared rule” through a common government for certain specified purposes and regional “self-rule” for constituent regional units of government for other purposes. The objective of federalism is to combine unity and diversity by accommodating, preserving and promoting distinct identities within a larger political union.

An essential point to note is that federalism requires a constitutional type of government which formally establishes the authority of the different levels of government. In this respect full-fledged federations are contrasted with unitary and confederal political systems. In unitary systems, the governments of the constituent units derive their authority from the central government. They may vary in their degree of decentralization, but ultimately the authority of the constituent units is established and retrievable by the central government. Thus the constituent units are ultimately subordinate to the central government. In confederal forms of the government, the central institutions derive their authority from the constituent units. In such systems the central institutions are therefore ultimately subordinate to the constituent units and their central institutions consist of delegates of the constituent units. What distinguishes a federal political system is that neither order of government derives its authority from the other. Both orders of government derive their authority from the constitution. In the terminology of K.C. Wheare (1968: 2) neither order of government is “subordinate” to the other, they are “coordinate.”

Each of these systems has its advantages and disadvantages. Unitary political systems facilitate decisive central action, but leave minorities vulnerable. Confederal systems provide full protection for constituent minorities, but invariably restrict decisive central action. Federations provide a balance between these extremes, but tend to be complex and involve constitutional legalities.

In order to establish constitutional “coordinacy” of the orders of government, federal systems generally have six basic common structural characteristics (Watts, 2008: 9): (1) two or more orders of government each acting directly on their citizens (rather than indirectly through the other order); (2) a formal constitutional distribution of legislative and executive authority, and an allocation of revenue resources between the orders of government ensuring some areas of genuine autonomy for each order; (3) a supreme written constitution, not unilaterally amendable by one order of government, and requiring the consent not only of the federal legislature, but also of a significant proportion of the constituent units through assent by their legislatures or by referendum

majorities; (4) an umpire (usually in the form of courts, but in Switzerland by provision for referendums, and in Ethiopia, by the House of the Federation (advised by a Council of Constitutional Inquiry) to rule on interpretation or a valid application of the constitution; (5) provision for designated representation of distinct regional views within federal policy-making institutions, usually provided by a federal second chamber composed of representatives of the regional electorates, legislatures, or governments; (6) processes and institutions to facilitate intergovernmental collaboration in those areas where governmental responsibilities are shared or inevitably overlap.

In reviewing the distinctive characteristics of federal political systems some further points are of note. In many political systems political practice has transformed the way the constitution operates. Therefore, to understand how a particular federal system operates, it is necessary to examine not only its constitutional law but also its political practices and processes. Federations have generally exhibited a number of significant characteristics in their political processes. One of these is a strong disposition to democratic procedures since they presume the voluntary consent of citizens in the constituent units. Another is emphasis on non-centralization as a principle and the dispersal of political decisions-making to multiple centres. Yet another is open political bargaining as a major feature of the way in which decisions are arrived. Fundamental is a respect for constitutionalism and the rule of law since each order of government derives its authority from a legal instrument, the constitution.

Hybrids

Statesmen are often more interested in pragmatic political solutions than in theoretical purity and therefore a number of hybrids combining the characteristics of different kinds of political systems have been established. Indeed, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries there has been an increase in these. A number of fundamentally federal systems have incorporated some unitary elements and a number of predominately unitary systems have incorporated some federal features. There are also examples of federal-confederal hybrids.

Where predominately federal systems have included some powers enabling the federal government in certain circumstances to override the governments of the constituent units, this arrangement more typical of unitary systems has led K.C. Wheare (1963: 20) to describe them as “quasi-federations.” At different stages in their development that description has been applicable to Canada, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, South Africa, Russia, Argentina and Venezuela (Watts, 2008: 13-4). In the case of Canada, while the constitution still retains the quasi-federal elements, they have fallen into disuse over the past half century so that while Canada has a “quasi-federal” constitution, in practice its

processes are those of a full-fledged federal system rather than of a hybrid.

In other cases we may identify federal-confederal hybrids. Germany, for example, while predominately a federation, has a confederal element in the Bundesrat, its federal second chamber, which is composed of the instructed delegates of the Land governments. A more extensive federal-confederal hybrid is the United Arab Emirates which, while it labels itself as a federation, is in its fundamental structure basically confederal (Watts 2008: 55).

An outstanding example of a confederal-federal hybrid is the European Union since Maastricht. Among its confederal features are the intergovernmental character of the Council of Ministers, the distribution of Commissioners among the member nation-states, the role of the latter in nominating commissioners, the almost total reliance upon the constituent member national governments for the implementation and administration of Union law, and the derivation of Union citizenship from citizenship in a member state. At the same time, elements more typical of a federation are the role of the Commission in proposing legislation, the use of qualified majorities rather than unanimity for many categories or legislation generated by the Council of Ministers, the role of the Council's secretariat in developing more cohesive policy consideration than is typical of most confederal or international bodies, the expanding role of the European Parliament which has a veto power over a substantial portion of Community legislation, and the supremacy of Community law over the law of the member states. The net effect of this hybrid character is that while the member states have accepted increasing limitations on their powers of independent decision to a degree considerably greater than even in some full-fledged federal systems, the common legislative and executive institutions appear to lack the support of the direct electoral and fiscal base in relation to citizens found in full-fledged federations. Not surprisingly, the resulting technocratic emphasis and "democratic deficit" appears to have undermined public consent and support for the European Union.

These examples of hybrids point to both the value and limitations of hybrids combing elements of different forms of political systems. They do enable innovations to accommodate particular circumstances and in some cases such as Canada and India they have been helpful in facilitating the transition during the initial years after the adoption of federal institutions. On the other hand, as some instances and particularly the European Union have illustrated, the lack of the coherent logic of a full-fledged federal system may itself become a source of tensions and difficulties.

Federal Variations

While certain fundamental structural features and political processes may be

common to full-fledged federations, it is to be noted that federations have exhibited many variations in the application of the federal concept. There is no single pure ideal form of federal institutions. Moreover, the relative success or problems of a polity may derive as much from the particular federal variant adopted as from whether federal or non-federal institutions are established.

For instance, political systems have varied enormously in area and population. On the one hand, Russia, Canada, India and the United States are continental in size, while four micro-federations - Comoros, Micronesia, St. Kitts-Nevis and Belau - each have total populations of well under a million, and indeed in Belau only 17,000. Not surprisingly these contrasting examples exhibit very different balances in the distribution of responsibilities among their governments.

Federal political systems have also varied in the degree of cultural or national diversity they attempt to accommodate. Some, like Germany, the United States and Australia are predominantly mono-national federations. Others are predominantly multi-cultural or even multi-national with at least some of their regional units marked by ethnic, linguistic, religious or national differences. Examples of the latter are Switzerland, Canada, India and Ethiopia. Not surprisingly, in the latter group the emphasis on regional autonomy has tended to be sharper.

Federal political systems have also been the product of different processes. Most of the earlier federations, like the United States, Switzerland and Australia were created by aggregation of previously independent or separate units. Many more recent federations, like Spain, Germany (after the third Reich), Belgium and Ethiopia have been created by devolution from a previously unitary regime. Some, such as Canada and India have involved both aggregation and devolution as processes (Watts 2008: 65). Federal political systems created by devolution from a previously unitary system have tended, although not invariably, to retain stronger central powers. Belgium provides a notable exception. A particularly contentious issue in federations created by devolution has been the designation of the new constituent regional units and the boundaries delineating minority groups. In Nepal, despite general agreement in principle among the main political parties on the establishment of a federation, difficulties over the designation of the proposed constituent units have to date blocked the adoption of a new constitution. Federal political systems have also varied in the number and relative sizes of their constituent units. They have ranged from 83 in Russia and 50 in the United States to just 2 or 3 in Pakistan (before 1971), Czechoslovakia (before 1992), Rhodesia and Nyasaland (before 1963) and Nigeria (before 1963). When the number of constituent units has been just two or three, or when one or two

units have been disproportionately large this has tended to affect the internal dynamics of a federation. Indeed, it has been a major source of instability (Watts 2008: 71-74).

The constitutional distribution of legislative and administrative responsibilities among governments has also varied widely both in form and scope (Majeed et al 2006). In some federations such as the United States, Canada and Australia, generally the same level of government has executive responsibility for its legislation. In others, Germany and Austria being notable examples, the constitution itself assigns administrative responsibility for extensive areas of federal legislation to the governments of the constituent units. The scope of authority assigned to each order of government has also varied and this has affected the degree of centralization, decentralization or non-centralization within different federations. Not surprisingly the degree of internal economic integration has therefore varied considerably.

The allocation of taxing powers and financial resources to different governments has also varied. The taxing power of the central government (before transfers) as a percentage of combined federal-state revenues has varied from 98% in Nigeria to 40% in Switzerland; the spending power of the central government (after transfers) from 84% in Malaysia to 32% in Switzerland; and the dependence of constituent unit governments on central transfers has varied from 96% in South Africa to 13% in Canada (Watts 2008: 95-108). The proportion of own source revenues and the degree to which transfers are unconditional or conditional has affected the relative strengths of the federal and constituent unit governments in different federations.

There has also been a considerable variation in the character and composition of the central institutions in federations affecting the processes for generating federal unity. Some have presidential systems and others have parliamentary systems. Most have bicameral federal legislatures but there are large differences in the manner of their selection, in their regional composition, and in their veto powers (Watts 2008: 147-155).

The processes and institutions for resolving conflicts and facilitating collaboration between interdependent governments have also varied. Some federations, most notably Australia and Germany have developed extensive councils and formal processes for collaboration, while others such as Canada have relied largely on informal processes.

An important factor affecting the operation of federations has been whether the character of the legal system is based on common law or civil law (LeRoy and Saunders 2006: 348; Watts 2008: 160-161). The United States and most of the federations that have evolved from former British colonies have common law legal systems while most of the European and Latin American

federations have civil law systems. Canada, South Africa and Nigeria have mixed legal systems, although in the field of public law they are predominantly common law in character. In civil law systems legislative codes are the predominant source of law and the courts in their interpretation tend therefore to be more limited in scope. In the common law federations the law derives from either legislation or judicial decisions with the latter having precedential value. In these federations judicial review has come to be a major element in the adaption and operation of the constitution.

Two types of courts for ultimate constitutional jurisdiction may be found among federations. Most common is a supreme court serving as the final adjudicator for all laws including the constitution. The other is a specialist constitutional court for constitutional interpretation. This latter is the pattern followed in Germany, Austria, Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United Arab Emirates, Belgium and Spain. Switzerland and Ethiopia have their own unique arrangements for umpiring their federal systems.

The procedures for formal constitutional amendment also vary. To ensure that neither level of government is subordinated, special procedures are usually specified, but the nature of these has varied. In different federations constitutional amendments have required ratification by constituent unit legislatures, or by referendums, sometimes with special majorities and sometimes with a special role for the federal second chamber. As a result, the balance struck between constitutional rigidity and flexibility has varied.

Recent Trends

It is worth drawing special attention to three recent trends in the application of the federal idea. One is the increasing number of hybrids. While hybrid constitutions existed as early as the nineteenth century, for example Canada, 1867, they were relatively unusual until the latter half of the twentieth century. The European Union after Maastricht represents an outstanding combination of confederal and federal features. But in addition there has been an increasing number of nominally federal systems incorporating some unitary or confederal elements. Among these have been India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Spain, South Africa, Russia, Argentina, Venezuela, Comoros and the United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, a number of unitary systems have incorporated some federal features in their devolutionary arrangements, the United Kingdom and Italy providing notable examples.

A second marked trend in the latter part of the twentieth century has been the acceptance of asymmetry in the relationship of different constituent units to a federation or supranational organization. Examples found in federations are Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Comoros, India, Malaysia, St. Kitts

and Nevis, and Spain. Perhaps the most complex example of internal asymmetry in practice was displayed by Russia in the Yeltsin period when, despite the formal constitutional symmetry of the constituent units, many were permitted to negotiate their own unique relationships. Constitutional asymmetry in the powers of constituent units is not unique to federations. Italy and the United Kingdom provide significant examples. The European Union has exhibited characteristics of a Union of “variable speeds” and “variable geometry.” Internal asymmetry among the constituent units of a federation or union has been resorted to primarily in cases where the strength of the pressure for regional autonomy has varied in intensity in different regions. Experience in the various federal examples suggests that constitutional asymmetry among the units within a federal system often introduces complexity and accentuates severe jealousies among different regions. Nevertheless, it would appear that for some federations asymmetry has proved necessary as the only way to accommodate severely varied regional pressures for autonomy.

A third significant development has been the growing trend for federations themselves to become constituent members of an even wider federation or supra-national organization. In the contemporary effort to reconcile supra-national, national and regional impulses, there has been an emerging trend towards multi-level governance. Thus, for example the European Union contains within its membership four federations: Germany, Belgium, Spain and Austria. NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, while only a free trade area and far from a full-fledged federation, is composed of three federations: the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Elsewhere in Asia, Africa, and South America federations have participated in supra-national organizations, although none of these has reached the level of integration achieved by the European Union.

Contemporary Issues in Federations

Some issues and challenges facing federations in the contemporary world are worth identifying. One is adjusting and maintaining the balance of federal and regional priorities in response to changing conditions. To take just one example the basic original Canadian compromise in 1867 involved assigning economic policy to the federal government and cultural and social policy to the provinces. But a century later it became increasingly apparent that underlying economic issues had an important impact on cultural and social autonomy and that the latter could not be achieved without involvement in economic policy-making. Thus over the latter part of the 20th century a re-balancing of the federal and provincial roles in the operation of the Canadian economy has taken place.

Another major issue is the continuing accommodation of diversity.

Internal diversity is not susceptible to a one-time solution. It requires an ongoing process. The objective of a federal system is not to eliminate diversity, but to manage it. An important element of this is ensuring inclusiveness for all the major groups within the federation in the processes of federal policy-making. Only in this way can the different groups all feel that they have a stake in the continuance of the federal political system.

An issue which faces most federations is that of providing safeguards for minorities within minorities. Federations are essentially a territorial form of political organization. In safeguarding distinct groups or minorities, they do this best when those groups and minorities are regionally concentrated in such a way that they may achieve self-government as a majority within a regional unit of government. Examples are the many largely unilingual and uniconfessional cantons in Switzerland, the predominantly French-speaking majority in Quebec within Canada, the various linguistic majorities in the Indian states, the predominantly Flemish and French-speaking Communities within Belgium, the populations of the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia in Spain, and the primarily ethnic character of many of the Ethiopian states.

But populations in practice are rarely distributed into neat watertight territorial units. In virtually all federations some intra-unit minorities within the regional units have been unavoidable. Where significant intra-regional minorities have existed, sometimes efforts have been made to redraw boundaries to coincide better with the distribution of linguistic and ethnic groups. Examples are the separation of Jura from the canton of Bern in Switzerland, the reorganization of boundaries in India in 1956 on primarily linguistic lines, and the progressive evolution of Nigeria by stages from three regions to 36 states. Nevertheless, it has been extremely difficult in most federations to avoid leaving some intra-regional minorities. Consequently, the most widely used approach to this problem in federations has been to embody a set of fundamental citizens' rights in the constitution to be enforced by the courts (Watts 2008: 165-8). Among federations that have either included in the original constitution or have added later a list of fundamental rights are the United States (1791), Mexico (1917), Germany (1949), India (1950), Malaysia (1963), Spain (1978), Canada (1982), Belgium (1993), Russia (1993), Brazil (1994), South Africa (1996), Nigeria (1999) and Switzerland (1999). In Ethiopia with more than 80 different ethnic groups and some 200 dialects there are too many for each (except for some of the larger groups) to have its own constituent unit, but all Ethiopian languages enjoy equal recognition under the constitution.

An issue of particular importance in some contemporary federations is coping with secession movements. Notable examples of such movements have

occurred in Canada, Belgium and Spain. These are not unique to federations, however, and have occurred at least as frequently in unitary systems (for instance currently Scotland in the United Kingdom) and predominately confederal systems. Factors contributing to secessionist movements may be either excessive decentralization (for instance the disintegration of the West Indies Federations in 1962), or over centralization (for instance the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the USSR). It would seem to be important to strike a balance between sufficient involvement of the diverse groups in a federation in the central policy-making to give them a stake in its continued operation and sufficient regional self-government to assure them that their distinctiveness is not threatened. This has been especially important in federations created in the late 20th century by devolution from a previously unitary system where the process of transfers of powers to constituent units may have led to a excessive focus on devolution at the expense of adequate attention to arrangements and incentives necessary for continued unity. Belgium and Spain provide examples of such trends.

The increasing globalization of the late 20th century and early 21st century with its emphasis upon deregulation and international free trade has also affected the balance within federations. On the one hand, deregulation has helped to undermine the relative role and importance of federal governments. With it, too, has come a trend for greater involvement of constituent unit governments in international relations. In most earlier modern federations, international relations were considered an area exclusive federal jurisdiction. The United States and Australia are classic examples, and indeed in both cases this federal power has been used from time to time to encroach on areas of constituent unit jurisdiction. But by the late 20th century, in a number of federal constitutions there has been a recognition of some role for the constituent units in international relations. Belgium (1993) and Switzerland (1999) are prime examples where the constitution makes specific provision for this. In Germany the role of *Länder* in German-EU relations has been a major issue in which rulings of the German Constitutional Court have played an important part. In Canada, because of the wording and interpretation of the constitution, the provinces have come to play an important role through their responsibility for implementing treaties. In addition the practice of provinces (notably Quebec) participating in international organizations has become a regular feature. Thus, in a number of instances, international relations, or at least some aspects of them, have become a subject requiring intergovernmental collaboration within federations.

Lessons from the Experience of Federal Political Systems

In conclusion I would draw attention to a number of major lessons that can

be drawn from the experience of federal political systems in the contemporary world. First, federal systems do provide a practical way of combining through representative institutions the simultaneous benefits of both unity and diversity. Indeed, the United States (1789), Switzerland (1848), Canada (1867) and Australia (1901) are among the longest continuously operating constitutional systems anywhere in the world today.

Second, it is also clear, however, that federal systems are not a panacea for humanity's ills. Some federations have failed or have experienced serious difficulties. Account, therefore, must also be taken of the pathology of federal systems including the particular types of federal structures or hybrids and societal conditions and circumstances that have given rise to problems and stresses within federal systems (Watts 2008: 178-88).

Third, the degree to which a federal political system is effective depends to a large extent upon the acceptance of the need to respect constitutional norms and structures, and an emphasis upon the spirit of tolerance and compromise. These are at least as important as the institutional structure established.

Fourth, there is a no single ideal federal form. As noted above, federal political systems have exhibited many institutional variations. The extent to which a federal system can accommodate political realities may therefore depend not just on the adoption of a federal solution but on whether the particular form or variant of federal institutions adopted gives adequate expression to the demands and requirements of that particular society. Federalism is a pragmatic prudential technique, the applicability of which may well depend on the particular form in which it is adopted or adapted, or even on the development of innovations in its application.

Fifth, scholars have debated whether federations composed of different ethnic groups are workable or simply run the risk of suffering civil war (Elazar 1993). While the existence of different ethnic groups within a federation may sharpen difficulties, the persistence of such multi-ethnic or multi-national federations as Switzerland, Canada, India and Malaysia for lengthy periods indicates that, with appropriately designed institutions, federal systems can be sustained and prosper in such countries. Indeed federal systems have in these instances reduced tension by giving distinct groups a sense of security through their own self-government, thereby paradoxically contributing to greater harmony and unity.

Sixth, in some instances federal hybrids that have included some elements more typical of unitary or confederal forms of government have enabled adaption to particular circumstances, either for a transitional or for a longer period. Where such hybrid arrangements have undermined the fundamental federal logic of

effectively combining “shared rule” and “regional self-rule,” however, they can be counter-productive.

Seventh, in recent decades there has been resort to federal political structures as a solution in severe post-conflict situations. Among examples that come to mind are the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995), the Republic of Sudan (2008), the Republic of Iraq (2005), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (2006). But as the experience of these federations illustrates, in post-conflict situations typically the lack of the necessary essential political culture for effective operation of a federal system – respect for constitutional norms and structure and an emphasis upon tolerance and compromise – has rendered futile the effort to establish effective federal solutions. The dilemma is how such preconditions are to be established in a post-conflict situation permeated by hostility. That does not mean that federal solutions in post-conflict situations are impossible. The Swiss federation was established in 1848 following the Sonderbund civil war of 1847, and despite the American civil war of the 1860s the federal system of the United States was subsequently sustained. A third more recent example has been the establishment in 1995 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia following a period of bitter strife. Resort to a federal solution in a post-conflict situation is therefore not an impossible goal. Experience does point, however, to the importance of the effort, not simply to establish federal institutions, but to develop a fully supportive political culture without which those institutions are unlikely to be effective.

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