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**Proceedings of IGAD Mediation Reflection Conference 28-
29 April, 2026. Nairobi, Kenya.**

**Re-Imagining Mediation in a Fragmented World: The
Challenges of African Multilateral Leadership**

Organized by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

An independent compilation by

**BRIDGE Research and Innovation for Democratic Governance and
Enhanced Peace (BRIDGE)**

May 2026, Addis Ababa



Disclaimer & Editorial Note

This publication represents an unvalidated editorial proceeding compiled by BRIDGE Research and Innovation for Democratic Governance and Enhanced Peace. The foundational material is derived from 66 speeches, encompassing formal opening remarks, panelist presentations, interactive participant questions, plenary comments, and official closing addresses, delivered by 35 total speakers during IGAD Mediation Reflection Conference Proceeding 28-29 April, 2026. Nairobi, Kenya, which was publicly livestreamed via YouTube.

BRIDGE Research and Innovation for Democratic Governance and Enhanced Peace has transcribed, structured, and polished these oral presentations to conform to a readable, professionally rigorous proceeding format.

Please take note of the following parameters regarding this document: Some of the questions posed by conference participants are presented below in a refined form, reformulated as clear statements or comments to enhance readability, while maintaining their original context and underlying intent.

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BRIDGE Research and Innovation for Democratic Governance and Enhanced Peace undertook this independent transcription and synthesis initiative out of a profound recognition that conflict mediation remains an imperative structural anchor for the Horn of Africa. Transforming these live-streamed proceedings into an organized, permanent textual archive is intended to catalyze informed, central debate among regional policymakers, academic scholars, and civic populations.

It is BRIDGE's firm conviction that this accessible and synthesized iteration of the mediation conference proceedings will make a meaningful contribution to the evolving conflict landscape within the IGAD region. Beyond immediate relevance, it is intended to strengthen regional knowledge production, enhance strategic foresight, and foster sustained institutional learning across stakeholders. By distilling key insights and practices into an inclusive and usable format,



this initiative also aims to support more informed decision-making, encourage collaborative problem-solving, and reinforce long-term peacebuilding capacities throughout the region.

Dr. Kaleab Tadesse Sigatu

Director, BRIDGE Research and Innovation for Democratic Governance and Enhanced Peace, May, 2026, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



About BRIDGE Research and Innovation for Democratic Governance and Enhanced Peace

We are a non-profit think tank specializing in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) sub-regional organization, with a focus on peace, governance, development, across the IGAD region and parliamentary affairs in Ethiopia. Established and registered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, we operate as a local organization in accordance with the FDRE Civil Society Organization Proclamation No. 1113/2019.

The primary goal of the IGAD Knowledge and Research Program is to bridge the gap between complex sub-regional policies and the general public, decision-makers, and researchers by generating clear, policy-focused, and evidence-driven analysis. To achieve this, the program provides rigorous diagnostics of political, institutional, security, and socio-economic changes shaping the IGAD region, structuring its efforts around five highly critical regional thematic pillars.

These pillars include Peace and Security, which tracks dialogue mechanisms, institutional mediation effectiveness, and ongoing security challenges like the crisis in Sudan or maritime disputes in the Horn; Regional Integration, which analyzes how member states collaborate, implement regional treaties, and push for infrastructural or regulatory alignment; and IGAD and the Gulf Relations, which deconstructs the complex geopolitical dynamics, foreign policies, and strategic investments connecting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states to the Horn of Africa. Additionally, the program covers Climate Resilience by assessing environmental challenges, drought responses, cross-border resource management, and regional adaptation mechanisms, alongside Humanitarian and Social Affairs, which investigates issues surrounding regional displacement, migration management, health initiatives, and civil human security.

To ensure this gathered knowledge transforms into accessible and actionable insights, the program manages a regular publication consisting of three distinct literary and analytical outputs. This includes the IGAD Monthly Digest, a concise, monthly publication detailing institutional updates and evaluating recent accomplishments across the sub-regional bloc; Policy Briefs, which are target-specific research documents breaking down sudden political updates or security shocks into empirical conclusions for diplomats and policymakers; and Handbooks, which serve as long-form systemic publications that clarify institutional frameworks, treaty compliance, and operational pathways.



Moreover, IGAD Knowledge and Research Program overlaps with the Regional Governance & IGAD Training Program, a structured training architecture designed for diplomats, scholars, and policy practitioners that provides deep theoretical and applied dawn-to-dusk instruction regarding IGAD's decision-making architecture, administrative organs, and the cultural-environmental history of the Horn.

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1. H.E. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu¹ : Opening Speech: The Transformation of Peace Mediation: Challenges and Imperatives for the Horn of Africa

The Fragmentation of Global Mediation

We gather today at a moment of profound consequence, not only for our region but for the very concept of peace mediation itself. This is not an ordinary moment, nor is it an ordinary gathering. We meet at a time when the foundations that once sustained mediation are under visible and growing strain. The world that made mediation possible, anchored in shared norms, functioning multilateralism, and a minimum level of trust among states, is fragmenting before our eyes.

We are not simply living through a period of crisis; we are living through a transformation. We have entered an era in which mediation is no longer insulated from geopolitics but is actively shaped by it. It is an era characterized by competing initiatives, fragmented authority, and diminishing coherence. It is an era in which legitimacy is no longer assumed but must be earned patiently and politically. At the same time, mediation is unfolding in an increasingly transactional environment. The space for principled, consensus-based engagement is narrowing, while short-term deal-making is gaining ground. Yet, precisely because of these challenges, mediation has never been more necessary.



Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu

“ For IGAD, mediation is not optional. ”

¹ Executive Secretary, IGAD and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.



Acknowledgement of Regional Leadership

Before I proceed further, allow me to express our profound appreciation to our host country. We are honored to convene this important gathering here in Nairobi. I wish to extend our deepest gratitude to His Excellency President William Ruto, to his government, and to the people of Kenya for their unflinching and consistent commitment to peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. Kenya's role in advancing mediation and peaceful resolution in this region is both distinguished and enduring. Its leadership, both political and material, has been indispensable to the work of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

We are equally blessed by the presence of our Guest of Honor, the Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, the Honorable Musalia Mudavadi. Your Excellency, your diplomatic skill, your generosity toward IGAD, and your consistent service to peace are deeply valued. It is therefore most fitting that we are holding this reflection here in Nairobi in recognition of Kenya's leadership and commitment to peaceful solutions. May I respectfully request that you convey to His Excellency the President and to the people of Kenya the collective gratitude of all those gathered here and of IGAD.

The Systemic Nature of Conflict

For IGAD, mediation is not optional; it is our most visible political responsibility. Our people do not measure us by what we promise; they measure us by what we prevent: by the wars that do not happen, by the conflicts that do not escalate, and by the peace that becomes possible. Mediation is where the credibility of multilateralism is tested and, in our region, it is where history will judge us.

The Horn of Africa stands at a dangerous crossroads. What we are witnessing is not a series of isolated crises but the emergence of a system, a system of conflict that is interconnected, regionalized, and deeply entangled with external dynamics. The boundaries between internal and external factors have blurred. The lines between political conflict and geopolitical competition have all but disappeared. Wars today are fragmented, prolonged, and sustained by war economies. There is no longer a single center to negotiate with. This reality forces us to ask: what does mediation look like in a world without a center?



Reclaiming Mediation as a Political Strategy

We are not starting from zero. IGAD carries a proud legacy of mediation. These efforts succeeded because they were anchored in legitimacy, guided by political clarity, and supported by real coordination. However, if our past gives us confidence, our present demands honesty. Mediation today is under strain. Too often, it risks becoming crisis management rather than conflict resolution. Mediation is not merely technical; it is political. It is about power, it is about legitimacy, and ultimately, it is about building a shared future.

We must confront a growing tension between principled mediation and transactional deal-making. How do we end violence quickly without undermining sustainable peace? This is the central dilemma of our time and the reason this conference matters. We must reclaim mediation as a political strategy, restore multilateral coherence, and place people, rather than processes, at the center of our efforts.

The Crisis in Sudan: A Test of Credibility

Distinguished participants, we must also speak plainly about Sudan. Three years into a devastating war, mediation has not stopped the carnage. Despite sustained efforts, including the latest Berlin Conference and contributions by multilateral institutions, we have neither halted the fighting nor secured a credible political process. This is failure, and it must be acknowledged.

Sudan is fast becoming the epicenter of a deeper crisis: the erosion of mediation itself. If mediation cannot make a difference in Sudan, its credibility everywhere is at risk. What must change is clear: mediation must become unified, politically anchored, and strategically coherent, or it will continue to be outpaced by the wars it seeks to resolve.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

The cost of failure is not abstract. We cannot normalize permanent war, nor can we accept fragmentation as destiny. What the Horn of Africa requires is not management, but resolution. This requires political courage and strategic clarity.



Let this be a moment of decision: a decision to restore mediation and a decision to act with urgency and purpose. Mediation is what we can do; mediation is what we must do better. Let this conference mark the beginning of that commitment.



2. Ambassador Mohamed Belaiche² : Keynote Speech: The Imperative of African Leadership and Strategic Coordination in the Sudanese Peace Process

The Symbolism of African Agency

I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation for the convening of this significant meeting at this critical juncture in Sudan's history. I thank Dr. Workneh for this relevant initiative. The gathering of special envoys and stakeholders concerned with Sudanese affairs represents a message of hope. This is particularly vital at a time when suffering has intensified, the war has expanded, and the humanitarian and social burdens weighing heavily on the Sudanese people have reached their nadir.

The significance of this meeting lies in its symbolism; it affirms that the African voice remains present and that the African will is capable of delivering solutions to African problems, despite the horrors, divisions, and external complexities involved.



— Ambassador Mohamed Belaiche —

“ It is not too late to build trust among the Sudanese people, nor to create a unified national identity that transcends polarization and the desire for dominance. ”

² Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission and Head of the AU Liaison Office in Sudan



Harmonizing Global and Regional Initiatives

The primary challenge facing actors both within Sudan and abroad is determining how to bridge disparate efforts and connect paths that occasionally appear to run parallel without ever intersecting. Consequently, the presence of regional and international actors reflects a dedicated interest in supporting peace in Sudan. It further underscores the necessity to coordinate efforts, bridge the gaps between various initiatives, and formulate a more coherent approach.

In this context, the principles relating to the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Sudan acquire central importance. These principles serve as a legal and moral safeguard against the dangers of disintegration, division, and the imposition of a *fait accompli*. Therefore, any serious political process must begin with a clear rejection of any infringement upon the unity of Sudan. Within this framework, the African Union, in accordance with its responsibilities, will remain committed to our common quest for peace in Sudan and throughout the Horn of Africa.

Core Guiding Principles of the African Union Commission

The African Union Commission operates under several guiding principles to ensure a sustainable resolution:

- I. **Sudanese Ownership:** The African Union acts as a facilitator rather than an imposer, ensuring that the Sudanese voice leads the process.
- II. **Inclusivity:** Women, youth, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees must be central at every stage of the dialogue.
- III. **Coordination:** The African Union and IGAD work to ensure that regional and international efforts are harmonized.
- IV. **Accountability:** Justice for war crimes is an integral component of lasting peace.

Mitigating Resistance and Addressing Spoilers

The international community must anticipate resistance from spoilers. We must prepare mitigating strategies, such as diplomatic pressure and sanctions against non-compliant actors. Furthermore, strengthening partnerships with regional powers is essential to isolate those who seek to undermine the peace process, regardless of the complexities of the crisis.



Conclusion: Restoring the National Identity

It is not too late to build trust among the Sudanese people, nor is it too late to restore a unified national identity that transcends polarization and the desire for dominance. Nations are built not solely by security and political arrangements, but by emphasizing a shared destiny and restoring the value of the homeland and its common future.

Let us all hold fast to this vision. Let us make today's meeting a vital step on the difficult path toward restoring the state, stopping the war, building peace, and preserving unity. By defending the dignity of the African people, we can move from despair to the restoration of hope.



3. H.E. Dr. Musalia Mudavadi³: Guest of Honor: Addressing the Crisis of Mediation: Toward African-Led Solutions and Structural Reform

Institutional Strengthening and the Foreign Policy of Peace

Let me first express Kenya's sincere appreciation to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu for convening this timely and forward-looking engagement in Nairobi. I commend the IGAD team for its continued leadership and commitment to advancing peace and security, an objective that remains a long-held pillar of Kenya's foreign policy.

Furthermore, I warmly acknowledge the distinguished leaders present today. As experienced diplomats and mediators, your exemplary leadership and service in regional cooperation, political transition, and humanitarian diplomacy continue to enrich our collective efforts for stability. Your presence underscores our shared responsibility to strengthen dialogue, mediation, and African-led solutions to the conflicts that persistently affect our region.



Dr. Musalia Mudavadi

“ Peace has been privatised, perhaps even commercialised. ”

³ Prime Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs of the Republic of Kenya



Challenges to the Mediation Landscape

The Horn of Africa is currently confronted with a dual challenge regarding the mediation landscape:

- **Protracted and Mutating Conflicts:** The increasing fragmentation of actors tests the limits of traditional peace processes.
- **Shifting Global Dynamics:** Growing pressures on multilateralism impact the coherence, predictability, and effectiveness of mediation efforts.

These realities necessitate a strategic rethink of our approaches. We must pursue flexible and responsive mediation frameworks tailored specifically to our regional context. African ownership remains essential to ensuring the legitimacy, sustainability, and long-term success of these interventions.

Harmonization and Resource Commitment

Enhancing coordination among regional and continental actors is imperative. Fragmentation and duplication of efforts undermine our collective progress; therefore, a harmonized approach anchored in IGAD's leadership will strengthen coherence in the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, mediation must be inclusive. Sustainable peace cannot be achieved without the meaningful participation of women, youth, and local communities.

There is a clear need to strengthen IGAD as the primary regional mechanism for security. Accordingly, Member States must take primary responsibility for financing IGAD programs in a predictable, adequate, and sustainable manner. While we welcome the support of international partners, such assistance should remain complementary and supplementary rather than foundational. Ownership of mediation must be reflected in the resource commitments of our members. External regional peace initiatives should be mainstreamed into African-led mechanisms to safeguard the integrity of our collective objectives.

Bridging the Implementation Gap

The persistent gap between the signing of peace agreements and their actual implementation remains a significant challenge. Frequently, considerable effort is invested in reaching an accord,



only for the implementation to falter, resulting in a recurrence of conflict, often with greater intensity. We must prioritize implementation by strengthening institutional support mechanisms. This conference provides a critical opportunity to reflect on lessons learned and to charter a practical, forward-looking agenda.

The Pitfalls of External Interference and the "Privatization of Peace"

I wish to offer a candid insight based on recent international conferences regarding the situation in Sudan. During the London conference, after extensive deliberations on humanitarian aspects, the participants were unable to produce an agreed communiqué. This failure occurred despite the absence of Sudanese players; rather, it was caused by external actors who could not reach a consensus. It was disheartening to witness international powers arguing over punctuation in a text regarding humanitarian intervention while the crisis intensified.

This highlights a disturbing trend that some scholars describe as the "privatization" or "commercialization" of peace. Mediation is increasingly treated as a transactional business negotiation or an arbitration of interests rather than a genuine effort to save human lives. We must ask whether mediators are entering these spaces as business negotiators or as sincere arbitrators of peace.

The Paradox of Undermining Indigenous Institutions

There is a profound irony in the tendency of African actors to discredit their own institutions. Frequently, the African Union or IGAD presents reasonable, principled propositions that are initially rejected by parties to a conflict. Yet, when those same propositions are later presented by non-continental powers in foreign capitals, they are signed with appreciation. This undermines our own regional mechanisms. We must reflect inward and consider whether we are providing those with a transactional approach the opportunity to drive the African agenda at the expense of our own sovereignty.

The Economic Imperative for Stability

The ongoing Middle East crisis serves as a wake-up call. African nations are facing higher fuel prices and systematic shortages that bite deeply into our economies. In our own neighborhood, South Sudan possesses oil, while Mozambique, Tanzania, and Ethiopia possess gas or the



potential to utilize it. However, conflict prevents us from accessing these local resources, forcing a reliance on external suppliers whose shipping routes are currently disrupted.

If the mediation process could unlock this regional potential, it would allow our nations to become self-sustaining. For instance, Algeria now supplies nearly 25% of Italy's gas requirements following the disruption of Russian supplies to Europe. We possess the resources to be self-reliant, yet we remain entangled in conflict.

Conclusion: A Call for Goodwill and Dialogue

The potential for a self-sustaining and prosperous region is within our reach, but it requires the men and women of goodwill on the African continent to rise up. We must speak, mediate, and engage in genuine dialogue to unlock our collective potential. Kenya remains committed to supporting IGAD in the pursuit of sustainable security. I am confident that the insights from this conference will provide IGAD with the strategic direction necessary to create a result-oriented mediation framework responsive to the realities of our time.



4. Dr. Solomon A. Deresso ⁴: Moderator: The Future of Mediation: Addressing Normative Erosion and Institutional Fragmentation

Core Research Inquiries

The following questions serve as the framework for our discussion:

- How has normative erosion, if not outright collapse, and institutional fragmentation reshaped the practice of mediation?
- What are the implications of competing mediation tracks, and why is mediation increasingly disconnected from sustainable political outcomes?
- Can mediation retain legitimacy in the absence of multilateral coherence?

Reforming the Mediation Landscape

The transformation required to address these challenges involves identifying the specific coalition of actors, cognitive frameworks, processes, structures, and discourses necessary to breathe new life into this practice. Our objective is to restore mediation as the premier institutional tool for advancing global peace and security.



⁴ Founding Director of Amani Africa Media and Research Services



Given the significant shifts we are currently witnessing, we must determine what kind of systemic change would enable mediation to remain, and become, the primary instrument for dispute settlement. This evolution must be anchored in the fundamental principles of mediation, particularly those concerning legitimacy.

The Measure of Success

Ultimately, the success of mediation must be judged by the lives saved, the restoration of human dignity, and the return of hope following the types of societal ruptures currently being experienced in the Horn of Africa, most prominently in Sudan. The central challenge before us is to define the path by which we achieve these goals and effectively reach that standard of resolution.



5. Martin Griffiths⁵: Panelist: The Future of Global Mediation: A Call for African Leadership and Principled Multilateralism

The Crisis of Modern Conflict Resolution

My criticisms of global transactional mediation are rooted in a troubling contemporary reality: the world is experiencing more wars with far fewer sustainable agreements. Currently, global focus rests primarily on ending active hostilities rather than establishing durable pathways toward peace and stability. We see this vividly in efforts regarding Gaza, Sudan, and the broader Middle East.

While securing a ceasefire is of primary importance as a first step for our collective conscience, experience demonstrates that such pauses never endure if they are not explicitly linked to a broader peace process. It is significantly easier to end fighting than it is to build peace. However, mediators must be more ambitious; we cannot stop at a mere pause in hostilities. We must embrace civilian leaders and regional organizations to lead us toward comprehensive peace rather than focusing solely on the interests of military generals.



Martin Griffiths

“ If you want to end the fighting, don’t stop at a ceasefire—be more ambitious and build peace. ”

⁵ Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the United Nations from 2021 to 2024



The Limits of Ceasefire Management

Reflecting on my tenure as a United Nations mediator in Yemen from 2018 to 2021, we invested an enormous amount of time discussing dispute resolution mechanisms and ceasefire monitoring with regional powers and parties. That experience was searing because it highlighted the immense technical work required for ceasefire management. Without such detail, a ceasefire is not a functional reality; it is, at best, a pause.

In Gaza, for example, the situation has not progressed beyond a pause because it hasn't challenged the fundamental precepts held by the parties. These interests remain non-aligned, particularly regarding the continuing occupation of territories. Without addressing these core issues, mediation remains stuck in a cycle of temporary cessations.

The Normalization of Impunity

A grave concern in the international landscape is that impunity has become the norm. Legal processes remain tragically slow. While I take pride in the institutions established under Kofi Annan, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), there is a distressing lack of clarity and publicity regarding investigations into obvious breaches of international law.

In the context of the Gambia's process involving Myanmar, I was recently informed it may take another six years before the case reaches the court. We must ask how many people will die in that interim. In both Gaza and Sudan, there is negligible action regarding documented crimes and potential war crimes. This extends to the murder of humanitarian aid workers; globally, the number of cases brought against perpetrators is almost nonexistent. This represents a failure of accountability and a breach of the duty of care.

Conversely, African regional organizations treat justice and accountability with great seriousness. There is no reason not to make war today if one believes they can win without facing legal consequences. Even in the case of Syria, despite appalling war crimes, there is currently no serious process to bring leadership to trial.

The Rise of Transactional Mediation



Track One mediation, the negotiation between state parties, has increasingly been reclaimed by states themselves, moving away from professional, third-party organizations. While this shift in architecture is not inherently negative, we must consider the impact of states exercising "transactional mediation." This approach often lacks a sense of principles, purpose, or inclusion.

We need a common shared agenda based on multilateralism. I am heartened to see the United Nations, through political diplomacy, stepping in to assist in regions like the Horn of Africa. However, in the Middle East and elsewhere, legitimacy is increasingly treated as a matter of power, interests, and leverage. Yet, history shows that wars almost never end through force; they end through agreements that protect civilian rule. While nations like Pakistan, Oman, and Qatar have modeled energetic and principled mediation, the general rule of transnationalism remains a detriment to the quality and principles of the practice.

The Essential Role of Public Inclusion

To make mediation about more than just ending the fighting, the inclusion of ordinary people is essential. In my own history, including mediating between the Spanish government and the terrorist group ETA, both sides often agreed on one thing: excluding the people to avoid "complication." We saw this in the early Jeddah meetings regarding the Sudan war, where parties refused to involve the civilian "emergency rooms" that were actually leading humanitarian action on the ground.

Peace is complicated for a good reason. Without the validation and presence of the people, no outcome can be successful. In the case of ETA, the conflict ended only when the group realized the armed struggle was going nowhere and consulted their political base, which no longer desired violence. The legitimacy of a peace process depends on this structural inclusion. Furthermore, the "energy of hope" is an integral part of every peace process. If people lose a horizon of stability for their families, they lose hope, which leads to both a demise in the process and an increase in the loss of life.

The Challenge for African Multilateralism

Building peace takes longer and is more complex than ending a war. Ending a war has become a "political prize," often sought for prestige rather than humanitarian aspirations. Syria serves as an example where military action ended most of the fighting but failed to bring stability.



I have developed a deep respect for regional organizations like IGAD and the African Union. They possess the energy, local knowledge, and, most importantly, the principles that the broader international system currently lacks. I recall working with Kofi Annan in 2008 at the Serena Hotel; he successfully leveraged African traditions and values to resolve a controversial process by demanding that the principals take responsibility.

The United Nations remains the ultimate source of legitimacy, but it currently lacks the necessary spirit and energy. We need the Global South to take up the mantle of mediation. The old world needs the new world to come to its rescue. African leadership can bring mediation back to where it should be by insisting on the link between ending fighting and building peace, and by championing the inclusion of women and civil society.

We desperately need your leadership because of the failures we see globally, in Afghanistan, Myanmar, and the Middle East. We need a focused, constructive African contribution to the debate about multilateralism. You have the experience and the talent to forge a consensus that goes beyond the continent. We do not need to help you; we need you to help us.



6. Abdul Mohammed⁶: Panelist: Rethinking Mediation: Addressing Structural Mismatch and the Erosion of Multilateral Norms

The Current Global Rupture

We must emphasize that we are operating in a moment of profound significance, characterized by some as a transition and by others as a systemic rupture. The institutions with which we are associated, whether IGAD, the African Union, the United Nations, or the European Union, were established and operated to provide leadership based on norms and principles. These frameworks were intended to regulate the behavior of nation-states, constrain the exercise of power, and promote the peaceful resolution of conflict.



Abdul Muhammad

“ Multilateral institutions were not created to take us to heaven—they were created to prevent us from going to hell. ”

In moments of uncertainty, I recall the guidance of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, who observed that multilateral institutions were not created to take humanity to heaven, but rather to prevent it from going to hell. This perspective serves as a necessary framework to understand both our institutional strengths and our inherent weaknesses.

⁶ Senior Adviser to the IGAD Executive Secretary and Former chief of staff and senior political advisor of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan and South Sudan



The Hostile Environment of Modern Mediation

Today, these foundational norms and principles are under immense strain. As previously noted by the Executive Secretary and Martin Griffiths, these standards are being diluted, bypassed, and, in some instances, deliberately hollowed out. We have reached a critical crossroads. Military force, once considered a measure of last resort, is increasingly employed as a first option. This shift represents a defining signal of our age.



Abdul Mohammed

“ Military force, once considered a measure of last resort, is increasingly employed as a first option. ”

The restraints that once made war prohibitively costly and constrained the exercise of power are weakening. This constitutes the extremely hostile environment in which mediation must now operate. What we are witnessing is not simply a failure of mediation itself, but a structural mismatch between mediation as currently practiced and the contemporary realities it seeks to address.

The Structural Mismatch and Regional Complexity

Mediation evolved in an era characterized by greater coherence and clearer authority. In the present landscape, however, mediation is often overstretched, fragmented, sidelined, and strategically incoherent. In the Horn of Africa, this mismatch is especially visible. Conflicts are embedded in a regional system shaped by cross-border dynamics, external interventions, and entrenched war economies. We are not dealing with a collection of isolated crises, but rather a



complex and interconnected conflict system. This broader challenge is perhaps most starkly reflected in the ongoing crisis in Sudan.

African Responsibility and the Path Forward

This moment of erosion must also be viewed as a moment of extreme responsibility for Africa. It is vital to recognize that these norms and principles are not external or alien impositions. They are part and parcel of our internal African frameworks, traditions, and the vision embedded in Pan-Africanism. These values are in harmony with the realities of the people affected by conflict; nobody imposed them upon us.

The challenge before us is not simply to improve mediation, but to rethink it politically, strategically, and institutionally. The future of mediation will not be determined in theory, but in practice, specifically, in whether we are prepared to act, think, and lead differently. The question is not whether change is necessary, but whether we possess the readiness to implement it.

Conclusion: Toward a Global Coalition

As we conclude this meeting, I hope that a core idea will emerge, attached to a strategy that triggers the formation of a coalition. This coalition must be both African and global in scope, dedicated to rescuing and restoring the norms and principles that have traditionally animated our multilateral institutions.



7. Dr. Paul-Simon Handy⁷: The Ontological Shift in Mediation: Addressing Competition and Regional Leverage

The Perception of Failure versus Statistical Stability

In reviewing various mediation databases, one is struck by a notable discrepancy between contemporary sentiment and empirical data. While there is a pervasive sense that mediation is undergoing a fundamental transformation, the data suggests that mediation practices have remained remarkably stable over time. The feeling that mediation is failing may not stem from a change in the mechanics of the process itself, but rather from a shift in the underlying environment and the objectives of the actors involved.

Competing Ontologies: Liberal Models versus Transactional Bargaining

The most significant change in the current landscape is the increased competition regarding the "ontologies" of mediation, specifically, the contestation over what mediation is intended to achieve as an end state. For a considerable period, mediation processes were dominated by a liberal model. While this model faced occasional contestation, there was a general consensus that the desired outcome involved the establishment of liberal norms, institutional reforms, and democratic governance.

Today, this liberal approach is being challenged by many actors in favor of transactional bargaining. This alternative model prioritizes economic access, diplomatic recognition, and geopolitical interests over normative institutional changes. This shift raises critical questions about the guiding philosophy of regional organizations.

IGAD's Role and Regional Leverage

In this context, it is essential to define the specific ontology that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) applies to its mediation efforts. We must clarify what IGAD seeks to achieve as an end state and how it navigates a landscape where it competes with other, often

⁷ Institute for Security Studies' Regional Director for East Africa and its Representative to the African Union in Addis Ababa. Conference Participant for the Session.



more powerful, actors. Understanding these parameters is vital to defining IGAD's specific leverage in mediating the complex conflicts that characterize the region.



8. Pekka Haavisto⁸: Strategic Transactionalism and the Paradox of Inclusivity in Mediation

The Multidimensional Nature of Transactionalism

I wish to offer one observation and one inquiry, beginning with the phenomenon of transactionalism. It is a common assumption that mediation processes or the mediators themselves are primarily transactional in nature. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the parties to a conflict, the "clients", often operate within a transactional framework as well.

Reflecting on the Abuja talks concerning Sudan, held in neighboring Nigeria with various Darfur groups, the volatility of alliances was constant. It was necessary to verify daily the shifting friendships and enmities between actors. Significant transactionalism was driven by the clients themselves. Therefore, when assessing the perceived failures or the nature of a peace process, we must remember that responsibility does not reside solely with the mediator.



Pekka Haavisto

“ How inclusive is the inclusive process, who should be in the room and who should be left out from the room. ”

The Challenge of Defining Inclusivity

My question, directed to Martin Griffiths given his presence on this stage, concerns the practical application of inclusiveness. Inclusivity is a fundamental component of a process's credibility.

⁸ United Nations Personal Envoy for Sudan; Former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Conference Participant for the Session.



While the international community frequently emphasizes the participation of women and youth, the "elephant in the room" often involves radical elements, such as Islamist groups or other extremist factions.

Martin, given your extensive experience in Afghanistan and Yemen, I seek your counsel regarding the situation in Sudan. Specifically, how inclusive must an inclusive process truly be? We must determine who, by necessity, should be present in the room and who, if anyone, should be excluded to maintain the integrity and viability of the peace process. Check his verbatim with this statement.



9. Peyton Knopf:⁹ The Dilemma of Sovereign Legitimacy and the Erosion of State Authority in Mediation

The Concept of Legitimacy in Intergovernmental Mediation

A consistent theme emerging from this morning's deliberations, beginning with the opening remarks by Dr. Workneh, is the critical question of legitimacy. This is closely linked to the observation that mediation is increasingly being reclaimed by sovereign governments and, by extension, intergovernmental organizations. It is perhaps natural that when state actors and intergovernmental authorities lead mediation efforts, their primary inclination is to relate to other governments as the priority interlocutors.



Peyton Knopf

“ How can one wrestle with that as a mediator in this world in which you have government entities that are recognised as governments but not exercising the authority of governments? ”

The Disconnect Between Recognition and Functional Governance

However, when examining the conflicts discussed today, specifically Syria, Yemen, and Sudan, a significant discrepancy arises. Many of the recognized governments involved in these conflicts are not exercising the traditional roles associated with statehood. These entities do not maintain full control over their sovereign territory, they do not possess a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, and, in many instances, they fail to provide essential services to their populations.

⁹ Special Advisor to the Dialogue Advisory Group and Former Deputy Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa in Biden Administration. Conference Participant



In such environments, a profound tension exists regarding the question of legitimacy and the formal recognition of certain entities as governments. The case of Syria demonstrated that a recognized government could ultimately become a hollow shell of itself. This presents a fundamental challenge for mediators who are operating in a world where recognized governmental entities lack the functional authority typically inherent to their status.

Implications for Mediator Impartiality

The central question for the panel is how a mediator can navigate this tension. When confronting modern crises like those in Yemen and Sudan, mediators must contend with recognized governments that do not exercise effective authority. This raises a vital question regarding the conduct of mediation work: How does one maintain neutrality, or at least impartiality, while wrestling with the disconnect between the legal recognition of a state and its actual capacity to govern? Check his verbatim with this statement.



10. Dr. Abdalla Hamdok¹⁰: Addressing the Crisis in Sudan: Multilateral Opportunities and the Principle of Sufficient Inclusivity

Opportunities Within Failing Multilateralism

While this discussion is framed around the broader conflicts within the Horn of Africa, including Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, I am gratified that the crisis in Sudan has taken center stage. For some time, we in Sudan felt our conflict had been neglected by the global community, with the notable exceptions of the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).



Dr. Abdalla Hamdok

“ In Sudan, we are suffering from the phenomenon of “forum shopping.” There is a profound lack of coherence in the mediation efforts. ”

Despite the current climate of failing global multilateralism, there exists a unique opportunity. We should utilize this systemic failure to reinforce our own established rules and norms. As Ambassador Mohamed Belaiche noted, the African Union possesses instruments to address the unconstitutional takeover of power directly. Such mechanisms are absent elsewhere; for example, the United Nations frequently accepts dictators into the General Assembly immediately following a coup. Conversely, the African Union suspends such regimes. We should take immense pride in this African standard, despite the challenges it presents. In the case of Sudan,

¹⁰ Former Prime Minister of Sudan



the leadership of IGAD, the AU, and Ethiopia initially facilitated a transition. Although that process was later aborted by a military coup, the African Union's immediate suspension of Sudan remains a move of extreme importance.

The Dangers of Mediation Fragmentation

Turning to the current situation in Sudan, we are suffering from the phenomenon of "forum shopping." There is a profound lack of coherence in the mediation efforts. The process began in Jeddah under the dual sponsorship of the United States and Saudi Arabia. This was followed by the Manama talks, which expanded the sponsors to four, and later the Al Manama Proximity Talks (ALPS) and various other bilateral meetings.

Today, few even remember the ALPS initiative; it has vanished, only to be replaced by rumors of new events, such as potential meetings in Muscat. This fragmentation is extremely dangerous. Following the Berlin Conference, however, we are moving toward a more effective alignment. The dialogue between the "Quad" and the "Quintet" indicates we are moving in the right direction. We wish to see the international community enforce this alignment rather than allowing individual countries to pursue fragmented, separate approaches through independent meetings.

The Principle of Sufficient Inclusivity

I must conclude by addressing the issue of inclusivity, as Pekka Haavisto referenced. I do not believe that "one hundred percent inclusivity" is a functional reality. We must remain vigilant regarding spoilers. Had Europe accommodated the Nazis and fascists following the war, it would not have enjoyed the democratic flourish witnessed over the last seventy-eight years.

In this sense, we should not strive for absolute inclusion, but rather aspire toward "sufficient inclusivity." This pragmatic approach is what will truly allow us to move forward.



11. Haile Menkerios¹¹: Regional Integration as a Framework for Conflict Resolution

The Strategic Importance of Context and Framework

When approaching the resolution of any conflict, two factors remain paramount: first, a comprehensive understanding of the specific context is required; second, the proposed solution must be positioned within a clear strategic framework.

IGAD and the Mandate of Regional Integration

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was reformed specifically to serve as an instrument of regional integration. This foundational objective was intended to guide the collective efforts of the member states toward economic and political synergy.



Haile Menkerios

“ When approaching the resolution of any conflict, two factors remain paramount: first, a comprehensive understanding of the specific context is required; second, the proposed solution must be positioned within a clear strategic framework. ”

¹¹ Senior Advisor to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and former UN Assistant Secretary-General Political Affairs from 2007 to 2010, Head of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) from 2010 to 2011, and Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan from 2011 to 2013. Conference Participant for the Session.



The Integration Objective in Contemporary Mediation

My inquiry concerns the extent to which IGAD continues to prioritize this objective of regional integration when addressing current conflicts. Specifically, how is this mandate taken into account when designing peaceful resolutions for disputes within the IGAD region? There is a specific rationale behind this question, and I would appreciate the panel's insights into whether integration remains a central pillar of the organization's mediation strategy.



12. Ambassador Nureldin Satti¹²: Moral Authority and the Evolution of the Mediator's Role

The Restoration of Institutional Will

To address the inquiries regarding the role of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), I contend that the organization must first regain its moral authority. Achieving this requires securing the collective will of its member states. This principle is not unique to IGAD; it applies equally to the United Nations and the African Union. There can be no substantive action by these institutions without the unified support and commitment of their respective memberships. This collective alignment serves as the essential starting point for institutional efficacy.



Ambassador Nureldin Satti

“ There will be no real action for IGAD or any of those institutions without really gaining the collective support and wills of their member states. ”

The Coalition of the Willing for Mediation

I fully endorse the concept of a coalition as proposed by Abdul Mohammed. We must establish a "coalition of the willing" dedicated to mediation. This body would serve as a necessary counterweight to the "coalition of the willing" for anti-mediation that currently operates within our fractured global landscape. By fostering such a coalition, we can create the necessary

¹² Former Sudanese ambassador to the United States and former United Nations Deputy Special Representative for Burundi



leverage at the IGAD level, thereby generating the moral authority required to gain broader acceptability and recognition from member states and international partners.

The New Generation of Mediators

Finally, we must critically examine the mediators themselves. The contemporary world requires a new generation of mediators, a "new race" specifically adapted to this changing environment. These individuals must possess distinct qualities, most notably moral authority and specific personal characteristics that allow them to navigate current global complexities. We require mediators who are capable of accepting these challenges, confronting global realities, and demonstrating the strength of character necessary to fulfill their missions effectively.



13. Ambassador Hiruy Amanuel¹³: Institutional Identity and the Strategic Role of Individual State Mediation

The Dual Mandate of IGAD: Governments and Peoples

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is inherently an organisation of sovereign governments. However, through its recent treaty and various institutional assessments, the organization is increasingly viewing itself as an institution of people as well. It occupies a dual identity: it serves as an instrument for the governments of the region and as a representative body for the diverse populations residing within these territories.

The Challenge of Subnational and Unrecognized Entities

A significant challenge facing IGAD is how it should engage with authorities and administrations that operate on a subnational scope. These entities are often highly organized but remain unrecognized as sovereign member states. This presents a complex diplomatic and legal dilemma. What strategic advice can be offered to IGAD as it navigates the necessity of dealing with these subnational actors while maintaining its intergovernmental framework?



Ambassador Hiruy Amanuel



“ A significant challenge facing IGAD is how it should engage with authorities and administrations that operate on a subnational scope. These entities are often highly organised but remain unrecognised as sovereign member states. ”

¹³ Former UN Senior Advisor on Sudan, South Sudan/Horn of Africa Affairs, and as Political Director of the UN Mission in South Sudan and Former Diplomat at Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Conference Participant



Individual State Mediation versus Multilateral Institutions

I would like to direct an inquiry to Martin Griffiths regarding the successful mediation efforts of individual states, specifically Pakistan, Oman, and Qatar. These nations have demonstrated a unique and effective role in conflict resolution, yet their efforts are primarily unilateral rather than formally connected to broader multilateral institutions.

Does such a model hold potential value within the IGAD region or the wider African continent? Furthermore, can multilateral institutions in Africa extract specific lessons or strategic benefits from the independent diplomatic experiences of countries like Pakistan, Oman, and Qatar to enhance their own peacemaking capabilities?



14. Martin Griffiths¹⁴: The Evolution of Mediation: Balancing Armed Engagement, Institutional Wisdom, and Popular Legitimacy

The Necessity of Engaging Armed Actors

The question of whom we engage in mediation goes to the heart of the role of governance and the practicalities of peace. Throughout my career, working with groups ranging from the PKK and the Taliban to the regime of Bashar al-Assad, I have maintained that a peace process must engage those who manage war. While this engagement is often criticized, particularly when dealing with groups like the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan who are accused of terrible crimes, it remains a functional necessity.

Negotiations must involve those with the capacity to stop the violence. As I once advised the Indonesian government regarding the province of Aceh: one must start with those who possess the weapons. Ending the loss of life is the primary objective, and without the involvement of military heads and warlords, progress is impossible. However, this engagement must not be exclusive; it must exist within a broader framework.



Martin Griffiths



“ Peace processes are not sustainable without the support of the people. This is not a claim. It’s a fact. ”

¹⁴ Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the United Nations from 2021 to 2024



The Mediator's Vision and the Role of the People

A mediator is more than a facilitator; they must possess a vision for the process, tempered by modesty. When I mediated the Basque conflict, the founders of ETA told me that as a non-Basque, I was there only to "make the coffee." Yet, mediation requires more than logistical support. It requires a vision that understands the sequencing of dialogue, balancing the necessity of speaking with "bad people" to stop "bad things" while simultaneously grounding the process in the needs of civil society.

I have faced significant criticism for meeting with regime leaders, such as the junta in Myanmar, but such exclusion is counterproductive. Ultimately, the people must have the last word. While this may sound sentimental or like the perspective of a "London liberal," it is a foundational fact: peace processes are unsustainable without the support of the populace. Sudan serves as a classic example where peace cannot function without civilian leadership. The mediator's task is to marry these elements together to ensure that agreements are not merely rewards for the most effective negotiator, but sustainable foundations for the future.

The New Architecture of Mediation

The "new mediator" must represent a departure from historical norms. We need a new generation of practitioners, ideally from the Global South and including more women, who are steeped in the philosophy and moral principles of mediation. This is not about the mediator's ego or the imposition of a foreign vision; rather, it is about offering a perspective on what makes a future possible.

Mediators must be embraced for their wisdom as much as their empathy. This requires a re-examination and reimagining of how mediation organizations operate. We are currently at an inflection point where the practitioner acts as a moral being who understands the dynamics of conflict and exclusion without usurping the agency of the people involved.

Lessons from Individual State Diplomacy

Regarding the unique roles played by countries such as Qatar, Pakistan, and Oman, these are examples of effective mediation, yet they often lack multilateral protection. Oman, for instance, is a magnificent exponent of mediation as a listening process. Qatar took extraordinary risks in



its links with Hamas, facing immense pressure from the United States and others. Had these nations been part of a robust multilateral enterprise, they might have been better protected from the political fallout of their diplomatic courage.

In Africa, and specifically within the IGAD region, there is an opportunity to enhance mediation through increased legitimacy. Unlike the fragmented approaches seen in other regions, the collective reflection occurring here is unique. While there is no inherent problem with governments exercising their leverage in mediation, they must not become the "usurpers of legitimacy." The ultimate source of legitimacy resides with the people, and multilateralism is the vehicle through which their voices are included.



15. Abdul Mohammed¹⁵: The Evolution of Mediation: From Liberal Order Templates to Modern Dealmaking and the Crisis of Multilateral Legitimacy

The Lifecycle of Mediation Templates

The established templates that have guided mediation efforts were the product of a specific historical period characterized by a particular hegemonic era, often referred to as the liberal order or founded upon liberal principles. These frameworks were incubated during this era; however, it is significant to note that within the African context, they were creatively applied over a substantial duration. We must now communicate that this era may have reached its conclusion.



Abdul Mohammed

“ The whole purpose of mediation was to achieve a political outcome. As long as you had a mediator who kept that intact, transactions could take place under that hegemony. Now, that is no longer the case. Transactions have taken on a life of their own, and it is no longer called mediation—it is now called dealmaking. ”



In gatherings such as this, we often approach conflict with a prescribed methodology. We are trained to execute a sequence of actions: stop the war and establish security arrangements. The African Union extended this further through the "Silencing the Guns" initiative to ensure no stone was left unturned. Following security arrangements, the process typically moves into wealth

¹⁵ Senior Adviser to the IGAD Executive Secretary and Former chief of staff and senior political advisor of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan and South Sudan



sharing and power sharing. If the intensity of the conflict necessitates it, transitional justice is included as a component of the template. Furthermore, as inclusivity remains a persistent challenge, national dialogue is often incorporated. All of these were templates creatively applied throughout this period.

The Obsolescence of Traditional Frameworks

This period may have ended because modern warfare has rendered these templates obsolete. It is imperative that we discuss the nature of contemporary wars and our subsequent direction. While certain templates may need to be rescued, we have effectively reached the end of the line with current methodologies.

Regarding the issue of transactionalism, it has always been present in mediation. While working in Sudan, we listened and responded to transactional requests. However, those transactions took place under a liberally defined outcome for the mediation. At that time, the overarching purpose of mediation was a specific political outcome. As long as a mediator kept that framework intact, transactions could occur under that hegemony.

That framework no longer exists. Transactionalism has acquired a life of its own and is no longer defined as mediation; it is now called "dealmaking." The epicenter of this shift is the current United States administration, manifested in the "Abraham Accords" (or Board of Peace). This approach essentially involves making deals that multilateral organizations are unable to facilitate. The Security Council, whether willingly, knowingly, or unknowingly, blessed this approach, a decision I believe they now regret.

The Foundations and Autonomy of Multilateral Legitimacy

On the subject of legitimacy, it is important to recognize that multilateral institutions were created willingly by member states because each state reached the limits of exercising its individual sovereignty. Therefore, these institutions were intended as instruments to enhance sovereignty through collective means, allowing states to realize their sovereignty through collectivity.

This intent is evident in the preambles of major foundational documents. The United Nations Charter aims to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," and the preamble of



IGAD reflects similar sentiments. These represent member states realizing their limitations and lending their sovereignty. The same logic applies to the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which was a reinvention of the OAU. It demonstrates that even when member states are opposed to or uncooperative with multilateralism, they inherently require it for various reasons.

Legitimacy is driven by what has been formally confirmed through these acts. However, there is also a secondary form of legitimacy: autonomous legitimacy. This is acquired by multilateral institutions through the manner in which they conduct business, their success stories, and their determination. Currently, this autonomous legitimacy is absent.



16. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu,¹⁶ The Institutional Imperative: Challenges of Mediation and Enforcement in Regional Conflict

The Role of Multilateral Institutions in Mediation

The subject matter at hand is not limited to IGAD; rather, it concerns the broader practice of mediation. Mediation cannot be conducted in a vacuum without the support of institutions. IGAD is one such organization, created willingly by its member states to tackle challenges that a single country cannot resolve alone. While the role of IGAD is clearly defined, we continue to face significant challenges in fulfilling this mandate.



Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu



“ IGAD really doesn't have an enforcement mechanism. It relies entirely on the goodwill and political backing of the member states. Securing this support is often very challenging. ”

The Challenge of Enforcement and Political Willingness

When discussing mediation vis-à-vis the political willingness of member states, it is important to note that IGAD does not possess an autonomous enforcement mechanism. It relies entirely on the goodwill and political backing of the member states. Securing this support is often very challenging.

A critical point regarding the "clients", the parties who actually require mediation, has also been raised. We must examine the modern behavior of these clients and determine how to effectively

¹⁶ Executive Secretary, IGAD and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.



apply pressure upon them. One of the primary challenges IGAD faces is the enforcement of its decisions.

Case Study: The Enforcement Gap in South Sudan

For example, during the last African Union summit, there was a meeting between the C5 and IGAD regarding South Sudan. The outcome and decisions of that meeting were very clear. The African Union was mandated to enforce the decisions made by the C5; however, two or three months later, we are still struggling to enforce those outcomes. This situation illustrates why we are gathered here: to determine how we can work together more effectively.

Conclusion: The Necessity of Collective Action

Regarding the issues of leverage and the legality of institutions, it is evident that a single country cannot resolve issues that are cross-border in nature. There is no option other than multilateral institutions working together collectively. Sudan serves as a live example of this necessity, as previously mentioned by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. I ask this gathering to indicate any aspects that can help address the challenges we are facing here.



17. Murithi Mutiga¹⁷: Panelist: Reinventing African Mediation: Navigating the Global Shocks and Regional Crises of the New Century

The Late Commencement of the Century

A subset of historians posits that centuries often commence later than their chronological start. Many contend that the twentieth century truly began with the First World War. Recently, we debated when this current century began; candidates included the events of September 11, the secession of South Sudan, a truly epochal moment, and the global financial crisis. However, it is argued that all of those occurrences had historical precedents.

Conversely, there is a strong argument that this century has truly begun within this current decade. A full century of history seems to be unfolding within a single ten-year span. Reflecting on February 2020, the shock of COVID-19 represented a staggering blow to all of humanity, the likes of which had not been seen in a hundred years. Since then, the world has been unable to find a reprieve. We face extraordinary climatic emergencies and the global repercussions of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Furthermore, we are witnessing an invasion and a full-scale war of a nature that has not occurred since approximately 1792. While the Iran-Iraq conflict was distinct, the consequences of the current landscape are profound. I express this to emphasize my empathy for institutions such as IGAD and the African Union (AU) as they confront this dramatic landscape. My subsequent points are not intended as criticism, but as an attempt to identify a path forward.

Speed and Agency in Mediation

While global events have been dramatic, our own region is living through unpleasant history. The war in Sudan is of such consequence for both the nation and the region that it demands a fundamentally different approach than what has been attempted previously. We observe borders

¹⁷ Africa Program Director at the International Crisis Group.



being tested in this region and elsewhere, alongside the introduction of technology, such as drones, which are transforming the landscape of warfare in areas like the Great Lakes.



Murithi Mutiga



“ The longer a war lasts,
the more hopeless the task of resolving it. ”

In responding to this dramatic moment, mediation must prioritize speed. When Kofi Annan arrived in Nairobi, he observed to Kenyan leaders that the longer a war lasts, the more hopeless the task of resolving it becomes. This is a dramatic reality; as time passes, families begin to arm themselves for protection, armies become increasingly predatory, and war becomes a way of life. While the ideal time to stop a war is before it begins, agency in the early days of mediation is a critical lesson. Unfortunately, in the case of Sudan, the initial response was casual, slow, and lacked focus.

Entrepreneurship and Mediator Competition

Mediation must also be entrepreneurial. During the Kenyan crisis, Kofi Annan took the two leaders, Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, to a lodge in the middle of Tsavo called Kilaguni, where there was no telecommunications network. This was an act of entrepreneurial mediation that demonstrated he took the task with the utmost seriousness.

Furthermore, while competition among mediators is perhaps inevitable, we must demand that mediators keep the conflict at the core of their efforts rather than at the periphery. In the Great Lakes region, the East African Community and SADC occasionally made the mediation about



their own institutional differences and dominance. Even if such institutional competition exists, the primary issue must remain the central focus.

Pragmatism and "African Solutions"

Regarding the principle of "African solutions," we certainly need African institutions at the core. However, as Deng Xiaoping famously remarked, it does not matter if the cat is black or white, provided it catches the mice. In some instances, we must accept the reality that tasks need to be shared.

The Somalia-Ethiopia situation following the recognition of Somaliland serves as a potential model. It began within the region with significant IGAD involvement. Kenya subsequently took the lead, but recognizing it lacked sufficient leverage with its powerful neighbors, it prepared a brief and handed the process over to Turkey. Turkey acted as an aggressive and entrepreneurial mediator, and ultimately, a deal was achieved. This illustrates that regional leadership and external task-sharing can coexist effectively.

The Nexus of Ceasefires and Political Integration

I must qualify the issue of ceasefires. While a ceasefire is essential, it must be accompanied by peace. We may not always achieve comprehensive peace agreements immediately; therefore, we may require an initial ceasefire followed by intensive political engagement. As Abdul Mohammed often points out, one cannot divorce a ceasefire from politics. For instance, the Pretoria Agreement between the Ethiopian Federal Government and the TPLF was a success, yet it lacked the necessary accompanying political process. This is a gap we must address.

Conclusion: Humanitarian Victories and Institutional Reinvention

Finally, we must not lose track of "small wins." Similar to the Black Sea Grain Initiative or the Humus Initiative, we must focus on keeping enough people alive through the provision of essential goods while complicated peace negotiations continue.

We should not despair. Africa has provided many examples of successful mediation, including on the global stage. In 1964, when the Soviet Union faced being stripped of its voting rights at the UN General Assembly for unpaid dues, the Ghanaian chair of the assembly introduced a



creative "African solution." He proposed that for one year, the assembly would hold no votes and instead decide everything by consensus to avoid a dramatic confrontation between superpowers. This serves as a reminder of what Africa has to offer. As Alex Rondos suggests, if IGAD and the AU did not exist, we would need to invent them. However, it is clear that we currently need to reinvent them.



18. Jan Pospisil¹⁸: Panelist: Beyond the Peace Architecture: Fragmentation, Regionalization, and the Shift Toward Competitive Mediation Ecosystems

The Empirical Critique of Linear Peace Processes

I am working with a British-funded research program entitled the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform. Our primary objective is to collect peace agreements and analyze how they develop, interact, and shape the peace processes they encapsulate. Currently, we have collected approximately 2,300 agreements representing roughly 170 peace processes since 1990, which serves as our temporal cutoff.

The significant finding from this research concerns the "ideal type" of peace agreement or process, which has been reflected in our discussions thus far. This ideal model suggests a linear progression: beginning with a humanitarian ceasefire, moving to a cessation of hostilities where fighting stops, proceeding to substantive negotiations, culminating in a comprehensive peace agreement, and finally commencing implementation. However, in our analysis of these 170 processes since 1990, we have found that not a single one functioned in that manner. The essential takeaway is that the ideal process structure derived from traditional architectural thinking never occurs and has never happened. The current global situation provides a strong opportunity to reflect on held truths that do not necessarily reflect empirical realities. It offers a chance to examine actual occurrences and adapt practices to reflect the fragmentation on the ground.

The Reality of Intrinsically Regionalized Conflicts

Regarding the fragmented conflict landscape, Sudan serves as a primary example. There is a common tendency to view Sudan through the lens of external actors and proxy conflict. However, this is not an isolated example, particularly in the wider Horn of Africa region where we see

¹⁸ Researcher at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs and Associate Professor at the University of Vienna



conflicts regionalize. These are not strictly national or international conflicts; they are regional conflicts per se.

When observing the actors active in Sudan today, they are not foreign actors in the manner of the 1950s or 1960s who merely held proxies. Instead, there is intrinsic and direct involvement. These conflicts, similar to the situations in Somalia and other locales, are intrinsically regionalized. While this regionalization contributes significantly to fragmentation, it also establishes a specific context for mediation that must be taken into account.



Jan Pospisil



“ In the Horn of Africa, [conflicts] are not strictly national or international conflicts; they are regional conflicts per se. ”

Mediation as a Strategic Instrument of Regional Hegemony

Our program also maintains a database on mediation that examines the motivations of various actors. While mediation has never been entirely devoid of interest-based or transactional elements, we are now witnessing mediation becoming a decisive tool in the quest for regional hegemony and power.

This is evident in efforts across the Horn of Africa, where the Gulf states have become essential to negotiations. Turkey, Egypt, and other nations are positioning themselves similarly. In this context, the transactional element is no longer just about immediate gains; it is a strategic tool in regional competition. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that assigned roles such as "lead mediators" or institutional coherence will remain viable under these conditions. The traditional argument for a rigid "peace architecture" no longer fits the current reality.



The Decline of Comprehensive Peace Agreements and Integrated Missions

The era of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is also facing scrutiny. When comparing data from the last ten years to the period between 2005 and 2007, the number of signed CPAs is similar. However, the agreements from the earlier period, such as those in Sudan, Nepal, and the Philippines, were arguably significantly more impactful and successful than subsequent efforts. Agreements from the last decade, such as the Juba Peace Agreement or the DRC-Rwanda agreements, were not necessarily implemented or failed from the outset.

Empirically, we may have to definitively move beyond the era of comprehensive peace agreements. This shift correlates with changes in the United Nations peace architecture. The model of integrated UN missions, large-scale missions such as the one in South Sudan, which currently involves 17 civilian agencies and approximately 15,000 soldiers, is also being phased out. As these models reach their conclusion, we must ask what form peacemaking will take. It is likely to become more permanent and process-oriented.

Toward an Ecosystem of Competitive Peacemaking

In this evolving landscape, the leadership of regional organizations is vital. IGAD, like other multilateral organizations, is increasingly involved in ad hoc coalitions. There is no longer a clear, singular architecture; instead, we have what I would call an ecosystem of permanent interaction that includes competition.

In the field of mediation, there is a common complaint regarding "forum shopping" by conflict parties. However, competition in mediation is not inherently negative. We cannot know from the outset which specific plan or form will bring decisive progress to a process. Moving forward, we should remain flexible and open to ad hoc elements, accepting competition in mediation. Leadership often develops more effectively through competition than through centralized planning.



19. Kholood Khair¹⁹: The Marginalization of Civil Society in the Era of Transactional Mediation and State Fragmentation

The Shared Alienation of Mediators and Civic Actors

A fundamental reason many mediators feel unmoored from contemporary mediation processes is that they are experiencing the same alienation that civil society actors have historically faced. It is worth noting, as Jan Pospisil indicated, that current dynamics are not fundamentally different from those of the past. However, this sense of detachment is now being felt acutely by the mediators themselves.

The Challenge of Inclusion in Transactional, State-Led Processes

Given the brutally transactional nature of contemporary mediation, and the specific state-to-state led frameworks that dominate the landscape, a critical question arises regarding the inclusion of civil society voices. We are operating in an era where the primacy of armed non-state actors is giving rise to state and pseudo-state dynamics. These dynamics frequently marginalize and push away the civil society actors who are essential to the process.



Kholood Khair



“ Civil society actors that actually are the only ones who could probably guarantee any form of peace in the post-war era particularly with state fragmentation in the state that it is. ”

¹⁹ Founding Director of Confluence Advisory. Conference Participant



Civil Society as the Guarantor of Post-War Stability

The exclusion of these voices is particularly concerning because civil society actors are arguably the only ones capable of guaranteeing any sustainable form of peace in the post-war era. This necessity is magnified by the current degree of state fragmentation. As state structures continue to fracture, the role of civic actors becomes even more vital, yet they remain increasingly distanced from the very processes designed to resolve conflict.



20. Fouad Hikmat ²⁰ : Structural Deficits and the Reconceptualization of African Ownership in Mediation

The Structural Deficit in Mediation Tools

The challenge before us is not simply a lack of leadership; rather, there is a significant deficit in mediation tools. This represents a deep structural problem. As has been previously stated, the environment in which we mediate has fundamentally changed. In Africa, and specifically in the Horn of Africa, conflicts are increasingly characterized by fragmented authority. Consequently, most recent peace agreements, such as those for South Sudan and Abuja, despite the good intentions behind them, succeeded only in stabilizing violence temporarily. These processes eventually relapsed and fell apart. Even the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) failed in its ultimate goal, eventually leading to the fragmentation of the country.



Fouad Hikmat



“ Mediation must move beyond elite bargain games blueard other faces. ”

Moving Beyond Elite Bargains to Multi-Layered Processes

In my opinion, mediation must move beyond elite bargain games. It is necessary to transition toward multi-layered processes that effectively connect national negotiations with subnational dynamics.

²⁰ International Crisis Group, Special Adviser for the African Union and Sudan. Conference Participant



Redefining African Ownership and Multilateral Coherency

Regarding the concept of "African solutions" and the broader question of the legitimacy of multilateralism, we must redefine what we mean by "African ownership." This concept cannot remain a mere slogan. It is extremely important that we raise these questions. Achieving true ownership requires clarity in roles and coherency in action, specifically between IGAD and the African Union, and between the African Union and the United Nations. Furthermore, a more disciplined approach is required regarding how we engage external actors who influence or play significant roles in the conflict itself.

The Dilemma of Speed Versus Legitimacy

Finally, we must address a central dilemma: the tension between the speed of responding to a conflict to stop the war and the requirement for legitimacy. While we cannot choose one over the other, we must determine the proper sequencing. As we discuss the situation in Sudan, we should examine how to sequence the proposals of the Quad (the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt) with the endeavors of the Quintet (the African Union, IGAD, the League of Arab States, the European Union, and the United Nations).



21. Regional Accountability and the Institutional Limits of IGAD in the Horn of Africa

The Erosion of International Support and the Identity of IGAD

I have worked my entire adult life for the United Nations, spending a significant amount of time in Sudan and South Sudan. The issues discussed here are matters upon which I reflect deeply in my sorrow. I served in Nyala, South Darfur, for six years immediately following the war of 2003, at the time when the African Union was established. Through that experience, I came to know some of the major barriers to the conflict in Sudan personally.

A point that has not been raised in this conference is that IGAD is not merely a four-letter unanimous name; it represents the flags of these constituent countries. With the current breakdown of the international system, the European Union is nowhere to be seen to help, as they cannot help themselves. Similarly, the GCC is nowhere to be seen, as they also cannot help themselves. When we discuss IGAD, we are discussing the representation of these nations and the mediation efforts they undertake.



“ IGAD has to have 100% support of the member states through force, through political clout, through money and to enforce what IGAD works on mediation and support. ”

Unaddressed Regional Threats and the Necessity of Enforcement

The mediation concerning Sudan involves a subject that has been a taboo in this meeting: the upcoming conflict and the potential for a major war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. No one has



spoken about it. We must address how we are going to stop it, how we are going to mediate it, and how we are going to discuss it. These are the responsibilities of the member countries.

IGAD must have 100% support from its member states, through force, political clout, and financial resources, to enforce its work in mediation and support. Currently, that support is absent. Unless that support materializes, it does not matter whether we meet here, in Berlin, or in London under the auspices of international support groups; progress will not occur. The region must take the responsibility.

Contradictions in Regional Mediation and Culpability

There is another issue that remains unmentioned. When examining the conflict in Sudan, it is evident that member states of IGAD are part of the conflict. Some of the groups accused of genocide are coming here to Uganda and going to Addis Ababa. They are moving around while being parties and "genociders" in that conflict. Under these circumstances, where does mediation take place, and where is it going to take us?

We must leave this gathering with the consciousness that if we want to stop the war in Sudan, and if we want to stop a war from happening between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the countries in the region have to take responsibility.



22. Joseph Tucker ²¹ : Beyond the Comprehensive Peace Agreement: Identifying Viable Frameworks for Sudan

Preserving Institutional Memory and Lessons Learned

My perspective is informed by a decade of experience, beginning in 2009, working for the United States Department of State and USAID on issues regarding Sudan and South Sudan. While it is acknowledged that we cannot return to previous paradigms, it is essential that we do not discard the frameworks that preceded the current crisis. In 2010, I had the privilege of working alongside Abdul Mohammed and other members of this panel on the Sudan-South Sudan negotiations. In this context, I would highlight the Mbeki Foundation's summary report on lessons learned. This document serves as a vital resource for determining which previous strategies remain salvageable or instructive for contemporary efforts.



Joseph Tucker



“ We must consider what is not comprehensive enough to make something, whether it's a truce or a permanent ceasefire, actually viable. ”

Strategic Multitasking in Modern Mediation

A primary lesson derived from past negotiations is that mediators possess the capacity to manage multiple objectives simultaneously, provided they are supported by the requisite staff and expertise. As the Quintet becomes increasingly involved, there is a significant opportunity

²¹ International Crises Group, Senior Analyst, Horn of Africa



to advance the diplomatic dialogue beyond the narrow scope of a humanitarian truce. We must utilize this expertise to address the complexity of the situation more broadly.

The Threshold of Viability: Defining "Comprehensive Enough"

While there is a growing consensus that the era of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement has ended, we must confront the question of what constitutes a "sufficiently comprehensive" framework. There are internal subnational and national issues that threaten to derail a deal before it is even finalized. We have witnessed this pattern in Sudan over an extended period, and it is unfolding again today.

Issues such as inter-communal tensions in Darfur, the complexities within Kordofan, and the challenges of command and control on both sides are well-documented. There is a legitimate concern that an exclusive focus on external actors and the personalities of the two primary belligerents may mask these underlying realities. Therefore, we must consider what is not comprehensive enough to make something whether it's a truce or a permanent ceasefire actually viable.



23. Dr. Vasu Gounden²²: The Paradigm Shift in Mediation Doctrines: From Normative Dialogue to Transactional Strength

The Fundamental Doctrinal Shift

A profound conceptual transformation is currently redefining the global landscape of conflict resolution, carrying monumental consequences for how mediation is practiced. The field has shifted away from a decades-long paradigm of peace through dialogue toward an ascendant era of peace through strength. This structural shift effectively strips African actors and institutions of their historical diplomatic leverage.

Comparative Framework: Dialogue vs. Strength

The architectural differences between these two distinct periods of mediation highlight the current challenge facing continental diplomacy:

Diagnostic Feature	The Historical Paradigm: Peace through Dialogue	The Contemporary Paradigm: Peace through Strength
Primary Driver	Value-Driven: Anchored in international norms, democracy, and human rights.	Interest-Driven: Guided strictly by national self-interest and geopolitical advantage.
Strategic Goal	Transformational: Targeted at resolving root causes like poverty, inequality, and bad governance.	Transactional: Focused on short-term elite bargains and security stabilization.
Operational Currency	Soft Power: Dependent on gravitas, moral authority, and institutional legitimacy.	Hard Power: Dependent on military might, economic leverage, and technological proficiency (such as AI).

The Erasure of African Agency

For the past three decades, continental peace architectures relied on soft power currency. Eminent mediators possessed significant personal gravitas, while multilateral bodies like the

²² Executive Director of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). Conference Participant for the Session



United Nations, the African Union, and IGAD commanded deep institutional legitimacy. On a nation-state level, countries like post-apartheid South Africa wielded immense moral authority—reinforced by the global stature of figures like Nelson Mandela, enabling them to lead complex peace processes across Africa.



Dr. Vasu Gounden



“ The shift is from peace through dialogue to peace through strength. What we practiced all of us or most of us in this room for the last three decades was peace through dialogue. ”

Under the new paradigm of *peace through strength*, that historical currency has been devalued. The contemporary arena is dominated by hard military deployment, aggressive economic coercion, and advanced technological capabilities, including artificial intelligence proficiency. The stark consequence of this shift is that no single African country or regional institution, whether the AU, IGAD, SADC, ECOWAS, or ECCAS, possesses the necessary hard currency to project peace through strength. Consequently, African ownership and diplomatic agency are being steadily eroded by a global geopolitical evolution designed to marginalize traditional mediation. The urgent task for continental leaders is determining how to reclaim that agency within a highly unfavorable international system.



24. Ambassador Mohamed Belaiche²³: The Strategic Imperatives, Strengths, and Weaknesses of Multilateral Mediation

The Core Pillars of Multilateral Mediation

Multilateral mediation remains essential for ensuring legitimacy, sustainability, and coherence in international peace efforts. To be effective, this approach must provide a shared understanding among stakeholders, maintain a balanced level of external involvement, establish robust humanitarian safeguards, and incorporate clear accountability mechanisms.

Comparative Analysis of Regional Interventions: Case Studies in the Horn of Africa

In response to previous observations, it is evident that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the United Nations (UN), and the African Union (AU) have played pivotal roles in mediating conflicts within the Horn of Africa, specifically in Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan.

These interventions demonstrate clear institutional strengths, which include:

- Substantial regional legitimacy
- Strong convening power
- The capacity to deliver African-led solutions

Conversely, these historical interventions also expose critical institutional weaknesses. These systemic vulnerabilities include:

- Institutional fragility
- A persistent dependence on external resources
- Internal political divisions among member states

Conclusion and Strategic Doctrine Reform

²³ Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission and Head of the African Union (AU) Liaison Office in Sudan



To effectively meet the demands of today's complex conflict landscape, current mediation doctrines must be renewed. This structural reform is necessary to ensure the systematic implementation of inclusive, coherent, and accountable approaches to global conflict resolution.



25. Dr. Jan Pospisil²⁴: Critiques of Identity-Based Inclusion Frameworks and the Operational Shift toward Conflict Disruption

The Conceptual Pitfalls of Identity-Based Inclusion in Process Design

A critical examination of inclusion models in peace processes reveals significant structural flaws in how women and youth are integrated into negotiations. Drawing from the insights of Professor Christine Bell, a constitutional law expert involved in the Northern Ireland peace negotiations, a distinction must be made between entering a peace process as an identity representative versus entering as a technical expert. The primary objective for practitioners should be to participate strictly on the basis of professional expertise, such as constitutional or peace process expertise, rather than identity markers.

The current framework prioritizing "women and youth inclusion" serves as a strategic trap, functioning as a non-starter and a dead end for genuine empowerment. The established practice of creating separate "women's tables" and "youth tables" in process design is inherently paternalistic. Despite widespread recognition within the field that this segregated approach is flawed, it continues to be utilized mechanically in international mediation architecture.

The Strategic Value of Specialized Technical Demands

Rather than relying on segregated identity forums, substantial structural changes are achieved through diligent, targeted civil society engagement within specific policy domains. In the Northern Irish peace process, police reform was initially not a primary focus. However, sustained and meticulous work by civil society organizations elevated police reform into a central component of the Good Friday Agreement and the subsequent peace process. This demonstrates that process design should focus on integrating substantive, technical areas of reform rather than organizing participants by demographic categories.

²⁴ Researcher at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs and Associate Professor (Privatdozent) at the University of Vienna



Paradigmatic Shift: From Conflict Resolution to Conflict Disruption

The current limitations of comprehensive peace agreements necessitate an alternative framework for addressing protracted disputes. A conceptual alternative proposed by Roger Mac Ginty is conflict disruption, which operates in contrast to traditional notions of conflict resolution or conflict transformation. This approach offers a distinct strategic pathway for multilateral actors.

Instead of becoming stalled in attempts to secure a singular, nationwide comprehensive settlement, mediators should focus on localized, smaller-scale interventions. Past research into local peace processes and local peace agreements disproves the idealistic assumption, often held by international donors, that multiple local agreements will organically aggregate into a single national peace framework. Empirical evidence demonstrates that local agreements do not automatically scale upward; however, they still offer vital operational opportunities.

Empirical Applications and Localized Openings

Even within highly volatile environments, localized and transactional entry points remain viable. In the context of the conflict in Sudan, direct, and at times mediated, negotiations occurred between the south and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to address highly specific, localized issues. Similar dynamics were observed regarding the strategic infrastructure at Heglig during past pipeline disruptions, where, despite conflicting narratives, targeted agreements were tested.

These instances confirm that operational openings continuously exist. The contemporary challenge for international mediation is to identify these localized openings. Future peace initiatives will increasingly consist of a multiplicity of small-scale initiatives rather than a singular, national-level comprehensive settlement.



26. Murithi Mutiga²⁵ : The Imperatives of Practicality and Strategic Creativity in Contemporary African Conflict Resolution

The Limitations of Ideological Frameworks and the Reality of Leverage

An overreliance on the phrase "African solutions" fails to account for the constraints of the contemporary geopolitical landscape, even if the concept originated from a creative, consensus-driven context during the 1964 United Nations General Assembly. Practicality dictates an acknowledgment that external actors will inevitably possess geopolitical leverage.

A clear illustration of this dynamic occurred in the Great Lakes region, where a diplomatic agreement was brokered by the United States and signed without direct reference to the immediate conditions on the ground. Following the signing, the external brokers openly transferred the process to the African Union. However, the continental body demonstrated a clear lack of readiness to assume operational responsibility.



Murithi Mutiga



“ The contemporary international system is defined by profound instability, transitioning from what was once described as a world between orders into an era of outright global disorder. ”

The Perils of Institutional Gatekeeping and Labeling

²⁵ Africa Program Director at the International Crisis Group



Caution must be exercised against institutional tendencies within the continent to undermine or obstruct external peace efforts purely to protect institutional ownership or symbolic labels. A prominent example involved early civil society initiatives in the Sudanese conflict, where local actors sought to invite members of the United Nations Security Council to Port Sudan.

While no international members objected to the engagement, reports indicate that opposition arose from African representatives asserting that the conflict was strictly an internal continental matter. Such gatekeeping is counterproductive to the primary objective of conflict cessation. Achieving structural balance requires a willingness to collaborate across multilateral levels rather than prioritizing institutional branding over effective intervention.

Decentralization and Structural Creativity as Alternatives to Comprehensive Settlements

In scenarios where a comprehensive peace agreement remains unattainable, strategic creativity can yield alternative political arrangements, such as decentralization. Decentralization often commands broad consensus among conflicting parties in deeply divided societies.

When implemented correctly, the devolution of power can serve as a powerful mechanism for de-escalation, although its structural efficacy naturally varies depending on local contextual variables.

Navigating Global Disorder and Re-evaluating Strategic Leverage

The contemporary international system is defined by profound instability, transitioning from what was once described as a world between orders into an era of outright global disorder. The realities of this shifting paradigm are reflected in recent discourse, in which analysts and global leaders express regret over historical disarmament decisions, such as South Africa's relinquishment of its nuclear arsenal.

Within this disordered environment, major African states face significant internal challenges, yet they cannot abdicate their regional security responsibilities. Historical precedents, such as Nelson Mandela's mediation during the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, demonstrate that leadership remains essential.



Modern leverage, however, must be applied creatively and pragmatically. For instance, given that traditional diplomatic interventions have failed to alter the trajectory of the conflict in South Sudan, a viable alternative strategy requires engaging in direct, candid negotiations with regional leaders who possess actual, material leverage on the ground, such as President Yoweri Museveni.

The Complexities of Civil Society Engagement and the Danger of Maximalism

Civil society will inevitably play a critical role in long-term state stabilization, particularly in structurally complex nations like Sudan. The socio-political diversity of Sudan ensures that centralized governance models, such as the historical Egyptian model, which relied on a concentrated riverine population, are entirely inapplicable.

To maximize their impact, civil society organizations must achieve a higher degree of internal organization and readiness. Crucially, these actors must operate with the pragmatic understanding that complete fulfillment of all political demands is rarely achievable in a compromised peace process.

The political trajectory of Myanmar serves as a tragic warning regarding the dangers of political maximalism. In that context, intense, unyielding pressure from both international and domestic factions left no room for compromise, undermining efforts to maintain a highly delicate political compact with the military. As observed in Sudan, the pursuit of an absolute, ideologically pure solution by opposing factions frequently results in systemic collapse, proving all parties wrong.



27. Dr. Solomon A. Deresso²⁶: Moderator: The Transformation of Mediation Frameworks Amid Global Power Shifts and the Resurgence of Warfare

The Collapse of Established Mediation Frameworks

The contemporary geopolitical moment presents an unprecedented challenge to the practice of international mediation. Historically, mediation has been executed on the basis of specific, well-defined assumptions and institutional arrangements. These foundations are traditionally understood as either a hegemonic framework or the classic liberal peace framework.

Currently, all of these foundational assumptions are undergoing a radical transformation. This institutional destabilization is occurring in tandem with a profound shift in the global power structure itself. The emergence of entirely new mediation actors serves as a direct and definitive signifier of this structural realignment.



Dr. Solomon A. Deresso



“ Warfare is now being positioned front and center in international relations. This dangerous resurgence directly reinforces the paradigm of mediation through strength. ”

The Resurgence of Warfare as a Primary Strategic Instrument

A critical and profound reality observed across current diplomatic deliberations is the explicit recognition that war is returning to the global stage. Rather than being treated as a catastrophic

²⁶ Founding Director of Amani Africa Media and Research Services



last resort, military conflict is increasingly being chosen as an instrument of choice by global actors. Warfare is now being positioned front and center in international relations.

This dangerous resurgence directly reinforces the paradigm of mediation through strength. The positioning of military force as a primary strategic tool fundamentally redefines the contemporary era and disrupts traditional, dialogue-based conflict resolution.

Institutional Legitimacy and the Modern Character of Mediators

This shifting paradigm raises urgent, fundamental questions regarding the concept of legitimacy, the future role of multilateral institutions, and the essential character of modern mediators. The international community must determine precisely what kind of mediators are required to navigate this new historical and strategic environment.

Achieving the necessary adaptation requires a willingness to challenge the outdated mindset that continues to hold a firm grip on the collective diplomatic imagination. Practitioners must actively shed these obsolete perspectives and anchor their strategies firmly within the realities of the world as it currently exists, while simultaneously working toward the world as it ought to be.



28. El-Ghassim Wane²⁷: Panelist: The Strategic Re-Engineering of Regional Mediation Architecture: Leveraging African Union Precedents for Intergovernmental Authority on Development Systemic Reform

The Contemporary African Security Landscape and the Geopolitical Space for Intervention

The contemporary landscape of peace and security across the African continent is characterized by a high degree of acuity. While historical security crises are well-documented, the present context reflects distinct structural variations. Conflicts are multiplying and overlapping across the continent, manifesting primarily as internal disputes that rapidly acquire complex regional and extra-regional dimensions. Simultaneously, a resurgence of interstate friction further complicates efforts aimed at achieving sustainable economic development and continental integration.



El-Ghassim Wane



“ There is no single political issue that can be resolved through military means. Dialogue is an absolute necessity. ”

²⁷ Director of the Peace and Security Department at the African Union, and as Chief of Staff to the AU Commission Chairperson and Former Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multilateral Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)



This proliferation of conflict occurs in tandem with escalating external involvement in African domestic affairs, driven by intensifying geopolitical competition among both major and middle global powers. This externalization of conflict significantly narrows the strategic space available for African institutions to assert operational leadership. Compounding this challenge is a demonstrable crisis of Pan-African solidarity, exemplified by the current conflict in Sudan, alongside a pronounced crisis of confidence in domestic and continental institutions.

Consequently, conflicting parties increasingly seek mediation outside the continent, allowing processes orchestrated within foreign capitals to dictate regional outcomes. This trend marks a radical departure from historical, African-led peace processes, such as the Soldier Process concerning Ethiopia and Somalia, the Arusha Process for Burundi, the Djibouti Process, and the Machakos negotiations hosted in Kenya regarding South Sudan. In contrast to these locally driven initiatives, contemporary diplomatic trajectories are increasingly centered in external capitals such as Washington and Doha.

The Global Institutional Crisis and the Primacy of Early Mediation

These regional challenges unfold against a global backdrop of weakening multilateralism, characterized by a United Nations Security Council that is frequently polarized, paralyzed, or entirely bypassed. The global mediation architecture is further fragmented by competing normative frameworks, including the erosion of the liberal peace paradigm, and increasingly frequent violations of international humanitarian law. Within this disordered environment, the imperative for African states to establish internal structural order cannot be overemphasized.

The primary prerequisite for continental stability remains the systematic cessation of hostilities, historically conceptualized as "Silencing the Guns." Mediation stands as one of the most politically potent, cost-effective, and efficient instruments available to achieve this objective, particularly when deployed during the nascent stages of a crisis. Despite its demonstrable utility, mediation remains structurally underutilized and poorly organized within the regional architecture.

Historical Evolution of Continental Mediation: From the OAU to the AU Central Organ

An assessment of the African Union's (AU) historical mediation trajectory offers critical operational lessons for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). This



institutional evolution began with the inception of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963 in Addis Ababa. The foundational OAU Charter explicitly emphasized the peaceful settlement of disputes, a principle formally operationalized through the adoption of a dedicated protocol in Cairo in July 1964.

In practice, however, this original protocol failed to achieve operational viability due to its highly rigid mechanisms. The organization was immediately compelled to address active hostilities, such as the Algeria-Morocco border conflict, prior to the formalization of its legal machinery. Consequently, mediation developed through flexible, politically driven ad hoc structures. These included ad hoc committees of Heads of State, the appointment of eminent personalities, and direct interventions by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

These early mechanisms succeeded in stabilizing volatile situations by establishing foundational principles governing inter-African relations, most notably the *uti possidetis* principle concerning the invariability of colonial borders. However, this pragmatic diplomacy remained fundamentally reactive and structurally weak regarding conflict prevention. Furthermore, the era was characterized by an absolute absence of formal peace operations, despite visionary early proposals such as President Kwame Nkrumah's conceptualization of an African High Command.

The conclusion of the Cold War in the early 1990s precipitated structural shifts within and outside Africa, prompting institutional reform led by then-Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim. His seminal report on the fundamental changes occurring globally and their implications for Africa catalyzed the adoption of the June 1993 Cairo Declaration, which established the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution. This marked the first time the organization possessed a dedicated body tasked exclusively with peace and security, matters previously relegated to the Council of Ministers and the Assembly.

The 1993 Mechanism introduced three profound institutional shifts:

- A explicit normative prioritization of conflict prevention and diplomatic mediation.
- The establishment of a permanent, standing political body, the Central Organ, to ensure operational continuity across ambassadorial, ministerial, and heads-of-state levels.
- The formal, legal recognition of the role of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) within the continental peace and security architecture.



This institutional re-engineering increased OAU operational activity during the 1990s, leading to direct interventions in Rwanda, Burundi, the Comoros, and during the first and second conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It also facilitated the OAU-led mediation of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war through committees chaired by Burkina Faso and Algeria, combining diplomatic mediation with the targeted deployment of limited United Nations military observer missions.

Despite these advancements, significant structural limitations persisted. These included weak institutional capacity, pervasive state sovereignty concerns that allowed member states to block sensitive deliberations, and inadequate procedural rules. Within the Horn of Africa context, this procedural weakness was evident during the protracted conflict in southern Sudan. Because the Central Organ operated as an open-ended body allowing any member state to participate, the continuous presence of the Sudanese ambassador effectively obstructed deep, candid institutional deliberations on the crisis due to the diplomatic reluctance of other member states to engage contentiously in his presence.

Legal and Procedural Innovations of the African Union Peace and Security Architecture

To remedy these structural impediments, the transition to the African Union, initiated by the adoption of the Constitutive Act in Lomé in July 2000, established a highly structured peace and security architecture. Central to this modern system is the Peace and Security Council (PSC), a standing decision-making body composed of 15 member states elected based on defined regional criteria.

The PSC Protocol introduced two critical procedural innovations designed specifically to eliminate historical patterns of political obstruction in mediation:

- **The Elimination of Veto Powers over Agenda Setting:** No individual member state can legally block the formal discussion of a security issue. If the AU Commission or a member state tables a crisis for deliberation, the affected state cannot halt the proceedings by claiming the matter is strictly an internal affair.
- **The Exclusionary Rule for Conflict Parties:** Direct parties to a conflict, even if they are sitting elected members of the Peace and Security Council, are legally barred from participating



in related council deliberations. This mechanism was designed to preserve institutional credibility and prevent political obstruction, directly addressing the procedural failures observed during the OAU's handling of the historical Sudan crisis.

Operational Typologies of Mature AU Mediation

During its first fifteen years of operations, the African Union developed three distinct, highly effective practical mediation tools that enabled the continent to assert strategic ownership over its security dynamics.

1. Framework Communiqués as Structured Political Roadmaps

The PSC utilized framework communiqués to resolve complex political deadlocks or manage dangerous escalations. These documents function as authoritative, legally grounded political roadmaps that define precisely what actions must occur, which actors are responsible, and the exact sequence and timeframe for implementation. Crucially, these steps are explicitly anchored in established continental principles.

A framework communiqué simultaneously clarifies the strategic path forward, establishes strict political boundaries regarding acceptable state behavior, and curtails the capacity of conflicting parties to employ delaying tactics. Consequently, it alters the structural terms of negotiation before formal talks commence.

A premier empirical example is the PSC Communiqué of April 24, 2012, issued during the severe border crisis between Sudan and South Sudan over the Heglig infrastructure. The PSC outlined a complete, sequenced framework governing security, oil infrastructure, and border demarcation. This document was subsequently transmitted to the United Nations Security Council, which endorsed it *in toto*. This strategic copy-and-paste of an African-authored document into a Chapter VII UN resolution reinforced the African-led process, leveraging global enforcement power without relinquishing regional ownership.

2. High-Level Ad Hoc Panels and Eminent Personalities



The systematic deployment of High-Level Ad Hoc Panels composed of sitting or former Heads of State and eminent persons serves an essential diplomatic function. These panels possess extraordinary political weight, granting them direct access to decision-makers at the highest levels of governance where definitive strategic choices are made. This authority allows the AU to shape the mediation agenda early, long before domestic positions harden or external actors define the terms of engagement.

Furthermore, these panels afford the AU Commission vital political maneuverability. The Commission can strategically manage the process from a backstage position, shielding itself from direct political pushback from member states by operating behind the institutional authority of former presidents.

This dynamic was vividly illustrated by the work of President Thabo Mbeki as Chair of the AU High-Level Panel on Darfur and subsequently the AU High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan. The level of candor and direct accountability he demanded from President Omar al-Bashir and other key stakeholders could not have been replicated by standard bureaucratic actors within the Commission. The profound personal and political respect he commanded from global partners successfully preserved the integrity of the African-led framework.

3. International Contact Groups as Mechanisms for Coordination

International Contact Groups were established systematically to counter the fragmentation, parallel tracks, and overt competition that occur when multiple external actors launch uncoordinated diplomatic initiatives. These contact groups bring all relevant actors, the AU, RECs, neighboring states, the UN, major global powers, and international partners, into a single, structured institutional space.

The objective is to align international diplomatic efforts early, avoid duplication, and ensure the explicit acceptance of African leadership. This mechanism acknowledges a fundamental operational reality: while the AU possesses regional legitimacy, it frequently lacks material leverage. By convening external powers within an AU-linked framework, the continent can dictate the overarching conflict narrative and significantly increase the diplomatic and political costs for external actors attempting to bypass African-led processes. This approach was successfully deployed across interventions in Guinea, Madagascar, the Central African Republic, and through the Consultative Forum on Sudan.



El-Ghassim Wane



“ The systematic deployment of High-Level Ad Hoc Panels composed of sitting or former Heads of State and eminent persons serves an essential diplomatic function. This allows the AU to shape the mediation agenda early, long before domestic positions harden or external actors define the terms of engagement. ”

Strategic Recommendations for the Reform of the IGAD Mediation Architecture

While the African Union faces ongoing challenges in asserting its security leadership, its historical successes provide an essential blueprint. Translating these continental lessons into the regional context yields nine specific, action-oriented recommendations for the reform of the IGAD mediation architecture.

First: Conceptual Differentiation and Pragmatic Specialization

IGAD must recognize that it is not the African Union and must resist the temptation to replicate its extensive architecture. IGAD operates in a highly complex environment characterized by a small member-state base, many of whom are direct parties to regional crises or face severe domestic instability. This small membership is coupled with an extraordinarily high concentration of overlapping conflicts. This structural reality makes regional mediation both far more complex and entirely necessary.

Consequently, expansive AU tools like high-level ad hoc committees of sitting heads of state are structurally harder to replicate within IGAD, given the difficulty of identifying completely neutral regional actors possessing sufficient political weight. IGAD must avoid duplicating the AU's extensive normative and institutional frameworks on governance and security. That architecture emerged under specific historical conditions that cannot be reproduced today. Because IGAD



member states are already legally bound by AU instruments, the priority must be the pragmatic, focused execution and implementation of existing commitments rather than the creation of redundant regional protocols.

Second: Categorical Prioritization of Mediation and Prevention over Peace Enforcement

IGAD must prioritize political mediation and conflict prevention over military enforcement. Across the continent, there is a persistent temptation to assume that complex political crises can be resolved through peace enforcement operations. Empirical experience as the head of a major stabilization mission confirms that no political issue can be resolved through purely military means; dialogue is an absolute necessity.

Peace support operations are fundamentally large-scale, logistically intensive, and financially demanding. They absorb vast amounts of institutional time, political capital, and attention at the expense of more feasible, non-military diplomatic tools. As demonstrated by the AU's experience with chronic underfunding in its peace operations, sub-regional capacity is structurally insufficient to sustain large-scale military enforcement. IGAD's comparative advantage lies entirely in early political engagement, diplomatic facilitation, and proximity to the conflicting parties.

Third: Generative Diplomacy and the Tactical Mobilization of Political Will

The sub-regional body must not allow its mediation mandates to be constrained by a perceived lack of operational resources or political will. While a basic threshold of operational funding is required to convene parties and deploy envoys, effective mediation is driven primarily by institutional initiative, strategic creativity, agility, and the continuous search for operational openings.

Furthermore, political will does not exist in a vacuum; it is a variable that must be actively generated, encouraged, and sustained by an agile secretariat. The IGAD Secretariat must engage member states early, consistently, and relentlessly. The institution must practice "performance diplomacy", maintaining visible, continuous diplomatic action around sensitive issues. Even when immediate breakthroughs are elusive, consistent engagement builds critical coalitions, maintains institutional relevance, and creates conditions under which member states feel compelled to act.



Fourth: Strategic Maximization of the Executive Secretary's Good Offices

IGAD must systematically employ the quiet, diplomatic good offices of its Executive Secretary. The most effective mediation tools frequently operate outside the public view through sustained, discrete diplomacy, regular communication with heads of state, and early outreach before domestic positions become unyielding. The secretariat must fully leverage the personal connections and diplomatic capital of its current leadership to maintain open communication channels during formal process deadlocks.

Fifth: Institutional Positioning as a Regular Platform for Structural Dialogue

IGAD must utilize its institutional framework to serve as a continuous platform for regional dialogue, independent of active crises. The primary value of a regional organization is its capacity to bring polarized actors into the same room to build long-term trust and maintain communication lines.

The secretariat should establish regular, institutionalized discussions on foundational regional security issues, including border demarcation, non-subversion, governance, democracy, and reconciliation. Rather than generating new legal obligations, these dialogues must focus exclusively on translating existing continental AU commitments into practical, regional action.

Sixth: Structural Integration of Peace Frameworks with Economic Incentives

Mediation processes must be strengthened by explicitly linking political peace tracks with material economic incentives. The sub-regional body should highlight the mutual gains of regional economic integration, including shared infrastructure development, energy connectivity, trade facilitation, access to maritime ports, and regional transport corridors. By organizing regular, structured deliberations on these technical sectors in partnership with the AU and UN agencies, IGAD can increase state awareness of the high economic costs of warfare relative to the tangible benefits of cooperative interdependence.

Seventh: Convening a Regional Conference on Security, Stability, Development, and Cooperation

IGAD should initiate a comprehensive Regional Conference on Security, Stability, Development, and Cooperation in the Horn of Africa. This mechanism should be modeled on the historical Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Process), as adapted to the



African context through the structural "calabashes" of security, stability, development, and cooperation endorsed by the AU in 2000 and 2002. This initiative is further supported by the AU's August 2009 Tripoli Special Session decision endorsing a regional conference for the Horn.

This conference should operate via two distinct tracks:

- An internal track exclusively composed of the countries of the Horn of Africa to address regional disputes.
- An external track integrating key international partners, including Gulf states and permanent members of the UN Security Council, to align external engagement with African frameworks.

This architecture enables structurally strained or hostile states to engage indirectly within a coherent, inclusive setting, gradually easing bilateral tensions.

Eighth: Pragmatic Management of Neutrality Constraints

Given the high density of interconnected conflicts within the Horn of Africa, identifying entirely neutral domestic mediators is exceptionally difficult. IGAD must manage this constraint pragmatically by recognizing that it cannot rely solely on its internal political resources. The secretariat must remain flexible, working in close coordination with the African Union and the United Nations to introduce external facilitators when regional dynamics restrict local impartiality.

Ninth: Investment in a Lean, High-Capability Mediation Support Structure

IGAD must invest in a highly specialized, professional Mediation Support Unit. This unit does not require extensive personnel but must possess core technical competencies. These include advanced political and conflict analysis, process design expertise, and a dedicated operational support team. A lean, highly targeted institutional capacity can profoundly improve mediation outcomes when combined with political leadership and flexible deployment strategies.

Clarifying the Principle of "African Solutions to African Problems"

The core principle of "African solutions to African problems" remains highly essential in the contemporary era, despite frequent conceptual misunderstandings. Critics often dismiss the



paradigm by pointing to instances where African institutions have failed to act decisively, arguing that external actors must intervene to fill the operational vacuum. This perspective fundamentally misconstrues the doctrine.



El-Ghassim Wane



“ African solutions are not about excluding others. They have never been about excluding others. African solutions are ensured when Africans define the problem first based on our own history, our context and our realities. ”

The principle of African solutions is not an isolationist framework designed to exclude international partners. Rather, it mandates that African actors must primary-define the structural nature of their own conflicts based on localized history, context, and socio-political realities. When regional actors fail to define the problem, the resulting interventions inevitably reflect external geopolitical priorities rather than local needs.

This contextual approach was the defining strength of the Thabo Mbeki-led panel on Darfur, which prioritized deep contextual listening over pre-packaged external templates. True African solutions are fundamentally contextual solutions. Historically, no society has achieved sustainable development through external prescriptions. Genuine progress is achieved exclusively when an international region confronts its own challenges, learns from its operational failures, and adapts its own institutions.

This is particularly vital for a continent whose modern history has been profoundly distorted by external domination, from enslavement through colonialism. The principle must therefore be



used as a rigorous benchmark to hold African leaders, states, and institutions to higher standards of operational accountability and ownership.



29. Dr. Vasu Gounden²⁸: Moderator: The Preservation of African Agency through the Defense of Conceptual Frameworks

The Semantic and Conceptual Distinction Between Problems and Challenges

A critical semantic and conceptual distinction must be maintained when discussing the continent's trajectory: the paradigm must be framed around "African solutions to African challenges," rather than "African problems." The utilization of the term *challenges* represents a fundamental shift in perspective, moving away from a pathology-based view toward a more strategic, constructive framework for action.



Dr. Vasu Gounden



“ African solutions to African challenges is about our agency and we must be the first to explain it and to defend it. ”

The Defense of Regional Agency and the Perils of Internal Skepticism

The concept of African solutions to African challenges is fundamentally an assertion of regional agency. If African scholars, diplomats, and practitioners internally belittle, criticize, or ridicule this foundational concept, they inadvertently accelerate the erosion of their own geopolitical influence and self-determination.

²⁸ Executive Director of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)



While this doctrine is frequently dismissed or ridiculed across various international platforms, continental actors bear the primary responsibility to explicitly define, articulate, and defend it. Protecting this framework is not merely a matter of rhetoric; it is a strategic necessity required to preserve the continent's right to independent, self-determined diplomatic intervention.



30. Dr. Dawit Toga²⁹: Panelist: Institutional Abdication and Strategic Fragmentation: A Critical Assessment of the African Union's Mediation Trajectory in the Sudanese Conflict

The Contemporary Crisis of Leadership in African Union Mediation

An evaluation of the historical trajectory of African Union (AU) peace initiatives reveals a profound and disappointing decline in the institution's contemporary mediation capacity, particularly regarding the current conflict in Sudan. While recent diplomatic characterizations have reduced the AU's role to that of mere facilitation, historical precedent dictates that the organization's mandate extends far beyond passive accompaniment.

For the past two decades, AU mediation was defined by the provision of decisive political leadership and the systematic consolidation of disparate, scattered mediation tracks under a single, authoritative continental umbrella. In the current Sudanese conflict, however, the proliferation of uncoordinated diplomatic tracks serves competing external interests rather than conflict resolution.



Dr. Dawit Toga



“ Re-engineering the contemporary mediation architecture does not require the invention of new diplomatic mechanisms; rather, practitioners must draw from established, successful case studies within the continental toolkit. ”

²⁹ Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the African Leadership Centre (ALC) at King's College London, and Former Senior Political Analyst at the African Union (AU)



Despite institutional attempts to harmonize these fractured initiatives through the establishment of the Expanded Mechanism on the Sudan Crisis in 2023, parallel tracks continue to operate simultaneously without centralized coordination. This mechanism has suffered from severe operational stagnation, with its last formal convening occurring in 2024.

The provision of definitive leadership is a foundational tenet of international mediation. Historical institutional leaders would not have countenanced a scenario where the leadership of the AU Commission traveled to external capitals, such as Washington, merely to witness external actors mediating a continental conflict.

Consequently, the core argument remains that in the management of the current Sudanese crisis, the AU has abdicated its continental responsibility to provide primary leadership.

Lessons from the Historical Toolkit: Managed Partnership and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) Model

Re-engineering the contemporary mediation architecture does not require the invention of new diplomatic mechanisms; rather, practitioners must draw from established, successful case studies within the continental toolkit.

During the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) negotiations for Sudan, the AU played a critical supporting role. This process offers an essential lesson in managing external actors during protracted negotiations. While international partners are indispensable to the mediation process, providing vital material resources, including the funding of baseline operational and logistical requirements for participants, their involvement must be stringently managed.

During the CPA track, the chief mediator, Major General (Rtd) Lucas Tumbo, did not exclude the international community or the Troika (the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway). Instead, he structured the interaction to prevent external interference while strategically leveraging the political and economic influence of each international partner to pressure the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Government of Sudan to extract necessary concessions at critical junctures.



A protracted peace process cannot be brought to a successful conclusion when fractured by multiple, uncoordinated parallel tracks.

The Structural Roots of AU Marginalization: The UHIP Precedent vs. Post-2023 Failures

The contemporary balkanization of the Sudanese mediation landscape is unprecedented. The marginalization of the AU within this process is primarily driven by internal institutional factors, specifically strategic errors, organizational incoherence, and political indecision.

This stands in stark contrast to the historical successes achieved under the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). The AUHIP succeeded precisely because it executed a correct structural diagnosis of the conflict. It refused to treat peripheral crises in Darfur, Abyei, or the Blue Nile in isolation. Instead, the Panel correctly identified these conflicts as localized symptoms of a centralized failure of governance, which required an all-inclusive national dialogue with a wide array of stakeholders to generate sustainable, context-specific solutions.

Conversely, the post-2023 AU architecture has failed to apply these historical insights. Rather than designing an all-inclusive, internally driven political process, the institution has outsourced mediation to external actors possessing competing geopolitical interests.

The contemporary focus has shifted almost exclusively toward securing humanitarian ceasefires and establishing external coordination frameworks. While these represent worthy immediate objectives, they lack a foundational, comprehensive political process. By surrendering its structural leadership from the outset, the AU allowed the Jeddah track to proceed without anchoring those negotiations within an overarching AU political framework. This operational vacuum is continuously reinforced by pervasive political indecision within the Peace and Security Council (PSC).

Re-Evaluating Subsidiarity, the REC Veto, and Direct Engagement Mandates

The structural execution of the AU-REC relationship requires critical re-evaluation. While the principle of subsidiarity establishes an important coordination framework that empowers Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to lead mediations within their respective geographical



domains, the contemporary application of this provision has introduced severe operational gridlock, effectively granting RECs a functional veto over continental interventions.

This structural tension was highly evident during the 2015 mediation process in South Sudan, where the AU exhibited extreme reluctance to intervene dynamically, even when internal political divisions among IGAD member states became the primary obstacle to a successful resolution.

To resolve such institutional stalemates, serious consideration should be given to establishing an AU override mechanism. Such a mechanism would legally empower the continental authority to assume direct control of a mediation track in instances where a REC-led process is failing to contribute positively to conflict resolution.

Furthermore, the AU Commission must overcome its internal hesitation regarding direct communication with suspended authorities and military leadership, specifically the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Addressing the "empty chair" dilemma in modern mediation requires direct engagement with all material parties to a conflict.

Critically, the normative provisions of the AU Lomé Declaration and the framework on Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCG) do not legally prohibit Commission actors from interacting with suspended or de facto authorities. For example, during the historical suspension of Egypt, AU panel members regularly engaged in direct consultations with senior Egyptian officials and the presidency. The current institutional reluctance to engage active conflict leaders in Sudan represents a major strategic error that severely impedes diplomatic progress.

Strategic Options for Operational and Internal Institutional Reform

To recalibrate the current mediation architecture and restore institutional credibility, the African Union must implement three distinct operational shifts alongside definitive internal structural reforms:

Operational Shifts

- **Strategic Withdrawal from Fragmented Tracks:** The African Union should, as a matter of principle, withdraw its participation from ineffective, external mediation tracks that actively reject an AU-led political framework.



- **Conditioned Engagement:** The AU must strictly condition its diplomatic involvement upon a clearly defined political framework and an enforceable timeline, thereby preventing indefinite, open-ended negotiations that delay conflict resolution.
- **Appointment of Dedicated Envoys:** The current practice of utilizing rotating high-level panel members must be replaced by the appointment of a single, dedicated, and highly credible long-term Special Envoy for Sudan, insulated from daily bureaucratic and political pressures.

Internal Institutional Reforms

- **Establishment of a Permanent Sudan Subcommittee:** The PSC must transition away from relying on standard, rotating state memberships by establishing a permanent, dedicated Subcommittee on Sudan to ensure analytical and political continuity.
- **Creation of a Specialized Sudan Desk:** A fully staffed, competent Sudan Desk must be established within the relevant department to provide international partners, such as the United Nations, with clear institutional counterparts.
- **Securing Long-Term Sovereign Funding:** The AU must allocate multi-year, long-term financial resources for mediation that extend beyond annual budget constraints and remain entirely independent of donor-driven conditions.

These structural adjustments are entirely feasible and fall within the material and financial capabilities of the Commission. Their omission is a direct reflection of a lack of political will and determination within the leadership of the Commission and among member states. The Sudanese crisis is fundamentally more severe and structurally dangerous than historical conflicts managed by the organization.

Strategic Recommendations for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

Based on the structural realities of the Horn of Africa, the following targeted recommendations are proposed to enhance the operational efficacy of IGAD:



1. **Enhance Strategic Institutional Coordination:** IGAD must optimize its structural alignment with the African Union through formalized joint meetings and highly integrated, transparent communication channels.
2. **Institutionalize a Dedicated Regional Mediation Team:** The IGAD Executive Secretariat should immediately establish and fund a permanent, technically experienced mediation support team tasked exclusively with the Sudanese portfolio.
3. **Prioritize Ground-Up, Inclusive Civil Consultations:** Regional diplomacy must systematically prioritize localized, all-inclusive consultations that actively integrate civil society organizations and diverse domestic stakeholders into the foundational political track.



31. Dr. Vasu Gounden³⁰: Institutional Fragmentation and the Structural Ambiguities of Subsidiarity in African Diplomatic Architecture

The Jurisdictional Realities and Legal Deficits of Subsidiarity

The operational execution of international mediation across the continent is consistently impeded by systemic confusion surrounding the principle of subsidiarity. A critical, yet frequently misunderstood, structural reality is that no formal legal relationship exists between the African Union (AU) and the various Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

The RECs operate as entirely independent legal and political entities, outside the direct chain of command of the continental body. Consequently, the AU possesses no binding statutory authority over the RECs and lacks the legal mechanism to summon these sub-regional organizations to mandatory coordination proceedings. This absolute deficit of centralized hierarchical authority perpetuates continuous institutional friction and jurisdictional ambiguity whenever multi-tiered mediation efforts are deployed.

Overlapping Memberships and the Imperative for Institutional Rationalization

The structural efficiency of continental diplomacy is further compromised by the proliferation of regional organizations, characterized by dense cross-memberships and heavily duplicated mandates. Historically, leaders such as President Thabo Mbeki identified and lamented this institutional redundancy early in their tenures, calling for a comprehensive rationalization of Africa's regional architecture.

The current configuration demands a disproportionate expenditure of finite financial and operational resources. Furthermore, the administrative burden of attending consecutive, uncoordinated sub-regional summits places an unsustainable demand on the time of African Heads of State and Government. This continuous cycle of repetitive diplomatic meetings

³⁰ Executive Director of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)



ultimately dilutes the operational capacity of political leaders to execute substantive governance and strategic mandates.



32. Khalid Omer Yousif³¹: Internal Institutional Failures: The Self-Undermining Mechanics of Multilateral Mediation in Sudan

The Erosion of Mediatory Legitimacy Through the Abandonment of Impartiality

While contemporary diplomatic discourse extensively details how a rapidly changing global order systematically undermines multilateral institutions, a critical analytical gap remains regarding how these multilaterals actively undermine themselves from within.

In the specific context of the Sudanese conflict, multilateral institutions, most notably the African Union (AU), are severely compromising their own efficacy by abandoning their most valuable strategic asset: their institutional impartiality and neutrality. Recent official statements and operational actions originating from the AU demonstrate a perceptible bias, signaling that the institution has taken a definitive side in the dispute. This perceived departure from neutrality directly degrades the credibility of the AU, disqualifying it as a trusted, objective mediator in the eyes of the conflicting parties.



Khalid Omer Yousif



“ The multilaterals in Sudan especially the African Union are undermining themselves by just giving up their best currency which their impartiality their neutrality ”

Conceptual Deviation: The Shift from Conflict Fundamentals to Legitimacy Debates

³¹ Former Sudanese Minister of Cabinet Affairs. Conference Participant.



A primary responsibility of multilateral institutions, particularly continental African bodies, is to establish an authoritative, structurally accurate definition of the core conflict. In the case of Sudan, however, there is a problematic displacement of focus away from the fundamental drivers of the war toward peripheral bureaucratic issues, specifically the dispute over who constitutes the legitimate ruler of the state.

This conceptual deviation was highly evident during recent deliberations of the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). Instead of executing an in-depth, rigorous analysis of the catastrophic humanitarian crisis or designing immediate enforcement mechanisms to halt active hostilities, the council's focus was dominated by debates regarding the official legitimacy of General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. This preoccupation with formal state recognition fails to align with the immediate, survival-based priorities of the Sudanese population, for whom the cessation of violence is the paramount necessity.

The Strategic Mismanagement and Calibration of Multilateral Leverage

Multilateral institutions are failing to properly utilize and calibrate the specific forms of diplomatic leverage at their disposal. For the AU, a significant source of structural leverage resides in the official suspension of Sudan's membership following the unconstitutional change of government. This suspension should not function merely as a passive punitive measure; rather, it must be deployed as an active diplomatic instrument to compel disparate political and military actors to participate in structured negotiations.

Maximizing this effect requires a sophisticated taxonomy of power, wherein African institutions identify the exact nature of their own normative leverage alongside the material economic and military leverage wielded by middle and superpowers. Mapping these distinct forms of influence is an essential prerequisite for creating a coherent, multi-tiered platform of cooperation that harmonizes African-led initiatives with international mediation tracks.



33. Dr. Paul-Simon Handy³²: Panelist: Structural Impediments in Collective Security Architecture: The Institutional Risks of the Helsinki Model in the Horn of Africa

The Bureaucratization and Operational Distortion of the Helsinki Model in Africa

The proposition for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to establish a comprehensive Conference on Security, Stability, Development, and Cooperation, modeled directly after the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the historic Helsinki Process, requires a cautious evaluation of past structural adaptations on the continent.

An empirical precedent exists in the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), which explicitly utilized the Helsinki framework as its foundational blueprint. However, the trajectory of the ICGLR highlights significant institutional vulnerabilities. Instead of maintaining its original design as a flexible, politically driven diplomatic platform, the conference suffered from rapid over-bureaucratization. The institutional leadership sought to transform a fluid conference structure into a permanent, rigid international organization, subsequently attempting to position it as a formalized regional mechanism under the African Union (AU) architecture.

Furthermore, this structural transition triggered intense, counterproductive institutional competition among the various thematic "baskets" or policy domains within the ICGLR framework. This internal fragmentation was compounded by the perennial, systemic dependency on external donor funding, which routinely distorts ownership and compromises the strategic autonomy of continental peace initiatives.

The Ontological Conflict of Collective Security: Internal vs. External Threat Matrixes

The primary crisis afflicting collective security mechanisms across the African continent resides in a fundamental misalignment between traditional security design and contemporary threat realities. Classic models of collective security, including the European Helsinki process, were

³² Institute for Security Studies' Regional Director for East Africa and its Representative to the African Union in Addis Ababa.



structurally engineered to manage, deter, and regulate external, interstate threats across clearly defined borders.

Conversely, the contemporary threat matrix across the African continent is overwhelmingly internal. Security disruptions, armed conflicts, and governance crises originate predominantly within domestic borders rather than emanating from outside the region. Because traditional collective security frameworks are ontologically designed to preserve state sovereignty against external aggression, they prove structurally ill-equipped to intervene effectively in fluid, intra-state conflicts where the state itself is frequently a direct party to the dispute. This misalignment remains the most significant impediment to regional stability.



34. Ambassador Nureldin Satti³³: Leadership Dynamics and Strategic Cohesion: Critical Success Factors in the Burundi and CPA Peace Processes

The Confluence of Strategic Factors in the Burundi Peace Process

An empirical review of the historical Burundi peace process reveals a distinct constellation of variables that systematically enabled its successful conclusion. Drawing from extended operational engagement in the theater, several critical lessons emerge regarding the structural design of successful continental interventions.

1. Realist Leadership and the Recognition of Strategic Settlements

The primary prerequisite for a viable peace track is the presence of domestic political leadership that explicitly recognizes the objective necessity of a negotiated settlement. In the Burundian context, this was exemplified by Major Pierre Buyoya. Despite having executed two military coups d'état, his leadership ultimately acknowledged that protracted conflict was unsustainable, thereby demonstrating the necessary political realism to engage in substantive, structural compromises.

2. Sub-Regional Cohesion and Diplomatic Alignment

A secondary success factor resides in the absolute cohesion of the immediate sub-region. Under the joint leadership of Uganda and Tanzania, the regional state actors maintained a unified diplomatic front. This alignment prevented the fragmentation of the mediation landscape and successfully engineered an external political environment that compelled the domestic conflicting parties to remain committed to the negotiation track.

3. The Institutional Weight of Eminent Continental Champions

The Burundi process benefited directly from the sustained championship of eminent African statesmen who possessed immense personal gravitas and moral authority. The sequential

³³ Former Sudanese ambassador to the United States and former United Nations Deputy Special Representative for Burundi



leadership of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela, and Thabo Mbeki played a decisive role in guiding the complex negotiations. This political stewardship was essential to securing the foundational Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000, and it subsequently facilitated the signing of the 2003 Pretoria Protocol with the CNDD-FDD and the definitive September 2006 agreement with the FNL.

4. Material and Security Underwriting by Regional Powers

Sustained mediation requires a major regional power willing to underwrite the political process with substantial material and security commitments. South Africa executed this role effectively in Burundi, investing significant diplomatic capital alongside the direct deployment of military forces. These troops performed the vital tactical function of protecting returning exiled politicians, thereby establishing the baseline security guarantees required to foster domestic trust in the transitional architecture.

5. Synergistic Multi-Tiered Multilateral Dynamics

The successful resolution of the Burundian conflict was heavily reinforced by a highly positive, cooperative dynamic between the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). This structural synergy was driven by highly capable diplomatic actors, including Berhanu Dinka (UN Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region), Carolyn McAskie (Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Operation in Burundi), and Mohamed Sahnoun (OAU/AU Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region). Their collaborative management ensured that the global and continental tracks operated in lockstep rather than in competition, yielding a coherent and successful institutional outcome.

Inception and Catalytic Leadership in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)

The historical genesis of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) for Sudan underscores the primary importance of individual diplomatic initiative and strategic timing in conflict resolution. While the broader architecture of the CPA is well-documented, its initiation was catalyzed by Kenya's Foreign Minister, Dr. Bonaya Adhi Godana.



In July 2001, Dr. Godana formulated the foundational concept for the peace track and successfully convinced President Mwai Kibaki to undertake a high-level diplomatic mission to Khartoum. This intervention demonstrates that structural peace frameworks do not emerge spontaneously; they require visionary leadership to identify the precise moment of ripe conflict dynamics and generate the initial diplomatic momentum necessary to bring hostile state actors to the negotiating table.



35. Regional Geopolitics and Strategic Pathways to Durable Peace in the Horn of Africa

The Geopolitical Dimensions of Local Conflicts and External Interference

The first critical dynamic defining the Horn of Africa is that Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) member states are directly or indirectly involved in localized conflicts. Whether acting as sponsors, backing militias, or utilizing proxy forces, regional actors systematically perpetuate these instabilities. Consequently, these conflicts become protracted and seemingly endless; regardless of mediation efforts or formal agreements, the cycle of violence persists due to the active involvement of neighboring countries. The current situation in the Republic of the Sudan serves as a prime manifestation of this destructive trend. As previously noted, the territories of specific neighboring countries are actively being leveraged for the transshipment of armaments, as well as the illicit movement of finances and gold.

Strategic Leverage and Institutional Leadership

The second point of consideration centers on the unprecedented institutional opportunity currently available to the region. The best chance that this region has lies in the fact that both the Executive Secretary of IGAD and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission hail from the IGAD region, the Horn of Africa. These two officials, having previously held senior positions within their respective national governments, command immense respect across the continent. They must join hands and strategically deploy the immense leverage they possess with regional Heads of State and the broader international community to push for durable peace and absolute non-interference in domestic conflicts.

Economic Integration and Border Modernization

Finally, by joining hands, these institutional leaders must convene the Heads of State from across the region to finalize a comprehensive framework agreement. As the Foreign Minister of Kenya noted, the region must decisively move to open up its international borders, integrate its national economies, facilitate the free movement of people, and streamline the transfer of capital. Prioritizing these structural reforms is the only viable mechanism to ensure the collective prosperity of the region.



36. Murithi Mutiga ³⁴ : Public Perception and Pragmatic Challenges of the African Union

Public Endorsement versus Institutional Reality

Empirical data demonstrates that a significant majority of Africans maintain a foundational belief in the African Union. Survey data from Afrobarometer indicates that fifty-five percent of Africans believe in the efficacy and existence of the African Union, a statistical metric that exceeds the fifty-two percent approval rating recorded for the European Union by its own citizens. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, where sixty-eight percent of the population expresses a firm belief that the African Union should exist. These indicators underscore the reality that the core principle of the African Union remains unquestioned across the continent.

However, a stark dichotomy exists between this principled support and public reaction to the daily operations of the institution. A cursory examination of responses to official African Union social media communications, particularly from young Africans, reveals overwhelmingly negative sentiment. This divergence indicates that public criticism does not stem from a rejection of the institution itself, but rather from a profound sense of popular disappointment. Therefore, any convening centered solely on the abstract principle of "African solutions to African problems" would be brief, as the concept enjoys nearly universal endorsement. The critical challenge is not the principle, but the pragmatic execution of the mandate.

Pragmatic Inaction in Regional Diplomacy

The primary critique of the African Union is rooted in its pragmatic performance during active regional crises. A pertinent example involves the recent geopolitical tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia regarding Somaliland. While external actors, such as the Republic of Türkiye, intervened to broker a preliminary arrangement that temporarily de-escalated the immediate issue, a critical diplomatic gap remained. An external mediator was required to systematically address the broader, long-term bilateral relations between Somalia and Somaliland.

³⁴ Africa Program Director at the International Crisis Group



Despite being a localized issue involving fraternal states that could potentially achieve a functional working arrangement, and despite the African Union being uniquely positioned to spearhead this mediation, the institution failed to act. This case study illustrates the broader institutional gap between theoretical capacity and operational reality. Ultimately, the African Union must bridge the divide between the world as it should be and the world as it is, effectively demonstrating that it remains fit for purpose in a complex global environment.



37. Ambassador Mohamed Belaiche³⁵: Structural Mechanics and Institutional Complementarity in Regional Peace Operations

Institutional Complexities and the Proliferation of Peace Mechanisms

Managing issues of peace, fragilities, and political complexities presents extraordinary operational difficulties. To address the crisis in the Republic of the Sudan alone, the African Union Peace and Security Council has established five distinct institutional mechanisms: the Expanded Mechanism, the Core Group, the High-Level Panel, the Ad Hoc Presidential Committee, and currently, the Quintet mechanism. The underlying cause of this structural proliferation is the continuous search for an ideal institutional framework capable of resolving these intricate regional dynamics.

Resource Optimization and Regional Architecture Integration

To mitigate these systemic challenges, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Mediation Support Unit must be comprehensively resourced to prevent the utilization of ad hoc approaches. Concurrently, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) of the African Union must achieve deeper structural integration with sub-regional mechanisms. Given that all stakeholders face collective operational challenges, making meaningful progress requires an unwavering commitment to the principles of institutional complementarity and mutual solidarity.

³⁵ Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission and Head of the AU Liaison Office in Sudan



38. El-Ghassim Wane ³⁶ : Panelist: The Primacy of African Leadership: Institutional Potential, Regional Cooperation, and Concrete Action in the Sudan Crisis

The Imperative of African Solutions and Institutional Potential

The principle of "African solutions to African problems" must be understood from an internal institutional perspective. Having served within both the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) / African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) at headquarters and in the field, it is evident that the structural potential of the African Union is immense. When the African Union demonstrates proactiveness and a genuine sense of initiative, it possesses a unique operational capacity in Africa that the United Nations simply cannot replicate.



El-Ghassim Wane



“ The impression that African issues can be sorted out elsewhere is wrong in all respects. Wrong in peace and safety, wrong in democracy, and wrong in economic development. ”

Concurrently, conflict solutions framed outside the continent consistently fail to align with or safeguard African interests. Historical precedents, such as the mediation efforts led by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) in Côte d'Ivoire, demonstrate how

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external actors systematically complicate regional diplomatic initiatives. This interference occurred even during periods when institutional relationships with external partners were significantly more harmonious than they are at present.

A recent International Crisis Group (ICG) report from January exemplifies a problematic shift in external analysis. By directing its strategic recommendations entirely to external actors under the assumption that the African Union is irrelevant, the report promotes a deeply flawed narrative. While external actors possess distinct leverage and must remain engaged due to Africa's integral position within the United Nations system, the premise that African peace, security, democracy, and economic development can be sorted out elsewhere is fundamentally incorrect.

Empirical experience confirms that when African leadership takes the vanguard, it yields substantial, positive outcomes across human rights, democratization, and peace operations. The principle of African solutions should not be used to shield the Union from criticism; the African Union must undeniably step up its game. Rather, the principle must serve as a standard to challenge the institution to fulfill its mandate, countering the incorrect assumption that external actors possess viable solutions for continental challenges.

Regional Cooperation and Bureaucratic Architecture

Reflecting on the framework of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the process itself was excellent, even though it ultimately became bogged down in complex bureaucratic processes. Any similar regional convening initiated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union in the Horn of Africa must systematically integrate the lessons learned from that exercise. The foundational lesson remains clear: the internal structural challenges facing individual nations can only be resolved through sustained regional cooperation. Narrowing the search for peace to a single isolated country, without addressing wider cross-border dynamics, is a futile exercise.

Sudan as a Test of African Institutional Responsibility

The ongoing tragedy in the Republic of the Sudan represents a fundamental test of African responsibility and leadership. As articulated in past African Union Panel on Darfur (AUPD) reports, Africa was the first to assume explicit responsibility for peace and reconstruction on the continent by deploying peacekeepers, mediating peace talks, and demanding structural



accountability. When the broader international community inevitably diverts its attention to other global crises, Africa must remain structurally engaged because the Sudanese crisis directly impacts continental stability.

There are numerous specific, cost-free, politically viable, and highly rewarding strategic actions the African Union can execute immediately to address the Sudan crisis:

- **Invoking Article 4 of the Constitutive Act:** The African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) should formally determine whether the threshold for intervention outlined in Article 4 of the AU Constitutive Act, specifically concerning war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, has been met. The factual finding report issued by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) on July 25, 2025, clearly demonstrates that this threshold has been crossed. While the African Union currently lacks the physical deployment capacity to execute a direct intervention, a formal Article 4 determination would legally clarify the gravity of the crisis, maximize diplomatic leverage, and signal to both the belligerents and external actors that the current status quo is entirely unacceptable.
- **Establishing a Remote Monitoring Mechanism:** The African Union should establish an immediate remote monitoring mechanism to document human rights violations and identify perpetrators by leveraging existing institutional bodies. This requires no additional funding or new institutional creation. Existing structures, such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Special Rapporteur on Women, Peace and Security, and the Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, can utilize digital verification and open-source data to issue regular bi-weekly or bi-monthly reports on ongoing violence. This documentation would serve as vital political leverage when engaging Sudanese stakeholders.
- **Deploying a Protection-Focused Diplomatic Mission:** The Peace and Security Council has twice requested the African Union Commission to develop strategic options for the protection of civilians. The African Union should immediately dispatch a high-level delegation of senior statesmen to engage directly with all domestic and regional stakeholders, including actors in Khartoum, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), civilian leaders, and neighboring states. Even if a physical protection force is not immediately deployed, the process of direct, high-level diplomatic engagement creates new avenues of pressure and generates critical reporting to constrain the belligerents.



- **Establishing an Independent Commission of Inquiry and Legal Accountability:** Modeled on the successful 2013 AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan led by President Olusegun Obasanjo, the Union should establish an independent body to investigate violence in Sudan. To enforce accountability, the African Union Summit should pass a decisive resolution enabling the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in Arusha to try individuals for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Clarifying that a lack of progress toward a political solution will trigger criminal accountability avenues, and subsequent exclusion from the future political architecture, would fundamentally alter the incentives of the warring parties.
- **Leveraging Existing Intelligence Frameworks on External Interference:** Rather than attempting to replicate a separate, unfeasible panel of experts to monitor external actors, which the African Union currently lacks the technical capacity to sustain, the Peace and Security Council should formally request the existing UN-AU Panel of Experts to provide regular, comprehensive briefings. The African Union can then directly utilize this verified information in its diplomatic engagements to confront external spoilers.
- **Demonstrating Material and Symbolic Humanitarian Solidarity:** Africa will ultimately be judged by its institutional solidarity with Sudanese civilians. The severe travel restrictions, visa challenges, and transit blockages that Sudanese professionals and displaced persons face across African borders are profoundly concerning. The African Union must proactively intervene to ease transit restrictions for fleeing civilians. Furthermore, institutional visibility has been noticeably absent; high-level AU organs must conduct formal visits to refugee camps in neighboring host countries like the Republic of Chad, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Concurrently, the Peace and Security Council should request the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to provide monthly briefings on humanitarian access obstacles. Finally, African states can provide immediate, practical support through granting overflight permissions for humanitarian aid delivery, and offering financial contributions to the localized, grassroots mutual-aid organizations operating directly on the ground in Sudan.



39. Moses Chrispus Okello³⁷ : Panalist: The Imperative of Adaptive Mediation: Redesigning Conflict Resolution for Contemporary Warfare

The Obsolescence of Classical Mediation Models

The foundational challenge in contemporary conflict resolution is the urgent requirement for redesigning and operationalizing new mediation models. The traditional, classic mediation frameworks have been predominantly state-led, consensus-seeking, sequential, and anchored by large multilateral institutions. Unfortunately, these frameworks were designed for a world that no longer exists; international mediation has progressed far past those models.

The obsolescence of traditional mediation is driven by the fundamentally transformed nature of modern warfare. Contemporary conflicts are heavily multi-actor, transnational, and fought through strategic narratives and proxy forces as much as they are fought over physical territory. This represents an entirely different paradigm. Consequently, the operational models utilized today must structurally align with these multi-actor, transnational, and narrative-framed disputes.



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Shifting Foundations of Legitimacy and Institutional Proliferation

This systemic characterization reveals that classic mediation models falsely assumed legitimacy flows entirely from the process design itself, leading practitioners to spend excessive time on procedural engineering. In the current landscape, legitimacy flows primarily from leverage. This shift demands a completely different approach to strategic thinking, a reality exemplified across numerous conflicts today, particularly in the Horn of Africa. The Horn of Africa serves as a global case study for modern conflict evolution, illustrating precisely how mediation dynamics are shifting. For instance, in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) process in Sudan, elements of both old and new paradigms can be seen emerging concurrently.

Another prominent characteristic of modern diplomacy is that the international community currently contends with too many mediators and unfortunately too little actual mediation. While numerous actors are assigned formal mediation roles and move between capitals, substantive mediation is rarely achieved. This institutional gridlock has become a defining feature of the contemporary era.



A Diagnostic Topology of Conflict in the Horn of Africa

A diagnostic exploration of conflicts in the Horn of Africa over the past forty years reveals at least four distinct structural clusters, each demanding a specialized response:



- **Interstate Disputes with Intra-State Dimensions:** This represents the cluster where the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) maintains its highest institutional comfort level. Historical mediation formats within this category include the Sudan CPA, the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), and its eventual successor, the Pretoria Agreement for Ethiopia. Remarkably, this single region demonstrates at least four entirely different formats of mediation applied to a single cluster of conflict.
- **State Fragmentation:** This category is historically defined by the situation in the Federal Republic of Somalia, and the Republic of the Sudan is very rapidly deteriorating into this same classification. The onset of state fragmentation carries profound structural implications for how a mediation framework must be designed.
- **Pure Interstate Conflict:** The classic manifestation in this category is the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict, a dispute of which the region may unfortunately witness a second iteration. The manner in which the international community responded to this conflict, primarily spearheaded by the African Union with the initial diplomatic involvement of Algeria, demonstrates that pure interstate conflicts require entirely different models with unique institutional implications.
- **Subnational and Peripheral Conflicts:** This cluster includes insurgencies such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in past decades, as well as localized disputes like the Djibouti-Afar conflict, which was eventually resolved through specific constitutional arrangements.

This diverse topology proves that within this specific region of the world, there cannot be a single, monolithic mediation model. A distinct model must be tailored for every specific type of conflict as it arises, forming the baseline for genuine strategic adaptation.

Structural Deficits in Contemporary Processes: Inclusion, Legitimacy, and Participation

When analyzing these conflict clusters, three systemic deficits consistently span across modern mediation efforts: inclusion, legitimacy, and participation.



The Deficit of Inclusion

There is a critical distinction between formal inclusion and substantive participation. In evaluating the deficit of inclusion, the Eldoret and Mbagathi Somali Reconciliation Process in Kenya serves as a prime example of flawed design. The process was structured with armed factions negotiating in one room at Mbagathi, while civil society actors carried out an entirely separate conversation in an adjacent room. This represents a fundamentally broken approach to inclusion.

Similarly, the Sudan CPA was functionally a mediation designed to negotiate the separation of South Sudan from Sudan. Throughout the process of negotiating this separation, South Sudanese civil society was not integrated to the degree required. The consequence of this exclusionary design became devastatingly clear just two years after the process formally concluded. These historical cases reveal three repetitive failure patterns that continue to disrupt current conversations around Sudan:

- *Consultation without Consequence:* Including actors in a process without granting them the structural weight to influence the final outcome.
- *Representation without Mandate:* Exemplified during the LRA conflict, where delegates traveled to Ri-Kwangba to negotiate with the leadership but lacked the formal mandate to make binding decisions. This cross-cutting mismatch remains a severe issue across the region.
- *Inclusion without Sequencing:* Opening the doors all at once to every stakeholder without designing a structured, orderly sequence for institutional entry.

The Deficit of Legitimacy

The deficit of legitimacy spans three distinct areas: the legitimacy of the mediator, the legitimacy of the process, and, where international efforts fail most frequently, the legitimacy of the outcome. A process can feature a flawless design and a flawless mediator, yet still fail completely if the final outcome is not viewed as legitimate by the broader population.

Historically, this deficit is visible in the establishment of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia under President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed. Yusuf was granted a formal leadership mandate, yet his presidency faced immediate domestic legitimacy crises because many stakeholders viewed him as a proxy for the neighboring Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.



Legitimacy challenges also emerged during the initial stages of the Pretoria process between the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The process faced early resistance regarding the selection of President Olusegun Obasanjo in favor of President Uhuru Kenyatta. While this specific impasse was subsequently resolved, it underscores the reality that acute legitimacy concerns must be factored into every stage of mediation design.

The Deficit of Participation

Participation is not merely a question of who is present in the room; who is in the room is a question of inclusion. True participation asks a fundamental question: *Are the individuals inside the room structurally empowered to shape outcomes and change belligerent behavior?* International frameworks frequently assume that merely placing women and youth in a room satisfies the requirements of inclusion and participation. If those actors cannot actively alter the trajectory of the text and change the behavior of the warring parties, their presence is purely symbolic.

Core Principles of Next-Generation, Adaptive Mediation

An effective next-generation mediation model requires a balance of institutional continuity and structural change. These adaptive models must be distributed, politically intelligent, and highly flexible to match the shifting nature of contemporary conflicts and actors. This operational approach is guided by three core principles:

Principle 1: Strategy Must Precede Process

One of the greatest failures of modern diplomacy is placing procedural engineering ahead of political strategy. Mediators must first establish a rigorous political theory of change, a clear understanding of how political power is going to shift, and design a comprehensive strategy around that theory. Only after the strategy is set should the specific process be outlined.

Historically, the CPA process demonstrated the value of prioritizing strategy over process; because the overarching goal of a peaceful separation was explicitly defined from the outset, all subsequent procedural steps aligned cleanly toward that objective. The international community must flip the current order of operations to replicate this success.



Principle 2: Purposive, Decentralized Design

Mediation architecture must be deliberately decentralized to account for the proliferation of actors and interests. The crisis in Sudan demonstrates that if a process is not structurally decentralized, and if the diverse interests of fragmented stakeholders are suppressed rather than accounted for, the mediation will fail to achieve a viable solution.

Principle 3: Crafting Implementation-Grade Agreements

Mediators are frequently fixated on securing a signed document, meaning their psychological disposition is oriented almost exclusively toward signatures. Consequently, minimal thought is dedicated to analyzing post-agreement conditions and assessing whether the text can survive those realities.

The 2015 and 2016 agreements in South Sudan illustrate this flaw. While highly ambitious on paper, the design of those agreements failed to account for the actual capacities of the state, the underlying desires of the actors, or whether the belligerents would alter their behavior post-signature. To foolproof future agreements, mediation teams must include specialized personnel dedicated entirely to anticipating and planning for post-agreement operational realities.

Operationalizing the Adaptive Model: Iterative Design and Scenario Prepositioning

To move away from flawed, linear mediation designs, which move rigidly from assessment to pre-negotiation, negotiation, and a final signature, the international community must embrace a discursive, iterative approach.

Mediators must start with a political theory of change that maps the positions and trajectories of all actors, design a strategy, and engage stakeholders before formal negotiations begin. Crucially, the process must feature built-in *decision gates*. Mediators must constantly halt the process to re-evaluate whether their foundational assumptions still hold true as negotiations progress. If those assumptions are invalidated, the team must return to the political assessment phase, renegotiate the foundational premises, and then proceed. This operational model ensures constant adaptation as the process evolves, balanced by a decentralized structure to provide institutional stability.



Practically operationalizing this framework requires managing mediator proliferation, ensuring analytical discipline, securing sustainable financing, and executing precise sequencing to prevent forum-shopping and the dilution of diplomatic messaging. In the context of Sudan, this requires establishing a unified, consensus-driven strategic vision that binds all envoys and multilateral bodies, ensuring text discipline, maintaining shared diplomatic calendars, and establishing a joint understanding of available leverage. Whether operating through a Quad or a Quintet formation, mediators must possess real leverage to hold the process together.

Ultimately, any adaptive mediation model must rely on two final operational pillars:

- **Scenario-Driven Strategies:** Once a political destination is determined, a mediator must maintain three to five pre-analyzed scenarios within their rulebook, ensuring they are never surprised by developments on the ground. They must preposition their diplomatic responses to each scenario in advance. For example, while the primary international strategy assumes Sudan must remain a unified state, the ground reality reflects fragmentation. A prepared mediator must have alternative operational scenarios mapped out in their rulebook to pivot seamlessly if that fragmented direction becomes the dominant reality.
- **Sequenced Inclusion:** True inclusion rejects the assumption that every stakeholder should be brought into the room simultaneously to begin talking. Practitioners must deliberately identify specific constituencies to start with, anchored by a clearly structured, long-term plan for the progressive, orderly integration of subsequent actors into the process.



40. Alex Rondos³⁸: Geopolitical Stress Tests, Conflict Portfolios, and the Restructuring of Regional Hegemony in the Horn of Africa

Institutional Inertia under Systemic External Shocks

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region is currently absorbing a massive external shock, marking the third major systemic disruption in approximately six years, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the structural economic impacts of the war in Ukraine. In each instance, regional member states were neither consulted nor informed regarding the global plans or trajectories of these crises. Despite the profound domestic ramifications, including rising commodity prices and the imminent risk of severe food supply disruptions due to fertilizer shortages, neither the African Union nor IGAD has convened a formal summit of Heads of State since the onset of the current crisis.

Subjecting the continent's security architecture to a institutional "stress test" reveals a critical deficit in operational political will. Convening a high-level multilateral meeting is a foundational tool of diplomatic leverage; it commands international attention and establishes a baseline from which collective action is built. The absence of these institutional convenings leaves citizens disconnected from the mechanisms designed for their protection, raising fundamental political questions regarding institutional utility.

The Breakdown of Voluntarism, Collective Security, and the Rise of Conflict Portfolios

The core architecture of modern international relations, stretching back to the Treaty of Westphalia, dictates that multilateralism and collective security rely entirely on voluntary participation. When states voluntarily opt into these frameworks, they secure collective status and diplomatic leverage. Conversely, opting out carries structural consequences. The international arena is currently experiencing a period where states are actively running for cover

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rather than participating, turning the traditional concept that diplomatic restraint wins international kudos completely on its head. This structural retreat undermines foundational trust in global security arrangements across Europe, Asia, and Africa alike.

When diplomatic restraint no longer yields respectability or strategic leverage, the inverse rule takes hold: a systemic lack of restraint where violence becomes the primary option rather than the tool of last resort. The Horn of Africa exemplifies this trend; it has evolved into a region that may not be engaged in a singular regional war, but is indisputably a region at war.

In this environment of unchecked conflict, geoeconomics systematically trumps traditional statecraft. External and internal actors no longer seek to demonstrate institutional compliance; instead, they focus heavily on securing logistical corridors, controlling energy flows, establishing exclusive investment channels, and building what can be structurally defined as a "conflict portfolio." In this paradigm, generating and maintaining localized instability is leveraged as a strategic asset, functionally identical to an investor managing a financial portfolio.

Structural Vulnerabilities: Debt, Demographics, and the Rise of Modern Privateers

The Horn of Africa lacks the economic and institutional shock absorbers required to withstand the convergence of debt mismanagement and a demographic tidal wave. With a clear majority of the continental population under the age of thirty, a severe political confrontation is emerging. This younger generation will inevitably challenge the current political class regarding the structural liabilities and national debts they are inheriting, questioning why they must pay for obligations incurred by their predecessors. This generational divide represents the primary domestic political risk across the region.

Concurrently, the nature of international engagement has shifted toward a modern iteration of privateering. Historically, privateers were state-licensed actors granted official royal charters to outsource state-sanctioned international theft. Today, the rapid proliferation of private military companies and asymmetric financial networks reflects a similar dynamic of licensed transnational exploitation. Gulf actors, for example, risk being perceived as the structural successors of Tipu Tip, who historically dominated the gold and ivory trade from Zanzibar into the Congo, fundamentally reshaping African polities along his trade routes for external extraction.



This transactional, predatory engagement persists because the traditional global hegemon, the United States, appears indifferent or potentially complicit, while European powers remain insulated, focused on abstract rhetoric regarding "European values" that bears no structural relationship to contemporary geopolitical realities. The region must consequently navigate an array of external autocracies that find the consultative nature of democratic politics highly inconvenient.

Substance over Architecture: Mini-Lateralism and New Political Constituencies

To navigate this complex landscape, regional actors must prioritize political substance over formal institutional architecture. IGAD exists as a structural vessel, but effective statecraft requires mobilizing flexible, targeted mini-lateral arrangements among clusters of two or three countries to execute immediate diplomatic initiatives. The region contains a dense web of overlapping crises ripe for targeted intervention, including:

- The internal fragmentation of Sudan.
- Bilateral tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia.
- Border and security dynamics between Eritrea and Ethiopia.
- Internal political instability within Somalia.
- The complex trilateral relations connecting Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya.

These candidates for mediation can be brought together through creative, low-profile political maneuvers without waiting for the slow mechanisms of formal multilateral procedures. This approach is essential given the widespread regional perception that African multilateral institutions have effectively surrendered their diplomatic space to external actors, a failure for which the international response to the Sudan crisis is emblematic.

Furthermore, statecraft must expand beyond formal government channels. Approximately half of the current regional governments have fundamentally failed to foster a sense of national belonging among their entire citizenry, creating deep domestic fractures that external spoilers systematically exploit. Diplomats must cultivate back-channel relationships with new, highly political constituencies, specifically the younger generation. Rather than treating youth engagement as an isolated social project, this demographic must be integrated directly into structural discussions mapping out how regional economic integration can be leveraged as a primary delivery mechanism for durable peace.



Restructuring Regional Hegemony: The Strategic Re-engagement of Ethiopia

Historically, international engagement in the Horn of Africa operated on a clear, foundational assumption regarding the regional division of labor:

Under this traditional model, hard power and financial capital were structurally aligned. However, this alignment has broken down. In recent years, Ethiopia has left a distinct regional impression of withdrawing from its traditional role as a collective security leader, acting as a belligerent rather than a powerful broker.

Because impressions constitute ninety percent of functional politics, this shift has destabilized the regional architecture. No multilateral system or sub-regional body operates effectively without the backing of a committed regional power; IGAD was explicitly built upon this hyper-realist calculation.

Geographical and geological realities dictate that Ethiopia remains the natural hegemon of the region; its massive demographic scale and elevated topography mean that resources, rivers, and political consequences naturally flow downward into the rest of the Horn. Ethiopia's long-term national interests are best served not through isolation or unilateralism, but by actively brokering peace across its entire neighborhood.

The primary diplomatic challenge for the region is to collectively persuade Ethiopia to re-engage as a powerful broker of first choice. By building a comprehensive web of regional economic integration, Ethiopia can secure its vital national interests, including sustainable access to regional ports, through institutional consensus rather than unilateral friction. This re-centering of internal hegemony is the only mechanism available to ensure that regional mediation remains driven by actors from within the Horn, rather than being left entirely to external actors.



41. Hafsa Halawa ³⁹ : The Transnational Red Sea Security Architecture: Reconceptualizing Gulf Interventionism, Transactional Diplomacy, and Impartial Mediation

Dismantling the External-Internal Dichotomy in the Red Sea Basin

A persistent and deeply flawed analytical failure in contemporary conflict resolution is the rigid grouping of actors into "external spoilers" versus "regional stakeholders." This framework completely misunderstands the national security doctrines and power projection of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. For the Gulf States, particularly those bordering the Red Sea, the African coastline is not a distant theater of foreign intervention; it is explicitly their immediate neighborhood.

Geographically, the eastern coast of the Red Sea is dominated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a state whose sheer physical mass is seventy-seven percent the size of Western Europe. To Saudi Arabia and neighboring Gulf autocracies, the Red Sea basin is just as critical to their core strategic depth as their traditional eastern security perimeter facing the Islamic Republic of Iran and the wider Levant (Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon).

Over the past decade, the traditional boundary separating Gulf security policy from the affairs of North Africa, the Levant, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Horn of Africa, and the wider Indian Ocean has completely dissolved. International practitioners must expand their analytical horizons to match this unified, transnational security space. Regional discussions frequently treat the economic disruptions of proximity warfare as indirect "global shocks." In reality, the economic interconnectedness is direct and symbiotic:

African ports are structurally dependent on this bilateral maritime trade. Continental agricultural output flows directly to the Gulf to satisfy their food security requirements, just as African states rely on the reverse flow of Gulf energy products. Consequently, maritime blockades or instability affecting the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab al-Mandab hit both coastlines simultaneously. The relationship is not a one-way street of the Gulf acting upon Africa; rather, it has evolved into a

³⁹ Independent Political Analyst and Mediation Specialist



complex web where African states have become transactionally dependent on Gulf financial injections to prop up their domestic institutions and governing structures.

The New GCC Guard and Mediation as Foreign Policy Currency

The international community, including the United Nations system, the United States, and European powers, regularly practices a policy of uncritical deference toward the Gulf States, treating them with a degree of entitlement and impunity without demanding institutional accountability in return. This approach fails to recognize that the internal power structures of the GCC have fundamentally transformed.



The institutional memories of successful joint mediation from twenty years ago are obsolete. None of the current six GCC leaders who rule today were in power two decades ago; two of them were barely out of their teens. This new generation of leadership operates under entirely different strategic assumptions, unmoored from historical diplomatic precedents. This shift is mirrored demographically across the wider region, where the median age ranges from a young nineteen in Sudan to twenty-seven in neighboring states. These populations have no lived memory of past diplomatic mechanisms, making a reliance on outdated historical modalities an exercise in futility.

Within this new leadership guard, mediation is no longer pursued merely as a altruistic tool for conflict resolution; it has become the primary currency through which Gulf States trade their foreign policy and project power. While the State of Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman possess longer, more established institutional histories in mediation, with Qatar intervening in Lebanese



security arrangements since 2005 and Oman long serving as the primary back-channel broker between Western powers, Iran, and Yemen, the wider international community increasingly runs to Gulf actors who possess immense self-interest but zero historical experience or training in impartial mediation. By scrambling for access and funding in Gulf capitals, international think tanks, mediators, and multilateral institutions have systematically surrendered their agency, rendering themselves collateral damage or political fodder for internal Gulf rifts.

Structural Fractures and Divergent Security Doctrines within the GCC

The ongoing geopolitical competition in the Horn of Africa cannot be simplified as a superficial rivalry between "big brother" Saudi Arabia and an ambitious United Arab Emirates punching above its weight. Rather, it represents the eruption of a historical legacy security crisis that has dogged the GCC since its inception in 1981 and has characterized the Gulf since the post-colonial creation of the smaller littoral states in the early 1970s.

The smaller Gulf principalities have historically relied on multilateral constructs like the GCC, OPEC, and the Arab League to preserve their sovereign space and protect themselves from being dominated or absorbed by Saudi Arabia. Today, these exact multilateral structures are fracturing and rupturing under the weight of divergent national security doctrines.

This institutional erosion occurs at a moment when the war has exposed the profound lack of structural resilience within the Gulf economies themselves. Despite decades of rhetoric concerning economic diversification, the Gulf States remain acutely vulnerable, unable to diversify beyond oil production and deeply beholden to great power guarantees, and de facto tied to the United States through the strategic axis of Israel and Iran, which has anchored their security architecture for fifty years.

Crucially, the diametric opposition between Saudi and Emirati power projection is not fundamentally driven by competing visions for the future of Sudan, Somalia, Somaliland, or Egypt. Their external interventions are entirely outward reflections of internal, domestic anxieties regarding their own long-term political survival, economic diversification trajectories, and regime security. This deep structural fracturing will continue to trigger unpredictable cycles of geopolitical infighting, sudden diplomatic withdrawals, and rapid realignments that leave regional observers dizzy trying to decipher who holds the upper hand.



Reclaiming African Agency: Leveraging Transactional Interdependence

Because the Gulf States have spent the last two decades replacing traditional diplomacy with nakedly transactional relationships, African states must recognize that transactionalism is inherently a two-way street. If the Gulf wants strategic access, maritime real estate, and agricultural security from Africa, then Africa possesses real, tangible leverage.

The vast human demography, abundant natural resources, and critical maritime access points of the African littoral constitute the ultimate strategic stick. There is no structural reason why African states must accept a submissive narrative that forces them to choose between the UAE or Saudi Arabia, or de facto between Israel or Iran. Such binary thinking does not serve African societies, states, or regional governing architectures. African leadership must utilize its unique leverage to diversify its partnerships, ensuring that economic and security support from individual GCC states is negotiated from a position of mutual necessity rather than unilateral dependency.

The Politicization of Mediation Ecosystems and Radical Pragmatism

The international mediation ecosystem, encompassing independent centers, think tanks, and the United Nations, has become just as deeply politicized as the geopolitical rivalries it seeks to resolve. Over the past fifteen years, a massive shift in resource mobilization occurred: the UN, its primary aid agencies, and international mediation centers shifted their financial dependencies away from modest European budgets toward massive Gulf funding streams.

Consequently, these institutions have become structurally compromised, creating an environment where the Gulf States can act as the primary financial donors to UN humanitarian responses (such as the UNHCR response in Yemen) while simultaneously funding and fueling the very conflicts driving those humanitarian disasters. This funding dynamic has stripped mediators of their independence, dragging them directly into the proxy narratives of their funders.

This institutional paralysis explains why there is no viable, formal Track One diplomatic process for the war in Sudan. Mediators have abandoned objective facts on the ground in favor of ideological alignment and forum-shopping. To reclaim relevance and prevent sliding into complete obscurity or being faced with a series of *faits accomplis*, mediators must adopt a policy



of radical, unyielding pragmatism that treats hard geopolitical realities as baseline facts rather than moral choices:

- **The Egyptian-Sudanese Axis:** The Arab Republic of Egypt directly trains, arms, and supports the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and constitutes Sudan's critical northern border. *This is an unassailable geopolitical fact.*
- **The Ethiopian-RSF Axis:** The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia provides direct political backing, training, and material support to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and constitutes Sudan's vital southern border. *This is an unassailable geopolitical fact.*

An independent, impartial mediator has no business picking sides or debating the relative moral legitimacy of these regional alignments. The Sudan war is a catastrophic internal conflict within a military institution that has turned inward, tearing the state apart and rapidly regionalizing due to the competing security anxieties of its neighbors.

Practitioners must stop competing with one another for international visibility, donor funding, and high-level CNN access. Real, effective diplomacy in the Gulf does not require immense capital or media fanfare. The diplomatic corps of the GCC states is exceptionally disciplined; their public ministers will never reveal what they intend to keep hidden, and external actors are never permitted entry into the inner ruling circle.

Therefore, international mediation must set aside performative, public diplomacy and quietly engage the Gulf as an inseparable part of a unified Red Sea security architecture. Mediators must look past the external-internal game, directly confront the legitimate national security anxieties of all actors involved, and leverage the structural interdependence of the basin to halt the spreading wildfire of regionalized warfare.



42. Dr. Mohamed Ali Guyo⁴⁰: Panelist: The Transmutation of the Red Sea Axis: Mapping Geopolitical Fault Lines, Institutional Cohesion, and the Crisis of Hegemonic Leadership in IGAD

The Red Sea Evolution: From Trade Corridor to Geopolitical Fault Line

A retrospective analysis of the regional security landscape reveals a profound structural shift since the era of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The Horn of Africa has ceased to exist as an isolated geopolitical space; its security architecture is now irreversibly tethered to the broader geopolitical dynamics of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and the wider Middle East.

Crucially, the Red Sea basin has undergone a fundamental transmutation, shifting from an innocent commercial trade corridor into a volatile matrix of geopolitical fault lines. It has evolved into a hyper-competitive theater for proxy conflicts, asymmetric competition, and fluid, strategic realignments.



This structural transformation renders classical, localized conflict resolution models entirely obsolete. Contemporary mediators can no longer afford to evaluate internal conflict maps in isolation. To design viable interventions, practitioners must overlay regional conflict maps

⁴⁰ IGAD Special Envoy for the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Somalia



directly onto global and extra-regional geopolitical blueprints. Navigating the friction between internal contexts and external shocks requires a holistic, transnational perspective that integrates sub-regional diplomacy with the security doctrines of the wider maritime littoral.

Institutional Alignment and the Suppressed Strategic Blueprint

In response to these shifting maritime dynamics, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) previously executed a rigorous institutional audit, dedicating a comprehensive, high-level session exclusively to the security and geopolitics of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. This convening yielded a critical, binding resolution: the strategic alignment and formalized operational relationship between IGAD, the African Union (AU), and the United Nations (UN).

This trilateral alignment was designed to forge a common institutional understanding of the maritime security challenges confronting the Horn. Consequently, IGAD secured formal membership on the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), engaging regional Heads of State alongside Gulf leadership. This extensive diplomatic process culminated in a comprehensive report containing definitive, actionable recommendations for regional stabilization.

This strategic blueprint focuses heavily on two foundational pillars:

- **Comprehensive Horn of Africa Integration:** Systematically addressing the deep-seated barriers to structural, economic, and political integration that have historically fractured the sub-region.
- **A Multilateral Framework for Freedom of Navigation:** Establishing an inclusive, rule-based maritime platform in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to institutionalize a sustainable framework of maritime cooperation among continental and peninsular states.

Remarkably, despite being finalized and containing vital recommendations for regional leadership, this joint report has been bureaucratically stalled, having not yet formally landed on the agendas of the IGAD Council of Ministers or the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The immediate tabling and operationalization of this document remains a critical prerequisite for regional governance.



Geography as Destiny: Consolidating Contiguity and Strategic Outreach

To reclaim its diplomatic relevance, IGAD must urgently prioritize the rebuilding of its internal institutional cohesion. This requires immediate, high-level diplomatic outreach to all member states without exception, most notably the State of Eritrea. In a sub-region where geography is absolute destiny, political exclusion is a failed strategy that systematically breeds instability.

Excluding peripheral or alienated actors from the sub-regional architecture creates dangerous security vacuums and invites external spoilers to exploit domestic fractures. IGAD must maintain an open-door policy, executing strategic outreach at the highest executive levels to identify, confront, and systematically fix the underlying structural pathologies that continue to paralyze regional integration.

The Two Eras of IGAD: The Critical Need for a Institutional Champion

The historical trajectory of IGAD can be structurally bifurcated into two distinct operational epochs: the *Era of the Leadership Champion* and the contemporary *Era of Hegemonic Deficiency*.

The Era of the Leadership Champion

During this foundational era, IGAD successfully brokered and delivered landmark peace frameworks, including the Sudan peace process (CPA), the Somalia peace process, and the South Sudan peace negotiations. This success was achieved because specific member states stepped forward outside the rigid bureaucratic structure of the secretariat to act as political champions for the organization. These champions possessed a sophisticated, global worldview, demonstrating proactive leadership and pragmatic statecraft.

Crucially, these leaders consistently projected the structural *indispensability* of IGAD to the wider international community. While the organization itself lacked massive material leverage, its leaders creatively borrowed leverage from global superpowers and international partners through structured, innovative divisions of labor. When internal capacity was exhausted, external leverage was intelligently integrated to enforce compliance among belligerents. These leaders were not flawless, but they possessed the dynamic convening power, wisdom, and innovation



required to balance complex domestic national agendas with collective regional security priorities.

The Era of Hegemonic Deficiency

In stark contrast, the contemporary era is defined by a severe deficit of state-led championship. In the absence of powerful regional brokers willing to champion the collective mandate of the sub-region, the institutional architecture has slid into paralysis. Today, regional actors frequently point to the complexities of external geopolitics to excuse diplomatic inaction and structural failure.

Yet, acute geopolitical friction is not a novel feature of the contemporary landscape; previous generations of African leaders successfully navigated the intense ideological polarization of the Cold War and the complex realignments of the post-Cold War transition. They overcame these external shocks not through bureaucratic hand-wringing, but through unyielding political innovation, calculated pragmatism, and institutional wisdom.

To break out of its current paralysis, the sub-region must return to the drawing board. IGAD must systematically recalibrate its operational model, extract the core institutional lessons of the CPA era, and revive the state-led championship required to navigate the volatile geopolitical fault lines of the modern Red Sea basin.



43. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu⁴¹: Temporal Pragmatism, Consensus Problem-Definition, and Institutional Membership in Multilateral Clubs

Temporal Pragmatism: Navigating the Non-Linear Geopolitical Present

In responding to the provocations concerning how regional architectures must navigate contemporary systemic crises, a foundational premise must be established: there are no diplomatic shortcuts, and the linear mechanics of past statecraft do not apply to the current reality. While the physical geography of the African continent remains constant, the political and economic dynamics have entered completely uncharted territory.

The baseline lesson of regional statecraft is that historical templates cannot be neatly overlaid onto contemporary disruptions. The structural logic of yesterday does not dictate the conditions of today, nor does today guarantee the trajectory of tomorrow.

Therefore, multilateral institutions must engage in a continuous process of institutional learning, reflection, and rigorous debate. This house must aggregate the diverse operational experiences of the region, including the historical mechanics of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Sudan, the long-term stabilization efforts in Somalia, and crucially, the implementation of the Pretoria Agreement between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

The Pretoria Agreement represents a critical, indigenous peace framework that remains operational, yet it is frequently under-analyzed or ignored in international policy circles. Bringing these varied regional blueprints together is vital, not because they offer a singular "magic bullet" to fix a fragmented security landscape, but because they provide the necessary lessons to equip the next generation of leadership to move rapidly and manage crises more effectively.

⁴¹ Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia



The Contextualization and Consensus-Driven Definition of Conflict

A critical weakness currently paralyzing multilateral institutions is the fragmentation of collective responsibility, which is often exacerbated by competing definitions of the crises at hand. The primary challenge of modern diplomacy lies in the initial definition of the problem. Defining a conflict is never an objective, absolute, or static exercise; it is highly subject to competing rationalizations and intense politicization.

Because different actors view conflict drivers through the lens of their respective strategic interests, there is no single "correct" definition. Instead of pursuing an elusive, absolute narrative, mediators must focus on *contextualizing the problem*.

The objective of sub-regional statecraft must be to strip away excessive politicization and construct a highly contextualized definition that can command a baseline consensus among member states. Discouraging unilateral fragmentation and enforcing a culture of collective responsibility depends entirely on an institution's ability to forge this shared understanding.

The Limits of Structural Hegemony: Rethinking the "Era of Champions"

The historical model of relying on designated "IGAD Champions", where a powerful member state steps outside the formal secretariat structure to drive a peace process forward, must be re-evaluated under contemporary geopolitical discourse. While it is true that countries possess distinct comparative advantages rooted in scale, resources, and geography, it is equally true that sovereign states define their foreign policies and deploy their diplomatic instruments based entirely on internal domestic calculations and national self-interest.

Multilateral organizations do not possess the coercive leverage required to alter the internal policy choices of their constituent sovereign members. Nature can provide a state with vast demographic numbers and strategic geography, but nature cannot endow a state with the policy dynamism required to keep pace with a rapidly changing global environment. Consequently, a structural gap will always exist between a state's latent geopolitical weight and its actual operational agility.

The historical "champions" of the past did not emerge solely due to intrinsic institutional virtue; they were elevated because the specific global and regional power balances of that era allowed



them to assume that role. Because the contemporary geopolitical landscape has fundamentally shifted, relying exclusively on the "champion model" is insufficient. While state-led championship remains a viable option, it is only one tool among many. Multilateral institutions must look beyond a single state hegemon and focus instead on maximizing the collective, structural bargaining power of the entire organization.

Multilateral Organizations as Strategic Benefit Clubs

To understand why multilateral frameworks succeed or falter, practitioners must embrace a realist assessment of why sovereign states join international organizations. Regional bodies like IGAD are fundamentally "clubs" that states join based strictly on cold calculations of national interest.

States do not participate in multilateral mechanisms out of altruism or abstract normative commitments. They join a club to advance their own national objectives while simultaneously extracting concrete benefits from the collective collaboration.

The primary task of the IGAD leadership is to continuously ensure that when member states engage with the club, their sovereign interests are validated and they can clearly perceive the tangible returns of regional integration. By ensuring that membership yields undeniable strategic and economic value for each individual state, the institution can lock in the collective participation required to withstand external shocks and maintain long-term regional stability.



44. Reclaiming Regional Agency: Demographic Contiguity, Executive Leadership, and the Fallacy of Generational Inaction

The Fallacy of Generational Distinction: A Critique of Institutional Apologetics

A recurrent narrative in contemporary diplomatic discourse suggests that the strategic failures of the present can be excused by arguing that the historical context of past leadership was structurally unique. This line of reasoning is a form of institutional apologetics that must be decisively rejected. The leaders who successfully brokered past regional frameworks did not descend from heaven; they were simply political actors who chose to confront the crises of their time.

The leaders of today possess identical, if not superior, institutional tools and material resources. Should they choose to accept the structural responsibilities of their offices, they are entirely capable of matching or exceeding the diplomatic achievements of their predecessors. The core differentiator between institutional paralysis and diplomatic breakthrough is not a shift in global epochs, but rather how contemporary leaders choose to perceive, internalize, and respond to regional problems.

Transnational Demographic Contiguity: The True Foundation of the IGAD Bloc

To understand the true potential of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), statecraft must look past artificial colonial borders and ground its analysis in transnational demographic realities. IGAD is not a detached, continental bureaucracy; it is a compact bloc of eight highly integrated countries bound together by a single, interconnected people.

The Somali demographic serves as a prime manifestation of this cross-border integration:

The Somali people occupy contiguous spaces across the Republic of Kenya, the Republic of Djibouti, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and the Federal Republic of Somalia. They are structurally, culturally, and economically one people. This deep human integration exists independently of state structures, yet it remains starved of cohesive political direction. Transforming this organic demographic contiguity into a functional engine for regional peace requires proactive, coordinated leadership from the sub-region's most powerful actors.



The Mandate of Proximity: Mobilizing the Leverage of Institutional Insiders

The current leadership of the regional and continental security architectures presents an unprecedented, highly localized alignment of political capital. The Executive Secretary of IGAD previously served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, commanding years of high-level ministerial experience. Concurrently, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission brings deep regional expertise, having previously served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Djibouti.

These two chief executives are not detached international bureaucrats; they are ultimate institutional insiders who possess direct, personal, and historical relationships with every sitting Head of State in the Horn of Africa.

Given this unique proximity, these leaders must abandon passive bureaucratic management and actively push the regional Heads of State toward collective action. Reclaiming regional agency requires these two figures to strategically deploy their combined institutional leverage, step into the diplomatic vanguard, and force a unified security agenda.

The Absurdity of Unilateral Revisionism: Zero-Sum Geopolitics vs. Regional Resource Pooling

The current geopolitical landscape of the Red Sea basin and the wider Horn is increasingly threatened by a dangerous, zero-sum scramble for vital resources. If left unchecked, this unilateral mercantilism will plunge the region into catastrophic war. This existential risk can be illustrated by examining three highly combustible flashpoints:

- **The Ugandan Maritime Claim:** Historical political assertions suggesting the right to seize the Port of Lamu in Kenya by force to satisfy landlocked sea-outlet requirements.
- **The Ethiopian Port Desideratum:** The intense, unilateral push by Addis Ababa to secure sovereign access to the Port of Assab on the Eritrean coastline.
- **The Egyptian Hydro-Hegemonic Stance:** The persistent diplomatic and security posture of Cairo regarding its perceived right to control or neutralize the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) to safeguard its downstream water dependency.



If every sovereign state in the sub-region pursues its economic interests through the prism of unilateral force and hydro-political exclusion, the inevitable outcome is collective destruction.

To dismantle this existential threat, the IGAD member states must join forces, pool their leadership, and fundamentally reject the isolationist model of statecraft. Under the natural leadership of Ethiopia, which is bound by geography and scale to act as the region's anchor, the bloc can replace zero-sum competition with a comprehensive framework of regional integration. By establishing shared maritime economic corridors, institutionalizing joint port management, and creating collective water-sharing legal frameworks, the sub-region can transform its individual vulnerabilities into a shared, highly prosperous regional commons.



45. Natascha Skjaldgaard⁴²: The Age of Disruption: Evaluating European Union Strategic Overviews and Gulf State Multilateral Dilemmas

From Global Disorder to Systemic Disruption

A speaker noted previously that the international system has entered an age of disorder. However, ongoing global geopolitics, shifting dynamics, and the rapid acceleration of multipolarity suggest that the global landscape has advanced a step further into an age of disruption. Multipolarity is fundamentally reshaping established international frameworks. This systemic shift raises two critical inquiries regarding external actors operating within regional conflict ecosystems, specifically the Horn of Africa and Sudan.



The European Union Architecture: Deconstructing the "Sleeping at the Wheel" Paradox

The first inquiry is directed to Ambassador Alex Rondo regarding the explicit assertion that the European Union is "sleeping at the wheel."

⁴² AU Political Counsellor, Embassy of Denmark in Addis Ababa. Conference Participant.



Elaboration is required on what this exactly entails based on extensive diplomatic experience within the Horn of Africa. Within the internal European Union environment, an insular tendency exists to engage primarily with internal rhetoric, fostering an assumption that institutional performance is optimal. However, when external challenges disrupt this perspective, it necessitates a critical re-evaluation.

Given the current realities of global disruption, what are the precise operational and strategic implications of this critique for EU member states and their broader foreign policy apparatus?

The Gulf Cooperation Council Framework: Dual-Track Diplomatic Integration and Conflicting Interests

The second inquiry focuses on Hafsa's analysis concerning the geopolitical role of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, specifically the assertion that "the Gulf is for the Gulf." Mediation has become a fully integrated, institutionalized component of Gulf foreign policy, transforming these nations into increasingly powerful, assertive mediators on the global stage.

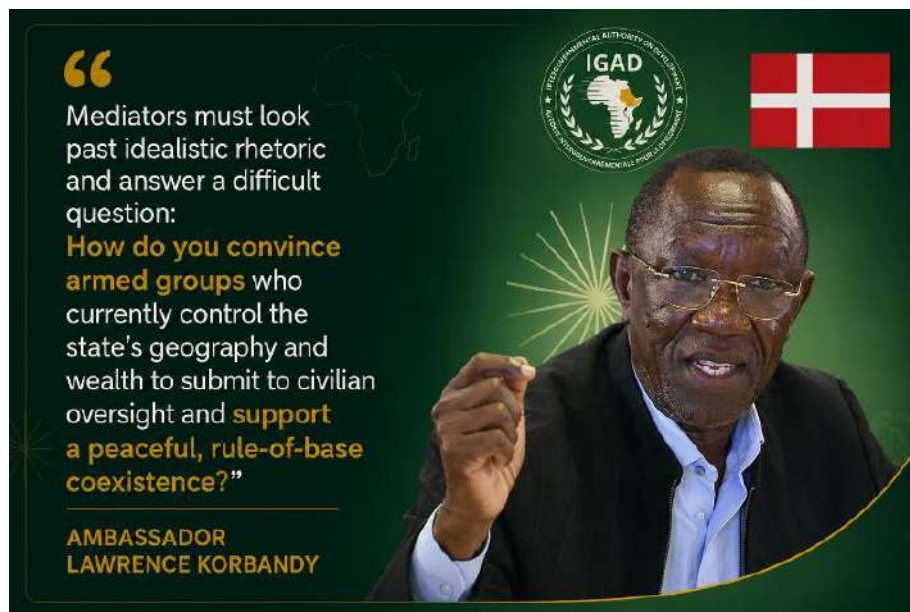
Conversely, a fundamental structural contradiction exists: certain Gulf states appear to mediate the exact conflicts that they are simultaneously fueling through parallel channels.

This dual-track approach has severe implications for complex crises, such as the war in Sudan. While these actors pursue mediation to advance their legitimate national interests, they concurrently engage in back-channeling behaviors that sustain the hostilities. Within the current fragmented international order, how can conflict resolution be achieved in Sudan when the primary mediating powers maintain such deeply conflicting strategic interests on the ground?



46. Ambassador Lawrence Korbandy⁴³ Beyond Transactional Statecraft: Cultural Pluralism, Deep Militarization, and the Structural Dilemma of Demilitarization in Sudan

Mediators must look past idealistic rhetoric and answer a difficult question: How do you convince armed groups who currently control the state's geography and wealth to submit to civilian oversight and support a peaceful, rule-of-base coexistence?



Confronting the Duality of the Sudanese Crisis

A realistic diagnostic assessment of the ongoing war in Sudan reveals that contemporary diplomatic frameworks remain dangerously disconnected from the realities on the ground. The international mediation ecosystem frequently approaches the conflict through abstract, detached methodologies that fail to answer two fundamental structural challenges.

Sudan is a state defined by deep, pervasive hyper-militarization, and its social fabric is inherently pluralistic. To construct a viable path toward sustainable peace, mediators must stop applying generic conflict-resolution templates and directly confront the dual challenge of transforming a

⁴³ IGAD Special Envoy for the Republic of Sudan and Former Legal Advisor to the President of South Sudan



dominant military-economic class while simultaneously honoring Sudan's complex, multicultural identity.

The Limits of Transactionalism: The Imperative of Cultural Mediation

The contemporary focus on transactional diplomacy, which treats mediation merely as a series of elite political bargains, financial trade-offs, and elite power-sharing agreements, is completely unsuited to the Sudanese reality. Sudan cannot be stabilized through an artificial political contract signed by rival generals in a foreign capital.

Because Sudan is fundamentally multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic, traditional transactional statecraft operates only on the surface of the crisis. Genuine mediation must integrate a deep, structural track of *cultural mediation*.

This cultural approach recognizes that the war has weaponized communal identities, ruptured historical patterns of coexistence, and local tribal dynamics. Serious mediation has not yet begun in Sudan precisely because international actors have ignored this pluralistic social foundation. A successful peace process must align elite security guarantees with an inclusive, Sudanese-owned dialogue that addresses structural marginalization, local resource distribution, and the diverse communal identities across all states and territories.

The War Economy and the Paradox of Sovereign Territory

The call for an immediate transition from military dictatorship to a civilian-led democratic governance model is a vital aspiration shared by the Sudanese people. However, international policy circles often treat this civilian transition as an administrative task, completely ignoring the realist distribution of power on the ground.

Sudan's warring factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), are not merely armed actors; they are the absolute rulers and economic governors of the state. They exercise complete control over sovereign territories, dominate illicit and formal commercial networks, and monopolize lucrative war economies, including the highly profitable extraction, smuggling, and trading of gold.

This concentration of hard power creates a profound structural paradox. It is impossible to build a durable civilian administration by simply demanding that these military factions step aside.



The current rulers possess no material incentive to voluntarily surrender the territorial sovereignty and financial monopolies that guarantee their survival.

The Mechanics of Structural Transformation: From Rulers to Stakeholders

The primary, unresolved challenge confronting the mediation community is identifying the precise operational mechanisms required to transform an entrenched military-economic class into civilian political actors. Mediators must look past idealistic rhetoric and answer a difficult question: How do you convince armed groups who currently control the state's geography and wealth to submit to civilian oversight and support a peaceful, rule-of-law coexistence?

This structural transformation cannot be achieved through immediate, coercive exclusion, which would only cause the state to fracture further into completely un-governable fiefdoms. Instead, the mediation architecture must design a highly pragmatic, phased transition strategy that shifts incentives across three core pillars:

- **The Decoupling and Re-channeling of Economic Flows:** Establishing structural mechanisms that dismantle the illicit war economy, while offering alternative, transparent investment frameworks that redirect financial resources away from private military procurement and toward national economic reconstruction.
- **Territorial Integration and Command Restructuring:** Moving away from zero-sum territorial control through verified security arrangements, eventually leading to a unified, professional national military under strict civilian authority.
- **The Conversion of Coercive Capital into Political Capital:** Providing clear, institutional pathways that allow military stakeholders to preserve their core security interests within a constitutional framework, incentivizing them to defend the peace agreement rather than violently subvert it.

Stopping the war is fundamentally distinct from ending the war. Stopping the war requires a cessation of hostilities, but *ending* the war demands a comprehensive structural transformation of the state's military-economic foundations. Only by directly confronting this transition and designing an inclusive process that balances cultural pluralism with hard military realities can mediators guide Sudan away from collapse and toward a durable civilian order.



47. Ambassador Nureldin Satti⁴⁴: The Evolution of Donorship, Collective Survival, and the Reciprocal Paradox of Sub-Regional Sabotage

The Strategic Shift in Donorship: From Western Monopolies to "Secret Sharers"

A historical evaluation of the aid architecture in the Horn of Africa reveals a profound transformation over the past quarter-century. Approximately twenty-five years ago, in this very city of Addis Ababa, traditional Western donors operating within the framework of the Somali Aid Coordination Body (SACB) routinely lamented the absolute absence of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states in regional humanitarian and development funding.

Today, that donor vacuum has been aggressively filled, but with consequences that traditional multilateral institutions failed to anticipate.

The Gulf States have transitioned from passive observers into what can be accurately termed the "secret sharers" of IGAD and the wider Horn. This new donorship model does not operate through the transparent, norm-bound mechanisms of traditional international financial institutions. Instead, it deploys immense transactional liquidity, direct financial injections, and parallel diplomatic tracks.



⁴⁴ Former Sudanese ambassador to the United States and former United Nations Deputy Special Representative for Burundi



While this funding stabilizes vulnerable regimes in the short term, it simultaneously bypasses formal sub-regional frameworks, fragments institutional cohesion, and allows external powers to buy significant strategic access. As the originators of the sub-regional institutional concept in 1985, African diplomats must ensure that the organization they built to foster independence does not become an instrument of external financial capture.

Recommitting to the Sovereign Utility of IGAD

To prevent the sub-regional architecture from dissolving into obscurity, member states must urgently re-emphasize their fundamental belief in the **utility of IGAD**. The current institutional paralysis is not a failure of the secretariat, but a direct reflection of a deficit in sovereign political will.

Member states must move past treating the organization as a forum for performative diplomacy and actively demonstrate their commitment through financial, political, and operational support. IGAD's foundational mandate was designed to shield the Horn from extra-regional manipulation; reviving that mandate requires states to re-invest in the platform as an indispensable tool for collective security and economic integration.

Harmonizing Collective Security vs. Mercantilist Self-Interest

The primary structural challenge confronting contemporary IGAD states is the urgent need to **harmonize their collective regional interests with their individual national policies**, particularly when engaging external actors like the Gulf States.

When individual member states pursue isolated, short-term mercantilist deals with foreign patrons, offering maritime access, agricultural land, or geopolitical alignment in exchange for immediate financial bailouts, they systematically erode the collective bargaining power of the entire bloc.

IGAD states must establish a unified code of external engagement. By aggregating their sovereign leverage, the eight member states can transform their relationship with the Gulf from one of unilateral dependency into a structured, balanced partnership that protects the geopolitical integrity of the entire sub-region.



The Shield of Collective Survival in a Fractured Global Order

In an increasingly volatile and highly polarized global environment, no single state in the Horn of Africa possesses the material weight to survive in isolation. The traditional security umbrellas of global superpowers are fracturing, leaving the region highly vulnerable to external shocks, supply-chain disruptions, and proxy competitions.

The member states of IGAD must agree on concrete ways and means to **survive collectively**. This requires establishing permanent institutional shields, including:

- Integrated regional early-warning systems for security threats.
- Interconnected food and energy security networks.
- A unified diplomatic front in continental and global forums.

Collective survival demands that the region stop reacting to external crises individually and begin operating as a coherent, defensive geopolitical bloc.

The Reciprocal Paradox: Strategic Interdependence and "My Brother's Keeper"

The foundational philosophy that must guide the future of the Horn of Africa is an unyielding commitment to the principle of being **"my brother's keeper."** Within the tightly integrated geography of the IGAD bloc, the security of every nation is structurally linked to its neighbors. The belief that a state can insulate itself from a fire burning across its border is a dangerous geopolitical illusion.

No country in this region is immune to conflict. Crucially, state actors must recognize the reciprocal paradox of regional sabotage: any attempt by one state to weaponize domestic proxies, exploit ethnic fractures, or deliberately manufacture instability within a neighboring brother state will inevitably trigger a devastating cycle of blowback.

The cross-border contagion of modern warfare ensures that the chaos a state exports today will return to destabilize its own capital tomorrow. True statecraft requires acknowledging this deep interdependence, abandoning zero-sum sub-regional sabotage, and realizing that safeguarding your brother's stability is the ultimate prerequisite for securing your own.



48. Haile Menkerios⁴⁵: The Peculiarities of State Formation in the Horn of Africa and the Capacity of IGAD

The Intersecting Dynamics of the Red Sea and Regional State Formation

The Horn of Africa, which is the epicenter of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), possesses distinct peculiarities. There are complex dynamics between the Horn of Africa and the opposite coast, as well as the profound impact of the Red Sea as an international waterway and common border.

In addition to these maritime factors, there is another critical dynamic: this region was the least impacted by colonialism. Consequently, the ongoing processes of nation formation and state formation constitute a highly unique internal force.

To what extent does this historical trajectory impact the ability of IGAD to act as a unified body, and what possible remedies could make IGAD an effective instrument for regional integration?



⁴⁵ Senior Advisor to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and former UN Assistant Secretary-General Political Affairs from 2007 to 2010, Head of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) from 2010 to 2011, and Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan from 2011 to 2013. Conference Participant for the Session.



The Reality of New Nation-States and Institutional Recommendations

A defining peculiarity of the Horn of Africa is that three new nation-states have been formed just within the recent era. Nowhere else on the African continent has this phenomenon occurred.

There is a structural reason for this pattern. Given that history, how realistic can we be if we ignore this fundamental peculiarity of the Horn of Africa?

We must assess the extent to which the regional architecture is impacted by these dynamics, and determine exactly what needs to be done as a matter of recommendation to move forward.



49. Dr. Abdalla Hamdok ⁴⁶ : Reconceptualizing Gulf-Horn Relations: From Exploitative Dynamics to Strategic Complementarities

The Evolutionary Continuum of State-Building in the Horn

An internal diagnostic of the sub-region requires a fundamental shift in how we conceptualize our domestic political architectures. We must look at ourselves within these countries as nations in the plural, rather than as a singular, static nation. The sociopolitical fabric of our respective territories is continuously evolving. This fluid internal reality is directly linked to the broader, ongoing challenges of state-building, where diverse domestic identities and institutional frameworks are still being negotiated and consolidated.

Re-evaluating the Gulf State Relationship

Regarding our relationship with the Gulf States, we must ask whether we need to look at it strictly as a one-way traffic defined by exploitation. Alternatively, we should consider whether we can think about complementarities and opportunities that could create a win-win situation for both sides within the current complicated environment.

⁴⁶ Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Sudan



50. Fouad Hikmat⁴⁷: Incorporating National Figures in Mediation and Exploring Regional Federalism

Incorporating National Figures to Enhance Mediation Legitimacy

When discussing the legitimacy of the mediation process and its mediators, a critical question arises regarding where we can incorporate national figures. Integrating these national elements could help the mediation process by ensuring a proper understanding of the context.

This approach could prevent the pre-determined outcomes seen in the past. For example, during the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) process, the separation of South Sudan from Sudan was a scenario that, even if not at the forefront, was key in building the negotiation process from Machakos through Naivasha. To avoid similar tracks now, we must consider if there is a place within current frameworks, such as the Quintet, to formally incorporate a national element into the mediation.

Regional Federalism as a Model for Integration

When discussing regional integration and the interconnectedness with the Gulf, we must look at the overlapping systems in this region. These include the Nile Basin (including the Eastern Basin), the IGAD bloc, and the Red Sea arena.

Given these overlapping spaces, we should consider whether it is possible to think about a form of regional federalism between these systems. Implementing a federalistic structure for these regional systems could help the region avoid the persistent issues of competitiveness and exploitation, fostering a more balanced framework for integration.

⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, Special Adviser for the African Union and Sudan. Conference Participant



51. Joseph Tucker ⁴⁸: Shaping United States Foreign Policy Posture Toward the Horn and the Gulf

The Historical Context of United States Engagement

Reflecting on an event from 2012, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) requested that the United States government intercede and speak directly to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding an critical issue. Historically, the United States has faced severe difficulties engaging with countries like Sudan and accurately accounting for their complex regional realities.

It is vital not to assume that current United States participation in multilateral frameworks, such as the Quad, reflects an advanced or maturing institutional understanding of how the Horn of Africa, including Sudan, interconnects with the wider region.

Recommendations for Future Strategic Alignment

If the current instability eventually subsides and an opportunity emerges to systematically re-engage the United States Department of State and related agencies, regional specialists must actively help reshape how the United States government conceptualizes this theater.

The international community urgently needs Washington to understand the Horn of Africa's intricate geopolitical relations with the wider Gulf, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Turkey. Correcting these long-standing analytical blind spots is an effort that has been desperately needed for the better part of two decades.

⁴⁸ International Crises Group, Senior Analyst, Horn of Africa. Conference Participant



52. Dr. Mohamed Ali Guyo⁴⁹: State Formation as Work in Progress and the Strategic Role of IGAD

The Ongoing Process of State Formation and Governance Failures

Unlike other parts of the African continent, the state formation process within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region remains an ongoing work in progress. The diverse historical experiences of the region have generated deep internal contradictions within our member states.

Consequently, various forces have emerged to directly challenge the very existence of the modern state in our region. This structural friction has historically led to the breakup of states, state collapse, state failure, and widespread failures of governance.

Geography, Coordination, and Leadership for Regional Integration

To address these existential challenges, IGAD is uniquely positioned to consolidate its member states through a comprehensive integration program. The foundational approach of the organization is to transform the premium geography of the region into a functional, intergovernmental authority dedicated to sustainable development.

The primary task ahead requires systematic coordination among the member states. By achieving an efficient level of institutional coordination, true regional integration will follow. This remains a continuous work in progress that ultimately depends on the quality of regional leadership.

⁴⁹ IGAD Special Envoy for the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Somalia



53. Alex Rondos⁵⁰ Recalibrating Europe-Africa Dynamics and the Evolving Mediation Mandate of IGAD

A Critique of European Engagement and the Opportunity for Structural Realignment

The contemporary European political posture toward African security crises can be characterized as asleep at the wheel. However, the current political disruptions and chaotic dynamics should not be viewed merely as liabilities; they present a strategic opportunity to set a definitive new tone and forge a completely restructured relationship between the two continents.

There is a distinct worry that the rhetoric emanating from Europe fails to match the scale of the existential challenges currently faced by the African continent. Historically, Europe and Africa are fundamentally joined at the hip. European policymakers must act in accordance with this shared destiny, moving decisively beyond performative rhetoric into concrete, actionable operations. A major opening exists for a genuinely new approach, one that effectively integrates financial capital, clear strategy, and proactive diplomacy.

The Domestic Dilemma of IGAD: From Velvet Divorce to Household Reconciliation

When assessing the historical successes of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the organization's legacy can be framed in a domestic context. IGAD successfully brokered what eventually became a "velvet, elected divorce" in Sudan, leading to the self-determination and secession of South Sudan.

Moving forward, the institution may be required to execute similar structural separations, or conversely, it must find innovative ways to act as an institutional psychotherapist to broker deep reconciliation within highly fractured households.

The primary challenge of the Horn of Africa lies in this exact tension. The convergence of so many diverse cultural, historical, and ethnic backgrounds makes the region incredibly dynamic,

⁵⁰ Senior Adviser, CMI — Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and Former EU Special Representative to the Horn of Africa and Senior Advisor with the Africa Center at the US Institute of Peace



yet keeps it constantly on edge. It is within the management of this internal diversity that the ultimate answers to regional stability reside.



54. Hafsa Halawa⁵¹: The Domestic Imperative of Sudan and Agency in Gulf-Horn Relations

Sudan as a Domestic Core for Gulf Survival

The ongoing crisis in Sudan cannot be understood merely through the lens of abstract strategic depth, shared ideology, or alliance-driven commitments. Instead, Sudan represents a core, concrete component of the domestic political, economic, and security plans for regional actors. For specific Gulf countries, particularly those most deeply involved in the theater, Sudan's stability, resources, and geography are directly tied to their own internal calculations for regime survival and long-term planning.

Exercising Sovereign Agency to Counter Exploitation

Regarding whether the relationship between the Gulf States and the Horn of Africa is inherently exploitative or mutually beneficial, the outcome rests entirely with the host nations. If African states wish to prevent an exploitative dynamic, they must not surrender their strategic assets, resources, and geopolitical alignment without securing equitable returns. Falling into asymmetric dependencies is avoidable through basic resource bargaining and regulatory oversight.



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The Kenyan Model of Diversified Investment

A clear example of a non-zero-sum approach can be observed in Kenya. The Kenyan government has successfully diversified its external partnerships, balancing investments and diplomatic relationships across multiple competing actors, including Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This model demonstrates that regional states possess the agency to structure foreign engagement in a manner that protects national interests and prevents external interaction from becoming a zero-sum game.



CLOSING INSIGHTS AND TAKEAWAYS

55. Dr. Vasu Gounden⁵²: Moderator: Re-Imagining Mediation in a Fragmented World: From Conversational Dialogue to Strategic Peacemaking

The Evolution of Resistance: Ideological Schools versus Transactional Insurgencies

Reflecting on personal history, joining the liberation movement in exile in Lusaka, Zambia, at a very young age provided a foundational understanding of guerrilla movements. A critical distinction between the guerrilla movements of the liberation era and the insurgencies of today is that historical movements emerged from rigorous political schools. Participants underwent extensive political and ideological training. Today, that ideological foundation is largely absent.

Contemporary movements have become highly transactional. While select groups remain political and ideological, the majority lack this grounding, which presents clear global dangers.

Later, as a student president leading thousands on the streets of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, one of South Africa's most violent provinces during the apartheid state of emergency, leadership operated under strict political discipline. Student leaders were educated in political philosophy by political elders. Mobilization was never arbitrary; actions were prepared and executed with military precision. The mandate to make the country ungovernable was carried out not through mere chaos, but through organized chaos.

At that time, the physical potential to mobilize was severely restricted by infrastructure. Conversely, contemporary youth possess immense, rapid mobilization capacity driven by social media. It is an error to underestimate modern youth as unpoliticized; they are highly politicized in their own way regarding their own issues. Because governments cannot respond as fast as youth can mobilize, this rapid communication serves as an accelerating factor that states must confront when dealing with directionless, non-ideological insurgencies.

⁵² Executive Director of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)



The Geopolitical Shift: From Peace through Dialogue to Peace through Strength

For decades, the conflict resolution field operated under the normative assumption that peace is built through dialogue, negotiation, inclusion, consensus building, and patient agreement-crafting. This paradigm of "peace through dialogue" was often slow, elitist, and structurally limited, yet it was grounded in the principle that political problems require political settlements rooted in legitimacy and consent.



Today, this assumption is under severe pressure due to a global shift toward "peace through strength." In this current environment, military advantage is systematically privileged over negotiated settlements. Powerful states and external actors pursue transactional deals where security pacts are substituted for comprehensive peace agreements. In these arrangements, access to maritime ports, mineral resources, energy corridors, data infrastructure, migration routes, and strategic territory is prioritized over the aspirations of affected communities.

Dialogue has not disappeared; rather, it takes place within a harder, more transactional, and highly militarized geopolitical environment. Mediation is not dead, but its context has fundamentally changed. If African mediation continues to rely on older, unstructured models of dialogue lacking strategy and leverage, it risks becoming marginal, symbolic, or entirely bypassed.

However, if Africa merely imitates the global turn to hard power, it risks losing the historical legitimacy of African-led mediation, which is anchored in proximity, solidarity, cultural rootedness, inclusivity, and political patience. The challenge for the Intergovernmental Authority



on Development (IGAD) is to build a new mediation model where dialogue is strengthened by strategy, leverage, and implementation capacity.

Shifting from Event-Based to Ecosystem-Based Mediation

The dominant paradigm of slow, elite-centered, and state-centric mediation is inadequate for today's fast-moving, fragmented, and internationally integrated conflicts. This is particularly evident in the Horn of Africa.

Modern conflicts are no longer simple disputes between two discrete parties sitting across a table. They are complex systems involving governments, armed movements, militias, regional and medium powers, global actors, commercial interests, illicit economies, diaspora networks, digital narratives, climate pressures, borderland communities, and traumatized populations.

The mediator is no longer managing a negotiation table; the mediator is operating inside an entire ecosystem. This reality requires a conceptual shift from event-based mediation to ecosystem-based mediation.

It is no longer sufficient to merely identify the parties, their positions, and the text of an agreement. Mediation architectures must actively investigate the underlying political economy sustaining the war, the beneficiaries of violence, the external actors enabling or constraining the conflict, and the regional rivalries feeding the crisis. Furthermore, mediators must determine which grievances are excluded from formal processes, what security guarantees are genuinely credible, what implementation mechanisms will survive post-signature, and who possesses the leverage to ensure compliance.

Restoring Mediation as a Strategic Political Instrument

Mediation must be restored as a strategic political instrument rather than a mere facilitative technique. The field has frequently reduced mediation to process management, focusing on shuttle diplomacy, agenda setting, text drafting, and convening meetings. While these skills remain important, they are insufficient in the present environment.

A mediator must understand power, incentives, sequencing, regional security architectures, and war economies. Mediators must distinguish when dialogue is being used in good faith and when it is deployed tactically to buy time, regroup, rearm, or legitimize battlefield gains.



If the global arena is moving toward strength, African mediation cannot remain naive about power. Africa's response should not be militarized peacemaking, but strategic peacemaking. This means mediation must be systematically backed by six core pillars:

- Coherent regional political leadership.
- Agreed African non-negotiables.
- Credible pressure on spoilers.
- Strict alignment between mediation, sanctions, incentives, reconstruction, humanitarian access, and security guarantees.
- A disciplined relationship with external partners.
- A clear, legally binding implementation architecture.

Without these components, mediation becomes a performative ceremony; with them, it becomes a cohesive political strategy.

Legitimacy as an Operational Form of Power

Legitimacy must be understood as a direct form of strength. While current global trends treat legitimacy as secondary to hard power, in fragmented conflicts it remains one of the few forms of power that African multilateral institutions still possess and must protect.

IGAD's comparative advantage does not lie in outspending or outgunning external powers. Instead, its advantage is that it is regional, proximate, historically embedded, politically recognized, and capable of convening African actors around an African agenda.

African multilateral institutions achieve relevance when they can set an agenda and convince international partners to accept its legitimacy. In a fragmented world, IGAD must act not only as a mediator of conflicts but as a custodian of a legitimate regional order. This requires a model of layered legitimacy that moves beyond elite bargains through five distinct tracks:

- **Track One:** Formal political and security negotiations among primary combatants.
- **Track Two:** Structural engagement with civil society, women, youth, religious leaders, elders, business communities, and intellectuals.
- **Track Three:** Community-level grievance mapping and the establishment of local peace infrastructures.



- **Track Four:** Regional and international alignment around agreed parameters.
- **Track Five:** Proactive public communication to prevent misinformation, manage social expectations, and build public ownership.

Through this layered approach, mediation transitions from a narrow bargain between elites into a process that societies can recognize, defend, and sustain.

The Seven Elements of a Strategic Mediation Ecosystem Model

To operationalize these shifts, IGAD should consider developing a **Strategic Mediation Ecosystem Model** comprised of seven structural elements:

1. **Strategic Diagnosis Before Mediation:** Prior to launching any formal process, IGAD must conduct a rigorous systems analysis encompassing political economy, regional alignments, military balances, external actors, war financing, community grievances, humanitarian pressures, climate stress, and social media narratives. This diagnostic step ensures mediators avoid addressing only the visible conflict while missing the hidden conflict system.
2. **African Agenda Setting and Defined Horizons:** IGAD must not enter conflicts as a reactive convener. It must clearly define the political horizon and establish the region's sought-after outcomes, whether they entail a ceasefire, a political transition, a federal bargain, a security sector compact, or the restoration of constitutional order. Without a defined political horizon, mediation becomes process without direction.
3. **Coherent Regional Leadership and Track Consolidation:** The strategic importance of the Horn of Africa cannot tolerate fragmented mediation. Competing diplomatic tracks weaken African leadership, invite forum shopping by combatants, incentivize spoilers, and allow external actors to divide the region. IGAD, the African Union, the United Nations, and neighboring states must work within a structured coordination framework where IGAD serves as the legitimate regional anchor.
4. **Inclusion Designed for Influence:** Inclusion must move past inviting women, youth, and civil society to decorative side events. Structural mechanisms must ensure their inputs directly shape the core agenda, the text of the agreement, the monitoring architecture, and the post-agreement recovery framework. Inclusion must transition from simple participation to actual structural influence.



5. **Leverage and Enforceable Incentives:** Mediation must be explicitly connected to consequences. The framework must establish clear incentives for compliance and material costs for obstruction. These measures should include diplomatic recognition, reconstruction support, phased sanctions relief, regional security guarantees, or targeted pressure against spoilers. Dialogue without leverage remains highly vulnerable to manipulation.
6. **Implementation Systems Designed from Onset:** Implementation timelines, guarantors, monitoring mechanisms, funding verification tools, and dispute resolution procedures must be fully designed before an agreement is signed. Treating implementation as an afterthought is a primary driver of agreement failure.
7. **Adaptive Learning Architectures:** Because conflicts evolve rapidly, mediation systems must adjust their assumptions, monitor risks, and update strategies in real time through a living, institutionalized learning architecture.

Institutional Recommendations for IGAD's Transition

To assert leadership in this new environment, IGAD must transition from a conventional convener of mediation processes into a comprehensive regional strategic mediation platform. This transition can be achieved through six practical steps:

- **Establish an IGAD Mediation Strategy and Analysis Cell:** A permanent, internal capability tasked with providing real-time political analysis, conflict mapping, scenario planning, and war economy analysis to support envoys before, during, and after mediation processes.
- **Develop an IGAD Mediation Doctrine for Fragmented Conflicts:** Codify distinct operational lessons from Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia to define how the institution mediates when authority is fragmented, external actors are heavily involved, and parties negotiate in bad faith.
- **Create a Regional Multi-Disciplinary Mediation Support Roster:** Assemble a permanent institutional roster comprising senior mediators, political analysts, constitutional experts, security sector specialists, gender and youth experts, and implementation monitors, recognizing that the modern mediator is a specialized team rather than a single individual.
- **Build an IGAD-AU-UN Coordination Support Compact:** Clarify institutional roles before crises escalate. The compact should position IGAD to lead on regional legitimacy and proximity,



the African Union to provide continental authority, and the United Nations to offer global legitimacy, technical capacity, and a Security Council interface.

- **Institutionalize Inclusive Legitimacy:** Establish standing mechanisms for non-state actors, youth, women, and borderland communities to directly influence mandates and monitoring options, ensuring their participation is structural rather than decorative.
- **Link Mediation to Regional Resilience Programs:** Explicitly connect peace agreements to long-term development, local livelihoods, climate adaptation, food security, and cross-border economic cooperation, recognizing that populations will not defend a peace that fails to tangibly improve their lives.

Conclusion

The global shift from peace through dialogue to peace through strength creates both severe danger and distinct opportunity for Africa. The danger is that African mediation will be sidelined by transactional geopolitics and externally brokered security arrangements that fail to produce sustainable peace.

The opportunity is for African institutions to completely redefine mediation practice for this new era. Dialogue, process, elite agreements, and neutrality without strategy are no longer sufficient. The current task is to construct a next generation of African mediation that is principled but not naive, inclusive but not symbolic, strategic but not militarized, and fully capable of shaping legitimate outcomes.



56. Felicita Wangechi Keiru⁵³ The Reality of the Situation Room: Structured Mediation, Fragmented Interests, and the Paradox of Sovereign Implementation

The Reality of the Situation Room vs. Abstract Strategy

The operational environment of a crisis mediator is defined by rapid acceleration rather than detached academic analysis. For example, when war erupted in South Sudan on December 23, an extraordinary summit was convened by December 27. Within four days, the mediation team was assembled and the warring parties were brought directly to the table. In such fast-moving crises, there is no time for detached, pre-emptive conflict mapping or strategic formulation; the analysis and the strategy must be forged dynamically directly at the negotiating table.

Because the global landscape has transformed, the practice of mediation must adapt. However, multilateral organizations like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU) remain structured as rigid, compartmentalized bureaucracies rather than flexible crisis-response operations. They do not maintain a permanent standing cadre of mediators. Instead, when a crisis breaks out, personalities are rapidly identified based on shifting political interests.

During the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) process for Sudan, the architecture was highly structured through the IGAD Sub-Committee on Sudan, which comprised the frontline states. This design established a direct line of communication from the resident IGAD ambassadors in Kenya up to the special envoy and the heads of state summit, enabling rapid political escalation when talks stalled.

The Evolution of Partners: From Supportive Donors to Predatory Hybrid Actors

The external diplomatic ecosystem surrounding African mediation has fundamentally changed over the past two decades. During the CPA negotiations, international partners acted in a

⁵³ Also known as Mama CPA, Felicita Wangechi Keirus Administrative and Advisory Specialist, alongside General Lazaro Sumbeiywo for the IGAD Sudan Peace Process, 2001–2005. She was also Political and Civil Affairs Officer for the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and later the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).
Takeaway Speaker



genuinely supportive capacity. They provided essential financial resources and demanded results, but their expectations aligned closely with the core objectives of the IGAD mediation team.

This cooperative model contrasted sharply with the mediation landscapes observed in Addis Ababa during the 2015 and 2016 South Sudan peace tracks. In those processes, the environment was crowded by a proliferation of external "hybrid actors" who brought competing geopolitical interests directly to the table. These actors independently influenced and manipulated the local parties, creating an fragmented environment that severely hindered diplomatic progress.

The Lifecycles of a Crisis and the Implementation Gap

To remain relevant, IGAD must transform its ad-hoc interventions into a permanent, structured, three-phased lifecycle model that spans the pre-negotiation, negotiation, and post-negotiation periods:

- **Pre-Mediation (Early Warning):** Mediation should not begin only when combatants arrive at the table. The regional architecture requires standing mechanisms to actively monitor structural anomalies and political warning signs before they erupt into open warfare.
- **The Active Process:** A mediation table is often just a ceasefire where protagonists change their weapons from guns to verbal battles. Mediators must continuously manage intense hostility, occasionally keeping the physical tables far apart to prevent physical altercations in the room, all while active fighting continues on the battlefield.
- **Post-Mediation (The Implementation Gap):** The most critical structural flaw in contemporary mediation is that once an agreement is signed, the mediator departs, leaving implementation behind. The hostile parties are returned to the same environment with their underlying grievances unresolved on the ground, having only agreed to settle them on paper. Because the oversight institutions are composed entirely of the combatants themselves, the conflict frequently restarts from where it left off.

During the CPA negotiations, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) refused to leave any item unwritten because previous peace agreements had been systematically violated. They demanded that every detail discussed be explicitly formalized. Yet, despite the comprehensive nature of the final text, very few clauses were genuinely implemented. The only



component pursued with absolute determination was the right to self-determination, which culminated in the 2011 referendum.

The structural root causes originally identified in the 1994 Declaration of Principles (DOP) remained unaddressed throughout the CPA, re-emerged during the subsequent IGAD processes, and continue to dominate contemporary peace initiatives like the Tumaini Initiative. Three consecutive peace processes have failed to resolve the fundamental drivers of the conflict.

Sovereignty, Representation, and the Limits of Neighborly Leverage

Mediation inherently challenges state sovereignty because a comprehensive peace agreement frequently alters the constitutional order of a nation by forcing the text of the accord directly into the national constitution. This raises difficult questions regarding representation: Are the participants at the table truly representative of the nation, or are they simply the individuals brave enough to pick up weapons and violently force their way to the negotiating table?

Negotiating with an active government is exceptionally difficult because state actors consistently assert their formal status, dismissing armed opponents as mere rebels who must state their demands. This acrimony persists long after the signing ceremony, preventing the process from reaching a conclusive end. Furthermore, regional mediation is complicated by the fact that frontline states often maintain complex, zero-sum bilateral disputes with the target government, which places state sovereignty under constant strain.

Despite these challenges, proximity remains an indispensable asset. Frontline states possess significant leverage over their immediate neighbors that distant international actors cannot replicate. As shared neighbors, frontline states control the cross-border channels, transit routes, and regional points of leverage that can either sustain a regime or restrict its options.

Conclusion: Activating High-Level Political Leverage

Ultimately, IGAD is only as strong as the seven flags of its member states. The organization must harness the collective weight of its heads of state to directly confront deadlocks.

During a critical relapse in the CPA process, international donors withheld financial support because the track lacked sufficient high-level political engagement. In response, an extraordinary IGAD summit was convened, the special envoy was replaced, and intensive shadow diplomacy



was initiated among regional leaders. This direct political intervention restored momentum and brought the resolution to a successful conclusion.

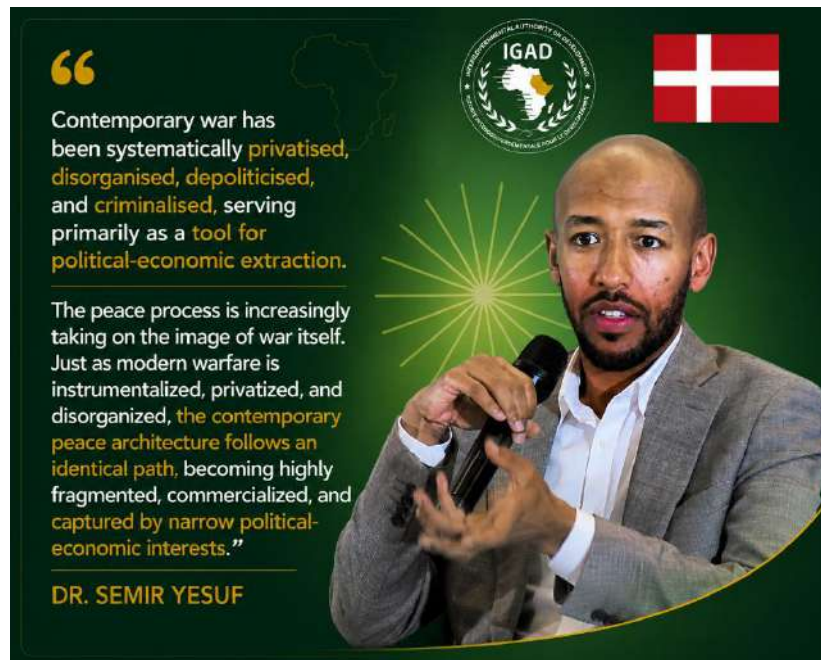
Moving forward, IGAD must cooperate closely with external hybrid actors, but it must do so strictly on its own terms, safeguarding the core strategic interests of the region and the sovereign populations involved.



57. Dr. Semir Yusuf⁵⁴: Takeaway Speaker: The Dual Paradoxes of Contemporary Peacemaking: Fragmented Systems and the Erosion of African Agency

The First Paradox: The Conflation of Mediation Drivers and Mediation Spoilers

An analytical evaluation of contemporary conflict resolution reveals a fundamental structural irony: the exact factors that necessitate international mediation are the precise elements that render it nearly impossible to execute.



The Imperative for Intervention

On one hand, the demand for structured mediation has intensified due to the changing architecture of contemporary warfare. The international system is characterized by a proliferation of high-intensity, deeply destructive, and structurally durable wars. These conflicts possess a strong tendency toward regionalization, connecting multiple geopolitical nodal points

⁵⁴ Former Head of Ethiopia Office, Rift Valley Institute; Former Senior Researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).



simultaneously and demanding external intervention to disrupt cycles of violence, particularly within the Horn of Africa.

Furthermore, this demand is amplified by a shifting international political order. The global system is no longer governed by predictable adherence to international law, multilateral institutions, or foundational norms. Major global powers have explicitly rejected the normative foundations of international order, creating a highly volatile and chaotic environment where mediation is urgently required to manage and mitigate systemic shocks.

The Inhibiting Realities

Conversely, these identical structural shifts transform mediation into an exceptionally daunting task. Both warfare and politics have lost their traditional frameworks. Modern war has been systematically privatized, disorganized, depoliticized, and criminalized, serving primarily as a tool for political-economic extraction.

The peace process is increasingly taking on the image of war itself. Just as modern warfare is instrumentalized, privatized, and disorganized, the contemporary peace architecture follows an identical path, becoming highly fragmented, commercialized, and captured by narrow political-economic interests.

This correlation presents African actors with a severe operational dilemma. Mediators are forced to navigate the tension between aspiring to return to a norm-bound world of Comprehensive Peace Agreements (CPAs) and enduring the chaotic reality of fragmented, regionalized conflicts that compel institutions to accept minimal concessions as major diplomatic achievements. Navigating this landscape requires balancing structural idealism with a clear-headed acceptance of a highly fractured operational arena.

The Second Paradox: The Structural Deficit of African Agency

The second fundamental irony centers on the concept of "African solutions for African problems." African agency is most urgently needed at this exact historical juncture, yet it is currently operating at its weakest point since the dawn of the post-colonial era.



African agency cannot be assumed to exist as a static, readily available resource. It has been severely eroded by high-intensity conflicts that have simultaneously hollowed out states and fractured civil societies.

The two vital custodians of regional agency, the sovereign state and local civic society, have suffered profound degradation within the Horn of Africa, most visibly in Sudan and Ethiopia. Frontline states have lost the baseline capacity to protect their populations and preserve domestic stability, while societies have been traumatized and deprived of their political leverage.

As classical state structures fracture, the regional political space is increasingly dominated by transactional warlords, paramilitary organizations, and armed entrepreneurs. In a landscape where the structural pillars of local authority have collapsed, invoking abstract African agency without addressing these realities becomes empty rhetoric.

Strategic Recommendations: Constructing Pragmatic Idealism

To resolve these institutional paradoxes and rebuild regional capacity from the ground up, African multilateral frameworks must implement two strategic shifts:

- **Formulate an Operational Model of Pragmatic Idealism:** The regional peace architecture must reject both detached idealism and unprincipled realism. IGAD and the African Union must develop an operational framework that preserves long-term normative aspirations, such as the reinsertion of political accountability, international law, and comprehensive settlements, while remaining tactically agile enough to operate within highly fragmented, non-linear conflict ecosystems.
- **Rebuild African Agency through the Mediation Process:** Agency should not be treated as a prerequisite for entering a negotiation; rather, the rebuilding of agency must be an explicit objective of the mediation itself. Peace tracks must be structured to systematically revitalize local state capacity and civic institutions. Through inclusive, multi-layered consultations and structural dialogues, mediation must deliberately strip power away from transacting warlords and restore it to legitimate, durable state and societal custodians.



58. Dr. Majak D'Agoot Atem⁵⁵: Takeaway Speaker: Reimagining Mediation in a Fragmented Arena: Geopolitical Shifts, Environmental Loops, and the Security Marketplace

The New World Order and the Recursive Conflict Loop

The theme of this meeting, reimagining mediation in a fragmented world, addresses a contemporary dilemma that can be described as the new world order that nobody ordered. The shift toward a sphere of chaos and unpredictability is driven by a combination of major geopolitical shifts and acute human security crises.

Pandemics and man-made calamities combine with various forms of warfare to play out in a recursive loop:

A natural disaster or calamity triggers a scarcity of critical resources, which drives populations to conflict over pastures, trade opportunities, and essential supplies. Over the last few years, these dynamics have produced massive spillover effects across all continents and regions.

In the Horn of Africa, these challenges are amplified by our strategic geography. The structural challenges of the Horn, the security of the Red Sea, and the friction surrounding hydropolitics are not new; they are historically embedded realities that different generations have lived with in this part of the continent. Today, these long-standing dynamics are simply being reimagined under new global realities.

The Externalization of Internal Crises

It is vital to understand the root causes of these shifts, recognizing that many defining events are externally generated rather than dependent on local dynamics. Even when examining the war in Sudan, many underlying causes are far removed from internal Sudanese factors.

⁵⁵ Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the African Leadership Centre (ALC) at King's College London, and Former Deputy Minister of Defence of South Sudan; Former Deputy Chief of Intelligence and Security Services. Takeaway Speaker



For example, the historical deployment of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and regular Sudanese forces in the Yemen conflict, alongside their strategic interactions with the Gulf States, created severe spillover effects. These external networks directly steered and accelerated the internal crisis in Sudan. Regional analysis must therefore focus on how internal vulnerabilities intersect with the spillover of major global and extra-regional crises.

The Political Marketplace: From Monopolization to Fragmented Security

The traditional economic drivers of civil war, such as greed, resource extraction, and deeply embedded local grievances, manifest differently within a fragmented security arena. The ideal state of nature that nations aspire to is defined by a sovereign state holding a complete monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.

When a state loses that structural monopoly, the security arena fragments rapidly. In Sudan, the collapse of state monopoly initially produced a duopoly dominated by two primary armed actors. However, if mediation is delayed, a security arena can easily degenerate from a duopoly into a hyper-fragmented, competitive political marketplace:

Allowing a conflict to stall without rapid, effective intervention permits new factions, militias, and warlords to emerge, each carving out territorial and economic enclaves. Delaying mediation directly yields a highly fragmented security landscape that is significantly more difficult to resolve.



59. Professor Samuel Kale Ewusi⁵⁶: The Currency of Strategic Leverage in African Peacemaking

The Erasure of Peace through Strength

Our institutional agency for mediation is rapidly eroding because the currency of "peace through strength" is totally absent within the contemporary African peace and security architecture. This structural deficit represents a critical vulnerability. As the wider global geopolitical environment shifts toward hard-power realities, transactional diplomacy, and militarized peacemaking, African institutions are left exposed.

Without the material resources, political leverage, or enforcement mechanisms to back our diplomatic efforts, we must critically evaluate what tools we actually have left in hand to shape outcomes and guarantee regional stability.

⁵⁶ Regional Director and United Nations University for Peace (UPEACE) and Representative to International Organizations in Africa for UPEACE. Conference Participant



60. Dr. Paul-Simon Handy⁵⁷: Takeaway Speaker: Regional Wars, Inward-Looking Hegemons, and the Bureaucracy Trap

The Peculiarities of State-Building and Regional Cooperation

The Horn of Africa is a region defined by ongoing conflict, which should be understood as a violent process of state-building. This sub-region possesses two stark historical peculiarities that set it apart from the rest of the continent:

- It is Africa's only region where territorial secession has been successfully executed.
- It ranks the highest on the continent for the number of interstate wars.

While warfare in Africa is generally internal, the Horn has experienced a surprising amount of conventional, interstate conflict. These volatile dynamics severely fracture trust and undermine basic regional cooperation, let alone regional integration, which is the ultimate end-state of cooperation. Despite these immense obstacles, there is no alternative; we must find ways to make IGAD work.

The Fading of Regional Hegemons and New Diplomatic Openings

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was originally built on the assumption that regional hegemons would carry more responsibility than other states in driving security processes forward. This model functioned relatively well during the first decade and a half of APSA's existence, but it has since faded.

Over the last six years, traditional hegemons have become increasingly inward-looking due to their own internal state-building contradictions. In the Horn, for instance, a division of labor once existed where Ethiopia assumed responsibility for regional security while Kenya drove the economy and business. The collapse of this dynamic is not unique to the Horn; it is symptomatic of hegemonic decline across most of Africa.

⁵⁷ Institute for Security Studies' Regional Director for East Africa and its Representative to the African Union in Addis Ababa.



However, this systemic shift creates a distinct opportunity for smaller countries that possess significant diplomatic clout. Hegemony does not necessarily require being the largest or most populous nation; strategic diplomatic capability can allow smaller states to step into leadership vacuums.

The Trap of Bureaucratization in Mediation Architecture

When structuring mediation, IGAD must carefully avoid the trap of big bureaucracies. Historically, the African Union's (AU) most significant mediation successes occurred when it completely lacked a dedicated, formal mediation unit. Since building a massive, formalized peace and security apparatus, the AU has struggled to properly deliver comprehensive peace agreements.

Therefore, any mediation unit established by IGAD must remain explicitly small. IGAD should not attempt to replicate the expansive bureaucratic frameworks of the United Nations or the African Union. Bureaucratizing the peace process means that institutional architecture will take precedence over individual competence and political leadership, a critical trap that IGAD must avoid.



61. Pekka Haavisto⁵⁸: The Evolution of Security Architecture, Multilateral Coalitions, and Accountability in the Horn

Maintaining Institutional Good Practices

While contemporary geopolitical shocks suggest that the entire global system has transformed, it has not altered completely. In adapting to a changing world, it remains vital to preserve and maintain established, successful institutional good practices within the mediation architect endure.

The Helsinki Process Model and the "Basket Three" Warning

The Helsinki Process is frequently cited as a baseline model for regional security architectures, and its principles can certainly be customized for the African context. However, a historical warning must accompany its replication. The original Helsinki Process contained a strategic "Trojan horse" in the form of "Basket Three," which mandated protections for the freedom of the press and civil liberties. While signatures to the accords initially believed the process would merely preserve the existing geopolitical status quo, the introduction of Basket Three led directly to the establishment of grassroots Helsinki monitoring groups across Eastern Europe. These advocacy networks systematically advanced civil rights from within, a process that ultimately contributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall. When drawing models from European diplomatic history, this transformative dynamic must be fully recognized.

The Strength of Multi-Layered Multilateral Coalitions

A point of analytical disagreement emerges regarding the evaluation of African mediation. Many observers characterize it as an institutional failure if the African Union or IGAD cannot independently manage every localized peace process. On the contrary, this dispersion of responsibility should be viewed as a structural strength.

⁵⁸ United Nations Personal Envoy for Sudan; Former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Conference Participant for the Session.



The current design of the Sudan peace process, where IGAD co-mediate alongside the United Nations, the European Union, and the League of Arab States, represents a progressive format. Sovereign, independent states naturally organize into regional blocs like the AU. Because individual multilateral organizations currently operate from positions of constrained geopolitical leverage, uniting their respective strengths, specialized knowledge, and institutional capabilities is a substantial asset rather than a liability.

External Meddling versus Internal Accountability: Looking in the Mirror

A final lesson stems from extensive engagements with Sudanese stakeholders. A persistent narrative often concludes that Sudan would be a flawless country were it not for the malicious meddling of its immediate neighbors in domestic life.

The historical reality requires an honest counter-perspective. Within the regional neighborhood, Sudan has frequently acted as a highly disruptive force. A candid assessment reveals that internal Sudanese actors have generated a significant portion of the region's instability, occupying the vast majority of IGAD's mediation activities throughout modern history. For any nation to progress toward sustainable peace, it must move past externalizing blame and look critically in the mirror to accept internal accountability.



62. Haile Menkerios⁵⁹ Ad-Hoc Mediation as a Response to Institutional Weakness and External Interference

The Breakdown of Permanent Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

The African continent is experiencing a reality where established, permanent mechanisms designed to address and resolve conflict have been weakened to the point of structural inadequacy. This baseline institutional fragility is further compounded by external interferences and competing foreign interests.

These external factors deeply complicate domestic conflicts, further eroding the coping mechanisms available to African nations and peoples. Consequently, formal multilateral institutions, such as the African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and other regional economic communities, find it exceptionally difficult to resolve crises through their standard, permanent procedures.

The Shift to Ad-Hoc Mediation

Because these permanent institutional channels have broken down or lack the capacity to address contemporary conflicts, the necessity for mediation arises. Mediation should fundamentally be understood as an ad-hoc process.

Permanent structures already exist to handle peace and security; however, it is precisely because of their current weakness and the added complications of external geopolitical meddling that ad-hoc mediation must be triggered to fill the governance vacuum.

The Imperative for Post-Agreement Implementation Mechanisms

A critical limitation of the current framework is that ad-hoc mediation alone is entirely insufficient to secure lasting peace. For a peace process to be successful, it cannot terminate at the signing

⁵⁹ Senior Advisor to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and former UN Assistant Secretary-General Political Affairs from 2007 to 2010, Head of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) from 2010 to 2011, and Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan from 2011 to 2013. Conference Participant



ceremony. The architecture must explicitly include robust, dedicated mechanisms for the follow-up and verification of implementation to ensure compliance and prevent a relapse into warfare.



63. Takeaway Speaker: Countering Strategic Self-Interest: People-Centered Mediation and the Frontier of Climate Security

The Shift from Shared Security to Transactional Self-Interest

A deeply unfortunate characteristic of the modern wave of mediation is its pervasive alignment with narrow self-interest. Historically, within the regional architecture, there was an understanding that peace in Sudan, Somalia, or Ethiopia directly equated to peace for Kenya. Regional security was viewed as an interconnected, collective good.

Today, that cooperative ethos has been replaced by individual, transactional calculations. To counter this, African institutions must be highly deliberate and strategic regarding the specific mediators chosen to sit at the negotiating table. This volatile environment offers a distinct opportunity for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU) to assert absolute ownership over peace processes and systematically influence their outcomes.

Prioritizing Multilateral Coordination and People-Centered Approaches

The most fundamental requirement for contemporary peacemaking is the urgent need to strengthen multilateral coordination while empowering African-led, people-centered mediation approaches. Conventional processes frequently prioritize elite bargains while entirely sidelining the immediate needs, interests, and desires of local populations. Integrating the aspirations of regular citizens is essential to anchoring the legitimacy of the overall process.

A stark, historical example of bringing a mediation and justice process directly down to the grassroots level, despite its inherent challenges, is the implementation of the **Gacaca courts** in Rwanda. The Gacaca model demonstrates a framework where conflict resolution and reconciliation were felt all the way down to the ground, successfully capturing the community's agency within the macro-peace architecture.

The New Frontier: Integrating Climate-Sensitive Mediation



A critical frontier that requires a significantly deeper, more robust analytical focus is the accelerating crisis of **climate stress**. Within the Horn of Africa, climate-security dynamics can no longer be treated as secondary issues; they must be integrated directly into the core of active peace processes.

The Horn of Africa is continuously plagued by severe environmental shocks, alternating between intense droughts and catastrophic flooding. These climate stresses act as direct risk multipliers, triggering immediate relapses into warfare over localized land disputes and water access.

To prevent these cyclical failures, regional organizations like IGAD must modernize their agendas to practice **climate-sensitive mediation**. This means that resource management, equitable water distribution, and climate adaptation frameworks must be designed as non-negotiable structural components inside the text of peace agreements, ensuring long-term stability in the areas most vulnerable to environmental degradation.



64. Dr. Abdalla Hamdok⁶⁰ Overcoming Multilateral Deficiencies through Regional Leadership and Aligned Global Leverage

The Value of Informal Multilateral Convening

The leadership of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is to be highly commended for organizing this assembly. This specific type of forum is extremely important because it provides a vital opportunity to move away from formal member-state meetings, which are inherently burdened by diplomatic limitations, rigid protocols, and institutional handicaps.

By stepping outside of conventional constraints, this gathering allows for a genuinely free, frank, and candid exchange of ideas. It creates a collaborative space to benefit from collective expertise in a manner that is not typically available within traditional state-centric meetings.

Sudan as the Center Stage of Regional Security

Although this conference was designed to address broader mediation frameworks across the entire IGAD region, the conflict in Sudan has naturally taken center stage. This focus is entirely justified, as Sudan represents arguably the most severe peace and security crisis on the African continent today. The analytical contributions, strategic thinking, and insights offered by the participants regarding how to systematically address and resolve this crisis are deeply valuable.

African Institutional Primacy Sustained by Aligned Global Leverage

African multilateral organizations, specifically IGAD and the African Union (AU), must decisively take the lead in resolving continental crises. It is necessary to remain clear-eyed about their structural deficiencies, operational shortcomings, and resource limitations. Despite these recognized handicaps, they remain the foundational umbrella organizations that possess the regional legitimacy required to head these processes, provided they receive structured external support.

⁶⁰ Former Prime Minister of the Republic of the Sudan. Conference Participant



Emphasizing African-led primacy does not mean denouncing or diminishing the essential contributions of international partners. In the specific context of Sudan, two primary multilateral initiatives bring significant promise and crucial external leverage to the peace process:

- **The Quad Framework:** Bringing together four key member states that possess the direct economic and political leverage required to influence the warring parties.
- **The Quintet Coalition:** Comprising five member states, which has recently demonstrated a highly promising, unified diplomatic alignment over the last few months.

Moving forward, the international community must actively build upon the consensus and foundations established during previous diplomatic efforts in Paris and London. Most notably, the Berlin process represented a significant step in the right direction. The strategic consensus forged in Berlin must be preserved, consolidated, and utilized as a baseline to move the current mediation process forward toward a sustainable political settlement.



65. Ambassador Mohamed Belaiche⁶¹ : The Strategic Triad: Principles, Ownership, and Collaborative Multilateralism

The Contemporary Paradox of the Horn

The Horn of Africa stands as a profound laboratory for regional diplomacy, continuously demonstrating both the immense promise and the severe pitfalls of African-led mediation. While local mechanisms possess unmatched proximity and cultural relevance, their effectiveness is frequently constrained by structural vulnerabilities and shifting geopolitical dynamics.

Re-Engineering the Mediation Doctrine

To navigate this complex landscape, African multilateral institutions must completely renew their operational doctrines. The current paradigm must shift from reactive, ad-hoc interventions to systematic, principle-driven frameworks. This doctrinal evolution requires the intentional integration of five core institutional pillars:

- **Strategic Ownership:** Grounding the peace process in genuine local and regional agency, ensuring outcomes are not captured by external transactional agendas.
- **Deep Inclusivity:** Structuring negotiations to move past narrow elite bargains, expanding the table to include wider social, civic, and community networks.
- **Humanitarian Primacy:** Elevating immediate civilian protection, unhindered humanitarian access, and human security as non-negotiable baselines within the active negotiating text.
- **Institutional Accountability:** Embedding clear compliance measures, verification tracking, and anti-impunity frameworks directly into the post-conflict architecture.

Cohesive Multilateralism: The Way Forward

This principle-driven approach must be reinforced by a robust model of collaborative multilateralism. Rather than allowing competing external tracks to fragment the diplomatic arena,

⁶¹ Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission and Head of the AU Liaison Office in Sudan. Conference Participant for the Session.



the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU) must act as the aligned, legitimate anchors of the process.

By unifying their institutional capabilities and coordinating with international partners from a position of strategic clarity, the AU and IGAD can shape a completely new era of mediation, one that is fundamentally proactive, operationally resilient, and capable of guiding fractured societies away from active conflict toward a durable, sustainable peace.



66. H.E. Siraj Fegessa⁶²: Closing Remarks on behalf of Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu: Transforming Consensus into Action: Closing Remarks and the Vision for an Institutionalized Annual Peace Platform

A Productive Exchange on Contemporary Mediation Realities

This highly productive and meaningful conference has provided a vital space for honest engagement regarding the acute realities confronting conflict mediation today. Over the past two days, the open exchanges and deep insights shared by distinguished participants have directly addressed the growing structural complexity of regional warfare, the fragmentation of ongoing diplomatic efforts, and the intensifying influence of extra-regional geopolitical dynamics.

Amid these challenges, the conference has successfully reaffirmed a central truth: regional mediation must become fundamentally strategic, and its systemic renewal is both necessary and fully possible.



⁶² Director of the Peace and Security Division, Former Minister of Defense Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia



Translating Dialogue into an Operational Foundation for Action

The outcomes, strategic frameworks, and recommendations generated during this conference will be of immense value in directly informing IGAD's future strategic direction. Rather than serving as an academic reflection for its own sake, this gathering has established a concrete foundation for institutional action.

The data and perspectives collected will be utilized to strengthen IGAD's internal peace and security architecture, making its mediation deployments more coherent, more effective, and significantly more responsive to the evolving, non-linear nature of conflict across the Horn of Africa and beyond. The clear task ahead is to reframe and strengthen regional mediation to ensure it remains a highly credible, enforceable tool for achieving sustainable peace.

Institutionalizing the Platform: A Commitment to Continuous Learning

To ensure that the regional architecture continuously adapts to changing security environments, the Executive Secretary has announced his intention to institutionalize this platform into an annual event.

Establishing this conference as a permanent annual fixture will ensure that IGAD, its member states, and its international partners engage in continuous learning, real-time strategy adjustment, and rigorous review of mediation doctrines.

Deep gratitude is extended to the government and the people of the Republic of Kenya for their exceptional generosity in hosting this event, as well as to the facilitators, organizers, and participants whose thoughtful commitment will now guide further action toward regional peace.