



Strategic Approaches: Interlocutory Methods for Fostering Harmony in the Conflict Landscapes of Somalia and Sudan

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Abstract

This study examined how integrating grand strategy with interlocutory methods could address ongoing conflicts in Somalia and Sudan. It explored combining high-level frameworks with localised peacebuilding efforts, such as community dialogue and grassroots participation, to promote lasting stability. Using qualitative methods—case studies, stakeholder interviews, and policy reviews—the research assessed traditional conflict resolution approaches and highlighted gaps. Findings showed that military and diplomatic strategies alone were insufficient, while local, inclusive methods offered greater promise. The study concluded that sustainable peace requires aligning international and regional strategies with local realities. It recommended enhancing multilateral cooperation, strengthening local engagement, and tailoring grand strategies to the unique dynamics of each conflict area.

Introduction

Protracted conflicts in Sudan and Somalia have drawn international concern due to their persistence, humanitarian toll, and destabilising impact across the Horn of Africa. Despite decades of peacebuilding efforts, these conflicts persist, often due to the use of fragmented strategies, short-term goals, and the exclusion of local actors. There is growing global recognition that sustainable peace requires a comprehensive plan: a long-term framework that integrates political, economic, and security tools. Increasingly, these strategies rely on interlocutory approaches emphasising inclusive dialogue, local participation, and iterative negotiations to achieve lasting peace (Crisis Group, 2023; Hume, 2020). Institutions such as the UN and AU emphasise the importance of local ownership and transitional justice; however, implementation often lags due to geopolitical interests (UN, 2022).

The United States has maintained a prominent role in mediating peace in both Sudan and Somalia. It played a central role in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and backed Sudan's 2019 transitional government and the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement. However, renewed conflict in 2023 between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) reversed many of these gains. The U.S. facilitated the Jeddah peace talks and imposed sanctions on actors obstructing peace, signalling a blend of diplomatic pressure and strategic involvement (BBC, 2023; Reuters, 2023). In Somalia, the U.S. continues to support counterterrorism and development, aligning with a broader grand strategy that incorporates local peace initiatives (USAID, 2023). These efforts demonstrate a gradual shift from militarised responses to more inclusive, community-centred approaches.



China's influence has grown through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and economic diplomacy, particularly in Sudan. It maintains strong ties through infrastructure and oil investments while promoting regional stability to protect these interests. Although China claims to adhere to the principle of non-interference, it has, in fact, subtly engaged in diplomacy. However, its strategies often lack participatory dialogue, a key element for cohesive peacebuilding (Xinhua, 2023). In Somalia, Chinese involvement is expanding through port development and bilateral aid, which can enhance state capacity and reduce conflict incentives. Nevertheless, these projects may also exacerbate inequality, fuel corruption, or reinforce authoritarianism, thereby risking the aggravation of political instability (Rolland, 2017; Brautigam, 2020).

Nigeria, although not directly involved in the Sudanese or Somali conflicts, offers lessons through its use of interlocutory methods. It has implemented national dialogues, amnesty programmes, and community reconciliation efforts to address internal disputes, such as those involving Boko Haram and the Niger Delta insurgency (Folan, 2020). As a key player in ECOWAS, Nigeria has also advanced African-led mediation and enforcement efforts. Its inclusion of traditional and religious actors underscores the value of culturally grounded peacebuilding models relevant to divided societies, such as Sudan and Somalia (ICG, 2021).

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) further illustrates the benefits of multifaceted conflict resolution that engages both state and non-state actors. Although not a direct party to the conflicts in Sudan or Somalia, the DRC has employed community peace forums, disarmament initiatives, and reintegration programmes supported by international partners (UNDP, 2020). The 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the Great Lakes Region exemplifies how regional diplomacy, local reconciliation, and external support can converge to promote stability. The DRC's experience demonstrates the need to include grassroots stakeholders, such as women's groups and religious leaders, in comprehensive peacebuilding efforts.

Sudan remains a case study in the complexities of post-conflict transitions. The 2005 CPA, the 2019 revolution, and the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement offered hope; yet, progress was derailed by the 2023 civil war, which displaced over seven million people (UNHCR, 2023). Failures in implementing peace accords stem primarily from the exclusion of grassroots actors. Interlocutory methods—such as civil society involvement, tribal dialogue, and transitional justice—are crucial for addressing Sudan's deep-seated grievances. These must be integrated into a broader strategy involving international aid, political unity, and economic renewal (IGAD, 2023; UN, 2022).

Somalia's conflict is influenced by clan divisions, terrorism (particularly from Al-Shabaab), and weak governance. Although international support through ATMIS and the federal government has established some groundwork, Somalia remains fragmented and reliant on aid (AU, 2022). The absence of effective communication between clans, the government, and civil society obstructs progress. Nevertheless, traditional peace committees, local forums, and elder councils have demonstrated success in building trust and resolving regional disputes (UNSOM, 2023). For sustainable peace, Somalia must incorporate these grassroots efforts into a comprehensive strategy that encompasses security reform, political decentralisation, and inclusive governance. Achieving enduring peace will require coordinated collaboration at both local and global levels.

Theoretical Framework

Realist Conflict Theory

Realist Conflict Theory is grounded in the theories of classical realists like Hans Morgenthau (1948), who argued that international politics is governed by objective principles intrinsic to human nature, particularly the pursuit of power and survival. Morgenthau asserted that governments primarily



pursue their national interest, which is defined by power, ultimately leading to conflict (Morgenthau, 1948). Kenneth Waltz (1979) built upon this foundation by developing structural realism, or neorealism, which emphasises the anarchic nature of the international system that compels nations to prioritise self-help and survival over collaboration. Waltz contended that the lack of a central authority in the global system drives nations into a continuous security dilemma, which may intensify wars (Waltz, 1979). Subsequently, John Mearsheimer (2001) expounded on this perspective through offensive realism, arguing that governments seek not only security but also the maximisation of their power to dominate others and avert threats, thereby amplifying competitive and conflictual behaviour (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The prolonged wars in Somalia and Sudan were thoroughly examined through the lens of Realist Conflict Theory, as both nations are situated within regional systems characterised by fragile state institutions, rival groups, and influential foreign players pursuing their interests. The clan-based conflicts in Somalia and the civil wars in Sudan arise from struggles for political dominance, resource distribution, and security issues—fundamental concepts in realism theory (Hendrickson & Arman, 1998; Young, 2012). Regional entities such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) face challenges as member states often prioritise their national security and strategic interests over collective peace initiatives, illustrating the realist notion of self-help and inter-state mistrust (Waga, 2024). Consequently, the theory provides a crucial explanatory framework for understanding the complexities of peace initiatives, which are often hampered by power dynamics and conflicting state objectives, in the Horn of Africa and the broader East African region.

Realist Conflict Theory effectively elucidates the structural catalysts of conflict; however, it does not intrinsically provide resolutions for peacebuilding. This research enhances realism by integrating interlocutory methods, such as conversation, negotiation, and community involvement, into a comprehensive grand plan for conflict resolution. This methodology acknowledges that while power dynamics provide the framework for conflict, enduring peace requires the resolution of social and political grievances at the grassroots level (Bercovitch, 2007). The grand strategy framework integrates macro-level geopolitical factors with micro-level peacebuilding strategies, suggesting that local ownership of peace initiatives and inclusive dialogue can reduce mistrust and foster collaboration, even in anarchic contexts (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2016). This synthesis provides a practical approach to augment realism perspectives with effective strategies for conflict management and resolution.

Realist Conflict Theory provides a fundamental framework for analysing the enduring wars in Somalia and Sudan, emphasising the anarchic international system, security concerns, and power struggles as primary catalysts. The focus on state interests and power dynamics clarifies the constraints and challenges faced by regional peace efforts, often hindered by self-serving actors (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). By integrating this theoretical framework with interlocutory peacebuilding techniques within a comprehensive strategy, the research advocates for a more holistic approach. This hybrid method addresses the stark realities of power politics while underscoring the importance of inclusive, locally driven dialogue and collaboration, making it particularly apt for the complex, multidimensional conflicts in these fragile governments.

Literature Review

Kaviaka (2024) examined the implementation of grand strategy in the foreign policies of the United States and China, assessing whether their international activities signify ambitions for worldwide hegemony or a quest for global harmony. The study analysed the strategic frameworks employed by both countries in international diplomacy, commerce, and security, emphasising how their ideological orientations—liberal internationalism versus state-led capitalism—inform their geopolitical



behaviour. The work cited is predominantly theoretical and global, highlighting the rivalry and strategic manoeuvres of two major powers.

Ayita (2025) examined the practice of mediation in Nigeria through an analysis of experiences from Abuja and Ondo, also deriving comparative insights from Ontario, Canada. The research examined the application of culturally embedded mediation tactics in local Nigerian settings and assessed how insights from Canadian mediation practices could enhance conflict resolution frameworks in Nigeria. He emphasised the significance of community engagement, the role of impartial mediators, and institutional support in promoting peaceful resolutions, particularly in civil and communal conflicts. Ayita's research on the Nigerian experience is firmly rooted in local and national conflict mediation practices, focusing on comparative learning; in contrast, the current study adopts a broader strategic perspective.

Palmieri (2024) analysed the convergence of justice, politics, and media culture in eighteenth-century Naples, emphasising the depiction of criminals as heroes within the era's socio-political discourse. The research examined the construction of crime and justice narratives through media and public perception, ultimately affecting governmental legitimacy and social order. Palmieri's work offers a historical and cultural exploration of the representation and politicisation of justice within a specific European context, highlighting symbolic authority, media influence, and governmental oversight. The current study on conflict inclinations in Somalia and Sudan directly addresses contemporary conflict resolution, emphasising practical strategies such as dialogue, negotiation, and peacebuilding mechanisms in active conflict zones. Although Palmieri's study is historical, media-centric, and rooted in European political culture, the present research employs a geopolitical and policy-driven framework designed to promote stability in contemporary unstable African governments.

Waga (2024) analysed the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) interventions in Somalia's enduring governance problem since 1991, using realism theory to assess the impact of state-centric interests and regional power dynamics on IGAD's efficacy. The research indicated that conflicting national interests among IGAD member states, along with external pressures and the complex dynamics of Somalia's internal conflicts, have hindered the organisation's peacebuilding efforts. Despite several attempts, durable peace remains elusive, suggesting that IGAD's plans are limited by insufficient regional collaboration and a focus on individual state security over collective stability. This study on Somalia and Sudan employs a comprehensive strategic framework that incorporates interlocutory tactics, including inclusive dialogue and community participation, within a grand strategy paradigm. This approach emphasises the necessity of synchronising political, economic, and security instruments to foster cohesion, contrasting with the previously mentioned constraints of regional organisational initiatives, which are limited by realist state actions.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the integration of grand strategy and interlocutory techniques in conflict resolution in Somalia and Sudan. It used an in-depth case study analysis to investigate the political, historical, and social dynamics underlying the prolonged crises in both countries. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including diplomats, local peacebuilders, NGO representatives, and community leaders, to obtain firsthand insights into the effectiveness of various conflict resolution strategies. Document analysis supplemented the interviews by examining policy papers, peace agreements, intervention reports, and academic literature to assess regional and international approaches. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify recurring patterns and connect findings from interviews and documents, facilitating a comprehensive evaluation of how grand strategies and local initiatives converge in efforts to establish sustainable peace.



Findings and Discussion

This study's results emphasise the vital role of grand strategy and dialogue techniques in achieving lasting peace and stability in the conflict zones of Somalia and Sudan. The study revealed several key findings, particularly regarding the limitations of conventional conflict resolution methods, the importance of community-oriented peacebuilding, and the integration of overarching strategies with localised peace initiatives.

Limitations of Traditional Conflict Resolution Approaches

The research revealed that conventional conflict resolution methods—such as military interventions, high-level diplomacy, and peacekeeping missions—have largely failed to resolve the deep-rooted conflicts in Somalia and Sudan. While these efforts sometimes provided short-term security, they often overlooked structural issues, such as weak governance, ethnic tensions, and local marginalisation. The lack of community ownership undermined long-term sustainability, leading to repeated cycles of violence.

Participants, including local leaders and peacebuilders, criticised external actors for prioritising security over addressing root causes. One respondent stated,

“The peacekeepers arrive; the firearms are poised; yet the conditions for the individuals on the ground remain unchanged.”

This sentiment resonated widely, highlighting frustration with imposed solutions that did not reflect local realities.

Secondary data supported these views. Although missions like AMISOM in Somalia have reduced violence in some areas, they have lacked effective political strategies to promote inclusive governance and long-term development. Similarly, UNAMID in Sudan struggled to address core issues such as ethnic marginalisation and impunity. The study underscores a critical need for inclusive, community-driven approaches. While international efforts play a role in stabilisation, they must align with local needs. Sustainable peace requires the integration of local voices and priorities into broader peacebuilding frameworks.

Role of Interlocutory Methods in Peacebuilding

The study found that interlocutory methods—particularly local peacebuilding efforts and community engagement—play a critical role in achieving sustainable peace in Somalia and Sudan. Community-driven initiatives such as local mediation, grassroots involvement, and informal conflict resolution have proven effective in reducing violence, fostering reconciliation, and enhancing social cohesion. These strategies emphasised inclusion, local agency, and trust-building.

Local peacebuilders, including community leaders, religious figures, and grassroots groups, played a crucial role in resolving conflicts and facilitating dialogue. Respondents emphasised the trust that communities place in these local actors because of their firsthand knowledge and cultural alignment. As one Somali participant noted, “When local leaders intervene to mediate, they win the community’s trust.” Religious leaders, elders, and local NGOs played a crucial role in brokering ceasefires and preventing conflict escalation.

Secondary data supported these findings. A 2021 UNDP report on Somalia highlighted the success of community-based peace efforts in enhancing local security. Local peace committees helped mediate clan disputes and reach agreements on resource and territorial issues. Similarly, the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement in Sudan relied on local mediators to bridge divisions among factions, underscoring the significance of local ownership in peace processes tailored to specific cultural and social contexts.



Participants emphasised that community-based approaches were more sustainable than externally imposed solutions. These methods addressed immediate local concerns while laying the foundation for lasting peace. A Sudanese respondent said,

“The international community may deploy peacekeepers, yet it is our populace that can establish enduring peace,”

highlighting the need for local initiative.

The findings underscore that sustainable peace requires empowering local stakeholders. Interlocutory strategies grounded in regional leadership, dialogue, and community participation are essential for reducing violence, building trust, and fostering long-term stability in conflict-affected regions.

Integration of Grand Strategy with Local Peacebuilding

The study found that while grand strategies—encompassing political, economic, and security frameworks—played a significant role in supporting peacebuilding efforts in Somalia and Sudan, their effectiveness largely depended on their alignment with local realities. International actors such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and IGAD provided essential resources, political legitimacy, and diplomatic support. However, these contributions often fell short when they did not reflect the unique needs, cultural contexts, and priorities of local communities.

Respondents from both countries highlighted a disconnect between foreign interventions and local expectations. A Sudanese participant noted that international organisations often misunderstand the complexities of regional conflicts, resulting in peacebuilding initiatives that are either ineffective or misaligned with community priorities. In Somalia, the emphasis on national peace accords and institutional reform overlooked pressing grassroots issues such as clan rivalries and disputes over land and resources. In Sudan, national-level agreements lacked the involvement of key local actors, which limited their impact on the ground.

Support for secondary data confirmed these observations. For instance, the 2020 AU Report on Peacebuilding indicated that the limited inclusion of local voices in frameworks such as the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur hindered effective implementation. These failures were attributed to the lack of local participation in negotiating core conflict drivers, including land disputes and ethnic tensions.

The study also revealed coordination challenges among international, national, and local actors. Stakeholders frequently pursued conflicting agendas, which weakened overall progress. A Somali participant remarked on the confusion and inefficiency that arose when the UN, government, and community each operated with divergent priorities.

Despite these obstacles, the study concluded that an integrated and inclusive approach—where global strategies are synchronised with community-level initiatives—is vital for sustainable peace. It emphasised that top-down approaches alone are insufficient. Instead, peacebuilding must be rooted in local ownership, adaptability, and mutual respect between international agencies and grassroots actors.

One Somali respondent succinctly stated, *“Peace cannot be achieved through top-down approaches. It should originate from inside the communities, supported by foreign partners that comprehend and honour our requirements.”*

In essence, the study confirmed that aligning grand strategies with localised peacebuilding enhances the sustainability, inclusivity, and effectiveness of peace efforts in Somalia and Sudan.



Challenges in the Coordination of Local and International Efforts

The findings revealed several obstacles in aligning local and international initiatives within the peacebuilding processes of Somalia and Sudan. While integrating grand strategies with grassroots approaches holds promise for achieving sustainable peace, a recurring challenge was the discrepancy between international peacebuilding objectives and the complex realities faced by local communities.

A central issue was the misalignment between the broader goals of international actors, such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU), and the local socio-political dynamics of the two nations. A Somali participant noted, "The international community proposes solutions that appear effective in theory, yet they do not consistently align with our community's actual needs." This disconnect was evident in both countries, where international peace interventions often overlooked local power structures, cultural norms, and everyday challenges, resulting in limited effectiveness or, at times, counterproductive outcomes.

In Sudan, peace processes led by the AU and UN primarily focused on political settlements and national governance reforms, while overlooking grassroots grievances, including ethnic tensions and resource-based conflicts. A respondent from Darfur remarked, "Peace agreements established in Khartoum hold little significance for us here in Darfur. We need answers to local problems, not just national discussions." Secondary data from UNDP and other peacebuilding agencies corroborated these insights, indicating that national-level agreements frequently faced implementation challenges due to inadequate attention to local conflict triggers.

In Somalia, despite receiving substantial international support, efforts often failed to accommodate the complex and often divisive clan-based politics and fragmented local governance. A Somali respondent emphasised, "The international community seeks to fix our country, yet they fail to comprehend the significance of clans in our society." This sentiment reflected the broader concern that neglecting clan leaders and community actors undermined the legitimacy and effectiveness of peace efforts.

The study also revealed that differing goals among stakeholders posed a significant challenge to coordination. While international actors prioritised national security and institutional reforms, local actors concentrated on addressing tangible community needs, such as land disputes and access to water.

A Sudanese participant stated,

"While the UN concentrates on political reforms, local peacebuilders are addressing immediate issues. Both matter, but they don't always align."

Ultimately, the findings underscored the necessity for more integrated, adaptive, and participatory strategies. Local actors must not only be consulted but also empowered to lead and participate in peacebuilding processes. As one Somali respondent said,

"To achieve enduring peace, we must take the initiative. The international community should support – but not dominate – our solutions."

The study concluded that peacebuilding in Somalia and Sudan can be more effective when policies are context-sensitive, inclusive, and flexible, promoting genuine collaboration between international frameworks and local needs.

Conclusion

The study concludes that conflict resolution in Somalia and Sudan is hindered by limited community participation, rigid top-down approaches, and fragmented international interventions. Despite



considerable investments, persistent violence reveals the inadequacy of externally driven peace processes. Instead, the findings underscore the effectiveness of interlocutory methods—such as inclusive dialogue, community mediation, and participatory negotiation—in fostering trust, reducing tensions, and enabling reconciliation through the active involvement of local actors, including elders, religious leaders, women’s groups, and youth networks. Sustainable peace is best achieved when peacebuilding efforts are strategically aligned across regional, national, and international levels, bridging the gap between global mandates and grassroots realities. The study advocates for a grand strategy that integrates local agency with international support while respecting contextual nuances. Ultimately, it emphasises that peacebuilding in fragile states must be adaptive and holistic, addressing political, economic, and historical grievances through inclusive and coordinated frameworks, such as the interlocutory approach proposed.

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