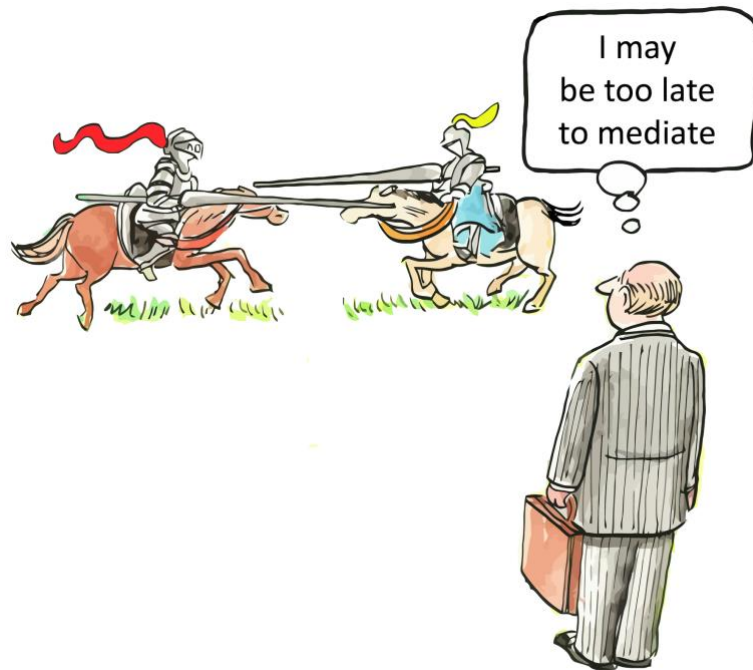


Mediation Fiddles as Sudan Burns



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Sudan's war has entered its third horrific year. Towns are in ruins. Millions are displaced. Famine looms. The very idea of a Sudanese state is unraveling. Yet amid this unfolding catastrophe, another, quieter collapse demands attention: the failure of mediation.

As someone who was deeply involved—serving as a senior member of the United Nations (UN)-led Sudan mediation—I speak not with detachment but with anger and urgency. The mediation has been lackluster, timid, and deeply unserious. Sudan is bleeding, and the world's response has been to shuffle papers and hold meetings while the country falls apart.

This is not to absolve the belligerents. Far from it. The warring parties bear primary responsibility for Sudan's destruction. They have chosen violence over peace, power over humanity. They have committed grave crimes, blocked humanitarian aid, and turned a blind eye to the suffering of their own people. They will be held accountable.

The foreign governments backing them—from near and far—share in this shame. Their weapons, financing, and political cover have prolonged the war and emboldened warlords. They, too, must be held to account.

But this article, on this grim second anniversary of the eruption of the war, is not only about them. It is about us—the mediators—and our collective failure to rise to the historic challenge before us.

Mediation in name only

Over the past 18 months, the so-called mediation has produced no ceasefire, no roadmap, no real process. Just intermittent visits, vague communiqués, and hollow briefings to the Security Council that highlight the grave responsibilities of the warring parties for the massive suffering they continue to inflict on their people while excusing or ignoring the failings of the diplomatic community.

The African Union (AU) and the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) peace architecture, though born of necessity and good intentions, has been overtaken by the brutal reality of a fragmented war, escalating foreign entanglements, and a humanitarian catastrophe of historic proportions. The assumptions that shaped the AU-IGAD process—the availability of two blocks of a coherent Sudanese political class, the possibility of a relatively neutral regional environment, the viability of incremental proximity talks—have been overtaken by the increasing fragmentation among civilian groups and brazen involvement of Sudan neighbors in the conflict.

A new leadership now guides the African Union, led by a Chairperson with strong knowledge of the Sudan file. The AU and IGAD once at the forefront of principled, multilateral efforts on Sudan, have an opportunity—and an obligation—to reassert their leadership and drive a credible peace process.

The UN-led consultative process led by the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy to Sudan has particularly faltered. Given the human and financial resources at its disposal, the UN's mediation effort under the Personal Envoy has been deeply disappointing. Key Sudanese stakeholders are of the view that the envoy's limited engagement reflects a profoundly unserious mindset on resolving Sudan's escalating crisis.

Its interpretation of its mandate has been narrow, its strategy minimalist. To date, the major result has been the establishment of a parallel mechanism that competes with, rather than complements, the AU-IGAD effort—fragmenting the multilateral response at the very moment coherence is most needed. What was once hoped would be a center of gravity for coordination has collapsed into irrelevance, its failure symbolized by the UN's self-inflicted diminished role at this year's London Conference on Sudan.

Parallel tracks—such as those hosted by Cairo and Jeddah—have operated in silos, lacking integration with the multilateral processes. Their contributions to halting the violence are indispensable, but by themselves they cannot produce an inclusive, sustainable peace. Such diplomacy alone will entrench division; multilateral leadership, one that actively coordinates and aligns bilateral efforts, is essential to rebuild the shattered Sudanese polity.

A call for a total reset

Sudan doesn't need more process. It needs purpose, pressure, and political courage.

We must recognize that the current mediation design has failed. Continuing with incremental steps and minimalist ambitions is to accept Sudan's disintegration as inevitable. Nothing less than a total reset is required, built around three pillars:

- First, a **single, unified mediation framework** must be established under African Union/IGAD political leadership, with strong, credible UN, League of Arab States (LAS), and European Union (EU) backing—not as adjuncts, but as an integral partners. The current fractured approach, with overlapping mandates and uncoordinated initiatives, must give way to a merged mechanism capable of strategic action.
- Second, **bilateral initiatives must be rallied in support of the multilateral framework**. Bilateral actors, particularly key regional powers, have the leverage to help halt the fighting. Their role is indispensable—but it must be deployed as part of a larger political strategy that can move Sudan from a state of war to a sustainable peace.

Stopping the war requires freezing the military support that fuels it and bringing the belligerents to the table. But only a legitimate, multilateral, Sudanese-owned political process can chart a future beyond ceasefire.

- Third, and **most crucially, Sudanese civilians must retake ownership of the peace process**. They cannot be consigned to the margins while foreign capitals decide Sudan's fate. A Sudanese-organized, internationally-supported Peace Conference must be convened—bringing together political formations, civil society, youth, women's groups, displaced communities—to forge a common peace agenda.

Peace cannot be simply elite-driven or imposed from outside. It must be anchored in the social realities of a Sudan fractured by war, displacement, and trauma. Societal peace—rebuilding trust, civic engagement, and inclusive political dialogue—must be at the heart of any mediation strategy.

Time for leadership and courage

This is not just another African conflict. It is a test case for the international system's, and especially the Afro-Arab region's, ability to act with seriousness when faced with catastrophic human suffering. Sudan is not slipping into crisis; it is plunging headfirst into possible state failure and partition. The longer mediation efforts cling to old assumptions, fragmented frameworks, and minimalist ambitions, the closer we edge toward the unthinkable: the partition of Sudan.

A successful reset demands more than technical adjustments. It requires political courage from all actors:

- Courage from the AU/IGAD to reclaim leadership and act decisively.

- Courage from the UN to step beyond minimalist mandates and embrace a robust political strategy in support of multilateral initiatives.
- Courage from Sudanese civilians to unite, compromise, and take charge of their country's destiny.
- Courage from bilateral actors to undertake initiatives in support of a multilateral framework.

Above all, it demands the humility to acknowledge failure—and the determination to build something better.

This is our moment of truth

The war in Sudan is a stain on the conscience of the world. The belligerents have chosen destruction. Their foreign enablers have fueled it. But we—the mediators, the international community—have failed to confront it with the seriousness the moment demands.

We owe the people of Sudan more than words. We owe them a peace effort as fierce, focused, and determined as the war is brutal.

Sudan is bleeding. Let this stage of the war be the turning point—where we finally act like we care and start mediating like we mean it.