

Pathways to Peace



Fostering Coordination in Sudan's Mediation Processes

Policy Brief by Maram Mahdi (ISS) and Gelila Enbaye (GPPi)

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
A Revitalized Quad	5
A Multilateral Quartet	6
Lessons Learned from the Trilateral Mechanism (2022-2023)	7
Best Practices for the Quad and Quartet	9
Final Pointers for Effective Coordination	10
Policy Recommendations	11

Introduction

Two years into the brutal war in Sudan, international and regional efforts aimed at achieving a ceasefire have dwindled. The war has resulted in one of the world's biggest humanitarian disasters and revealed the limitations of multilateral responses to stop the bloodshed. Since April 15, 2023, an estimated 150,000 people have died, over 12 million have been displaced, and thousands have been impacted by (health) crises such as cholera and famine.¹ The effect of this all-out war on people's livelihoods and state infrastructure is immeasurable. The dire situation is exacerbated by the spillover effects into neighboring countries; regional and external involvement has prolonged the conflict, while offering few viable pathways to its end.

A number of mediation efforts have pushed for peace, but their processes have been plagued by a lack of genuine political commitment from the warring parties, external meddling and civilian fragmentation. This intransigence of the warring parties, in particular, has created a major stumbling block to securing a ceasefire and reaching a negotiated settlement. Despite external leverage and pressure on the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to join mediation platforms, the parties remain distanced and continue to aggressively promote the war effort. RSF and SAF view the conflict in zero-sum terms, where both believe that victory can only be achieved if the other side is defeated. What is more, there is no incentive to end the war, because prolonging it benefits the RSF and SAF. It enables them to expand their local strongholds and gain administrative control crucial to their existence; the RSF and SAF are both creating parallel governments to cement their territorial control and legitimacy, effectively partitioning Sudan into several smaller localities.² Neither party has, therefore, shown much good faith or political will to commit to international ceasefire efforts that might require them to make major compromises or concessions.

To date, various international peace initiatives have taken place, but they have been largely competitive and ineffective, demonstrating the fragmented international order's inability to end the war. This proliferation of competing initiatives is primarily a result of geopolitical interest in Sudan and the country's membership in a plethora of multilateral organizations, including the United Nations, African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the League of Arab States (LAS). Some of the prominent peace platforms include the so-called Jeddah and Geneva talks, the AU's High-Level Panel and IGAD's Quartet. In addition to these multilateral platforms, several states, including Bahrain, Egypt and Türkiye, have hosted their own conflict resolution, humanitarian access or political dialogue initiatives. This multiplicity of fora has resulted in an overabundance of initiatives, opening up the possibility for warring parties to "forum-shop."³ Coordination or sequencing of platforms has been largely nonexistent. Instead of cooperation, the facilitators seem to be driven by strategic interests — some use their platform to tip the scales in favor of specific conflict parties, or are interested primarily in enhancing their convening power.⁴

-
- 1 Akinwotu, Emmanuel. "In Sudan, Hundreds Killed in Attacks on Famine-Hit Displacement Camps." *World. NPR*, April 14, 2025. <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/14/nx-sl-5363700/in-sudan-hundreds-killed-in-attacks-on-famine-hit-displacement-camps>; International Rescue Committee. "Crisis in Sudan: What Is Happening and How to Help | The IRC." July 24, 2025. <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-sudan-what-happening-and-how-help>; United Nations News. "Sudan War Exacerbates Risk of Cholera and Malaria: UNICEF | UN News." May 28, 2025. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1163811>.
 - 2 Nashed, Mat. "Why Sudan's RSF Chose This Parallel Government Ahead of Peace Talks." *Al Jazeera*, July 28, 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/28/why-sudans-rsf-chose-this-parallel-government-ahead-of-peace-talks>.
 - 3 Mahdi, Maram. "Sudanese Are Losing Hope with Each New Peace Initiative." *Institute for Security Studies*, June 8, 2024. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/sudanese-are-losing-hope-with-each-new-peace-initiative>.
 - 4 Svensson, Isak. "Who Brings Which Peace?: Neutral versus Biased Mediation and Institutional Peace Arrangements in Civil Wars." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 3 (2009): 446–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002709332207>.

Peace efforts are further complicated by external actors providing logistical, financial and diplomatic support. The inflow of weapons and supply lines to the RSF and SAF undermines the ceasefire attempts and protracts the conflict. According to the United Nations Panel of Experts, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for example, has supposedly supported the RSF (though the UAE has denied this).⁵ Egypt, Iran and Türkiye have allegedly supplied drones and jets to SAF, based on longstanding bilateral relations.⁶ Including countries with vested interests in the conflict in mediation or dialogue processes sows doubt about the legitimacy and credibility of these processes.

The last high-level mediation effort was a year ago, in August 2024, in Geneva. Since then, the warring parties have utilized the attention vacuum to expand and capture new territories. They were also able to exploit a global lack of attention to the conflict, a result of a disengaged United States administration, mounting crises in the Middle East, and a collapsing multilateral and international world order. It seems now, however, that attention dynamics may be shifting; the US administration has renewed its efforts to revitalize the Quad initiative, and multilateral organizations are trying to unify their efforts (see explanatory boxes down below). If they are to be successful, these new initiatives must take lessons from previous efforts and sequence their interventions. The scale of Sudan's conflict and the long-term implications for the wider region demand a concerted, coordinated and synchronized peace effort.

This policy brief assesses the opportunities and challenges surrounding emerging initiatives to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. It analyzes a proposed multilateral Quartet, bringing together the UN, AU, IGAD, and Arab League, to build a common vision to unify and coordinate international mediation and peace efforts. The brief also assesses the revitalized Quad and the challenges that it must anticipate and address to successfully produce a ceasefire. Finally, the brief considers how previous efforts can inform existing initiatives, focusing on the Trilateral Mechanism established during the transitional period, which could help future collaboration between the UN, AU and IGAD.

This brief is grounded in the knowledge that international commitment and coordination will prove vital for Sudan; while conflict ripeness will determine the parties' commitment to the process, international actors can prepare and improve coordination to anticipate mediation windows. Only a well-coordinated mediation effort can ultimately end the war.

Figure 1: Emerging Initiatives

<p>Quad for Sudan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-led group constituted during Sudan's transitional period (2019-2023) • Originally composed US, UK, UAE, and Saudi Arabia • The US is revitalizing the Quad with new membership (with Egypt replacing the UK's role) 	<p>Quartet of Special Envoys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multilateral initiative to streamline the positions of institutional special envoys • IGAD has taken the lead in drafting the consensus vision, but adoption is required from all entities for the mechanism to come into effect • IGAD, AU, IGAD and the Arab League will form part of the Quartet
--	---

⁵ United Nations. Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan. 2024. <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/65>.

⁶ Salih, Zainab Mohammed. "Conflict in Sudan: A Map of Regional and International Actors | Wilson Center." *Wilson Center*, December 19, 2024. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/conflict-sudan-map-regional-and-international-actors>.

The success of these initiatives will depend on the interplay, coordination and sequencing between them.

The success of these initiatives will depend on the interplay, coordination and sequencing between them. A visible trend — not only in Sudan but across a number of different African crises — is the important role that middle powers play in convening peace talks. Whether these initiatives compete or coordinate to achieve a ceasefire will not only determine their effectiveness but ultimately indicate whether the nature of diplomacy has shifted from a multilateral to a state-led effort.

A Revitalized Quad

US President Donald Trump's visit to the Middle East in May 2025 spurred discussions on the crisis in Sudan and firmly placed it on the new administration's agenda. A few weeks after his trip to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, Washington prepared the groundwork to revitalize the Quad (although the new composition of the Quad, the meeting's modalities, agenda, and participants are yet to be finalized).⁷ The Quad immediately ran into an challenge, stemming from a reported disagreement on what role (if any) the warring parties should play in a potential peace process.⁸ Egypt — and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia — view SAF as a legitimate state institution and the representative of the Sudanese people. In contrast, the US and UAE believe that neither the RSF nor the SAF should play any role in Sudan's post-war governance.⁹ This internal discord caused the meeting, originally set to take place on July 29, 2025, to be postponed.

Another major challenge centered on the Quad's internal composition. Despite the inclusion of Egypt — a member of the Arab League and AU — some have already criticized the Quad for its lack of African voices and institutions. It is entirely unclear if any African regional bodies (like the AU or IGAD) will be involved in the Quad's processes. Additionally, the glaring omission of Sudanese civilian and grassroots voices from the Quad meetings is a serious impediment; this means that the ultimate owners and implementers of the peace process are excluded from the process.

Aligning Quad members' competing ideologies, positions and interests will be a formidable challenge, but also an opportunity to break the current stalemate and achieve genuine commitments to the peace project. The process of aligning these states — each with considerable leverage over the warring parties — could limit the RSF's and SAF's supply lines, strengthen the impact of sanctions, and pressure the opposing factions into a ceasefire. In addition, creating this alignment within the Quad could have knock-on effects and lift the deadlock in key multilateral platforms such as the UN Security Council and AU Peace and Security Council.

An added advantage of the state-led Quad is its ability to revive and ensure the implementation of the Jeddah Agreement, which is, so far, the only platform that has been able to enable a short-term humanitarian ceasefire. Since two of its members, the US and Saudi Arabia, have previously engaged with the warring parties, the Quad very well may be in a position to revive the Jeddah Agreement, secure a ceasefire, and hand over a broad-based political and peace process to multilateral entities to take forward.

7 Africa Intelligence. "Sudan : Washington to Host Quartet on 29 July." *Africa Intelligence*, July 24, 2025. <https://www.africain-telligence.com/eastern-africa-and-the-horn/2025/07/24/washington-to-host-quartet-on-29-july.110493657-art>.

8 The New Arab. "Sudan Quartet Meeting Postponed after Egypt-UAE Spat." *The New Arab*, July 30, 2025. <https://www.newar-ab.com/news/sudan-quartet-meeting-postponed-after-egypt-uae-spat>.

9 Ibid.

A Multilateral Quartet

The multilateral “Quartet” is similarly facing significant challenges in terms of its form and function. The composition of the institutional mechanism is a key obstacle, as organizations’ levels of commitment and readiness to unify the positions of their representatives (Special Envoys) vary. While IGAD has been spearheading this initiative, other organizations have been somewhat reluctant to advance it.

Another issue facing the Quartet is a lack of engagement from certain key groups. The meeting outlining the draft “consensus vision,” for example, did not include any representation from the AU.¹⁰ While this was the result of a leadership change within the AU Commission (a new chairperson was elected a few weeks prior), the subsequent lack of engagement from the AU, as well as from the UN and the Arab League to approve the consensus visions and align the positions of their Special Envoys, is indicative of their lack of commitment. Upon the invitation of the European Union in June 2025, the four institutions held further consultative meetings in Brussels, discussing Sudan’s war.¹¹ Although this seemingly indicates the EU’s interest in

the multilateral Quartet, if the positions of the Special Envoys were to be streamlined, it would be prudent to outline the EU’s participation and value-add.

There is a real risk within the Quartet that ambition may not translate into meaningful action.

There is a real risk within the Quartet that ambition may not translate into meaningful action. One major barrier: the four institutions, largely influenced by the positions of their member states, are not aligned on their positions on the role of the warring parties. This makes bringing

together these four institutions a challenge. The AU suspended Sudan in 2021 based on the rules and principles outlined in its Constitutive Act, while the UN continues to recognize SAF officials as representatives of the Sudanese state.¹² These divergent approaches could conceivably pose difficulties when creating an institutional consensus. On the other hand, these institutional positions are not set in stone. The fact that the AU now recognizes the Transitional Sovereignty Council as legitimate state authorities, could significantly assist in aligning institutional positions.¹³

Beyond aligning the institutional dispositions, a major determinant of the Quartet’s effectiveness (if constituted) will revolve around the warring parties’ perceptions of the body’s neutrality. It is imperative that the Quartet maximally preserves its (perceived) neutrality to ensure buy-in and trust from the conflict parties.

If the Quartet initiative manages to overcome these challenges, it could be extremely promising. It could solve several bottlenecks observed in current mediation efforts. A multilateral Quartet would lessen the competition among multilateral institutions by binding

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ European External Action Service. “Sudan: EU Convenes 4th Consultative Meeting on Enhancing Coordination of Peace Initiatives and Efforts | EEAS.” June 26, 2025. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/sudan-eu-convenes-4th-consultative-meeting-enhancing-coordination-peace-initiatives-and-efforts_en.

¹² African Union. “Communique of the 1050th Meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) on the Situation in the Sudan-African Union - Peace and Security Department.” *African Union Peace and Security Department*, November 26, 2021; United Nations News. “Sudanese Leader Denounces ‘Devastating Aggression’ Being Waged by Rebels against His Country.” September 26, 2024. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/09/1155016>; Mousa, Sabah. “Sudan in the Agenda of the Arab Summit... A Priority in Discourse But a Challenge in Resolution - Sudan Horizon.” Reports. *Sudan Horizon*, May 17, 2025. <https://sudanhorizon.com/sudan-in-the-agenda-of-the-arab-summit-a-priority-in-discourse-but-a-challenge-in-resolution/>.

¹³ African Union. “Press Statement of the 1292nd Meeting of the Peace and Security Council, Held on 29 July 2025, Following the Announcement on Saturday 26 July 2025 of the Establishment of a Parallel Government in the Republic of Sudan by the Sudanese Coalition (Tasis) Led by the Paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).” *Peace and Security Council*, 2025. <https://papsrepository.africanunion.org/handle/123456789/2540>.

all organizations to a single initiative and reducing parallel and state-led initiatives. These institutions could then engage in political- and technical-level coordination. Its consensus vision provides a role for all actors, while acknowledging comparative advantages between institutions, reducing the desire of multilateral actors to demonstrate relevance, capacity or muscle through their own initiatives. With a clear division of labor, the vision also addresses issues around subsidiarity and complementarity, instead of simply focusing on proximity as a legitimate reason for mediation involvement. This inclusive approach to mediation efforts could increase pressure to curtail parallel initiatives.

The Quartet would allow the Special Envoys to speak with one voice and limit the warring parties' influence over the process and their utilization of divide-and-rule tactics. At times, however, civilian and armed groups have influenced or criticized the appointment of Special Envoys, including most recently the UN's Special Envoy.¹⁴ Efforts by the warring parties to cherry-pick the facilitator can be further limited if the Quartet Special Envoys agree on a roadmap of initiatives needed for Sudan's path to sustainable peace. The consensus vision provides a first step towards streamlining coordination amongst multilateral actors and could help reduce the ability of the warring parties to forum-shop.

Lessons Learned from the Trilateral Mechanism (2022-2023)

The Trilateral Mechanism is a pertinent example of how institutions can collaborate in a crisis setting.

The Trilateral Mechanism that brought together the UN, AU and IGAD to assist Sudanese stakeholders during the transitional period is a pertinent example of how institutions can collaborate in a crisis setting.¹⁵ This joint initiative, led by the United Nations Integrated Transition Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), with the AU and IGAD as co-conveners, facilitated two years of dialogue (2022-2023) between military and civilian actors, including the armed movements and political groups that signed the 2020 Juba Agreement. Together, they organized national-level consultations to prepare a political process toward civilian rule and attempted to mediate the tensions when war erupted in 2023. Although the Trilateral Mechanism operated in very unusual circumstances — the mechanism was established to guide Sudan's return to a constitutional order post-military coup — it could offer the anticipated Quartet valuable lessons on cooperation. What follows are some of the learnings from the Trilateral Mechanism.

Inclusion of African Stakeholders Is Key

UNITAMS was established by the Security Council in June 2020 to provide oversight, assistance and support for Sudan's transition back to constitutional order.¹⁶ The Trilateral Mechanism was conceptualized and led by UNITAMS, until the AU and IGAD's inclusion in March 2022. Even though the mechanism largely depended on UNITAMS staff, resources and logistics (a high resource-burden compared to that of the two African partners), the

14 Africa Intelligence. "Sudan : Civil Coalitions Battle It out around UN Special Envoy." *Africa Intelligence*, June 19, 2025. https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-africa-and-the-horn/2025/06/19/civil-coalitions-battle-it-out-around-un-special-envoy%2C110467079-art?utm_source=AIA&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=PROS_EDIT_FULL_WEB&did=110061659.

15 Perthes, Volker. "Sudan's Transition to War and the Limits of the UN's Good Offices." SWP Research Paper, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2024, 14/2024. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2024RP14>.

16 Mahdi, Maram. "Could Joint AU-UN Mediation Break Sudan's Stalemate?" *Institute for Security Studies*, March 21, 2022. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/could-joint-au-un-mediation-break-sudans-stalemate>.

three organizations were able to create conducive working methods.¹⁷ While the UN provided financial and technical capacity, the inclusion of the AU and IGAD enhanced the mechanism's credibility, which was particularly helpful when the UN's legitimacy was scrutinized after it welcomed the restoration of the transitional agreement in November 2021.¹⁸ The creation of a technocratic government under former Prime Minister Hamdok was not accepted by key Sudanese civilian actors such as the Forces for Freedom and Change Central Council (FFC-CC).¹⁹

An added advantage of including African partners was that it leveraged the AU's previous efforts and inroads with stakeholders in Sudan. The AU was instrumental in diffusing the crisis after the 2019 coup and played a significant role in securing the power-sharing agreement.²⁰ Finally, the inclusion of African representation protected the mechanism from critique or denunciations of the group as a "Western" entity.

Trust-Building Measures Helped Unify the Mechanism Stakeholders

One of the key components of the Trilateral Mechanism was the time that the AU, IGAD and UNITAMS spent working out conducive working methods, building trust and setting up confidence-building measures. These helped overcome some of the initial challenges and discord within the group, chiefly the fact that the different Sudanese stakeholders did not see the mechanism as a single entity and preferred to work bilaterally with the organizations.²¹ Ultimately, the confidence-building measures helped to overcome these dynamics and streamline the positions of the Special Envoys. As one of our interviewees pointed out, "trust had to be built between the three envoys and their staff, different perspectives, not least on process design, had to be reconciled or, where differences persisted, tolerated."

Staff Count Can Make or Break a Mechanism

Resourcing posed an additional challenge. UNITAMS only had 300 staff, which severely limited the ability of the mechanism to hold broad-based consultations with the plethora of Sudanese stakeholders demanding inclusion.²² If the multilateral Quartet is to be constituted, the organizations would have to seriously contend with the technical and financial resources required for such a mission with an expansive mandate.

UNITAMS only had 300 staff, which severely limited the ability of the mechanism to hold broad-based consultations with the plethora of Sudanese stakeholders demanding inclusion.

When SAF's military commander Abdel Fattah Burhan withdrew support for UNITAMS, the UN mission had to leave, and consequently, coordination efforts under the Trilateral Mechanism also came to a halt.²³ Despite the mentioned challenges, these examples of multilateral coordination efforts demonstrate important lessons on how to enhance

17 Perthes, *Sudan's Transition to War and the Limits of the UN's Good Offices*.

18 Perthes, *Sudan's Transition to War and the Limits of the UN's Good Offices*, 13.

19 Ibid.

20 Mahdi, Maram. "Could Joint AU-UN Mediation Break Sudan's Stalemate?".

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Whitfield, Teresa. "Minilateral Mechanisms for Peacemaking in a Multipolar World: Friends, Contact Groups, Troikas, Quads, and Quints." *International Peace Institute*, May 22, 2025. <https://www.ipinst.org/2025/05/minilateral-mechanisms-for-peacemaking-in-a-multipolar-world-friends-contact-groups-troikas-quads-and-quints>, 35.

credibility, broaden local buy-in, and make effective use of limited resources. They should inform today's international approach, which will similarly benefit from institutional coordination and strategic harmonization.

Best Practices for the Quad and Quartet

The Trilateral Mechanism demonstrated that coherence is possible when political and technical efforts are aligned. We could apply the learnings from this example to break the current mediation deadlock regarding the Sudanese civil war. A coordinated international framework could effectively engage the Sudanese conflict parties in ceasefire talks and prepare a long-term political process. Such coordination should be sequenced and designed on a case-by-case basis, taking the distinct strengths of facilitators into account.²⁴ Coordinated international action would provide a role for all mediators involved, thereby reducing interest in demonstrating relevance, capacity or muscle. A division of labor between the Quartet and Quad initiatives is needed and cannot be left undefined. Consequently, the Quad and Quartet initiatives should harmonize their approaches and jointly build on shared strategic priorities in Sudan. It's important to outline the entry points and best practices that the Quartet and Quad mechanisms can leverage to make meaningful progress in the resolution of the conflict in Sudan.

A division of labor between the Quartet and Quad initiatives is needed and cannot be left undefined.

Humanitarian Ceasefire as a Priority

For both the Quad and the Quartet, achieving a humanitarian ceasefire and the protection of civilians should be a key priority. Humanitarian access can serve as an entry point for a more robust ceasefire by reducing violence and laying the groundwork for the broader political process.²⁵ Out of the multilateral organizations engaged in Sudan, the UN has the most capacity and available funding to broker and monitor a humanitarian ceasefire — though even the UN will likely face difficulties securing humanitarian access (when the Jeddah Declaration's lack of enforcement and compliance mechanisms rendered conflict parties' tentative commitments on humanitarian access largely aspirational and without implementation).²⁶ Humanitarian access requires commitment and buy-in from Sudanese de facto authorities and the RSF. The Quartet should therefore prioritize implementing a strong monitoring and compliance mechanism to pressure the conflict parties to allow humanitarian access. Within the Quartet, the UN — with its specialized agencies — can take the lead in working on humanitarian provision and providing relief to Sudanese civilians.²⁷

24 OSCE. "Regional Organizations in Conflict Mediation: Lessons of Experience & Cooperation with the United Nations." 2016. <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/230526>, 22.

25 Interview with former UN official, 18 July 2025 (online).

26 Kurtz, Gerrit. "Protecting Civilians in Sudan." Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), August 7, 2025. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/protecting-civilians-in-sudan>.

27 United Nations. "United Nations Security Council: Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan." S/PV.9822. 2024. <https://docs.un.org/en/S/PV.9822>, 5; ReliefWeb. "Sudan: Humanitarian Access Snapshot June 2025." *ReliefWeb*, July 8, 2025. <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-access-snapshot-june-2025>.

Strategic Dialogue with External Backers

Consulting the conflict parties' external backers — and integrating the interests of these states, pivotal to Sudan's mediation processes — will be crucial to preparing ceasefire negotiations. The Arab League, in particular, could prove helpful to the functioning of the proposed Quartet. The Quartet should leverage the Arab League's credibility and mandate as a regional body to engage the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on Sudan and bring them together under a common agenda.²⁸ The Arab League could also support certain arrangements amongst its member states, such as halting arms supplies, reducing violence, and creating space for the protection of civilians. Coordinating the involvement of various parties according to their relative strengths and spheres of influence offers the greatest potential for impact; while the Arab League could play an important convening role, the US would likely be more effective at exerting pressure and influence over some of Sudan's external patrons. By strategically engaging external actors and bringing together the key power brokers in Sudan's war. The Quad could prepare a broad-based political/peace process for multilateral entities to take forward.

Preparing Sudan's Political Process

In 2024 and 2025, two members of the Quartet, the AU and IGAD, jointly convened two civilian inter-Sudanese dialogues.²⁹ These dialogues, which included various political parties and civil society organizations, are crucial in ensuring broad Sudanese inclusion and preparing actors for the long-term political process. While the dialogues have not yet produced concrete outcomes — and engaging with Sudanese political forces can be challenging — these broad-based consultations are absolutely vital in developing an inclusive roadmap and vision that can allow for a civilian-led transitional government post-war. Through their dialogue work, the AU and IGAD will bolster the Quartet's legitimacy; the Quartet should leverage this for Sudan's long-term peace process.

Final Pointers for Effective Coordination

This policy brief has sketched out how coordinated international engagement can be achieved within the mediation process in Sudan. If done right, it could send a significant signal of resolve to the conflict parties and spur their genuine commitment towards peace efforts. International actors, such as the outlined Quartet and Quad initiatives, must design and implement a division of labor based on complementary strengths to maximize impact under resource constraints. Without coordination, Sudanese conflict parties and patrons may exploit divergences and loopholes for their own gain.

In addition, initiatives such as the Quartet and Quad must strike a balance between the need for a swift resolution and the ripple effects of “quick fixes.”³⁰ Sudan faces a total war where the

28 Elhag, Areig. “To Resolve Sudan's Conflict, Merge the Jeddah and Quad Tracks” Washington Institute, February 7, 2025. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/resolve-sudans-conflict-merge-jeddah-and-quad-tracks>.

29 Statement by Alhaji Sarjoh Bah, Director, Conflict Management Directorate at Sudanese Youth Forum (2025). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/dcmd-welcome-speech-sudan-youth-forum.pdf>.

30 Eljak Elmedni, Bakry. “To End Sudan's Wars, a Comprehensive Response Is Needed.” *Sudan Transparency and Policy Tracker*, July 15, 2025. <https://sudantransparency.org/to-end-sudans-wars-a-comprehensive-response-is-needed/>.

contentious nature of state legitimacy and the transitional process cannot be ignored. War erupted in the middle of a political transition that has not yet been concluded. Mediators must prioritize achieving a ceasefire and protecting civilians, while supporting Sudanese actors in their political process towards sustainable peace. This prioritization must also be reflected in the coordination of mediators, so that ceasefire mediation can lay the groundwork for a sustainable peace process.

Most importantly, without Sudanese ownership, external, top-down efforts cannot be sustainable. Sudanese civilian actors might view international coordination as an asset to their own peace objectives (as it streamlines engagement by reducing the number of interlocutors), but ultimately, a mediated ceasefire will only succeed if the SAF, the RSF and their backers are willing to engage in good faith.

Policy Recommendations

Mediation and dialogue initiatives must invest in a coordinated approach between bilateral, regional and multilateral efforts to advance ceasefire negotiations and a political process in Sudan. Concurrent initiatives like the Quad and Quartet initiatives could operate side-by-side in an effective manner, but only if their division of labor is well defined. They should focus on sequencing their efforts and on crafting a common approach on whether and how to include the Sudanese conflict parties. Furthermore, previous coordination efforts like the Trilateral Mechanism demonstrate the importance of trust-building among involved parties before pursuing confidence-building and mediation with conflict parties.

The UN Security Council should consider constituting a broader political mission similar to UNITAMS. Recognizing the urgent need for a ceasefire and broader political process, neighboring countries and UNSC members such as the Group of Three African States (A3) should lobby for support for a coordinated political and transition mission.

AU and IGAD should maintain inter-Sudanese civilian dialogue efforts despite ongoing challenges. While Sudan's deeply fragmented civilian landscape and the blurred lines between civilian, political and armed actors pose undeniable challenges, meaningful engagement cannot happen without dedicated spaces for dialogue. The AU and IGAD, drawing on their prior experience and relationships with Sudanese civilian stakeholders, are well-placed to convene and facilitate future dialogue processes that remain inclusive. It is time for a follow-up to the most recent dialogue held in February 2025 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The Quad and Arab League should continue to diplomatically engage with the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Sudan's conflict must remain a standing agenda item for LAS convenings and future Quad meetings. The Arab League should prioritize strategic dialogue; its involvement adds a valuable layer of regional legitimacy to multilateral efforts but will require close coordination with Quartet and Quad members to ensure effectiveness.

Other actors, such as the EU, US and UK should sustain support for a coordinated approach by minimizing friction from competing mediation and dialogue platforms. Mediation and dialogue support should be directed toward reinforcing the coordinated efforts of multilateral and bilateral third parties. This can include logistical, technical and financial assistance. Parallel dialogue initiatives may be introduced, as the US-led Quad has demonstrated. In this context, influential actors such as the EU and the US can strengthen coordination by aligning multilateral efforts to ensure that support is most impactful.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our GPPi colleagues Melissa Li, Abi Watson, and Philipp Rotmann as well as Gerrit Kurtz for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts. Our thanks also go to our interview partners and the members of our practitioner group, whose perspectives and insights greatly informed this policy brief. Finally, we are grateful to Oliver Jung and Zoë Johnson for their excellent editorial support.

This publication is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office as part of the project “Stabilization Lab: Improving Key Instruments for Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding.” This arm of the project on “Political Tools for Managing Crises in Africa,” is a collaboration between GPPi and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). The views expressed herein solely reflect those of the authors and do not present the official position of the German government.

Reflect. Advise. Engage.

The Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) is an independent non-profit think tank based in Berlin. We conduct research, offer ideas and advice and facilitate dialogue, seeking to contribute to a world that is more peaceful, just and equipped to address global challenges.

Cover Photo: In April 2025, the UK Foreign Secretary hosted the “London Conference” to discuss humanitarian access and political solutions to end the war in Sudan with other international actors. Source: Flickr / Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Reinhardtstr. 7, 10117 Berlin, Germany

Phone +49 30 275 959 75-0

gppi@gppi.net

gppi.net