Sudan's April War

Regional Mediation at an Impasse!

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Over the past two years, regional and international mediation efforts have consistently failed to resolve Sudan's conflict. Initiatives have been announced and meetings scheduled, but disputes over participation and lack of coordination undermined every attempt. The latest postponement of the Djibouti meeting in mid-December under the auspices of IGAD and the African Union is not an isolated incident but part of a recurring pattern.

IGAD and the AU, after joining the Jeddah platform in October 2023, shifted their role from military negotiations focused on ceasefire and civilian protection to a dual track: direct talks between Burhan and Hemedti under IGAD, and a broader political dialogue organized by the AU. This reorientation, however, has not produced the desired results.

Reasons for failure

The central question remains unresolved: who is included in the process? Initial disputes revolved around Islamists, later disagreements focused on the Rapid Support Forces and the "Ta'sis" coalition, and each dispute led to postponement or collapse. Without consensus on

participation criteria, mediators cannot establish an agenda, ensure inclusiveness, or define an end goal.

Six major meetings scheduled by IGAD and the AU between July 2023 and December 2025 demonstrate the pattern: early attempts stalled over Islamists, later efforts collapsed over civilian representation, and the most recent initiatives failed over military coalitions.

A review of the AU and IGAD's major invitations and meetings with Sudanese political actors underscores these fruitless efforts:

- **July 2023:** Initial meetings with political forces to prepare for the AU track.
- **September 2023:** Meetings coincided with the Quad's declaration (September 12).
- **Nov 2023 – Feb 2024:** Regular meetings with major civilian forces, stalled due to disagreements over participant lists.
- **Aug – Sep 2024:** Renewed attempts to convene parties, focused on disputes over Islamist participation.
- **June 2025:** Expanded invitation to political forces, failed due to rejection of "Ta'sis" coalition participation.
- **Dec 16–18, 2025:** Planned Djibouti meeting, postponed over the same disputes.

This sequence highlights both the absence of Sudanese consensus and the lack of alignment among mediators themselves.

Mediation challenges

The difficulties are compounded not only by conflicting mediation tracks but also by underlying institutional rivalries. Tensions between the African Union, chaired by Djibouti's Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, and IGAD, led by Ethiopia's Workneh Gebeyehu, have quietly shaped the dynamics of the process. These latent rivalries added another layer of complexity to the Djibouti meeting, contributing to its postponement and further weakening the credibility of the mediation effort.

Beyond this, priorities remain divergent. The Quad (made up of the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt) emphasizes ceasefire and civilian protection, while IGAD and the AU promote a comprehensive political process. With no mechanism to coordinate, mediators operate at cross purposes, creating confusion among Sudanese actors.

IGAD's credibility has also eroded, with member states viewing it as biased, and Eritrea's withdrawal on December 12 has further weaken the organization's standing. History offers a stark contrast: IGAD's one notable success—the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement—was achieved under exceptional conditions, including Kenya's acceptance by both parties, the authority of General Lazaro Sumbeiywo, and decisive international backing from the Troika. Those conditions are absent today. The repeated failures of IGAD and the AU reflect structural limitations rather than temporary setbacks.

The Quintet's Equal Failure

Equally, the Quintet or so-called "Committee of Five"—the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy, the European Union, and the Arab League—has been no less ineffective than IGAD and the AU. The envoy's call for Geneva talks between the SAF and RSF on humanitarian assistance seems as if it is an alternative to the Quad's plan, while the Arab League remains completely adrift and the EU has no discernible impact. Together, the five lack leverage, coherence, or even a consolidated body. By contrast, the Quad, backed firmly by Washington and coordinated with Riyadh, Cairo, and Abu Dhabi, projects far greater weight. Yet, in a paradox that borders on absurd, the Quintet still aspires to play out a central role despite its institutional weakness. The result is a confused and confusing landscape of mediation, where the very actors who lack mechanisms and credibility insist on inserting themselves into a process already dominated by stronger players.

Conclusion

The persistence of multiple platforms without coordination, combined with disputes over participation and weak mediator legitimacy, makes any political process highly vulnerable. Unless clear rules for inclusion are established, and unless mediators can move from consultation to decision, meetings will continue to fail. Meanwhile, the war itself imposes new realities on the ground, shaping the political landscape independently of negotiation halls.

IGAD and the AU are attempting not only to mediate but to reclaim a file lost to the Jeddah track. Structural weaknesses, Sudanese divisions, and competing regional and international initiatives constrain their ability to succeed. In this context, the prospect of a comprehensive political process remains suspended, while the war continues to redefine the parameters of any future negotiation.