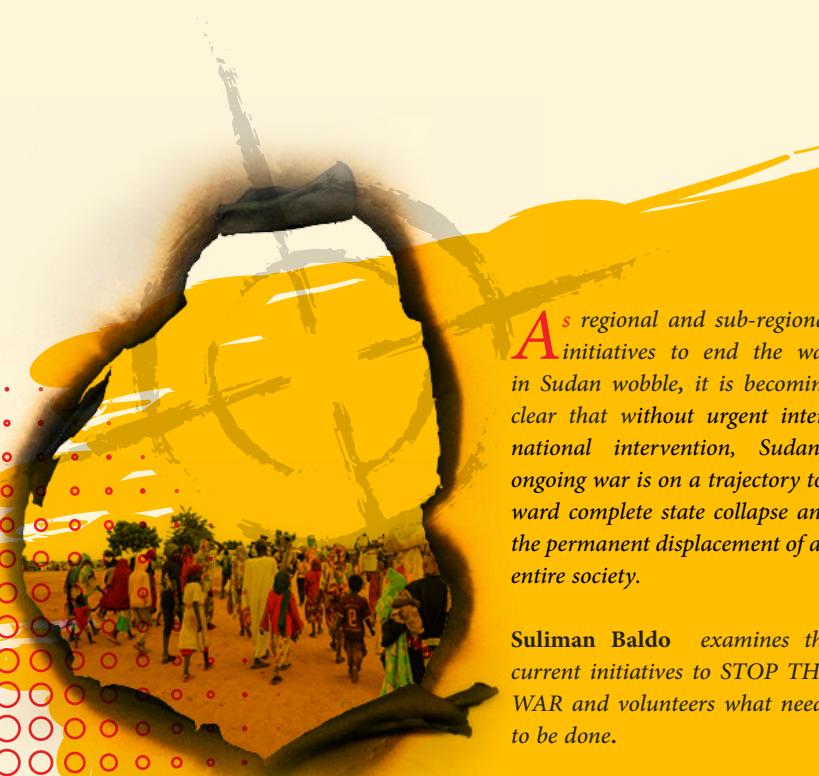


# **Current status of initiatives to stop the war in Sudan**

**Suliman Baldo**



**A**s regional and sub-regional initiatives to end the war in Sudan wobble, it is becoming clear that without urgent international intervention, Sudan's ongoing war is on a trajectory toward complete state collapse and the permanent displacement of an entire society.

**Suliman Baldo** examines the current initiatives to STOP THE WAR and volunteers what needs to be done.

Having entered its second year on April 15, 2024, the devastating war in Sudan has proven difficult to resolve despite multiple diplomatic initiatives. The lack of determined and forceful diplomatic efforts is bewildering.

The war between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has created one of the largest humanitarian and human rights crises in the world, with thousands of civilians killed, nine million forced into displacement and exile, and nearly 25 million threatened by impending famine and starvation.

This calamity notwithstanding, the international and regional diplomatic community has failed to act with the required sense of urgency and determination to end this slow motion collapse of a nation and uprooting of its people.

A key challenge explaining, but not justifying, the world's inattention to the war in Sudan is its focus on crises in Ukraine and Gaza while neglecting protracted complex conflicts in Sudan, the Eastern Congo, and the Horn and Sahel regions of Africa.

The disparity reveals a lack of the international community's political will for a more just allocation of its investments in peacemaking. When that diplomatic lethargy extends to the dramatic dispar-

ity in contributions to humanitarian operations, the dual failures should shame the world.

The primary culprits in the lack of political will to end the conflict are, however, the SAF's and the RSF's commanders, because of their repeated failures to abide by several commitments they made to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access. Instead, the warring parties laid Sudan to waste by destroying its infrastructure, attacking civilians, and using denial of access to humanitarian aid as a weapon of war.

### The Paris Conference

The approach of the first anniversary of the conflict on April 15 infused a sense of urgency to push for an end to the war and the tackling of its humanitarian consequences.

Held symbolically on April 15, the Paris Ministerial Conference rode on this wave to raise more significant pledges from the donor community for the [Joint Appeal](#) for \$4.1 billion that the UN launched on February 7 and was funded at a meager 6 per cent of the funds two months later.

Governments and organisations attending the conference pledged another \$2 billion, significantly increasing the resources available for humanitarian operations to ward off famine and starvation.

Yet, the funds raised remain insufficient and more needs to be done to contain the impending humanitarian disaster.

At the political level, the outcomes of the ministerial meeting were, at best, ambiguous. The participating governments and agencies agreed only on the need to coordinate pre-existing mediation initiatives and condemned widespread violations committed by the belligerents. International humanitarian agencies were frustrated that the conference organisers did not invite representatives of the SAF and RSF and armed movements sharing territorial control on the ground to press them into concrete engagements for the cross-border and cross-line facilitation of humanitarian operations. This left participating international NGOs in the humanitarian track concerned that their participation would add to their difficulties when demanding to work on both sides of frontlines.

Recognising that lack of consensus among civilian stakeholders constituted a serious challenge to peacemaking efforts, the Paris conference provided a venue, parallel to the humanitarian conference, for some 50 Sudanese influencers representing a broad spectrum of the Sudanese political landscape to meet and discuss the situation in their beleaguered country. These included leaders of the Coordination of Civilian Democratic Forces (known by its Arabic acronym as Taqad-

dum), the most prominent pro-democracy and anti-war coalition, alongside participants linked to political groupings opposed to the group and independent Islamist thinkers and writers. The meeting represented the first in which such a diverse group could participate to iron out their differences and agree on a consensus to end the war. While the brevity of the event did not allow such a consensus to emerge, the event represented a breakthrough in the words of several participants.

### **Jeddah and Manama Talks**

As a result of the belligerents' repeated violations of the agreements they committed to, the ceasefire talks launched in May 2023 by the United States of America and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, with the narrow aim of achieving a sustainable humanitarian ceasefire, were adjourned indefinitely in early December. However, the appointment of US Special Envoy for Sudan Tom Perriolo reinvigorated US and KSA diplomatic efforts, leading to a call to reconvene the talks in May 2024.

Apparently, in preparation for the revival of the ceasefire talks, the US-KSA facilitators took part in three undisclosed meetings held in the capital of Bahrain, Manama, in January involving Gen. Shamseldin Kabbashi, the deputy SAF commander, and Gen. Abdelrahim Dagalo, deputy RSF commander. Repre-

representatives from Egypt and the UAE, supporters of SAF and RSF respectively, also attended. These discussions led to drafting of a document titled “Principles and Foundations For A Lasting Solution for the Sudanese Crisis,” which emphasised maintaining Sudan’s unity, modernising the military, transitioning to democratic civilian governance, promoting equal citizenship, and addressing longstanding conflicts post-independence.

Additionally, the declaration called for dismantling remnants of the Bashir regime and handing over three ICC indictees - Omer Al-Bashir, the former President, along with his Defense and Interior ministers, Generals Abdelrahim M. Hussein and Ahmed Haroun - who coordinated the genocidal campaign in Darfur from 2003 to 2005.

Another significant challenge for peacemaking efforts is the sheer complexity of Sudan’s multilayered conflict, with the SAF’s decisions beholden to its Islamist allies and the SAF and the RSF drawing on deep-rooted political and ethnic tensions to reinforce their military and political positions.

As a result, following the conclusion of the last encounter in Manama in late January, Gen. Kabashi reneged on the engagements he made there shortly after his return to Sudan, reportedly under the influence of Islamist hardliners and stal-

warts of the Bashir regime who used their influence within the SAF high command to push for the reversal of the agreements that Kabashi initialed on SAF’s behalf. The US and Saudi insistence on the SAF and RSF sending delegations mandated to sign on their behalf, requiring the same level of representation as in the Manama talks, delayed the resumption of the talks from April 18 to an unspecified date in May.

### **African and other mediation initiatives**

The principle of subsidiarity observed by the international community in addressing conflicts threatening regional and global peace and stability requires sub regional and regional organisations to step in first to resolve disputes in their backyards. In the case of Sudan, the responsibility falls on the sub-regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union. In the early phases of the conflict, the AU de facto curtailed the UN from intervening in the crisis in Sudan, claiming that it should be in the lead.

The AU and the IGAD issued separate roadmaps to resolve the conflict in May and June 2023, respectively, preparing themselves to lead the political phase of peacemaking. Conceived as an “emergency diplomacy” intervention to get the SAF and RSF to agree to a ceasefire and humanitarian access, the Jeddah process initially sidelined the AU and the IGAD.

By the end of 2023, the IGAD positioned itself to lead in achieving a ceasefire and guiding the civilian-led political transition.

However, several challenges threatened to undermine IGAD's efforts and the AU's role in facilitating and supporting it in these endeavours. SAF commander Lt.-Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan agreed, during an IGAD summit in December, to meet with RSF commander Lt.-Gen. Hemeti within two weeks, to negotiate an unconditional ceasefire and kickstart the political transition. Hemeti also agreed to the same terms.

However, Sudan's foreign ministry, in which Islamists hold a strong sway, criticised the final communique of the IGAD summit and rejected it. Another challenge for IGAD was the official reception extended to Hemeti by several IGAD's heads of state and government during a regional tour in mid-December. This implicit diplomatic recognition irked the SAF and made it less likely for Burhan to agree to meet with Hemeti under IGAD's auspices. Additionally, during a meeting with Djiboutian President Ismail Guelleh on January 4, the Taqaddum civilian pro-democracy faction sought inclusion in the Burhan-Hemeti meeting, aiming to establish legitimacy as the representative of the Sudanese people in the peace process. Islamist supporters of the SAF's war efforts would reject Taqaddum and other

anti-war forces in the representation of civilians in the political process.

Since then, Burhan and other SAF commanders repeatedly affirmed their rejection of any negotiations with the RSF until the latter surrenders territories under its control to the "legitimate" government authority. For its part, the RSF is unlikely to cede any control of territories it military gained without political concessions from the SAF.

Russia's and Turkey's offers of mediation and Egypt's Sudan Neighbours initiative, launched in July, failed to generate traction because the RSF declined to cooperate with any.

### **United Nations roles**

These developments reduced the UN to an observer's seat in ongoing peace efforts, a position into which the SAF authorities forced the UN when Sudan unilaterally terminated the UN political mission in December. The UN Secretary-General's appointment of a personal envoy, with a limited mandate of reporting to his office rather than to the UN Security Council, may, on the other hand, offer the Personal Envoy and his boss more freedom to interact with and officially play a role in coordinating ongoing peace efforts. Meanwhile, the UN and its humanitarian agencies continue to play leading roles in coordinating and implementing the large-scale humanitarian

interventions needed to provide a lifeline to the millions of war victims in Sudan.

### **Factors likely to reinvigorate peace efforts**

The ongoing conflict has been draining the considerable financial resources amassed by the warring factions over the decades, diminishing their capacity to sustain their military campaigns.

Adding to the economic pressures on the SAF and RSF is the growing set of international financial and individual sanctions that the US, the EU, and the UK have imposed on their largest corporations and their respective leaders for pushing forward with the war or overseeing egregious violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws.

This weakness could compel both sides to come to the negotiation table. Countering this logic, as the conflict persists, there's a growing likelihood that regional powers, such as the UAE's support for the RSF and suspected Egyptian air assistance to the SAF, will intensify the backing of their respective allies, offsetting the depletion of their resources. Only under significant and coordinated economic pressures targeting the wealth accumulated during the three decades of kleptocratic rule under ousted President Omer al-Bashir, would the parties consider relinquishing control of the post-war political landscape to civilians. The

international community should apply similar maximum pressures on regional powers already involved in supporting their preferred factions in Sudan's devastating conflict.

Without intervention, Sudan's ongoing war is on a trajectory toward complete state collapse and the permanent displacement of an entire society whose democratic aspirations were stifled by the ruthless military entities now vying for dominance over the nation's future. The RSF and the SAF have proven unfit for such a role. Instead, the international community should actively back the peaceful movement for democracy and a state governed by justice and the rule of law, led by civic forces, and ensure its success.

The pressing need for increased international intervention to halt the Sudanese conflict should stem from the evident reality that besides displacing millions of Sudanese into exile and famine-stricken conditions, the war also risks significantly jeopardising the stability and security of neighbouring nations.

War in Sudan recently led to the interruption of South Sudanese oil exports, the primary source of revenue for the impoverished and fragile state, risking to throw it into further turmoil and violence.

Fighters from Chad and Niger join the RSF ranks by ethnic solidarity and by making quick wealth from looted items from RSF-held areas. Their return could trigger serious destabilisation and conflicts in their original countries, similar to what happened when Tawareq fighters of the Ghadaffi Brigades returned to

Mali from Libya. Increasing incidents of cross-border violence are threatening the transition in Chad. We hope that acknowledging these regional risks will finally resonate within the international community, prompting more vigorous peacemaking efforts than we have seen.



***Sudan in Perspective***

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