Beyond liberal peace? The IGAD-led peace mediation in South Sudan

Ibrahim Magara and
Jan Pospisil

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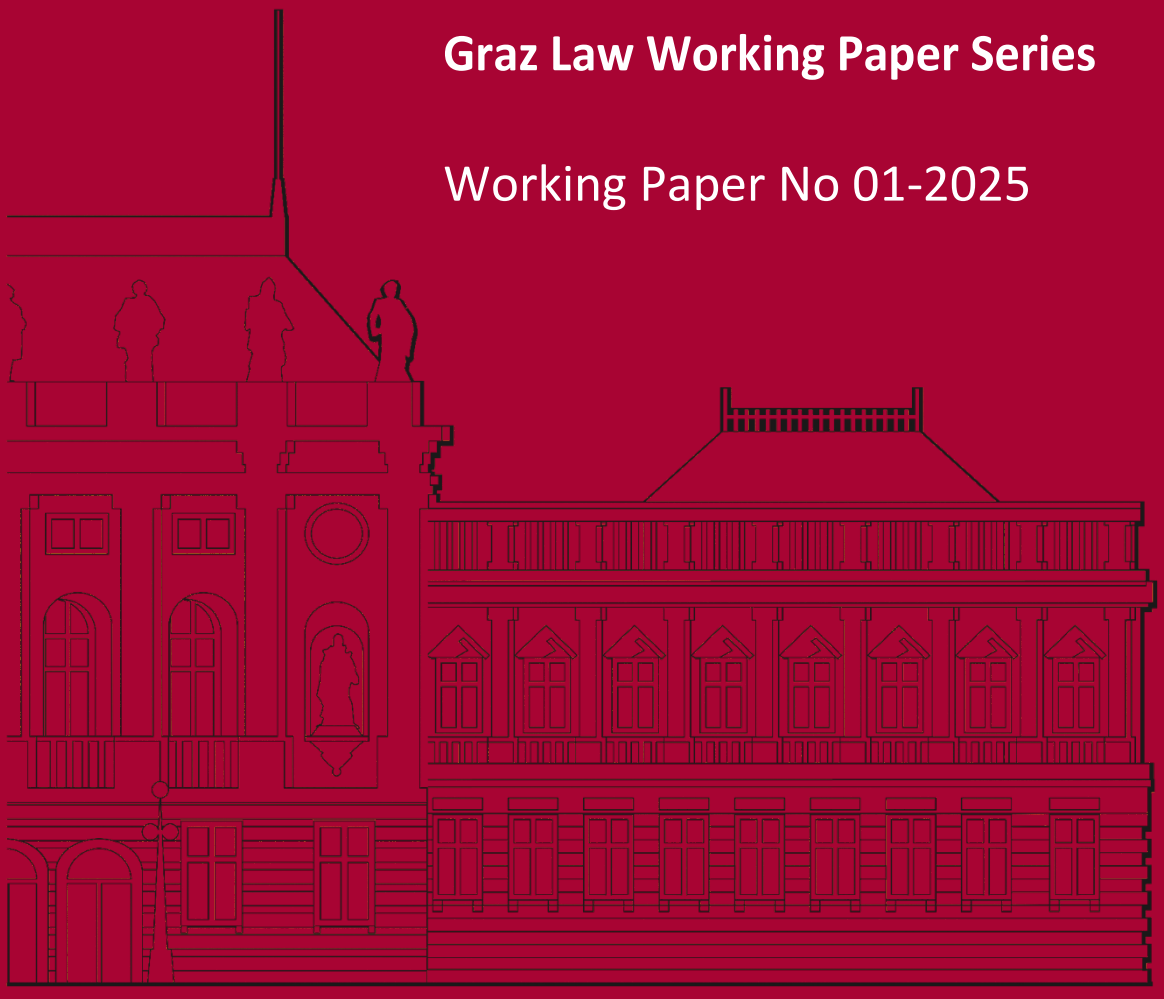

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Faculty of Law
University of Graz
Universitätsstraße 15
8010 Graz
Austria

E-Mail: law.wps@uni-graz.at

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Abstract

Africa's subregional bodies, particularly the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), are increasingly central to peacemaking. This article examines IGAD's mediation in South Sudan against the backdrop of the declining liberal peace paradigm, traditionally rooted in open markets, democratic governance, and structured peacebuilding processes. Liberal peacebuilding, often criticised for its top-down and technocratic approach, has proven ineffective in addressing the fragmented realities of contemporary conflicts. Using IGAD's peace efforts in South Sudan as a case study, the article highlights the tensions between liberal peacebuilding and alternative regionalised approaches. It explores IGAD's mediation practices, which integrate elements of liberal frameworks while navigating complex regional dynamics and competing national interests.

Keywords: Peace Processes, IGAD, South Sudan, Mediation, Fragmentation, Violent Conflict, Political Transitions

Authors

Ibrahim Magara Dr. Ibrahim Sakawa Magara is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) and an Adjunct Lecturer at St. Paul's University in Kenya). Magara holds a PhD in international politics from Loughborough University, in the UK and a Master of Arts degree from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa's Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations in Kenya. Through a combination of theory and empirical data Magara's PhD advances knowledge of security and peace regionalism in Africa through the case of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led peace process for South Sudan.

Jan Pospisil Dr Jan Pospisil is an Associate Professor (Research) at Coventry University's Centre for Peace and Security. His work focuses on peace and transition processes and political settlements, peace mediation, donor politics in peacebuilding, competitive regionalism, resilience, the Horn of Africa region, and South Sudanese and Sudanese politics. Jan is a co-investigator in the six-year follow-up programme Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep), funded by UK FCDO. He holds a Habilitation in Political Science at the University of Vienna and teaches at the University of Graz since 2018.

Contact the Author: **ae0299@coventry.ac.uk**

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1 Introduction

Africa's subregional bodies, particularly the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other regional mechanisms are increasingly involved in peacemaking roles. However, the outcomes of their efforts vary widely. These initiatives align with a broader global trend – the decline of liberal peacebuilding. Traditionally, liberal peacebuilding has been seen as a vehicle for promoting a liberal world order characterised by open markets, democratic governance, and accountability. However, while the literature on regionalism and liberal peacebuilding has advanced, there is minimal cross-dialogue about the ongoing decline of liberal peace.

This chapter examines the role of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)[1] in regional conflict management, especially through mediation, against the backdrop of a diminishing liberal peace agenda. Using IGAD's peace process in South Sudan as a case study, this chapter explores how its mediation practices and outcomes either align with or deviate from the global liberal peace framework, now increasingly challenged. The chapter mainly refers to peacemaking in its overarching connotation, and to peacebuilding in a narrow definition, mainly focusing on the implementation of peace agreements, but also implying multi-pronged efforts of managing and resolving conflicts as well as establishing conditions that support peace in its contending perspectives.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of international peace mediation, emphasising its global popularity. It then presents a case study of IGAD's peace mediation efforts in South Sudan, which incorporated elements of liberal peacebuilding within a regionally driven mediation framework. The chapter proceeds to discuss major debates around liberal peacebuilding, highlighting the current crisis contributing to its decline. It then elaborates on two dimensions of fragmentation. Stressing the importance of ongoing negotiation and adaptation in envisioning alternative peace paradigms. The chapter concludes

[1] Headquartered in Djibouti, IGAD is a Regional Economic Community (REC) in the Horn of Africa comprised of eight countries (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda). Other than Eritrea, which protested following its war with Ethiopia, all member states have been active over the years.

by examining how Africa's regional bodies and mechanisms can offer platforms for reimagining peace theory and practice, moving beyond the waning liberal peace paradigm.

2 International peace mediation

As Deiniol Lloyd Jones observes, 'mediation is a form of conflict resolution in international politics which stresses the vital role of a third party in the process of creating peace and facilitating agreement between erstwhile disputing actors.'[2] Mediation has a rich history across all cultures and regions of the world. By the late 1960s, advancements in organisational psychology triggered important intellectual shifts regarding the conduct of mediation, starting as a heavily descriptive field before taking a prescriptive approach.[3] Contributing to these earlier theoretical developments, John Burton propagated problem-solving techniques that combine political action and scientific experimentation as well as general regulations of an elaborate practice of mediation. Burton went on to propose the use of controlled communication.[4] Which essentially pertains to specific ways of using language to reach consensual agreements over disputes. These ideas have since been advanced through a combination of experimentation and other analytical approaches to mediation, with mixed outcomes.

Mediation has become the most prevalent form of facilitated negotiations for resolving intrastate and interstate disputes of varying intensities. This is evident in both the expanding body of relevant literature and the frequency with which mediation is invoked in response to armed conflicts across the globe. Over the past twenty-five years, 'the use of mediation has increased rapidly as has the depth of scholarly research.'[5] Mediation scholarship has exponentially expanded. Leading to deeper insights into key dynamics of mediation theory and including insights into the timing or 'ripeness' of mediation, various mediator approaches, styles and strategies, and the critical role of power – conceived as authority and influence – within mediation processes.[6] Some scholars argue that 'when applied to the confluence of conditions that typify today's conflict and crisis arena', mediation could make 'a crucial

[2] Jones, D. L. (2000). Mediation, conflict resolution and critical theory. *Review of International Studies*, 26(4), 647-662, p. 648

[3] Bercovitch, J. (2011). *Theory and practice of international mediation: Selected essays*. London: Routledge.

[4] Burton, J. W. (1988). *Conflict resolution as a political system.* Retrieved from: https://hdl.handle.net/1920/10674.

[5] Raines, S. S. & Foultz, B. (2020). International mediation. In Butcher, C. & Hallward, M.C. (eds.). *Understanding international conflict management*. London: Routledge, 41–52, p. 42.

[6] Raines & Foultz, '*International mediation*', p. 42.

difference in whether or not the international community will be successful in limiting conflict.'[7] Such approaches position peace mediation as a pivotal component in the broader frameworks of peace practices, including liberal peacebuilding.

The UN and other international organisations are leading promoters of peace mediation globally. Besides being outlined in Chapter 6, Article 33 of the UN Charter, in 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution reaffirming the international community's commitment to bolstering the role of mediation in conflict management. Since then, mediation practices have broadened. They now include strategies of addressing the root causes of conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Ideas, practices, and discourses of mediation revolve around elements of incentives for mediation, approaches and strategies of mediation, dynamics of mediation and characteristics of mediators.[8] There are two broad approaches to mediation: facilitative and coercive. Fundamentally, both approaches entail use and management of power which is here understood as authority to influence or control. Zartman and Touval, for instance, identified motives and context as key factors determining, affecting, and shaping mediation. Contending that mediators with power leverage their positions of influence to manipulate the parties into a settlement. This underscores the significance of power in mediation practices.[9]

Expounding the theme of power further, Svensson engages the classical distinction between 'power mediators' and 'pure mediators.' He conceives a power mediator as one who 'uses its economic, military, and political resources to pull or push the parties in their preferred direction […] and exercises its leverage over the parties in order to make them comply.'[10] Relatedly, other scholars suggest that 'manipulative mediators can influence the direction of a conflict not only through carrot-and-stick measures but also by acting as a potential enforcement mechanism for any agreements that are reached.'[11]

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[7] Wilkenfeld, J., Beardsley, K. & Quinn, D. (2019). *Research Handbook on Mediating International Crises*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

[8] Wiegand, K., Rowland, E. & Keels, E. (2021). Third-party knowledge and success in civil war mediation. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 23(1), 3–21; Assefa, H. (2019). *Mediation of civil wars: Approaches and strategies – the Sudan conflict*. London: Routledge; Nagel, R. U. (2019). Talking to the shameless?: Sexual violence and mediation in intrastate conflicts. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 63(8), 1832–859; Zartman, I. W. (2019). Dynamics and constraints in negotiating internal conflicts. In *Zartman, I. Z. (ed). A pioneer in conflict management and area studies*. Vol. 23. Cham: Springer, 161–172.

[9] Zartman, I. W. & Touval, S. (1985). International mediation: Conflict resolution and power politics. *Journal of Social Issues*, 41(2), 27–45.

[10] Svensson, I. (2007). Mediation with muscles or minds? Exploring power mediators and pure mediators in civil wars. *International Negotiation*, 12(2), 229–248, p. 230.

[11] Quinn, D., Wilkenfeld, J., Smarick, K. & Asal, V. (2006). Power play: Mediation in symmetric and asymmetric international crises. *International Interactions,* 32(4), 441–470, p. 445.

Allard Duursma introduces a capacity-based mediation perspective, which emphasises building local capacity and fostering genuine commitment among conflicting parties, rather than relying on coercion. According to Duursma, coercive approaches – where external actors apply pressure to compel parties into agreements – often fail, especially in fragmented conflict environments.[12] In these settings, the landscape is usually marked by a complex array of competing interests and factions, making it difficult for any single actor to wield sufficient influence to ensure compliance or to sustain peace over time. This leads to a situation where many actors are involved in mediating the same conflict.

Fragmentation complicates mediation further because external pressures can backfire, pushing groups to resist imposed solutions or to fracture alliances. Thus, Duursma suggests that mediation efforts are more effective when they focus on enhancing the capacities of local actors to negotiate and reach mutually acceptable solutions, rather than on imposing externally driven agendas.[13] By fostering local ownership and creating conditions for sustainable agreements, a capacity-based approach aims to achieve more durable outcomes, even in the face of significant internal divisions. This, in part, forms the basis for the arguably romanticised emphasis of the local turn in mediation and peacebuilding more broadly. Overemphasis of the local turn may take attention away from other equally important spheres of mediation practice. Key among them, the phenomenon of regionalised mediation practice where Africa's RECs, like IGAD have been playing a key role.[14]

Motives behind mediation processes provide a window into understanding intricate dynamics of regional mediation. Including the importance of proximity in international peace mediation. Greig and Regan, for instance, argue that a state is nearly 14 times more likely to mediate in a neighbouring country than in one that is thousands of miles away, as neighbouring states often have more direct stakes in the conflict, including potential threats to their security.[15] In the Casamance conflict in Senegal, for example, both the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau offered to mediate due to concerns about conflict spill-over and the potential influx of refugees.[16] Similar dynamics are evident in Algeria's involvement in the Tuareg revolt

[12] Duursma, A. (2020). African solutions to African challenges: The role of legitimacy in mediating civil wars in Africa. *International Organization*, 74(2), 295–330.
[13] Duursma, *'African solutions to African challenges'.*
[14] Back, I. (2024). The Role of Regional Multi-Actor Mediators: The Case of IGAD in the Ethiopia-Tigray Conflict, *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 15:2, 151-166, DOI: 10.1080/21520844.2024.2343261.
[15] Greig, J. M. & Regan, P. M. (2008). When do they say yes? An analysis of the willingness to offer and accept mediation in civil wars. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(4), 759–781.
[16] Greig & Regan, *'When do they say yes',* 82.

in Mali[17] and the joint mediation by Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in the Russia-Iran conflict.[18] These same factors apply to the situation in South Sudan, where IGAD member states reached a consensus on the need to prevent conflict spill-over, which could destabilise an already troubled region hence they were mostly driven by self-help motives.[19]

The evolving praxis of international mediation and the role that proximity plays in mediation initiatives coincide with an increased role of subregional bodies, like IGAD, in conducting mediation.[20] A significant number of international peace mediation initiatives in Africa are conducted by or through ad-hoc mechanisms within subregional bodies and regional mechanisms, such as IGAD. This then raises the question as to whether such bodies and mechanisms as IGAD can be thought of as providing platforms for peace negotiations and adaptation that may contribute to (re)conceiving peacebuilding at a time when liberal peacebuilding is in a sharp decline.

3 Controversies of liberal peacebuilding

Motivated by a desire to establish and spread a global liberal world order – characterised by open markets, liberal democracy, and good governance – liberal peacebuilding is primarily driven by Western powers and international organisations like the UN. This approach is rooted in the belief that peace can be constructed by establishing political and economic structures that embody liberal values. At the core of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm is the concept of top-down planning: constructing peaceful societies through comprehensive peace agreements and meticulously designed, time-bound roadmaps intended to transform conflict-affected societies into democratic, peaceful and prosperous countries. This emphasis on planning may seem paradoxical, given the openness associated with liberalism as a political ideal. Yet, it remains central to the liberal peacebuilding approach.

Two key processes define liberal peacebuilding: harmonisation and planning with implementation. The harmonisation process aims to streamline and coordinate peace negotiations under a single, widely accepted mediator, such as a state, group of states, or

[17] Svensson, *'Mediation with muscles or minds?'*.
[18] Iji, T. (2001). Multiparty mediation in Tajikistan: The 1997 peace agreement. *International Negotiation*, 6(3), 357–385.
[19] Magara, I. S. (2023) Regional peace-making in Africa: A study of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led peace process for South Sudan, 2013–2018. Social Science and Humanities thesis, Loughborough University. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.26174/thesis.lboro.23267078.v1.
[20] Pring, J. & Palmiano Federer J. (2020). The normative agency of regional organizations and non-governmental organizations in international peace mediation. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 26(4), 429–448.

international organisation. This process seeks to bring conflicting parties together around a common negotiation table and to create an atmosphere that can enhance genuine inclusive dialogue. In the end, the mediator should be able to develop a unified peace framework. A framework that includes all stakeholders. And one that enjoys broad international participation in the peacebuilding process.[21]

The second process, planning and implementation, involves identifying the root causes of conflict, followed by creating agreements that systematically address and resolve these issues. Typically, this leads to a transitional government. Often in the form of a power-sharing arrangement among conflicting parties, which is then tasked with implementing the transitional program. However, this approach frequently encounters significant challenges and often fails to achieve lasting outcomes. Primarily because of the inherent instability of power-sharing governments. They tend to perpetuate conflict through political means rather than fostering genuine peace. As seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even decades after the Dayton Agreement, such arrangements often lead to what Bell and Pospisil term a 'formalised political unsettlement.' A scenario where the root causes of the conflict remain unaddressed, and the peace process stagnates, for example as demonstrated by the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, decades after the Dayton Agreement.[22]

The emphasis on implementation of peace agreements often overshadows the critical need for deeper political and societal transformation. While the technical tasks outlined in peace agreements are essential, they can distract key actors from the complex processes necessary to transition society from conflict to peace. Mary Kaldor's concept of 'civicness'[23] addresses this issue, emphasising the need for changes in governance, collective thinking and societal attitudes. Kaldor argues that true peace requires transforming how societies govern and how individuals relate to one another. These changes cannot be achieved merely through the mechanical implementation of pre-negotiated peace agreements.

Societal transformation is a cornerstone of lasting peace. And it resists the same degree of planning as political or economic reforms. The inherent contradiction in liberal peacebuilding lies in its reliance on meticulous planning to establish open, democratic societies with strong governance. This approach assumes that complex social dynamics can be engineered and

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[21] Paris. R. (2004). *At war's end: Building peace after civil conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[22] Bell, C. and Pospisil, J. (2017). Navigating inclusion in transitions from conflict: The formalised political unsettlement. *Journal of International Development,* 29(5), 576–593.
[23] Kaldor, M. and Radice, H. (2022). Introduction: Civicness in conflict. *Journal of Civil Society*, 18(2), 125–141.

controlled, a notion that has proven unrealistic and fundamentally at odds with the principles of political liberalism. Scholars like Oliver Richmond[24] argue that liberal peacebuilding often fails to account for the organic, unpredictable nature of societal change. Leading to interventions disconnected from local realities. This critique underscores the need for a more flexible, context-sensitive approach to peacebuilding. One that moves beyond top-down planning and supports organic, bottom-up social transformation. As this working paper contends, addressing the challenges of peace mediation in a fragmented world requires rethinking traditional paradigms and developing new strategies that are better suited to the complexities of contemporary conflicts but also amenable to constantly evolving societal dynamics and needs.

The persistence of conventional peacebuilding processes, despite their evident limitations, can be attributed to a combination of international pressure and entrenched routine practices. Traditionally, support for peace processes has been aligned with major global institutions such as the UN, regional organisations like the African Union (AU) and subregional bodies. It equally relies on other internalised mechanisms including various formal and informal groups such as Troikas and Groups of Friends that rally around specific peace initiatives. These entities provide crucial diplomatic backing, financial resources, and legitimacy, thereby reinforcing the reliance on traditional liberal peacebuilding approaches.[25]

Over time, this top-down, externally driven approach to peace negotiations has become quite mainstream and routine. Initially grounded in the expertise of diplomats and international organisations, it has gradually morphed into what William Easterly describes as the 'tyranny of experts.' According to Easterly, this phenomenon emerges when technocratic expertise supersedes local knowledge, leading to rigid, formulaic solutions that overlook complex realities on the ground.[26] In liberal peacebuilding, this has resulted in a cycle of repetitive planning and implementation, where technical solutions eclipse the need for more adaptable, context-sensitive approaches.[27]

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[24] Richmond, O. P. (2012). *A post-liberal peace*. Abingdon: Routledge.
[25] Tschirgi, N. (2004). *Post-conflict peacebuilding revisited: Achievements, limitations, challenges*. New York, NY: International Peace Academy.
[26] Easterly, W. (2014). *The tyranny of experts: Economists, dictators, and the forgotten rights of the poor*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
[27] Mac Ginty, R. (2011). *International peacebuilding and local resistance: Hybrid forms of peace*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

This routinised approach has become increasingly unsustainable amid evolving global dynamics. Scholars of critical peacebuilding, such as Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, have mounted significant critiques of the liberal peacebuilding model, arguing that it imposes a one-size-fits-all framework that ignores local contexts and reinforces existing power imbalances.[28] Despite these critiques, there remains a reluctance to challenge this entrenched routine – a 'disaster' that has turned peace practices into a mechanical exercise, disconnected from the nuanced realities of the societies it seeks to transform.

Conventional practices of peacemaking, including those through mediation tools, have become increasingly unviable in a world marked by fragmentation and growing geopolitical turbulence. The fragmentation of global power, driven by the emergence of new regional players and the waning influence of traditional Western powers, has disrupted the once-coherent frameworks that previously supported peace negotiations and peacebuilding efforts. This shift has introduced a new level of unpredictability and complexity to peace processes, highlighting the inadequacy of old routines.[29] The rise of a multipolar world and the growing influence of non-state actors have further complicated the peacebuilding landscape, underscoring the need to move beyond entrenched routines in favour of more adaptable and inclusive strategies.

The challenges of this new geopolitical context demand a rethinking of both international and regional approaches to peacemaking and peacebuilding. As the global order becomes increasingly fragmented, there is a pressing need to move beyond routine practices toward a more dynamic, locally informed, and context-responsive mode of peacebuilding. This shift requires not only abandoning outdated approaches but also developing new methodologies that are better suited to the complexities of today's conflicts and peace processes. While larger multilateral organisations often struggle to embrace this flexibility, smaller regional entities such as IGAD are often better positioned – and, at times, even compelled by their limited influence in the regional power dynamics – to experiment with and adopt these innovative approaches.

[28] Mac Ginty, R. (2011). *International peacebuilding and local resistance: Hybrid forms of peace*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; Richmond, '*A post-liberal peace*'.
[29] Chandler, D. (2010). *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance*. Abingdon: Routledge.

4 Two dynamics of fragmentation

The term 'fragmentation' has gained prominence in peacebuilding literature, reflecting the increasing complexity and disorder in global and regional orders. Scholars and practitioners use this term to refer to the breakdown of previously stable and coherent political, social, or economic structures. This concept has risen alongside related terms like hybrid peacebuilding. Hybrid peacebuilding involves blending international and local practices and acknowledging the fractured nature of contemporary conflicts and societies.[30]

Fragmentation, therefore, extends beyond a mere conceptual tool, influencing new theoretical frameworks in international relations, such as the quantum approach advanced by scholars like Der Derian and Wendt.[31] A perspective that draws parallels between principles of quantum mechanics – such as complementarity, uncertainty, and entanglement – and the fluid, unpredictable nature of today's international relations. These quantum principles challenge traditional linear and deterministic models, suggesting that international processes are marked by inherent uncertainties and intricate interdependencies, much like the quantum world. For example, the concept of 'superposition' in quantum mechanics, where entities can exist in multiple states simultaneously, could metaphorically capture how states or actors in international relations may embody conflicting identities or interests, reflecting a form of internal fragmentation. At the core of these discussions is the idea that fragmentation involves a perceived or actual breakdown of allegedly previously stable configurations. This breakdown manifests in two interconnected processes: the fragmentation of context and the fragmentation of order – or, more precisely, the fragmentation of the concept of order itself.

The first type of fragmentation refers to the disintegration of global and regional structures that once provided a sense of order. The notion of a coherent world order has shifted into what Desai and Lang have termed 'global ungovernance.'[32] As they suggest, instead of advancing toward a unified system of global governance, we are experiencing a retreat into more chaotic and uncoordinated forms of global interaction. Regional groupings, once considered potential foundations for a new global order, are now increasingly at the forefront of international conflict mediation. However, these regional blocs, whether in Africa, Asia, or

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[30] Mac Ginty, R. (2010). Hybrid peace: The interaction between top-down and bottom-up peace. *Security Dialogue*, 41(4), 391-412; Richmond, O. P. and Mitchell, A. (2011). *Hybrid forms of peace: From everyday agency to post-liberalism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

[31] Der Derian, J. and Wendt, A. (2020). *Quantum international relations: A new ontology for world politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[32] Desai, D. and Lang A. (2020). Introduction: Global Un-Governance. *Transnational Legal Theory*, 11(3), 219–243.

the Middle East, exhibit turbulence and fluidity rather than stability. Alliances form and dissolve rapidly, and state interests shift unpredictably, making it challenging to establish enduring structures capable of institutionalisation and predictability.

Fragmentation is more salient in the Global South where the visible markers of statehood often exist only in fragments. In many instances, describing these states as undergoing fragmentation may be somewhat misleading. They might be better understood as having been inherently fragmented from the outset. Joel Migdal's 'state-in-society' approach underscores this perspective. Showing how states in various parts of the world have historically operated not as cohesive unified entities but as collections of isolated governance 'islands' and artefacts of statehood.[33] In these states, the mechanisms of governance may exist in limited and localised forms, often functioning primarily to secure the interests of the ruling elites rather than to serve the broader goals of statehood. This prioritisation of elite survival over holistic governance has led to a model of governance that is fragmented not only in its physical presence but also in its structural coherence and effectiveness. This leads to a situation where pockets of governance are disconnected from a unified national framework.

Such contextualised fragmentation is paralleled by a breakdown in the idea of global or regional order. The 1990s marked the zenith of global governance, highlighted by ambitious frameworks like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) initiative. R2P represented an attempt to redefine state sovereignty, proposing that states have an international duty to protect their populations from atrocities, thereby introducing a normative shift toward accountability in international relations. This doctrine symbolised the height of a movement toward collective international responsibility, fostering hopes of a more unified and morally driven world order. However, the waning influence of R2P and similar frameworks underscores a broader decline in global governance as a unifying force. The fading of such radical concepts reflects the erosion of global governance structures that once aimed to standardise and enforce norms across states, making it evident that we are transitioning into a more fragmented and unpredictable global landscape.

The challenge for contemporary peacemaking and peacebuilding lies not only in navigating the fragmented landscape of global governance. It needs to fundamentally rethink how order and governance might look in a world where traditional structures and international

[33] Migdal, J. S. (2001). *State in society: Studying how states and societies transform and constitute one another*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

institutions no longer serve as reliable pillars. As fragmentation becomes the norm rather than the exception, there is a pressing need to move beyond outdated models of statehood and global governance that assume coherent and hierarchical structures as prerequisites for stability.

Instead, peacemakers must adopt more adaptive, flexible approaches that reflect the realities of fragmented contexts and the inherently complex, often chaotic, nature of contemporary international relations. In a world marked by shifting alliances, fluid identities, and conflicting interests, peacebuilders, in turn, are called upon to develop frameworks that can thrive within these fractured environments, fostering resilience and cooperation rather than a rigid institutionalised order.

As one of the most ambitious regional efforts to establish stable order in Africa, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), has struggled to achieve lasting traction in the face of regional fragmentation. Conceived as a structured and cohesive framework for addressing peace and security issues across Africa, APSA was designed to empower African nations to address conflicts autonomously and collaboratively, reducing dependency on external powers. However, APSA's impact has been constrained by the same forces of fragmentation that challenge global governance: disparate national interests, limited resources, and the lack of a centralised authority.

Subregional bodies such, as IGAD, bring localised knowledge and region-specific expertise to bear on peace processes. In so doing, they play a crucial role within APSA in such a moment of existential crisis. IGAD's peace efforts, as in South Sudan, reflect APSA's vision of African-led conflict management, though they also illustrate the practical limitations that APSA faces in achieving cohesive, sustainable outcomes amid regional volatility. Competing national interests within IGAD member states and resource constraints often limit its ability to act as an enduring peace framework under the APSA umbrella. In South Sudan, for example, IGAD's initiatives have been both instrumental and hindered by internal complexities; member states such as Uganda and Sudan have their stakes in the region, creating entanglements that sometimes complicate mediation. This reflects a larger trend within APSA, where regional alliances, conflicting national agendas, and decentralised authority undermine the intended stability of African-led peace initiatives.

The difficulties faced by the architectural design of the APSA and the norm implementation role of Africa's subregional bodies like IGAD highlight the broader disintegration of the belief

that stable, hierarchical structures alone can effectively manage conflict in today's fragmented world. These challenges once again accentuate the fact that sustainable peace may require innovative and decentralised approaches. Approaches that better accommodate the fluidity of contemporary regional conflicts, which are not only complex but also simultaneously internationalised and localised.

Over recent years, faith in the concepts of regional, subregional, and interregional order has significantly declined, particularly within peacebuilding. This decline stems from a growing disillusionment with the ability of regional structures to provide the stability and coherence necessary for effective conflict resolution. IGAD's experiences underscore this shift: while IGAD brings critical regional knowledge to conflict management, it also exemplifies the limitations of relying solely on formalised structures in complex and entangled conflicts. The challenge, therefore, is to envision what a departure from liberal peacemaking ideas might entail in an era marked by fragmentation and unpredictability. Such a shift requires reimagining peacebuilding beyond the conventional liberal frameworks, which often emphasise inclusivity in a standardised, formulaic sense and focus heavily on addressing so-called root causes of conflict in prescriptive ways.

Moving forward, peacebuilding efforts must embrace the inherent uncertainties and complexities that characterise fragmented environments, developing new methodologies that are not only more flexible but also more deeply responsive to the realities and needs of the diverse actors and interests shaping these peace processes. This means considering alternative pathways for conflict resolution that may break away from linear, top-down approaches, and exploring more radical forms of bottom-up peacebuilding that elevate local knowledge, practices, and agency.

In this evolving context, bodies like IGAD can play a pivotal role by leveraging their regional understanding to implement peacebuilding strategies that are less rigid and more adaptive. For example, IGAD's involvement in South Sudan reflects a model that, while operating within broader frameworks, increasingly acknowledges the importance of localised dynamics and actor-specific needs. This approach could benefit from integrating complex systems theory, as suggested by scholars like Cilliers, to address the non-linear and adaptive nature of peace processes in fragmented contexts.[34] Drawing insights from complex systems theory, IGAD and similar regional bodies could implement peacebuilding strategies that are iterative and

[34] Cilliers, P. (2002). *Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*. Abingdon: Routledge.

responsive, capable of evolving in tandem with the fluid and often unpredictable dynamics of conflict zones. Embracing these interdisciplinary approaches and adaptive frameworks could lay the foundation for a form of peacebuilding that is not only resilient but also tailored to the diverse, evolving landscape of modern conflicts.

5 The case study: IGAD's peace mediation in South Sudan since 2013

IGAD spearheaded a mediation initiative in South Sudan following the outbreak of the civil war in 2013. The mediation was led by three lead mediators. These were: Ethiopia's Mesfin Seyoum, Kenya's Lazaro Sumbeiywo and Sudan's Mohamed al-Dabi.[35] Besides IGAD mediators, 'diplomats from Africa, the US and Europe flooded the region, hoping to contain the conflict before it spiralled out of control'[36]. The beginning of the mediation was fluxed as it took some 20 months before the negotiating parties – largely comprised of President Salva Kiir-led government, his main armed rival Riek Machar, Former Detainees (FDs) and other political parties – agreed to the terms of a political settlement in August 2015 on the basis of which the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) was concluded.[37]

Underpinning the ARCSS was an elite bargain crafted into a power-sharing arrangement under a transitional unity government tasked with the responsibility of implementing an ambitious post-conflict recovery and reform over 30 months. Besides delays in the implementation of the ARCSS, failure by parties to demilitarise jeopardised the post-mediation process ultimately leading to the collapse of the agreement and a resumption of violence in July 2016.[38] As a result, the conflict intensified and spread across South Sudan which saw the war enter a new and dangerous phase.[39]

In June 2017, through the so-called High-Level Revitalisation Forum (HLRF), IGAD renewed its mediation efforts in view of restoring implementation of the ARCSS, a process that started

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[35] Verjee, A. (2020). How mediators conceive of peace: The case of IGAD in South Sudan, 2013-15. In Nouwen, S. M. H., James, L. & Srinivasan, S. (eds.). *Making and breaking Peace in Sudan and South Sudan: The Comprehensive Peace Agreement and beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 277–296.

[36] Vertin, Z. (2018). *A poisoned well: Lessons in mediation from South Sudan's troubled peace process*. International Peace Institute (IPI). Retrieved from: A Poisoned Well: Lessons in Mediation from South Sudan's Troubled Peace Process.

[37] Deng, D. (10 December 2018). *Compound fractures political formations, armed groups and regional mediation in South Sudan*. Institute for Security Studies (ISS). Retrieved from: Compound fractures: political formations, armed groups and regional mediation in South Sudan | ISS Africa.

[38] Young, J. (2017). *Isolation and endurance: Riek Machar and the SPLM-IO in 2016-17*. Small Arms Survey, Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA). Retrieved from: http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/working-papers/HSBA-SPLM-IO-Update-Oct-2017.pdf.

[39] Deng, '*Compound fractures*'; Boswell, A. (2017). 'Spreading fallout: The collapse of the ARCSS and new conflict along the Equatorias-DRC border.' Small Arms Survey, Human Security Baseline Assessment Issue Brief no. 28.

with consultations between August and October 2017 leading up to the HLRF forum in December 2017.[40] Led by IGAD's three mediators together with an expanded team of collaborators referred to as the IGAD-plus[41], the parties to the conflict recommitted to the terms of a cessation of hostilities, which they hardly respected. Amid persistent ceasefire violations,[42] the mediation process proceeded with Phases II and III of the HLRF in Addis Ababa in February and May 2018, respectively.

Nevertheless, IGAD mediators failed to secure a peace deal. Amid their frustration and increased pressure, mediators turned to IGAD heads to push for a face-to-face meeting between Kiir and Machar to deal with outstanding issues, including security arrangements.[43] In the end, Sudan's Omar al-Bashir and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni convened in Khartoum and, through persuasion and coercion, pushed Kiir and Machar into signing a raft of agreements culminating in the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018.[44] The ensuing transition in South Sudan has been marred by widespread delays including concerns that parties to the conflict lack sufficient political will and commitment to implementing the peace agreement. In September 2024, the transitional process was further extended by 24 months[45] (amid contestations from some quarters, including the UN.[46]

Besides the intrigues of the protracted political transition in South Sudan, the peace process and outcomes of IGAD's mediation demonstrate yet again that peace efforts are largely influenced by a global liberal order, even when such processes are spearheaded by or domiciled in regional initiatives and mechanisms. IGAD's mediation's goal, as expressly stated

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[40] Higashi, D. (2022). *Inclusivity in mediation and peacebuilding: UN, neighboring states, and global powers*. London: Edward Elgar Publishing.

[41] IGAD-Plus members include: Representatives of IGAD (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda); five Representatives of AU (Algeria, Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa); the African Union Commission (AUC); the People's Republic of China; the European Union (EU); the Co-Chair of IGAD Partners Forum; the Kingdom of Norway; United Kingdom (UK); United States of America (USA) and the United Nations (UN). See: https://igad.int/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1187:press-release-participation-of-the-igad-plus-peace-process&catid=1:latest-news.

[42] Verjee, A. (2019). *Ceasefire monitoring in South Sudan 2014-2019*. USIP. Retrieved from: Ceasefire Monitoring in South Sudan 2014–2019: "A Very Ugly Mission" | United States Institute of Peace

[43] Sudan Tribune. (06 July 2018). *Agreement on outstanding issues of security arrangements.* Retrieved from: http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article65805.

[44] Mamdani, M. (24 September 2018). *The trouble with South Sudan's new peace deal.* The New York Times. Retrieved from: Opinion | The Trouble With South Sudan's New Peace Deal - The New York Times.

[45] Takpiny, B. (2024). South Sudan extends transitional government by 2 years, pushing election to 2026. Retrieved from: transitional-government-by-2-years-pushing-election-to-2026/3329855.

[46] Africanews. (2024). UN expresses disappointment over extension of South Sudan's transitional period to 2027. Retrieved from: disappointment-over-extension-of-south-sudans-transitional-period-to-2027/.

in the R-ARCSS, was to establish 'the foundation for a united, peaceful and prosperous society based on justice, equality, respect for human rights and the rule of law'[47]. IGAD's mediation ended up with a time-bound comprehensive peace agreement.

The R-ARCSS certainly embodies an aspiration for statebuilding in South Sudan, aiming to institutionalise governance aligned with liberal democratic principles. Its roadmap begins with establishing a transitional government of national unity, followed by a sequence of institutional reforms, ultimately leading to general elections and economic liberalisation as the alleged path to sustainable peace. This approach mirrors the liberal peacebuilding model, which typically envisions peacemaking as a linear process: waiting for conditions to be 'ripe' for elections, designing electoral systems that reward moderation, holding plural elections, and ending with (re)building effective state institutions.[48] However, as discussed above, this linear approach through liberal peace theory can be problematic in complex and fragmented contexts.

Despite these controversies, IGAD's mediation process is credited for establishing a 'protected space for political dialogue involving not only the principal parties but smaller parties and civil society as well, allowing time to find creative solutions to irresolvable political differences.'[49] This raises a critical question: do Africa's subregional bodies and mechanisms offer essential platforms for (re)negotiating fragmentation and potential for (re)imagining alternative paradigms for peacemaking? This question is particularly relevant against the backdrop of a declining liberal peace paradigm, suggesting a possible shift towards more contextually adaptive approaches of peacebuilding in Africa and beyond.

6 Assessing IGAD's role in peacemaking

Overcoming the limitations of liberal peacemaking in a fragmented world requires a paradigm shift – one that not only critiques the shortcomings of the past but also actively seeks out new frameworks that are better suited to the fluid and contested nature of contemporary global politics. This shift would mark a move away from the idea that peace can be engineered through technocratic means and towards a more nuanced understanding of peace as an

[47] IGAD (12 September 2018). The Revitalized Agreement on Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Retrieved from: https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/02/South-Sudan-Peace-Agreement-September-2018.pdf.

[48] Paris. '*At war's end', 188*.

[49] De Waal, A., Boswell, A., Deng, D., Ibreck, R., Benson, M. & Pospisil, J. (December 2019). *South Sudan: The politics of delay.* Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338006401_South_Sudan_The_Politics_of_Delay.

emergent, context-dependent process that requires ongoing negotiation and adaptation. The question at stake is whether, in the face of a waning liberal peace world order and lack of traction of extant alternatives such as local turn and resilience, less institutionalised regional bodies and mechanisms, such as IGAD, offer any form of alternative framework for the domestication of fragmentations and possible (re)imagination of peace theory and praxis going forward.

As with peace mediation more broadly, IGAD's peace efforts in South Sudan highlight the central role of proximity in peace interventions led by subregional bodies. Countries and leaders involved in mediation are often drawn from neighbouring states, yet, as IGAD's experience in South Sudan illustrates, these neighbouring countries are often deeply entangled in the very conflicts they seek to resolve. Proximity fosters entanglement, but it also creates a level of interdependence that can drive (re)negotiations of differences and foster conflictual consensus with potentially transformative outcomes. As Jacob Chol argues, countries in the region, particularly Sudan and Uganda, are unlikely to destabilise South Sudan without risking harm to themselves, given the close economic interconnections that make insecurity in one state potentially devastating for the others.[50]

Many observers also agree that the R-ARCSS reflects, in part, the need to accommodate the interests of bordering countries, notably Sudan and Uganda, along with their leaders – particularly Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni and Sudan's former, ousted ruler Omar al-Bashir.[51] While this situation may suggest that IGAD is a relatively weak entity, heavily influenced by the decisions of individual heads of state,[52] it also points to a transformation in regional relationships with broader implications for peace practices in Africa and beyond. Perhaps the less visible yet invaluable role of a regional body like IGAD lies in providing a diplomatic platform for peace negotiations.

These peace processes vary widely – they may be formal or informal, ad hoc or permanent, structured or unstructured. Yet, they share one common feature: they attract diverse actors who bring different, often conflicting, conceptions of peace. These actors articulate peace in various ways, each contributing uniquely to the broader craft of peacebuilding. For instance,

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[50] Chol, J. D. (2020). "You don't own peace": The coward state, South Sudan, and IGAD relations. In Adetula, V., Bereketeab, R. & Obi, C. (eds.). *Regional Economic Communities and peacebuilding in Africa*. London: Routledge, 202–214.

[51] Mamdani, '*The trouble with South Sudan's new peace deal'.*

[52] Bereketeab, R. (2019). Regional Economic Communities and peacebuilding: The IGAD experience. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 26(1), 137–156, p. 141.

while the role of civil society remains controversial and ambivalent (Magara and Miranda, 2024), IGAD's peace process for South Sudan offered a platform for segments of civil society to act as peace protagonists, shaping and influencing ideas and practices of peace in South Sudan

The South Sudan mediation illustrates how IGAD serves as a platform for multiple regional and international actors who collectively shape peace ideas and practices within and beyond Africa. The increased presence of non-Western actors like China in IGAD's peace and security efforts, for instance, suggests a possible entry point for challenging the values, norms, and peace concepts traditionally upheld by the Western-dominated liberal order. Some African leaders perceive China as offering a refreshing alternative to the West, which is often criticised for imposing imperialistic and neo-colonial conditions. However, neither the West nor China assumes a singular, fixed role, as both are complex entities with diverse and evolving perspectives on peace. Their roles in regional peace are thus dynamic, varied, and shaped by context.

The potential disruptions arising from these shifting dynamics remain to be seen. Nevertheless, IGAD's involvement highlights the capacity of Africa's subregional bodies and mechanisms to influence peace discourses and practices, potentially inspiring nuanced conceptions of peace that transcend the liberal paradigm. Regional bodies like IGAD thus provide critical spaces for (re)negotiating fragmentation stemming from the challenges facing liberal peacebuilding. Through these interactions, these entities contribute to evolving peace practices that may reshape the contours of peace praxis and potentially offer alternatives to traditional peacebuilding frameworks. As the international multilateral order experiences severe strain, subregional bodies, especially in Africa and the global south more broadly, are emerging as important levels of analysis and spaces of practice for interactions on issues of collective peace and security governance.

7 Concluding observations

Peace mediation has expanded to incorporate multifaceted elements of conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding. In managing or resolving conflicts and implementing peace agreements, as seen in South Sudan, mediation processes often lean towards a liberal peace paradigm. However, elements of divergence are increasingly evident, suggesting the potential for alternative approaches to peacebuilding. This is especially relevant in the context of

regional conflict management in Africa, where the continent's subregional bodies, like IGAD, are less institutionalised. Hence, do not fully conform to liberal principles.

In examining IGAD's peace mediation in South Sudan, this chapter highlighted both the challenges and opportunities inherent in moving beyond a traditional liberal peacebuilding paradigm in a fragmented global order. The case of IGAD has demonstrated that on the one hand, it exemplifies many of the difficulties associated with liberal peacebuilding. Since its mediation efforts often reflect a top-down, linear approach, structured around ideals of democratic governance and stability that align with liberal norms. However, on the other hand, IGAD also deviates from this model in notable ways. Illustrating the potential for subregional organisations to engage in a more adaptive, context-sensitive approach to peacebuilding outside and beyond liberal peacebuilding.

IGAD's peace mediation in South Sudan remains controversial, with arguments both supporting and questioning its success. The effectiveness of IGAD's efforts is a matter of perspective, influenced by the viewpoints of different scholars and policymakers. Eurocentric international relations theorists, for instance, might regard IGAD's conflict management as ineffective due to its lack of rule-based institutional frameworks to enforce implementation through transparent, accountable, and pluralistic processes. In contrast, policymakers and bureaucrats affiliated with African governments, IGAD, and other regional organisations argue that IGAD played a vital role in facilitating complex negotiations leading to the peace agreement and in establishing ad hoc mechanisms to support its implementation. Such contestation is welcome as it refreshingly engenders diversity and multiplicity which a routinised liberal peacebuilding paradigm severely lacked.

Furthermore, as a subregional body rooted in African contexts, IGAD operates amid overlapping national interests and regional entanglements, navigating a fragmented environment that necessitates flexibility and localised responses. Crucially IGAD provides a diplomatic space for political dialogue and peace negotiations. Such a platform is a valuable arena where disputants and interested parties converge, compete, and cooperate with conflict altering outcomes. This space equally accommodates diverse actors. Including China and other non-Western actors as well as civil society groups.

Each of these new groupings contribute to (re)enacting alternative norms and ideas of pace beyond the traditionally dominant liberal Western ideas of peace. Thus, IGAD's mediation efforts in South Sudan reflect both the limitations of liberal peacebuilding and the potential

for an alternative, decentralised framework better suited to fragmented, multipolar realities. This case suggests that Africa's subregional bodies, while constrained, could play a critical role in reimagining peacebuilding paradigms for a fragmented world, fostering resilient and adaptable forms of order that resonate with local and regional complexities. In the end, such spaces, as IGAD have the potential to enrich peace theory and practice with new insights and perspectives that can potentially inspire nuanced paradigms of peacebuilding beyond the rigidities of liberal peacebuilding.

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