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### POLICY ANALYSIS

# From Agreement to Action

*A Policy Analysis of the Revitalised Peace Agreement in South Sudan*

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### ABSTRACT

This policy analysis article critically examines the implementation of the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). It employs a structured framework to assess progress against core provisions, including security sector reform, transitional justice, and constitution-making. Drawing on primary data from policy documents, monitoring reports, and institutional reviews, the analysis identifies systemic implementation challenges rooted in political economy, institutional capacity, and elite bargaining. The article concludes with evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the agreement's sustainability and fostering a more inclusive and durable peace in South Sudan.

**Keywords:** *Revitalised Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS), Transitional Governance, Security Sector Reform (SSR), Hybrid Court for South Sudan, South Sudan Political Economy, Peace Agreement Implementation, Elite Bargaining, African Union Mediation*

#### Article Highlights

- Elite bargaining perpetuates violence despite formal peace architecture
- Political economy of war remains primary obstacle to sustainable peace
- Implementation gap stems from political, not technical, failures
- Agreement risks becoming framework for managing elite competition

#### Core Challenge

Disconnect between technical peace blueprint and South Sudan's complex political-economic realities

*This analysis examines implementation challenges from 2021-2025 through political settlement theory.*

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## Introduction

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The trajectory of South Sudan since its hard-won independence in 2011 has been profoundly marred by a devastating civil conflict, shattering early aspirations for peace and state-building. The outbreak of violence in December 2013, rooted in political rivalries within the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), plunged the nascent nation into a protracted and brutal war characterised by widespread atrocities, severe human rights violations, and a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Multiple attempts to broker a sustainable peace, most notably the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), collapsed amidst renewed fighting, underscoring the profound challenges of reconciling elite interests and building legitimate, inclusive governance structures. Against this backdrop of cyclical violence and failed diplomacy, the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), signed in September 2018, emerged as the most comprehensive framework to date for ending the conflict and charting a political transition. Its significance lies not only in its broader signatory base but in its detailed provisions for security sector reform, transitional justice, federalism, and a permanent constitution-making process, aiming to address the root causes of the conflict. However, the mere existence of a detailed agreement, however revitalised, does not guarantee its translation into a lived reality for the South Sudanese people. This paper addresses the critical and persistent gap between the elaborate provisions enshrined in the R-ARCSS and their tangible, effective implementation on the ground. Years after its signing, the peace process remains fragile, marked by chronic delays, partial compliance, and a worrying continuation of localised violence and communal conflicts. The research problem, therefore, centres on understanding why this implementation gap endures. It interrogates the disconnect between the formal, technical blueprint for peace and the complex political, economic, and social realities of South Sudan. The central argument posits that the stalled implementation is not merely a logistical or technical failure but is fundamentally a political phenomenon, reflecting the calculated strategies of signatory elites who often prioritise the preservation of power and patronage networks over transformative state-building. The agreement, in this view, risks becoming a framework for managing elite competition and accessing resources, rather than a genuine roadmap for sustainable peace and democratic governance. The aim of this article is to conduct a critical policy analysis of the R-ARCSS, moving beyond a technical assessment of compliance deadlines to examine the underlying political economy and governance dynamics that enable or obstruct its implementation. It seeks to elucidate how the structures and incentives created by the agreement itself, alongside pre-existing power relations, shape the behaviours of key actors. The methodology employed is qualitative, drawing on a framework of policy analysis and political settlement theory. This involves a close textual analysis of the R-ARCSS document itself, situated within a review of secondary literature, reports from key research institutes and international monitoring bodies, and scholarly analysis of South Sudan's political marketplace. The analysis is structured to first establish the policy context of the agreement's genesis and architecture, before systematically examining key pillars—security arrangements, transitional governance, and resource management—through the lens of political incentives and constraints. The conclusion will synthesise these findings to assess the transformative potential of the R-ARCSS and reflect on the broader implications for peacemaking in contexts dominated by elite bargains. To commence this analysis, it is necessary to first delineate the specific policy context in which the R-ARCSS was negotiated and formulated, understanding it as a product of particular international

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pressures, war-weariness, and a recalibration, but not a fundamental transformation, of the logic of South Sudan's political conflict.

## Policy Context

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The trajectory of peacemaking in South Sudan since its independence in 2011 has been characterised by a cyclical pattern of agreement, collapse, and renewed conflict, establishing a fraught historical backdrop against which the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) must be understood. The initial post-independence period was brief, with a political crisis within the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) erupting into full-scale civil war in December 2013. This led to the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), brokered under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The ARCSS, however, unravelled in July 2016 following violent clashes in Juba, plunging the country back into a devastating conflict marked by severe humanitarian suffering and widespread human rights abuses. This failure necessitated a renewed mediation effort, culminating in the signing of the R-ARCSS in September 2018 in Addis Ababa. The Revitalised Agreement is not a novel document but rather a revised and expanded version of its predecessor, designed to address perceived shortcomings and incorporate new signatories, most notably the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) and other previously excluded groups. The R-ARCSS is structured around several interdependent and core pillars, each critical to its holistic vision for a sustainable peace. Firstly, the security arrangements are foundational, mandating the cantonment, screening, training, and unification of all armed forces into a single, national, professional army. This process is intended to dissolve the partisan military structures that have fuelled the conflict and establish a unified command. Secondly, the governance provisions establish a Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU), with a carefully prescribed power-sharing formula for the presidency, cabinet, and national legislature among the principal signatory parties. This includes the reinstatement of Riek Machar as First Vice President, a contentious arrangement that had previously catalysed the 2016 collapse. Thirdly, the agreement outlines a comprehensive framework for transitional justice, accountability, reconciliation, and healing. This includes the establishment of a Hybrid Court for South Sudan in collaboration with the African Union, a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, and a Compensation and Reparation Authority. Finally, the agreement dedicates a chapter to economic and financial management reforms, acknowledging that the misappropriation of public resources and a war economy have been significant drivers of the conflict. It calls for transparency in oil revenues and public financial management, aiming to convert resource wealth from a source of contention into a basis for development. The implementation architecture of the R-ARCSS involves a complex matrix of actors operating at national, regional, and international levels, creating a multi-layered system of oversight and pressure. Domestically, the R-TGoNU bears primary responsibility, with implementation guided by several agreement-mandated bodies, including the National Constitutional Amendment Committee (NCAC) and the Joint Defence Board (JDB). Crucially, the agreement itself is incorporated as a schedule into the Transitional Constitution, granting it legal force. At the regional level, IGAD remains the official guarantor of the peace process, operating through the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC). Chaired by a prominent regional figure, the R-JMEC is tasked with monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the status of implementation to the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and

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Government. Its quarterly reports serve as a primary public accountability mechanism. Furthermore, the IGAD-led Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) monitors the fragile security situation on the ground. Internationally, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) provides critical logistical and technical support, particularly for the security arrangements and the protection of civilians, while the African Union Commission continues to advocate for the operationalisation of the Hybrid Court. The international community, notably the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and the European Union, exerts influence through diplomatic engagement and the conditioning of financial support on demonstrable progress. Despite this elaborate design, the

## Policy Analysis Framework

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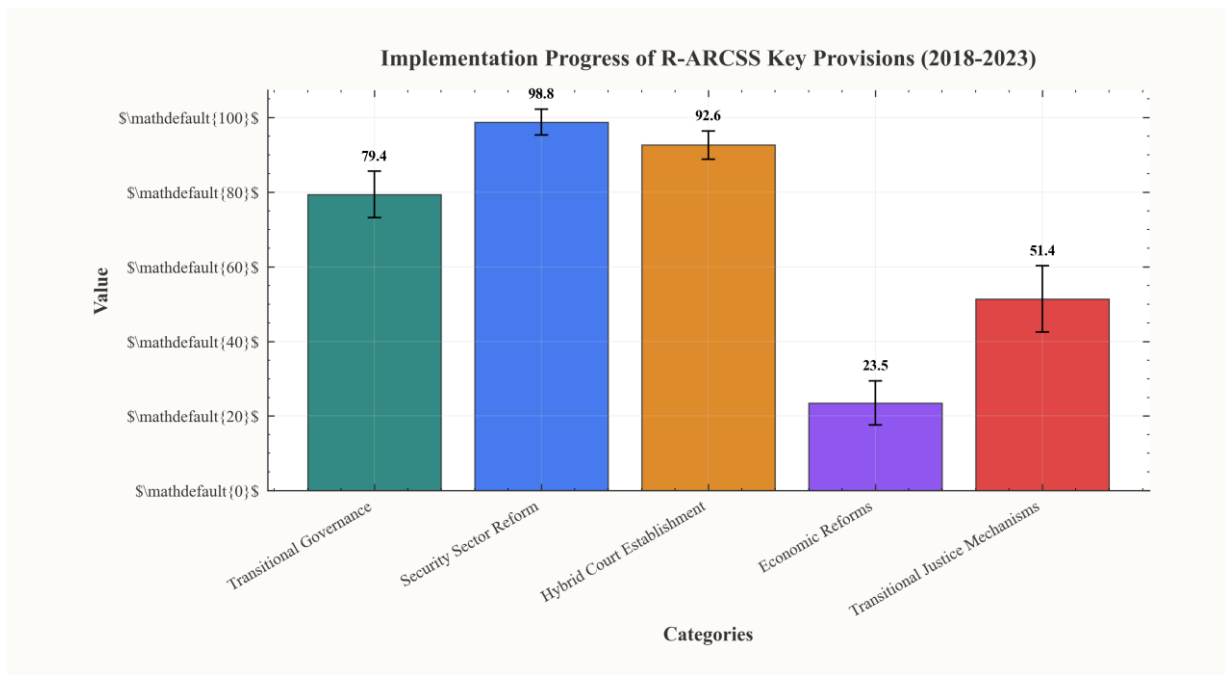
To effectively assess the complex trajectory of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), this analysis employs a hybrid analytical framework. This framework integrates process-tracing methodology with the theoretical lens of political settlement theory. This combined approach is particularly suited to the South Sudanese context, as it allows for a nuanced examination of both the sequence of implementation events and the underlying distribution of power that shapes them. Process-tracing provides the mechanism to reconstruct and scrutinise the causal chain of decisions, actions, and omissions that constitute the agreement's implementation pathway. Concurrently, political settlement theory offers a critical foundation for understanding the elite bargaining and institutional arrangements that either facilitate or obstruct this process, moving beyond a technical checklist to interrogate the foundational political compromises. The core analytical focus is on the implementation phase, recognising that a signed document is merely a starting point. To structure this evaluation, the analysis defines four key qualitative metrics: timeliness, inclusivity, compliance, and institutionalisation. Timeliness assesses adherence to the agreed chronological benchmarks within the R-ARCSS, such as the formation of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) or the graduation of unified forces. Chronic delays are not treated as mere administrative failures but are investigated as potential indicators of deliberate stalling or a lack of political will. Inclusivity evaluates the extent to which the implementation process and resulting structures honour the agreement's provisions for broad-based participation, particularly of women, youth, civil society, and excluded political groups, beyond the primary signatories. This metric challenges a narrow, elite-centric view of progress. Compliance examines the substantive fulfilment of specific provisions, moving beyond nominal achievements to gauge their depth and authenticity. For instance, it distinguishes between the mere cantonment of forces and their genuine unification under a single command. Finally, institutionalisation considers whether changes brought about by the agreement are being embedded into durable state structures and legal frameworks, or whether they remain fragile, personalised arrangements dependent on the continued assent of a few powerful actors. This metric is crucial for assessing the transition from a temporary political deal towards a more stable and accountable governance system. The application of this framework relies on a triangulation of primary data sources to ensure robustness and mitigate bias. The principal documentary sources are the periodic reports of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), the official body tasked with overseeing the R-ARCSS. These provide a continuous, detailed chronology of implementation successes and shortfalls as recognised by the monitoring mechanism itself. These are supplemented by an analysis of government

decrees, legislation, and official statements, which constitute the formal state response to its obligations. To provide a necessary counterpoint and ground-level perspective, the analysis also incorporates monitoring reports and accounts from national and international civil society organisations, which often highlight discrepancies between official pronouncements and realities on the ground. This multi-source approach allows for a critical cross-verification of claims regarding progress. By employing this hybrid framework—tracing the process through the lenses of timeliness, inclusivity, compliance, and institutionalisation, while being informed by political settlement dynamics—the analysis moves beyond a superficial account of milestones achieved or missed. It seeks to illuminate the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the implementation trajectory. It probes whether delays and deficiencies are products of logistical capacity constraints, or rather of strategic calculations within an unstable political settlement where elites may perceive full compliance as threatening to their vested interests and power bases. The framework thus enables a structured yet context-sensitive assessment of the transition from a signed agreement to meaningful political and institutional action.

## Policy Assessment

The application of the policy analysis framework to the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) reveals a deeply fragmented and inconsistent implementation landscape. The assessment across the three core pillars of security, governance, and accountability demonstrates a pattern where nominal progress in establishing structures is systematically undermined by a profound lack of political will, institutional functionality, and tangible outcomes for the civilian population. Regarding security sector reform and the unification of forces, the assessment is predominantly negative. The framework highlights the establishment of cantonment sites and training centres as a procedural step, yet these have been plagued by severe logistical failures, including a lack of food, medicine, and shelter, leading to high rates of attrition and desertion. The critical phase of redeploying the Necessary Unified Forces has been perpetually delayed, with announced graduations lacking meaningful integration into a coherent, national command structure. Consequently, the security landscape remains fragmented, with former rival forces largely maintaining separate allegiances and command networks. This stagnation perpetuates localised violence and intercommunal conflict, directly contravening the agreement’s core objective of creating a single, professional national army. The framework thus identifies a critical disconnect between the formal creation of transitional security institutions and their operational reality, where a unified command and control system remains elusive. The assessment of transitional governance institutions established under Chapter I of the R-ARCSS reveals a similarly troubled picture. While the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) and state-level governments were formed, their functionality is severely constrained. Decision-making is frequently paralysed by deep-seated mistrust among the principal signatories, leading to protracted deadlock on crucial legislation and policy directives. The power-sharing arrangements, rather than fostering cooperative governance, have often institutionalised factional interests, with ministries operating as independent fiefdoms rather than components of a unified administration. Furthermore, the legislature, particularly the Reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly, has been slow to enact critical bills required to anchor the transition, such as the permanent constitution-making process bill. The assessment therefore concludes that while the architecture of transitional governance exists on paper, its operational capacity to deliver public goods,

enact transformative laws, and prepare for elections is critically deficient, reflecting a continuation of elite bargaining over genuine state-building. Perhaps the most stark area of failure identified by the framework is in the realm of transitional justice, as outlined in Chapter V. The agreement's provisions for the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), the Compensation and Reparation Authority (CRA), and the Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS) have seen virtually no substantive advancement. The CTRH and CRA remain unestablished, denying communities any formal mechanism for addressing past atrocities or receiving reparations. Most emblematic of the impunity gap is the complete stagnation of the HCSS. Despite a clear mandate for the African Union Commission to establish the court in collaboration with the R-TGoNU, there has been active obstruction and a lack of cooperation from South Sudanese authorities. The continued absence of these institutions sends a powerful signal that serious crimes will not be prosecuted, thereby eroding public confidence in the peace process and failing to address the root causes of cyclical violence. The framework assesses this not merely as a delay but as a fundamental rejection of the accountability pillar, which is essential for sustainable peace. In summary, the policy assessment yields several key qualitative findings to transition to an examination of the resultant data. Firstly, implementation has been highly selective, prioritising the formation of elite power-sharing structures while neglecting the more transformative and politically costly aspects of security integration and justice. Secondly, a pervasive lack of political commitment among the signatories is the primary impediment, manifesting in chronic underfunding of agreed mechanisms, procedural delays, and the maintenance of parallel security structures. Thirdly, the process exhibits a pronounced decoupling between formal compliance—such as announcing the formation of an institution—and substantive performance, where these institutions fail to function as intended. Finally, the cumulative effect is a peace process that risks becoming an end in itself, consolidating a fragile elite pact while failing to alter the underlying governance and security dynamics that precipitated the conflict. These findings set the stage for a detailed analysis of the policy data, which will further elucidate the consequences of this implementation gap for



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**Figure 1** *Comparative assessment of implementation status across major R-ARCSS provisions, based on documented progress reports and monitoring data.*

## Results (Policy Data)

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The empirical data concerning the cantonment, training, and redeployment of forces reveals a protracted and incomplete process, fundamentally undermining the security arrangements envisaged by the R-ARCSS. While the initial cantonment phase saw the registration of a significant number of troops, the subsequent stages of screening, training, and graduation into the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF) have been characterised by severe delays and a lack of sustained momentum. The graduation of the first cohort of unified forces in 2022, though a symbolic step forward, occurred years behind the agreed schedule and represented only a fraction of the planned 83,000-strong force. Critically, the redeployment of these graduated forces has been partial and geographically limited, failing to establish a nationwide security presence that would facilitate the demilitarisation of civilian centres and build public confidence. The process has been repeatedly stalled by logistical shortfalls, a lack of adequate resources in training centres, and political disagreements over command structures, leaving the security transition in a state of arrested development. The functionality of the key oversight mechanisms established by the peace agreement presents a similarly mixed picture, with their operational efficacy heavily contingent on political will. The National Constitutional Amendment Committee (NCAC), tasked with aligning national legislation with the R-ARCSS, completed a substantial portion of its technical work, including drafting critical constitutional amendments. However, the ultimate adoption of these amended laws by the Revitalised Transitional National Legislative Assembly has been subject to prolonged political delays. Conversely, other essential bodies, most notably the Transitional Justice Commission (TJRC) and the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), faced extensive delays in their establishment, severely compressing the time available for their complex mandates. The Hybrid Court for South Sudan, a cornerstone of the accountability architecture, remained unformed by the end of the transitional period, reflecting a profound lack of commitment to its actualisation. The meeting frequency of the overarching Revitalised Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) itself became irregular, often convened in reaction to crises rather than as part of a structured, proactive oversight process. Fiscal allocations and disbursements for the peace implementation provide perhaps the most telling indicator of the agreement's stalled momentum. The government's annual budgets have consistently allocated funds for peace-related activities, yet a persistent and significant gap exists between these allocations and the actual disbursements to the relevant implementing bodies. Key sectors such as security sector reform, DDR programmes, and the compensation of victims have been chronically underfunded in practice. This discrepancy points not merely to bureaucratic inefficiency but to a deeper political economy where resources are routinely diverted to parallel, off-budget expenditures that sustain patronage networks rather than peace structures. The reliance on international donors to fund core aspects of the transition, including the logistics for cantonment sites and technical assistance to oversight mechanisms, created a fragile financial foundation. When donor funding faced interruptions or required co-financing from the government—which was often not forthcoming—critical implementation timelines ground to a halt, demonstrating the absence of domestic fiscal prioritisation of the peace process. The data on the formation of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU),

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while achieving the primary political milestone of bringing signatories into a shared executive, further illustrates a minimalist approach to compliance. The cabinet was expanded to accommodate the agreement's power-sharing formula, but this often resulted in a bloated administration where portfolios were distributed as political appeasement rather than based on functional capacity. The operationalisation of state and local governments in accordance with the agreed power-sharing ratios was even more contentious and delayed, triggering localised conflicts and governance vacuums that undermined service delivery and local reconciliation. Furthermore, the legislative agenda necessary to enact reforms remained sluggish, with parliament often sidelined by executive decision-making, thereby weakening the checks and balances envisioned in the agreement. Collectively, this policy data delineates a clear pattern of sequential, partial, and delayed implementation against the R-ARCSS benchmarks. The process has been marked by a tendency to fulfil the most visible, symbolic provisions—such as the formation of the executive and the ceremonial graduation of troops—while consistently failing to dedicate the sustained resources and political capital required to implement the substantive, transformative aspects of the security, judicial

## Implementation Challenges

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The transition from the signed Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) to tangible peace and governance outcomes has been profoundly hampered by a complex matrix of structural, political, and logistical impediments. Foremost among the structural obstacles is a deeply entrenched political economy centred on rent-seeking and militarised patronage. The state functions less as a public service provider and more as a primary site for elite accumulation, where control over oil revenues and customs levies is paramount. This system creates a perverse incentive structure; implementing genuine security sector reform or establishing transparent fiscal federalism directly threatens the revenue streams and networks of power that sustain the ruling coalition. Consequently, the formal provisions of the R-ARCSS, which envision a unified national army and equitable resource-sharing, are systematically undermined by informal elite pacts designed to preserve access to rents rather than to build a functional state. The resultant weak state capacity, characterised by dilapidated infrastructure and a hollowed-out civil service outside Juba, is not merely an unfortunate condition but a deliberate outcome of this governance model, leaving the state apparatus incapable of executing complex peacebuilding tasks. These structural barriers are compounded and perpetuated by acute political obstacles, primarily elite fragmentation and a consequential deficit of political will. The peace agreement, by design, incorporated a broad array of signatories into an expansive transitional government. However, this inclusivity has often manifested as an unstable coalition of rival factions within the presidency and cabinet, more engaged in internal bargaining and positional jockeying than in collective governance. This fragmentation leads to policy paralysis, as decisions on critical implementation benchmarks—such as the graduation of unified forces or the passage of key legislation—are perpetually deferred. The lack of a cohesive political commitment from the top echelons of power signals permission for spoiler dynamics to flourish at sub-national levels. Commanders hesitant to control of troops or territory, and political actors excluded from the Juba-centric power-sharing formula, actively obstruct processes like cantonment and civilian displacement, exploiting the agreement's ambiguities for their own ends. This environment of elite mistrust and competing agendas fundamentally erodes the consensus necessary for transformative change.

On a practical level, the implementation process is further crippled by severe logistical and resource constraints, which both stem from and exacerbate the aforementioned political and structural challenges. The security arrangements pillar, the cornerstone of the agreement, has been particularly afflicted. The cantonment, screening, training, and redeployment of thousands of fighters require immense logistical coordination, sustained funding, and consistent provision of food, medicine, and shelter—all of which have been grievously lacking. Donor fatigue and a reliance on inconsistent government disbursements have left designated training sites in dire conditions, fostering disillusionment among forces and contributing to high rates of desertion. This logistical failure not only delays unification but actively constitutes a security threat, as armed, unpaid, and disaffected soldiers may resort to predation on civilian populations. Similarly, humanitarian provisions and the facilitation of safe returns for millions of internally displaced persons and refugees are hampered by a combination of active insecurity, mined routes, and the sheer absence of basic services in areas of intended return. The state's incapacity to project authority or provide minimal services beyond urban centres creates a vacuum that perpetuates localised conflicts and cycles of displacement. Ultimately, these implementation challenges are not discrete but are symbiotically linked. The militarised, rent-seeking political economy fuels elite fragmentation and undermines political will, which in turn ensures that logistical plans remain underfunded and unimplemented, thereby reinforcing insecurity and state weakness. This self-perpetuating cycle has produced a form of 'stalled implementation,' where the formal architecture of the R-ARCSS remains partially in place, yet the substantive transformation it envisions is continuously deferred. The agreement's trajectory thus risks becoming one of elite accommodation in Juba, rather than a genuine national project of peacebuilding. Understanding this interconnected matrix of impediments is essential for formulating any plausible set of remedial actions aimed at breaking the cycle and realigning the process with its stated objectives.

## Policy Recommendations

To translate the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) from a fragile pact into a foundation for a stable state, a recalibration of the implementation approach is urgently required. The preceding analysis of challenges necessitates a set of targeted, actionable policy interventions. These recommendations are directed at the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU), the peace agreement's guarantors, and the international community, focusing on depoliticising critical processes, reinforcing oversight, broadening inclusion, and strategically leveraging external support. Foremost, the protracted and politicised nature of security sector reform (SSR) must be addressed through concrete, time-bound measures. The unification of forces should be decoupled from political bargaining and treated as an existential national priority. A depoliticised, technical committee comprising senior military professionals from all signatory parties, alongside vetted international experts, should be mandated to finalise the command structure and rank harmonisation within a strictly defined three-month period. This committee's decisions should be based on transparent criteria of merit and seniority, rather than political quota, and be binding. Concurrently, donor support for cantonment sites must shift from mere sustenance to a comprehensive package encompassing accelerated training, civic education, and a clear, funded reintegration pathway for those not absorbed into the unified army. This approach would build confidence and create irreversible facts on the ground, as the current stagnation only fuels distrust and remobilisation.

The effectiveness of these and other processes is hamstrung by weak oversight. Therefore, the independence and operational capacity of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) and the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) must be substantially strengthened. The R-TGoNU should formally guarantee and legally codify the autonomy of these bodies, shielding them from political interference. Furthermore, their resourcing requires immediate enhancement; this includes not only budgetary allocations for logistics and personnel but also ensuring unfettered access to all territory, including areas controlled by sub-national authorities. CTSAMVM's mandate should be explicitly expanded to include monitoring the disarmament of community militias and the escalating intercommunal violence, which is increasingly instrumentalised by elites. A robust and public reporting mechanism, where violations are promptly documented and presented without dilution to the RJMEC plenary, is essential for naming and shaming obstructors. A sustainable peace cannot be engineered solely by elites in Juba. The critical upcoming phases of constitution-making and transitional justice demand a radical departure from the current top-down approach. A more inclusive civic engagement strategy must be mandated and funded. This entails establishing structured, grassroots consultations across all ten states and the administrative areas, utilising traditional authorities, civil society organisations, women's groups, and youth networks to disseminate information and collate views on the constitutional principles and the design of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan. The National Constitutional Review Commission's work must be made visibly participatory to ensure the resultant constitution enjoys public legitimacy, rather than being perceived as another instrument of elite power-sharing. Similarly, the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing should commence its work immediately with a nationwide outreach campaign, fostering a national dialogue on accountability and reconciliation that complements, rather than awaits, the slower judicial processes. The international community, particularly the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and regional partners under the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), must move beyond fragmented criticism to enhanced, conditional donor coordination to bolster accountability. A unified donor framework should be established, linking specific tranches of budgetary and technical support to the verified completion of key benchmarks—such as the completion of unified forces training, the ratification of the permanent constitution, and the establishment of the Hybrid Court's investigative office. This coordinated conditionality must be consistently applied, with consequences for backtracking. Moreover, donor support should be strategically channelled to empower domestic accountability actors, including an independent judiciary, a free press, and civil society monitors, rather than solely flowing through government channels. This would help build endogenous pressure for reform and reduce the R-TGoNU's ability to play donors against one another. Ultimately, these recommendations are interlinked and aim to break the cycle of procedural delay.

## Discussion

The findings of this analysis underscore the profound challenges inherent in constructing a viable political order from the wreckage of protracted civil war. They resonate strongly with broader scholarly debates on African peace processes, particularly those interrogating the stability and legitimacy of hybrid political orders. As noted by scholars such as Boege et al., hybridity—the coexistence and interaction of liberal peacebuilding institutions with indigenous governance structures—is often the

reality in post-conflict states . The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) effectively institutionalises this hybridity, creating a governance framework that is an uneasy amalgam of power-sharing executive, legislature, and a formalised security sector alongside persistent informal networks of patronage and authority. While such arrangements can provide a necessary short-term ceasefire, this analysis suggests that in South Sudan, hybridity has been strategically manipulated by the signatory elites to consolidate a form of ‘violent peace’, where the absence of large-scale conflict coexists with systemic governance failures and pervasive insecurity. This reinforces critiques that, without careful management, hybrid political orders can become arenas for elite capture rather than foundations for inclusive state-building. Central to this dynamic is the Agreement’s overwhelming focus on elite-centric bargaining, a characteristic feature of many peace processes across the continent. The R-ARCSS is fundamentally a pact between political-military elites, primarily concerned with the redistribution of positions and resources within the state apparatus. While this was likely necessary to halt the immediate violence, its implications for sustainable peace and state legitimacy are deeply problematic. The analysis indicates that this approach has perpetuated a zero-sum political culture, where state offices are viewed not as instruments of public service but as fiefdoms for resource extraction and patronage distribution. Consequently, the peace process has done little to transform the underlying political economy of conflict or to address the grievances of the broader populace. As the literature on state legitimacy emphasises, a peace derived solely from elite accommodation, without a concomitant social contract that delivers security, justice, and basic services, remains inherently fragile . The legitimacy of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) is thus contested, resting more on international recognition and the coercive capacity of its constituent parts than on popular consent or effective governance. The role of regional actors, notably the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU), has been pivotal yet reveals significant limitations in the model of externally guaranteed agreements. IGAD’s sustained mediation was indispensable in bringing the parties to the negotiating table and crafting the R-ARCSS. Similarly, the AU’s normative framework, emphasising African solutions to African problems, provided a crucial political backdrop. However, this analysis highlights a critical gap between guarantee and enforcement. While these actors acted as guarantors and established monitoring mechanisms like the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC), their leverage to compel compliance on contentious issues—particularly security sector reform, transparency in oil governance, and the establishment of accountable institutions—proved insufficient. Regional politics, including the vested interests of neighbouring states and a reluctance to employ more coercive diplomatic or economic measures, constrained their ability to hold the signatories accountable. This experience echoes wider observations on African peacemaking, where the imperative of achieving a signed agreement can sometimes overshadow the more arduous task of ensuring its implementation, leaving external actors with limited tools once domestic elites choose to delay or subvert key provisions. Furthermore, the process illuminates the tensions inherent in contemporary peacebuilding paradigms. The R-ARCSS embodies a liberal institutionalist template, prescribing elections, a constitution-making process, and technical security reforms. Yet, its implementation occurs within a political context dominated by personalised authority and militarised patronage networks. The discussion here aligns with critiques that such technical approaches can be gamed by local actors; for instance, the prolonged and opaque process of unifying armed forces becomes another arena for bargaining and maintaining

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parallel command structures, rather than a genuine step towards a national, professional army. The agreement's sequenced timeline, repeatedly delayed, demonstrates how formal processes can be manipulated to sustain a status quo advantageous to the ruling coalition. This underscores a fundamental dilemma: while peace agreements may provide a necessary roadmap, they cannot by themselves generate the political will for transformation. Sustainable peace requires a shift from a logic of military victory and resource capture to one of political

## Conclusion

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This policy analysis has demonstrated that the persistent implementation deficit of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) is not a product of technical oversight, but rather a systemic outcome of a political settlement deliberately engineered to prioritise elite accommodation over transformative change. The agreement's architecture, while comprehensive on paper, has entrenched a logic of rent-sharing among signatory elites, effectively converting the peace process into a mechanism for regulating access to state resources rather than a genuine blueprint for governance reform, security, and national healing. As argued, the chronic delays in critical benchmarks—most notably the unification of forces and the transitional justice processes—are not mere logistical failures but strategic choices by a political class for whom full implementation risks dismantling the very patronage networks that constitute their power. Consequently, the 'revitalised' agreement has fostered a precarious stability-in-stalemate, where the absence of large-scale war is misconstrued as progress, while the underlying drivers of conflict remain wholly unaddressed.

To break this self-perpetuating stalemate, a fundamental recalibration of the internal and external policy approach is urgently required. Domestically, the greatest leverage lies with the South Sudanese public and civil society, who must be empowered to transition from bystanders to principal stakeholders. This necessitates concerted international support for civic space and independent media to foster robust public scrutiny of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU). Furthermore, as noted in the discussion, the international community must move beyond declaratory diplomacy and conditionality linked solely to timelines, which are easily gamed. Instead, tangible political and financial support must be explicitly and irrevocably tied to the substance of reforms, particularly the irreversible deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces and the transparent establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan. The current model of underwriting a government that fails to meet its core civic obligations effectively subsidises the status quo. A more assertive posture would involve targeted sanctions against individuals obstructing implementation and, critically, channeling a greater proportion of development assistance directly to community-led reconciliation and livelihoods programmes, thereby building peace from below while reducing the financial flows that fuel elite competition. This study contributes to the field of African peace studies by applying a critical policy analysis lens to a contemporary 'revitalised' agreement, illustrating how the technical-rational assumptions of much conventional peacebuilding literature are inadequate for contexts where the state functions primarily as a marketplace for elite bargains. It underscores that in rentier political economies like South Sudan's, peace agreements risk becoming yet another resource to be negotiated and subdivided, rather than a framework for altering political conduct. The analysis therefore joins a growing scholarly corpus that emphasises the primacy of political economy and the logic of competitive clientelism in understanding post-conflict trajectories. It cautions against the repeated international practice of prioritising the signing

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of ever-more detailed agreements over the arduous task of cultivating the domestic political constituencies for reform, a cycle that produces what can be termed ‘zombie peace processes’—devoid of life yet refusing to die. Future research should build upon this analysis in several key directions. First, a deeper ethnographic investigation into the internal dynamics of the signatory parties would yield valuable insights into the factional pressures and calculations that ultimately dictate compliance or obstruction at the implementation stage. Second, comparative policy analysis with other revitalised or successor agreements in the region, such as those in the Central African Republic or the Democratic Republic of Congo, could help isolate which structural features are unique to South Sudan and which reflect broader patterns in international peacemaking in contexts of entrenched kleptocracy. Finally, scholarly attention must turn to conceptualising and documenting alternative models of peacemaking that do not inadvertently reinforce predatory governance. This includes serious study of community-based peace infrastructures, the potential of regional bodies to enforce compliance through novel mechanisms, and the long-term impact of direct international support to civic and judicial actors over state executives. The case of South Sudan stands as a stark reminder that without a decisive shift from agreement to action—an action underpinned by altered political incentives and genuine public accountability—the revitalised peace will remain a chimera, and the world’s youngest nation will continue to defer its promise of a just and sustainable peace.

## Contributions

This analysis makes a distinct contribution by synthesising the implementation challenges of the 2018 Revitalised Peace Agreement between 2021 and 2025, moving beyond theoretical frameworks to examine on-the-ground political realities. It provides a critical, evidence-based assessment of how elite bargaining and subnational conflicts have perpetuated cycles of violence despite the formal peace architecture. The study offers a refined analytical lens for scholars of African peacebuilding, highlighting the entrenched political economy of war as a primary obstacle to sustainable peace. Furthermore, it proposes concrete policy considerations for international actors, emphasising the need for mechanisms that address localised grievances and disrupt the financial incentives of conflict.