

THE PROS AND CONS OF THE REGIONAL INITIATIVES TO STOP THE WAR IN SUDAN



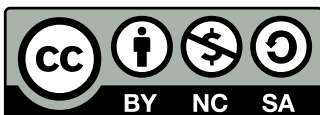
THE PROS AND CONS OF THE REGIONAL INITIATIVES TO STOP THE WAR IN SUDAN



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 15 April 2023, fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has ravaged the country. The fighting started in the capital Khartoum and its adjacent towns Bahri and Omdurman, and quickly spread to Darfur where local militia groups and the RSF have carried out horrific ethnic cleansing campaigns in and around El Geneina, West Darfur. Fighting also spread to other towns in Darfur, Northern Kordofan and Southern Kordofan, and it is poised to spread further.

The war has plunged Sudan into a humanitarian catastrophe, with over five million now displaced, including one million refugees in neighbouring countries (IOM 2023). Over 20 million people now face severe food shortages, and UN officials have said over six million are 'one step away from famine' (UN News 2023). Thousands of people have been killed or injured, and hundreds have been detained and abused in detention. The SAF have bombed indiscriminately, killing civilians, while the RSF have carried out appalling crimes of looting, burning, and rape (Amnesty International 2023). The fighting has destroyed infrastructure such as hospitals, banks, schools, markets and homes.

The international community have called on parties to agree a permanent ceasefire, allow humanitarian aid in, and start a peaceful political process. Various external actors—the African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Agency for Development (IGAD), the United States–Saudi talks in Jeddah, and Sudan's neighbouring countries—have launched diplomatic initiatives. But nearly six months on, these efforts have not yielded tangible results and fighting continues.

International and regional actors' interest in Sudan's problems is not new, but their track record in mediating effectively is mixed. Given the plethora of external actors with a history of interests in Sudan, international and regional mediation processes can be unwieldy. As was reflected by the experts and participants, there is an obvious pressing need for coordination. All too often, external players have been motivated by their own interests—whether

economic, political or special loyalties—and acted as spoilers rather than mediators. Today again, regional actors including would-be mediators are openly supporting belligerents.

Sudanese stakeholders, including analysts, political actors and civil society, are thus grappling with the question of whether regional initiatives are capable of brokering peace and a democratic transition in Sudan. To this end, the Sudanese Experts and Facilitators Group (SEFG), a nonpartisan group of prominent Sudanese nationals including civil society activists, public figures and academics, convened an online symposium with support from International IDEA on 28 August 2023. Its aim was to discuss and analyse the opportunities and challenges presented by regional and international initiatives.

Three experts chosen for their expertise in Sudanese affairs, diplomacy and regional conflict-resolution systems provided commentary, followed by a plenary discussion. A number of recommendations emerged.

The first expert, Dr Suliman Baldo, executive director of Sudan Transparency and Policy Tracker (STPT) and a prominent Sudanese civil society leader, provided context to ground the discussion. The second expert, Dame Rosalind Marsden, formerly British Ambassador to Sudan and EU Special Representative for Sudan and South Sudan, provided analysis of international and regional mediation efforts. The third expert, Dr L. Muthoni Wanyeki, a prominent human rights activist in Kenya and executive director of Open Society—Africa, provided insights into some of the specific challenges facing regional actors. The event was moderated by Maryam El Faki, a Sudanese pro-democracy activist. The agenda, biographies and description of SEFG may be found in 'About the organizations' at the end of this Report.

Chapter 1

BACKGROUND

Since independence, Sudan has been mired in internal conflicts provoking involvement by external actors. The most prominent were the multilateral efforts to broker an end to Sudan's second civil war (1983–2005) which led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA 2005). The United Nations, Troika countries (USA, UK, Norway), the European Union, the AU, IGAD, League of Arab States and neighbouring states including Kenya played important roles in this process. Many of the same actors involved in the CPA negotiations were also part of efforts to mediate a solution to the Darfur crisis, which erupted as the CPA was being concluded.

Before the current war broke out, many of the relevant external actors were already in Sudan. The UN had its political mission, UNITAMS (United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan), to support the transitional authorities. Following the army's coup in October 2021, a Trilateral Mechanism made up of the UN, AU and IGAD oversaw efforts to finalize a 'framework agreement' to revive the transitional period. The Quad group (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), UK, USA) had also supported these processes. These institutions and others responded to the coup with an outcry of alarm and concern. Within weeks, they also began to launch mediation initiatives:

- The AU convened an emergency meeting on 16 April 2023 calling for a political solution to the conflict. IGAD made similar calls and resolved to send a high-level delegation to Sudan within days of the outbreak of war (IGAD 2023a).
- The League of Arab States held several emergency meetings in April and May to address the situation in Sudan, calling for an end to the war (Africa News 2023).
- On 20 April, the AU formed an 'Expanded Mechanism' to coordinate all mediation efforts. This Mechanism is composed of: Trilateral Mechanism actors (AU, UN, IGAD); League of Arab States; the UN Security Council's

permanent members (the 'P5') and its African members; neighbouring countries (Central African Republic, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan); IGAD's Quartet (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan); Comoros as Chair of the AU; the Quad countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK and USA); the Troika (Norway, UK, USA); Germany and Qatar (AU 2023b).

- In early May 2023, the USA and Saudi Arabia convened the warring parties in Jeddah, with the aim of a permanent ceasefire. This platform did not include other mediators or Sudanese civil or political actors and has been critiqued as too narrow (Chughtai and Murphy 2023). On 11 May, parties signed the Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan (US Department of State 2023b). Following successive ceasefire violations, talks were suspended the following month.
- On 27 May, the AU's Peace and Security Council adopted the AU's Roadmap for Resolution of the Conflict in Sudan (see: AU 2023a).
- On 12 June, IGAD adopted its Roadmap for the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of Sudan (IGAD 2023b).
- On 10 July, IGAD formed the Quartet Group of Countries for the Resolution of the Situation in the Republic of Sudan, led by Kenya's President William Ruto, and resolved to request possible deployment of the East Africa Standby Force (EASF) for the protection of civilians and to guarantee humanitarian access (IGAD 2023c). Sudan boycotted the meeting, which was attended by an RSF representative, and rejected the initiative (Atit 2023).
- On 13 July, Egypt hosted a Summit of Sudan's Neighbours, which included Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan, and set up a 'Ministerial Mechanism' to continue mediation efforts with these states (Lewis 2023). On 7 August, Chad hosted the first meeting of this Ministerial Mechanism, which reportedly developed a three-part roadmap for peace (*Sudan Tribune* 2023b).
- Separately, Chad has hosted meetings with Darfuri groups, signatories of the Juba Peace Agreement (*Sudan Tribune* 2023a).

As this chronology shows, initiatives are not synchronized. One of the consequences is that the belligerent parties are able to 'forum-shop'. For example, the SAF rejected the IGAD Summit on the grounds that Ruto was biased, but welcomed Egypt's initiative for neighbouring countries. Another consequence is that Sudanese civil and political actors are engaging with different external actors and this could undermine their efforts.

The AU's Roadmap and Extended Mechanism would create an all-inclusive coordinating body under which all initiatives (Egypt, Jeddah, IGAD) could be synchronized; however, the Mechanism does not appear to be active and it is unclear if AU staff working on the Sudan file have the resources and contacts they need. Challenges facing all stakeholders include how to structure the

mediation beyond the immediate goal of a ceasefire; what issues talks should address; who should be at the table to discuss them; and what a political dispensation could look like. This is particularly difficult when external actors and Sudanese civil and political forces may have different views.

Among the recommendations suggested by the experts is to support the Mechanism to be as effective as possible, to support Sudanese civil and political actors to be as engaged with it as possible, and to ensure that calls for accountability remain strong.

Chapter 2

PERSPECTIVE ON THE REGIONAL INITIATIVES

The CPA failed to bring lasting peace. It was not really comprehensive; it should have addressed Sudan's other internal wars.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER, DR SULIMAN BALDO

Sudanese history shows that external mediations can lead to solutions but can also be used to create crises. Multilateral mediation led to a robust peace agreement as we saw during the talks leading to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of January 2005. This was a multilateral mediation effort that combined regional and international actors—such as the AU, IGAD, Friends of IGAD, Troika, the UN—and individual governments.

In hindsight, the CPA failed to bring lasting peace. It was not really comprehensive; it should have addressed Sudan's other internal wars. While the CPA succeeded in ending the civil war in the South, the regime of Omar al-Bashir (the National Congress Party, NCP) used an aggressive forum-shopping strategy in regional platforms to block the international community and divide armed opposition groups. The CPA process, in which IGAD was the lead mediator, was supported by several international actors. But six months later, in June 2005, the regime signed a separate agreement with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Cairo, mediated by the Egyptian Government. It also concluded the now-defunct Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in May 2006, mediated by the AU. It concluded the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement in June 2006, facilitated by Eritrea. Using multiple forums and multiple platforms helped the regime to dilute the impact that the CPA could have had in addressing the common root causes of Sudan's many civil wars. As a result, we are seeing a devastating war again two decades later.

We now turn to this current crisis. The sheer brutality of the killing of peaceful protesters on 3 June 2019 triggered the mediation led by the AU and international partners, resulting in the Constitutional Document. The massacre was the climax of continued violence against protesters across Sudan for years. A major flaw of the international community's response at the time was to continue dealing with the generals after all this brutality.

Then during the transitional period, the security forces and their backers—mainly remnants of al-Bashir’s regime seeking to regain power through their influence in the army’s high command and other security forces—did everything to derail the first phase of the transition led by Prime Minister Hamdok. That is, to block reforms and accountability for corruption and serious crimes during al-Bashir’s rule. When the security establishment saw that economic reforms would pose an existential threat to their grip on resources, they staged the coup of October 2021.

That coup failed. The pro-democracy movement led by resistance committees, political opponents, trade unions, women’s associations and businesses rejected the military security establishment and made it impossible for it to put a government in place or claim full authority to run the affairs of Sudan. In mid-2022 this internal resistance, coupled with international isolation, eventually forced the generals to start negotiations known as the Framework Political process.

The Trilateral Mechanism (UN, AU, IGAD) led this mediation so as to avoid duplication and ensure some level of coordination. Regional actors were seen as more inclined to favour a role for the military, while the UN appeared more attentive to the aspirations for democracy and civilian rule. The Quad (Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK and USA) tried to ease the tensions and use their leverage to press both the military establishment and the civilian parties to find a middle ground. It was not always smooth, but the Quad had the political muscle to press both sides.

But the mediators and the international community behind them repeated the same mistake as they had after al-Bashir fell in 2019: giving the generals too much legitimacy despite their coup against a constitutionally founded, civilian-led transitional government. In the talks that followed the coup, the two generals who had acted in unison in the deadly repression against popular aspirations now fell out over the integration of the RSF in the SAF (a reform that the civilians demanded). The army pulled out of negotiations over this issue, adding to the tensions between the two regular forces, and contributing to the conditions that led to war.

It is tragic that the depth of this polarization took the relevant international and regional mechanisms by surprise. Today half of the population is facing severe food insecurity. The creatives, writers, workers, professionals, the farmers and herders of rural Sudan—all are scattered and victimized, leading to paralysis and collapse not only in institutions but also at the societal level. It is no exaggeration to say Sudan is at risk of total collapse.

How are international and regional mediators approaching this crisis?

The priority is to end the fighting. The Jeddah platform is focused on ending the fighting with a humanitarian ceasefire to allow supplies and workers to reach victims of the conflict. The USA and Saudi Arabia do have leverage over the military establishment. (Saudi Arabia and the UAE directly funded both the

The Trilateral Mechanism (UN, AU, IGAD) led this mediation so as to avoid duplication and ensure some level of coordination.

army and RSF to fight on their behalf in the war in Yemen. Saudi Arabia also offers scholarships to children of the security establishment. The USA has leverage because of its clout at other levels.) While the Jeddah platform's initial focus (emergency diplomacy) is still very much needed, convening a more comprehensive and sustainable process must remain the priority.

The AU is expected to lead in convening Sudanese civic actors on a civilian political track, which will be part of overall agreement at some point. But there have been indications that the AU lacks strategy and focus and some concerning delays: the AU declared it would convene the meeting on 15 August, then delayed to 8 September, then again postponed it.

Meanwhile, we are shocked by how silent and inactive the AU has been on ethnic cleansing in West Darfur despite its stated commitment to 'never again' principles. News that the AU Chair Moussa Faki dined with an advisor to the RSF, despite the latter's involvement in widespread and systematic ethnic cleansing in Darfur, raised concerns about the neutrality of the Chair. It is unsettling that the AU has not activated the full range of its peace and security mechanisms in the face of killings that are comparable to the 2003–2004 genocide in the region. The Commission is not even reporting on steps it is taking to address the crisis. The AU Peace and Security Council must seize the initiative to coordinate its efforts with those of the IGAD and the UN.

The principle of subsidiarity means that the subregional body, IGAD, should take the lead. But IGAD is unable to do this because the SAF have boycotted it as a forum. IGAD's Quartet Group has not convened commanders of the warring sides to negotiate an end to the conflict, as they had hoped. Meanwhile, the UN was unable to claim a mediation role as the AU and the IGAD insisted on retaining the lead. The recent resignation of Volker Perthes (as the Secretary-General's Special Representative) may energize the UN's role, but long-standing gridlock in the UN Security Council continues to paralyse action—despite the gravity of the crisis in Sudan and the serious threats it poses to regional and international security.

These mediation initiatives and platforms must not compete but instead coordinate their efforts.

These mediation initiatives and platforms must not compete but instead coordinate their efforts. Until this happens, Sudanese civic and political actors will work to form a critical and representative voice for civilians, and develop the missing strategy for the political negotiations. These must start in earnest as soon as a sustainable and observable ceasefire can be upheld by the belligerents.

EXPERT COMMENTARY BY DAME ROSALIND MARSDEN

In the early phase of the war, hopes were pinned on the US–Saudi sponsored Jeddah talks, which began on 7 May 2023, but these hopes faded as successive temporary humanitarian truces and the Declaration of Commitments were largely ignored. On 21 June, the USA adjourned the talks,

saying that the format was not succeeding as they had hoped. Two months later, we still do not know if proceedings in Jeddah will resume, and both of the warring parties seem to have continued to put forward conditions which they know the other side will not agree to.

Meanwhile, both sides look set to continue fighting. Al-Burhan, following his escape from Khartoum, made a defiant speech in Port Sudan, saying there was no agreement with the RSF to release him and that he intends to crush the insurgency (TRT Afrika 2023; Al Jazeera 2023). Indeed, the SAF's large-scale public mobilization efforts in their hinterlands, as well as the RSF's mobilization among their tribal base, suggest both sides are preparing for a long fight.

When it comes to pros and cons of the Jeddah process, some positive aspects are:

- It is focused on the issues of highest immediate priority—stopping the war and reaching an effective short-term ceasefire to facilitate humanitarian assistance.
- Both the SAF and RSF have been treated in Jeddah as purely military delegations, so the talks have not legitimized the de facto coup authorities.
- It is sponsored by two powerful countries which have the political muscle to exert leverage on the warring parties and their regional backers (Egypt and the UAE) if they choose to do so.
- In his video message to the Sudanese people on 22 May, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stressed that the USA supports the democratic aspirations of the Sudanese people and that Sudanese civilians must be the ones who define Sudan's path going forward (US Department of State 2023a). Both Blinken and Ambassador Godfrey called for a civilian government, without referring to a 'civilian-led' government as in the past.

But there are also some negative aspects:

- The sponsors of the Jeddah talks have been unable or perhaps unwilling to exert as much leverage on the warring parties and their regional backers as was initially expected. Despite the imposition of US sanctions on 1 June, fighting continued and intensified.
- The SAF and RSF are simply playing for time because they are both determined to prevail militarily before engaging in any serious negotiations. The main obstacle to reaching a ceasefire may be that the SAF does not want to negotiate from a position of military weakness. The SAF wants to negotiate on its own terms but until now its military performance on the ground has not given it that option.

Both the SAF and RSF have been treated in Jeddah as purely military delegations, so the talks have not legitimized the de facto coup authorities.

- Thus far, commitments made in Jeddah have not been honoured by military commanders on the ground because their negotiating delegations did not have real decision-making authority.
- The apparent lack of a clear negotiating strategy, the sidelining of other international partners such as the Troika and the EU, and the exclusion of the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths, from the discussion of humanitarian issues were also problems. Importantly, Sudanese civilians were also excluded, despite the key role played by emergency rooms and local volunteer networks in providing humanitarian relief to their local communities. This meant that the Jeddah forum served to focus attention on the warring parties rather than empowering Sudanese civilians who are the main victims of the war.

The AU and IGAD interventions have included ambitious summit communiqués and roadmaps but little follow-up and concrete action.

As far as African regional initiatives are concerned, AU and IGAD interventions have included ambitious summit communiqués and roadmaps but little follow-up and concrete action. On the positive side:

- Both the AU and IGAD were quick to respond to the outbreak of hostilities, issuing statements calling for an immediate ceasefire and offering to intervene with the warring parties.
- The AU quickly recognized the need for coordination and established an Expanded Mechanism and Core Group with all the relevant regional and international players.
- The AU succeeded in winning support for African leadership and the Expanded Mechanism from the USA, the EU and the Troika.
- President Ruto of Kenya spoke out strongly in support of the role of Sudanese civilians in the negotiations.

Where things have not gone so well, however, is that many of the AU and IGAD summit commitments have looked unrealistic. For example, the pledges made to send high-level delegations to engage the warring parties had an air of unreality given fighting was raging in Khartoum and it was impossible to get into the country. IGAD's 12 June Roadmap announced that the IGAD Quartet led by Kenya would organize a meeting between the two warring generals within 10 days, secure agreement to a humanitarian corridor within 2 weeks, and initiate an inclusive political process in Kenya within 3 weeks. These deadlines were quickly forgotten.

Moreover, in the first two months after war started, there seemed to be an element of competition among regional organizations with both the AU and IGAD announcing roadmaps and some regional leaders trying to play a lead role, without having any obvious leverage on the warring parties.

While the AU and IGAD have decided to focus on convening a dialogue among Sudanese civilians in preparation for peace negotiations, respective officials

have not done enough to consult the main Sudanese civil society and political actors, who have made clear they want to be the ones to design the process. Pro-democracy actors were upset by news that the AU was intending to invite representatives of the former regime and of the warring parties, which further delayed plans. It is to be hoped that the AU will learn from this experience and work to regain the trust of Sudanese civilians.

The multiplicity of initiatives has given the belligerents the opportunity of forum-shopping. The NCP-controlled Ministry of Foreign Affairs has shown itself particularly adept at neutralizing potential mediators who they think might favour Sudanese civilians in the pro-democracy movement: first by declaring the UN's Volker Perthes persona non grata and sidelining the UN as a whole from the mediation process; then by rejecting AU mediation on the grounds that Sudan remains suspended from AU activities; then refusing to engage with the Kenya-led IGAD mechanism, alleging bias and accusing it of intending to 'invade' Sudan using the East African Standing Force.

It was perhaps no coincidence that three days after the SAF rejected the IGAD mechanism, Egypt launched its own mediation initiative by convening a Regional Summit of Sudan's Neighbours. The Regional Summit agreed to establish a ministerial mechanism at foreign minister level to develop a comprehensive action plan to resolve the Sudan conflict. The Sudanese Permanent Representative made clear in the UN Security Council that the de facto coup authorities favour Cairo's initiative. This is hardly surprising as Egypt is the SAF's principal regional backer and the two armies have a military cooperation agreement. While Egypt hardly looks like a neutral mediator, on the other hand it would be able to exert pressure on the SAF if it so wished.

Given the emergence of the Egyptian-led initiative, the need for closer coordination seems clear. But this raises the question whether it is possible for all the mediators to be on the same page if they have different strategic interests and different views of the desired end state. On that, there is quite a gap between Sudanese civilian stakeholders and their international supporters on the one side—who want to see a democratic civilian transitional government, in which neither of the warring parties nor old regime loyalists play any part—and those Sudanese who prefer a political dispensation in which the SAF retains considerable power and the government includes their Islamist backers in the interests of inclusivity.

Among all stakeholders, there is disagreement over which 'civilians' should be included and what the agenda of an intra-Sudanese (domestic) dialogue should be. This underlines the importance of (a) democratic civil society and political actors in the No to War campaign coming together as soon as possible to agree on a common minimum agenda; and (b) international actors continuing to remind regional mediators that Sudanese civilian stakeholders must be the ones to design the process and to reshape Sudan's democratic future.

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EXPERT COMMENTARY BY DR L. MUTHONI WANYEKI

It is clear that regional initiatives to end this war remain on the back foot, not least because of an underlying racism positing that Sudan's is not an 'African' problem but one of the Maghreb and Mashreq, even though the Maghreb is part of Africa too. This sentiment underscores much of the frustration within IGAD and the AU.

As we have heard, some of the biggest challenges are:

- *The continued multiplicity of external groupings and initiatives.* The US–Saudi and neighbours' initiatives, as well as older Friends of Sudan, Troika, Quad and Trilateral Mechanism (IGAD, AU, UN) initiatives, together result in energy and resources being thinly spread. Leadership is not always optimally aligned, nor messaging and leverage used to best effect.
- *Leverage vs legitimacy.* As Dr Chidi Odinkalu has pointed out, the external actors with the leverage lack legitimacy, while those with legitimacy lack leverage. This enables evasion and forum-shopping not only by the protagonists but also by domestic civic and political actors.
- *Civic and political actors have been sidelined.* Sudan's civilian organizations are unhappy and vocal about the legitimization of force as right, with accountability concerns being put to one side. They warn of this happening despite all the information from inside the country of gross and systemic human rights violations.
- *War economy.* It is difficult to understand the inability to 'turn off the taps', that is, to stop the inflows of resources from neighbours and other spoilers on the one hand, and outflows of resources like gold in exchange for leverage and military hardware. These are the flows ensuring that the war continues.

With Sudan still suspended from the AU and without the diplomatic, financial and sanctions leverage of the Saudis and the USA, both IGAD and the AU are struggling to get the parties committed to an 'African solution to African problems'.

One 'positive' in the overall context is that the AU is trying to establish a single coordinating mechanism, the Expanded Mechanism on the Crisis in Sudan (Box 1). An important first priority is to commit to this mechanism. It aims to ensure that: (a) neighbours with malign interests and other spoilers are contained; (b) all external actors provide the correct combination of leverage—both carrots and sticks—and at the correct time; and (c) civic and political actors take primacy. However, it has stalled because of a lack of deep knowledge and connection with Sudanese actors.

However, with Sudan still suspended from the AU and without the diplomatic, financial and sanctions leverage of the Saudis and the USA, both IGAD and the AU are struggling to get the parties committed to an 'African solution to African problems'. The parties are still able to evade engagement by forum-shopping.

A second priority is to be serious about how to achieve a post-war scenario without either Burhan or Hemedti, as demanded by Sudanese civic and

Box 1. Expanded Mechanism on the Crisis in Sudan

The AU Commission's roadmap for de-escalation, endorsed by the AU Peace and Security Council at its meeting at Heads of State and Government level on 27 May, focuses on:

- an immediate end to the fighting for a comprehensive ceasefire;
- an effective response to the humanitarian situation;
- the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and respect of international humanitarian law (IHL);
- recognition of the role of neighbouring member states as the war has already impacted them;
- an inclusive political process for resolution of the war; and
- a unification of international efforts.

The Expanded Mechanism is composed of a Core Group—IGAD, the AU and the UN—plus the Special Contact Group (neighbouring member states) as well as the League of Arab States, the EU, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the United Kingdom and the United States. Its goals are to:

- provide day-to-day guidance to all external actors in their engagements with Sudanese stakeholders;
- show continental leadership; and
- ensure an African solution is found.

Source: African Union, 'African Union Roadmap for the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of Sudan', 2023, <<https://tinyurl.com/55f57kua>>, accessed 23 October 2023.

political actors. The question is how to turn off their financial taps and how to contain spoilers.

The third priority is to clarify who should be at the table beyond this first phase of getting the protagonists to stop. The Sudanese need to take the time to come to consensus. There are several civil and political fronts now emerging, convening in different cities and engaging with different external actors (Box 2).

Box 2. Sudanese civilian groupings

Educated Sudanese with administrative skills in and outside the country formed the National Mechanism for Civilian Democratic Transformation. During its inception meeting on 29 March, it agreed to form an emergency government including only Sudanese civilians with managerial experience for one year to coordinate humanitarian access and the pathway to elections. Seven committees were tasked with identifying priority areas (such as security, humanitarian access, governance) and defining a framework. It is not clear if the National Mechanism is coordinating with the Sudanese civic and political fronts against the war.

Various other Sudanese civic and political fronts against the war have convened in Nairobi under the auspices of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) and in Addis Ababa and Cairo. They include the International IDEA-supported Sudanese Experts and Facilitators Group (SEFG) as well as the Inclusive Peace-supported Sudanese Women Against War, an umbrella group of nine organizations.

The problem is that these Sudanese civic and political anti-war fronts remain divided, including on whether the parties to the conflict can be involved in Sudan's future. This also enables forum-shopping—some seem to prefer to deal with the US–Saudi initiative and call for its expansion, while others seem to prefer to deal with Egypt and the neighbours' initiative, playing into notions that Sudan 'belongs' to the Maghreb and Mashreq ambit. Others are talking to South Sudan, which undermines the IGAD initiative.

'Without a strong international call for accountability, there is no incentive for warring parties to adhere to the rules of war, let alone to broker peace'.

Finally, the fourth priority is not to drop accountability. The Coalition of Sudanese Lawyers, Academics and Human Rights Activists has called upon the UN to establish an accountability mechanism to investigate and document crimes committed in the ongoing conflict. They emphasized that 'without a strong international call for accountability, there is no incentive for warring parties to adhere to the rules of war, let alone to broker peace'. As well as being an instrument of leverage, accountability needs to be on the table because of the damage done to so many people.

In concluding, it may be useful to reflect on lessons from regional efforts in other African contexts:

- *Negotiating capacity.* A strong mediation team has both high-level political and technical staff. Sudanese domestic actors are not engaging as much with the regional mediation staff, who do not have the same resources at their disposal as other external actors.
- *External pressure is never enough.* Sudanese anti-war calls should be as unified a front as possible, including not only civic and political actors, but also private sector actors. The calls start at the domestic level, which then gives legitimacy to the region, and then to other external actors.
- *Successful regional interventions are marked by domestic support.* Domestic actors' support takes the forms of respecting the effort to establish a single mediation platform and engaging with information, analysis and solutions. The complex web of interests between the parties and all external actors, including the spoilers, necessitates this focus.
- *Between a minimal and a maximal platform.* Structures should be not as narrow as Jeddah but not so broad as to lose coherence. A helpful platform states who is on board with what points and where divergences remain, and that includes analysis of who is engaging with whom, and to what ends.

Chapter 3

PLENARY DISCUSSION

A participant asked how to resolve the contradiction between attempting to mediate between the warring sides and excluding them from political dispensation. Secondly, how are we to address the fact that Islamists will likely continue to be disruptive to these processes?

Commentator (SB) noted that mediators must speak to the belligerents in order to stop the fighting but can be clear that their future involvement will be limited. With regard to Islamists, there are extremists who are fuelling the war even at the propaganda level and cannot be part of the future of Sudan.

A participant from UNITAMS added that it is clear there are organizations or states trying to influence this war for their own reasons. Moreover, the peacebuilding initiatives are not synchronized. We need coordination and consolidation of efforts; we are still struggling with the first of these.

In response to a question about the role of the UN Security Council, commentator (RM) observed that in the current environment, vetoes may be expected. One measure that could be useful to put pressure would be to extend the UN arms embargo on Darfur to the whole country. The EU and UK have a Sudan-wide arms embargo and so too should the UN, particularly given the influx of military supplies—but there is hesitancy to pursue this because of the risk it would be vetoed. On the question of coordination, it seems the Core Group (UN, AU, IGAD) is not active. But with Egypt leading a regional (neighbours') initiative, the Core Group should now bring regional and international actors together.

Commentator (MW) added that the focus should be on how the warring parties are getting their arms, and where pressure can be applied to stop them. There is no getting around the AU's Expanded Mechanism, however frustrated and disappointed people may be. The more we engage it, the better it will be. On the issue of the UN Security Council, potential vetoes would not be an issue if

With regard to Islamists, there are extremists who are fuelling the war even at the propaganda level and cannot be part of the future of Sudan.

the African group was in agreement. The Expanded Mechanism could be used to achieve a unified African position.

Commentator (SB) pointed out that while the UN is part of the AU Mechanism and might technically support mediation, it is paralysed in part due to the position of the three African member states of the Security Council, who held up action based on the principle of subsidiarity. The AU should provide leadership and not exclude, paralyse, or limit the UN. For their part, the UN need to be more forceful in deploying humanitarian aid by pressing belligerents to lift red tape and stop attacks on humanitarian workers.

Commentator (SB): With regard to unification of civilian actors, we do see more convergence. The Declaration of Principles is one; there are many others like the National Mechanism for supporting democratic transformation and ending the war, the Conference of Civil Society Organizations, and Concerned Sudanese. Everyone is talking to each other. It would be good to have them speaking with one voice. They want the same thing, to stop the fighting, allow humanitarian intervention, and restore the civilian government and end impunity.

To focus on military actors alone would again be a betrayal of the Sudanese and their hopes for a world in which their rights are respected. This war is such a massive shock; everyone has to be focused.

A participant from the AU's Trilateral Mechanism agreed that coordination is needed, including with civilian initiatives who should be given a leadership role. Commentator (RM) agreed with the importance of coordinating with civil and political groups. Commentator (MW) urged those working with external actors to take more responsibility for helping civilians to engage.

Commentator (SB) added that when we call on civilians to be involved it is not a secondary afterthought. It is because civilians are the ones running the country by providing assistance to victims of the conflict. To focus on military actors alone would again be a betrayal of the Sudanese and their hopes for a world in which their rights are respected. This war is such a massive shock; everyone has to be focused. We do not have time for divisiveness in civil society. The situation is too dire. We need to keep society and the country together: one platform, one voice.

Chapter 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. International and regional mediators should improve coordination with each other and with civic and political actors.
2. The AU's Core Group should convene as soon as possible. It should activate the Expanded Mechanism to harmonize efforts and contain malign actors who are fuelling the war by providing support to either of the warring sides.
3. The UN should expand the existing Darfur arms embargo on Sudan as a whole and impose targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for grave violations.
4. Sudanese civilian and political groups should strive for coordination and avoid contributing to 'forum-shopping' among the various regional initiatives.
5. Do not drop accountability for the serious international criminal and human rights violations perpetrated by the warring sides.

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About the organizations

INTERNATIONAL IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 34 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

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We develop policy-friendly research related to elections, parliaments, constitutions, digitalization, climate change, inclusion and political representation, all under the umbrella of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We assess the performance of democracies around the world through our unique Global State of Democracy Indices and Democracy Tracker.

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THE SUDANESE EXPERTS AND FACILITATORS GROUP (SEFG), ESTABLISHED 23 MAY 2023

Introduction

The 2018 December Revolution marked a new phase in Sudan's recent history. In many ways, Sudanese society is on the brink of structural change, led by youth who make up about 40 per cent of the population. Thirty years of rule by the Inqaz Islamic regime left the country in tatters, embroiled in violent conflicts and exposed to manipulation by different regional and international interests. An energetic and dynamic expression of societal resilience, youth resistance committees mobilized and led a broad-based popular uprising not only ending Inqaz Islamic rule, but pointing to a new era in Sudan's politics.

The coup by General al-Burhan in October 2021 stalled the democratic transition. The resulting political crisis threatened a return to Sudan's years as an authoritarian, pariah state. War and dictatorship remain one of the potential future pathways.

At critical junctures, the Sudanese context has always been influenced by leading public figures from academic institutions, civil society organizations, tribal leaders and prominent businesspeople; their social standing with different groups allows them to provide guidance and to mediate between conflicting political factions. For example, one may refer to the Graduate Congress in the 1930s, the National Roundtable in 1960s or Khartoum University in 2020 where rival groups were brought together to deliberate and find a way out of national crisis.

Such a role is desperately needed during the current political stalemate. A group of prominent Sudanese met to discuss the idea of establishing a nonpartisan group that would serve as a reference and catalyst—offering policy advice to assist concerned actors seeking a way out of current and future political deadlocks; and doing so by providing facilitation and expert viewpoints on relevant issues directly to political actors in Sudan.

The 2018 December Revolution principles and slogans of Freedom, Peace and Justice will guide the group's engagement with political and civil actors, that is, a solid commitment to the universal humane values and principles including, but not limited to, democracy, human rights, equality, dignity, equal and sustainable development, openness, and tolerance. The group has zero tolerance for ideologies, discourse and practices of hate and extremism, or for discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, region and faith.

The group is not motivated by partisan agenda and is not seeking to compete as an alternative to the existing political actors. Furthermore, its approach and engagement with actors is based on the values of respect and constructive dialogue that enrich the accumulated knowledge available to all. In addition to national actors, the group is planning to closely engage with regional and international actors to deliberate and provide nonpartisan viewpoints and insight that may be helpful in mitigating Sudan's conflicts.

Objectives

1. Serve as facilitators between key political actors during political stalemates and propose options and solutions for disputed political issues.
2. Propose and guide the production of expert knowledge materials that support democracy, peace, and equity.
3. Strengthen and empower youth and other civil society movements/ organizations to engage in political and peace processes at the national and regional levels.

Role, function and methodology

1. The group will engage with actors objectively and without prejudice, personalization, egocentrism and predisposition.
2. The SEFG will engage with Sudanese, regional and international actors to discuss informed pathways and/or proposals for peaceful democratic transition in Sudan.
3. Convene and/or participate in meetings, conferences and workshops for national, regional and international bodies to discuss Sudan's transitional processes.
4. Provide technical know-how and build the capacity of Sudanese resistance committees, youth, and wider civil society to play an enabling role in the peace processes at the national and regional levels.
5. Proactively engage in policy-oriented research to inform and influence public opinion and decision-making processes on key political issues.



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After the war broke out in Sudan on 15 April 2023, the critical question became focused, 'Are regional organizations and initiatives still capable of achieving lasting peace in Sudan?', where do the weaknesses lie, and what are the strengths in the role of these organizations in making peace in Sudan? Based on these questions, International IDEA in Sudan has organized this seminar: 'The Pros and Cons of the Regional Initiatives to Stop the War in Sudan'.

From early times, regional organizations and initiatives at the Arab and African levels played a role in mediating the conflicts to bring peace to Sudan. Despite the success of these initiatives in signing peace agreements in Sudan, they could not address the root causes of the conflicts and achieve sustainable peace. Wars and disputes continued, and Sudan continues to move from one warfare to another to this day. This seminar was designed to support regional organizations in adopting a realistic and logical approach capable of producing a lasting peace that addresses the roots of the conflict in Sudan.