7. Elite Bargains and the Structural Impediments to Comprehensive Peace in South Sudan (2011–2025)

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Abstract

The paper discusses conflict management in South Sudan since independence in 2011 to 2025, by evaluating the interplay of historical grievances, political rivalry, ethnic mobilization, and economic forces that have sustained violence in the youngest country in Africa. It demonstrates how the attempts at managing conflict based on elite power-sharing deals such as the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), the 2018 Revitalized Agreement (R-ARCSS), and the ongoing Tumaini Initiative have been effective in providing temporary relief of large-scale violence, but have failed systematically to combat structural factors behind the conflict such as governance deficits, personalized political authority, systemized corruption, and lack of transitional justice systems. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has shown the potential and constraint of African solutions to African problems, with diplomatic activity but grappling with fragmentation, conflicting member states, and inadequate enforcement capabilities. International intervention, especially the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), have offered the much-needed humanitarian security and diplomatic aid but are limited by sovereignty issues, limited resources, and the basic dilemma of securing civilians when violence is committed by host governments. The humanitarian disaster, 9 million-granted-aid patients, 7.7-acute-food insecurity patients, and more than 4.4 million displaced residents indicate the human price of political failures and the necessity of a more effective strategy. The paper outlines five major obstacles to sustainable peace, including; political stasis typified by elite intransigence and transition fatigue typified by frequent electoral delays; security sector failure

characterized by non-integrated ethnically-organized militias loyal to one commander instead of the state; economic collapse in the form of oil dependence intensified by the 2023 civil war in Sudan, which has broken export routes; humanitarian disaster which creates a state of permanent crisis; and institutional failures associated with transitional justice institutions that exist only on paper after almost ten years since the first deals. The study establishes that the conflict in South Sudan is really about governance, who governs, the way power is wielded and whether state institutions exist to serve people or to exploit them; and not primarily ethnic animosities. To establish and maintain sustainable peace, it is necessary to go beyond elite bargains to actual institutional changes such as security sector reforms, transitional justice implementation, economic, and non-economic diversification, inclusive institutions of governance, and nation-building programs that cut across ethnic lines. This research adds to the academic discussion of regionalized peace mediation, the efficacy of power-sharing arrangement, and post-conflict state-building in Africa. It also offers evidence-based policy suggestions to practitioners working in conflict management. The case of South Sudan is not only a caution of how so easily independence dreams turn into bloodshed when the state apparatus is inefficient but also a lesson as to how with patience, the dream of peace can remain alive in the hearts of citizens even after years of deception and devastation. This study is not only applicable to just South Sudan but also to debates about sustainable peace in the fragile states of Africa as well.

Keywords: South Sudan conflict, Elite power-sharing, Governance failure, Regional mediation (IGAD), Sustainable peacebuilding

1. Introduction

South Sudan is a paradox of modern African politics. On July 9, 2011, it became the 54th nation of Africa and the youngest state in the world born amidst a wave of international optimism only to fall to a

crippling civil war barely two years after gaining independence.[1] What was heralded as a success in self-determination and a successful end to one of the longest liberation struggles in Africa has turned out to be among the most difficult issues of conflict management that the continent has ever experienced. The history of the nation since the blissful independence to the blood-thirsty civil conflict brings to light the intricate relationship between the former grievances of the past, the ethnic lines, the struggle to control resources, and the ineffective systems of institutions that are the hallmark of most African states in the post-conflict period. Today, South Sudan is continuing with a very uncertain status of a transitional period with the length of its peace process being prolonged multiple times and its democratic election being constantly postponed as of October 2025.[2]

The challenges of the South Sudan conflict go well beyond its boundaries. The crisis has caused one of the largest humanitarian disasters in the world, where about 7.7 million people are in acute food insecurity and more than four million displaced.[3] The ripple effects of the conflict have led to destabilization of the larger East African region, which places a strain on the neighboring countries due to influx of the huge numbers of refugees and the dynamics of security in the region. In addition, South Sudan is a highly experimental case with regard to the modern conflict management strategies in Africa as the regional bodies such as Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and African Union have been taking the lead in the issue of peace mediation with the backing of international community including the United Nations and western powers.

Since the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed in September 2018 and unity government was established in February 2020, the

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[1] Baldoumas, Abigael, Anila Noor, Duncan Knox, Fionna Smyth, Helen Kezie-Nwoha, Maria Alabdeh, and Marie Sophie Pettersson. "Beyond Rhetoric: Feminist leadership for a transformative Women, Peace and Security agenda at 25-Case studies from Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and South Sudan." (2025).

[2] Aubeelack, Anusha Sheila. "Customs, Courts, and Conflict: Strengthening the Legal System in South Sudan." (2025).

[3] https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16146.doc.htm

sustainable peace is still to be achieved.[4] The transition has been postponed several times; the last time it was postponed in September 2024, pushing the elections to December 2026 due to continued violence, partial application of essential peace conditions, and the ever-growing lack of trust of political elites.[5] The most recent tensions in March 2025, which were associated with the conflicts between the government and opposition, have also sounded warning bells about the possibility of a full-scale civil war once again, and the UN Commission on Human Rights has cautioned the country that it is on a slippery slope.[6]

This paper contends that the structural inefficiencies of elite power-sharing arrangements have essentially limited conflict management in South Sudan by focusing more on political accommodation than actual transformation of the underlying causes of the conflict. Although the R-ARCSS and its predecessors have managed to get warring parties at the negotiation table and set up ceasefire formats, they have not done well in confronting the underlying pathologies of governance, accountability, and national identity that contribute to recurrent violence. The tenacity of personalized political power, instrumentalization of ethnic identities, systematic corruption and lack of a strong transitional justice systems constantly hamper any chances of a sustainable peace.

2. Methodological Approaches and Theoretical Grounding

This paper is an analysis of conflict management initiatives in South Sudan since the independence of this nation in 2011 up to October 2025, with special focus on those that took place after the eruption of civil war in 2013. The study employs a multi-dimensional analytical approach that examines the political,

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[4] Joshi, Madhav. "Revitalizing Towards Peace or Relapsing Into Chaos? Implementation of South Sudan's 2018 Agreement and the Upcoming Elections." (2024).

[5] Özoflu, Melek Aylin. "Navigating Fragility: Unraveling Intergroup Relations in South Sudan's Peace-Building Process." *Journal of Humanity, Peace and Justice* 1, no. 1 (2024): 37-48.

[6] Morrison, Chas, Haji Elias Hillary, and Diria Vicky Thomas. "Cultures and practices of local civilian self-protection in South Sudan." *Peacebuilding* (2025): 1-13.

economic, social, and institutional dynamics that contribute to the conflict and the many mechanisms utilised to control it at the local, national, regional, and international levels.

The methodology of this research is a qualitative case study which uses several sources of evidence to build up a holistic analysis of the conflict management in South Sudan. The research is based on document analysis, discussing peace agreements, United Nations reports (including Security Council briefings, UNMISS reports, and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs evaluations), African Union and IGAD documents, reports of the international non-governmental organizations (Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, etc.), and scientific articles of 2018-2025. This timeframe has been used to make sure that the analysis has been based on recent developments and also has been analytical.

The study utilized a process-tracing design to study the evolution of conflict management interventions over time and how particular policies are causally related to the observed outcomes. The triangulation of data presented by various sources should help the study address possible biases that individual reports possess and come up with a comprehensive ground-level picture of successes and failures of the peace process in South Sudan. The theoretical frameworks of peace and conflict studies explored in the analysis are enhanced by the literature on power-sharing arrangements, transitional justice, and post-conflict state-building in Africa.

Relying on the conflict transformation theory this paper makes significant contributions to the academic and policy discussion of conflict management. On one hand the provides critical reflections of the effectiveness of regionalized peace mediation especially that of IGAD as the main mediator a template that is increasingly being advanced to African conflicts in the principle of African solutions to African problems. In addition, the paper analyzes the practical implementation of inclusive peace deals that include international best practices in terms of power-sharing, security sector reform and transitional justice and therefore, this offers empirical data on what works and what does not work in post-conflict environments.

Considering the heavy presence of international resources in the peace process of South Sudan through the deployment of UN peacekeepers, billions of dollars in humanitarian aid, and the

widespread involvement of diplomats in the understanding of what can facilitate or hinder the progress, it is necessary to ensure that such intervention in the future can be even more effective through more effective research on the relationships between factors that facilitate or hamper progress.

3. An Overview of the South Sudan Conflict

3.1 The Colonial Legacy and First Civil War (1899-1972)

The origin of the modern conflict of South Sudan is firmly rooted in the colonial policies of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1956) that institutionalized an intense geographical, economic, and cultural division between the north and the south of Sudan. The British colonial rulers had followed what came to be called the Southern Policy, a calculated policy of administrative segregation that isolated, in an administrative sense, the administration of the mostly African and non-Muslim south, and the Arab-Islamic north.[7] This policy was reflected in unequal educational facilities; the government schools were provided in the north and the missionaries were assigned the responsibility of education in the south; and unequal economic investment, which localized development in the north and ignored the south, and language policies that encouraged the use of Arabic and English in the north and local languages and romanized Arabic in the missionary schools in the south.[8] The aftermath of such colonial maneuvers was not only asymmetry in development but the establishment of two different political communities with different orientations: northern elites, who were oriented at Arab and Islamic civilization, and southern people, oriented more and more at sub-Saharan African identities and Western Christianity. When Britain suddenly changed its Southern Policy in 1947, quickly incorporating the south into a unified Sudanese administrative unit in anticipation of independence, Britain left a

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[7] Lin, David. "The Role of British Colonial Policy in the South Sudanese Civil War: A Postcolonial Conflict Analysis (2018)." (2018).

[8] Seri-Hersch, Iris. "Education in colonial Sudan, 1900–1957." *Oxford research encyclopaedia of African history* (2017).

legacy of institutionalized inequality and suspicion toward each other in the nascent Sudanese state that would turn out to be disastrous.[9]

This legacy of colonialism resulted in the First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972), which erupted with the Torit Mutiny of August 1955;a military uprising by soldiers of the south against their inevitable overthrow by northern officers just months before the official independence of Sudan in January 1956.[10]What started as a military mutiny quickly spread to a protracted uprising as the southern soldiers fled into the bush with their arms and eventually coalesced into the Anya-Nya guerrilla movement.[11] The war that had taken the lives of between 500,000 and one million people in a period of seventeen years was rooted in political representation, cultural freedom and economic fairness with the southern Sudanese opposing what they saw as northern Arab domination and the foisting of Islamic culture.[12] The war was finally resolved with the Addis Ababa Agreement of February 1972, mediated by Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and facilitated by the World Council of Churches, which gave the south regional autonomy by creating the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region that had its own legislature, executive council and integrated Anya-Nya forces into the national military structure.[13] Although celebrated as a breakthrough in international efforts to bring civil unrest in Africa to a close; the first negotiated cessation of a post-colonial African civil war; the Addis Ababa Agreement was not devoid of structural flaws. It could not answer the underlying resource allocation questions especially relating to the oil revenues found in the southern region, and only offered partial autonomy and not the federal system many southern leaders had theorized, thus sprouting the seeds of future conflict.[14]

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[9] Sharkey, Heather J. *Living with colonialism: Nationalism and culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*. Vol. 3. Univ of California Press, 2003.

[10] accessed October 22, 2025, https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/first-sudanese-civil-war-erupts.

[11] Momodu, Samuel. "First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972)." *BlackPast. org* (2020).

[12] Johnson, Douglas Hamilton. *The root causes of Sudan's civil wars*. Indiana University Press, 2003.

[13] Stevens, Richard P. "The 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement and the Sudan's Afro-Arab Policy." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 14, no. 2 (1976): 247-274.

[14] Kuol, Luka Biong D. "South Sudan: the elusive quest for a resilient social contract?." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 14, no. 1 (2020): 64-83.

3.2 The Second Civil War and Path to Independence (1983-2005)

The precarious peace that had been settled by the Addis Ababa Agreement collapsed, in a spectacle, in the year 1983, when President Jaafar Nimeiri, who was then facing political difficulties in the north and had become dependent on Islamist support, decided to abrogate some of the main points of the accord. In September 1983, Nimeiri issued the infamous September Laws which declared the existence of Sharia (Islamic law) in the whole country, even in the non-Muslim south, and also restructured the autonomous southern region into three distinct provinces effectively breaking down the institutional structure that had ensured the south-maintained self-governance. These moves did not only signify changes in policy but a factual existential challenge to southern identity and political ambitions and sparked off what would mark the longest civil war in African history.[15] The Second Sudanese Civil War was formally declared in May 1983 as a mutiny of the 105th Battalion (then based at Bor) led by a southern officer, colonel John Garang de Mabior, who had studied agricultural economics at Iowa State University, proclaimed the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and its political wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).[16]His idea of a New Sudan was not a mere secession, but the restructuring of the state so as to produce a secular, democratic, This wider revolutionary agenda contrasted with a more localised southern nationalism of the Anya-Nya, but it would later become controversial in the south itself, where many had simple ambitions of out-right independence as opposed to revised unity.

The Second Civil War was disastrously prolonged, taking an estimated two million lives and displacing more than four million people with twenty-two years of intermittent but brutal conflict between the Derg regime and the SPLA, which, despite its defeat, left the country in disarray as different groups started feasting on each other after Mengistu was ousted in 1991.[17] The Comprehensive Peace

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[15] Tekle, Dawit Yemane. "What factors contributed to the failure of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, 1972." Master's thesis, 2015.

[16] Boal, Iain A. *Afflicted powers: Capital and spectacle in a new age of war*. Verso, 2005.

[17] DeRouen Jr, Karl, and Uk Heo, eds. *Civil Wars of the World: Major Conflicts Since World War II [2 Volumes]*.

Agreement (CPA) signed on January 9, 2005, following years of negotiation under the arbiter of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), was a landmark of diplomacy that brokered share of power at national level, with Garang as First Vice President; sharing of wealth in oil revenues; withdrawal of forces across the border, and most importantly, the southern self-determination referendum that was to be held after six years of an interim government.[18] The interim period (2005-2011) under the successor of Garang, Salva Kiir Mayardit, saw a slow movement out of the ambitious state-building provisions of the CPA toward separation preparations, which led to the January 2011 referendum in which 98.83 percent of the southern Sudanese residents voted to secede.[19]

3.3 Independence and the Seeds of Internal Conflict (2011-2013)

The Second Civil War was ruinously long lasting with an estimated toll of two million lives lost and a figure of more than four million displaced amid twenty two years of sporadic yet fierce fighting.[20] The course of the conflict was deeply influenced by the regional and international relations: As Ethiopia offered essential protection and assistance to the SPLA, the declaration of independence by Mengistu Haile South Sudan on July 9, 2011, was met with ecstatic celebrations throughout the new territory and a wave of international goodwill the country was officially admitted to the United Nations on July 14 and the African Union on July 27, 2011.[21] The government of President Salva Kiir Mayardit inherited a strong international presence, including a strong United Nations peacekeeping mission (UNMISS), major development aid provided by western powers and diplomatic support of regional powers. The euphoria

Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2007.

[18] Young, John. *The fate of Sudan: The origins and consequences of a flawed peace process*. Zed Books Ltd., 2012.

[19] Wolpe, H., and R. Oakley. "Implementing Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement,,,." *Prospects and challenges* (2008): 14.

[20] Raisa, Nuzhat Tasnim Rahman. "Democracy Vs Conflict: An Investigation inside Post-Conflict Reconstruction in South Sudan and Libya." *African Journal of Democracy and Election Research* 5, no. 1 (2025): 25.

[21] De Waal, Alex. "When kleptocracy becomes insolvent: Brute causes of the civil war in South Sudan." *African Affairs* 113, no. 452 (2014): 347-369.

over independence, however, blossomed over deep structural weaknesses and unsettled scores that would turn out to be fatal in the near future. The new state faced monumental challenges: it was one of the least developed countries worldwide with little infrastructure with less than 100 kilometers of paved roads serving an area the size of France; literacy rates below 30 percent, and a government that was virtually entirely reliant on oil revenue and was piped through Khartoum, creating dangerous economic interdependence with the Khartoum government.[22] The SPLM: a liberation movement that had been developed through decades of guerrilla warfare found it difficult to convert itself into a democratic governing party able to make services and manage ethnic diversity.

The South Sudan civil war after independence was sown with unresolved grievances, both among the SPLM itself and its inability to create inclusive, democratic governance institutions. The history of the SPLM was not that of a unified movement, but one of diverse constituencies whose interests often clashed: Dinka communities, which constituted the numerical and political heart of the movement; Nuer populations, whose manpower in war favored the movement but who often felt they had been marginalized in making decisions; and Equatorians, who resented the fact that the two larger ethnic groups were getting all the attention.[23] In July, 2013, Kiir fired his entire cabinet, including Vice President Riek Machar;a move that took the whole country by storm and was largely viewed as a preemptive move against his perceived opponents within the SPLM. Their removal added to divisions among factions that erupted into open outright violence on December 15, 2013, when a targeted program of killing of Nuer civilians occurred in Juba and massacres broke out against both sides of the conflict, quickly assuming ethnic overtones. The terrible irony of the South Sudanese experience of liberation to fratricidal war in the space of fewer than thirty months of statehood highlights the sheer

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[22] Rolandsen, Øystein H. *Guerrilla government: political changes in the southern Sudan during the 1990s*. Nordic Africa Institute, 2005.

[23] Baldoumas, Abigael, Anila Noor, Duncan Knox, Fionna Smyth, Helen Kezie-Nwoha, Maria Alabdeh, and Marie Sophie Pettersson. "Beyond Rhetoric: Feminist leadership for a transformative Women, Peace and Security agenda at 25-Case studies from Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and South Sudan." (2025).

difficulties of post-conflict state-building when liberation movements effectively seize political space and ethnic identities are easily turned into weapons by rival elites.

4. Nature and Dynamics of the South Sudan Conflict

4.1 Key Drivers of the Conflict

The civil war in South Sudan is a wired interaction between the political, ethnic, economical, and regional factors that, in turn, support each other and contribute to the cyclical repetition of violence. Fundamentally, there is an underlying crisis of governance that is marked by a low rate of institutionalization and the personalization of state power. The war was not due to primordial ethnic hatreds but rather elite political competition that played the cards of ethnicity as a way of rallying support and consolidating power.[24]

Although the ethnic aspects of the war are admittedly relevant, they should be seen as the results rather than the cause of political manipulations by the elite. According to de Waal, ethnicization of violence was rapidly bound up as the fighting broke out in December 2013, and the ethnicization was based not on tribal antagonisms but upon the structural realities of South Sudanese military forces, which, notably, found themselves organized along ethnic lines with loyalties to individual commanders and not to a professional national institution.[25] This pattern of elite politics meant that what had initially been seen as an intra-elite power game of distributing patronage gave way to an ethnic genocide, though, which is why so much of the literature has yet to uncover just how easy and cheap ethnic mobilization could be.

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[24] De Waal, Alex. "When kleptocracy becomes insolvent: Brute causes of the civil war in South Sudan." *African Affairs* 113, no. 452 (2014): 347-369.
[25] De Waal, Alex. "Understanding the roots of conflict in South Sudan." *Interview by Katherine Noel. Council on Foreign Relations. September. https://www. cfr. org/interview/understanding-roots-conflict-southsudan* (2016).

These political and ethnic dynamics are reinforced by economic factors, which form a strong incentive to keep up violence. This complete reliance on the oil wealth practically made South Sudan a kind of kleptocratic state, in which the big tent methodology of South Sudanese President Kiir to uphold political stability by soliciting bribes of oil rents had become debtor to its own trap when oil prices dropped and production failed. Competition is not limited to oil but includes land conflicts, cattle raiding that has been politicized throughout the war, and dominance of humanitarian resources that are a major economic pipeline in a nation where international aid is a great percentage of GDP.
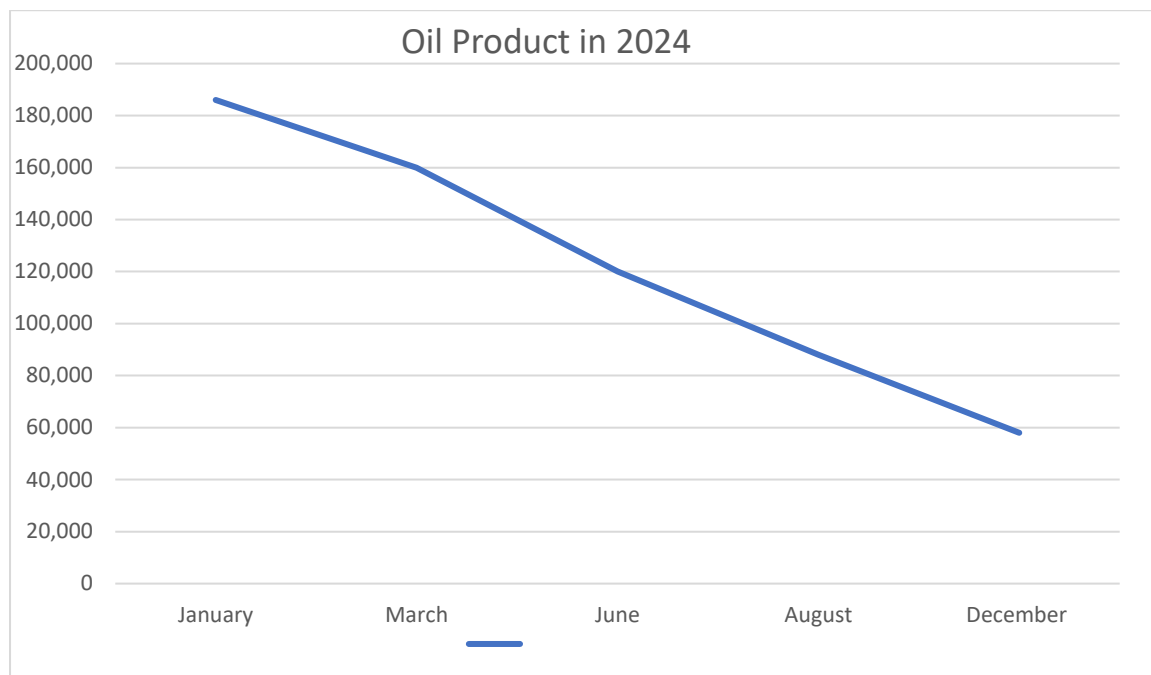

Figure 1: South Sudan Oil Production & Revenue Crisis (2024 alone)

Source: OPEC Annual Report(2024)

The conflict in South Sudan is also complicated by regional dynamics, which turn it into an element of a wider East African security dilemma, as opposed to an entirely domestic one. The relationship between Sudan and South Sudan has been characterized by cooperation and antagonism, but in 2013-2014, the South Sudanese government was on the verge of collapse as Khartoum supported the opposition against Juba to pressure the latter over oil transit fees, but the intervention of IGAD helped to regionalize the conflict. The South Sudanese civil war that erupted in April 2023 has had an impact that is far-reaching across the region, disrupting oil export, cutting government revenues by two-thirds, and

leading to an outflow of more than 900,000 refugees and returnees and the concern that the conflict may spread to other nations.[26]

4.2 Impact of the Conflict

The humanitarian disaster caused by the civil war in South Sudan is one of the most disastrous crises of the twenty-first century, the outcomes of which go far beyond the number of casualties to include the annihilation of the social fabric, economic ruin, and generation trauma. Although no exact death tolls exist because of limited access and the inadequacy of the data collection infrastructure, there are credible estimates of up to 400,000 to 500,000 deaths directly or indirectly as a result of the conflict since December 2013, with far more lives lost to hunger and disease than to bullets and bombs.[27]

Displacement is arguably the most apparent effect of the conflict, as South Sudan is dealt with one of the most significant forced migration crises in the world. By 2025, more than 2.3 million South Sudanese are internally displaced even within the country, with another 2.2 million becoming refugees to their neighbors in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Additionally, there is an influx of more than 900,000 refugees and returnees, which caused a conflict in South Sudan in 2023, and in this situation overcrowded transit centers have little access to food, water, and sanitation.

1. Category	2. Number	3. Source/Year
4. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)	5. 2.3 million	6. UNHCR, 2025
7. South Sudanese Refugees (Regional)	8. 2.3 million	9. UNHCR, 2025

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[26] Khaled, Abu Faisal Md, and Dennis Dijkzeul. "Advancing Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Programming and Coordination in South Sudan."
[27] "Study of Internal Conflict (SOIC) Case Studies: South Sudan Civil War 2013–Present," U.S. Department of Defense, March 2024,

10. Refugees/Returnees from Sudan Crisis	11. 900,000+	12. OCHA, 2023-2025
13. Population Dependent on Humanitarian Aid	14. 9 million (75%)	15. OCHA, 2025
16. People Facing Acute Food Insecurity	17. 7.7 million	18. World Vision, 2025

Table 1: South Sudan Forced Displacement Overview (2024-2025)

Source:UNHCR (2025); World Vision (2025); OCHA (2023-2025)

Food insecurity has become catastrophic with a total of 7.7 million, of almost two-thirds the South Sudanese population, expected to experience crisis-level food insecurity or worse in the period between April and July 2025 due to the combined effects of conflict-induced agricultural disruption, both severe flooding and drought, economic collapse, and diminished humanitarian access.[28] There is also a significant rate of malnutrition with more than 2.1 million individuals at risk of acute malnutrition in 2025 where the disease has spread across 17 out of 18 states of South Sudan, killing more than 700 individuals by early 2025 including more than 2.3 million children under five years of age who are severely wasting and developing.[29]

5. Conflict Management Mechanisms

The management of South Sudan's conflict has involved a multiplicity of actors operating at regional, continental, and international levels, each bringing distinct mandates, capacities, and political interests

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[28] Gichuki, Deborah Wangechi. "Regional Organizations and Conflict Intervention in Africa: Case of Inter-Governmental Authority for Development in South Sudan, 2011-2022." PhD diss., Kenyatta University, 2025.

[29] Menwa, Mohammed. "Algorithm and Altruism: Digital Mutual Aid Network as a Community Led Humanitarian Infrastructure: Case Study Of Mutual Aid in Sudan's Conflict (2023-2025)." (2025).

to bear on the crisis. This section examines the principal conflict management mechanisms deployed since December 2013, evaluating their structural configurations, operational modalities, and relative effectiveness in containing violence and advancing peace. The analysis reveals a detailed institutional landscape characterized by overlapping mandates, competing regional interests, and persistent challenges in translating negotiated agreements into durable peace.

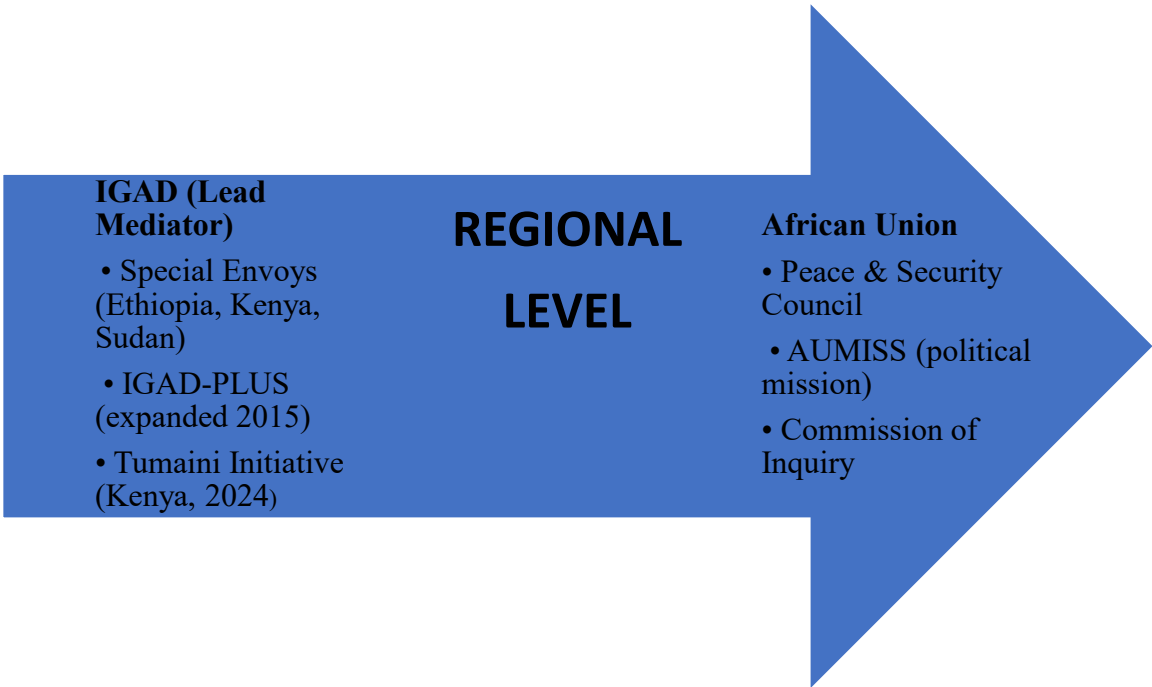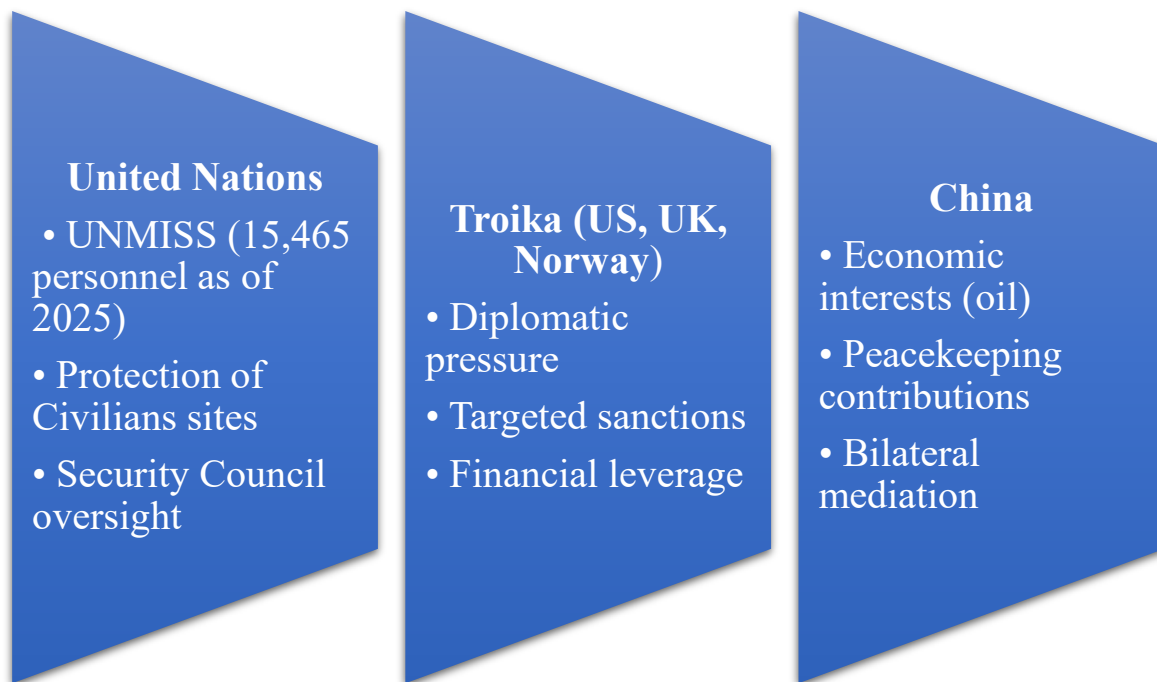**REGIONAL**   **LEVEL**

IGAD (Lead Mediator)
• Special Envoys (Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan)
• IGAD-PLUS (expanded 2015)
• Tumaini Initiative (Kenya, 2024)

REGIONAL LEVEL

African Union
• Peace & Security Council
• AUMISS (political mission)
• Commission of Inquiry

Figure 2&3: Institutional Architecture for South Sudan Conflict Management International Level (created by the authors)

United Nations
- UNMISS (15,465 personnel as of 2025)
- Protection of Civilians sites
- Security Council oversight

Troika (US, UK, Norway)
- Diplomatic pressure
- Targeted sanctions
- Financial leverage

China
- Economic interests (oil)
- Peacekeeping contributions
- Bilateral mediation

5.1 Regional Initiatives

5.1.1The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

Since the conflict broke out in South Sudan, IGAD has been the key broker of the conflict because of its adherence to the principle of African solutions to African problems, which has gradually become the guiding principle in conflict management on the continent. [30] IGAD has been undergoing a transformation in its mission since its foundation, which was based on the following considerations: the institutional memory of mediating the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that established the independent state of South Sudan, the regional legitimacy, and the need to ensure that the African conflicts are kept within the African institutions.[31]

The mediation architecture of South Sudan by IGAD has progressed over the years in terms of its adaptive capacity as well as structural tensions.[32] The first move, however, proved challenging since

[30] Gichuki, Deborah Wangechi. "Regional Organizations and Conflict Intervention in Africa: Case of Inter-Governmental Authority for Development in South Sudan, 2011-2022." PhD diss., Kenyatta University, 2025.

[31] Sudan, South. "Keeping Faith with the IGAD Peace Process." *International Crisis Group (ICG)* (2015).

[32] International Crisis Group. *South Sudan: Keeping Faith with the IGAD Peace Process*. International Crisis Group, 2022.

Uganda intervened militarily on behalf of the Kiir government and competing prescriptions of member states, with Ethiopia seeking hegemony in the region and Kenya and Sudan exploring bilateral relations with South Sudan factions. Another problem that aggravated mediation was the increasing centralization of decision making in the hands of the heads of state, as individual powers sought direct access to the parties in South Sudan, forcing the special envoys to the margins, and creating numerous parallel negotiation channels.[33]

Likewise, academic evaluation of the performance of IGAD in mediation indicates that there is a deep ambivalence.[34] The advocates underline that IGAD has the benefit of convening at short notice, is contextually aware of South Sudanese politics, and that its mediation has been effective in ensuring that the parties appear to make peace, irrespective of the fact that their interests are competing.[35]

The continued division of IGAD efforts in terms of mediation is a critical challenge. In March 2025, IGAD, through its Office of the Special Envoy to South Sudan tried to bring together the two tracks, giving a Ministerial Sub-Committee to review modalities of inclusive dialogue based on both the R-ARCSS and Tumaini successes, but failed when the SPLM-IO and civil society coalitions were stalled by a crisis rooted in South Sudanese politics and Ethiopian and Kenyan domestic challenges respectively.[36]

5.1.2 African Union Engagement

The African Union has also been more peripheral but symbolically important in South Sudan conflict management, which is mostly by political monitors than mediators.[37] The AU Peace and Security

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[33] International Crisis Group. *South Sudan: Keeping Faith with the IGAD Peace Process*. International Crisis Group, 2022.
[34] https://theglobalobservatory.org/2025/07/beyond-elite-bargains-the-legacy-and-future-of-igads-mediation-in-south-sudan/
[35] Magara, Ibrahim Sakawa. "South Sudan and IGAD." In *Redefining Peace in a Shifting World: IGAD, South Sudan, and the New African Security Paradigm*, pp. 77-113. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025.
[36] https://igad.int/communique-of-the-43rd-extraordinary-summit-of-igad-heads-of-state-and-government-on-the-situation-in-the-republic-of-south-sudan/
[37] Haileyesus, Elshaddai Mesfin. "The Role of IGAD's Hegemons in the South Sudan Peace Talks." PhD diss., Addis Ababa University, 2016.

Council has also held numerous meetings to discuss the crisis with the release of communiques denouncing violence and a demand to adhere to peace agreements. In March 2025, the PSC called on collaborative mediation following increased violence, and it prioritized the collaboration with IGAD, the United Nations, and the international community, although it did not directly deploy its mediation framework.[38] The initial steps of the conflict were marked by numerous documented atrocities, which were recorded by the AU Commission of Inquiry and suggested accountability mechanisms, including the creation of a Hybrid Court in South Sudan to prosecute the individuals who committed the most significant number of crimes and the crimes against humanity.

A case in point of the supportive but subsidiary role of the African Union is the African Union Mission in South Sudan (AUMISS) which was not a military peacekeeping force but a political mission.[39] AUMISS operates under a primary triadic model of coordination with IGAD and UNMISS, releasing joint statements that promote the advancement of the R-ARCSS implementation, encourage the dialogue between parties and demand the accomplishment of transitional tasks.[40] This trilateral partnership has also highlighted 2025 as a " decisive year to achieve unmet benchmarks and prepare now ahead of elections due in December 2026, but AUMISS still has limited resources, limited presence in the field, and depends on moral suasion and not enforcement capacity. According to scholarly analysis, when the AU contributes as a supportive and not a lead actor in missions, as has been the case with South Sudan, its visibility and operational impact is peripheral to a substantive work in IGAD structures and UN structures.[41]

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[38] Dakuyo, Aboubacar. "Defining human rights in the socio-cultural and political context of South Sudan: how to move towards the assertion of full human rights in line with international law?." *The International Journal of Human Rights* (2025): 1-27.

[39] Gemechu, Degefe Kebede. "Political and Social Conflicts in South Sudan: The Post-Independence Challenges." *Journal of Modern Science* 51, no. 2 (2023): 236-254.

[40] https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/joint-communique-aumiss-igad-and-unmiss-highlight-2025-year-of-opportunity-tangible-progress-south

[41] Augustine Ejembi Ocheja, "Transferring Policy: The African Union's Protection of Civilians Policy in Peacekeeping Missions in Somalia and South Sudan," ReliefWeb, 2022,

5.2 International Mechanisms

5.2.1 United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

UNMISS is the largest international commitment to the management of conflict in South Sudan and is one of the largest and most expensive peacekeeping missions undertaken by the UN.[42] Most recently as of February 2022, there were 15,465 employees of UNMISS; 12,500 of whom are military, 1,323 are police, and the remainder are vast civilian personnel, with an authorization to employ all possible means to protect civilians who are under imminent threat of physical violence.[43]

The most visible and controversial role of the UNMISS has been Projection of Civilians (PoC) sites, fortified compounds in UN bases that have been home to civilians who have fled violence.[44] In its most extreme form, the sites hosted more than 200,000 internally displaced people, which essentially transformed them into semi-permanent displacement camps under the UN peacekeepers.[45] The sites have however created massive tensions with the government which considers it as trespassing on its sovereignty as well as offering refuge to opposition supporters. The government restated its unsavory request that UNMISS should leave its Tomping headquarters in Juba in 2025, and that movement restrictions be imposed on the mission, which is a major blow to its capacity to perform its protective mandate.[46]

The success of the protection mandate of UNMISS has been a point of heated discussion in policy and academic discussions. The renewal of the mandate in March 2023 again focused on a more proactive way of physically protecting civilians, with the Security Council asking an independent review

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[42] https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unmiss

[43] Eyanae, Bernadette. "Assessing the Performance of United Nations Peacekeeping in Africa: The Case of UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)." PhD diss., University of Nairobi, 2022.

[44] Halidu, Agaba, Umeh Chioma Blessing, Elekwachi Chioma, and Charles Akinsola. "The United Nations' Role in Managing the Conflict in South Sudan, 2013-2022: A Focus on Protection of Civilians (PoC) and Humanitarian Assistance." *Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 2 (2025): 71-77.

[45] Murphy, Ray. "The United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the protection of civilians." *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 22, no. 3 (2017): 367-394.

[46] Kuol, Luka Biong Deng. "South Sudan: The Perils of Security Governance and the Treacherous Path to Democratic Transition ." *International Relations* 13, no. 2 (2025): 50-73.

of the impact of the protection strategy used by UNMISS, against the backdrop of concern over the potential lack of ability to counter the emerging protection challenges through the current disposition and capabilities of the mission.[47]

Of the 11-vote vote, China, a major troop contributor, said that the provision to renew the UNMISS mandate to 2026 would create a power hub above the Government of South Sudan, whereas the United States insisted that the mission needed to be permitted to continue in implementation of its mandate despite the severe financial challenges of the UN-wide financial crisis.[48]

5.2.2 Troika and Bilateral Actors

The Troika, a combination of the United States, United Kingdom and Norway, has made major impacts to the management of the conflict in South Sudan by exerting pressure on it through diplomacy, selective sanctions, and monetary pressure. Troika members, as the architects of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 and the primary champions of South Sudanese independence have been deeply involved throughout the crisis, both publicly talking about violence as well as privately applying targeted sanctions on individuals and institutions that obstruct peace, such as arms embargoes and asset freezes.[49] Nonetheless, the force of Troika has been limited by the parties acknowledging that the Western players are uninterested in strong intervention beyond peacekeeping and humanitarian aid, and the credibility of threats is decaying.

The role of china in the management of the South Sudanese conflict can be seen as a reflection of its larger strategic interests in Africa and of the unique characteristics of its conflict management strategy, which focuses on the idea of sovereignty and non-intervention. Being the biggest destination of South Sudanese oil and the largest investor in the petroleum sector of South Sudan, China has large

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[47] Gregory, Julie, and Lisa Sharland. *Host-country consent in UN peacekeeping*. Stimson Center, 2023.

[48] Swyngedouw, Arno. "Syria, Chemical Weapons and Armed Intervention." PhD diss., Ghent University, 2019.

[49] International Crisis Group. *South Sudan: Keeping Faith with the IGAD Peace Process*. International Crisis Group, 2022.

economic leverage, but it has been practicing it in a measured manner by hosting direct negotiations between South Sudanese leaders. Nevertheless, the lack of contingency of economic engagement on political reforms or approval of coercive actions by China has reduced its influence on the actions of parties. The 2023 oil export interruption by Sudan, due to the civil war in that country has put China in a tricky situation because the smaller production of oil directly impacts the economic interests of China but offers potential leverage that Beijing has been hesitant to use aggressively.[50]

6. Peace Processes and Agreements

The peace architecture of South Sudan consists of a series of negotiated agreements that have attempted, with different levels of success, to put an end to violence and put in place political transition structures. All these agreements, the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), the 2018 Revitalized Agreement (R-ARCSS) and the ongoing Tumaini Initiative demonstrate how the approaches to conflict resolution change over time, but they also demonstrate the ongoing problems of translating elite bargains into sustainable peace. This section looks at each of the key peace processes, the contents of these processes, their past implementation records, and their structural roadblocks that have limited their success.

6.1 The 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS)

Negotiations, which began in January 2014 and were signed on August 17, 2015 in Addis Ababa and ratified by the National Legislative Assembly of South Sudan on September 10, 2015, were a response of IGAD to the disastrous civil war, which broke out in December 2013.[51] This was the beginning of an agreement that was to be signed reluctantly and with strong reservation by the president Kiir who in his

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[50] International Crisis Group. *South Sudan: Keeping Faith with the IGAD Peace Process*. International Crisis Group, 2022.

[51] Authority, Intergovernmental, and Autorité Intergouvernementale. "Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan." (2015).

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official statement to the nation spoke of the agreement as the most divisive and unprecedented peace deal in the history of the country and the African continent as a whole.[52]

The ARCSS envisaged comprehensive power sharing arrangements based on the establishment of a new Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU) to be formed following a pre-transitional period of 90 days; cantonment, screening, and integration of government and opposition forces into a new national army; power-sharing in the executive institutions with Machar returning as First Vice President; and the creation of transitional justice institutions such as a Hybrid Court of South Sudan, a Commission on Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, and a Reparation and Compensation Authority.[53]

Implementation of the ARCSS proved disastrous. While the TGoNU was eventually formed on April 29, 2016 with Machar's return to Juba as First Vice President, critical security arrangements remained unimplemented.[54] Cantonment of forces never occurred effectively, demobilization and disarmament programs stalled, and the capital remained heavily militarized with ethnically organized armed groups loyal to competing leaders.[55] Tensions escalated throughout early 2016, culminating in catastrophic violence on July 8-11, 2016, when fighting erupted between government and opposition forces in Juba, effectively collapsing the TGoNU. Machar fled the capital and was replaced by Taban Deng Gai, triggering the resumption of civil war across multiple theaters.[56] The July 2016 crisis exposed the fundamental weakness of elite power-sharing arrangements absent genuine security sector reform and mutual trust. As scholars have noted, the ARCSS replicated defects common to African peace

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[52] Vhumbunu, Clayton Hazvinei. "Conflict resurgence and the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan: a hurried and imposed peace pact?." *Conflict Trends* 2016, no. 3 (2016): 3-12.

[53] Vhumbunu, Clayton Hazvinei. "Conflict resurgence and the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan: a hurried and imposed peace pact?." *Conflict Trends* 2016, no. 3 (2016): 3-12.

[54] Joshi, Madhav. "Revitalizing Towards Peace or Relapsing Into Chaos? Implementation of South Sudan's 2018 Agreement and the Upcoming Elections." (2024).

[55] Ryan, Kem. "Taking stock of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies* 12 (2019).

[56] Kindersley, Nicki, and Øystein H. Rolandsen. "Prospects for peace and the UN regional protection force in South Sudan." *African Affairs* 120, no. 480 (2021): 479-490.

agreements: it prioritized elite accommodation through patronage distribution over institutional transformation, created incentives for "winner-takes-all" electoral competition, and failed to address the structural drivers of conflict including governance deficits, resource mismanagement, and weak rule of law.[57]

6.2 The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict (R-ARCSS) - 2018

Following the ARCSS collapse, IGAD convened the High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) in December 2017 to salvage the peace process.[58]Through fifteen months of negotiations, punctuated by continued fighting and humanitarian catastrophe, the HLRF produced the R-ARCSS, signed on September 12, 2018 in Addis Ababa. The R-ARCSS represented both continuity and modification: it retained the ARCSS's basic power-sharing framework while introducing amendments intended to address implementation failures. Critical changes included: expansion of vice presidents from two to five to accommodate additional opposition factions; extension of the pre-transitional period from 90 days to eight months to allow for security arrangements; reduction of states from 32 to ten plus three administrative areas to resolve boundary disputes; more detailed provisions for cantonment, training, and unification of forces; and strengthened monitoring mechanisms.[59]

The agreement established a Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) with President Kiir retaining the presidency, Machar returning as First Vice President, and three additional vice presidents representing other opposition factions and former government officials.[60] Power-sharing extended to all levels: the Council of Ministers would comprise 35 percent government

[57] Muorwel, James Kunhiak, and Jan Pospisil. "Peace in Transition: The Case of South Sudan." (2024).

[58] Vhumbunu, Clayton Hazvinei. "Reviving peace in South Sudan through the Revitalised peace Agreement: Understanding the enablers and possible obstacles." *Conflict Trends* 2018, no. 4 (2018): 3-11.

[59] Wambua, Muema. "Hurting Stalemate in International Interventions." *Beyond History: African Agency in Development, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution* (2020): 101.

[60] Gokarn, Nivedita. "From rhetoric to reality? Analyzing the gendered dimension in peace agreements." (2023).

appointees, 20 percent SPLM-IO, 10 percent South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA), 10 percent Other Political Parties, and 25 percent members retained from the Incumbent TGoNU.[61] The agreement mandated 35 percent women's representation in executive institutions, though implementation has fallen significantly short of this target. A 36-month transitional period was envisioned, concluding with elections, though this timeline has been repeatedly extended.

Implementation of the R-ARCSS has been uneven and consistently behind schedule. The pre-transitional period, intended for eight months, stretched to 18 months as parties failed to complete cantonment and force unification. The R-TGoNU was finally formed on February 22, 2020, when Machar returned to Juba for the second time and was reinstated as First Vice President. This formation represented a significant milestone, reducing large-scale political violence between the main parties. However, critical benchmarks remain unmet as of October 2025. The unification of forces has stalled indefinitely; security sector reform remains incomplete; the number and boundaries of states continue to generate controversy; and transitional justice institutions; the Hybrid Court, Truth Commission, and Reparations Authority exist only on paper, with no meaningful steps toward operationalization.[62] The transitional period has been extended multiple times, most recently in August 2024 when the R-TGoNU extended the transition by 24 months, postponing elections until December 2026, citing insufficient time to complete critical tasks including security arrangements, constitutional reform, and census enumeration.[63]

19. Key Provision	20. Status	21. Progress %	22. Details

[61] Joshi, Madhav, Matthew Hauenstein, and Jason Quinn. "Expanding the Peace Accords Matrix Implementation Dataset: Partial peace agreements in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement negotiation and implementation process, 1989–2021." *Journal of Peace Research* (2025): 00223433251322596.

[62] Dakuyo, Aboubacar. "Defining human rights in the socio-cultural and political context of South Sudan: how to move towards the assertion of full human rights in line with international law?." *The International Journal of Human Rights* (2025): 1-27.

[63] Özoflu, Melek Aylin. "Navigating Fragility: Unraveling Intergroup Relations in South Sudan's Peace-Building Process." *Journal of Humanity, Peace and Justice* 1, no. 1 (2024): 37-48.

23. Unified National Forces	24. Not Implemented	25. 15%	26. Cantonment stalled since April 2024; forces remain ethnically organized
27. Security Sector Reform	28. Incomplete	29. 20%	30. DDR processes halted; no professional national army
31. Transitional Government Formation	32. Completed	33. 100%	34. R-TGoNU formed February 2020; Machar as First VP
35. State Boundaries (10+3 formula)	36. Contested	37. 60%	38. Number agreed but boundaries generate controversy
39. Hybrid Court for South Sudan	40. Not Operational	41. 0%	42. Exists only on paper; no funding or staff
43. Truth & Reconciliation Commission	44. Not Operational	45. 0%	46. No meaningful steps toward establishment
47. Compensation & Reparations Authority	48. Not Operational	49. 0%	50. Not established

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51. Elections (originally Dec 2024)	52. Postponed	53. N/A	54. Extended to December 2026 (multiple delays)
55. 35% Women's Representation	56. Partial	57. 35-40%	58. Mandated but implementation inconsistent

Table 2: R-ARCSS Implementation Status (as of October 2025) (created by the authors)

6.3 The Tumaini Peace Initiative (2024-Present)

The Tumaini Initiative ("Hope" in Swahili) represents the latest attempt to achieve comprehensive peace by incorporating holdout groups that refused to sign the R-ARCSS. Launched on May 9, 2024 in Nairobi, Kenya, the initiative emerged from President Kiir's February 2023 request to Kenyan President William Ruto to assume mediation leadership from the Community of Sant'Egidio, whose Rome Process had stalled after years of sporadic engagement with opposition movements.[64] President Ruto appointed retired General Lazarus Sumbeiywo,the architect of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that enabled South Sudan's independence as Chief Mediator, signaling Kenya's assertion of regional diplomatic leadership and its rivalry with Ethiopia for influence in South Sudan's affairs.[65]

The Tumaini Initiative initially brought together the R-TGoNU government delegation and the South Sudan Opposition Movement Alliance (SSOMA), later reorganized as the United People's Alliance (UPA) under the leadership of Pagan Amum Okiech, Paul Malong Awan, and Mario Laku Thomas. These opposition figures, all former SPLM insiders who fell out with President Kiir command armed militias and represent constituencies excluded from the R-ARCSS. On May 16, 2024, participants signed a

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[64] Magara, Ibrahim, and Jan Pospisil. "Overloaded? Hope and Scepticism around the Tumaini Peace Initiative for South Sudan." (2024).

[65] Amuwo, Adekunle. "Rethinking Development in Africa: What about the 'overloaded'government?." *The Coming African Hour: Dialectics of Opportunities and Constraints* (2010): 87-106.

"Declaration of Commitment" pledging to renounce violence and engage in good-faith negotiations, witnessed by six African heads of state in a high-profile ceremony that generated considerable optimism.[66]By July 2024, the parties had initialed eleven protocols addressing root causes of conflict, governance reforms, power-sharing arrangements, security sector restructuring, establishment of the Hybrid Court, justice sector reforms, resource management, and constitutional review processes.[67]

However, the Tumaini Initiative has encountered severe political headwinds and now faces an uncertain future. On July 16, 2024,one day after the protocols were initiated,the SPLM-IO, led by First Vice President Machar, withdrew from the government delegation, accusing the initiative of overstepping its mandate and seeking to annex or replace the R-ARCSS rather than complement it.[68]This withdrawal reflected Machar's concern that Tumaini's inclusion of his rivals would dilute his political position and that the initiative's power-sharing proposals contradicted the existing government structure. Opposition groups, for their part, demanded repeal of the National Security Service Act passed in June 2024, which granted security services sweeping arrest powers without warrants; a provision they characterized as reproducing "Khartoum regime's reign of terror." The opposition also condemned the government's unilateral extension of the transitional period without consulting holdout groups.

Talks resumed in November 2024 with a restructured government delegation led by General Kuol Manyang Juuk,ironically, a previous critic of the initiative but made limited progress before adjourning in February 2025 with fundamental disagreements unresolved.[69] The central controversy concerns the relationship between Tumaini and R-ARCSS: the government insists Tumaini must function as an annex to the existing agreement, preserving current power-sharing arrangements with minor

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[66] Roba, Ibrahim S. "Diplomacy and the Attainment of Statehood in Africa: a Comparative Study of South Sudan and Eritrea." PhD diss., University of Nairobi, 2024.
[67] https://www.independent.co.ug/tumaini-initiative-as-solution-to-s-sudan-problem/
[68] Magara, Ibrahim, and Jan Pospisil. "Overloaded? Hope and Scepticism around the Tumaini Peace Initiative for South Sudan." (2024).
[69] https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/opinion-all-eyes-on-two-eminent-lazaruses-as-tumaini-talks-resume

accommodations for new entrants, while the opposition demands recognition of Tumaini as a standalone agreement that would restructure governance from first principles and address what they term the "root causes" of conflict—political, governance, and leadership crises; power struggles; structural weaknesses; economic mismanagement; and lack of social cohesion. By August 2025, General Kuol declared the Tumaini Initiative "dead and defunct," pronouncing that it had deviated from its mandate and could not override the R-ARCSS, while opposition spokesperson Lual Dau accused the government of deliberately killing the process and warned that the opposition would pursue unspecified alternative means to bring peace.[70]

The Tumaini Initiative's struggles illuminate several critical dynamics in South Sudan's peace landscape. First, the proliferation of peace processes; R-ARCSS, Tumaini, the Rome Process reflects fragmentation among both government and opposition actors, each seeking advantageous negotiation forums. Second, the initiative demonstrates the tensions inherent in attempting inclusive peace processes when existing power-sharing arrangements create winners who resist dilution of their positions. Third, Kenya's mediation, while bringing fresh energy and Sumbeiywo's considerable diplomatic capital, has sparked regional rivalries and raised questions about coordination within the IGAD framework. Finally, the controversy over whether Tumaini should annex to or replace the R-ARCSS exposes a fundamental conceptual divide: whether peace requires incremental adjustment of existing elite bargains or wholesale renegotiation of South Sudan's political settlement.

South Sudan Peace Processes Timeline (2013-2025)
2013 DEC: Civil war erupts (Kiir vs. Machar)
2014 JAN: IGAD mediation begins
2015 AUG: ARCSS signed (Kiir reluctant)

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[70] https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/kiir-deliberately-killed-tumaini-initiative-opposition

2016 APR: TGoNU formed (Machar returns as VP)
2016 JUL: ARCSS collapses (Juba violence; Machar flees) Civil war resumes
2017 DEC: High-Level Revitalization Forum launched
2018 SEP: R-ARCSS signed (revitalized agreement)
2020 FEB: R-TGoNU formed (Machar returns again) Large-scale violence reduces
2023 APR: Sudan civil war begins → Oil exports disrupted
2024 FEB: Elections postponed to Dec 2024
2024 MAY: Tumaini Initiative launched (Kenya mediation)
2024 JUL: Tumaini protocols initialed SPLM-IO withdraws from talks
2024 AUG: Transition extended 24 months Elections → Dec 2026
2025 FEB: Kiir dismisses 2 VPs (SPLM-IO) Nasir clashes erupt
2025 AUG: Gen. Kuol declares Tumaini "dead and defunct"
2025 OCT: Status - Fragile peace; benchmarks unmet

Figure 3: South Sudan Peace Processes Timeline (2013-2025) (created by the authors)

7. CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE

7.1 Political Paralysis and Elite Intransigence

The main hindrances to the consolidation of sustainable peace in South Sudan is the lack of genuine political will of the elite to implement the agreed reforms aimed at diminishing their monopolistic control over the state resources and powers. What scholars have described as a phenomenon of a transition fatigue has become characterized by successive extensions of the transition period, most recently pushing the date of the election off of February 2025 into December 2026, as a power-restoring

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mechanism that gives political leaders time to remain in power despite their ostensory peace-related promises.[71]

An example of such a dynamic is the unilateral decision-making of President Kiir: dismissing two deputy presidents and the head of intelligence, all of whom are SPLM-IO members, without consulting the First Vice President Machar in February 2025 is against the provisions of the R-ARCSS on power-sharing.[72]

This is further complicated by the fact that the South Sudan government and opposition camps are riddled with their own frictions that cannot reach a consensus response to the political challenge, and that as leadership gains become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the ruling elite, the ability to command their nominal followers diminishes as Machar apparently loses control over some SPLM-IO groups.[73]

7.2 Security Sector Failures and Persistent Violence

The inability to consolidate the armed forces in South Sudan stands out as the greatest challenge towards achieving sustainable peace. In spite of the Rapidness Accord on the Reconciliation and Consolidation of Statutory Citizenry (R-ARCSS), which envisioned the creation of the united forces by cantonment, screening, and integrating the different armed structures, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts have come to a halt since April 2024,[74] despite its progressive perspectives on prudent management of the forces of arms and ammunition, and on the application of the Joint Action Plan to deal with the problem of sexual violence associated with the conflict.

The existing state of security is characterized by ethnically organized militias that are loyal to individual commanders instead of serving a professionalized national army, therefore making South

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[71] https://issafrica.org/iss-today/transition-fatigue-in-south-sudan-ramps-up-tensions
[72] Time, Over. "1. South Sudan's peace process has achieved significant progress, but the election."
[73] CORTINOVIS, Roberto, Ana-Maria DUTA, and Teresa TALÒ. "Two years of war: conflict and displacement in Sudan."
[74] James, Laura M. "Fields of control: oil and (in) security in Sudan and South Sudan." (2015).

Sudan a de facto conglomeration of warring armed groups that coexist tentatively on a breaking political system.[75] This division led to a violent outburst in March 2025 when an autonomous Nuer militia allied to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement -South (SPLM-IO) took control of a government army base in Nasir because of the fear that the garrison would be replaced by forces loyal to competing communities.[76] The resultant government airstrikes caused civilian deaths, and massive displacement. Besides political-military conflict, intercommunal violence has spiked, with United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) finding that it increased by 43 percent in 2024 compared to 2023, which has been 83 percent of civilian deaths as the local militias battled cattle raiding and natural resource contests.[77] Without radically reforming the security sector, as well as fully integrating the forces, the lasting ceasefire will continue to be vulnerable to an untimely breakdown, since the armed forces still maintain the potential as well as the motivation to restart large-scale hostilities.

7.3 Humanitarian Catastrophe and Population Vulnerability

Humanitarian crisis in South Sudan has become so severe whereby over 9million people; the majority of the national population, is currently and now dependent on humanitarian aid to survive hence forms a clear signal of state failure and breakdown of society.[78]

By 2025, 7.7 million individuals are facing high-skilled food insecurity, with 83,000 individuals under the threat of famine conditions; however, humanitarian funding on the 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan is at just 28.5 percent, and violence against humanitarian workers, as well as bureaucratic obstacles set forth by the government, continue to obstruct humanitarian activity.[79] As of

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[75] Verjee, Aly. "The future of South Sudan and the peace agreement." *Chatham House. October* 26 (2016): 2016.
[76] De Waal, Alex. "When kleptocracy becomes insolvent: Brute causes of the civil war in South Sudan." *African Affairs* 113, no. 452 (2014): 347-369.
[77] Musa, Intern Dr Mustafa. "Sudan's Unfolding Humanitarian and Health Catastrophe (2024-2025)."
[78] Riak, Jacob Dut Chol. "The Role of the United Nations in South Sudanese State Building and Failure." *Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (2025): 1-19.
[79] https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/south-sudan-crisis-response-plan-2023-2025

April 2023, the influx of over 900,000 returnees in Sudan to escape the crisis has swamped South Sudan, which already has insufficient infrastructure and services to meet its population needs, on top of an internally displaced population of 2.3 million and 2.2 million refugees across its borders.[80]

These difficulties are exacerbated by climate shocks; both excessive rainy seasons and dry seasons are threatening agricultural production in a country where almost the entire population engages in subsistence farming. At the same time a general cholera epidemic, which starts at the end of 2024, has attracted more than 700 deaths in the environment of polluted water sources and collapsed healthcare.[81] This natural disaster serves as an effect and cause of war: violence creates displacement and food insecurity, humanitarian distress creates discontents, weakening social bonds, and creating desperate people who can be recruited by militancy groups that guarantees food or security.

The scale of human suffering has grown to the extent of a humanitarian crisis which has become a permanent state rather than a transient crisis thus inherently limiting recovery and stability.

8. Analysis of the Study Findings

The strive to sustainable peace in South Sudan requires an essential shift of the elite-based, short-term bargaining paradigm that has traditionally formed the essence of conflict-management attempts. In line with this a holistic approach needs to be taken that should both tackle the immediate security demands and structural change in the long term. The international community, in the short term, will be obliged to utilize its considerable financial and diplomatic assets, to compel adherence to available provisions of peace -agreements, especially by the prompt creation of cantonments, demobilization of combatants, and real integration of armed forces under common command structures, which are not answerable to

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[80] Langan, Mary Elizabeth. "ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT PROLIFERATION AND INTERCOMMUNAL CONFLICT IN SOUTH SUDAN." PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2025.

[81] SUDAN, FAMILIES IN. "Unprecedented hunger, mental health tragedy, and gender-based violence: THE CRISIS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN SUDAN." (2024).

individual commanders. Mechanisms of enforcement must involve plausible remedies to failure to comply, such as specific impacts on spoilers, contingency of development aid, and the introduction of powerful surveillance mechanisms with superior checking abilities.

At the same time, measures must be taken to operationalize transitional-justice institutions, namely the Hybrid Court in South Sudan, the Truth, Reconciliation and Healing Commission and the Compensation and Reparations Authority, as the responsibility of the perpetrated atrocities are still necessary not only to achieve justice but also to break cycles of impunity which act as incentives of future violence. To enhance its political structure, South Sudan in the medium term should move beyond the zero-sum, power-sharing formations to a true institutional building that will enable a peaceful process of political competition. This includes having independent electoral management institutions, constitutional reforms that decentralize power away of the presidency and the establishment of mechanisms of inclusive governance that bring civil society, women groups, the youth and the marginalised groups into decision-making processes. Economic reform is also of paramount importance; it needs to be diversified so that it does not rely on oil, and it has to invest in agriculture, infrastructure, and human-capital formation, and it has to introduce resource-management systems and anti-corruption policies that will redirect state revenues that have been used to enrich the elite to public service provision. The focus of long-term peacebuilding needs to focus on nation-building activities that cut across ethnic lines, which will include curricular education focused on a common South-Sudanese identity, community-level inter-ethnic dialogue forums, and economic integration that creates cross-cutting interests among the diverse population.

Local actors, especially the IGAD member states, should rise above competing interests to make concerted diplomatic pressure and assist local level reconciliation through local-oriented conflict-resolution systems that seek to use traditional authorities and customary practices. Lastly, the international community needs to invest in long-term initiatives beyond interventions during crisis periods, because the transformation of South Sudan is not going to take years, but decades, and international aid withdrawal will not only waste resources already devoted to the country, but also force South Sudanese people into further misery. Such an inclusive strategy recognizes that though, peace

agreements are essential, it is not enough without simultaneous investment in institutional, economic, and social pillars that allow such agreements to turn to the experienced reality of ordinary citizens.

9. Conclusion

The history of South Sudan, of the exultation, independence that followed in 2011 and the subsequent disaster of civil war and the dubious transitional grey area, is one of the most disheartening state-building failures of post-conflict states since the war conclusion, with much to teach the constraints of international intervention, structural obstacles to conflict causation, and the significant difficulties encountered during the transition of freedom movements into democratic governance.

This paper explains that the conflict in South Sudan was superficial, mobilized around ethnic factors, but the real cause of the conflict is governance failures, elite power struggles and the lack of inclusive political institutions that would direct the diversity and aid peaceful contestations.

The series of peace pacts, that is, the Abuja II Comprehensive Peace Agreement (ARCSS), the ARCSS revamped (R-ARCSS), and the Tumaini Initiative has managed to offer some respite against mass-scale violence by means of elite settlement and sharing of power. However, these agreements have never dealt with underlying symptoms that produce a recurrent war: the personalization of power, militarisation of politics, economic rapacity and the instrumentalisation of ethnic identities by rival political leaders. The enduring disjuncture between the protections of the peace arrangements and their practical implementation manifestations is indicative not only of deficiency of political intent, though again this is a pivotal element, but of the structural incapacity to accomplish sustaining peace by elite tradeoffs that sustain as opposed to alter the systems that initially yielded the conflict in its very existence.

The regional organisations specifically the intergovernmental authority on development (IGAD) has shown the potential and shortcomings of the African solutions to African problems. IGAD has managed to gather parties and have diplomatic involvement but lacks structure, bickering members

states issue and lacks enough enforcement capability to coerce parties to adhere to negotiated agreements

The international community, such as the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations in general, has been essential in offering humanitarian security and diplomatic assistance. Nevertheless, they also face sovereignty-related limitations, resource shortage and even the inherent problem of defending civilians when host states are the cause of the violence themselves. The humanitarian disaster recorded in this article, with three-quarters of the South Sudanese population forced to depend on external aid, the displacement of millions, the onset of food shortages on the brink of famine, and the breakdown of the core state operations, reflects the human price of political failures and a need to develop more efficient conflict-management measures. However, in dealing with this destruction, the efforts of South Sudanese communities, the presence of local peace activities and ongoing efforts by regional and international actors suggests that sustainable peace, though elusive, can be achieved.

To pursue sustainable peace it will also be necessary to recognize some uncomfortable truths: peace processes, which are modestly tailored to serve the interests of elite will merely result in elite peace and not popular peace; elections which are planned in advance before a thorough security sector reform and audience development process can only end in the process of legitimate of an authoritarian governments; whether it is with good intentions or bad intentions international interventions cannot take the place of domestic political will, which puts the national interests of the country before the personal enrichment of individuals. Overall, the war in South Sudan is essentially a governance problem: who is in power, how power is used, and the quality of the services rendered by state institutions to citizens, or whether they take advantage of them.

South Sudan will continue to be buried in the vicious cycles of violence interspersed by weak cease-fires till South Sudan leaders realise that their legitimacy are not linked with military coercion and ethno-political mobilization efforts but by offering security, justice and prosperity to every citizen including those outside their group. As a result, the role of the international community should change to being a mediator of elite bargains to being an advocate of actual changes of governance structures

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even though these changes are not in the interest of those who are currently in power. As South Sudan celebrates its fourteenth year of freedom, the question ceases to be whether this nation will survive, its people have shown that they will endure under the most adverse circumstances ever, but whether they can move beyond not only their survival but building of a democratic, inclusive, and thriving nation that millions of people died to achieve. The responses to this question will influence not just the future of South Sudan but also general discourses regarding post-conflict state-building, the effectiveness of regional conflict-management organisms, and the future of peaceful sustainability in the weak states of Africa. The path of South Sudan is still incomplete, but also, we can use it as a warning, showing how easily the ambitions of prosperity can transform to violence when the state turns to unsustainable governance; and as an inspirational example, resting upon the undying belief of citizens who still want to believe in peace, despite decades of betrayal and troubles.

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