

Between Revolution and Relapse: The Architecture of Sudan's Failed Transition (2018–2023)

Kristian Svendsen RIKO – Rådet for International Konfliktløsning Prepared for the AARCON Workshop "Transitions: The Aftermath of War and Conflict", Aarhus University, June 2026

Abstract. Between December 2018 and April 2023 the international community brought much of its conflict-transformation repertoire to Sudan — mediated negotiations, constitutional engineering, power-sharing frameworks, security-sector reform timelines, economic stabilisation, and a UN political mission — across three agreements. All three collapsed, and Sudan now faces one of the gravest humanitarian crises in the world. The puzzle is not that the field lacks a theory of bottom-up authority. The everyday and local turn in peace and conflict studies has spent more than a decade theorising the practice-based, community-rooted authority that Sudan's neighbourhood resistance committees embodied (Mac Ginty 2011, 2014; Richmond 2011; Autesserre 2014, 2021). The puzzle is that in the case those theories seem written for — a movement that removed a dictator in 2019 and has sustained millions through the war that began in 2023 — the theory never reached the practice. I use spoiler theory, the commitment problem, Lederach's gaps and the political-settlements literature to diagnose the collapse. I then read what the process excluded through mutual aid, commons governance, legibility and post-colonial state theory, with the Sudanese analyst Muzan Alneel at the centre. Three mechanisms, I argue, kept the committees out: the bargain was priced in a currency of organised violence they did not hold and could not trade; their authority was illegible to an apparatus built to read armed parties and constitutional ratios; and, offered consultation without power, the committees themselves refused. The paper closes by asking what it would take for the field to carry its own everyday-turn insight into the design of the processes it supports.

Keywords: Sudan; conflict transformation; the everyday turn; resistance committees; Emergency Response Rooms; peace processes; legibility; mutual aid; political settlements; Muzan Alneel.

For Muzan Alneel, and for the Sudanese youth who put their lives on the line — above all those who, like her, did not live to continue the work.

“My political stance is that people should not be killed.”

- (Muzan Alneel, 1986 – 2026)

Introduction

حرية، سلام، وعدالة — *freedom, peace, justice*. The chant carried through the streets of Khartoum from December 2018 through 2019, and it named the demand the Sudanese revolution made of its own future. Access to justice, human security and restorative justice are among the focus

areas of the Aarhus Centre for Conflict Management (AARCON), the host of this workshop — a centre that describes its own way of working as “bottom-up” (AARCON 2026).¹ The two registers carry the same promise, almost word for word: chanted by a population in 2018 and 2019, articulated by the field today. What follows is a study of how far apart they remained.

Sudan tested the promise. Between December 2018 and April 2023, the international community deployed much of its conflict-transformation repertoire: mediated negotiations, constitutional engineering, power-sharing arrangements, a peace agreement with armed groups, a security-sector reform timeline, economic stabilisation, suspension from a regional body, coordinated diplomatic pressure, and a UN political mission.² The result, three years after the war began: more than 15 million people forced from their homes since April 2023 — roughly one in three Sudanese — of whom some 8.9 million remained internally displaced as of April 2026, the fall from earlier peaks reflecting large-scale returns to retaken areas rather than any easing of the crisis (IOM 2026); a death toll of roughly 150,000;³ famine confirmed by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) in El Fasher and Kadugli as of November 2025;⁴ and mass atrocities in Darfur that echo the genocidal violence of 2003.

This paper asks why the field’s own theory of bottom-up authority did not translate into practice in the case that tested it most directly. Sudan is not uniquely dysfunctional, and the people who designed its transition were not uniquely incompetent, which is what makes the recurrence of the same collapse across three successive agreements worth explaining. The field can plainly conceive of practice-based authority. For more than a decade the everyday and local turn in peace and conflict studies has theorised the kind of authority the neighbourhood resistance committees embodied: peace as something ordinary people do from below in daily practice, not something granted from above through elite settlement (Mac Ginty 2011, 2014, 2021; Richmond 2011; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Autesserre 2014, 2021). The committees removed a

¹ AARCON, an interdisciplinary centre at the School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University, lists ten focus areas in all (AARCON 2026); I foreground the three most pertinent to this case rather than presenting them as the centre’s sole organising commitments.

² One concrete instance of each: constitutional engineering, the August 2019 Constitutional Declaration; power-sharing, the eleven-member Sovereignty Council; the armed-group agreement, the Juba Peace Agreement of October 2020; the security-sector reform timeline, the two-versus-ten-year integration dispute; the regional measure, the African Union’s suspension of Sudan in June 2019; coordinated pressure, the Troika of the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway; the UN political mission, UNITAMS, the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan, established in June 2020 by Security Council Resolution 2524 (2020), its mandate terminated in December 2023 at Sudan’s request, with operations ceasing at the end of February 2024.

³ ACLED has directly recorded some tens of thousands of conflict fatalities (ACLED 2026). The figure of roughly 150,000 originates in the estimate offered by the then US Special Envoy for Sudan, Tom Perriello, in May 2024, extrapolating from recorded counts believed to understate mortality severely. Modelled mortality work points higher still: a capture–recapture study led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine estimated some 61,000 all-cause deaths in Khartoum state alone between April 2023 and June 2024, roughly 26,000 of them from intentional injuries (Dahab et al. 2025). The in-text figure is a conservative working number, not a finding. Developments after the analytical window, including the Sudanese Armed Forces’ recapture of Khartoum in March 2025 and the fall of El Fasher in October 2025, are not analysed here.

⁴ The determination is that of the IPC’s Famine Review Committee, released on 3 November 2025, which classified El Fasher (North Darfur) and Kadugli (South Kordofan) in Famine (IPC Phase 5, with reasonable evidence) for September 2025, with persistence projected through January 2026 (IPC 2025). It is the third famine determination in Sudan since August 2024, after Zamzam camp and the five-area expansion of December 2024. As a post-window event it is reported here only to fix the present severity of the crisis, not as part of the diagnosis.

dictator in 2019; a nationwide mapping counted 5,289 of them in 2021;⁵ their successor networks now sustain millions across a war zone.⁶ It would be hard to design a case closer to what that turn describes. Yet the prevailing template of practice — elite negotiation, institutional design from above, international custodianship — did not act on their authority, even though the theory to recognise it was already in the field’s hands.⁷ Two questions hide in that puzzle, and they should be separated at the outset. The case question — why did everyday authority not shape Sudan’s transition? — is one this paper answers. The field question — whether any internationally supported process can act on such authority without destroying it — is one the case can only sharpen. Throughout, “the practice” means the operational repertoire of internationally supported transitions — the mediators, envoys, donors and mission designers — not the scholars.

The local turn’s own second wave has an answer to this puzzle, and it should be named before the paper offers a different one. Critics within the turn locate the non-adoption in ideology, habit and interest: the liberal peace absorbs “the local” as a governance technique, and the everyday routines of intervention screen out what practitioners profess to value (Autesserre 2014; Paffenholz 2015). Those accounts are right, and this paper builds on them. Its contribution is to specify mechanisms that operate even where will and ideology are favourable: how the table is priced, what the table can see, and what the actors outside the room were themselves willing to accept. That is why remedies aimed at goodwill keep failing: the constraint does not sit only in practitioners’ heads.

The paper proceeds in two halves. The first asks why the resistance committees were not included in practice during the transition. It uses established diagnostic theory — Stedman’s spoiler typology, Fearon’s commitment problem and Lederach’s gaps — to explain why each agreement failed, and then turns to the political-settlements and legibility literatures to explain the deeper reasons the committees had no place at the table. The second half builds the alternative account: what the committees and the Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) actually are, read through mutual aid, commons governance and post-colonial state theory, with Muzan Alneel,⁸ who theorised them from inside the movement, kept at the centre.

A word on the claim’s scope. Three agreements collapsed for reasons the established frameworks identify correctly: spoiler dynamics, commitment problems, institutional gaps. All three also shared a condition the frameworks do not measure — the absence, at the negotiating table, of the civic infrastructure capable of sustaining an agreement’s legitimacy once signed. That absence

⁵ The figure of 5,289 comes from a nationwide mapping supported by the Carter Center, reported in March 2021 (Carter Center 2021). It is a survey snapshot, not a census: committees formed, merged and dissolved continuously, and the true number at any moment is unknowable. I use the mapped figure as the best available order of magnitude.

⁶ The civil-resistance literature (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011) explains why unarmed movements can remove entrenched regimes and finds that nonviolent revolutions tend to produce better transition outcomes than armed ones. This paper’s question begins where that literature stops: Sudan is a clear nonviolent success that then failed at the settlement stage, and its deviance from the Chenoweth–Stephan expectation motivates locating the inquiry at the settlement stage rather than in the mobilisation.

⁷ This is the mainstream liberal-peacebuilding template and its critique (Paris 2004; Richmond 2011), used here descriptively. “Prevailing” rather than “dominant”: it is the default repertoire of internationally supported transitions, not the only available one.

⁸ Muzan Alneel (1986–2026) was a Sudanese engineer and revolutionary-socialist analyst who theorised the resistance committees from inside the movement they belonged to. She died in exile on 15 April 2026, the third anniversary of the war (TNI 2026). Her key essays appeared in *New Politics* (2023) and through the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (2023, 2024).

does not on its own explain why an agreement fails; spoilers and commitment problems do that work. But the presence of such infrastructure may be a necessary condition for an agreement to endure. That is the bounded claim, and its epistemic limits are taken up where they belong, in the objections near the end.

Part 1: Three agreements, one pattern

Between August 2019 and December 2022, Sudan produced three major political agreements. Each was negotiated by different actors under different conditions. Each failed. The recurrence of the failure, not any difference of design between the three, is the analytical puzzle.

The Constitutional Declaration (2019)

The August 2019 Constitutional Declaration was negotiated between the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) and the Transitional Military Council — chaired by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (“Hemedti”) as its second centre of power — after months of mass protest and the 3 June Khartoum massacre.⁹ It created a hybrid governance structure: an eleven-member Sovereignty Council (five military, five civilian, one jointly chosen), a civilian-led cabinet under Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, and a planned 300-member Transitional Legislative Council. The military would chair the Sovereignty Council for the first twenty-one months before transferring to civilian leadership.

The Declaration was a product of the street it did not seat. The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA)¹⁰ had called the marches; the neighbourhood resistance committees had organised them, block by block, and held the sit-in at army headquarters that forced the negotiation into being. Neither was at the table. The FFC¹¹ entered the talks claiming to speak for that street, while the committees that constituted it held no seat, and the SPA was progressively marginalised inside the coalition it had launched — an early instance of the absorption of revolutionary organisation into elite politics that Alneel would later anatomise.

The International IDEA assessment¹² identifies three categories of structural weakness (Davies 2022). First, the Declaration assumed the FFC and the military could govern together in good faith, an assumption the 3 June massacre had contradicted only weeks before negotiations

⁹ The 737-room figure is the network’s and its supporters’ account as compiled by the Right Livelihood Foundation (2025); independent enumerations have put the number of rooms active at any one time considerably lower. The divergence reflects definitional boundaries — what counts as an active room in a decentralised, self-organised network — as much as measurement, and I report the spread rather than adjudicate it. Nothing in the argument turns on which count is right.

¹⁰ The three focus areas — access to justice, human security and restorative justice — are among the ten AARCON lists, as set out in the Introduction (AARCON 2026). The parallel with the revolution’s own demand holds independently of the centre’s framing.

¹¹ The precedent counsels against optimism, and is the reason the first move needs the second. The Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan (May 2023), signed by both belligerents, made civilian protection an explicit track commitment and was violated within days. A protection commitment with no cost attached is the commitment problem of Part 1 in humanitarian dress; the second move, which attaches the cost, is what a bare declaration lacks.

¹² On 3 June 2019, security forces led by the RSF stormed the protesters’ sit-in outside army headquarters in Khartoum. The Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors documented more than 100 killed, some of whose bodies were recovered from the Nile, alongside mass injuries and documented sexual violence. The promised investigation has produced no prosecutions.

resumed. Second, the Sovereignty Council accumulated enormous powers without meaningful checks: no legislature was ever formed, no constitutional court was established, and no independent dispute-resolution mechanism existed. Third, the implementation mandate was unrealistically broad, covering everything from economic reform to transitional justice without sequencing or prioritisation.

The civilian government operated under near-impossible conditions, controlling by Hamdok's own account less than a fifth of the state's resources while the security sector held the rest through a commercial empire, something we will examine below (The Sentry 2021). The cabinet bore the full cost of IMF-demanded austerity, fuel-subsidy removal and currency devaluation, while this military economic empire remained untouched. Inflation averaged 359 per cent over 2021, peaking above 420 per cent by mid-year (IMF 2022).

The Juba Peace Agreement (2020)

The October 2020 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) brought armed groups into the transitional framework. It allocated 25 per cent of the cabinet, 25 per cent of the Transitional Legislative Council, and three additional seats on the Sovereignty Council to armed-group signatories, including the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)¹³ and Minni Minnawi's faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA-MM)¹⁴, and was placed above the Constitutional Declaration in the legal hierarchy.

The design assumed that integrating armed actors into the political structure would reduce spoiler incentives. The opposite happened. Armed-group leaders entered government without disarming: Gibril Ibrahim became Minister of Finance while retaining command of JEM forces, and Minni Minnawi became Governor of Darfur¹⁵ while retaining command of SLA-MM. The new armed members naturally aligned with the military component, expanding the Sovereignty Council and shifting its balance from 5–5–1 to an effective military-aligned majority of eight in a fourteen-member council (an alignment that held at the time; the signatories later fragmented in both directions). The agreement placed those with guns at the top of the political order without regard to how many people they actually represented, while the resistance committees active in the same peripheral towns, in Nyala, El Fasher and Kadugli, were neither seated nor given any formal consultative role in the process.

The two most militarily significant groups — Abdel Wahid al-Nur's faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA-AW)¹⁶ and Abdel Aziz al-Hilu's Sudan People's Liberation Movement—

¹³ An alliance of professional unions — doctors, journalists, lawyers, teachers, engineers — formed underground in the years when independent unions were banned. Its call for a wage march in December 2018 became the call for regime change, and its published protest schedules gave the uprising national coordination.

¹⁴ The Forces of Freedom and Change: the umbrella coalition formed around the Declaration of Freedom and Change of 1 January 2019, joining the SPA, the traditional opposition-party blocs and civil-society groups into a single negotiating front.

¹⁵ The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, a Stockholm-based intergovernmental organisation supporting democratic institution-building, which tracked the legal architecture of Sudan's transition throughout.

¹⁶ The Justice and Equality Movement: a Darfuri armed movement founded in 2001, with roots in the Islamist wing of Sudanese politics, led since 2012 by Gibril Ibrahim, brother of its founder Khalil Ibrahim.

North (SPLM-N)¹⁷ — refused to sign. Only a small fraction of the agreement’s provisions had been implemented by the time of the October 2021 coup (International IDEA 2022a). Several signatories later split from the FFC, organised anti-government sit-ins, and helped facilitate the October 2021 coup.

The Framework Agreement (2022)

The December 2022 Framework Agreement was signed after fourteen months of sustained non-violent anti-coup resistance, organised above all by the resistance committees under lethal repression. It nominally removed any formal military role in politics and stipulated the integration of the RSF into the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). On paper it was a substantial civilian victory. The committees rejected it — the agreement their own resistance had made possible — through their coordinating bodies’ public statements and by restating the three No’s on the street. A horizontal network of thousands speaks in many voices, and the claim here is about its dominant, publicly stated position, not a counted vote; the grounds are examined below. That fact, a bottom-up movement disowning the settlement built on its own mobilisation, is the theory–practice gap in its most compressed form, and the rest of the paper is in large part an attempt to explain it.

In practice the agreement deferred the five most contentious issues — transitional justice, security-sector reform, dismantling the former regime, JPA implementation and Eastern Sudan — to a Phase II that never materialised. The integration timeline — the schedule on which the RSF would be folded into the SAF — became the fault line: the SAF demanded integration within two years; the RSF demanded ten. For Hemedti, two years meant the imminent liquidation of his command without time to adapt. For Burhan, ten years meant the RSF would outlast any election cycle: a parallel army with its own economy and its own foreign patrons, still intact under whatever government the transition produced, and by then impossible to compel into a merger. The gap was not negotiable. On 15 April 2023, war erupted.

The diagnostic toolkit: what established theory explains

Three established frameworks answer the first of the paper’s two questions — why did each agreement fail? — and they answer it well.

Stedman’s (1997) spoiler theory identifies the pattern. The SAF leadership functioned as an inside greedy spoiler, formally committed to the transition while systematically undermining it, expanding or contracting its demands as calculations of cost and risk shifted. The RSF behaved similarly, adopting democratic rhetoric while expanding its military and commercial capacity. Remnants of the former ruling National Congress Party (NCP)¹⁸ operated as outside total spoilers, seeking some form of restoration of the old regime. Stedman’s framework predicts that spoiler management requires effective custodians of peace, and Sudan’s custodians failed. The

¹⁷ The Sudan Liberation Army split early in the Darfur war; Minni Minnawi’s largely Zaghawa-based faction was the only major movement to sign the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement in Abuja — a settlement whose collapse foreshadowed the pattern examined here.

¹⁸ The post was created for him. Darfur had been administered as separate states since the single Darfur Region was broken up in 1994; the JPA provided for a restored regional tier, and Minnawi was appointed its governor in August 2021 — a position with thin administrative machinery beneath it, whose value was symbolic and narrative as much as governmental.

Troika,¹⁹ the EU and the African Union offered facilitation without enforcement and rhetoric without leverage. Saudi Arabia and the UAE pledged some three billion dollars in support to the junta within weeks of Bashir's fall (de Waal 2019) and then advocated dialogue; their engagement bought the junta time and priced stability above transition. Whether it merely failed the democratic transition or actively impeded it is contested; what it was not is custodianship.

Fearon's (1995) commitment problem explains why each agreement collapsed exactly where it did: at the clauses requiring a party to give up coercive power on a schedule. Where no enforceable third-party guarantee exists, neither side can credibly commit to arrangements that require reducing its own coercive power. The Constitutional Declaration was a textbook case: sequenced power transfer, no enforcement mechanism, ambiguous replacement rules. The Framework Agreement exposed the problem at its sharpest: integrating the RSF into the SAF required Hemetti to hand control of his forces to a rival institution. Walter (1997) finds that only about a fifth of the civil wars fought between 1940 and 1990 ended in negotiated settlement, because combatants face a dilemma: arms are the only thing that makes an agreement credible, and peace requires giving them up. Sudan did not beat those odds; it joined them, punctually.

Lederach's three gaps — the justice gap, the process-structure gap and the interdependence gap, his name for the elite-grassroots distance — are all present (Lederach 1997, 1999). The transition delivered no accountability for the 3 June massacre or for decades of violence in Darfur. Key institutions — the legislature, the constitutional court — were never formed. And the tension between Track 1 elite negotiation and Track 3 grassroots mobilisation widened with each agreement rather than narrowing.

It is the third gap that opens the door to the rest of the paper. Lederach names the elite-grassroots distance, and the everyday and local turn that followed him made the grassroots an autonomous site of political authority rather than an input to only be consulted (Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2011; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). The field, in other words, already has the theory: it knows that durable peace is built and held below the level of the settlement. The diagnostic toolkit tells us why each agreement broke. It does not tell us why the one resource that might have held an agreement together was never brought into the room. For that, three further things are needed: an account of how the table is priced, an account of what the table can see, and an account of what the committees themselves refused.

The price of a seat

Beneath the framework-level diagnoses lies a more structural account of why the table rewards armed actors, and it comes from political economy, not conflict resolution. The political-settlements literature (Khan 2010; Kelsall et al. 2022) holds that the institutional bargain a society lives under is durable only when the benefits its institutions distribute track the underlying distribution of *holding power*: a group's capability to engage in and survive conflicts, derived from wealth and from coercive and organisational capacity. Khan's definition is deliberately broad; the capability can be organisational as much as military. What a settlement table prices, though, is its armed form: the capacity to sustain and absorb the costs of organised violence. Holding power is, by definition, not legitimacy, electoral weight or moral claim. A

¹⁹ Abdel Wahid al-Nur's faction, with its base among the Fur and a stronghold in the Jebel Marra highlands, has refused every negotiated framework since 2006 on the ground that security for civilians must precede any political agreement; al-Nur has led the movement largely from exile.

negotiated settlement is exactly such a bargain. So a table priced by holding power seats those who can credibly threaten to restart the war, more or less regardless of mandate. The concept is descriptive, not predictive; holding power is hard to measure before conflict reveals it. It describes who gets a chair, not who ought to.

Bell and Pospisil (2017) give this its peace-process form. Most contemporary agreements, they argue, do not resolve the underlying conflict; they institutionalise its continued negotiation among the actors with the capacity to disrupt it — a *formalised political unsettlement* — while broader inclusion is deferred to processes those same actors control. In the Sudanese and wider Horn context, de Waal (2015) names the same logic a *political marketplace*, in which loyalty is bought and the credible threat of violence sets the price. The three billion dollars the Gulf states pledged to the military after Bashir's fall, and Hemedti's ascent on gold exports,²⁰ border-control revenue and payments for RSF deployments to Yemen,²¹ illustrate the marketplace logic de Waal describes.

None of this means inclusion is theatre. The evidence runs the other way. Nilsson's (2012) study of 83 agreements finds that the participation of civil society is associated with a substantially lower risk of the peace collapsing, and Paffenholz's (2014) comparative work shows that where inclusion is well designed it shapes outcomes. The difficulty is that inclusion is most valuable precisely where it is least likely to be granted. Its weight depends on its modality and, decisively, on elite consent: those who hold the table retain gatekeeping control over who enters, how and when (Paffenholz 2014). So inclusion drifts into the consultative register — an observer seat, a clause, a Track 2 forum — arranged around a bargain whose real substance is the division of power among the armed. Paffenholz's later caution sharpens the point: the local turn risks being honoured in form and emptied in substance, with "the local" admitted as a consultee rather than recognised as an author (Paffenholz 2015). Nilsson's association should be read as observational, not as a clean causal estimate, but the direction is clear. The field does not lack the tools of inclusion. It subordinates an instrument the evidence associates with durability to a bargain built on holding power.

Sudan shows the mechanism in concrete form. Hamdok's civilian cabinet controlled, by his own account, roughly only 1/5 of the state's resources; the army and the RSF held the remainder through a network of some 250 enterprises, most tax-exempt and outside civilian audit (The Sentry 2021; Clingendael 2023). That is economic holding power no constitutional clause could offset. The Juba Peace Agreement then allocated the armed movements three Sovereignty Council seats, five ministries and a quarter of the legislature — shares the International Crisis Group (2020) and International IDEA (2022a) judged disproportionate to those movements' actual constituencies. The resistance committees, by contrast, carried mass and legitimacy but no holding power in the bargaining sense: no guns, and no single representative the process could seat. In a settlement priced by the capacity for organised violence, they had no price.

²⁰ The Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North fought on in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan and in Blue Nile after South Sudan's 2011 secession; Abdel Aziz al-Hilu's faction, the militarily stronger after the movement's 2017 split, conditions any settlement on a secular state or self-determination for the areas it holds.

²¹ The political vehicle of the National Islamic Front's 1989 coup, in power from 1998 until Bashir's fall. The transitional government formally dissolved it in November 2019; its networks in the security services, the civil service and the economy outlived the dissolution.

That claim needs an immediate qualification, because on Khan's definition the committees did hold power. They made the October 2021 coup ungovernable for fourteen months and forced the generals back to a table: demonstrated capacity to impose costs, sustained under fire. The distinction is between power and bargaining currency. A rebel commander can trade his capacity for violence because he can credibly switch it off: sign, canton, integrate. The committees' power could not be traded, because no one could deliver it. No leadership could commit 5,289 horizontal committees to stop mobilising, and everyone at the table knew it. Their disruption capacity was real but non-negotiable in the literal sense: it could not be exchanged for seats. This is a credible-commitment problem in structure if not in Fearon's source, running symmetrically against the unarmed, and it is where the pricing account and the legibility account developed in the next section meet. What made the committees powerful — leaderless, horizontal, everywhere — is exactly what made their power untradeable. And the table itself was not neutral ground: it was a marketplace built by the liberal-peace repertoire, set up to transact with counterparts of a particular shape — delegations, spokesmen, signatures. That is why the street needed a proxy at all. The FFC is the mirror image, and it confirms the distinction rather than denting it. The FFC held no guns, yet it took five Sovereignty Council seats, the cabinet and the premiership: a table priced by holding power seating the unarmed. It was seated as the tradeable proxy for the street's disruption capacity, able to promise plausibly to demobilise the sit-in and call off the marches — the very switch the committees could not throw. That chair was borrowed against a currency the FFC did not own, and it hollowed out as the loan came due, first to 1/5th of the state's resources, then to nothing in the October 2021 coup. Getting a chair and having it carry weight are different things, and tradeable holding power is the difference.

Nor were the committees only excluded; they also refused. The trilateral mechanism of the African Union, IGAD and UNITAMS sought civic consultation ahead of the Framework Agreement, and most committees declined on principle, restating the three No's they had held since the coup: "No negotiation, no partnership, no legitimacy." But the refusal was endogenous to what was on offer. What was offered was consultee status inside a bargain already priced by holding power, brokered with the same generals who had cleared the sit-in on 3 June 2019 — Paffenholz's consultee-not-author warning, in Sudanese form. Exclusion and self-exclusion reinforced each other, and this paper counts both among its mechanisms. The everyday turn, for its part, asks that authority of this kind be recognised, and is itself divided on whether seating it would preserve or destroy it (Paffenholz 2015). Sudan turns that division from a scholarly quarrel into a matter of record.

That is the first part of the answer to why the committees were not in the room, and it owes nothing to any failure of vision. The next section supplies the second part: why the process could not have acted on their authority even had it wished to.

Seeing like a peace process

Legibility, in James C. Scott's sense, names the mechanism. It is what turns the failure to enact the everyday turn from an oversight into something structural: the operational apparatus of a peace process could not act on the committees' authority even where the will to do so existed.

In *Seeing Like a State*, Scott (1998) argues that centralised institutions — states, colonial administrations, development agencies — must simplify complex social realities in order to administer them. They create grids: standardised names, cadastral maps, enumerated populations,

zoned cities. The simplification is not neutral. It systematically displaces local, practical, experience-based knowledge, what Scott calls *mētis*,²² in favour of abstract, codified, universalising knowledge, *episteme*. What an administrative apparatus is built to register filters out much of what matters most about the place it governs.

Scott identifies four conditions that together produce catastrophic institutional failure: the administrative ordering of society, a high-modernist ideology that overestimates the capacity of designed institutions to improve the human condition, the authoritarian power to impose the design, and a prostrate civil society unable to resist.

International peace processes operate on the same logic. They must render a conflict legible before they can address it: reduce its complexity to enumerable parties, quantifiable benchmarks, administrable categories. The designers are not naïve about this; no mediator believes a conflict has only two parties. But whatever the analysis knows, the instrument must end in a list of signatories, and the knowledge of multiplicity is reduced back to the simple at exactly that point. The Constitutional Declaration reduced Sudan's political landscape to two principal parties and assumed they could co-govern. The Juba Agreement reduced the periphery's grievances to a set of armed-group leaders who could be given ministerial positions. The Framework Agreement reduced the security-sector question to an integration timeline measured in years. What else the designers could have done is a fair question, and it is deferred rather than dodged: Part 2 and the conclusion return to it.

Each simplification made the problem administrable. Each at the same time stripped out the political reality that did not fit the categories. The committees could not be brought to a table because there was no table large enough and no representative whose authority to speak for all of them the process would recognise. Their power was *mētis*: practical knowledge embedded in neighbourhood relationships, mutual obligation, shared risk.²³ The instruments of the process worked in *episteme*:²⁴ abstract institutional categories drawn from comparative law and transitional-justice templates. The distinction is the whole point. The everyday turn values *mētis* and names the committees as authority; the operational machinery of a peace process — the seats, the ratios, the signatory lists — registers only *episteme*. The failure is one of translation, not of vision: what the theory could see, the apparatus could not seat.

The field's own literature supplies the micro-foundations of that failure. Séverine Autesserre's *Peaceland* (2014) shows, from inside the practice, how the everyday routines of international intervention reproduce exactly the filter Scott describes: rotation cycles of development experts and diplomats short enough to reward transferable expertise over country knowledge, security procedures that wall interveners off from the neighbourhoods they serve, and a professional economy that values thematic, technical knowledge above local knowledge. Her account explains how individual practitioners (like myself — I worked inside that apparatus in Sudan

²² The United States, the United Kingdom and Norway, coordinating on Sudan since the negotiations that produced the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (see n. 2).

²³ Through the family-held Al Gunade conglomerate, Hemedti's network took control of the Jebel Amer goldfields in North Darfur, for a period among Sudan's most productive, with exports flowing largely through the United Arab Emirates.

²⁴ From the mid-2010s the RSF supplied thousands of fighters to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, payments for which accrued to the force and its leadership rather than to the treasury.

from 2019 to 2021) who personally hold everyday-turn commitments still operate an apparatus that cannot act on them: the person can recognise the committees; the machinery they run has no seat to offer them. Mac Ginty (2014) reaches a matching prediction from the concept itself — everyday peace, in his account, is small-scale, fluid and fragile, properties that resist being scaled into formal process. These are not external critiques; they are the field's own findings corroborating the mechanism Scott names. Sudan is a case of a gap the field named long ago, not one it is discovering here.

The committees' illegibility had two consequences. It made them vulnerable, because they could not negotiate their inclusion in formal processes. And it made them structurally resilient, because they could not be co-opted by a power-sharing deal: there was no leadership to co-opt and no single demand a ministerial appointment could satisfy.

Scott's four conditions map onto Sudan only in part, and the mismatch is itself instructive. Two were plainly present: administrative ordering (the constitutional framework) and a high-modernist confidence — in the loose sense of over-trusting designed institutions, not Scott's full scientism — that the transition could be managed from above. The third fits awkwardly. Scott's authoritarian condition is a power willing to use coercion to bring the design into being, and in his cases the same actor holds the pen and the gun; in Sudan the two were split, the military holding the coercive power but turning it against the constitutional design in the October 2021 coup rather than imposing it. The fourth condition, a prostrate civil society unable to resist, was absent altogether. The resistance committees were not prostrate. They coordinated the revolution, sustained fourteen months of anti-coup protest despite lethal repression, and reorganised as emergency responders when the war broke out. Sudan did still collapse, into war and mass displacement. What the surviving civic structures appear to have prevented is not the war but something Scott's typology points to more precisely: the erasure of society as a future political subject. Even amid mass atrocity, a dense layer of self-organised institutions persisted, capable of running hospitals and feeding millions. That is suggestive, not demonstrative; Scott's four conditions describe when high-modernist schemes fail catastrophically, and do not license a counterfactual claim that grassroots resilience alone averted total collapse. But they direct attention to an actor the peace architecture could not register, and they explain why: the very legibility a peace process requires filters out the authority the field's theory tells it to value.

The answer to the paper's case question can now be assembled. The committees were *priced out*: the bargain was denominated in holding power, and their demonstrated capacity to disrupt could not be traded at that table. They were *unreadable*: their authority was *mētis*, and the apparatus registers *episteme*. And they were *unwilling*: offered consultation inside a bargain already priced against them, they refused. The three mechanisms reinforced one another: the pricing made refusal rational, the refusal deepened the illegibility, and the illegibility ensured no better offer could be constructed. Within this single case the pricing and legibility mechanisms are observationally equivalent — both predict the same empty seat — and they separate only comparatively. “Never brought into the room” is shorthand for that joint failure, not for a single act of exclusion.

If the process failed in part because its instruments could not act on the political order being built outside their frame, then the question becomes what that order is, where it comes from, and what it means for how we think about conflict transformation.

Part 2: The alternative

The theorists who supply this paper's vocabulary come later; a Sudanese one reached much of it first and should be named now. Muzan Alneel spent the transition theorising the resistance committees from inside the movement they belonged to. She described what they were doing not as humanitarian relief but as “a revolutionary way of doing politics”: a means by which people without elite credentials could act on political reality rather than receive it (Alneel 2023a). Her reading was explicitly revolutionary-socialist, and other Sudanese actors, including the civilian politicians she criticised, contested it. But its categories anticipate much of what the frameworks below describe from outside: neighbourhood councils as a form of dual power, the refusal of elite partnership, the insistence that legitimacy is constituted through practice rather than transferred through agreement. This paper treats her work as an analysis produced from inside the movement, not as one more external lens, and reads the theory that follows as corroboration of an account that already existed in Sudanese terms. Hers is not the movement's single self-description — a horizontal network of thousands of committees does not have one — but it is the most developed theorisation to emerge from within it. Alneel's writing is the everyday turn already at work in Sudanese practice: the bottom-up authority the literature describes, observed and theorised from inside.

What the ERRs are

The Emergency Response Rooms emerged largely from the resistance committees that coordinated the 2019 revolution, expanded during COVID-19 with community kitchens and health services, and became the backbone of Sudan's humanitarian response when war erupted in April 2023. By the Right Livelihood Foundation's account the network had grown to some 737 ERRs active across all eighteen states, with an estimated 26,000 volunteers; the ERRs' own reporting put the number of civilians reached at over 11.5 million as of December 2024.²⁵ What is not in dispute is that the ERRs reach places most international organisations cannot. They run hospitals, schools serving tens of thousands of children, communal kitchens, evacuation networks and psychosocial support. Nearly 160 volunteers had been killed by late 2025 (Right Livelihood Foundation 2025), a toll the ERRs' own spokespeople describe as an undercount. In 2025 the network received the Right Livelihood Award, the Rafto Prize, the Chatham House Prize and the EU Human Rights Prize, and it has appeared on the annual Nobel Peace Prize shortlist published by the director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo in 2024 and 2025, topping the 2025 list (PRIO 2025).

The standard reading of this story is one of resilience: communities filling a gap left by the collapsed state and the overwhelmed international system. That reading is correct as far as it goes, but it stops at humanitarianism. The ERRs are also a political fact, and that is the argument here. Many of their volunteers would refuse the word — ‘political’ is a dangerous label in wartime Sudan, and non-factionality is the networks' operating principle. The claim is about function, not self-description: an infrastructure that decides how scarce food is shared, coordinates across a war zone and commands more local legitimacy than either belligerent is doing politics in every sense but the partisan one.

²⁵ The term is ancient Greek: *mētis* is the cunning, adaptive, practical intelligence personified in the goddess Metis and embodied in Homer's Odysseus, *polymētis*, ‘of many wiles’. Scott borrows the concept from Detienne and Vernant's (1978) study.

Mutual aid, Fanon, Mbembe

Pyotr Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* (1902) supplies the philosophical groundwork. Against the Social Darwinists of his time, Kropotkin argued that cooperation is not altruism or charity but a survival strategy, a structural tendency with deeper roots than competition. Communities that cooperate internally outperform those that compete. The distinction matters for how we read the ERRs. They are not delivering charity to victims. They are a community organising its own survival and, in doing so, building institutional infrastructure. The *nafeer* tradition, a Sudanese practice of communal mobilisation for collective harvests, house-building and crisis response, is the local expression of what Kropotkin identified as a universal tendency (Sharfi 2025). As one ERR volunteer put it: "There is no structure, there's nothing, it's just a literal translation of 'it's calling to mobilise'" (quoted in Sharfi 2025). This is mutual aid: spontaneous and practice-based.

Alneel pressed the point one step beyond Kropotkin's descriptive claim. She argued that the wartime networks — the kitchens, the clinics, the water and electricity repairs, the ambulance runs organised from the first days of fighting in Khartoum — need not remain improvised relief but could become standing structures of self-government. These she called People's or Neighbourhood Councils: bodies that tie political decisions directly to the demand for water, safe housing, dialysis, transport and schooling. Where Kropotkin shows that the cooperative tendency survives the state's attempts to destroy it, Alneel describes the work of converting that tendency into an institution, and is candid that it is unfinished — a programme the committees were reaching towards rather than a thing already built (Alneel 2023b, 2024).

Kropotkin also documented how early modern European states dismantled the mutual-aid institutions of civic life — guilds, communes, sworn brotherhoods — to establish bureaucratic dependency, and how the tendency then went underground rather than disappearing. Bashir's *tamkeen*²⁶ system ran the same programme: it purged independent civil society, replaced civil servants with loyalists, and monopolised economic life through party-controlled networks. The resistance committees, which began organising underground in the years before the uprising, are the re-emergence Kropotkin's pattern predicts (Abbashar 2023).

Frantz Fanon extends the argument from the philosophical to the political. His analysis in "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" predicted that post-colonial states would be captured by a national bourgeoisie that replaces the coloniser without transforming the extractive structure (Fanon 1961). Sudan's centre-periphery model — Khartoum extracting from Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile — is that prediction realised. It is also the structure Mamdani will name, below, the bifurcated state: Fanon supplies the class reading of the capture, Mamdani the institutional form it inherited. The FFC's trajectory follows the pattern: instead of building on the revolutionary networks that had actually removed Bashir, the civilian political elite reproduced the competition for state power that had marked every previous Sudanese transition. The Constitutional Declaration tasked a technocratic cabinet with state survival while denying it authority over coercive instruments or economic assets. Alneel made this Fanonian argument in Sudanese terms and in advance. In an essay section bluntly titled "The bourgeoisie will not lead the revolution" (Alneel 2023a), she argued that the FFC, a coalition drawn largely from the

²⁶ For a Western analogue, think of the knowledge held by a long-serving publican or the volunteer who has run the local sports club for twenty years: who is reliable, whose word will move others, which favour can be called in and when. The knowledge is real, decisive and collectively held — and no register or organisation chart could capture it, which is Scott's point.

traditional parties of agricultural and commercial capital, had class interests structurally irreconcilable with those of the working people who had filled the streets. Every choice the coalition made to preserve its partnership with the generals, she argued, shielded the old elite at the revolution's expense (Alneel 2020, 2024). Her account does not replace Fanon's; it localises it, naming the specific Sudanese coalition in which the pattern Fanon predicted recurred. Recent scholarship reads the committees in the same register: Gibson (2025) finds in their charters an enactment of Fanon's call for popular sovereignty, while Bishai (2023) describes them performing a citizen-centred governance that needs no permission from absent state structures.

The committees' maximalist slogan, "No negotiation, no partnership, no legitimacy", can be read in Fanonian terms, though not in the way most commonly associated with Fanon. Other civilian actors, including FFC signatories who chose to negotiate, rejected that position; this paper takes no view on which strategy was right, and reads the slogan as evidence of a form of political organisation rather than as the authentic will of the Sudanese people. What is analytically striking is that it claims constituent power — the capacity of a people to author the terms of their own rule — without armed struggle. That is a different basis for the claim than the one Fanon defended in Algeria. The committees insist that legitimacy cannot be transferred through elite agreement but must be constituted through popular practice. Their 2022 Charter for the Establishment of People's Authority (also rendered "People's Power") is, on its own account, less a protest slogan than a constitutional vision developed from below through participatory processes (International IDEA 2022b). It was, moreover, one of two charter streams: a more radical Revolutionary Charter circulated in parallel, and the committees divided over them before working towards harmonisation. The split itself is the no-single-signatory problem in documentary form: even the committees' own constitutional vision had no single author a process could have countersigned.

A constituent power claimed without arms still has to survive armed sovereignty, and that is the condition the last of these frameworks names. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics — sovereignty expressed through the power to dictate who may live and who must die — frames the conditions within which this constituent power operates (Mbembe 2003). The Bashir regime outsourced violence to ethnic militias: the Janjaweed, Arab pastoralist irregulars armed to crush Darfur's rebellion from 2003. The RSF is their institutional descendant — formalised as a paramilitary in 2013, given legal status by statute in 2017, and never subordinated to the army whose counter-insurgency it had fought. The current war has produced what Mbembe calls "death-worlds": conditions of mass civilian death in which the distinction between war and governance collapses. The ERRs operate inside these death-worlds, and their persistence there both qualifies Mbembe's bleakest implications and sharpens the legibility argument: an apparatus that could not register civic authority in peacetime Khartoum has no instrument at all for reading it inside a death-world. Even under necropolitical conditions, cooperative self-organisation persists. That is a structural fact, with consequences for what can later be rebuilt.

One qualification belongs here, and it disciplines everything above. We see only the ERRs that survived. In western Darfur, in El Geneina, Zalingei and areas under full RSF control, grassroots structures have been systematically destroyed through targeted killing, displacement and the elimination of community leaders. Their destruction is itself evidence of how threatening mutual-aid networks are to armed actors who depend on civilian atomisation, but that observation cannot be allowed to convert a loss into a confirmation. The resilience claim is selection-limited: we observe the networks that survived, in the conditions that permitted

survival, and cannot infer from them how mutual aid performs where repression was total. The places where the networks could not persist are missing data, not absence of the phenomenon.

Why they are institutionally viable

Elinor Ostrom's *Governing the Commons* (1990) demonstrated that communities can self-govern shared resources through locally evolved rules, monitoring and graduated sanctions, often more effectively than states or markets, and identified eight design principles that predict success. Her principles were derived from common-pool resources — fisheries, irrigation, pasture — where the central problem is over-extraction of a rivalrous good, whereas the ERRs produce public goods (healthcare, food, safety) under predation. The transfer is defensible because what travels is Ostrom's account of what makes self-governance durable, which she herself later generalised beyond resource management into a theory of polycentric order (Ostrom 2010). But the resource logic differs, and the mapping borrows the institutional-form principles, not the appropriation problem at Ostrom's core.

The ERR network satisfies most of the conditions. The boundary condition is met: the committees are neighbourhood-based with specific territorial scope. Rules are proportional to local conditions: committees adapt their activities to local needs — kitchens in Omdurman, hospital operations in Khartoum, evacuation networks in Darfur. Collective-choice arrangements exist: committees operate through democratic internal decision-making, and the political charters were drafted through participatory processes. Monitoring is community-based: volunteers answer to their neighbours, not to external funders, a description that held cleanly until international funding began to arrive from 2024. And the network itself — hundreds of autonomous but connected rooms across the country — is Ostrom's nested-enterprise principle in practice.

One principle is actively and violently challenged. Ostrom's seventh principle requires that the rights of self-governing communities are not challenged by external governmental authorities. Throughout the transition that condition failed: both warring parties targeted resistance-committee members with killing, torture and sexual assault. The predation intensified as the committees' authority grew, and its most explicit form — the formal dissolution decree taken up in the Discussion below — was still to come. External authority, predatory and bent on atomising the population, stood directly against the seventh principle throughout, and the committees sustained their self-governance in spite of it.

On the available evidence the committees appear to satisfy five of Ostrom's eight principles; the seventh is violently challenged; graduated sanctions and conflict resolution are unverified. This is a partial and preliminary fit, and it describes the surviving network, so the same selection limit applies here as to the resilience claim: the principles can only be mapped where the committees were not destroyed. Within that limit, the committees show real alignment with Ostrom's framework under conditions her theory would predict make self-governance impossible. Whether the fit holds under systematic scrutiny remains an open empirical question.

Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) adds a structural dimension. Mamdani argues that post-colonial African states inherited a bifurcated governance model from colonialism: direct rule in urban centres, indirect rule through "customary" authorities in the countryside. This bifurcation is the root of most post-colonial political crises; it creates two tiers of citizenship and

channels rural political expression through state-approved intermediaries — chiefs, tribal leaders, paramilitaries — and not through democratic participation.

The resistance committees are a structural break from this model. They are direct, horizontal and neighbourhood-based. They do not operate through customary authorities or ethnic intermediaries. Their governance practice cuts across the colonial bifurcation that every post-independence Sudanese regime reproduced. A peace process that channels political participation through armed-group leaders and party representatives reproduces Mamdani's bifurcated model. A process that takes the resistance committees seriously does not.

The committees are, however, predominantly an urban phenomenon, concentrated in Khartoum, Omdurman and other cities. In rural Darfur, Kordofan and Eastern Sudan, where Mamdani's bifurcation is most acute, the relevant grassroots governance structures may be native-administration systems and tribal authorities rather than resistance committees — precisely the “customary” intermediaries Mamdani critiques. The limit is a gradient, not a wall: ERRs run evacuation networks and communal kitchens in and around El Fasher, and displaced-community structures carry mutual aid into the camps. But in much of the rural periphery the available carriers of everyday authority are hierarchical and customary, and whether the *mētis* claim this paper makes extends to them is a question the argument raises rather than settles. A Khartoum-derived model applied unexamined to Darfur would reproduce the centre-periphery bias it borrows Fanon to condemn.

What this means: the everyday turn and the Nordic quality-of-peace tradition

The ERRs do not position themselves as the political architecture of a future Sudan. They describe their work in the language of mutual aid, dignity and community survival, not constitutional authority. There are good reasons for this. Under conditions where both warring parties target grassroots organisers, claiming political power invites military repression. Beyond survival, the ERRs' effectiveness depends on their non-factional character: they serve their neighbourhoods regardless of political affiliation. The moment they become a faction, they lose the thing that makes them work.

But this self-understanding does not diminish their significance for conflict-transformation theory. It clarifies it. The ERRs make government possible rather than replacing it. They sustain the social fabric — the relationships, the trust, the practical knowledge of who needs what and how to deliver it — without which any negotiated agreement is an abstraction imposed on a destroyed society. As Kurtz (2024) concludes, Sudan's best chance lies in the social capital of its citizens' voluntary commitment to humanitarian aid, democracy and local reconciliation.

What the field already knows and has not yet acted on can be stated precisely. The Nordic peace-research tradition has long treated peace as practised rather than possessed: something communities *do*, not something states *achieve* through agreement. The contemporary form of that tradition has made the claim sharper. In *Peace and the Politics of Memory* (2024), Mannergren Selimovic, Björkdahl, Buckley-Zistel, Kappler and Williams set out a quality-of-peace, or varieties-of-peace, programme organised around three criteria for whether a peace is worth the name: *inclusivity*, *pluralism* and *dignity*. The triad is developed there for the politics of memory; I carry it beyond that context deliberately, as the field's most precise current criteria for the quality of a peace. Against those criteria, the contrast in Sudan is sharp. On the record

examined here, the formal process fell short on each. It was not inclusive in any sense the criterion intends, having priced out everyone without holding power; it was not pluralist, having reduced the political field to a handful of armed and party actors; and it extended little dignity to a population whose revolution it folded into a power-sharing ratio. The ERRs' practice aligns with all three, within the selection limit set out earlier: inclusive by neighbourhood, not by faction, plural in their refusal to belong to any single political camp, built around dignity as their explicit organising language — though this is the practice of the networks that survived to be observed, and the internal pluralism of a mutual-aid room under siege is easier to assert than to audit. What Sudan exposes is the distance between the criteria and the processes. The charge is not aimed at the research tradition, AARCON included, whose bottom-up commitments are what make the question askable in the first place; it is aimed at the operational wing of the field — the mediators, envoys and donors who design and fund the processes. The research tradition supplies the vantage point from which the gap is visible. This paper asks its hosts to press that question, not to answer for the mediators.

A *mētis*-trusting peace process — one that treats local, practical knowledge as authoritative — would differ from the Constitutional Declaration model in three respects.

First, it would recognise that the preconditions for peace are being built outside the negotiating room. The ERR network, the resistance committees' charters and the *nafeer*-based mobilisation structures are the civic infrastructure that may determine whether an agreement has a population capable of sustaining it, not merely inputs to be consulted while a process runs. The Constitutional Declaration was signed over that infrastructure without resting on it. On this paper's hypothesis, a future agreement will need to rest on it.

Second, it would treat the protection of grassroots structures as analytically central, not peripheral. If civic infrastructure is necessary for an agreement's durability, then the destruction of that infrastructure bears directly on outcomes the international community says it seeks, in a way current frameworks do not register. A process that depends on a precondition cannot be indifferent to that precondition's survival.

Third, it would take seriously what the committees' 2022 charters actually say: federalism and radical decentralisation, mandatory accountability, transitional justice for all crimes, and a national peace conference to review the failed agreements. The charters were drafted through participatory processes involving thousands of neighbourhood committees; they represent the committees' stated visions rather than a settled national consensus, and other actors contest them. Taking them seriously does not mean endorsing them. It means treating a programme built from below as a formal input to a process, not a residue to be managed.

Objections

The obvious counterargument is that mutual aid does not stop artillery shells. This is true, and what it concedes is narrower than it sounds. Two different questions are at stake: what makes the fighting stop, and what makes a settlement hold once it does. Civic infrastructure is largely irrelevant to the first. Neighbourhood committees cannot negotiate ceasefires with generals, and this paper does not argue that they should. Track 1 negotiations between armed actors are necessary to end the war. The claim defended here is bounded to the second question: a settlement with no civic infrastructure anchored beneath it is structurally fragile, and Sudan's

three collapses are consistent with that claim. The objection and the argument answer different questions, and conceding the first does not touch the second.

The harder objections are not about artillery; they are about the argument itself. The first is that the thesis may be difficult to falsify from a single case. Every collapse can be read as confirming the missing-infrastructure account, when elite incentives and the absence of external enforcement — which all three agreements also shared — are equally consistent with the same pattern. Three failures with no variation on the key variable cannot, on their own, isolate its effect. The response is that this paper offers a hypothesis and a mechanism, not a demonstration, and that the comparative design in which the hypothesis could be tested can be specified. Two shadow cases suggest its shape. In Tunisia, civic infrastructure was actually seated: the national dialogue Quartet of unions, employers, lawyers and human-rights leagues brokered the 2013–14 settlement, and it held for the rest of the decade, until the democratic reversal of 2021 — longer, on any fixed horizon, than anything Sudan achieved. In South Sudan, the 2015 and 2018 agreements were priced almost purely in holding power, and collapsed serially.

One distinction has to be drawn before these cases can carry weight, because the paper's variable is ambiguous between two conditions: that civic infrastructure *exists and survives* beneath a settlement, and that it is *seated in* one. Sudan had abundant infrastructure under all three failed agreements, so only on the second reading is it evidence at all — and yet the paper's own conclusion is that authority of the committees' kind cannot be seated without being destroyed. The necessity hypothesis therefore attaches to the first condition, survival; incorporation is a modality available only to civil societies organised enough to be seated. This is why Tunisia is as much disanalogy as parallel: the Quartet were hierarchical membership organisations whose leaderships could deliver and call off their constituencies, and so held the legibility and the tradeable currency the committees lacked. Tunisia shows that deliverable civic infrastructure can be seated and hold; it does not show that Sudan's kind can. A decisive test would need the case the single-case design cannot supply — a durable settlement signed over a society with no surviving civic infrastructure beneath it, the condition-absent success that alone would falsify a necessity claim. Together the three cases specify that comparison: survival present or absent, durability measured over a fixed post-settlement window, holding power held roughly constant. The paper is hypothesis-generating, with the design stated.

The second objection is sharper, because it turns the argument against its own prescription. The ERRs work partly because they are non-factional and un-coopted; a process that elevates them into a formal political pillar could strip them of exactly that character, and the visibility could mark their members for the targeting this paper documents. This is a real risk, not a rhetorical one. It disciplines the prescription rather than defeating it: the implication is to protect the conditions in which civic infrastructure survives, not to conscript it into the architecture of a settlement. Here the paper also parts company with Alneel, whose analysis it has leaned on. Her conclusion was that the committees should refuse negotiation outright — no partnership, no legitimisation, no settlement brokered over their heads. The argument here is narrower and, on her terms, more compromised: it accepts that negotiations between armed actors are necessary to stop the killing, and asks only that the process not destroy the civic ground beneath it. Alneel might regard that as conceding too much. The disagreement is better stated plainly than dissolved, because it marks the boundary of what a single case can license: this paper claims that civic infrastructure conditions the durability of a settlement, not that settlement itself should be refused.

Taken together, the two objections point towards a further conclusion. The gap between the everyday turn and practice may be partly constitutive. Authority of the committees' kind — non-factional, leaderless, constituted through practice — cannot be enacted *in* a settlement without becoming something else; it can only be protected *under* one. If that is right, the theory–practice gap is not merely a failure of application waiting on better process design. It is partly a property of the authority itself, and the design task is to stop destroying it, not to seat it.

Discussion: the post-transition turn

Everything in this section comes after the transition the paper has diagnosed. It is offered not as part of the argument but as retrospective evidence of what the argument identified: that the committees held a political authority the formal process could not seat. The clearest confirmation of that authority is not anything the peace process did with it. It is what the post-transition state did against it.

On 16 January 2024, the SAF-aligned government's Ministry of Federal Governance, seated in Port Sudan, issued a decree dissolving the resistance committees, the native-administration committees and the Forces of Freedom and Change committees alike. It ordered their assets inventoried and their bank accounts frozen, and replaced them with state-authorised “facilitating committees” capped at seven members and closed to the politically active (Radio Dabanga 2024). Two deflationary readings are available. The first is that a wartime state dissolves everything: the decree swept up the FFC committees and the native-administration committees alongside the resistance committees, an indiscriminate purge of the December-revolution inheritance. The second is fiscal: asset inventories and frozen accounts as war-economy housekeeping. The three readings are not mutually exclusive, and the decree on its own cannot adjudicate between them. But two features of its design point past housekeeping, and past a merely indiscriminate sweep, at least where the resistance committees are concerned. Housekeeping does not replace what it dissolves, and this decree substituted new committees — appointed under locality directors, capped in size and screened for political inactivity — machinery for replacing one form of authority with another. And the accompanying accusation, that committee activists were collaborating with the RSF, a charge the committees denied, is the language a state uses about a rival claim to authority, not about the residue of a bureaucratic purge. On the reading most consistent with that design, what the peace process could not seat, the post-transition state moved against as a rival. Read against Ostrom's seventh principle, the decree is the external-authority challenge in its most explicit form, arriving only once the transition had already passed.

The decree also clarifies the protection-versus-visibility dilemma raised below. The committees' visibility, the international prizes included, raises their political profile at the very moment a belligerent state is moving to extinguish them. The honour and the hazard arrive together.

One post-transition development bears on the future rather than the diagnosis, and is flagged as such. The war is beginning to produce something like a *de facto* two-state trajectory. It is not only a physical contest over territory but a narrative and information war, fought over which authority is legitimate and over which partner agreements — with international organisations, with local NGOs — carry the colour of sovereignty. Whether this hardens into durable partition cannot yet be known. But it changes the terrain on which any future settlement, and any future

protection of civic structures, will have to be attempted. A partition would double the problem this paper has described: two rival sovereign grids, with the committees illegible to both.

Four dilemmas for this room

The argument generates tensions it cannot resolve, and they are the ones worth putting to a room of practitioners.

Local ownership versus external pressure. If the committees' authority rests on being un-coopted, does any form of international support or inclusion damage the thing that makes them work, and if so, what is the least-damaging form of help?

Dependence versus independence. Funding mutual-aid networks directly can save lives, but at scale it binds them to the very system whose compliance rules they do not control: vetting and counter-terror screening, reporting demands that push fiduciary risk onto volunteers, and an exposure to donor politics the networks never chose. Humanitarian money is not, in principle, a political lever — donor doctrine ring-fences it from conditionality — so the trade here is not access for leverage but survival for autonomy. Who carries that risk, and who decides when the funding stops? The early-2025 suspension of US assistance, which closed a large share of ERR communal kitchens, showed how quickly the dependence can be called in, and how far the networks' independence had already been mortgaged.

Inclusion versus speed. Building civic infrastructure beneath an agreement takes years; ceasefires are needed now. How much durability is it legitimate to trade for an earlier end to the killing?

Protection versus visibility. Naming and elevating the ERRs internationally may strengthen their hand, or mark their members for the persecution that has already claimed the life of nearly 160 volunteers. When does recognition become exposure? There is a sharper edge here for the European and Nordic actors in the room. The same international community that Alneel (2023c, 2024) charged with a counter-revolutionary reflex — pressing the committees to “be realistic” and accept yet another partnership with the generals — is now the one awarding them prizes. Recognition and co-optation can wear the same face; the prize that honours a network can also be the gesture that domesticates it. There is an operational face to this that the workshop's own participants will recognise: engagement metadata, vetting rosters and interlocutor lists are themselves targeting data in a war where both sides have killed organisers. Whether the current wave of international esteem protects the ERRs or merely claims them is a question this paper treats the committees themselves, not their admirers, as the ones to answer. The dissolution decree examined in the Discussion above shows just how much is at stake in being seen.

None of these has a clean answer. Stating them matters because the prevailing paradigm tends to file the first and last as programming risks to be mitigated — the stuff of do-no-harm annexes and duty-of-care checklists — rather than as design constraints on the track itself. The actors they concern are legible to it as beneficiaries and caseloads; as authorities whose character a process could preserve or destroy, they are not.

Conclusion: the AARCON focus areas

Return, finally, to the three focus areas and to the chant that mirrored them: حرية، سلام، وعدالة — *freedom, peace, justice*.²⁷

Access to justice. In Sudan the formal justice system collapsed. The investigation into the 3 June massacre produced no prosecutions; the International Criminal Court warrants for Bashir were never executed; transitional justice was listed as a priority in every agreement and delivered in none. Where courts do not function, the resistance committees' neighbourhood governance — informal dispute resolution, community accountability — supplies a measure of everyday justice the formal system was meant to provide and did not. It cannot, and does not claim to, deliver accountability for atrocity crimes; that still requires formal mechanisms the transition never built. The dilemma is that the only justice currently available is the kind the formal system was supposed to make unnecessary.

Human security. The UN's human-security framework emphasises freedom from want and freedom from fear. The ERRs, with thousands of volunteers running hospitals, schools, kitchens and evacuation networks across the country, are among the principal providers of human security in Sudan, and in many besieged areas the only ones, reaching places the international humanitarian system cannot. On their funding, the record should be set down exactly: a purity claim here would be false, and the truth is more instructive. The rooms were at first funded almost entirely by community contributions and diaspora remittances. From 2024, substantial international funding began to reach them through localisation intermediaries and pooled funds, and when the United States froze its assistance in early 2025, a large share of ERR communal kitchens closed. The shock proved publicly both the dependence that had grown quietly and the capture risk the dilemmas above name. The everyday authority this paper describes is already entangled with the international system whose processes could not seat it.

Peace. The chant demanded it, and it is the one word of the three the focus areas do not name. In Galtung's terms Sudan today has neither negative peace — the guns have not stopped — nor positive peace as a national condition (Galtung 1969). But positive peace is not only a condition; it is a practice, and the ERRs are practising it: the kitchens, the clinics and the neighbourhood governance are the presence of cooperative structure amid the most complete absence of negative peace imaginable. The committees are not waiting for the war to end to begin building the peace that is supposed to follow it.

Restorative justice. Here the evidence is thinnest. The committees' 2022 charters call for transitional justice for all crimes, a national peace conference, and a settlement founded on cooperation between state and society. This is a restorative-justice vision articulated from below, not by external consultants, but it remains, for now, a vision on paper — exactly the kind of noun the rest of this paper is sceptical of. What the committees practise is the prior condition for restoration: the maintenance of relationships across a society being pulled apart.

²⁷ Scott's episteme — abstract, codified, universalising knowledge — is the narrower, classical sense of the word. It should not be read in Foucault's sense of the *épistémè* as the historical *a priori* that structures what can count as knowledge in a period (Foucault 1970); the term here is Scott's throughout.

The three focus areas are already being practised, in the middle of a war, by volunteers, under active repression from both warring parties. The committees do not describe what they do in the language of conflict-transformation theory. They describe it as *nafeer*: a call to mobilise, a practice of mutual obligation that predates the state and does not depend on it. What they are sustaining is the precondition for everything conflict transformation claims to pursue: a society capable of holding itself together.

The answer this paper has given to its case question can now be said in a sentence. The committees were priced out, unreadable and unwilling: the bargain was denominated in a currency of organised violence they did not hold and could not trade; the operational apparatus could not register their authority; and, offered consultation without power, they refused.

Each mechanism carries a practical implication. If the durability hypothesis holds, four moves follow — though none is costless, and the dilemmas above price each one. Most of the actors this workshop addresses do not hold the Sudanese tables, which run through Jeddah, the African Union and IGAD, and the regional sponsors; for European and Nordic actors the ask is largely a support-role one — mediation-support capacity, funding and evidence — not a seat they can reprice at will. Within that role, three of the four moves are protective rather than incorporating: they ask the committees to join nothing. That does not make them costless, since international attention is itself exposure, as the fourth dilemma and the January 2024 decree show; but it does answer the refusal, because the ask is aimed at the process, not at the committees.

The first is a mediation posture: civic space treated as a first-order objective of any track, resourced through the mediation-support units and standby teams the Europeans already fund, not left as a humanitarian afterthought.²⁸ The second is a sanctions instrument, and it belongs to member states and the EU Council, with envoys and donors supplying the evidentiary basis: targeted measures tied specifically to attacks on civic structures, not only to ceasefire benchmarks, attaching a cost to destroying what the bargain otherwise prices at zero. The third is a condition on normalisation: reversal of the January 2024 dissolution decree, understood as genuine restoration verified by the committees' own confirmation rather than a Port Sudan gazette, since a formal repeal can sit alongside keeping the "facilitating committees" in place. Its leverage is real but bounded, because Port Sudan holds Gulf and Russian alternatives to Western normalisation, and the paper's own scepticism about custodians without leverage applies to its own prescription. The move is still worth pressing, because it is binary and monitorable, and because a state that outlaws its own civic infrastructure puts at risk any durable settlement built on top of it.

The fourth move is positive, and it is where the paper's own critique bites hardest: donors can route flexible financing to mutual-aid networks. Financing requires enumeration, registration and monitoring — Scott's grid, rebuilt with kinder intentions — and its binding constraints are as much banking as politics: correspondent-banking de-risking, checkpoint taxation, the collapse of formal transfer channels. The 2025 funding shock shows the dependence such financing creates. The move remains defensible, but it inherits this paper's diagnosis and must be designed against

²⁸ *Tamkeen* ('empowerment', 'consolidation'): the policy, pursued after the 1989 coup, of staffing the state, the security organs, the economy and licensed civil society with movement loyalists, and of dismantling or capturing every institution that might organise independently of the party.

it, and the test is administered room by room, polycentric because the network is: the committees' own answer to the co-optation question, not the answer of their admirers.

Against the legibility mechanism itself, the nearest available answer is the third respect set out in Part 2: treating a charter drafted from below as a formal input to a process, not a residue to be managed. Together these operationalise, for this war, the three respects a *mētis*-trusting process was said to owe. None of this displaces Track 1. Negotiations between armed actors remain necessary to stop the fighting; the argument concerns sequence and protection, not substitution. The mediator's task is not to step aside for the committees but to keep the space in which they operate from being destroyed by the very process meant to produce peace.

The thinkers who supply the vocabulary for that — Kropotkin, Ostrom, Scott, Fanon, Mbembe, Mamdani — come from outside the conflict-resolution subfield's working canon: anarchist theory, institutional economics, political ecology, post-colonial thought. The Global South voices among them, Fanon, Mbembe and Mamdani, are the ones the field most consistently leaves out. And the voice it leaves out most completely is the kind this paper has tried to keep at its centre: not a theorist writing about Sudan from the canon, but a Sudanese theorist of the committees themselves. Muzan Alneel analysed the resistance committees as a participant and named what they were building before the institutions designed to govern Sudan could see it. She died in exile two months before this workshop, on the third anniversary of the war, still writing — one of some four million Sudanese displaced across borders. A field that draws its categories mainly from Euro-American institutional design will tend to undervalue political practices that operate through forms those categories do not capture, and will tend to be the last to hear of them from the people doing them.

Sudan's resistance committees are not asking for a seat at the negotiating table. They are keeping people alive while the table produces documents the committees themselves have refused to recognise. Why the field's theory never reached them is a question this paper has answered. Whether any internationally supported process can act on authority of their kind without destroying it — the field question — remains open, and Sudan may show that it cannot be fully closed: if such authority can only be protected, never enacted, then the everyday turn enters process design as a constraint, not a blueprint. Sudan does not settle the question. It is the case that makes it impossible to ignore.

References

Aarhus Centre for Conflict Management (AARCON) (2026) *About AARCON*. Aarhus: School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University. Available at: <https://aarcon.au.dk/> (Accessed: 1 June 2026).

Abbashar, A. (2023) *Sudan's resistance committees: from neighbourhood organising to political authority*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep.

Alneel, M. (2020) 'Which way forward for Sudanese resistance?', *Spring Magazine*, 8 December. Available at: <https://springmag.ca/which-way-forward-for-sudanese-resistance> (Accessed: 1 June 2026).

- Alneel, M. (2023a) 'A revolutionary way of doing politics is taking shape in Sudan', *New Politics*, 19(2). Available at: https://newpol.org/issue_post/a-revolutionary-way-of-doing-politics-is-taking-shape-in-sudan/ (Accessed: 1 June 2026).
- Alneel, M. (2023b) 'Sudan's revolutionary path against war'. Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.
- Alneel, M. (2023c) 'The Sudan conflict: an interview with Muzan Alneel'. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.
- Alneel, M. (2024) 'The Sudanese revolution in crisis'. Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.
- Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (2026) *Sudan: conflict and fatality data*. Madison, WI: ACLED.
- Autesserre, S. (2014) *Peaceland: conflict resolution and the everyday politics of international intervention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Autesserre, S. (2021) *The frontlines of peace: an insider's guide to changing the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, C. and Pospisil, J. (2017) 'Navigating inclusion in transitions from conflict: the formalised political unsettlement', *Journal of International Development*, 29(5), pp. 576–593.
- Bishai, L.S. (2023) 'Resistance is life: how Sudan's resistance committees perform democratic power', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 28(6), pp. 1473–1491.
- Carter Center (2021) *Sudan's youth and the transition*. Atlanta, GA: The Carter Center.
- Chenoweth, E. and Stephan, M.J. (2011) *Why civil resistance works: the strategic logic of nonviolent conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Clingendael (2023) *Kleptocracy versus democracy: how security-business networks hold Sudan's private sector and democratic transition hostage*. The Hague: Clingendael Institute.
- Dahab, M., AbuKoura, R., Checchi, F. et al. (2025) 'War-time mortality in Sudan: a multiple systems estimation analysis', *The Lancet Global Health*, 13(9), pp. e1583–e1590.
- Davies, B. (2022) *Sudan's 2019 Constitutional Declaration: its impact on the transition*. Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Detienne, M. and Vernant, J.-P. (1978) *Cunning intelligence in Greek culture and society*. Translated by J. Lloyd. Hassocks: Harvester Press.
- de Waal, A. (2015) *The real politics of the Horn of Africa: money, war and the business of power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- de Waal, A. (2019) *Sudan: a political marketplace framework analysis*. Occasional Paper 19. Somerville, MA: World Peace Foundation.
- Fanon, F. (1961) *The wretched of the earth*. Translated by C. Farrington (1963). New York: Grove Press.

Fearon, J.D. (1995) 'Rationalist explanations for war', *International Organization*, 49(3), pp. 379–414.

Foucault, M. (1970) *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*. Translated from the French. London: Tavistock Publications.

Galtung, J. (1969) 'Violence, peace, and peace research', *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), pp. 167–191.

Gibson, N.C. (2025) 'Fanon's continuing presence and revolutionary Sudan', *Review of African Political Economy*, 52(186), pp. 439–453.

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) (2025) *Sudan: acute food insecurity situation for September 2025 and projections for October 2025 – January 2026 and for February – May 2026. Famine Review Committee conclusions*, 3 November 2025. Rome: IPC Global Partners.

International Crisis Group (2020) *The rebels come to Khartoum: how to implement Sudan's new peace agreement*. Brussels: International Crisis Group.

International IDEA (2022a) *The Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

International IDEA (2022b) *Sudan resistance committee draft charters*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2022) *World Economic Outlook database, October 2022*. Washington, DC: IMF.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2026) *Sudan: three years of conflict and displacement*. Geneva: IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix.

Kelsall, T., Schulz, N., Ferguson, W.D., vom Hau, M., Hickey, S. and Levy, B. (2022) *Political settlements and development: theory, evidence, implications*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Khan, M.H. (2010) *Political settlements and the governance of growth-enhancing institutions*. London: SOAS, University of London.

Kropotkin, P. (1902) *Mutual aid: a factor of evolution*. London: William Heinemann.

Kurtz, G. (2024) *Power relations in Sudan after the fall of Bashir: from revolution to war*. SWP Research Paper 2024/RP05. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

Lederach, J.P. (1997) *Building peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Lederach, J.P. (1999) 'Justpeace: the challenge of the 21st century', in European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ed.) *People building peace: 35 inspiring stories from around the world*. Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, pp. 27–35.

Mac Ginty, R. (2011) *International peacebuilding and local resistance: hybrid forms of peace*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Mac Ginty, R. (2014) 'Everyday peace: bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies', *Security Dialogue*, 45(6), pp. 548–564.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2021) *Everyday peace: how so-called ordinary people can disrupt violent conflict*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mac Ginty, R. and Richmond, O.P. (2013) 'The local turn in peace building: a critical agenda for peace', *Third World Quarterly*, 34(5), pp. 763–783.
- Mamdani, M. (1996) *Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mannergren Selimovic, J., Björkdahl, A., Buckley-Zistel, S., Kappler, S. and Williams, T. (2024) *Peace and the politics of memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mbembe, A. (2003) 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15(1), pp. 11–40.
- Nilsson, D. (2012) 'Anchoring the peace: civil society actors in peace accords and durable peace', *International Interactions*, 38(2), pp. 243–266.
- Ostrom, E. (1990) *Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ostrom, E. (2010) 'Beyond markets and states: polycentric governance of complex economic systems', *American Economic Review*, 100(3), pp. 641–672.
- Paffenholz, T. (2014) 'Civil society and peace negotiations: beyond the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy', *Negotiation Journal*, 30(1), pp. 69–91.
- Paffenholz, T. (2015) 'Unpacking the local turn in peacebuilding: a critical assessment towards an agenda for future research', *Third World Quarterly*, 36(5), pp. 857–874.
- Paris, R. (2004) *At war's end: building peace after civil conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) (2025) *PRIO Director's Nobel Peace Prize shortlist 2025*. Oslo: PRIO. Available at: <https://www.prio.org/news/3596> (Accessed: 8 July 2026).
- Radio Dabanga (2024) 'Sudan gov't cracks down on grassroots service committees in the entire country', 22 January. Available at: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-cracks-down-on-civil-society-groups-in-the-entire-country> (Accessed: 1 June 2026).
- Richmond, O.P. (2011) *A post-liberal peace*. London: Routledge.
- Right Livelihood Foundation (2025) *Emergency Response Rooms (Sudan): 2025 laureate*. Stockholm: Right Livelihood. Available at: <https://rightlivelihood.org/the-change-makers/find-a-laureate/emergency-response-rooms/> (Accessed: 1 June 2026).
- Scott, J.C. (1998) *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- The Sentry (2021) *Sudan struggles to control its parastatals*. Washington, DC: The Sentry.

Sharfi, M. (2025) 'Working paper: the role of nafeer and social networks in Sudan's humanitarian response and the challenges for international aid', *Journal of Social Encounters*, 9(1), pp. 55–69.

Stedman, S.J. (1997) 'Spoiler problems in peace processes', *International Security*, 22(2), pp. 5–53.

Transnational Institute (TNI) (2026) *TNI obituary: Muzan Alneel*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/tni-obituary-muzan-alneel> (Accessed: 8 July 2026).

Walter, B.F. (1997) 'The critical barrier to civil war settlement', *International Organization*, 51(3), pp. 335–364.

Declaration of generative AI use

During the preparation of this article, the author used Anthropic's Claude LLM models to support manuscript structuring, improve clarity and readability, generate alternative formulations, identify potential counterarguments and hidden assumptions, and develop search terms for further literature review.

The AI system was not treated as a source of evidence or scholarly authority. It was not used to generate empirical findings, fabricate or validate references, or make final decisions concerning the interpretation of evidence. All sources cited in the article were accessed and reviewed by the author, and all substantive claims, analytical judgments and conclusions were independently evaluated against the underlying evidence.

AI-generated outputs were treated as provisional suggestions and were critically reviewed, revised or rejected by the author. The author retains full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, argumentation and final content of the article.