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Juba Peace Agreement (JPA): Bridging Traditional and Modern Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) in October 2020, highlighting how the integration of traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms was pivotal to its success. Particular focus is placed on the indigenous practices of Judiyya and Ajaweed, historically employed in Darfur and Kordofan to mediate and resolve disputes among local communities in Sudan.

By applying the principles and values of these age-old mechanisms, the South Sudan Mediation Committee (SSMC) effectively facilitated negotiations between the Transitional Government of Sudan (TGoS) and the Sudanese Revolutionary Front This culminated in the successful signing of the peace accord on October 3, 2020 [1].

The integration of these traditional practices into modern mediation not only fostered a positive atmosphere but also informed key negotiation strategies. These approaches led to breakthroughs on critical issues and laid the groundwork for the agreement's implementation, demonstrating the enduring relevance of indigenous conflict resolution systems in contemporary peacebuilding efforts.

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Introduction

The negotiations that culminated in the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) between Sudanese rebel groups and the Transitional Government of Sudan (TGoS) took place within the broader context of a political transformation in Sudan. The close ties between Sudan and South Sudan, as well as the effectiveness of the South Sudan Mediation Committee (SSMC), must be understood against the backdrop of these shifting political dynamics.

On April 11, 2019, Sudan's three-decade-long autocratic regime under President Omer Hassan Al-Bashir was overthrown following a popular uprising. This movement, supported by pressure from the regime's security committee and fellow military officers, forced Al-Bashir to step down (Zunes, 2021, p. 2). However, the removal of the president did not resolve the underlying power struggles. The military initially installed Al-Bashir's Defense Minister, Awad Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Auf, as leader. He was soon replaced by General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Al-Burhan, the Military Inspectorate Department head, who assumed the chairmanship of the Transitional Military Council (TMC). However, these transitions were met with widespread resistance from protestors who occupied streets in major cities, including Khartoum, and the Army Headquarters at Giyada[4]

The Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC)—a coalition of political parties, civil society organizations, and armed movements established in 2018 to spearhead Al-Bashir's removal—also rejected these military-led changes, describing them as mere extensions of the previous regime. Confrontations between civilians and military forces ensued, marked by human rights violations and fatalities. On June 3, 2019, security forces attacked peaceful protestors at Giyada, resulting in significant loss of life (Fricke et al., 2020; Zunes, 2021, p. 16).

These events disrupted peace dialogues between the TMC and the FFC, which had been mediated by the African Union (AU) and Ethiopia in Khartoum. Under international pressure, negotiations resumed, leading to the signing of a Political Declaration and a Constitutional Declaration on August 4, 2019. These agreements established a civilian-military partnership to govern Sudan for a 39-month transitional period.

Dr. Abdalla Hamdok was appointed Prime Minister under the Constitutional Declaration. However, this partnership faced challenges and ultimately collapsed on October 25, 2021, due to disputes over leadership during the transitional period. Al-Burhan was expected to hand over the Sovereign Council's chairmanship to a civilian in November 2021, but disagreements derailed the transition.

Despite these setbacks, one notable achievement of the civilian-military partnership was the peace negotiations with rebel groups in Juba, culminating in the JPA's signing on October 3, 2020. The transitional period, though fraught with challenges, prioritized comprehensive peace efforts within six months of its inception, reflecting a commitment to resolving Sudan's long-standing conflicts.

Before the AU and Ethiopia launched their mediation efforts, President Salva Kiir Mayardit of South Sudan dispatched a delegation to assess the situation in Khartoum and explore options for conflict resolution. The delegation's initiative was well received by the parties in Khartoum, who expressed appreciation for South Sudan's involvement. This led to an agreement for South Sudan to mediate between Sudan's conflicting factions.

However, when Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the AU's Mohamed al-Hacen Lebatt initiated parallel mediation efforts in Khartoum, South Sudan's leadership decided to step aside to avoid competing initiatives. Instead, South Sudan pledged to support the AU-Ethiopia efforts while focusing its mediation on the armed conflicts between the TGoS and the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF). This strategic pivot underscored South Sudan's commitment to fostering peace and stability in Sudan.

Background of the Conflicts: The Broader Political Context
The signing of the right to self-determination for the people of Southern Sudan, as part of the Machakos Protocol on July 20, 2002, between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), inspired marginalized groups across Sudan to seek similar rights. This landmark agreement motivated these groups to voice their grievances and demand political and economic inclusion.

In Darfur, intellectuals who had distanced themselves from President Omer Al-Bashir's regime and aligned with Hassan Al-Turabi's faction in 1999 published the "Black Book." This document cataloged the region's grievances, focusing on political and economic marginalization under northern Sudanese elites. Khalil Ibrahim Mohamed, who would later establish the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), was one of the authors of the "Black Book" (de Waal, 2015, p. 54). Williams (2016, p. 10) interpreted the document as an exposé of the entrenched oppressive relationship between the dominant core in Khartoum and Sudan's marginalized peripheral zones.

According to Tubiana (2011, p. 134), the root cause of the Darfur conflict lay in Khartoum's monopolization of power, which had persisted since Sudan's independence. This power was concentrated among elites from three central Nile Valley tribes, collectively representing less than five percent of Sudan's population. The publication of the "Black Book" preceded the February 2003 armed rebellion launched by the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and the JEM.

Efforts to end the conflict saw various rebel groups agree to peace talks, often with demands for self-determination as a precondition (Reuters, 2006). Al-Bashir's strategy involved fragmenting the opposition by engaging with factions separately, resulting in weak peace agreements such as those signed in Abuja (2006) and Doha (2011). However, the lack of commitment to implementing these agreements led many leaders to return to rebellion.

In Sudan's southeast, another armed opposition, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), waged a protracted struggle against marginalization, advocating for a secular and democratic "New Sudan." Initially part of the SPLM led by Dr. John Garang, the SPLM-N splintered from its southern counterpart after South Sudan's independence in 2011. The SPLM-N remained in Sudan under Malik Agar, with Abdelaziz Al-Hilu serving as deputy and Yasir Arman as secretary-general.

Further fragmentation occurred within the SPLM-N, dividing the group into two factions: one led by Malik Agar and Yasir Arman, and the other by Abdelaziz Al-Hilu. Internal reconciliation efforts failed, with both factions refusing dialogue. Instead, they pursued separate negotiations with the Sudanese government in Addis Ababa under African Union (AU) mediation. Al-Bashir's regime continued its pattern of luring opposition factions into signing peace agreements, which were then undermined by poor implementation.

Beyond armed rebel groups, non-armed political organizations also campaigned against marginalization. These organizations joined forces with exiled armed movements to form the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF). Together, they sought to unify opposition efforts to challenge and ultimately replace the government in Khartoum.

Formation and Credibility of the South Sudan Mediation Committee
The decades-long internal armed conflicts between the Sudanese government and various rebel groups had previously seen numerous failed mediation attempts by foreign governments, international organizations, and regional entities. When the South Sudan Mediation Committee (SSMC) was entrusted with the responsibility of mediating the conflict by President Salva Kiir Mayardit, it faced a formidable challenge: succeeding where many seasoned international experts had failed. Recognizing the need for a fresh approach, the SSMC skillfully intertwined modern conflict resolution strategies, as outlined in the UN Mediation Guidelines (2012), with indigenous mechanisms such as Judiyya and Ajaweed. This innovative methodology ultimately led to what many considered a miraculous breakthrough in resolving Sudan's protracted conflicts, particularly in Darfur.

Skepticism and the Need for Credibility
At the outset, South Sudan's involvement in the mediation faced skepticism, both domestically and internationally, largely due to perceptions about its capability and motives. A candid conversation with a colleague encapsulated these doubts:
- **Perceived Bias:** South Sudan was seen as an adversary to Sudan due to the liberation struggle that culminated in its independence in 2011.
- **Internal Instability:** South Sudan's own challenges with stability raised questions about its ability to mediate another country's conflicts.
- **Weak Diplomatic Relations:** South Sudan's strained relationships with Western powers complicated its ability to secure international support for a peace accord.
- **Economic Challenges:** The country's dire economic situation cast doubt on its capacity to sustain prolonged negotiations.
- **Lack of Expertise:** Questions were raised about South Sudan's ability to manage complex mediations in a neutral, transparent, and professional manner.

Anticipating these concerns, South Sudan formed a mediation team comprising experts with diverse backgrounds, including military and security, governance, economic, and humanitarian fields. Despite widespread doubts, South Sudan's extensive experience with conflict resolution—gained from being one of Africa's longest-war-affected nations—equipped it with the necessary expertise to handle the mediation professionally.

Factors Contributing to Success

Several factors contributed to the credibility and success of South Sudan's mediation efforts:

- **Deep Understanding of Sudan's Conflicts:** South Sudan's familiarity with issues such as marginalization, exclusion, ethnic and religious discrimination, and the monopolization of military and security power by elites in Khartoum provided a unique advantage.

- **President Salva Kiir's Influence:** As a respected leader who fought against marginalization in Sudan and a former colleague to many serving generals in the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), President Kiir commanded significant respect among Sudanese stakeholders.

- **Support from Key Stakeholders:** Despite initial resistance from some foreign actors, both the Sudanese government and opposition insisted on South Sudan leading the mediation due to their confidence in its leadership. IGAD[5] the African Union (AU), and UNAMID[6] also supported South Sudan's role.

International Support and Challenges

While skepticism persisted among certain powerful nations, the Troika (United States, United Kingdom, and Norway) and the European Union eventually lent their support to the process. Observers from these entities attended most of the negotiations, and their pressure on the parties reinforced the mediation's credibility. Special envoys and representatives from the US, UK, EU, China, AU, IGAD, and the Arab League, as well as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (via recorded message), participated in the Juba peace agreement's signing ceremony, further legitimizing the process.

Notably, a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution supporting the peace process avoided explicitly naming South Sudan as the mediating country, reflecting the initial reluctance of some countries. However, as the negotiations progressed and successes became apparent, international backing for South Sudan's mediation grew stronger.

The Mediation Process

The groundwork for peace talks began in July 2019, with leaders of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) and SPLM-North (Al-Hilu faction) arriving in Juba for preliminary consultations. Senior officials from the Transitional Military Council (TMC) also participated, signaling a shared commitment to dialogue. These consultations set the stage for the signing of the Constitutional Declaration on August 4, 2019.

In September 2019, the first round of negotiations began, resulting in the signing of a Declaration of Principles (DoP) between the SRF and the Transitional Government of Sudan (TGoS). However, the SPLM-N (Al-Hilu faction) declined to sign the DoP but agreed to a roadmap for peaceful engagement, including a unilateral ceasefire to build confidence among the warring parties.

Exploring the Nexus Between Traditional and Modern Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

The South Sudan Mediation Committee (SSMC) chose a different approach compared to previous failed efforts to mediate Sudanese conflicts. They integrated principles of Judiyya[7] and Ajaweed[8]—traditional conflict resolution mechanisms—into the structure and approach of their mediation processes.

Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Judiyya and Ajaweed

In both Sudan and South Sudan, Judiyya (the mechanism) and Ajaweed (the mediators) are widely used for resolving conflicts. In Sudan, especially in Darfur and Kordofan, Ajaweed are selected from traditional leaders, typically respected elders known for their integrity. Bronkhorst (2012, p. 128) and Egeimi et al. (2003, p. 20) describe Ajaweed as men of good deeds who command respect. In more recent times, the selection of Ajaweed has evolved to include experts knowledgeable in tribal history, customary law, and conventional conflict resolution methods—a practice now also applied in South Sudan.

As calls for "African solutions to African problems" grow louder (Wilson Center, 2009; Apuuli, 2012; Hussein, 2015), the relevance and effectiveness of Judiyya and Ajaweed in addressing local disputes have become increasingly evident. El-Tom (2012) defines Judiyya as a grassroots system of arbitration focused on reconciliation and the restoration of social relationships within communities. Notably, Judiyya is inclusive, allowing participation from all interested parties, including passing guests.

In this spirit, the SSMC adopted a similarly flexible approach to peace negotiations in Juba, welcoming hundreds of delegates from both the government and opposition groups. The inclusion of approximately 150 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Darfur camps, facilitated by UNAMID, further emphasized grassroots participation. This inclusive approach mirrored the Judiyya tradition in Darfur, lending credibility to the process and paving the way for reconciliation among Darfur's diverse communities.

Inclusivity and Local Ownership

Inclusive peacemaking processes foster ownership and sustainability, as opposed to imposed settlements, which rarely endure (Wol, 2021). The impact of this inclusive approach was evident during the Juba negotiations. For instance, one IDP participant, after reviewing the draft agreement on transitional justice, remarked, "This is the type of justice we would like to see in Darfur," endorsing provisions for the voluntary return and resettlement of IDPs on ancestral lands[9].

The Role of Judiyya in Conflict Resolution

Judiyya has long been employed to address inter-communal violence in Sudan, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan. It emphasizes reconciliation through collective accountability rather than punitive measures. Even in cases of murder or mass killings, Judiyya avoids imposing death sentences on individuals. Instead, communities collectively bear responsibility, often through diya (blood compensation). El-Tom (2012, p. 107) highlights this practice in Sudan, Chad, and Somalia.

This reconciliatory approach is traditionally conducted by Native Administrations and has been effective in fostering peace. However, its role has diminished over time with the decline of traditional leadership (Mohammed, 2002; Wol, 2009).

In a recent example, Judiyya principles were applied during inter-communal clashes between Twic[10] and Ngok[11] communities over ownership of Aneet[12]. The investigative committee tasked with resolving the conflict included notable figures such as Hussein Abdelbagi Akol, Joseph Monytuil Wejang, and the author—sons of paramount chiefs who had gained experience accompanying their fathers in similar reconciliations[13]. This underscores the enduring significance of Judiyya as a conflict resolution mechanism in both Sudan and South Sudan.

Membership and Flexibility in Ajaweed

The composition of Ajaweed mediators is another key factor in their effectiveness. As El-Tom (2012) and Bronkhorst (2012) note, Ajaweed members are replaced promptly if they lose their status, with competency and subject matter knowledge being the primary criteria for replacement.

A similar principle was observed within the SSMC. For example, when Mayiik Ayii Deng was appointed to the committee but later replaced by Nhial Deng Nhial, the transition was seamless. Likewise, Malek Ruben Riak was succeeded by Chol Thon Balok, ensuring continuity and effectiveness in the mediation process. The integration of traditional mechanisms such as Judiyya and Ajaweed into modern conflict resolution frameworks demonstrates their enduring relevance. By embracing these approaches, the SSMC not only achieved breakthroughs in peace negotiations but also highlighted the importance of combining local traditions with contemporary strategies to address complex conflicts effectively.

Cultural Affinity and SSMC Strategies

In its quest to mediate peace in Sudan, the South Sudan Mediation Committee (SSMC) applied unique strategies rooted in the cultural, social, and historical contexts of Sudan and South Sudan. These strategies were rarely utilized in conventional mediation processes but proved to be crucial for success. While initial skepticism existed due to the history of conflict between the two nations, shared cultural affinity ultimately played a significant role in shaping a positive outcome.

Hospitality and Honoring Guests

Hospitality is deeply ingrained in the cultures of both Sudan and South Sudan. Regardless of material wealth, hosting and honoring guests is a source of pride. This cultural principle transcended political grievances, such as South Sudanese resentment towards former President Omer Al-Bashir's brutal regime.

Despite Al-Bashir's history, many South Sudanese respected his acceptance of self-determination for South Sudan and his cooperation in declaring its independence on July 9, 2011. His public remarks during South Sudan's independence ceremony emphasized respect for the will of the people, further bridging the cultural divide between the two nations (BBC News, 2011; Al Jazeera, 2011).

Utilizing Sudanese Sympathy and Emotion

The Sudanese culture is characterized by emotional resilience, sympathy, and a capacity for reconciliation. These traits played a pivotal role in the Juba peace negotiations. The December 2018 Revolution had already created momentum for collaboration between the government and opposition. During a pre-negotiations workshop in Addis Ababa organized by the Public International Law and Policy Group (PILPG)[14], both sides expressed strong support for Juba as the venue for negotiations.

Throughout the talks, the Sudanese parties referred to each other as comrades, emphasizing their shared struggle against injustice. Historical examples demonstrate this cultural propensity for forgiveness and reconciliation, such as the warm reception of deposed leaders like President Gaafar Nimeiri upon his return to Khartoum after decades in exile. This cultural perspective helped the SSMC bring conflicting parties together and resolve disputes swiftly, even in cases of disagreement within the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF).

Multi-Track Approach

The SSMC employed a multi-track strategy to handle parallel negotiations across different tracks and thematic issues. For example:
- **Regional Tracks:** Five tracks were established, focusing on Darfur, Two Areas[15] (Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile), Eastern Sudan, Northern Sudan, and Central Sudan.
- **Thematic Issues:** Topics such as economic reforms and humanitarian issues were addressed concurrently within the same track.

This approach allowed for simultaneous progress across multiple fronts, a departure from the single-table model used in agreements like the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The PILPG played a key role in integrating the outcomes from these multiple tracks into a unified document.

Flexibility in Delegation Sizes

The SSMC adopted the Judiyya principle of inclusivity, allowing large and diverse delegations to participate in the talks. This contrasted with conventional mediation processes that often limit delegation sizes for logistical and budgetary reasons.

Although this flexibility presented challenges, it ensured representation of various factions and constituencies, addressing issues of misrepresentation that had plagued previous mediations. In the Judiyya tradition, all voices are valued equally, regardless of rank, fostering coherent group positions during negotiations.

Building Momentum: Non-Stop and No-Break Approach

Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the SSMC opted for a non-stop approach to maintain momentum. This decision minimized the risk of negotiators altering their positions or seeking alternative forums.

Although costly, this strategy ensured continuity and resulted in significant breakthroughs. For example, limited breaks were allowed only for leadership-level consultations on difficult issues.

Accessibility and Constructive Engagement

The SSMC emphasized long-term accessibility and engagement, including late-night and holiday meetings. Formal and informal engagements were integral, fostering trust and enabling the parties to address grievances directly.

Direct talks were complemented by indirect interventions from international partners, who bridged gaps on sensitive issues like transitional justice and security arrangements. High-level meetings and phone calls by President Salva Kiir with key stakeholders further reinforced the process.

Balancing Direct and Indirect Approaches

The SSMC effectively balanced direct and indirect negotiation methods:
- **Direct Approaches:** Face-to-face meetings fostered confidence and allowed parties to collaborate on contentious issues, such as cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC) on Darfur war crimes.
- **Indirect Approaches:** International and regional actors, including President Kiir, facilitated compromise through backchannel diplomacy.

This dual strategy ensured that substantive progress was achieved while maintaining trust among the parties.

Secure and Conducive Environment in Juba

Juba provided a secure and culturally familiar environment for the Sudanese delegates. The city's resemblance to Sudanese towns in language, cuisine, and culture made the delegates feel at home, reducing the need for frequent breaks.

The SSMC also organized social events, such as cultural nights featuring Sudanese singers, to foster informal interactions and build relationships among the delegates.

Virtual Negotiations During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unique challenges to the peace talks. When in-person negotiations became impossible, the SSMC introduced virtual engagements with support from the European Union (EU), which provided facilities in Juba and Khartoum.

While initially met with resistance, particularly from SLM-MM leader Mini Arko Minawi, virtual negotiations eventually proved effective in advancing discussions on security arrangements and other critical issues. The mediation's determination to continue despite the pandemic underscored its commitment to achieving peace.

Substantive Issues of the JPA

Although two major armed movements—the SPLM-N led by Abdelaziz Al-Hilu and the SLM/A led by Abdul Wahed Mohamed Al-Noor—did not join the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA), significant armed groups from Darfur, Nuba Mountains, and Blue Nile signed the accord. The negotiations addressed key root causes of the conflict, focusing on marginalized areas. The agreement included 17 different protocols, with several notable provisions discussed below.

Transitional Security Arrangements and Permanent Ceasefire

Peaceful democratic transformation in Sudan is unattainable without silencing guns and unifying armed groups under state control. The JPA stipulated that all forces be integrated into a unified army within 44 months. However, delays in implementing security arrangements, particularly in Darfur, have hindered progress.

The Darfur protocol proposed establishing a 12,000-strong Darfur Security Force, drawn from opposition and government forces, to protect civilians as an alternative to UNAMID. However, its implementation has been marred by delays and violations, such as forces moving into cities with weapons without reporting to cantonment sites as required.

In contrast, the Two Areas (Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile) have seen comparatively better progress in security arrangements, as only one armed group, the SPLM-N/SRF, is involved. However, the ongoing conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which erupted in April 2023, has severely obstructed the JPA's implementation, especially in Darfur.

Federalism and Regional Autonomy

The centralization of power and resources in Khartoum, controlled by a small elite, has long been a contentious issue in Sudanese politics (Tubiana, 2011). Federalism emerged as a solution to address injustice and marginalization, a demand voiced by southern MPs before Sudan's independence and later by MPs from the east, Nuba Mountains, and Darfur (Johnson, 2011).

In the JPA, Darfur opted for federalism, while the Two Areas demanded autonomous rule. The agreement envisioned a shift from Sudan's current 18 states to eight regions following a governance conference. Darfur was declared a region, with Mini Minawi appointed regional governor, and autonomy for the Two Areas was to be established by presidential decree.

This governance framework sought to address the longstanding tension between marginalization and domination, potentially preventing further secessionist tendencies and regional instability.

Transitional Justice and Accountability

Transitional justice and accountability were among the most contentious issues in the JPA negotiations. For Darfur, the agreement included cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the establishment of two additional mechanisms:
- **Special Court for Darfur:** To prosecute crimes committed in the region.
- **Traditional Justice Mechanism:** To address community-level disputes and grievances.

The ICC had already issued arrest warrants for former President Al-Bashir and four others, including Janjaweed militia leader Ali Kushayb, who is currently facing charges in The Hague (VoA, 2022).

The agreement also established a Truth and Reconciliation Mechanism to promote truth-telling, reconciliation, and healing in post-conflict communities. Drawing lessons from South Africa and Rwanda, the JPA aimed to foster harmony in deeply divided societies. However, the balance between justice and reconciliation remains a philosophical debate, with some advocating for accountability as a prerequisite for peace and others emphasizing forgiveness and healing.

Economic Reforms

Decades of conflict have devastated Sudan's economy. By October 2020, inflation had soared to 230%, one of the highest in the world, driven by a devalued Sudanese Pound and a growing budget deficit (Reuters, 2020).

The JPA included provisions to:
- Promote self-reliance and free-market policies.
- Review financial policies and encourage production.
- Integrate Sudan's economy with regional and international partners.

However, Sudan's $60 billion foreign debt presents a significant obstacle. The JPA proposed a donors' conference to support conflict-affected areas, facilitate IDP and refugee repatriation, and reintegrate former combatants. This plan was derailed by the ongoing conflict.

Voluntary Return and Resettlement of Refugees and IDPs

Years of violence in Darfur, Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, and other regions have displaced millions. As of 2024, Sudan had nearly 1.3 million refugees and 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), with ongoing violence increasing displacement to an estimated 11 million (IOM, 2024).

The JPA prioritized the voluntary return and resettlement of refugees and IDPs. In Darfur, reconstruction efforts required $13 billion over ten years, but recurring violence and lack of funding hindered progress. Similar programs were outlined for the Two Areas but remained largely unimplemented.

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism (MEM)

The JPA established a Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) to oversee its implementation and hold parties accountable. However, disagreements over MEM leadership delayed its formation.

South Sudan, as the mediator, sought to lead the MEM, but the Troika (Norway, UK, and USA) opposed this, citing funding and technical capacity concerns. A consultative meeting in Juba in October 2021 aimed to resolve this issue but was disrupted by subsequent conflict.

Challenges of Peace Negotiations in Juba

The peace negotiations in Juba faced numerous challenges. Among the most significant were:

Lack of Funding

The multi-track approach and the flexible delegation sizes—sometimes exceeding 500 delegates—imposed a heavy financial burden. The South Sudan government, grappling with a post-conflict economy, struggled to cover expenses related to accommodation, transportation, food, and other necessities.

Weekly expenses reached approximately $700,000 over 48 weeks. While the United Arab Emirates and the Sudanese government provided some financial support, outstanding debts to hotels and car owners remain unaddressed. Promises from other friendly countries to settle these bills have yet to materialize.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a significant threat to the peace process, which was gaining momentum when the outbreak began. With Juba's airport closed and a lockdown in place, the mediation committee and peace partners, particularly the European Union, innovatively adopted virtual negotiations.

This approach allowed the JPA talks to progress remotely, marking the first time sensitive issues like security arrangements were discussed via video conferencing in Sudanese peace talks. While initially challenging, this strategy facilitated progress in critical areas, particularly for Darfur and the Two Areas.

Internal Discord within the SRF

Internal divisions within the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) coalition complicated the negotiations. Mini Arko Minawi, the outgoing SRF leader, opposed the election of Al-Hadi Idris Yahaya as chairman, citing the premature timing of the election.

Disputes over SRF leadership and substantive issues led Minawi to form a parallel coalition. This division strained the talks as both factions sought favorable outcomes. The mediation committee maintained neutrality, advising the factions to separate their internal political issues from the peace talks, ultimately allowing the process to proceed successfully. **Integration of JPA into One Document**

The multi-track approach yielded agreements across different tracks, but integrating these into a unified document posed significant challenges. A consolidated document was necessary to address crosscutting issues such as federal governance, constitutional processes, and transitional timelines.

The Public International Law and Policy Group (PILPG) provided technical assistance to ensure the integration process maintained complementarity and avoided contradictions.

Challenges in Non-Armed Opposition Tracks

The non-armed tracks—Eastern, Northern, and Central Sudan—focused on addressing marginalization in their respective regions but faced unique challenges:

- **Eastern Track:** Internal tensions arose due to leadership disputes and opposition from Beja Chiefs. Although attempts were made to address these concerns through conferences and specific provisions in the JPA, the agreement was later suspended due to ongoing objections.
- **Northern and Central Tracks:** These regions were not considered conflict zones but still sought resource allocation and greater participation in governance. Disparities in resource allocation and state-level representation created tensions, requiring amendments to the JPA.

Lack of Women's Representation in the SSMC

The absence of women in the South Sudan Mediation Committee (SSMC) and its technical secretariat was a critical oversight. This exclusion reflected broader societal norms in Sudan and South Sudan, where women have historically faced barriers to public participation.

However, the significance of women, such as the Hakamats[16] of Darfur and Kordofan, in influencing conflict dynamics is undeniable. Future efforts must focus on systematically including women in peace processes through capacity-building, awareness campaigns, and policy reforms.

Lack of Progress in the SPLM-N Track

The SPLM-N, led by Abdelaziz Al-Hilu, engaged separately from the SRF but encountered significant challenges. Disputes over secularism and self-determination, which were addressed in the Declaration of Principles (DoP), stalled negotiations.

Despite efforts by international actors, including the World Food Programme (WFP) and ACCORD, peace talks with the SPLM-N reached a stalemate in July 2021, with no resumption since.

Conclusion

The Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) represents a unique and valuable case study for scholars and practitioners advocating for African solutions to African problems. By combining traditional mechanisms like Judiyya and Ajaweed with modern mediation strategies, the South Sudan Mediation Committee achieved what many international actors could not.

Three notable innovations emerged from the JPA experience:
Multi-Track Approach: This enabled progress on multiple fronts simultaneously, despite challenges in integrating the outcomes.
Virtual Negotiations: These demonstrated that sensitive discussions, including security arrangements, could be effectively conducted online.

Khartoum Negotiations: Shifting part of the talks to Khartoum broke deadlocks on critical issues.
Further research is needed to expand the literature on Judiyya and Ajaweed, which have proven to be effective conflict resolution mechanisms. Efforts should also focus on addressing their limitations, such as the exclusion of women, by integrating gender-inclusive approaches into these traditional systems.

Finally, the transitional context created by the fall of Al-Bashir and the alignment of civil society and military actors provided a historic opportunity for negotiations. South Sudan's leadership

demonstrated political will and strategic wisdom in initiating and sustaining this process, earning commendation for advancing peace in Sudan.

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Endnotes

[1] JPA is a peace agreement between the Transitional Government of
Sudan and different armed and non-armed organizations in Juba on October 3, 2020.

[2] Dr. Wol is an Adjunct Associate Professor in University of Juba and currently he serves as Minister of Investment in the Republic of South Sudan.

[3] SRF is an armed opposition alliance formed in 2017 to oust president Bashir's from power through violence.

[4] Giyada is an Arabic word for military headquarters

[5] Resolution No. 13th of the Communiqué of the 13th Ordinary Summit
of IGAD Heads of State and Government, 29 November 2019, Addis Ababa,
Ethiopia.

[6] Paragraph No. 3(i) of the Resolution No. 2495(2019) adopted by the
Security Council at its 8654th meeting on 31 October 2019.

[7] Judiyya is a traditional mechanism of conflict resolution applied in Sudan particularly in Darfur and Kordofan regions.

[8] Ajaweed are mediators in the Sudanese traditional conflict resolution.

[9] Chapter 3 of Darfur Agreement between the Transitional Government
of Sudan and Darfur Parties to Peace signed in Juba, October 3rd, 2020.

[10] Twic and Ngok are sections of the Dinka tribe.

[11] Ngok is a section of the Dinka occupying Abyei, a territory being
contested between South Sudan and Sudan

[12] Aneet is a small market found in Agok town in Abyei of the Ngok
Dinka disputed area

[13] Check the Republican Decree No 05/2022 issued on 24th February
2022 available in the presidential page in face book.

[14] PILPG is an American Law Firm that has been funded by the US
government to provide capacity building to SRF to engage in
negotiations with Bashir and after the fall of Bashir government, PILG
provided assistance to the parties to negotiations and mediation in Juba .

[15] Two Areas indicates Nuba Mountains/Southern Kordofan and Blue
Nile. The name came to surface during CPA's negotiations and included
in the agreement in 2005. From there becomes part of the Sudanese geographical identity.

[16] Hakamats are traditional female singers and lyricists who hold great significance for many tribes in Sudan particularly in Darfur and Kordofan regions.