

# Accord

ISSUE 30

an international review of peace initiatives

February 2024 | Issue Editor: Teresa Whitfield



## STILL TIME TO TALK

Adaptation and  
innovation in  
peace mediation



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an international review of peace initiatives

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# Acronyms

<b>ACCORD</b>	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes	<b>IPN</b>	Insider Peacebuilders Network
<b>AGC</b>	Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces of Colombia	<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State
<b>AI</b>	Artificial intelligence	<b>ISWAP</b>	Islamic State West Africa Province
<b>ARCSS</b>	Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan	<b>JMEC</b>	Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission
<b>AU</b>	African Union	<b>JNIM</b>	Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin
<b>AUHIP</b>	African Union High-Level Implementation Panel	<b>KNDR</b>	Kenya National Dialogue Reconciliation
<b>AUPSC</b>	African Union Peace and Security Council	<b>KWCG</b>	Kenya Women's Consultative Group
<b>BATNA</b>	Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement	<b>M&amp;V</b>	Monitoring and verification
<b>BAY</b>	Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe	<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>BRICS</b>	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa	<b>NDC</b>	National Dialogue Conference [Yemen]
<b>CBM</b>	Confidence-building measure	<b>NOREF</b>	Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution
<b>CBY</b>	Central Bank of Yemen	<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>CMI</b>	Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation	<b>OIC</b>	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Peace Agreement [Sudan]	<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>CPI</b>	Cordoba Peace Institute	<b>PIJCA</b>	Interfaith Platform of Central African Youth
<b>DAG</b>	Dialogue Advisory Group	<b>PoC</b>	Point of contact
<b>DDoS</b>	Distributed denial-of-service	<b>PRIO</b>	Peace Research Institute Oslo
<b>EIP</b>	European Institute for Peace	<b>RARCSS</b>	Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
<b>ELN</b>	National Liberation Army [Colombia]	<b>REC</b>	Regional economic community
<b>ETA</b>	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna	<b>RSF</b>	Rapid Support Forces
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>SAF</b>	Sudanese Armed Forces
<b>FARC</b>	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	<b>SSWC</b>	South Sudan Women's Coalition
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product	<b>TMC</b>	Transitional Military Council
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic information systems	<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>HD</b>	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue	<b>UNAMA</b>	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
<b>HLRF</b>	High-Level Revitalisation Forum	<b>UNITAMS</b>	United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission to Sudan
<b>HTS</b>	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross	<b>UNSMIL</b>	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology	<b>WPS</b>	Women, peace and security
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development		
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organisation		

# INTRODUCTION

## Still time to talk

**Teresa Whitfield** is Issue Editor of this *Accord*. She is an independent consultant and a senior adviser to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD). From 2016–22 she was Director of the Policy and Mediation Division in the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. She also spent five years at the UN in the 1990s working on Central American peace processes and other issues and has been a fellow of New York University's Center on International Cooperation, Director of the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum at the Social Science Research Council, and senior adviser to the president of the International Crisis Group. She has published widely on peacemaking and mediation.

**Mediators are inherently adaptive. Their work is grounded in the world as it is and, in their support of conflict parties and others seeking to move from war to peace, necessarily imbued with hope of what the world of tomorrow might become. Yet the policy and practice of mediation have struggled to keep pace with the changing realities of conflict and global politics. The value of mediation as a tool to facilitate political solutions to violent conflict is therefore under severe pressure.**

At a moment of profound geopolitical polarisation, surging armed conflict, deep technological change, and the rising prominence of systemic threats such as the climate emergency and the risks associated with artificial intelligence (AI) and infectious disease, this publication develops ideas on how peace mediation policy and practice can adapt and innovate to tackle today's challenges.

We focus on mediation as a specific activity within the wider sphere of peacebuilding and conflict transformation and follow the UN's 2012 Guidance on Effective Mediation in understanding mediation as 'a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements'. We do not distinguish between the type of armed conflict (international, internal, internationalised-internal, local) or the nature of the agreements (comprehensive, cessation of hostilities, issue-based) that mediation seeks to support. Recognising that there remains confusion around what mediation is (even within the parameters of the UN's definition, as Govinda Clayton and colleagues have explored), we place emphasis on mediation as 'third party assisted negotiation'.

In a period of geopolitical flux, we include analysis of the changing identities and approaches of mediators.

But we also seek to recall the centrality of ownership of the process by the parties to the conflict and other affected local or national constituencies. We recognise a spectrum of mediation strategies, reflecting differing levels of engagement, support, and pressure on the part of third parties. And we acknowledge that terminology and practice may be determined by political sensitivities and realities. Conflict parties and third parties alike may refer not to mediation but 'facilitation' or other formulas they deem less intrusive. Some conflict parties opt squarely for direct negotiations but may still require support. Some third parties engage in peacemaking through the exercise of power and leverage that bears little resemblance to the mediation 'fundamentals' outlined in the UN Guidance.

If adaptation is intrinsic to mediation as a context-specific practice, at different moments in mediation's history, innovation has also flourished. We approach innovation in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Declaration on Public Sector Innovation (2019), as understood to mean 'implementing something novel to the context in order to achieve impact'. Innovation for mediation is thus not limited to methodologies introduced by digital technologies or even to practices that are themselves self-evidently 'new'. In some situations, it may rather involve revisiting the 'old' and adapting it – as 'something novel' – to the current context.

Four sections follow this introduction, each containing a selection of articles by different contributors that reflect a variety of perspectives and experiences. They address: (1) the current context and landscape for mediation; (2) diversified mediators, mandates, and ambitions; (3) engaging resistant, elusive, and excluded parties and constituencies; and (4) mediation with and on technology. Concluding recommendations help identify what is happening and what needs to happen for mediation to maintain contemporary relevance, and how to close the gap between the two.

## Peace and security in crisis

The International Crisis Group began its annual review of the ten conflicts to watch in 2024 with a stark question: 'Can we stop things falling apart?' Inter-state conflict is on the rise, and internal armed conflicts are internationalised and fragmented, with multiple and often incohesive belligerents with diverse motives for their violent behaviour. Conflicts involve a fluid mix of political, economic, criminal and ideological agendas; the atomisation of non-state armed groups and local militias; porous borders; the accelerating impacts of climate change; a range of involvements of external actors; and a rapidly evolving digital landscape, all of which complicate mediation. The comprehensive peace agreements seen in the post-Cold-War period have become increasingly elusive, and the liberal peacebuilding they presaged has experienced failures and pushback.

### **THE CURRENT MOMENT REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURE FROM THE NORM PREVAILING SINCE THE 1990s THAT POLITICAL SOLUTIONS SHOULD BE SOUGHT TO VIOLENT CONFLICTS.**

The return of inter-state war on the European continent, regional escalation in the Middle East, an intensifying series of attacks, tensions and shadow-wars across multiple seas and oceans, and lingering fears of the potentially calamitous impacts of confrontation over Taiwan all point to an increasingly dangerous world. Military victories in Afghanistan and Nagorny Karabakh and active conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, in Sudan, and between Israel and Hamas all followed the failure or neglect of political processes. The current moment therefore represents a significant departure from the norm prevailing since the 1990s – first dented by the attacks of 9/11 – that political solutions should be sought to violent conflicts.

Even before Hamas's 7 October 2023 attack on Israel and Israel's assault on Gaza in response, the war in Ukraine had fuelled a significant escalation in military budgets – 13 per cent in Europe, the biggest annual increase since the end of the Cold War, and 3.7 per cent across the world, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Foreign aid from OECD countries surged in 2022 due to spending on refugees and assistance for Ukraine, but by 2023 it was evident that sustaining such levels will not be feasible. Several governments with long trajectories as funders of the peace sector have either announced or are considering sizeable cuts.

More broadly, human suffering is increasing, exacerbated by the intertwining of armed conflict with the failure of states to respond to the needs of their populations, as well as transnational threats such as climate change, organised crime, and the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Except for a short period in the early 1990s, since 2014, according to the Peace Research Institute Oslo, the number of state-based armed conflicts has been at its highest level since 1946; in 2022, largely as result of the wars in Ethiopia and Ukraine, there were more people killed in conflicts than in any year since 1994, the year of the Rwandan genocide. Meanwhile the UN assesses that nearly 300 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2024 as a result of conflicts, climate emergencies (the two increasingly converging) and other drivers. By mid-2023, 110 million people had been forced to flee their homes, more than double the 43 million a decade earlier.

A backsliding on human rights and the closure of civic space – although the protests seen across six continents in 2019, for example, spoke to the power of nonviolent mobilisation against governments of all political stripes – are among the more visible aspects of a broader contestation of the principles underpinning mediation. Some states have used the principles of 'sovereignty' and 'national ownership' to resist norms sustained by an always fragile international consensus, such as inclusion and respect for international law, as well as the less settled norms associated with transitional justice and emerging discussions around the relationship between the climate emergency, conflict, and peace efforts. Resistance to the meaningful participation of women in peace processes has different sources and forms but is widespread and intensifying. Impunity is rife.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine accelerated geopolitical re-alignment and the polarisation associated with the weakening of multilateral frameworks, a series of failed Western-led interventions and a collision of worldviews that has been a long-time brewing. The 2021 coup in Myanmar, the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, the resurgence of coups across West Africa and the Sahel, the descent of the internationally backed transition in Sudan into open warfare, and Israel's dismissal of appeals for it to adhere to international humanitarian law in Gaza all speak to the limitations of international leverage. Yawning differences among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the Council's resulting inability to act on major conflicts in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Ukraine, and Israel-Palestine have accelerated demands for its reform and contributed to diminishing faith in the UN as a global peacemaker.

The war in Ukraine reinvigorated the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). But it also complicated relations between the West and



A woman surveys buildings destroyed by an Israeli bombardment of Rafah refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, 1 January 2024.  
© AFP via Getty Images

states that either do not want to jeopardise trade and other relationships with China and Russia, or are inherently critical of what they see as hypocrisy in Western values and international interventions, or both. Many 'swing' states are increasingly active on the world stage, seeking to join new coalitions (as the August 2023 meeting and expansion of the BRICS, originally composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa demonstrated) and asserting their strategic independence, including as mediators or brokers of peace.

## **THE WARS IN UKRAINE AND GAZA PROVIDE A VIVID EXAMPLE OF BOTH THE HORRORS AND DEVASTATION WROUGHT BY CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS AND THE POTENCY OF NEW MEANS OF WARFARE.**

Among states in the Global South, accusations of double standards surged in response to the outpouring of Western support for Ukraine. The strong backing by the United States – outraged by the suffering inflicted on Israelis by Hamas's attack on 7 October – for Israel's response, despite the disproportionate suffering inflicted on Palestinian civilians, only reinforced divisions.

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza provide a vivid example of both the horrors and devastation wrought by conventional weapons and the potency of new means of warfare. AI-based advances in military technology, drones, missiles, cyberattacks (as Francesca Bosco discusses on p.25 with regard to Ukraine) and the weaponisation of social media for mis- and dis-information are all in play. Alongside the devastating consequences of Israel's retaliatory war on Hamas, the use and misuse of social media within and around the conflict has fuelled toxic divisions and violent hate crimes far from the Gaza strip, while in Gaza itself targeting by the Israeli Defense Forces has been accelerated by an AI target creation platform called 'The Gospel'. Tech companies have emerged as important, if often reluctant, actors in conflict. As they own and largely operate much of the technology used by conflict actors, they have the ability to benefit one side or the other.

Meanwhile, stringent economic sanctions are regularly deployed by Western actors as a tool to influence war and peace as well as government and armed group behaviours. Relaxing sanctions can in turn serve a variety of purposes in conflict resolution efforts, as Zuzana Hudáková and colleagues have found; it will inevitably be a subject of negotiation in any denouement of the war in Ukraine.

## Mediation at a crossroads

In a difficult global context, in which mediation has become increasingly fragmented, competitive and transactional, the need for both adaptation and innovation is clear. The diversification of mediators at a formal level – the UN and regional organisations, established peace actors like Norway, Switzerland and Qatar, power mediators such as the United States and Russia, but also a widening number of middle power states – is accelerating. Each have interests at stake – from the extension of norms in the interests of sustainable peace, to soft power influence beyond their borders, regional security, or the protection of proxies, economic interests, arms sales, or access to resources – and bring a wide variety of approaches to their engagements.

There are also high levels of activity by international private mediation entities and an increased recognition of the contributions made by an array of ‘insider’ and local mediators working at a subnational level. How different mediators relate to each other, and to what extent they can align their varied ambitions when they engage in the same conflict theatre, has become a critical question.

In recent years, mediation as a practice has seen extensive professionalisation. Since the establishment of the UN’s Mediation Support Unit in 2006, expertise on mediation and mediation support has been developed within regional organisations, states and non-governmental mediation actors, and by regular exchange among them. An explosion of guidance materials (on issues such as the mediation of ceasefire agreements; gender and inclusive peace processes; the potential and challenges offered by digital technologies; supporting local mediation; the implications of climate change; or peacemaking using Islamic principles), academic literature and courses on conflict resolution and mediation have greatly expanded the shared knowledge base, albeit with an obvious skew towards the production of knowledge in the West. A prestigious master’s programme at ETH Zurich is dedicated to preparing the next generation of global peace mediators and rightly prioritises the diversity of its cohorts. Meetings of the European Union’s ‘Community of Practice’ on mediation, the Oslo Mediation Forum hosted by Norway and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, and Türkiye’s Istanbul Mediation Meetings are among the many offerings in the mediation calendar, complemented by regionally hosted meetings such as the African Union’s High-Level Retreats of its Special Envoys, or the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s (OIC) conferences on mediation.

Much that has been learned about mediation has been put to good use. Examples cited within this publication demonstrate that effective leadership and partnership among mediators – multilateral and regional organisations, states, international non-governmental mediators, civil society organisations, women’s organisations, religious leaders, or tribal and community leaders – have helped advance peace. The support given by third parties has enabled conflict parties to agree violence prevention and reduction mechanisms, security arrangements and modalities for reintegration, as well as agreements to manage environmental issues, to verify information relating to ceasefires and disarmament, or the mis- and dis-information spread through social media, or address conflicts related to disputes around, for example, water or the mining sector.

**THIRTY YEARS OF ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE, EXPERTISE AND RESOURCES HAVE SEEN SUCCESS IN HELPING BRING CONFLICTS TO AN END. YET MEDIATION PROCESSES TOO FREQUENTLY ARE NOT WELCOME, NOT WORKING, OR NOT EQUAL TO THE DISRUPTIVE FORCES OF THE CURRENT MOMENT.**

Collectively, this experience of mediation demonstrates that responding to fragmentation of the conflict with multi-level engagement offers a potent means of moving ‘beyond’ and ‘beneath’ the state. It reinforces the value of keeping talking, even as violence rages. It also underlines the need for new configurations of actors to manage the contemporary challenges of geopolitics and fragmented conflict.

Yet we also acknowledge that this is a moment for critical introspection. Thirty years of accumulated knowledge, expertise and resources have seen success in helping bring conflicts to an end, prevent violence, and save lives. And yet mediation processes too frequently are not welcome, not working, or not equal to the disruptive local, national, and geopolitical forces of the current moment. The informal rules of politics in many fragile and conflict-affected countries, as Alex de Waal and others have set out in their analysis of the contribution of the ‘political marketplace framework’ to peace processes, are determined by ‘those who command violence and control money’. Among the consequences are peace processes that ‘are neither liberal nor in conformity with customary norms’.





Ukrainian and Turkish ministers exchange documents at a signature ceremony in Istanbul, Türkiye, for the Black Sea Grain Initiative brokered by the UN and Türkiye, in the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, July 2022. © Ozan Kose/AFP via Getty Images

Affected populations are understandably frustrated and disillusioned. The Central African Republic has seen nearly a dozen peace agreements come and go since 1997 but, as Kenny Gluck, a former deputy head of the UN mission there has observed, with no lasting impact on the peacefulness of the country. In December 2023 50 civil society organisations from or working in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) petitioned the UN Security Council to press facilitators and participants in the Nairobi and Luanda processes addressing the conflicts in the country's east to 'move beyond short term interests and stalemates' and 'put peace and security for eastern DRC's population first'. The devastating new war in Sudan has been met by chaotic and ineffective responses by multiple would-be mediators. Decades of work on the Middle East peace process, and then its neglect, have been swept aside by the worst violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict since 1948.

Mediation is never a panacea – it is, in the end, a tool that can be better or worse applied in support of conflict parties who have taken the difficult decision to take up arms, and may or may not be persuaded that circumstances are ripe to put them down again. But what adaptations and innovations can be introduced to better marry the available resources and interests in peacemaking across the globe with the enormous challenges at hand?

In their opening article, addressing 'The evolution of innovation in international mediation', David Lanz and Phillip Lustenberger on p.12 suggest that significant mediation innovation comes at 'critical junctures' in world politics. They trace this history through four such moments – the founding of the United Nations after the end of the Second World War, the Cold War, the post-Cold War period, and the period that followed the 9/11 attacks on the United States – before addressing the developments and innovations in the period that has opened since the early 2010s.

**THE NEW DISTRIBUTION OF GLOBAL POWER AND NEW TYPES OF WARFARE AND VIOLENCE HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS.**

We are at such a critical juncture now. Mediators can draw on valuable knowledge and expertise to shape relevant practice, as Sanam Anderlini's analysis of innovations around the women, peace and security agenda argues on p.16. Experience over the years has underlined the benefits of early consultations with women's organisations, the provision of gendered analysis and advice to mediation teams, and the direct

engagement of independent delegations of women peacebuilders and other representatives of civil society with the warring parties.

Yet such work receives uneven take-up. And, as Hugo Slim addresses in his article on 'Mediation in the world and wars of the 2020s' on p.21, the new distribution of global power and new types of warfare and violence have significant implications. Mediators of different kinds will pursue different goals, some working towards mutually acceptable agreements between conflict parties with political order, and thus the preservation of elite interests, as their goal, while others may hold out for inclusive processes and social justice. They will increasingly be drawn into new fields of work (climate, cyber, space, energy, as well as the mediation of urban violence) and new partnerships. And everywhere they will have to navigate polarised geopolitics.

**WE NEED TO EMBRACE 'MULTI-MEDIATION' AS A TAPESTRY OF DIFFERENT MEDIATION PROCESSES FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES IN DIFFERENT PLACES AND LEVELS, THAT EACH ADDRESS ONE DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT IN WAYS THAT CAN IMPACT THE WHOLE.**

Christine Bell in her article on p.27 suggests that holistic or 'comprehensive' resolution of today's highly fragmented conflicts, characterised by inter-related sets of communal, national, transnational, and geopolitical conflicts, is 'almost impossible'. In its stead she proposes that we need to embrace 'multimediation' as a tapestry of different mediation processes for different purposes in different places and levels, and with different groups of actors that each address one dimension of the conflict in ways that can impact the whole.

A holistic and strategic approach to such processes of 'multimediation' is, of course, an extraordinarily difficult endeavour, born out by the critical analysis contained within articles included across the breadth of the publication. Yet, within a generally sombre picture, authors also point to areas for hope as well as need for more effective mediation, and identify adaptive and creative experience on which it is possible to build or suggest new avenues for engagement.

The recommendations summarised below and further developed at the volume's conclusion attempt to capture many of them but cannot do justice to the wealth of experience and insight generously shared across the publication.

## 10 ways to adapt and innovate mediation policy and practice

### Mediation strategy and process

1. Prioritise mediation and the pursuit of political solutions as primary objectives in strategies to tackle armed conflict.
2. Pursue mediation and political solutions *below* and *beyond* the state – the state should not be the only locus for conflict resolution.
3. Redefine 'success' in mediation as achieving specific or localised gains that make people safer, reduce violence and support momentum towards sustainable peace.

### Mediation partnerships and principles

4. Commit to partnerships between diverse mediators in order to support peace processes effectively, balance skills and interests, avoid competition and maximise collective impact.
5. Build consensus among diverse mediators around core peacemaking values and principles – but acknowledge that there will often be different worldviews that need to be managed carefully.
6. Defend impartiality as a mediation 'fundamental' – accepting that this may need to be balanced among diverse mediators in a peace process.

### Mediation approaches and tools

7. Support engagement with 'hard-to-reach' armed groups as a policy imperative, facilitating pathways and reducing barriers to mediation.
8. Encourage and enable inclusion in mediation processes, emphasising its tactical and strategic value in generating momentum and achieving sustainable outcomes.
9. Upskill mediators to keep pace with rapidly changing conflict issues, and to adapt peace processes, talks and agreements to prevent and resolve them.
10. Do no harm to prospects for peace amid mediation adaptation and innovation.



# **SECTION 1**

## **The landscape for peace mediation**

# THE EVOLUTION OF INNOVATION IN INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION

**David Lanz** is Deputy Director for Mediation Support and Policy at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) in Geneva. He is a trained mediator with wide-ranging experience supporting international mediation processes. Before joining HD, he worked as Representative for Dialogue Promotion at the International Crisis Group, co-headed the mediation programme at swisspeace, and served in the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. David has masters' degrees from the Geneva Graduate Institute and from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and a PhD from the University of Basel, and has published on peace negotiations, international mediation and collective security.

**Philipp Lustenberger** is the Special Envoy for the Peace Process in Colombia of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. Prior to this appointment, he co-headed the mediation programme at swisspeace, was deployed as senior adviser at the Swiss Embassy in Bogotá, and worked at the Mediation Support Unit of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. He has worked on humanitarian issues and peace process support in Cameroon, Colombia, Guatemala, India, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, Sudan and Syria. Philipp is a trained mediator and holds masters' degrees from the Geneva Graduate Institute and the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

**In May 1899, diplomats flocked to The Hague to participate in the first of two peace conferences. The Austrian pacifist Bertha von Suttner enlisted Henri Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, in her efforts to commit states to disarmament and conflict settlement by publishing a letter she had received from him. Dunant wrote that he would 'like to see the Hague Congress set up a Permanent Mediation Bureau recognized by all the States in the world ... and to which they would be obliged always to have recourse in order to smooth out complications'.**

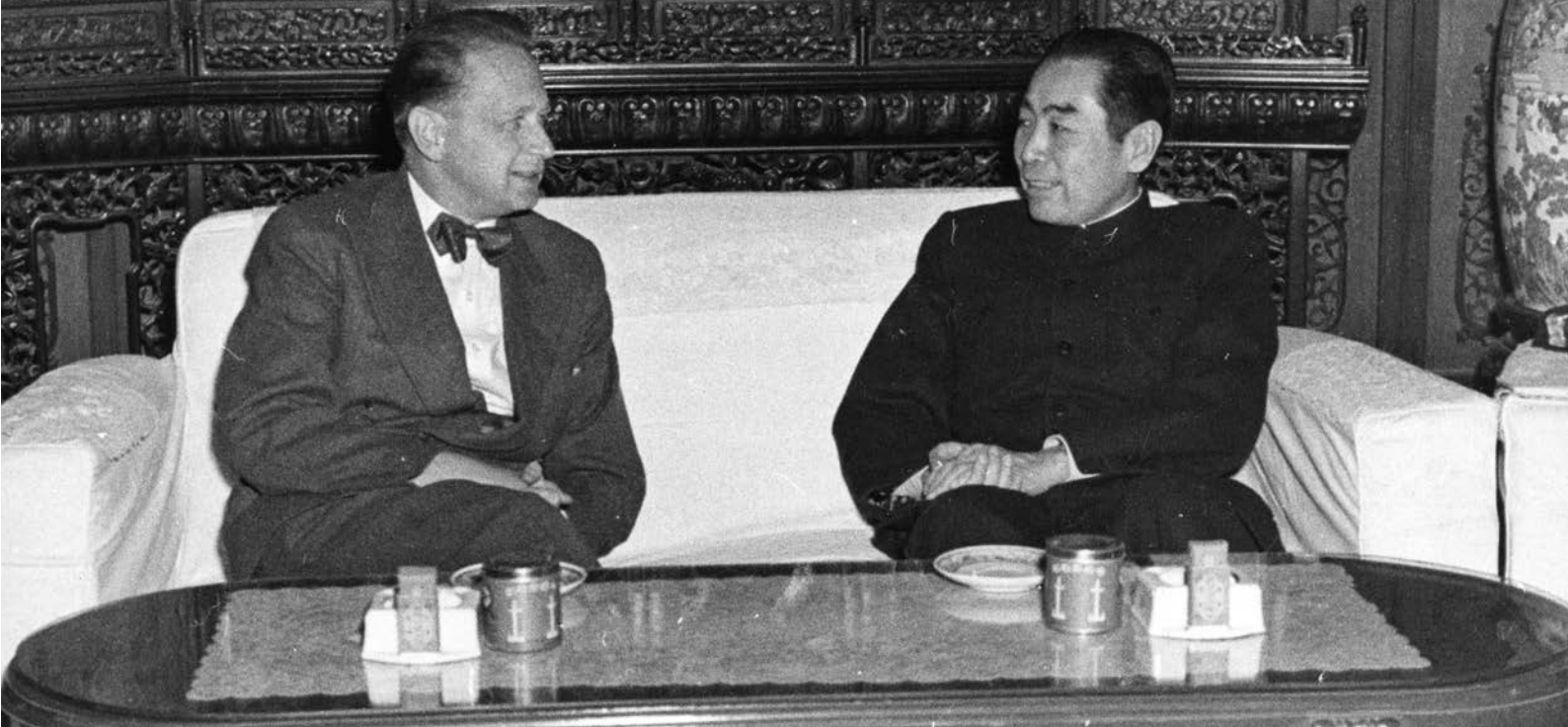
Von Suttner and Dunant's calls were heeded, at least partially. The final act of the conference, signed in July 1899 by 26 mostly European states, featured an entire convention on the peaceful settlement of international disputes. 'In case of serious disagreement or conflict, before an appeal to arms', states committed 'to have recourse, as far as circumstances allow, to the good offices or mediation of one or more friendly Powers.'

Codifying in an international treaty the obligation for states to seek mediation was novel, breaking with the existing practice whereby neutral states offered their good offices on an ad hoc basis. Although quickly overtaken by the First World War, the ambition is an appropriate starting point for this article, which traces the evolution of international mediation through innovation in relation to systemic and institutional change and hopes to shed light on what has driven it.

This article focuses on international mediation, understood as efforts by international actors to help conflict parties settle their dispute peacefully and within a system of collective security. Other forms of mediation and innovations associated with them, as well as other perspectives on the evolution of mediation, are addressed elsewhere in this volume.

## **THE POTENTIAL FOR INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION IN INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION IS GREATEST DURING CRITICAL JUNCTURES IN WORLD POLITICS.**

The analysis in this article rests on two assumptions. First, international mediation is a response to armed conflict and takes place in a context of agreed norms and frameworks. Second, the potential for institutional innovation in international mediation is greatest during critical junctures in world politics, when new institutions, norms, ideas, and power dispensations in the international system crystallise and create opportunities for change. The article therefore focuses on four critical junctures since 1945, and the innovations they enabled, before zeroing in on the period since the early 2010s and some broader innovations that characterise the practice of international mediation today.



## Critical junctures enabling innovation in international mediation since 1945

### United Nations

Although mediation featured prominently in the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions, the Covenant of the League of Nations (1919) did not mention mediation as a means to resolve disputes, instead prioritising arbitration and judicial mechanisms and conflict settlement by the League's Council. This changed with the foundation of the United Nations in 1945 – the first critical juncture. The UN Charter prohibits the threat or use of force by states, obliges them to resolve disputes peacefully (including through mediation), and, absent this, authorises the Security Council to take action to maintain international peace and security. Mediation thus became one element in a comprehensive system of collective security, as Henri Dunant had imagined it.

The appointment of mediators representing the UN was a significant practical innovation. This happened for the first time in May 1948 when the UN General Assembly mandated the Swedish diplomat Folke Bernadotte 'to use his good offices ... to promote a peaceful adjustment of the future situation in Palestine'. In his function as UN mediator, Bernadotte consulted with Jewish leaders, Palestinian authorities and Arab states in the region. He helped to bring about a truce in June 1948 and worked to formulate a peace plan. However, before being able to present the plan, Bernadotte was assassinated in Jerusalem by members of a Zionist paramilitary extremist group. He was succeeded by his aide Ralph Bunche, who obtained signatures on

armistice agreements between Israel and the Arab States – which earned him a Nobel Peace Prize in 1950. These efforts only brought short-term reprieve, as the conflict remains unresolved to this day. The efforts of Bernadotte and Bunche were nonetheless significant insofar as they acted as representatives of the UN as a multilateral organisation, rather than of individual states, endeavouring to find a solution to a conflict by proactively engaging with conflict parties.

### Cold War

The Cold War period was a second critical juncture. Rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union fuelled proxy conflicts and limited the UN Security Council's role in resolving them. However, even in this difficult context, successive UN Secretaries-General practised their good offices. Dag Hammarskjöld, who was Secretary-General from 1953 until 1961, articulated a more assertive 'preventive diplomacy' as a means to find solutions to crises before they escalated. In practice, this entailed several innovations: mediation was conducted by the Secretary-General himself or his representatives (men in this period and the vast majority of them subsequently), rather than by mediators appointed by the General Assembly or the Security Council. Hammarskjöld championed the impartiality of his peace efforts, and he pushed the UN to react fast and engage early. Also innovative was his approach to conflicts in which superpowers confronted one another. In 1955, he negotiated the release of 11 US airmen held in China. A year later, he helped resolve the Suez crisis through direct talks that brought about a ceasefire to be monitored by UN peacekeepers.

## The post-Cold War and regional organisations

A third critical juncture came towards the end of the Cold War, when multilateral efforts to resolve conflicts increased significantly. In the second half of the 1980s, under the leadership of Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar, the UN stepped up its role as a mediator, working to end civil wars in Cambodia, Namibia, Angola, and Central America among other places. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the UN was thrust into an even more central role as a peacemaker, and regional organisations also became more active. Mediation became a preferred tool in a continuum of approaches – preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding – clearly laid out in Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 Agenda for Peace. The tools conceptualised by Boutros-Ghali underpinned a vision of a liberal peace, which emphasised democracy, human rights and justice as the goals of international mediation. In this context, mediation was to lay the foundation for transformation through a peace agreement, ushering in a transitional period during which former belligerents share power while peacekeepers ensure security, enabling post-conflict peacebuilding and finally internationally supervised elections and a new democratic constitution.

This approach had profound practical implications. As the Cold War adversaries reconciled and wound down their proxy wars, mediation by the UN and others was focused on civil wars, rather than on disputes between states. Peace agreements were frequently comprehensive documents with detailed provisions on power sharing, wealth sharing, justice, and security sector reform. From lean diplomatic efforts, mediators began to head teams of technical experts and coordinate diplomatic coalitions that provided political leverage during a lengthy negotiation process. The mediation to end the civil war in Sudan exemplified this approach. Led by the Kenyan general Lazaro Sumbeiywo, representing the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional organisation in East Africa, the negotiations concluded in 2005 in a 241-comprehensive peace agreement, whose implementation was largely handed to the UN.

In the post-Cold War period, international mediation was also shaped by the push to prevent mass atrocities and promote accountability for international crimes, notably through the creation of ad hoc tribunals and, eventually, the International Criminal Court. This sharpened tensions between the goals of peace and justice, whilst contributing to innovative practice in the field of transitional justice. Further innovation came in the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which was adopted in 2000 thanks to the efforts of civil society and a diverse coalition of states, including Namibia and Sweden. The resolution gave impetus to calls that more women needed to participate in peace efforts and for peace agreements to address the needs of women and men.

While there is continued resistance to the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, Resolution 1325 in time spurred innovation as Sanam Anderlini discusses in more detail on p.16. Gender-responsive language in peace agreements slowly increased, as have, in some contexts, the number of women, women's groups and gender experts participating in peace talks as mediators, negotiators and advisers. A case in point: the UN's appointment of women to head peace operations and as mediators has increased in recent years.

The end of the Cold War also unleashed the potential of what Chapter VIII of the UN Charter describes as 'regional arrangements and agencies'. Under the principle of subsidiarity, the role of regional organisations in international mediation grew, with the Organisation of African Unity, the League of Arab States and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference engaged with the UN in Somalia in the early 1990s and then increasingly active within their respective regions. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations was a key actor in the Cambodian peace process, and the Organization of American States in Central America. In time, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe took a prominent role in mediating conflicts related to the dissolution of the Soviet Union while, in later years, the European Union incorporated mediation in its emerging foreign and security policy. In Africa, the Economic Community of West African States mediated an end to the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The creation of the African Union in 2002 and its subsequent establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture embraced new norms and mechanisms rooted in the principle of 'non-indifference' and the call for African solutions to African problems.

## 9/11 and the War on Terror

A fourth critical juncture occurred after the attacks of 11 September 2001 when the fight against terrorism became a dominant paradigm of world politics. Militarised responses to armed conflict and the listing of groups as terrorist became more common. These approaches often crowded out mediation in formal peace processes. Sensitivity with regard to sovereignty also increased, leading to pushback against the involvement of international mediators, especially from the UN. These developments challenged the post-Cold War model of mediation but also contributed to a significant innovation: mediation through private diplomacy, often conducted by specialised non-governmental organisations, such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva or CMI Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation in Helsinki, which established themselves in the 2000s. (See article on international private mediators on p.49) Their work was innovative insofar as they transcend different levels of engagement. They were able to engage flexibly with any conflict party, including proscribed groups, and with the kind of confidentiality and informality that multilateral and state mediators struggle to maintain.

The involvement of private mediators is also often less problematic for governments concerned about internationalising what they consider internal issues.

Recognition of the complexity of armed conflicts, and the variegated challenges international mediators were facing, led to a push to professionalise mediation through the establishment of dedicated mediation support structures. These units provided technical expertise and hands-on operational support to mediation teams, and they promoted learning from past operations. The creation of the UN Mediation Support Unit in 2006 came first, followed by similar structures established in foreign ministries and regional organisations. The advent of mediation support also contributed to the setting out of guidance for effective mediation practice and defined mediation as a specialised field within the broader area of international peace and security.

## Recent developments and innovations

Developments in world politics since the early 2010s constitute another critical juncture. As the number of active armed conflicts has risen, geopolitical polarisation, associated with the contestation of global norms and the weakening of multilateral frameworks, a series of failed Western-led interventions and now the war in Ukraine, has complicated the context in which international mediators operate. While inter-state conflict, or the threat of it, is on the rise, internal armed conflicts have become more internationalised and fragmented, with multiple and often incohesive belligerents pursuing a diverse mix of motives for their violent behaviour. Comprehensive peace agreements, as pursued in the post-Cold War period, rarely seem a possibility, and the liberal peacebuilding they presaged has experienced pushback. New technologies affect conflict dynamics by providing new means of warfare, including the use of social media for mis- and disinformation.

At the same time, international actors offering mediation have grown in number, size and diversity. A larger number of states in different parts of the world emphasise mediation in their foreign policy. More regional organisations and private diplomacy organisations offer their mediation services, reinforcing an earlier trend. However, the main armed conflict parties, be they international, national or more localised armed groups, are often reluctant to engage in serious peace talks. In a number of contexts, such as the Central African Republic and Mali, multiple national-level peace agreements have proven not to be viable. Mediation efforts in other situations, such as Syria, Sudan and Ukraine, have taken a back seat to military dynamics, and conflicts continue.

So far, challenges – rather than opportunities – for mediation have marked the current juncture. Still, a number of innovations have crystallised, many of which are covered by other articles in this volume. The diversity of mediators has energised some efforts and led to new partnerships, or ad hoc forums of coordination.

Moreover, recognising the fragmented nature of conflicts, international mediators have begun in recent years to engage more thoroughly at different levels of society, in particular the subnational level. Many international actors thus work with local mediators, including women, young people and customary, religious and business leaders, recognising their ability to address subnational dynamics of violence and seeking to encourage more inclusive processes. Meanwhile, the use of new technologies, as this publication explores, has fostered innovation in the analysis of conflict dynamics, communication with the parties and the wider public, as well in expanding the inclusivity of peace processes and in monitoring and verifying agreements.

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIATORS HAVE BEGUN IN RECENT YEARS TO ENGAGE MORE THOROUGHLY AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SOCIETY.

In the absence of willingness and space to foster conflict resolution, international mediators have also had to be pragmatic and lower their ambitions. With decreasing opportunities for all-out resolution of armed conflicts, mediators have reinforced efforts to manage the devastating consequences of violence, including through facilitating the delivery of services and humanitarian relief or addressing community-level tensions.

## Responding to today's critical juncture

Henry Dunant's one-stop shop for mediation has never materialised. Still, mediation has become a permanent feature of the international system in addressing armed conflicts. Rather than a single bureau, multiple states, as well as multilateral and non-governmental actors offer their mediation services. The analysis of critical junctures since the Second World War illustrates how shifts in the geopolitical environment have stimulated different innovations in the practice of mediation. As discussed in this article, mediation tends to produce innovation through adaptation, rather than through the anticipation of future trends. This is because international mediation operates within the constraints of global politics, having to adjust to changing conflict dynamics. Yet critical junctures in world politics have created opportunities for innovation, and pioneering mediation actors have seized them.

Overall, in recent years, the field of peace mediation has also become more professionalised and attentive to its own learning. Given the major transformations taking place, the urgency of innovation to which this volume seeks to respond is clear. While we begin from the premise that the practice of mediation needs to respond to an increasingly polarised world, a fragmented conflict landscape and the rapid onslaught of new threats, peace mediation's track record of adaptation inspires some optimism.

# THE CONTRIBUTION AND POTENTIAL OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

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**December 2023: In Afghanistan, the Taliban are limiting women and girls' access to education, work, and public life. Israel's siege and bombing of Gaza is the first war in history where children comprise over 40 per cent of casualties. In Sudan, millions have fled their homes and sexual and gender-based violence is rampant. The juxtaposition of this human devastation with the luxurious backdrops of Jeddah or Doha, where ceasefire or hostage negotiations are taking place, is jarring.**

In an era of geopolitical division and flux, there is competition between states, UN and multilateral organisations and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) for involvement in peace mediation. As others in this volume discuss, the peace they pursue – a cessation of violence and short-term stability or sustainable peace grounded in social justice – is itself contested. This contestation is particularly evident regarding women's participation, whether as mediators, in political delegations, or independently, even though the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, initiated in 2000 through UN Security Council Resolution 1325, has long been a locus for innovation in peacemaking.

Since 2000, wars have grown more fragmented and protracted, and societal polarisation is rising as identities are weaponised and the pushback against women's rights and participation in public life is more vociferous. Despite – or perhaps because of – these trends, WPS is even more relevant and necessary to contemporary peacemaking.

## Women, peace and security: evolution, perception, and opposition

Resolution 1325 was the first time the Security Council addressed women's experiences of war and roles in peacemaking. It was the result of a tripartite collaboration between civil society, the UN and states – notably Bangladesh and Namibia. Canada, France, and Slovenia were early supporters. It followed a global NGO-led campaign to bring visibility to women's experiences of war and peacemaking: *Women building peace, from the village council to the negotiating table*. The campaigners consulted women fighters, mediators and activists confronting military occupations and calling for justice and reconciliation even after genocide. They found a common and yet transformative fact: in conflict settings, women have agency and influence. Yet much of this agency had remained invisible.

**RESOLUTION 1325 HIGHLIGHTED THE ROLE LONG PLAYED BY WOMEN ACROSS MANY CULTURES IN MEDIATING DISPUTES, FOSTERING PEACE, OR CALLING FOR CEASEFIRES.**

Resolution 1325 came at a critical moment in the UN's history. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the Council was grappling with how to address internal conflicts while respecting the principles of non-interference and state sovereignty. The pragmatic and innovative message – women build peace – resonated with Security Council members. It also highlighted the role long played by women across many cultures in mediating disputes, fostering peace, or calling for



ceasefires. Yet in multilateral and diplomatic spaces suffused by post-colonial mindsets and sexism, this contribution of women to peace had gone unrecognised.

Despite the power of the messages, the agenda has been plagued by misconceptions. For example, the emphasis on women's rights and 'peace for women', antagonises men and circumscribes women's involvement to 'women's issues', excluding them from broader discussions on security and governance that are also highly relevant to women. It does a disservice to women peacebuilders, who typically advocate peace and rights for all.

## **DESPITE EVIDENCE OF WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND THE INCREASED VISIBILITY OF WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS, MANY MEDIATORS REMAIN SCEPTICAL ABOUT WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN PEACE PROCESSES.**

Meanwhile, despite evidence of women's contributions to sustainable peace and the increased visibility of women peacebuilders, many mediators remain sceptical about women's inclusion in peace processes. 'The parties won't include women in their delegations', is an often-cited reason for their exclusion. Women peacebuilders do not want to be forced into delegations, and instead advocate independent representation. Mediators also often relegate women peacebuilders to 'women's issues', which, they believe, are not a priority. Yet often women peacebuilders are addressing critical security-oriented issues. For example, in the Yemen process, the exchange of prisoners was one of three components of the Stockholm agreement mediated by the UN in December 2018. In Stockholm's aftermath, the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) initially struggled to secure releases. The Abductees' Mothers Association, formed in 2016, was pivotal in focusing attention on the issue of civilian detainees. Working through local and tribal mediators and lawyers, it has been involved in the release of around 950 civilian prisoners and – having been excluded from earlier security dialogues – now engages with the ICRC and UN.

International mediators also often fall back on the excuse that conflict parties 'won't bring women because of culture'. However, women's exclusion is nearly universal across cultures because exclusion is about power. Male-dominated belligerent parties do not want to cede power to women or answer to independent women peacebuilders. But as Esra Çuhadar describes on p.78, women have also initiated measures to counter resistance to their presence at high-level negotiations.

## **WPS: achievements, and evolving innovations in mediation**

Despite these challenges, the WPS agenda and women peacebuilders have altered peacemaking irrevocably. They have exposed flaws and initiated strategies that improve mediation and peace outcomes, and demonstrated how integrating local peace actors – their strategies, perspectives, cultural know-how and initiatives – with established high-level (track one) practices is essential to addressing today's complex conflicts.

### **Bringing women's agency and gendered approaches to international attention**

Historically, the Security Council primarily concentrated on state security and the actions of armed actors. Resolution 1325 brought attention to women's experiences, which prompted more recognition of civilians and particular sectors of society, and later contributed to the development of the youth, peace, and security agenda. Men, too, have been recognised. For example, during the negotiation of Resolution 1820 on conflict-related sexual violence in 2008, WPS advocates pressed for language to acknowledge sexual violence perpetrated against men. Faced with resistance from negotiating states, they secured reference to non-gendered terms such as 'civilians' and 'people' that enabled attention to sexual violence against men and boys.

The WPS agenda has catalysed new practices in state and intergovernmental institutions. The UN Security Council invites women peacebuilders as briefers and its travelling delegations meet with women's peacebuilding organisations. Increased reporting on gendered context analysis and information about local women's peace initiatives are important steps to understanding the problems and solutions that societies face from within.

The UN has also appointed gender advisers and more women as envoys at its headquarters and in peace operations. With advice from civil society experts, it developed guidance on gender and inclusive mediation processes, including seminal work on incorporating the prohibition of sexual violence in ceasefire agreements. Experts provide advice on inclusive process design and the gendered dimensions of agreements. As Julie Hawke reflects on p.102, the UN has been quick to use digital tools to further inclusion. As far back as 2012, the UN enabled public participation in constitution drafting in Somalia through text messaging.

The Women Building Peace campaign also succeeded in attaining WPS resolutions at the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2000. WPS advocates have ensured that other regional organisations and states have similar commitments.

The African Union, as Chido Mutangadura describes on p.83, adopted a robust normative framework including a WPS Envoy and the FemWise network. But gaps between states and institutions' policies and practices are significant – as the Afghan process showed.

In 2019, the launch of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks was another innovation. The idea was for member states and the broader mediation community to have a pool of experienced women from which to draw. Yet these women's expertise and knowledge remains largely un- or at least under-utilised.

### **Innovating for meaningful participation**

There is ample evidence of the vital contributions of women's movements and representation in peace processes to increasing the sustainability of agreements and promoting accountability of belligerent actors to constituencies. Different strategies have been pursued to promote women's participation.

In Burundi, Nelson Mandela demonstrated the sort of leverage mediators can apply. In July 2000, he convened women representing the 19 negotiating parties, observers, refugees, the internally displaced and the diaspora and enabled them to negotiate key issues. As Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury later recalled, 'Mandela briefed...the Security Council and said men weren't willing to involve women. In the evening he would sit and listen to the women and in the morning, he would suggest their points to the men as if they were his own ideas. The men loved them. Eventually he told them, these were the women's points. That's how he brought women into the final two rounds of talks.'

The Philippines-Mindanao peace process is among the most far-reaching examples of Resolution 1325 implementation. Women held key leadership positions in the formal talks. Muslim and indigenous women were fundamental in civil society engagement with the process. They also created a multi-ethnic, all-women's ceasefire monitoring contingent launched in 2010 by the Mindanao People's Caucus. It owed its significant impact to its reach into and trust among affected communities.

The Yemen National Dialogue Conference (NDC) of 2012–14 saw notable innovation in process design. The UN team proposed including political and tribal leaders, youth, and women. There was an all-woman delegation and a 30 per cent women's quota in other delegations.

## **STRUCTURAL INNOVATIONS IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE INCLUDED GENDER SUB-COMMISSIONS AND WOMEN'S ADVISORY BOARDS.**

Structural innovations in peace negotiations have included gender sub-commissions and Women's Advisory Boards. The Sri Lankan sub-commission initiated in 2002 during talks between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was productive but disconnected from the highest-level political negotiations, which collapsed in 2003. The Colombian sub-commission – part of the talks between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – was greeted with scepticism but grew to play an important role in the process and mainstreamed gender perspectives across the 2016 peace agreement. Colombian women peacebuilders remain strong advocates for the agreement's implementation and broadening participation, including in the participation mechanism discussed in this publication by Donka Atanassova and Philipp Lustenberger on p.90. Their influence is also evident in current negotiations between President Gustavo Petro's government and the National Liberation Army (ELN), where there is near-gender parity in negotiating delegations and the government's chief negotiator is a woman.

The Syrian Women's Advisory Board, the first of its kind, established in 2016, was designed to advise the UN Special Envoy for Syria. This was replicated in 2018 in Yemen as a Technical Advisory Group, in parallel to a larger consultative mechanism, the Women's Pact for Peace and Security. Women's advisory boards have been criticised for many reasons, including the risk of relegating women to secondary roles rather than as equal parties in negotiating their country's future, as well as for their flawed selection processes. But they can be learnt from and improved upon.

Ad hoc structures or initiatives cannot replace the political will that is needed from belligerent parties, but they can sustain and keep the urgency of peace alive, when negotiations stall or tensions arise. Victims' delegations are a case in point. First introduced by Femmes Afrique Solidarité in West Africa in the early 2000s, victims later played a powerful role in Colombia's peace process. Delegations of Colombians from different regions of the country – 60 per cent women – impacted by state and FARC violence travelled to Cuba to speak to the parties directly. They brought immediacy to the imperative for stopping the violence and contributed to integrating victims' needs and restorative justice into the agreement.

## Recognising women's innovations and harnessing of cultural power

The 'tyranny of the urgent' is typically why international actors convene exclusively military and political elites for negotiations. Yet these negotiators are often far removed from the violence they perpetuate and may have little concern for affected populations. By contrast, many women peacebuilders living at the frontlines of conflicts take on the responsibility to protect others or engage in peace efforts. They rely on creativity and tactical cultural entry points to assert influence.

The harnessing of cultural practices – be they kinship ties, religion, or traditional practices – to advance peace has been a signature strategy among women peacebuilders. (This is not without some irony, given that international mediators often refer to culture as the rationale for women's exclusion.) Such indigenous strategies confer legitimacy and enable them access to both conflict parties and grassroots communities in ways inaccessible to outsiders.

Somali women peacebuilders, for example, drew on kinship ties, using their marital status and position as the daughters of clan elders to initiate dialogue and resolve disputes between government figures, through informal channels. The Yemenis Abductees' Mothers Association (mentioned above) used their traditional role as mothers to engage influential tribal leaders. In Cameroon in 2018–19, inspired by historical women's secret societies, the Southwest/Northwest Women's Task Force organised 'public lamentations' against the war. Five thousand women sat in the streets wailing in protest at the recruitment of youth into militias and the rape of girls and women – shaming the government and armed groups into ceasefire and peace negotiations. In Lebanon, the NGO March uses the arts for peacemaking. Director Lea Baroudi brought young people from warring factions together to act in a play they eventually performed to sold-out audiences. They came to rehearsals armed; during months of rehearsals, they shifted from enemies to friends, realising how poverty and multi-generational trauma fuelled radicalisation.

Such initiatives abound and the international WPS community of practice supports them and draws attention to the cultural and psycho-social aspects of peacemaking. But senior mediators – especially state and inter-governmental representatives – rarely acknowledge such approaches within process design, and too often assume that technical solutions and political bargains are sufficient.



Esther Omam, Executive Director of Reach Out Cameroon and vision bearer of the Southwest/Northwest Women's Task Force, leads a coalition of over 1,000 women in a peaceful protest against the massacre of school children in Kumba, Cameroon, October 2020. © Reach Out

## From pledge to practice: implementing WPS today

There are two critical ingredients for peacemaking: first, political will among belligerent parties to stop violence and negotiate; second, representation of impacted communities – recognising the diversity of women, of youth and other marginalised groups, especially those already active in peacemaking – to inform negotiations and press implementation forward. WPS can contribute to both if its full potential is realised.

A starting point would be to shift from ad hoc to systemic and consistent practices, building on precedence and what we have learned from decades of innovation on WPS. This is critical and doable – even in today's polarised international landscape.

Supporting an inclusive process involves leadership on the part of mediators and their teams to counter the tendency towards more transactional peace processes by designing inclusive, gender-responsive processes. This includes ensuring:

- gendered context analysis and gendered issue-specific expertise from the outset;
- inclusive consultations and process design that normalises the participation of independent women peacebuilders' delegations;

- early identification and systemic engagement with women peacebuilders on process design and substance including through cooperation with existing specialised WPS networks and INGOs;
- enabling women peacebuilders to convene and negotiate agenda items and offer fresh perspectives and solutions;
- funding, logistical and technical support to women peacebuilders to enable their participation in formal gatherings and processes;
- maximising efforts to encourage the participation of women in the delegations of belligerent parties; and
- including women mediators in mediation teams.

**THE KEY INNOVATION NEEDED AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL IS SUPPORT TO WOMEN WHO HAVE THE COURAGE TO STEP UP AS PEACEBUILDERS EVEN AMIDST RAGING WAR.**

The key innovation needed at the international level is support to women who have the courage to step up as peacebuilders even amidst raging war. Bilateral or multilateral bodies need to engage and, crucially, *heed* the expert analysis, advice and solutions offered by women peacebuilders and other civil society actors, and act on them. Across the diplomatic and mediation community, implementation of the WPS agenda has to be normalised and prioritised.

In 2002, two women peace activists spoke to the Security Council. ‘Peace is made between peoples and not between leaders’ said Palestinian Maha Abu-Dayeh Shammās. ‘If we leave it only to men, we get Israeli generals and Palestinians – who will not be defeated – there is no room to negotiate.’ Her Israeli-American colleague, Terry Greenblatt, added, ‘Even when we are women whose very existence and narrative contradicts each other, we will talk – we will not shoot... We are willing to sit together – on the same side of the table ... look at our complex joint history, with the commitment and intention of not getting up until – in respect and reciprocity – we can get up together and...fulfil our joint destiny.’

Considering the events of 2023, their vision of peacemaking is needed more than ever. It embodies the *raison d’être* of Resolution 1325 – an agenda long overdue for implementation.

# MEDIATION IN THE WORLD AND WARS OF THE 2020s

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**The world's geopolitics is changing once again, and every time it does, there is a temptation to believe that politics, war and peacemaking will be totally transformed. When the Cold War ended, many policymakers and practitioners assumed they were experiencing a complete break with the conflict and international relations of earlier decades. They began to talk and plan as if conflict were starting again from scratch with no continuities of any kind and nothing worth inheriting from existing political insight and professional expertise.**

Post-Cold War conflicts were seen as 'new wars', as if there had never been vicious civil wars, invasions, armed groups or counter-insurgencies before the 1990s. Solutions to address them had to be created. Rather bizarrely, the newly victorious liberal world order set about 'inventing' peacemaking, preventive diplomacy, private diplomacy and mediation, all of which had a long history already.

**A NEW DISTRIBUTION OF GLOBAL POWER AND NEW TYPES OF WARFARE WILL REQUIRE INNOVATIONS IN MEDIATION. BUT NOT ALL CONFLICTS ARE NEW, NOR IS IT NECESSARY TO INNOVATE MEDIATION PRACTICE FROM SCRATCH.**

The world is changing dramatically again but the challenge for 2020s mediators is to grasp these changes with a sense of nuance. A new distribution of global power and new types of warfare will indeed require innovations in mediation and lead mediators into new fields of work. But, at the same time, there is valuable knowledge and expertise from the past which 2020s mediators can use to shape a relevant practice

and an appropriate ambition for the world and wars of the 2020s. Not all conflicts are new. Nor is it necessary to innovate mediation practice from scratch. To help this necessary course correction, this article looks at certain changes in geopolitics, diplomacy and warfare and what they may mean for the 2020s mediator.

## Geopolitical change

There is indeed a major shift in global power and international relations in the 2020s: the end of liberal global hegemony and the return to a geopolitically contested world. China and India have returned to their rightful place as major powers. Russia and NATO are in open conflict over Ukraine. Important progress by African states in shaping greater continental order via the African Union (AU) is under intense pressure again from new coups and conflicts. The Pacific is once more a potential battleground, with flashpoints in the Koreas and Taiwan and geostrategic rivalry between new Western alliances and China. Russia is on the march across Africa, determined to disrupt African alliances with the liberal West. Nuclear war is less unthinkable than it has been at any time since the Cold War. Disarmament regimes are crumbling and agreements on new weapons are not forthcoming.

In the struggle for power and influence in the multipolar world of the 2020s, geopolitics is once more dangerously inimical and military budgets are skyrocketing. The contest is as much economic as ideological. Economic de-coupling and home-shoring are major policies in Washington, Beijing, Brussels and Moscow as hopes collapse for great power peacebuilding through liberal trade. The prospect of a Third World War has joined the list of existential risks threatening the survival of our world and our species, alongside climate change, pandemics, and the prospect of artificial intelligence (AI) slipping beyond our control. All this suggests a return to mediation between great powers around disarmament, the risk of 'big wars', and actual proxy wars.

A cargo ship loaded with grain that departed from Chornomorsk, Ukraine, transits the Bosphorus strait on 9 August 2022. Safe passage of the vessel was guaranteed by the Black Sea Grain Initiative, signed between Russia and Ukraine in July 2022. © Chris McGrath/Getty Images



Authoritarianism and hardline conservatism are once again serious ideological challengers to liberal democracy. They hold sway in Russia, India and China, and in the New Right politics of the USA, Europe and Latin America, in many Islamic countries and in small states like Hungary, Georgia, Uganda and Rwanda. A key part of expanding conservatism and authoritarianism is a political shift in civil society which is no longer simply or majority liberal. Frequently seen as the progressive bedrock of tracks two and three for liberal peacemakers, civil society is now often authoritarian itself. The liberal mediator's goal of inclusive multi-stakeholder peacebuilding will fade from view if many governments in conflict are one-party states with no real civil society and a preference for patriarchy.

Existential climate change has finally arrived as a geopolitical priority. Climate justice is producing new tensions between original emission states, new emitters and low emission states. States are competing to pivot to renewable energy and a winning position in the new green economy. A similar scramble to win the race for AI dominance is in play between great powers. Protectionism is rising fast in key commodities and technologies, and access to microchip production has become a security priority. Mediation in highly contested trade negotiations, often back-channelled outside the World Trade Organization, will be a growth area.

In religious politics, the struggle between liberals and conservatives is fierce again. Pope Francis's worldwide synodal consultation feels threatening to Catholic

conservatives who are on the rise, just as evangelical conservatism increases in many Protestant churches. Ten conservative African Archbishops have refused to recognise the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury because of his blessing of same-sex relationships, and the Orthodox Church in Russia and Georgia has firmly aligned with authoritarian leaders. The Taliban have defeated the West in Afghanistan and are implementing their authoritarian misogyny. The religious gerontocracy in Iran has held firm against liberal revolt. Many other Muslim countries, like Pakistan and Indonesia, still struggle over different understandings of an Islamic state, while millions of Muslims are creating liberal forms of Islamic life in the West. Hindu nationalism is dominant and aggressive in Indian politics. Buddhist authoritarians are brutal in Myanmar and Cambodia, and ultra-conservative Jewish settler groups have a controlling grip in the Israeli government. The need for inter-religious mediation is rising.

## Diplomatic change

Above these tectonic political shifts, the diplomatic arena is changing too. A new range of important 'middle powers' has emerged in the last 30 years. Countries like Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Singapore, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Algeria, and Kenya have increasing influence that is manifest in new diplomatic confidence and international effectiveness. New small group diplomacy (minilateral and plurilateral) is emerging. Liberal groupings like the G7, the Munich

Security Council and Davos are challenged by an expanding BRICS bloc (originally Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Raisina Dialogue and the BAO Forum. The G20 is a contested grouping as China, Russia and India strike their own positions against Western members. The G77 is still strong when it agrees to be so. The AU has political weight, and the Alliance of Small Island States has proved itself a powerful asymmetric force in climate politics.

Western states tend to lament the collapse of multilateralism. What they really mean is the collapse of their own dominance within multilateralism and the relative international consensus in their favour that prevailed between 1990 and the UN-sanctioned invasion of Libya in 2011. For China and Russia, the Libyan intervention confirmed that Western interventions are instigated in bad faith, more intent on regime change than the UN doctrine of the 'responsibility to protect' civilians.

## Changes in war and warfare

Accompanying these geopolitical and diplomatic trends, politics and technology are changing warfare. AI-based advances in military technology are adding new domains to the traditional ones of land, sea, air and psychological operations. Today, all major military doctrines are focused on cyber space, outer space and intimate digital information space as intense new domains of war in which they need to win.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and Azerbaijan's 2023 invasion and ethnic cleansing of all Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh show that inter-state wars will remain central to mediation. So too will coups and civil wars as shown by Sahelian conflicts and the internationalised civil wars that continue in Central African Republic (CAR), Syria and Yemen. All have intense regional dimensions that are manifest in coalitions, alliances and over-spill. This means that 2020s mediators must brace themselves for a complex international chessboard around every conflict. The terrible new war between Hamas and Israel shows how this 100-year conflict remains resistant to mediation.

Classic struggles of state repression and civic uprising persist in places like Venezuela, Myanmar and Iran. Protests have been intense in China, France and Israel, while the US still tries to come to terms with an alleged coup attempt on Capitol Hill in January 2021.

Economic warfare has always been a part of war in strategies of blockade, pillage or scorched earth. But economic warfare today is truly global and weaponised in sanctions by all sides. Russia's blockade of Ukrainian wheat and fertiliser raised food import prices, reduced local yields and brought hunger to people thousands of miles away from the war zone. Europe's

de-coupling from Russian energy brought inflationary suffering to citizens all over Europe and Russia. These are continental-scale blockades not seen since the two World Wars, and bigger still.

Many commentators are unduly optimistic that climate change will not cause war but function only as 'conflict multipliers'. I disagree and think this overly optimistic. Climate crisis will cause armed conflict and organised violence in the 2020s, and climate injustices will be argued as just cause for war. States will contest natural resources, migration and unjust adaptation with neighbouring states. Resistance movements will rise up to challenge governments on the speed and fairness of their climate action. There will be much work for mediators specialised in climate action.

**IN EVERY GENERATION THERE IS A DANGER THAT THE GEOPOLITICAL FOCAL CONFLICT OF THE MOMENT COMES TO DOMINATE THE IMAGINATION AND PRACTICE OF INTERNATIONAL POLICY. THIS SKEWS FUNDING, POLICY AND GOOD PRACTICE.**

Finally, a caveat on changing warfare. In every generation, there is a danger that the geopolitical focal conflict of the moment, which is Ukraine today, comes to dominate the imagination and practice of international policy. This stereotypes the challenges of war and peace, and skews funding, policy and good practice. Mediators and peacebuilders must resist such stereotyping by insisting that all war today is not identical to Ukraine but is a more diverse array of conflicts and struggles that require distinct and nuanced engagement.

## Three new challenges for 2020s mediators

The return to enmity and ideological contest between great powers, and within international society at large, combined with the big shifts in warfare and climate, mean that 2020s mediators need to change some of their focus and methods in three main ways.

First, the **reach and depth of mediation** is likely to change. Western mediators who are perceived as carrying liberal values into a mediation will not be as acceptable in the 2020s. Normative assumptions about democracy, women's inclusion and civil society will find no place in many peace processes, even rhetorically. The backlash against such norms is real and well organised in many parts of the world. No-go areas have expanded and are likely to confine the liberal peacemaker to conflicts in the Western sphere of influence.

## PERSONALITY AND ART WILL STILL COUNT. MEDIATORS MUST STILL BE GIFTED AT BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER, EARNING TRUST AND PROBLEM-SOLVING.

Mediators who work best beyond the Western core will be those who travel with little ideological baggage. These are mediators who are more interested in simply supporting parties to reach a mutually acceptable agreement, and so often required to be content with helping to achieve political order rather than social justice. They must be interest-based fixers who are much less concerned with societal needs, inclusion, institutional reform and an idealised vision of post-conflict societies. They will seek support in authoritarian civil society (religious or secular) and respect the status quo rather than change it. But personality and art will still count for such pragmatic mediators. They must still be gifted at bringing people together, earning trust and problem-solving. Not anyone can do it, even when order rather than justice is the goal.

The easterly and southerly swing in diplomatic power and influence means any global UN mediator must get out beyond the Western diplomatic core and de-occidentalise their network. The geographical and cultural diversity of today's major and middle powers, and their diplomatic groupings, means it will never be enough to work on the world from the West or the East, the North or the South. Good UN mediators will need to be truly worldly. Somehow, they must also carry a basic level of global norms with them wherever they go and represent them even when they cannot secure them.

A second change in mediation is **the ubiquity of geopolitics**. As in previous eras of empire and Cold War, every national and local conflict now has a geopolitical dimension as all great powers compete everywhere for global influence. The chess board in each mediation will get bigger. Early 21st century mediators could mediate effectively in fairly small political bubbles in Liberia, CAR, Colombia, Aceh in Indonesia, and Sri Lanka because great powers were essentially disinterested. A small Group of Friends or equivalent could fund and leverage the process relatively effectively.

Today, conflicts that do not fall easily within one Great Power's direct sphere of influence will be surrounded by a circle of enemies and not a group of friends. China will be building its Belt and Road Initiative there, Russia will be disrupting the West there, and the West will be pushing its own geostrategic interests, while managing its own US vs Europe competition over trade and the transition to the green economy. Not even little conflicts will escape big eyes. Anywhere could become a global flashpoint.

The third and biggest change will be the creation of **new fields of mediation**. Climate crisis is a major new field for mediation and *climate mediation* is going to be big. New climate action policies, like anticipation, mitigation, adaptation, human mobility, just transition, and loss and damage, will nowhere be delivered smoothly or without conflict. For billions of people, climate crisis will produce conflict in fights over resources, mobility, adaptation and maladaptation. This means a new field of climate rights and laws will need to be discovered and negotiated at local, national and global level.

## CLIMATE CRISIS IS A MAJOR NEW FIELD FOR MEDIATION AND CLIMATE MEDIATION IS GOING TO BE BIG.

Conflict's extension into new human spaces and new areas of human competition also gives new scope for mediation to expand – most obviously into outer space, cyber space and urban space, meaning *space mediation*, *cyber mediation* and *urban mediation* will be increasingly important. All three spaces, two profoundly physical and the other virtual, are already sites of violent conflict. Mediators have a role to play in processes to agree new norms and laws for states and businesses in outer space. There is almost endless misinformation, disinformation and hate in virtual spaces against which they must work for truth and more humane behaviour. And there is a lot to do in cities around fair planning, gangs, and climate adaptation.

The exponential increase in economic warfare means *economic mediation* will also become a significant focus for 2020 mediators. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, which for a year enabled the continuing flow of Ukrainian grain exports around the world, is already a textbook case of this kind of mediation in economic warfare (see article by Teresa Whitfield on page 53). We can expect blockades, sanctions and extreme protectionism to escalate as a major mediation challenge.

Finally, of course, *disarmament mediation* must continue to find its place again in the alarmingly belligerent geopolitics of the 2020s. Processes to regulate nuclear weapons must be resuscitated, and new processes stepped up to define and regulate the rapidly developing array of new tech weapons. AI-based weapons and targeting systems present genuinely new ethical, operational and legal challenges around autonomy, responsibility, mass and speed. Today's disarmament mediator must become expert in this field if humanity's latest technology of global annihilation is to be correctly understood and rigorously limited by international agreement.

Each one of these new fields of mediation contains threats to peace and risks of war. This makes them important uncharted territory for mediators of the 2020s to explore.



## BYTES AND BOMBS: DECODING THE IMPACT OF CYBERATTACKS IN THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA CONFLICT

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**War and technology have always been two sides of the same coin, each advancing the other inadvertently or intentionally. But contemporary conflicts are no longer limited to guns, tanks, and fighter jets, and have expanded into a new dimension – cyberspace. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has clearly demonstrated this expansion of the battlefield and how cyber operations have become a crucial part of warfare.**

### **The cyber dimension of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict**

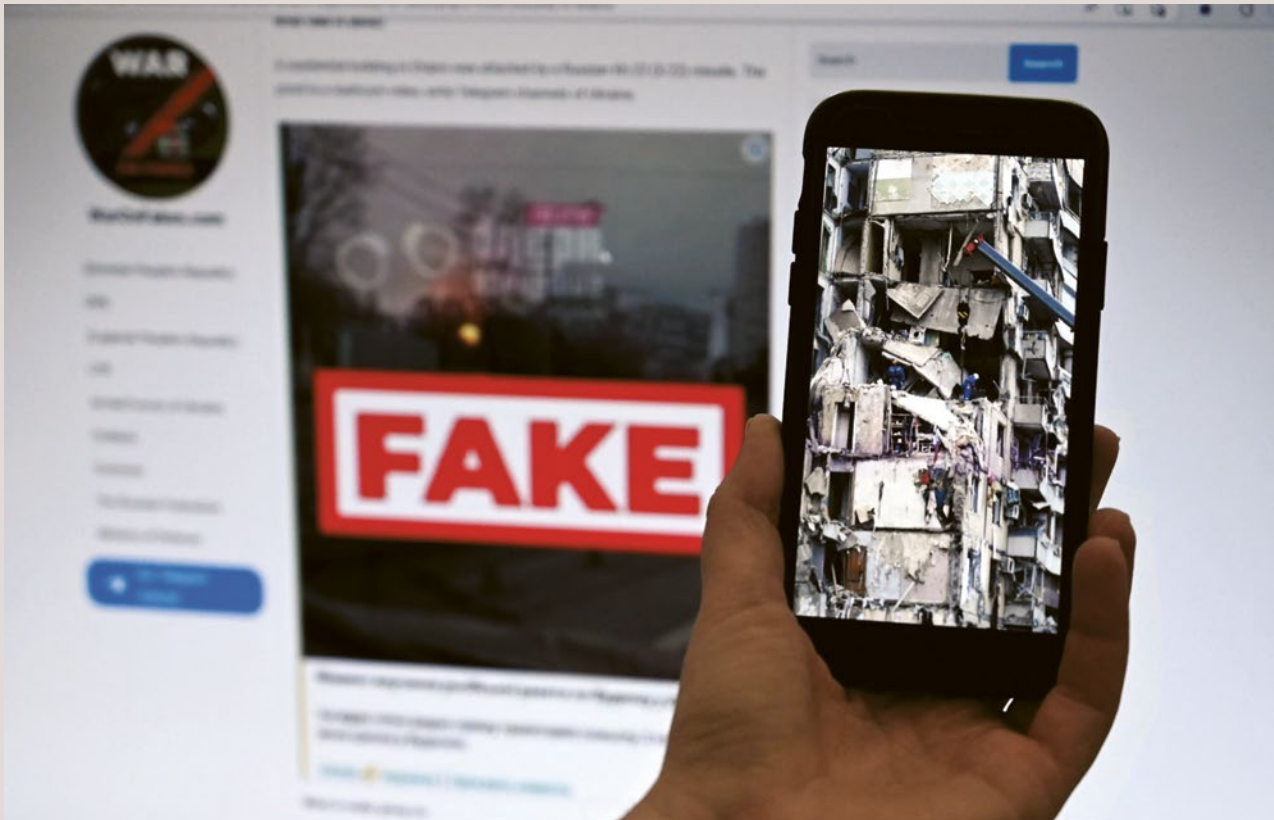
As tensions were increasing on the border between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, from the CyberPeace Institute we recorded a series of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. These arise when an attacker prevents a user from accessing online services and sites by flooding it with internet traffic. This occurred repeatedly against Ukrainian government websites, such as the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as Ukrainian banks. Ukraine has been targeted by cyberattacks since 2014, but the number and frequency of those attacks intensified at the beginning of 2022. On 24 February, the day of Russia’s invasion, the soldiers marching over the border were accompanied by a large-scale cyberattack disrupting broadband satellite internet access to tens of thousands of people in Ukraine and Europe.

Over the course of the following 16 months, we reported over 2,000 cyberattacks connected to the invasion of Ukraine, impacting 25 sectors in over 50 countries. The majority had a disruptive objective, but there were also destructive attacks, disinformation and data weaponisation. Attacks were most often carried out by collectives, but state-sponsored actors can also be traced. In Ukraine, the main targets were the financial sector, public administration, telecommunications, and the media. Attacks against the Kyiv Post and other Ukrainian media have hindered Ukrainian public access to vital information. Ukrainian cyber operations infiltrating Russian media servers have aimed to release false information on aerial bombardments to stoke fear and a sense of proximity among the Russian population. Public administration and transportation services of countries supporting Ukraine, especially Poland, Canada and Germany, have also been increasingly targeted by pro-Russian hackers.

### **The harm resulting from cyberattacks**

While cyberattacks have not played a devastating role in the tactical advances of either side, they were certainly significant. The impact of cyberattacks is easily underestimated due to the lack of immediately visible victims and the indirect nature of the harm caused. However, cyberattacks threatening crucial services such as energy, healthcare, media, and government institutions can have a devastating psychological impact on the civilian population. Attacks on the financial and telecommunications sector can lead to serious financial loss and contribute to the isolation of a population from both their fellow citizens and the outside world. Moreover, building on war fatigue, attacks against third countries aim to decrease popular support for governments backing Ukraine by disseminating false or misleading information about the conflict – with potentially disastrous consequences for the Ukrainian people.

*continued...*



A phone screen displays a picture of rescuers working on a residential building in Dnipro, Ukraine destroyed by a Russian missile strike on 16 January 2023. In the background, the WarOnFakes.com website displays a fake video of the same residential building intended to shift blame away from Moscow as part of Russia's disinformation campaign on the conflict. © Olivier Douliery/AFP via Getty Images

## Priorities for cyber-peacemaking

Cyberattacks have emerged as a crucial new dimension in contemporary conflicts with a significant impact on civilian populations, organisations and non-belligerent countries. They also have a potential contribution to 'kinetic' (i.e. physical, non-cyber) conflict escalation, not least because the target is unlikely to know the aim of the attacker – whether espionage or physical harm. Recognising this, it is crucial to adopt a human-centric approach to the analysis of cyberattacks in conflict and to understand the role that cyber threats play in peacemaking and mediation processes.

**PEACEMAKING PRACTITIONERS WILL HAVE TO ENGAGE WITH TECHNICAL EXPERTS AND CYBERSECURITY ORGANISATIONS TO IMPROVE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CYBER-DIMENSION OF CONFLICT.**

The new types of actors (both state-sponsored or independent) involved in conflict and their growing number will further complicate conflict resolution efforts, with attribution becoming a particular challenge. In regard to the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the CyberPeace Institute has identified over 100 threat actors in cyberspace that need to be held accountable for violating international laws and made to respect ceasefire and peace agreements. The issue

is made even more complicated by civilians engaging in cyberwarfare. How are these volunteer cyber-armies to be treated under international humanitarian law, or in peacebuilding and mediation efforts?

Current conflict resolution models will require adjustment to adequately respond to the realities of cyber conflict. Peacemaking practitioners will have to engage with technical experts and cybersecurity organisations to improve their understanding of the cyber-dimension of conflict. As we tread the new frontiers of digital warfare, building sustainable peace requires not just the disarmament of guns and bombs. It also demands decoding the chaos of cyberconflict – and returning to cyberpeace.

# ‘MULTIMEDIATION’: ADAPTING IN RESPONSE TO FRAGMENTATION

**Christine Bell** is Professor of Constitutional Law and Assistant Principal (Global Justice), University of Edinburgh. She is also Executive Director of the Peace and Conflict Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) and responsible for the team producing the PA-X Peace Agreement Database. She has been involved in giving legal and mediation advice in a number of peace processes, including Colombia, Northern Ireland, Somali Regional State in Ethiopia, Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Her academic work and practice experience has centrally focused on issues of inclusion, equality and human rights, including with particular reference to gender.

Since the Cold War, peace processes have focused on reaching accords among the main conflict parties. These operated partly as contracts between the parties, partly as road maps for social change, and partly as pre-constitutional agreements that would lay the foundation for turning an elite political-military bargain into a social contract. As many articles in this volume document, UN, regional and private mediation evolved a surrounding architecture of support in the form of new peacemaking structures and organisations, and new process-oriented legal standards and guidelines, such as those on women, peace and security. The professionalisation of peace mediation as a practice in a sense built-in innovation as a practice of continually learning lessons to better address future processes.

**RATHER THAN ‘A CONFLICT’ TO BE RESOLVED, VIOLENT CONFLICT INCREASINGLY OPERATES AS AN INTERTWINED SET OF LOCAL, NATIONAL, TRANSNATIONAL AND GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS.**

This practice is now under pressure due to the increasing fragmentation of both intrastate conflict and geopolitical mechanisms to resolve it. Rather than ‘a conflict’ to be resolved, violent conflict in many contexts increasingly operates as an intertwined set of local, national, transnational and geopolitical conflicts that together form a complex and adaptive conflict system. Geopolitical shifts mean that many more states are now intervening in conflicts as professed third party mediators, but often with very different conceptions of mediation and of the peace it is to achieve. Peace process models premised on using mediation to achieve a ‘national peace accord’ often find the project

impossible, even as the expectations for the quality of mediation process, and for the nature of the peace it should deliver, have greatly increased.

This article focuses on mediation adaptation arising in reaction to fragmentation, and in particular, on what I term ‘multimediation’, that is: a collection of mediation and dialogue innovations, taking place through ad hoc initiatives across contexts and organisations. The article speculates whether multimediation might be developed into a form of more deliberate collective and systemic innovation in situations where a holistic peace process is not possible. Could multimediation offer a principled but pragmatic response to conflict fragmentation by mounting multiple processes to unwind aspects of the conflict? I explore the possibilities of weaving better strategy around multimediation in places where peace and transition processes are literally and figuratively inconceivable.

## Fragmentation: a driver of mediation adaptation

In recent times, peace and transition processes imperfectly map onto the fragmented nature of conflict and geopolitics in the most complex and protracted settings. There are several inter-related reasons.

### **Conflict has become more fragmented within countries.**

Conflict in many settings now often involves multiple armed actors rather than a state and a ‘big armed opposition’ group with satellites around. Conflict fragmentation sees armed groups coming together in agreements of alliance, and falling apart again, or splitting and further fragmenting, in ways that impact local-national conflict dynamics. The lines between official state forces and paramilitary alliances, political conflict, economic interests, and organised crime,

are increasingly blurred. As a result, constructing a national peace process that can provide for holistic resolution of what are really an inter-related set of local, national, transnational and geopolitical conflicts, is almost impossible, as efforts in Afghanistan, Sudan, and Yemen, have illustrated.

**International mediation interventions are also fragmented, multiple and competitive.** New geopolitical dynamics see many more third-party states intervene not just as conflict actors – as they always have – but as putative ‘mediators’ of conflict termination. Diverse and competing mediation initiatives relate to underlying proxy wars and often have conflict end-goals in view. Local armed actors draw on transnational and geopolitical alliances, giving international backers new ways to turn conflict on and off even while ostensibly engaged in peace initiatives. National actors, for their part, can ‘mediator shop’ as a form of conflict-continuance. Local, national and international conflict actors are able to change partners and allies quickly – when conflict is resolved at one level, those dissatisfied with the outcome can quickly jump levels to undermine any peace agreed. This situation defies traditional peace process design. It also creates a ‘peace-in-conflict’ dynamic, whereby assertion of mediation is often a tool to ally with one side of the conflict to stabilise it, rather than an attempt to deliver social peace at the national level, as multiple Russian-negotiated localised agreements in Syria illustrate.

## **WHAT IS NEW IS THE WAY IN WHICH MEDIATION ITSELF IS INCREASINGLY SEEN AS AN IMPORTANT STRATEGIC MOVE FOR A STATE CONCERNED TO PROJECT ITS AMBITIONS ON A WORLD STAGE.**

None of these factors are in-and-of themselves ‘new’. However, something quite new is going on in how they are unfolding together. The degree of conflict fragmentation within countries experiencing the most protracted and large-scale conflict involves the very fast fracturing, splintering, coming together and falling apart of armed actors. Massive ‘conflict reversals’ can be created almost overnight, as recent conflict in Sudan illustrates. Elsewhere, as in Libya, there are multiple ‘capital cities’, rival governments, and no authority or group with the capacity for national effective control. Geopolitical alliances are also in a particular moment of flux. Here, what is new is the way in which mediation itself is increasingly seen as an important strategic move for a state concerned to project its ambitions on a world stage. This leads to an exponentially multiplying number of putative mediation initiatives by a wide diversity of actors, as the following section of this volume discusses.

These dynamics are affecting mediation practices through a number of interconnected ‘whammies’. First, even our ability to hold onto mediation as a peacemaking practice is changing. Mediation by a range of states who focus on stabilisation can play a role in de-escalating conflict but sometimes does so by shoring up autocratic actors, rather than seeking compromise that might also address civilian needs and justice claims. Second, the always-fragile international consensus that international law governs peacemaking and can be extended to promote values such as inclusion in peace processes is breaking down. The mediation space is being used not just to influence conflict outcomes, but as a place to project visions of the global order that are not fully aligned with international legal standards. Finally, the consequences of this shape-shifting geopolitical world are undermining not just liberal peacemaking practices, but liberal practices in liberal states themselves. Conflict-driven migration flows, for example, are being used by Western states to justify moves away from human rights and other international legal standards.

## **Multimediation**

Fragmented geopolitical and national contexts have produced mediation adaptation, both at the level of individuals and organisations. I call the resulting phenomenon ‘multimediation’, defined as follows:

Multimediation is the accidental and deliberate use of multiple overlapping mediation processes directed towards the discrete problems and actors that make up a complex conflict system, with a view to unwinding key elements of that system, but with an uncertain final destination point in terms of ‘peace’.

Multimediation has evolved through discrete overlapping mediation innovations – not all from the peacemaking community – that respond to conflict fragmentation with different task-focused mediation initiatives. Some examples illustrate.

## **Localised disaggregated mediation**

International mediators are now more likely to be engaged in local mediation than they were, in part because they operate in contexts where an overarching process is not possible, but also because they recognise local conflicts as part of the wider conflict dynamic. The United Nations, for example, has supported local mediation processes, as in Central African Republic or South Sudan, alongside wider attempts to produce national transitional constitutional frameworks and constitutions. Donors now regularly support mediation efforts in localised conflicts, and increasingly both regional organisations and private mediator groups support localised mediation to de-escalate emergent nation-wide conflict, before it is established, or after a peace process when conflict threatens to re-ignite.

## Disaggregated ‘mediation constellations’

Mediation innovation sees new ‘mediation constellations’ (see Hugo Slim’s article on p.21) established in the form of issue-specific forums of international organisations, conflict actors, and sometimes technocrats coming together to de-escalate or unwind dimensions of a fragmented conflict. States engage sometimes because key issues need urgently addressing to avoid catastrophe, and sometimes in the hope of building towards a process that might bring discrete efforts into one mediation frame. These constellations operate both in intra-state and international conflict. In Sudan, for example, prior to the outbreak of conflict in April 2023, different processes and agreements addressed the military-civilian opposition negotiation over a transitional central government and the armed group negotiations at the periphery, with attempts to connect the processes over time. In Ukraine, mediation constellations emerged around humanitarian corridor negotiations at the start of the war; to agree a deal to get grain out of the country; and to ensure that fighting around nuclear power plants does not cause nuclear catastrophe.

## One-sided pre-process mediation

Multi-mediation is also generated by ‘intra-party mediation’ between actors that are understood to comprise ‘one side’ of the conflict in any loose binary description. These actors may have an enemy in common, but have quite different visions of the state they are trying to achieve as an alternative and thus may find it difficult to mount a common negotiating platform without prior inter-group dialogue and agreement. In Myanmar, for example, the civilian opposition to the February 2021 coup and ethnic armed organisations and other civic actors found themselves self-mediating with forms of international support to create a National Unity Government and a common possible federal vision of the country. In Yemen, a Saudi-created ‘Presidential Leadership Council’ (PLC) brings together many diverse non-Houthi political and military interests in anticipation of a speculative future peace process. Yet, the PLC has no shared vision for the country. Processes of internal brokering or mediation relating to PLC and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and allies, and indeed between the PLC and the STC, all sit against a backdrop of a Saudi Arabia and Houthi negotiation that itself is only dealing with one dimension of the conflict system, albeit a key one.

## Globalised peace-conflict multimediation

Multimediation is also produced by the new competitive and overlaid global mediation-dynamic described elsewhere in this volume. International organisations, regional groupings of states, individual states, and private mediators of different hues all are engaged in

conflict resolution but sometimes with different goals. Their positions may change as they mediate with, or in parallel to, each other. For example Saudi Arabia-Iran negotiations shifted several mediation dynamics in the region until the outbreak of the Hamas-Israel conflict, which is likely to shift regional dynamics again, in unpredictable ways. In Sudan, an ever-growing plethora of initiatives have been launched to try to address the 2023 conflict. Normative mediators such as the United Nations can face difficult decisions as to when and how to try to stay involved with deal-making efforts. In Syria, for example, the Russia-Türkiye-Iran Astana talks started to displace the UN’s mediation primacy and gradually normalised the three states’ military presence on the ground.

## Multimediation speculative futures

What should we make of multimediation as an emergent reality, and is it possible to mould it into a more coherent and strategic response to conflict fragmentation?

Perhaps. Multimediation itself is not completely new – it has evolved successfully in many contexts. Local civic actors are nearly always involved in a broad range of conflict de-escalation efforts. Dig beneath the surface of relatively successful formal processes in Nepal, Northern Ireland, and South Africa, and multiple civic mediation initiatives can be understood to have put in place an agenda for change that the formal peace process found it useful to rely on. As the formal peace process emerged and unfolded, these efforts spiralled out and connected over time to touch nearly every constituency and sector. A vital untold part of the story of mediation ‘success’, these sectoral mediation spirals helped the central peace mediation break log jams and overcome obstacles to implementation.

Multimediation can therefore perhaps be thought of as a useful ‘whole-of-conflict’ strategy for a complex conflict system. Such an approach does not negate a need for a ‘big’ peace process at some point, but perhaps puts the big process in its place as only addressing one part of the conflict system, while other processes are needed for other parts of it.

## Multimediation as alternative ‘non-process process’?

At present, eclectic mediation responses to fragmentation dynamics are not understood as an alternative to the peace process. Although often supported by the mediation community, discrete initiatives tend to be seen as ‘doing one’s best’ while waiting for a proper peace process to appear. At the local level, for example, those engaged in multiple armed actor negotiations worry about how to justify to funders whether their mediation efforts might ever ‘scale up or connect out’, to a national process.

However, if no successful holistic peace process is possible in deeply fragmented contexts can multimediation be envisaged, less as 'doing something when a peace process is not possible', and more as a form of fragmented process for fragmented conflict?

Could the deeper systemic innovation of multimediation be its capacity to unwind complex conflict systems where a traditional peace process appears not to fit? Some modest ways of attempting to weave strategy around multimediation efforts seem worth a try.

**First, at the national level it would be possible to develop better mapping and exchange of information on mediation and peace efforts in ways that do not destroy them** (recognising the need for discretion around some initiatives). International country teams expend tremendous resources on 'conflict analysis', but much less on 'dialogue process' analysis. Meanwhile, external funders support overlapping and sometimes competing initiatives. Could the mediation field and its funders not do better to map dialogue processes, and connect this to some shared 'conflict unwinding' analysis? There are some examples of attempts to cohere initiatives: 'track two' forums that bring private and NGO mediation initiatives together (on Afghanistan and currently on Yemen); or in-country multi-donor trust funds that have tried to incubate ways of connecting conflict analysis to local peace intervention projects (South Sudan); and annual meetings of mediation donors and NGOs. But these efforts are not consistent and do not always deliver a coordinated approach to mediation efforts.

## **COULD THE DEEPER SYSTEMIC INNOVATION OF MULTIMEDIATION BE ITS CAPACITY TO UNWIND COMPLEX CONFLICT SYSTEMS WHERE A TRADITIONAL PEACE PROCESS APPEARS NOT TO FIT?**

**Second, at the global level, there is a need for innovation in how to mediate between the mediators.** International organisations and countries who support peacemaking often face difficult questions of which initiative to support, or how to engage with the outcomes of a mediation that seem designed to support a military status quo or even victory. It is hard to see the world becoming more peaceful without a long, hard slog to re-centre international legal order and cooperation as the only hope for humanity. In the short term, however, thinking about how very different types of mediator could at least be corralled into some joint forums

of information exchange or even dialogue, would be useful, but faces the issue of who would do it. As the AU's attempts to cohere efforts to address the 2023 conflict in Sudan through an 'Expanded Mechanism', described by Barney Afako on p.44, illustrate, in contexts of extreme fragmentation of the mediators the challenges are considerable.

**Third, alongside these process innovations, we may also need substance innovation.** Mediation efforts have always been premised on agreements producing an institutional blueprint for government at the national and sub-national level, within the state's boundaries. Should we now think more creatively about state structures as loose coordinating mechanisms for disparate groups with disparate national aspirations and geographies of control, rather than *the* national architecture to which all international financial support and legitimacy flows? Could we find more novel ways to fund coherent pockets of democratisation or 'civicness' and self-government, without requiring it somehow to be fit into an idealised architecture that bears very little relationship to how power is actually transacted?

Perhaps, however, the starting point is more basic. Mediators and peacebuilders could be more aware of, and exchange perspectives on, the ways in which contemporary conflict dynamics are fundamentally disrupting their discourse and practice, with a view to building a creative response. This volume, of course, is an attempt to do this. Yet, two different conversations with regard to mediation co-exist, even within single organisations, in cognitive dissonance. One focuses on how to build on mediation practices in a way that makes them better and better, so that they create a more inclusive or more 'positive' peace. The other focuses on how on earth to mediate any sort of principled end to conflict when a profound disruption of everything that has underpinned the practice is under way. The disruption stands to dismantle wider civic agendas, such as women, peace and security, altogether.

Before embracing multimediation as a rich tapestry of efforts to be better woven together, we need to recognise that competing war and peace goals are part of the tapestry of the current mediation context. Yet, mediation always involves trying to bridge divides between real human beings in an effort to agree a baseline common political project, even as disagreement persists as to what the project is. Therefore, the complex mixed picture of multimediation does not pose a unique challenge for the mediation community.

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## **SECTION 2**

# **Diversified mediators, mandates and ambitions**

# DIVERSIFIED MEDIATORS, MANDATES AND AMBITIONS

Teresa Whitfield is Issue Editor of this *Accord*. See the Introduction for her biography.

**The reach and type of mediators is changing, with a shift to the South and East and, as Mateja Peter and Sanja Badanjak’s analysis of ‘what the data says’ sets out on p.35, a new prominence of regional or ‘middle power’ mediators. While some states continue to facilitate discrete processes – such as Norway’s role in talks between the government of Nicolás Maduro and the opposition in Venezuela and in patiently nurturing a return to talks between the government of the Philippines and communist rebels, announced in November 2023 – there is also an increase in processes in which multiple mediators, facilitators and levels (‘tracks’) are engaged simultaneously, leading to potential congestion.**

This proliferation of mediators demands innovation in how they work together, drawing on lessons learned from some of the more successful collaborative efforts of the past, as well as attention to what their engagement may mean for the outcomes of the peace processes with which they are involved. Mediation of internationalised internal conflicts is particularly challenged by the multiple roles assumed by states that may be both fuelling the conflict and, at least formally, participating in efforts to end it.

Across Africa, peacemaking cooperation between the UN, the African Union, the regional economic communities and the continent’s most powerful states is – according to the Institute for Security Studies – undermined by confusion, and sometimes competition, about an appropriate division of labour. Meanwhile, against the background of shifting regional and geopolitical relationships in the Middle East, and the increased influence of the Gulf States across the Horn of Africa and North Africa, states such as Egypt, Oman, Qatar (see article by Sultan Barakat on p.37), Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are all increasingly active. As for other mediators, their engagement may be just one facet of complex economic, diplomatic or security relationships with the contending parties – and with more distant powers. Questions of prioritisation and interest are paramount.

China, too, has stepped forwards, as Yun Sun describes on p.40. While its extensive international involvements have rarely manifested in an explicit mediation role, its mediation between Iran and Saudi Arabia sealed the terms of a deal quietly developed through direct talks previously facilitated by Iraq and Oman. Numerous states active in their own regions – from Brazil, to China, Kenya, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye and the UAE – have also indicated their readiness, or put forward ideas, to support an eventual negotiation of the end of the war in Ukraine. The constellation of regional actors engaged with the United States in talks on ceasefires, the return of hostages, humanitarian assistance and an eventual return to a political process to address the Israel-Palestine conflict, looks very different to the now-defunct Quartet on the Middle Peace Process of the EU, Russia, the UN and the United States.

Against this shifting terrain, peacemakers are having to assess the setbacks they have faced as well as the situations where many feel their efforts have little purchase. The messy and increasingly transactional character of peace negotiations has brought to the fore significant differences in the extent to which political and civil rights will be prioritised, as well as persistent failures in agreement implementation.

Some mediators engage within normative and other frameworks that are hard-baked into their identities as multilateral organisations, foreign policy positions (for example on human rights, and women, peace and security), or, in the case of non-governmental organisations, defined principles or values. Drawing on a multi-year global participatory process, in January 2023, the International Commission on Inclusive Peace introduced eight broad ‘Principles for Peace’ for addressing 21st century conflict. In practice, however, clear red lines – for example, that the UN will not endorse peace agreements that offer amnesties for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity or gross violations of human rights – are the exception in a field of activity that necessarily involves compromise between warring parties with blood on their hands. Yet, more broadly, globally agreed norms – even when sometimes violated – can be of utility in peace processes.





Omani and Saudi delegations meet Houthi officials as part of efforts to negotiate a new truce with the Iran-allied Houthi group, Sana'a, Yemen, 9 April 2023. © Saba News Agency via Getty Images

A normative grounding, as the UN emphasised in an October 2023 'practice note' on the tangible benefits of human rights to mediation processes, is a powerful source of legitimacy. Reaffirming the provisions of the UN Charter on non-intervention has often been a principle in the resolution of internationalised civil war.

The UN and other impartial mediators frequently need to 'borrow' leverage from global or regional powers. Other actors, meanwhile, have long engaged in or around peace processes based on explicit interests or relationships with one or other of the conflict parties – a bias that, according to work by Isak Svensson, can bring benefits to peacemaking. They have not hesitated to use the economic and other leverage available to them, when this has served their purposes. Nor have some blanched at the hypocrisy that has broadcast support for human rights, or international intervention, in some contexts, and studiously avoided it on others.

Divisions in the Security Council have precluded new mediation mandates since the establishment of three special political missions in Libya (2011), and on Syria and Yemen (both 2012) in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions of 2011 (though the Secretary-General has the capacity to appoint Personal Envoys, as he did for Bolivia and Mozambique in 2019, Sudan in late 2023, and Cyprus in early 2024, without recourse to the Security Council). The UN retains the formal peacemaking lead

in these three contexts as well in legacy conflicts such as Cyprus and Western Sahara. However, its effectiveness will always be constrained by the positions of its member states. Without consensus among those involved, it has struggled to shape an external environment favourable to peace or find agreement to an end to external military intervention – two elements that Sean William Kane extracted from his 2022 study of mediation processes at the end of the Cold War as central means to tackle internationalised internal conflicts.

In Syria, UN efforts to lead the political process were overtaken by big power politics, military dynamics on the ground, and the creation of the parallel 'Astana Process' by Iran, Russia, and Türkiye. During 2020 and 2021, the Berlin International Conference (see article on p.42), led by Germany and the UN at the highest level, proved an innovative means to unify international actors with different roles in the Libyan crisis in support of a peaceful solution. The UN's efforts to mediate an inclusive Yemeni process have shown promise, while involving careful navigation around talks between Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah (the Houthi movement) facilitated by Oman. However, progress reached in December 2023, including discussions of a UN roadmap, was imperilled in early 2024 by the Houthis' attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea, the retaliatory strikes against them by the United States and United Kingdom and the risks of wider regional conflict.

Elsewhere the UN is constructively engaged in peacemaking in a supporting role. In Colombia, for example, it is one of several actors, along with the Catholic Church and several 'guarantor' states and donors, accompanying negotiations between the government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group. It is also supporting a distinct process with dissident members of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

## **INNOVATIVE COLLABORATIONS HAVE BEEN PURSUED BETWEEN MULTILATERAL AND STATE MEDIATORS AND PRIVATE OR NON-GOVERNMENTAL MEDIATORS.**

Evolving partnerships of different kinds have become a near constant feature of contemporary mediation. As Barney Afako demonstrates in his article on innovation in the Horn of Africa on p.44, in different contexts facilitators and mediators in the region have adopted new tools to enhance their interventions. These have included complementary institutional and ad hoc partnerships, mediation panels, and the pooling of leverage and expertise in multiple forms of engagement. Both the complexity and fragility of this multi-actor mediation have been underlined by the course of events in Sudan. At the time of writing, multiple and competing initiatives have gained little traction in the devastating war.

Innovative collaborations have also been pursued between multilateral and state mediators and private or non-governmental mediators (whose eruption into the mediation space is described in the article on international private mediators on p.49). Such collaborations include formal arrangements such as the mixed state/NGO International Contact Group established to support the peace process in Mindanao (documented by Conciliation Resources in 2013); support to the UN by private mediation and other peacemaking entities in multi-layered engagements; and ad hoc partnerships such as that between the Swiss ambassador (later appointed the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy), international private mediators and a national mediator in the successful process to secure agreement and implementation of the Maputo Accord for Peace and Reconciliation of August 2019. The potential value of NGOs, or private mediation organisations, as partners has been enhanced by the expansion of their own engagements to include many more local and insider mediators and a recognition that their relevance will depend on an ever-widening network of relationships with the diversity of other mediators.

In this challenging context, mediators of all kinds are forced to be humble with regard to their potential reach and influence, but also creative and pragmatic. In Ukraine, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, mediated by UN and Türkiye, as described on p.53, illustrated that when conditions for political mediation are not present, an innovative approach to humanitarian or economic mediation, seizing the opportunity by drawing on ad hoc partnerships and expertise, offers potential to alleviate suffering.

Mediators may also face the challenge of filling a gap between unattainable comprehensive peace agreements and unsatisfying 'partial' agreements. In contexts of continuous negotiation and renegotiation, in which states exist in a condition that Christine Bell and Jan Popsipil described as 'formalised political unsettlement', Christopher Thornton suggests on p.54 that international actors need to think creatively about uncertainty and flux. Mediators can still help parties work towards peace. But this is more likely to involve iterative processes, balancing the short-term interests of conflict parties with the determination of other actors to secure the long-term interests of the wider society and future generations.

## **MEDIATORS MAY ALSO FACE THE CHALLENGE OF FILLING A GAP BETWEEN UNATTAINABLE COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENTS AND UNSATISFYING 'PARTIAL' AGREEMENTS.**

In one example of a long-term approach, Rafat Al-Akhali highlights on p.58 the centrality of economic issues to the conflict in Yemen and welcomes the decision by the UN to formally recognise this by calling for a dedicated 'economic track' to the peace process (as was earlier introduced in Libya). Elsewhere, issues of political economy can and have been too frequently ignored – or addressed in opaque and self-interested side deals – under the pressure of hastily assembled agreements among political and security elites.

The implications for what we consider to be mediation 'success' are considerable. In circumstances in which a comprehensive, just and sustainable peace is elusive, distinct agreements at local, regional and national levels may be all that it is possible to achieve. Yet these may have intrinsic value. The challenge for conflict parties and those working to support them alike is how to assess and plan for peace efforts to move beyond isolated attempts to limit violence and help establish norms of dialogue, civic engagement and inclusivity in the resolution of differences.

# DIVERSIFICATION AND CONGESTION IN INTERNATIONAL PEACEMAKING

## What the data says

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**Data on peace agreements and mediation efforts provides important insights into changing trends in international involvement in peacemaking. Across the mediation field, data shows diversification of third parties involved in peace processes and, in places, potential for congestion. Both these trends are contributing to an increasingly fragmented mediation space.**

Involvement of third parties – actors not directly involved in the fighting – takes various forms, from hosting and providing material support for negotiations, to offering incentives for talks such as aid or investment, providing good offices, facilitating talks, mediating, witnessing, or signing a peace accord, guaranteeing some level of security to the negotiating sides, or supporting implementation of agreements. Different third parties get involved in different ways and at various stages of peacemaking. They are also involved in different types of agreements. Increasing diversification brings new constellations of third parties cooperating and competing with each other, a development we see as key to understanding the future of international peacemaking.

**INCREASING DIVERSIFICATION BRINGS NEW CONSTELLATIONS OF THIRD PARTIES COOPERATING AND COMPETING WITH EACH OTHER.**

The PA-X Peace Agreement database, which collects all formal, written, and signed agreements in armed conflicts and violent crises since 1990, enables analysis of third-party signatories of agreements. Its comprehensiveness means that it is a strong indicator of trends of who is involved when agreements are reached. This work is complemented by a growing Global Peacemaking Database following all third-party mediation attempts, including those not leading to formal agreements. What follows are a few highlights drawing on PA-X, and on the cases of Sudan and South Sudan in the Global Peacemaking Database:

- **Half of formal and signed agreements involve international third-party signatories** – primarily states, and international and regional organisations, but also various non-state actors and individuals.
- **The most prolific international third-party signatories** between 1990 and 2022 were the UN (383 agreements), Russia (132 agreements), the US (126 agreements), the African Union (123 agreements) and the European Union (106 agreements).
- **The engagement of Western states as third-party signatories has been decreasing** over the last 15–20 years – notably France, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States. The drop in US engagement is the starkest.

- **This decline is offset by an increase in other third-party signatories** – states such as Kenya, Qatar and Türkiye, and organisations like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in East Africa, often in relation to agreements in their neighbourhoods.
- **China's** rising global influence does not yet show an overall increase in acting as a third-party signatory, but there are indications that its interest in conflict mediation may be growing (see article by Yun Sun, p.40). Besides engagements in its neighbourhood, China also appears as the only non-African and non-Western state among top 15 mediators of South Sudanese crises since the country's independence in 2011, predominantly engaging as a member of multilateral initiatives.
- **Russia** has three main types of involvement as a third-party signatory. First, like the other permanent members of the UN Security Council, it participates in large international conferences and in Security Council resolutions that function as peace agreements. These are now in decline. Second, it acts as a third party in protracted conflicts related to the dissolution of the USSR. In that, its role resembles that of a regional power. And third, over the last decade, Russia increasingly acts as a signatory to agreements related to conflicts in Syria and, reflecting its increased engagements in Africa, the Central African Republic.
- **Fluctuations in frequency of individual actors as signatories** are likely linked to the apparent decline of large-scale international peace conferences, a broader reduction in the overall number of *comprehensive* formal peace agreements aiming to resolve the entirety of a conflict, and an increase in *local* agreements that aim to tackle geographically limited or issue-specific aspects of the wider conflict. Western countries mostly sign comprehensive agreements, and so the drop in the number of Western signatories may not indicate their 'retreat' from acting as third parties, but rather a continuing level of willingness to act but fewer *opportunities* to do so.
- **Global fragmentation seems to be influencing the drop in conflict-wide comprehensive agreements**, with multiple actors mediating but hardly speaking with a unified voice. Mediation efforts in Sudan between 1990 and 2022 have seen a growth in the number of third parties and disconnected mediation efforts. After President Omer al-Bashir's ouster in 2019, there was a three-fold increase in mediation attempts compared to the height of the Darfur crisis (2003–05), and significantly more third-party involvement (over 70 actors in 2020). In comparison, there were 15 actors involved in mediation between 2003 and 2005 (if we remove those actors only appearing as signatories of the 2004 Conclusion of IGAD Negotiations on Peace in the Sudan). Data suggest mediation in Sudan has correspondingly become less coordinated as the number of third parties has grown.
- **Regional actors** tend to seek opportunities to act as mediators and brokers of partial and local agreements when conflict-wide accords seem unreachable. Since 2004, data shows a clear increase in regional engagement by the AU, EU, IGAD and regional states.
- **Qatar** first appeared as a third-party signatory to an agreement reached between Eritrea and Sudan in 1999. Since then, it has served as third party signatory to 21 agreements, with frequency increasing since 2010 – from peace negotiations in Darfur, to multilateral negotiations for Afghanistan, Syria and Libya (see article by Sultan Barakat, p.37). Qatar often acts as a host, with five agreements named after its capital, Doha. Forty per cent of agreements signed by Qatar relate to Sudan. In Sudan, until 2011, only Qatar appeared besides African and Western states among top 15 mediators; since then, it has been joined by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. After the outbreak of conflict in April 2023, the latter played an important role alongside the US and, from October 2023, IGAD (also participating on behalf of the AU), in Jeddah talks.
- **Neighbouring states take increasingly important roles as peace brokers.** Kenya's history as a third-party signatory dates back to the early 1990s. Its involvement has remained largely regional, supporting mediation processes in Sudan and South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Great Lakes region. Its 2023 agreement to lead a multinational security mission in Haiti represents an exceptional involvement in peace and security beyond the African continent. South Sudan has emerged as one of the top mediators of the Sudan crisis post-al-Bashir. South Sudan, therefore, not only provides an illustrative example of neighbourly mediation in the Horn of Africa, but also offers a rare case study of mediation by an actor that seceded from the country whose conflict it is mediating.

*This article draws on the PAX Peace Agreement Database and the Global Peacemaking Database, and the following papers: Sanja Badanjak (2023) *Third parties in peace agreements: first look at new data and key trends*, PeaceRep, University of Edinburgh; and Mateja Peter and Kasia Houghton (2023) *Congestion and diversification of third-party mediation in Sudan and South Sudan: first look at some longer-term trends*. PeaceRep, University of Edinburgh. More details on [peacerep.org](https://www.peacerep.org).*

## QATAR'S MEDIATION – MOTIVATIONS, ACCEPTANCE AND MODALITIES

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The pause in Israel's war on Gaza between 24–30 November 2023, along with each side's release of a limited number of hostages and prisoners, could not have taken place without Qatar's mediation efforts in what United States President Joe Biden acknowledged as a 'critical partnership'.

Qatar has over the past three decades mediated several high-profile conflicts that have brought it unparalleled attention. This is remarkable given the commonly accepted assumption that small states, particularly from the Global South, are inherently limited in their power to act as third parties during conflict. Lacking an understanding of Qatar's motivations, it is easy for outsiders to dismiss its efforts as mere 'chequebook diplomacy'. Despite varied experiences in Qatar's mediation efforts, common themes and patterns can be distilled into what could be termed 'the Qatari way' in terms of motivation, modality and acceptance.

**QATAR HAS OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES MEDIATED SEVERAL HIGH-PROFILE CONFLICTS. THIS IS REMARKABLE GIVEN THE COMMONLY ACCEPTED ASSUMPTION THAT SMALL STATES, PARTICULARLY FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH, ARE INHERENTLY LIMITED IN THEIR POWER TO ACT AS THIRD PARTIES DURING CONFLICT.**

### Overview of Qatar's mediation

Following the 2006 July war between Israel and Hizbullah in Lebanon, Qatar's opposition to Israel elevated its status in the Arab world, bridged Sunni–Shiite divisions across the Middle East and bolstered its image both regionally and globally. Between 2006 and 2010, Qatar found itself involved in the mediation of multiple conflicts, benefiting from factors such as its lack of the historical baggage associated with traditional regional mediators like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, particularly evident in Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen.

From 2011, however, Qatar's interventionist role in the Arab Spring and its aftermath – and the severe criticism this drew from within the region – complicated its positioning as a mediator. The blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt in June 2017 on the basis of allegations of Qatari support of militant groups made Qatar itself a subject for mediation, as regional (Kuwait and Oman) and international parties (European Union and US) attempted to resolve the Gulf crisis.

Despite the rising tensions in this period, Qatar was meanwhile skillfully positioning itself as a mediator between the US and Taliban, capitalising on its previous efforts in hosting the Taliban political office (2013) and securing the release of five Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo Bay in exchange for US soldier Bowe Bergdahl (2014). Significantly for Doha, the US–Taliban talks ensured active US and international engagement throughout the years of the blockade and ushered in a renewed role for Qatar as a trusted destination for conflict mediation.

More recently, Qatar's mediation efforts extended to Chad, culminating in 40 opposition groups agreeing a roadmap to a national dialogue process in 2022. Additionally, Qatar hosted secret negotiations between the US and Venezuela, leading to a temporary suspension of US sanctions. It also helped secure the exchange of five American and five Iranian prisoners. The deal involved the unfreezing of US\$5.9 billion in Iranian assets held in South Korea. Between October and December 2023, Qatar headed talks with Moscow and Kyiv to facilitate the return of 10 Ukrainian minors as a pilot for the safe return of a large number of Ukrainian children who had been unlawfully deported from Ukraine to Russia.

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Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani speaks to the African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat during a signing ceremony between Chad's military ruler and more than forty opposition groups to launch national peace talks, Doha, 8 August 2022. © Mustafa Abumunes/AFP via Getty Images

## Motivation for Qatar as a mediator

Security and stability, broadly conceived, are critical drivers of Qatar's interest in mediation – from both external and internal perspectives. The state mediates conflicts in the Middle East to stabilise the region. This is expected to reduce external threats such as terrorism or population displacement, ensure a conducive business environment and, in the words of the former Qatari Prime Minister, allow international diplomatic efforts to focus on the core issue facing the region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Qatar's prosperity is built on its export of liquefied natural gas, which flows via the Hormuz Strait, linking regional stability with Qatari national security. The combination of its geographical location and wealth leaves it with no option but to pursue an independent foreign policy among bigger and stronger neighbours that are often at odds with each other (Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia).

Qatar also feels a moral and religious compulsion to act as a regional peacemaker. The Holy Quran states that 'if two groups of Muslims fight against each other, reconcile them' [Surah al-Hujurat 49:9]. And Qatari officials make it clear that the moral and religious compulsion of the former Emir to act as a regional peacemaker contributed to the emergence of mediation as a major element of foreign policy. Outside observers, on the other hand, have argued that Qatar intervenes in conflicts to raise its profile as part of a concerted branding effort.

## Qatar's mediation modalities

Qatar's mediation modalities have been diverse, including both classic track one diplomacy in Yemen, Lebanon and Chad, and, in Darfur and Afghanistan, a combination of track one efforts with track two dialogue with community and civil society leaders. Similarly, Qatar has acted as both solo mediator and as part of a coalition, working closely with the African Union, the Arab League, and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Qatar demonstrates an ability to switch smoothly between simple facilitation of talks – offering generous venue and logistical support – and more involved mediation – setting up agendas and making proposals. In fact, most of its long-term processes, such as on Afghanistan, Chad and even Darfur, started with Qatar playing a facilitation role and agreeing to act as formal mediator only after receiving an official request and or approval from the parties to the conflict. This is consistent with Qatar's objective of maintaining impartiality, creating trust, and ensuring that mediation processes are voluntary and that the resulting agreements are owned by the disputing parties.

Qatar's mediation remains exclusively state driven. It is usually led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and/or the Amiri Diwan (the administrative office of the Amir) and its associated advisers, including the National Security Adviser. The latter tend to focus more on mediation for hostage release and or prisoner exchange.

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Consistent with recommendations in a paper written by the author for the Brookings Institution, the foreign ministry in 2016 initiated a process of professionalisation of its mediation capacity. This included a new Special Envoy for Counterterrorism and Mediation in Conflict Resolution to act as Qatar's chief mediator and coordinate efforts between other agencies. Attempts to deepen capacity through training male and female mediators as well as opening greater possibilities for younger diplomats to be involved are in progress in the foreign ministry's Diplomatic Institute.

Qatar's wealth and its foreign ministry's ability to take decisions without being questioned or scrutinised by the public has meant that it can act decisively whenever there is a need to incentivise an agreement. Sizeable investments in Lebanon, Yemen and Darfur played a role in securing agreement. In recent years, this modality of inducement has been avoided, partly because experience demonstrated that many of the investments made were not sustainable.

## Acceptance of Qatar as a mediator

Qatar is accepted as a third-party mediator in regional conflicts in no small part due to its advantageous geographical location and cultural affinity within the Arab and Muslim worlds, as well as its friendly connections with numerous states. A fundamental pillar of Qatar's foreign policy, according to a senior Qatari mediation official, is a belief that 'maintaining channels of communication' and focusing on issues rather than personalities and attitudes is the 'only constructive way to engage in politics in our globalised environment, where trade, investment and politics are closely aligned'. Qatar has retained comprehensive diplomatic and trade connections with both Western and Eastern countries, North and South, even with some of those with whom it has troubled relations (Qatar was the first Arab country to open a Trade Office for Israel following the Oslo agreement). This extensive connectivity – Qatar Airways flies direct to more than 90 countries – has maintained Qatar's ability to act as a bridge.

**QATAR IS ACCEPTED AS A THIRD-PARTY MEDIATOR IN REGIONAL CONFLICTS IN NO SMALL PART DUE TO ITS ADVANTAGEOUS GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND CULTURAL AFFINITY WITHIN THE ARAB AND MUSLIM WORLDS.**

Furthermore, Qatar's active engagement in international organisations and hosting of diplomatic summits strengthens its position as a competent global mediator. The Doha Forum was launched in 2003 to promote dialogue among world leaders, policy makers, and academics in the aftermath of 9/11 and has established itself as a leading platform to discuss critical challenges facing the world.

Qatar's pursuit of an independent trajectory in foreign affairs is combined with a unique ability to maintain lines of communication with a wide array of actors. It is remarkable that in Doha controversial and opposed actors can co-inhabit a space of a few square kilometers, with the offices of Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, the Taliban and Al Jazeera near the US Central Command (CENTCOM). It is important to understand that Qatar's hosting of non-state actors is always done in close coordination with other states (particularly the US) and exclusively as part of a longer-term mediation roadmap, and not out of ideological sympathy. Their political offices operate under strict conditions, including the prohibition of raising funds or engaging in direct support of military acts, and require an indication of serious engagement in political processes to justify their maintenance in Doha.

Qatar's foreign policy frequently entails maintaining an equal distance from all sides in a conflict, but without shying away from expressing a position where necessary, often in line with international law. This 'principled impartiality' aims to allow Qatar to gain the trust of opposing parties while maintaining its respect for international law.

A case in point is Qatar's declared position on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The fact that Qatar called on Russia to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and provided Ukraine with US\$100 million of humanitarian assistance did not stop Russia from accepting Qatari mediation on the return of Ukrainian minors.

Similarly, while Qatar did not endorse Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October, it immediately issued a statement that held Israel responsible due to the occupation and later accused it of breaches of the Geneva conventions and even genocide. Nevertheless, Qatar's history of providing transparent reconstruction assistance to Gaza (just under US\$1 billion over the last 18 years) – via Israeli banks and with a full oversight by Israel's authorities – combined with being a reliable and strategic partner of the US, helped facilitate Israel's acceptance of Qatari mediation when it came to the release of the Israeli captives held by Hamas.

## CHINA STEPS INTO CONFLICT MEDIATION

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Two factors contributed to China's longstanding dormancy in the field of conflict mediation. First, until the early 2000s, China's global presence, especially in conflict countries, had been limited. The second was its principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, strongly defended not least to hold firm against potential foreign intervention in its own affairs, such as the ethnic unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet. The Cambodian Peace Process in the early 1990s was an exception, but also an example of a conflict in which Beijing had significant interests, and where a mandate from the UN Security Council gave legitimacy to intervention.

Fast forward to the 2010s, by when China's global economic engagement made it impossible to evade involvement in many conflicts in less developed countries. The inevitability originated from China's search for raw materials, such as oil, to fuel its domestic economic growth, drawing it into resource-rich countries prone to internal instability, including Sudan, Zimbabwe, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Myanmar among others. Very quickly, China found its national interests intrinsically entangled in the domestic conflicts of these countries. Staying aloof was no longer an option.

Beyond economic issues, there are also other interests at stake, including China's great power image and its security. China's relationship with authoritarian leaders has won Beijing lucrative economic agreements but they are not cost-free. Before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, for example, the conflict in Darfur and China's cosy relationship with Sudanese President Omer al-Bashir inflicted reputational damage on China's international image. Similarly, China had a comfortable relationship with the Burmese junta before the 2010 elections. But when the power dynamics in Myanmar began to shift, the ensuing conflicts in the country took a direct toll on China's border security, sending tens of thousands of refugees into the bordering Yunnan province and leading to Chinese civilian casualties. These forced China to take a more hands-on approach toward the conflicts in Sudan and Myanmar, pressuring the authorities to accept the joint United Nations-African Union mission in Darfur (UNAMID), and negotiations with ethnic armed groups, respectively.

### **CHINA STARTED TO SEE PEACEMAKING AS A SOURCE OF GREAT POWER LEADERSHIP, CREDIBILITY AND INFLUENCE.**

With China's close relationship with authorities in the conflict countries, foreign demand for China to play a bigger role in ending conflicts grew; China also started to see peacemaking as a source of great power leadership, credibility and influence. The Saudi-Iran peace deal announced in Beijing in March 2023, following rounds of talks facilitated by Iraq and Oman, represents a significant advance in China's perception of the benefits of mediation as a foreign policy instrument that attests to and elevates its diplomatic capability.

There are several distinct features to China's approach. First, China's role is more facilitatory than mediatory: Beijing is more interested in laying the political groundwork and providing political and logistical support to make the dialogue happen than setting agendas or designing or promoting a specific resolution to the conflict itself. Unlike its Western counterparts, China consciously chooses to stay clear of political processes such as democratic elections or power sharing, or issues such as women's rights. Instead, China will facilitate the conditions for dialogue, but leave the parties to the conflict to determine their own course and solution.

### **CHINA WILL FACILITATE THE CONDITIONS FOR DIALOGUE, BUT LEAVE THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT TO DETERMINE THEIR OWN COURSE AND SOLUTION.**

*continued...*





Newspapers in Tehran feature on their front pages news of the China-brokered deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore ties, signed in Beijing the previous day, 11 March 2023. © Atta Kenare/AFP via Getty Images

Second, China uses its influence to provide incentives for dialogues to happen and bear fruit. Such incentives include both intangible pressure from its involvement as a great power and tangible rewards resulting from a breakthrough. For example, when China positioned itself as a mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran, its presence alone increased the pressure for the two sides to reach some type of deal for fear that failure to do so would affect their relations with Beijing. Similarly, when such deals are reached, it is almost guaranteed that the parties can count on China to provide rewards in economic and/or diplomatic fields.

Third, China's vision for conflict resolution always has an element of economic development – for example, its prescription of a three-step solution to the Rohingya crisis: ceasefire, repatriation and then economic development. The emphasis on economic development reflects China's consistent argument that poverty is the core source of instability, as well as its own experience and conviction of performance legitimacy – that economic development provides the foundation for political legitimacy even without democratic elections, and that development and stability are complementary. Beijing has ample incentive to play a role in post-conflict reconstruction, and so this approach could potentially be politically useful and economically lucrative for China as well.

**CHINA IS EXPERIMENTING WITH DIFFERENT STRATEGIES TO USE ITS POSITIONS AND INFLUENCE TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF CONFLICTS.**

Despite its nascent interest in conflict mediation, China is not yet a frontrunner in the field and is experimenting with different strategies to use its positions and influence to shape the future of conflicts. Its role will primarily focus on facilitation of peace talks and post-conflict economic reconstruction. It is becoming less constrained by its own 'non-interference' principle, but still is far from taking coercive political or military action to impose peace.

## FROM THE OUTSIDE IN: THE BERLIN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LIBYA

*Teresa Whitfield is Issue Editor of this Accord. See the Introduction for her biography.*

By mid-2019, the UN's efforts to advance a peace process in Libya were stuck. As Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Ghassan Salamé had tried to work 'from the inside out'. This meant prioritising engagement with a broad swathe of Libyans in preparation for an inclusive national conference to be held in April 2019. But an assault on the capital Tripoli by the renegade General Khalifa Haftar just days before it was to take place returned Libya to open conflict and left the UN plan in tatters. The attack also exposed both deep divisions in the UN Security Council and significant military and other interference in Libya by regional and other states.

To address the particular challenge of mediating a highly internationalised conflict in a context in which the usual rounds of engagement with ambassadors and travel to capitals was not having traction, in July 2019 Salamé proposed a high-level meeting to bring 'concerned countries' together and create the space for the re-launching of a Libyan process. Germany appeared a logical partner. It was perceived as neutral by the Libyans, was an elected member of the Security Council with close ties to the regional actors, and in Chancellor Angela Merkel had a leader able to command deep personal authority.

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UN Special Envoy for Libya, Ghassan Salamé, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas attend a press conference on the Berlin International Conference on Libya, Germany, 19 January 2020. © Omar Messinger-Pool/Getty Images

As Christian Buck, a senior German official who, with Salamé's deputy Stephanie Williams, would assume responsibility for the conference's preparation, would recall in an interview, the Chancellor took particular interest in Libya and, encouraged by her foreign policy adviser Jan Hecker, a critical advocate of the initiative, agreed to meet with Salamé in August. He asked whether she would be willing to 'help shield the Libyan process against influences from outside' by hosting a conference with leaders of countries including the five permanent members of the Security Council and others engaged in the conflict (these would eventually include Algeria, Egypt, Italy, the Republic of the Congo, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates as well as representatives of the African Union, the European Union and the League of Arab States). Merkel responded positively, but with some caution: she would not commit to holding the conference until it became clear that it would achieve something worthwhile.

Over the following months, Germany and the UN convened six preparatory meetings to advance the drafting of a 55-point outcome document. The states involved committed to refrain from interfering in Libya's armed conflict and to support UN efforts to return to an intra-Libyan political process. During the meetings the officials were, one recalled, 'unusually focused' by the knowledge that 'his or her president or head of state' would be in the room. Many asked when the conference would take place, but it was not until late December that Merkel gave the green light.

On 19 January 2020, the Berlin International Conference, co-chaired by Merkel and Secretary-General António Guterres, brought together an extraordinary gathering of world leaders (Presidents Donald Trump of the United States and Xi Jinping of China were among the very few heads of state not to attend in person). Its conclusions addressed a ceasefire, the arms embargo, a return to the political process, security sector reform, economic and financial reform, respect for international humanitarian law and human rights, and a range of mechanisms, outlined in an annex, to secure follow up.

**THE BERLIN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE STANDS AS AN INNOVATIVE EXAMPLE OF HOW TO BRING OUTSIDE ACTORS TO ADDRESS AN INTERNATIONALISED INTERNAL CONFLICT AND CREATE THE SPACE NECESSARY FOR NATIONAL ACTORS TO ADDRESS THEIR OWN CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES.**

Some of the Conference's conclusions were, perhaps inevitably, quickly ignored or violated. But it also had significant impact. In its high-level political investment, close collaboration between the UN and an engaged member state, and painstaking preparation, the Berlin International Conference stands as an innovative example of how to bring outside actors to address an internationalised internal conflict and create the space necessary for national actors to address their own challenges and priorities. It established four international working groups and, critically, launched three intra-Libyan tracks on the economic, political and security aspects of the conflict, facilitated by the UN. Over the following year these would yield a durable ceasefire, a roadmap towards elections, and terms for the formation of a government of national unity.

A second Berlin International Conference would be held in June 2021, with Libyan participants present and wider representation from the region. Participants reaffirmed the conclusions of the first conference and agreed – albeit with a 'reservation' expressed by Türkiye – that 'all foreign forces and mercenaries need to be withdrawn from Libya without delay'. Unfortunately, however, cracks in the Libyan process had appeared. Authorities within what had been conceived as an interim government began to create obstacles to the holding of elections, and General Haftar remained in control of the east of the country. Elections planned for December 2021 did not take place, and, as of the time of writing, the unifying of national institutions in Libya remains an elusive goal.

# PURSuing EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

## Innovation and collaboration in peacemaking in the Horn of Africa

**Barney Afako** is a lawyer. He has worked with the United Nations, including as a member of the Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers, the African Union and IGAD to support mediation processes in the Horn of Africa, including Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. He has also advised on peace processes for Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Colombia and Yemen, among others. In 2009, he was an adviser to the African Union Panel on Darfur, and thereafter supported the AU High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan and the Horn of Africa.

**Peacemaking is challenging; the complexity of the issues, managing heightened expectations and recalcitrant parties, and an increasingly crowded and fractious mediation field complicate the endeavour. In responding to Sudan's conflicts, and supporting South Sudanese and Ethiopian peace processes, regional and international facilitators have explored new approaches: they have promoted strategic and ad hoc partnerships, established mediation panels, combined multiple formats of engagement, and pooled leverage and expertise. Yet humility is required. The effects of innovations do not always yield immediate or enduring success: a new crisis in Sudan in April 2023 brought multiple, fragmented, and largely ineffectual mediation responses. South Sudan's parties have struggled to implement their 2018 peace agreement; while Ethiopia's Pretoria Agreement has not yet catalysed a just, inclusive and durable peace for either Tigray or Ethiopia.**

### Enhancing leverage and expertise – concluding Sudan's CPA process

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army provided for a referendum on self-determination. Preparations for the potential secession of the South were politically charged and technically complex, requiring competent oversight and close international support. In 2010, the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) mandated a High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) – composed of former heads of state Thabo Mbeki of

South Africa, General Abdulsalami Abubakar of Nigeria, and Pierre Buyoya of Burundi – to support the 'post-referendum' negotiations.

For the AU, the panel consolidated its move away from the practice of appointing a single mediator. Conscious of the sensitivity and precariousness of the CPA process, the AU sought to harness the political experience and stature of senior African leaders to help resolve complex questions around the South's potential secession.

Although the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) had mediated the CPA negotiations, it now partnered with the AU and AUHIP. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, as chair of IGAD, and leader of the regional hegemon, brought real leverage, buttressed by a deep familiarity with the issues and a formidable political acumen. Mutual political and intellectual respect between Zenawi and Mbeki – both ardent pan-Africanists – sustained an effective partnership. On key issues, including the conflagration in Abyei, in the oil negotiations, and security arrangements, Zenawi's support and advice were indispensable.

The AU also understood the importance of the leverage and backing of the international community, including on debt relief and lifting of sanctions. At critical points, the AUPSC sought UN Security Council endorsement of its decisions, including in 2012 after conflict broke out between Sudan and South Sudan around the border town of Heglig. Mbeki regularly briefed the Security Council and collaborated closely with the UN Mission in Sudan, whose leadership and staff worked closely with the Panel. The Troika of the United States, United Kingdom and Norway that had supported the CPA process again provided assistance: Norway on oil issues, and the UK on security and border questions, among others. United States envoys worked closely with the AUHIP to unlock difficult issues.

The Panel systematically drew upon technical expertise from other entities, including the Assessment and Evaluation Commission established under the CPA, and the African Development Bank – whose expertise included debt and banking issues.

This high-level AU panel, partnering with IGAD, regularly briefing the UN Security Council, and systematically leveraging other diplomatic and technical resources illustrates the possibilities of combining creative and collaborative peacemaking, without diluting political leadership and the parties' ownership of the process.

## Blended negotiation formats – South Sudan

A witty definition of a treaty is 'a disagreement reduced to writing'. Although the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) addressed power sharing, inclusion, transitional justice, constitution making, a ceasefire, security sector reform, governance, and economic management, among others, this text masked deep and abiding political cleavages. In July 2016, the country returned to war, and Riek Machar, the main opposition leader, fled. Neither the UN Mission in South Sudan nor the agreement's Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) could prevent renewed conflict.

Yet, the government refused to countenance any re-negotiation of an agreement that no longer reflected political and security realities. The immense regional and international investment in securing the ceasefire and other commitments and architectures of the 2015 Agreement risked going to waste as the country slid back into hostilities and new armed groups emerged. New ideas were needed.

The Chair of JMEC, former President of Botswana Festus Mogae, promoted the idea of 'revitalising' rather than 'renegotiating' the 2015 agreement and called for broad engagements to include 'estranged groups' (a moniker for new armed and other opposition groups). Thus, JMEC designed a South Sudanese stakeholder consultation, through which the idea of a High-Level Revitalisation Forum (HLRF) was conceived.

IGAD's endorsement of the HLRF enabled a multi-stakeholder engagement to emerge, to include women and other marginalised constituencies such as refugees. This approach both masked and created opportunities for real political engagement on the prospect of reviving the ARCSS, beyond the reservations of the Juba government. Here too, multilateral entities invested in collaboration: while IGAD appointed a Special Envoy, it invited the AU to identify senior facilitators to assist its envoy to manage the HLRF deliberations.

While AU facilitators led the formal, large convenings in Addis Ababa, an IGAD team – comprising Ethiopia, the Special Envoy and Kenya – engaged the key parties in smaller, more focused, and often confidential, sessions. They shuttled, especially to Juba and South Africa, where Machar was confined under arrangements endorsed by the region and other international entities. Gradually, as it became clear that excluding Machar from the process was politically untenable, he was allowed to join the negotiations. Still, it took the leaders of Sudan and Uganda to secure the final signatures to the new agreement in 2018.

The disastrous unravelling of the 2015 Agreement demanded a new, credible effort to stop renewed violence, and re-secure the gains of the ARCSS. Through linguistic reformulations and adopting a flexible architecture – using multiple formats and facilitators – the HLRF was conceived to overcome acute sensitivity and resistance to reopening the ARCSS. Architectural innovation created space for real negotiations, and eventually nurtured a new political and diplomatic consensus, enabling the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (RARCSS) to be adopted in 2018.

## Pooling multilateral facilitation – Sudan's post-revolution negotiations

Following the Sudanese revolution that drove President Omer al-Bashir from power in April 2019, the AU and Ethiopia facilitated difficult negotiations between the military and civilian components, culminating in the signing of the Constitutional Declaration of July 2019. Based on these outcomes, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission to Sudan (UNITAMS) to assist in the managing of Sudan's expected transition.

However, like South Sudan's ARCSS, the Sudanese transition floundered: here, the reasons were complex but undoubtedly include the failure to address the decades of militarisation of Sudanese politics, a lack of genuine inclusivity, and the deficiency of guarantees and leverage for implementation of the accords. Reluctant to cede power to civilians, the military launched a coup d'état, deposing civilian prime minister Abdalla Hamdok in October 2021, effectively curtailing the transition.

With the collapse of the transition, UNITAMS was now thrust into an unexpected facilitation role, and sought to deploy its good offices to that end. Encountering both resistance and encouragement from domestic, regional and international actors, UNITAMS attempted to make sense of a crowded mediation space: competition for leadership of the process was intense; both IGAD and the AU announced separate initiatives.

## **STRUCTURAL INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY TRANSLATE INTO LEVERAGE OR SUCCESS.**

Eventually, the three bodies agreed to set aside differences and merge efforts through a Trilateral Mechanism; a formal three-way multilateral partnership, pooling resources and leverage. Thus, through a negotiated process, a collective multilateral effort for restoring the Sudanese transition was realised. Without cultivating this consensus, institutional competition would have further hampered peacemaking efforts.

Yet, structural innovation and collaboration do not automatically translate into leverage or success: in mid-April 2023, despite other efforts by regional and international actors, fighting broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in Khartoum. Conflict quickly spread to Darfur and other parts of the country, displacing millions. Sudan has been plunged into great peril, with regional and international actors drawn into the power struggle.

Faced with a new, grave, crisis, the need for an effective response became even more urgent. Building on the Trilateral Mechanism, the AU convened an Expanded Mechanism (along with a smaller Core Group) to collaborate on exploring pathways for addressing the latest crisis. This time, however, IGAD initiated its own political track led by four regional heads of state, though Kenya's role was resisted by the SAF, and Egypt launched a separate initiative of neighbouring states. In Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and the United States convened talks on a narrow set of issues around the delivery of a humanitarian assistance and a potential ceasefire.

With the League of Arab States, the UN, AU, IGAD and others pressing for involvement, the prospects for a coherent international response, that also amplifies the voices of civilians and non-armed actors, remained uncertain. Achieving consensus on a credible and coherent strategy to address the multiple dimensions of the crisis, with meaningful participation of civilian actors and other Sudanese stakeholders, including women, is a critical first step. All this would require innovative efforts and creative modes of collaboration from the various initiatives seeking to respond to Sudan's crisis, based on recognition of comparative advantages.

## **Securing consent, seizing opportunities: Ethiopia's Tigray negotiations**

After conflict broke out in Tigray in November 2020, the AU appointed former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo as High Representative for the Horn of Africa, charged with facilitating the resolution of the Tigray conflict. Months passed without a process taking shape, while the casualties in a particularly bloody conflict piled up. Perceiving the AU and its envoy to be inclined towards the government in Addis Ababa, the Tigrayans remained deeply sceptical of the AU initiative and Obasanjo's role, preferring an international architecture whose impartiality would be assured.

An impasse ensued. Each side held out for a decisive military outcome, while battlefield fortunes fluctuated, and a horrendous humanitarian situation unfolded. In the background, United States facilitators pursued de-escalation, even convening secret negotiations.

Under growing international pressure, the parties agreed to be convened by the AU after it appointed two additional facilitators, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, and South Africa's former Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. Tigrayans saw both as counterweights to Obasanjo.

Transforming the sole-facilitator role into a panel and moving the talks to South Africa were intended to increase confidence in the process after the Tigrayan side had resisted the AU-appointed mediator. And, indeed, the contribution of President Kenyatta and Deputy President Mlambo-Ngcuka, alongside dogged background work by South Africa, the United States and the United Nations observer, proved instrumental to securing the Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities after a week of negotiations in November 2022.

The Pretoria Agreement took many, including Ethiopians, by surprise and indeed generated criticism for its lack of inclusivity and its modest content. Building on the previous secret talks enabled by the US, the parties appeared to have seized the opportunity to lay down the building blocks for de-escalation, each having realised that the political, security and humanitarian costs of the conflict in Tigray had become unsustainable. Perhaps they also recognised that their other common challenges, including Eritrea's involvement in Ethiopia and Tigray, required collaboration between Tigray and the Federal Government of Ethiopia.



Military chiefs of the Ethiopian Armed Forces and Tigray rebel forces shake hands during a signing ceremony for the implementation of the permanent cessation of hostilities agreement between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, Nairobi, Kenya, 12 November 2022. © Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images

Though a relatively short text, the Pretoria Agreement set the stage for military de-escalation in Tigray, the establishment of a new Tigrayan government, and practical security guarantees, including the adoption of international monitoring mechanisms. It also committed the parties to other key processes including transitional justice, and a roadmap for further bilateral negotiations. It deferred important questions of detail and implementation.

After Pretoria, the talks moved to Nairobi where negotiations on security arrangements, and tensions, continued. With Kenya hosting, the parties reaffirmed the Pretoria approach; they clarified sequences for disarmament, modalities for joint implementation, and endorsed international oversight mechanisms, thus further consolidating the process.

**FACILITATORS JUDICIOUSLY APPLIED A LIGHT TOUCH, RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF DIRECT INTERACTIONS IN WHICH NEGOTIATORS COULD EXCHANGE ASSURANCES AND UNCOVER COMMON INTERESTS FOR THEMSELVES.**

A notable feature of the Tigrayan talks was the preference of the parties to hold direct negotiations. Building on historical relationships between the key negotiators and their prior secret talks, the parties often chose to negotiate without the presence of third-party facilitators, speaking local languages. By acquiescing to these requests, facilitators judiciously applied a light touch, recognising the value of direct interactions in which negotiators could exchange assurances and uncover common interests for themselves much faster than through a mediator.

The AU overcame Tigrayan resistance to a single mediator by establishing a panel of facilitators picked to ensure the concerns of each side would be addressed. Choosing additional facilitators from two key countries also allowed Pretoria and Nairobi to host the negotiations, and thus bring to bear their leverage, which was critical for achieving outcomes at each stage. An enlarged facilitation architecture did not need to tread heavily; mediators wisely allowed the conflict parties to negotiate directly, and clearly more effectively. However, the minimalist approach reflected in the Pretoria text may have foreshadowed, or contributed to, subsequent implementation delays.

## Innovation, practical collaboration, and leadership

Multilateral peacemaking no longer enjoys automatic deference. As the world faces ever more complex conflicts, increasingly assertive states and other entities are vying for mediation roles, often bringing self-interested leverage and influences to bear on the parties and shaping the trajectory of the conflict. How to counter fragmentation and competition with effective cooperation and coordination has become a critical collective obligation, requiring creativity.

### **HOW TO COUNTER FRAGMENTATION AND COMPETITION WITH EFFECTIVE COOPERATION AND COORDINATION HAS BECOME A CRITICAL COLLECTIVE OBLIGATION, REQUIRING CREATIVITY.**

The capacity to respond in novel ways to contemporary mediation challenges is an attribute of individual and institutional leadership. In Sudan, South Sudan and, belatedly in Ethiopia, multilateral institutions established joint oversight of peace processes, established panels, and harnessed leverage and support from different sources to overcome fragmentation and invigorate processes.

Beyond formal collaborations, key facilitators also brought to bear strategic vision and made critical creative interventions to initiate or bring focus to negotiations. In the Sudan post-referendum negotiations, Mbeki led an inductive process helping the parties to articulate a common vision and organising principle for the process: 'two viable states at peace with each other'. This brought much-needed conceptual clarity to a complex and politically challenging process, which could easily have suffered from a piecemeal approach.

For the stalled South Sudan agreement, Mogae helped IGAD to frame the process as a 'revitalisation' rather than a re-negotiation; through a novel mix of formats and political realism, IGAD gradually coaxed a new deal out of the South Sudanese stakeholders, including 'estranged groups'. In the Tigray process, the AU appointed additional facilitators, who enhanced the credibility of the process, and encouraged direct and incremental negotiations.

International and regional responses to Sudan in 2023 demonstrated the consequences of the failure of cohesion and effective collaboration among peacemakers. Although different facilitators brought some attention to a deepening crisis, their impacts remained negligible. But other contexts illustrated that where multiple mediation entities recognised the importance of collaboration, and explored novel ways to pool efforts, they registered successes. While innovation and creative adaptation are not panaceas, they are essential ingredients for harnessing the contribution of multiple mediation stakeholders in complex peace processes.



# INTERNATIONAL PRIVATE MEDIATORS IN A WORLD IN FLUX

Teresa Whitfield is Issue Editor of this *Accord*. See the Introduction for her biography.

**International private or non-governmental mediators have been a significant source of innovation in mediation practice. They are distinct from local or ‘insider’ mediators operating from within a society in conflict, but may frequently engage, support or partner with them. (The important roles played by these local mediators feature significantly elsewhere in this publication.) Private mediators’ capacity to work at different levels and in support of multilateral, regional, national, and local entities and conflict parties has made them a prominent feature of the response to the fragmented and internationalised internal conflicts that characterise today’s conflict landscape. Some increasingly facilitate backchannels and promote dialogue at an inter-state level as well.**

Like the rest of the mediation field, private mediators are nonetheless faced with difficult choices as they confront the changed strategic environment. They have adapted quickly to the rapid evolution of digital technologies and are also increasingly helping conflict parties address stresses induced by the climate emergency. Yet evolving geopolitics, and the new prominence of regional and middle powers in both conflicts and peace efforts, present questions about what private mediators – most of whom are largely funded by Western donors – can achieve, how they relate to important international and state actors and what principles they can uphold, and how.

## Origins and growth

The potential contribution of unofficial actors to peacemaking came to the fore in October 1992, when mediation by the ecclesiastical Community of Sant’ Egidio concluded with the signing of the General Peace Agreement between the Government of Mozambique and its armed opposition in the Mozambican National Resistance, RENAMO. Less visible at this time was the work behind the scenes by Norwegian and Israeli

academics and members of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in early 1993 that would set in train the Oslo process, and Norway’s commitment to patient and creative peacemaking. These and other engagements (including by the Carter Center) reflected the new space for informal mediators that was opening after the Cold War as the constraints of the previous decades were beginning to loosen. But it was still a moment when the UN and other official mediation actors dominated.

Over the following decades several new non-governmental mediation organisations were founded and others evolved to fill a niche resulting from the state-centred focus and protocols of the more formal actors. Private actors with the ability to draw upon the skills and contacts gained in the official world were well placed to act with an independence, flexibility, and discretion not available to official actors, and particularly well suited to early contacts with non-state armed groups, including those nationally or internationally proscribed as terrorists. They were also able to prove their utility to governments sensitive to the implication of another state or multilateral organisation in their internal conflicts, and attracted by the discretion, deniability, and – if things went wrong – ease of dismissal offered by private actors.

These attributes were all evident in the involvement of non-governmental mediators in negotiations between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Government of Indonesia. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), founded in 1999, had shifted the focus of its early work in Aceh away from the humanitarian crisis and towards facilitating talks to resolve the separatist conflict. The process broke down in December 2002, but was later brought to a successful conclusion by the former President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, and the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) he had founded as an independent organisation in 2000.

HD’s early work continued to focus on facilitation of channels and negotiations in internal conflicts. In 2003 it began exploring contacts with the Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), at the time included on terrorist lists by the United States and European



Ram Manikkalingam, Director of the Dialogue Advisory Group, speaks to the press in his role as chair of the International Verification Commission for the peace process in the Basque Country, with his fellow commissioners in the background, Bilbao, 21 February 2014. © Rafa Rivas/AFP via Getty Images

Union (EU). These would be the first steps in a 15-year involvement that concluded in May 2018, when the announcement of ETA's final dissolution was made at the Centre's Geneva headquarters. Along the way, other non-governmental individuals and organisations also became involved, in some instances – as in the leadership by the Dialogue Advisory Group (DAG) of an International Verification Commission to monitor ETA's ceasefire and disarmament – with a much more public profile. By this time, HD had changed considerably. It had a decentralised structure, with most of its staff located internationally and many of them 'insider' mediators. Active in 80% of the world's most violent conflicts, in 2023 it was by some distance the largest actor in an expanded ecosystem of private entities mediating conflicts and advising and supporting parties at different levels.

In addition to CMI (renamed CMI–Martti Ahtisaari Foundation), the Community of Sant' Egidio, which has retained its particular expertise in Africa, and the Carter Center (less involved in mediation than in the past), the most prominent of the Western-based organisations working internationally include: the Berghof Foundation and the European Institute for Peace (EIP), like HD, headed by former UN officials; two smaller entities, Inter Mediate and DAG, which are headed by former government officials with first-hand experience of

peacemaking in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka respectively; as well as Conciliation Resources, which built from a focus on peacebuilding to support peace processes in Colombia, Ethiopia and the Philippines.

A wider array of organisations are members of an informal Mediation Support Network (MSN). These include prominent mediation support and peacebuilding actors in the Global South, such as: ACCORD, based in South Africa, which since 1992 has been a leading actor in the building of mediation capacity across the continent; the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), established in response to the region's conflicts of the 1990s in 1998; and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) in Cambodia, founded in 2008 to strengthen and support Asian approaches to conflict transformation, and an active partner in a network of South East Asian women mediators. The MSN has proven an effective means of sharing expertise across the sector. It also includes both the UN's Mediation Support Unit, and organisations such as swisspeace, the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF), the Swedish Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) and the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), with funding arrangements and mandates from their governments that give them a somewhat hybrid profile.

## Adaptation and innovation

Collectively, the non-governmental organisations quickly extended the breadth and depth of their work. They take seriously a commitment to improve the practice of mediation and peacemaking (a number have developed particular expertise in training) and to pioneer practice on core issues such as gender and inclusion, as well as newer areas such as climate security and environmental peacemaking or digital technologies, which have at the same time been the subject of attention by the UN and other multilateral organisations. With a commitment to conflict transformation maintained over fifty years, the Berghof Foundation grew outwards from an original focus on peace research and continues to integrate research with operational support, including on subjects such as engaging with protest movements to strengthen non-violent strategies.

**PRIVATE MEDIATION ENTITIES SEE THEIR GREATEST ASSETS AS THEIR INDEPENDENCE, IMPARTIALITY, AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT EXTEND FROM THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS ALL THE WAY TO CONFLICT-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES OR ARMED GROUPS.**

Most of the more prominent private mediation entities see their greatest assets as their independence, impartiality, and relationships that extend from the highest levels of government and international organisations all the way to conflict-affected communities or armed groups. They benefit from their ability to hire former diplomats and negotiators as senior advisers and door-openers as well as to work with local partners, and to remain engaged in conflict contexts over many years, often working quietly, away from the spotlight. They draw support from donors – for the most part Western governments and institutions such as the EU – who invest strategically in work they cannot do themselves.

Yet operational exigencies that regularly demand discretion, and a business model that makes competition almost inevitable (including, in some instances, between donors anxious to play a role in given conflicts), have at times led to criticism. Conscious of the reputational risks that this entails, over the years the larger organisations have developed commitments to identified values and operating principles. In 2020, the leading

private mediation actors together agreed a ‘statement of intent of complementarity’ that sought to maximise their combined impact and minimise risks of duplication or contradiction (see Further reading). More robust systems of accountability have helped document their work, but balancing the need to demonstrate impact with the difficulty of doing so given their commitment to a low profile is not easy. Moreover, while pressure to assess results has grown, the results themselves have in some respects become more intangible: with long-term agreements more infrequently obtainable, their efforts can still make valuable contributions to the reduction of violence or conditions created for political talks to take place. But such achievements are hard to quantify.

**WHILE PRESSURE TO ASSESS RESULTS HAS GROWN, THE RESULTS THEMSELVES HAVE IN SOME RESPECTS BECOME MORE INTANGIBLE.**

Experience has highlighted the benefits of partnerships. These have ranged from formal arrangements – such as a ‘hybrid’ International Contact Group that brought states (Japan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the United Kingdom) and international NGOs (The Asia Foundation, Conciliation Resources, HD and Muhammadiyah) together to support negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front – to much more informal collaborations. Examples of the latter include the range of non-governmental mediation and peace supporters around the Basque peace process, or the collaboration between a Swiss ambassador, HD, Inter Mediate and a national mediator in Mozambique in support of negotiations that concluded in a new peace agreement between the government and RENAMO in August 2019. Many organisations sustain creative partnerships with local mediators, offering a mix of advice and capacity building, technical and logistical support, and in some instances access to resources.

Collaboration with official actors extends from informal exchange in contexts such as the annual Oslo Forum mediators’ retreats, co-hosted by Norway and HD, to operational partnerships. ACCORD has for many years provided close support of the African Union and the continent’s sub-regional organisations. CMI has also worked closely with African institutions; separately, it developed a specialisation in support for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and remains deeply engaged in Eastern Europe. EIP’s proximity to the European Union and a board of governors comprised of nine European member states gives it a particular mix of flexibility and diplomatic access.

Several UN missions have gained from private entities' relationships with actors either beyond their reach or whom they have not been able to prioritise, sometimes out of a need to maintain their impartiality or distance. In Yemen, years of peacemaking efforts led by the UN have been complemented by consultations at the local level led by the Berghof Foundation and other NGOs. EIP, for example, has worked to build the capacity of southern Yemen actors. In Libya, HD worked with the UN mission to expand the range of participants in a National Conference planned for 2019. After this was torpedoed by the outbreak of open conflict, it provided support as the UN worked towards a ceasefire and the resumption of a political process. DAG, meanwhile, helped the UN reach out to armed groups, while Chatham House provided economic expertise, and International IDEA support on constitutional issues. At the request of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, swisspeace and NOREF supported the Syrian Civil Society Support Room, enabling civil society actors to share perspectives with the Special Envoy.

Such relationships are most effective when the UN envoy or other official lead is able to 'conduct' the orchestra of non-governmental partners, and they each have a clear understanding of the parts they are assigned to play.

**WITH THE FLEXIBILITY TO OPERATE WHEN AND WHERE STATES AND MULTILATERALS CAN'T, UNOFFICIAL MEDIATORS ARE IN SOME RESPECTS WELL PLACED TO CHART THE DIFFICULT PERIOD AHEAD.**

## New frontiers

With the flexibility to operate when and where states and multilaterals can't, to tap into different networks through a wide range of partnerships, and to continue to push thinking and practice forward into new areas of work, unofficial mediators should be well placed to chart the difficult period ahead. As the development of their field has been primarily rooted in and supported by the West, this will involve rebalancing their work to be most effective in a new geopolitical context while navigating an increasingly challenging funding environment.

The return of inter-state war in Ukraine and the high levels of geopolitical polarisation impeding bilateral diplomacy elsewhere have already pushed a number of the mediation organisations to engage more directly at the inter-state level. This takes different forms, from the support to official actors on the Black Sea Grain Initiative described on p.53 below, to quiet engagement between a state and its neighbours on issues of contention, work with governments on internationalised conflicts, or the facilitation of discussions on regional issues. For several years, HD has facilitated dialogue among officials from the states bordering the South China Sea to reduce the risk of maritime confrontation and conserve resources. EIP, meanwhile, has supported confidential dialogue among high-level individuals from the countries bordering the Arabian Gulf to try to develop initiatives to de-escalate tension.

Conscious of the challenges ahead, many of the private mediation organisations recognise that, if they seek to maintain credibility on a global stage, as well as effectiveness at the local and national levels, a strategic priority will be to establish and build trusted relationships with a sufficiently diverse range of partners. In a multipolar world in which peacemaking has become increasingly transactional, maintaining their independence, values, and impartiality as they do so will not always be straightforward.

## MEDIATION ALONGSIDE THE HELL OF WAR: THE BLACK SEA GRAIN DEAL

*Teresa Whitfield is Issue Editor of this Accord. See the Introduction for her biography.*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 precipitated a devastating war and Europe's most profound security crisis since the Second World War. It also triggered a major shock to the global economy, with dramatic rises in the prices of energy, food and fertilisers. The determined response by Ukraine and its Western backers created military dynamics that rendered a negotiated solution a distant prospect. Yet in the first few months of the war an ambitious mediation facilitated by the UN and Türkiye produced parallel agreements known as the 'Black Sea Grain Initiative'. Over the next year the safe passage of commercial ships through a heavily mined war zone proceeded without incident. The extension of the initiative became increasingly fraught, but nearly 33 million tonnes of grain were exported to 45 countries, helping reduce and stabilise spiralling global food prices.

The effort was innovative on several fronts, but in some respects also a classic mediation. It was innovative in engaging conflict parties aggressively pursuing military campaigns against each other on economic and humanitarian issues with no direct bearing on their fighting. As in any negotiation, however, it was structured around proposals that could appeal to the interests of each side: Ukraine stood to gain from

**TWO SEPARATE BUT PARALLEL PROCESSES, ONE ADDRESSING THE GRAIN SHIPMENTS THROUGH THE BLACK SEA AND THE OTHER RUSSIA'S OWN AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS, REPRESENTED THE MEDIATION'S MOST DISTINCTIVE INNOVATION, BUT ALSO ITS PRINCIPAL VULNERABILITY.**

a renewed flow of export revenues, and Russia to counter perceptions that its actions were damaging already fragile economies in Africa and the Middle East. That each would play ball was by no means assured. Ukraine feared exploitation by Russia of the opening of its ports. Russia insisted on UN support for its efforts to export its wheat and fertilisers in return for easing the blockade it had established in the Black Sea. This led to the pursuit of two separate but parallel processes, one addressing the grain shipments through the Black Sea and the other Russia's own agricultural exports. The dual track represented the mediation's most distinctive innovation, but also its principal vulnerability.

The mediation rested on effective and unusual partnerships, mobilised at speed. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, and his senior officials drew upon actors from around the UN system, the private sector and civil society. Among the latter, HD had been present in Ukraine since 2014 and had a network of contacts attuned to agricultural conditions within the country as well as the impacts of rising food prices internationally. With access to the UN at the highest levels, it engaged with the Secretary-General's office as the initiative was taking shape and provided support as the pace of work picked up.

Guterres pitched an outline of the eventual deal when he visited Ankara and then Moscow and Kyiv in April 2022. He charged two UN Task Forces to take forward discussions, one on Ukrainian grain shipments through the Black Sea (led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths), and the other on the access of Russian food and fertilisers to the global market (led by Rebecca Grynspan, Secretary-General of the UN trade and development body, UNCTAD). Türkiye was uniquely placed to complement the UN role, drawing on the hard leverage of its geostrategic position, as well as the strong relations maintained by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine and its own significant interests in the success of the initiative.

The warring states could not be expected to sit down together, which meant that the final deal required parallel agreements of each with the UN and Türkiye, signed in Istanbul on 22 July 2022. The parties established a Joint Coordination Centre to be staffed by the UN and nationals of Russia, Türkiye and Ukraine. In a separate Memorandum of Understanding agreed with Russia, the UN Secretariat committed to promoting the access of Russian food products and fertilisers to the world market. Russia's unhappiness with the pace of its implementation would shadow negotiations about the extension of the grain deal in the year to come. On 17 July 2023 these culminated in its decision to pull out, and therefore the deal's collapse. But back in Istanbul a year earlier, Guterres, flanked by President Erdoğan, had been justified in welcoming the Black Sea Grain Initiative as 'a beacon of hope on the Black Sea'.

# EYES ON THE LONG TERM

## Reconceptualising the negotiation of political settlements

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**In the 'golden age' of mediation, immediately after the end of the Cold War, peace agreements aimed to provide definitive answers to the questions which led societies down the road to violence and civil war. 'Comprehensive peace agreements' sought not only to stop the immediate fighting but to revise the fundamental nature of the state and society to make the resurgence of violence impossible.**

The Dayton Agreement, for example, which ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, contained provisions related to the protection of human rights, treatment of displaced persons, preservation of national monuments and restitution of property. It also included the Constitution of the State of Bosnia-Herzegovina as an annex.

Such detailed agreements are correlated with long-term reductions in violence (documented, for example, by Joshi and Quinn). However, the heyday of detailed comprehensive agreements is long over. The opportunities for negotiating comprehensive peace agreements are vanishingly rare today due to the nature of societies in which conflicts are taking place and a lack of consensus in the international system. Most intra-state conflicts today involve multiple conflict parties, sometimes with weak command-and-control structures, fighting in fragile states. Many conflicts also have a 'proxy war' dimension or are otherwise impacted by the involvement of external actors.

The difficulty of reaching comprehensive agreements – and their limitations – has in some instances led to the negotiation of 'framework agreements', which outline the details of a process through which unresolved issues would be addressed without necessarily agreeing upon content. Such agreements perform an important function in contemporary conflict resolution, but, as we will see, are rarely smoothly implemented. More recently, even agreement on frameworks has proved elusive, leading

to 'partial' agreements to halt or reduce violence without addressing the root causes of the conflict. Such agreements often take the form of local ceasefires or temporary truces, as seen in Syria and Yemen. Although not necessarily damaging in and of themselves, these may have negative side-effects (such as displacement) and reduce interest in an overall settlement to the conflict.

It is essential to find a way to ensure that decades of death and destruction do not give way to an unending succession of corrupt, self-serving governments that prey upon and suppress their populations. This requires mediators and conflict parties to chart a course between the quixotic search for a perfect 'comprehensive' agreement and the negotiation of often utopic 'framework agreements', or unsatisfying 'partial' agreements.

Doing so requires a reconceptualisation of mediation as an *iterative process*, which seeks to produce a series of micro-agreements (formal or informal) over time and must engage an evolving (and hopefully increasingly inclusive) set of constituencies. In today's complex environment, this long-term, adaptive perspective offers a viable path to a sustainable and equitable end to violence. Applying such an approach requires significant innovation, not only in the way agreements are conceived, crafted, implemented, and evaluated, but also in the way mediation teams and donor support are structured.

### The benefits and limits of 'framework' agreements

Despite their potential benefits, comprehensive agreements have important limitations. Peace processes are all necessarily exclusionary to some extent: even in cases where more inclusive dialogues are attempted, powerful veto players are given the principal say on key provisions of the texts. This is normatively problematic, especially if the agreement establishes long-term principles on the structure of the state.

Moreover, codifying long-term governance principles in the heat of conflict encourages the creation of systems which accentuate inter-group differences and make cross-party coalitions more difficult. Both the Dayton agreement in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Ta'if agreement in Lebanon, for example, created fixed confessional or ethnic systems for dividing power that cemented cleavages, which remain in place today. Given these factors, one should not lament the demise of comprehensive peace agreements too emphatically.

However, this is not to recommend that peace agreements only address the steps necessary to halt immediate violence. The signature of a peace accord can provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform society. This opportunity should not be wasted by simply agreeing to pause fighting and divide up government posts between the warring factions.

One solution to bridge the gap between comprehensive and partial agreements has been the negotiation of 'framework' agreements that put an immediate stop to the violence and outline the *process* through which the broader post-conflict political settlement will be established. An early example of this approach is the 1991 Framework for a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, otherwise known as the Paris Peace Agreement, which created a mixed international-domestic transitional administration, and outlined the process of getting to elections and a post-conflict constitution.

Most framework agreements envisage three phases. First, the conclusion of a ceasefire, where parties lay down their arms; second, the establishment of a political transition in which belligerents jointly manage the state; and third, a process of structural reform and statebuilding, typically including constitutional reform and elections, as well as processes of transitional justice, security sector reform, and post-conflict reconstruction and development.

These three phases are interlinked, often overlapping, and may compromise and complicate one another. Smooth and linear progress from one phase to the next is rare. Bell and Zulueta-Fülscher, for example, note that the linear trajectories outlined in the peace agreements reached in Somalia in 2000 and 2002, in Yemen in 2011, and in Libya in 2015 (and, indeed, 2020–21) were not followed. Processes move backwards and forwards between the three ideal conceptual phases of ceasefire, transition, and reform.

The continuous negotiation and renegotiation witnessed in most post-conflict contexts has led some to contend that formal 'framework' agreements provide an illusory image of the structured process to be followed. Instead, Bell and Pospisil suggest many post-conflict states exist in a state of 'formalised political unsettlement'. Recognising that this is the most likely outcome of

a negotiation process requires international actors to think creatively about the potential benefits of uncertainty and flux.

Accepting that the terms of the political settlement will be renegotiated and revised reduces the 'finality' of any agreement, preventing the emergence of perceived 'winners' and 'losers'. This flexibility allows the accommodation of new groups (including the management of spoilers), adaptation to any shift in alliances, and changes to the priorities and balance of power between constituencies. Such flexibility is particularly useful in contemporary contexts of fragmentation. It also provides opportunities for excluded groups to peacefully press their claims over time, which may lead to gradually more inclusive institutions and systems of governance. Moreover, the assumption that negotiation will remain at the heart of institutional decision-making incorporates a long-term vision of compromise-based politics which may be more appropriate for conflict-prone societies than 'winner-takes-all' majoritarian, or even other forms of, democratic systems. However, such an iterative, open-ended approach also requires serious thinking about guarantees and vetoes to forestall the risk of conflict continuing or agreements being made in bad faith, as discussed below.

**RECOGNISING THAT PEACE PROCESSES ARE OFTEN ITERATIVE AND REQUIRE CONSTANT RENEGOTIATION MEANS THAT THE ROLE OF MEDIATORS CANNOT END WITH THE SIGNATURE OF AN ACCORD.**

## Mediation in contexts of formalised political unsettlement

Recognising that peace processes are often iterative and require constant renegotiation means that the role of mediators cannot end with the signature of an accord. Indeed, in many contexts, transitions are catalysed without a formal agreement being reached. Such ad hoc transitions do not obviate the need for mediation, negotiation and international support but rather may require more of them. The 2015 Nobel Peace Prize, for example, was awarded to four Tunisian civil society organisations for their mediation of a series of agreements between political parties which allowed the Tunisian transition to move ahead. It entailed neither a comprehensive agreement nor a framework agreement, but a continuous process of negotiation between key constituencies. Mediation can perform an important function even in contexts where there is no formal peace agreement, including cases of decisive military victory or unconstitutional regime change, such as coups and mass social protests.



Negotiating the transition in Tunisia: Ettakatol, Ennahda and CPR politicians inside the Constituent Assembly (2011) © Fethi Belaid

Mediators also play important roles in distinct phases of a peace and transition process – from ceasefires to political reforms. For example, in Burundi, an initial ceasefire in August 2000 did not include several key parties to the conflict. Through continued efforts they were later convinced to lay down their arms and join the ceasefire. In other contexts, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo following the 2002 Sun City Agreement, mediators have been less effective in engaging those opposed to an initial ceasefire. Keeping the door open for groups to join a ceasefire and contribute to a process of political transition and reform (notwithstanding the potential need to maintain military pressure) may incentivise groups to join a ceasefire process at a later stage.

The power-sharing phase of an agreement is also prone to setbacks and difficulties. The structure of the power-sharing government formed in 2001 in Burundi was subject to disputes which were only resolved by continued mediation efforts and several restructurings of the transitional executive and legislature over four until 2005. In Sudan, the coalition of military and civil leaders charged with managing the transition to democracy in 2019 broke down when the military seized power in 2021; a further clash between erstwhile power-sharing partners plunged the country back into violence in April 2023.

During the third, 'reform', phase of a transition, mediators, conflict parties and international supporters of the process must tread a fine line between securing sufficient agreement to allow a process to move forward while allowing the reform and state-building

processes enough leeway to make genuine changes. This phase provides the greatest opportunity for the inclusive and participatory processes essential for the reform and transformation of the post-conflict state. However, opening up decision making to new social constituencies demands a careful balancing of public participation with elite vetoes. For example, the highly inclusive National Dialogue in Yemen (2012–14) partly failed due to the opposition of powerful groups from the north and south of the country, the Houthi and al-Hirak respectively, which felt that the process did not sufficiently protect their interests. The constitution-drafting process launched in Libya with the election of a constituent assembly in February 2014 also failed, partly because its deliberations were divorced from the considerations of the main conflict parties.

Concretely, if we consider, for example, a process of constitutional reform, drafters of an agreement should consider outlining processes of participant selection, the mandate given to the bodies established, and the steps of the process to come (with a realistic timeframe). A framework agreement, unlike a comprehensive agreement, would be careful about overdetermining the content of the new constitution or delineating the governance model to be adopted. This type of approach to peace talks allowed the demobilisation of several armed groups in Colombia and their participation in the 1990 Constituent Assembly. The Paris Peace Agreement in Cambodia and the South African peace process managed the balance between the interests of key conflict parties and the need for broader public participation well.



## Lessons for international assistance

Sometimes the careful drafting of agreements may alleviate some of the risks of elite capture and entrenchment leading to conflict resurgence. The use of 'sunset' and 'sunrise' clauses, for example, which outline when temporary provisions will end and what will then replace them respectively, are useful. However, such text-based approaches will only work if they reflect the existing political and military balance of power. These can sometimes be shaped by sustained pressure and support from domestic and international actors, but safeguarding against reversals, missed deadlines and reneging by parties needs vigilance.

Sustained engagement requires a degree of continuity and unity of purpose from components of the international community supporting the process. In Libya, for example, momentum was lost after the successful conclusion of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) in January 2021, due to a change in the UN leadership and faltering international support. The Government of National Unity, which was intended to last for only one year, was allowed to entrench itself. While international unity may be elusive, continuity in official mediation teams and strategy where possible, and detailed handovers and explicit rationales for changes in approach where necessary, could be more easily encouraged.

**MEDIATORS MUST BE ATTUNED TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN A PROCESS MUST BE CALCULATED IN TERMS OF YEARS, RATHER THAN DAYS AND MONTHS.**

International development assistance and financial aid should be conflict sensitive and linked to progress within each phase of the process. In Sudan, for example, lack of international support to the economy, which might have been linked to certain benchmarks on the inclusivity of the transitional administration, helped contribute to its military capture. While the political and potentially contested nature of processes of national dialogue and/or constitutional reform is often recognised by international actors, it is common for supporters of peace processes (and sometimes conflict parties themselves) to consider other reform processes, including security sector reform, transitional justice, and economic and development programming, as technical – rather than highly political – processes. There is a need for dialogue and mediation capacity to support all processes designed to help rebuild post-conflict societies.

The assumption that the revision and renegotiation of prior agreements is essential and does not constitute a failure of the process requires donors to rethink models of assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of mediation initiatives. With this mindset, the conclusion of micro-

agreements and continued engagement of parties in dialogue and negotiation is a success in and of itself. Mediators must also be attuned to the possibility that their involvement in a process must be calculated in terms of years, rather than days and months.

On the other hand, sustained international involvement in the internal and domestic political affairs of a post-conflict state may raise concerns about the sovereignty and legitimacy of constitutive processes. As such, insider mediators – those who come from the societies in which they are mediating – should be better supported by external actors, while paying careful attention to the maintenance of impartiality and independence. Insider mediators possess significant advantages, notably legitimacy, commitment, and nuanced appreciation of the micro-dynamics of a society. However, they are also prone to intimidation, manipulation and perceived or real biases. Long-term mediation in contexts of formalised political unsettlement is consequently best achieved through genuine partnerships between domestic, regional and international stakeholders.

## Beyond comprehensive and partial peace processes: an iterative approach

If the gap between unattainable 'comprehensive peace agreements' and unsatisfying 'partial agreements' is to be successfully bridged, mediators must help parties develop adaptive frameworks and design processes to answer the complex questions facing society in a sustainable and inclusive manner. This requires balancing the short-term interests of the conflict parties with the longer-term interest of broader society and future generations. A process which diverges too drastically from the perceived interests of key constituencies is likely to be torpedoed by veto players, as we have seen in Sudan. However, a process which simply reproduces elite-dominated and unresponsive governance models which fail a vast majority of the population is also likely to sow the seeds of future discontentment and conflict. Mediation should seek to maintain this delicate balance as the peace and transition process moves forward.

Mediators and donors must recognise that the linear model of ceasefire to power-sharing political transition to permanent constitution and democratic elections rarely works. The (re)negotiation of a country's political settlement after civil war is most often an iterative process. For donor support, mediation teams and international post-conflict development and state-building programmes to be designed and evaluated accordingly requires significant innovation. Careful and flexible drafting of peace agreements, diligent monitoring of progress, and sustained, conflict-sensitive and tailored international support will help ensure that formalised political unsettlement, where agreements are adapted and revised over time, promotes long-term prosperity and stability and thus the best outcomes for populations.

## GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS: THE ECONOMIC TRACK IN YEMEN'S PEACE PROCESS

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**The conflict in Yemen has garnered international attention primarily for its regional dimensions and the humanitarian crisis it has caused. The early UN-led peace efforts, in successive rounds of shuttle diplomacy and mediation, focused almost exclusively on reaching agreements on the political and military arrangements needed to stop the conflict and start a political process. The economic dimensions, by contrast, were largely overlooked. More recent recognition that economic issues are key to resolving the conflict represents a critical shift and calls for attention and creativity if they are to be fully integrated into and supported in the wider political process.**

### Economic conflict

As the military battles for territorial dominance in Yemen have slowly subsided, the struggle for control over key economic resources and institutions has taken centre stage. The fight over the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) exemplifies this. After conflict broke out in early 2015, tensions around control of the CBY simmered for 18 months. They culminated in the Saudi-backed and internationally recognised government replacing the CBY's board and relocating its headquarters from Sana'a, controlled by the rebel Houthi movement ('Ansar Allah') to the temporary capital Aden in September 2016. The CBY was no longer able to pay public sector salaries regularly due to declining government revenues and the fragmentation of fiscal authorities, giving rise to the 'salaries crisis' that persists today.

The relocated CBY printed significant amounts of money, causing spiralling inflation and eventually leading, at the end of 2019, to the de facto authorities in Sana'a banning use of banknotes printed by the Aden-based government in the areas they controlled. This effectively established two currencies in the country and with it the 'currency crisis', also still ongoing. Finally, the fragmentation of the CBY has had significant ramifications on the banking sector, which became the victim of regulatory conflict between the competing CBY administrations in Sana'a and Aden.

Further contestation over access of fuel shipments to Hudaydah port, export of crude oil from government-controlled areas, the re-opening of Sana'a airport, control over oil-producing governorates and oil export revenues, the telecommunications sector, the supply of cooking gas, and control over the national air carrier, Yemenia airways, demonstrates beyond doubt that control over resources is a critical driver of the conflict in Yemen.

### Economic peacemaking

Yet international mediation and peacemaking efforts have fallen short of addressing the economic dimensions of the conflict adequately. The official UN-led peace process engaged with some of these issues – including the economic file as one of the confidence-building measures in the Stockholm consultations in December 2018, and brokered a temporary agreement for access of fuel shipments to Hudaydah port in early 2020 (a deal which collapsed a few months later). However, it was not until January 2022 that the new Special Envoy, Hans Grundberg, announced that the framework for the peace process would include three tracks: political, military/security, and economic.

*continued...*



An employee of Yemen's Central Bank counts stacks of Yemeni currency at the bank's headquarters in the Houthi-controlled capital Sana'a, Yemen, 23 June 2021. © Mohammed Huwais/AFP via Getty Images

Three out of the five points of the truce announced in April 2022 were related to the economic file (entry of fuel ships to Hudaydah port, flights out of Sana'a airport, and opening of roads in Taiz). Negotiations to extend the truce again centred primarily on economic issues; Grundberg announced in October 2022 that he had submitted a proposal to the parties to extend the truce by six months with additional elements including 'the payment of civil servant salaries and pensions, the opening of specific roads in Taiz and other governorates, additional destinations for flights to and from Sanaa airport, unhindered entry of fuel ships into Hudaydah port'. While the truce was not formally extended, it has largely held. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has continued direct talks with the Houthi movement, increasingly publicly and visibly as they progressed. Within these negotiations, economic issues and especially questions surrounding the payment of public sector salaries have taken centre stage.

### **Priorities for future mediation**

If the Saudi-Houthi talks succeed in reaching an agreement, including with the internationally recognised government, the economic track will have a prominent role in the next stages of the peace process and the UN roadmap. This will require the international community to provide political support and an authorising environment to move it forward. It will also require a significant boost in the political economy and economic negotiation resources and capacities of the Office of the UN Special Envoy to lead its mediation.

**THE ECONOMIC TRACK  
WILL HAVE A PROMINENT  
ROLE IN THE NEXT STAGES  
OF THE PEACE PROCESS  
AND THE UN ROADMAP.**

## **SECTION 3**

# **Engaging resistant, elusive and excluded parties in peace mediation**

# ENGAGING RESISTANT, ELUSIVE AND EXCLUDED PARTIES IN PEACE MEDIATION

Teresa Whitfield is Issue Editor of this *Accord*. See the Introduction for her biography.

**A broad international consensus on the benefits of inclusion – evident, for example, in the twin resolutions on ‘sustaining peace’ adopted by the UN General Assembly and Security Council in April 2016 – belies considerable confusion as to who is to be included in what, and how. Mediators have long prioritised the inclusion of conflict parties necessary to stop the killing. The benefits of also involving broader constituencies whose participation might contribute to any resulting agreement’s legitimacy and durability are now broadly accepted (see *Accord* 29). Such inclusion is frequently resisted by the conflict parties themselves, yet pressure for processes that embrace plurality, diversity and participation by distinct communities affected by conflict, as well as professional and business actors whose support of a peace effort may prove critical, is consistent.**

Both types of inclusion are important for moving from the short-term needs of violence reduction and humanitarian access to longer-term processes of implementation and peacebuilding.

Engaging violent parties that are proscribed as terrorists or primarily identified as criminal organisations is complicated both by the dynamics of conflict and violence in which they are involved, and by the national and international laws and enforcement mechanisms established in response. Indeed, writing in 2020, Magnus Lundgren and Isak Svensson found that a ‘surprising decline’ of track one international mediation (i.e. involving conflict parties’ leadership) could be explained by the rise in number of Islamist armed actors, coupled with the more frequent recourse to the listing of armed groups as terrorist since 2001.

With a focus on the challenge of engaging Islamist groups sanctioned by the UN for their association with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, Jerome Drevon on p.64 assesses how legal obstacles to mediation are compounded by the groups’ identities, strategies and resistance to the international order. While humanitarian and private mediators especially have found creative ways to engage, he suggests potential innovation in more flexible UN sanctions regimes, including by developing criteria for de-listing of groups that show signs of willingness to engage in political processes.

**ENGAGING VIOLENT PARTIES THAT ARE PROSCRIBED AS TERRORISTS OR PRIMARILY IDENTIFIED AS CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS IS COMPLICATED BY THE DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE IN WHICH THEY ARE INVOLVED, AND BY THE LAWS AND ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS ESTABLISHED IN RESPONSE.**

Between 2015 and 2021, according to the UN’s *Global Study on Homicide 2023*, organised crime was responsible for as many deaths as all armed conflicts combined. Strategies to respond to this widespread violence have rarely extended to formal mediation, yet engagements of different kinds with criminal organisations have always taken place. Rafael Gude, Adrian Bergmann, and Alexandra Abello Colak in their article on p.68 address the challenge presented by the blurring of lines between criminal and political violence and examine the evolving practice in negotiating with criminal actors in the Americas, arguing for its potential in effectively reducing violence.



Colombian President Gustavo Petro speaks to the press at the opening of a Unified Command Site for Life in Buenaventura, Colombia, part of his 'total peace' policy aimed at comprehensively addressing violence in the country, 6 September 2022. © Joaquin Sarmiento/AFP via Getty Images

President Gustavo Petro's ambitious strategy of 'total peace' in Colombia includes parallel engagements with non-state armed groups and criminal structures of widely different reach. It is being closely watched across a region where many states are suffering from high levels of criminal violence and where there is a resurgence of interest in *mano dura* ('iron fist') tactics. After a dramatic explosion of gang violence in Ecuador in early 2024, for example, President Daniel Noboa ordered the armed forces to restore order and declared a 60-day state of emergency. A violent response led the president to take an unprecedented step in the combat of organised crime and declare 'an internal armed conflict'.

Broadening the frame of analysis, Jeff Seul on p.72 steps back to assess the challenges of mediating collisions of worldview in violent conflicts. Recognising that most violent conflicts have a worldview dimension, he argues that mediators will need to recognise that expectations that parties will change or compromise their core values will be frustrated. The challenge then is how to help reach a realistic and sustainable outcome that works across multiple worldviews. While the diversification of mediators and approaches may help increase awareness and acceptance of 'moral pluralism', Seul also cautions that mediators need to

develop a nuanced awareness of their own worldviews, and therefore the biases with which they engage. In an interview addressing work he has led within the Cordoba Peace Institute, Abbas Aroua draws attention to the revitalisation of Islamic peace resources as one means of engaging across divides.

Efforts towards processes more inclusive of unarmed actors have proceeded unevenly. Mediators and their mandating institutions have adopted specific strategies to enable the meaningful participation of women, and, more recently, young people too, in the face of consistent, if varied, resistance. Esra Çuhadar on p.78 analyses the differences in the type – implicit, explicit, and coercive – and depth of resistance women have faced as well as the distinct innovations within and around a peace process to counter resistance. An interview with Habiba Sarabi, a former member of the government negotiating delegation in Afghanistan, on p.81 recalls how deliberate strategies to increase the participation and influence of women met with resistance from the Taliban and were then overtaken by the downwards trajectory of the process. Any incentive the Taliban might have had to moderate their positions on the rights of women and girls in the context of negotiation was overridden by their military victory.

In her analysis of the gap between the aspiration and reality of inclusion in African peacemaking on p.83, Chido Mutangadura documents a pioneering institutional commitment to inclusion at the regional and sub-regional level – rooted in formal commitments to the women, peace, and security agenda and then, more recently, the youth, peace, and security agenda – and the efforts of practitioners and peacebuilders to push for more inclusive strategies and multi-track mediation. More needs to be done to draw on the innovative practice that women and young people have brought to the continent’s peacemaking, and to encourage mediators and their advisers to access and implement the best practice available to them.

**RESISTANCE COMMITTEES IN THE VANGUARD OF SUDAN’S POLITICAL MOBILISATION HAVE PURSUED A ‘MAXIMALIST’ APPROACH TO POLITICAL CHANGE, WHICH HAS CHALLENGED INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS MORE COMFORTABLE WITH CONVENTIONAL NEGOTIATION FORMATS.**

Mutangadura’s analysis is complemented by Kholood Khair’s account on p.87 of the costs of exclusion of Sudan’s pro-democracy civil society movements from the political processes that followed the revolution they led in 2019. Resistance Committees in the vanguard of Sudan’s political mobilisation have pursued a ‘maximalist’ approach to political change, which has challenged international stakeholders more comfortable with conventional negotiation formats among identified party leaders. Khair argues that mediation must adapt to be able to incorporate powerful if amorphous positions from the ‘street’. The experience resonates with other contexts where innovative means of mobilisation and expression have driven change but those at the forefront of the protests still find themselves excluded from the ensuing political processes – often to their detriment.

The section closes with two further examples of inclusive practice, in some respects at opposite ends of the peacemaking spectrum. Sharif Abukhar Ahmed on p.89 describes how an insider network in Hirshabelle State and Galmudug State in Somalia, supported by the Berghof Foundation, has had positive results in fostering more inclusive, local processes to address threats to communities posed by the escalating impacts of climate change. The push for inclusion came from women, young people and minorities wanting to play a greater role in resolving and preventing conflicts than had been possible under the traditional legal framework.

In the case of the ongoing negotiations between the government of Colombia and the ELN, as Donka Atanassova and Philipp Lustenberger describe on p.90, the parties have responded to long-standing demands from distinct social sectors for inclusion by creating of a diverse ‘National Participation Committee’. They have also set in train a process of consultation with members of the public to discuss how they want to participate and contribute to the broad transformations envisaged as the eventual outcome of the peace process.

Together, the articles in this section underline the centrality of the different forms of inclusion of both armed actors directly responsible for violence and unarmed actors demanding agency and a voice in determining the scope of peace. Efforts toward achieving both need to overcome different forms of stigma, obstacle and resistance and require commitment, creativity and courage.

# MEDIATING WITH PROSCRIBED ARMED GROUPS

## The imperative of innovation

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**Mediating conflicts involving non-state armed groups proscribed by the United Nations Security Council presents difficult and distinct challenges. These groups are overwhelmingly listed for their association with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (ISIS). And while various other proscription regimes exist, such as the 'terrorist' lists of the European Union, the United States and others, the sanctions regime established by Security Council resolution 1267 (1999) against Al-Qaeda (originally the Taliban too, later put on a different list) and in 2015 expanded by resolution 2253 to include individuals and entities supporting ISIL, imposes binding international legal obligations on all states.**

As recent research by Lundgren and colleagues on the impact of terrorist designations on mediation occurrence in civil wars has found, 'proscription by international organisations such as the UN translates into systematically lower mediation probabilities'. While sanction regimes may not explicitly prohibit engagement, in practice they exert a chilling effect that deters mediation.

### **ARMED GROUPS DESIGNATED BY THE UNITED NATIONS EXERCISE AUTHORITY OVER MANY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE.**

Yet engaging with designated groups is an absolute necessity in today's armed conflicts. Armed groups designated by the United Nations exercise authority over many millions of people, with many of those in the Sahel, Somalia and Syria. (As of July 2023, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) estimated that some 64 million persons across the world lived in areas fully controlled by armed groups, and a further 131 million in

areas fluidly controlled or contested by them.) Dialogue is needed to pursue achievable goals, such as securing humanitarian access to affected populations, and occasionally negotiating local ceasefires with other local or national actors to alleviate suffering, even if only temporarily. Such forms of engagement hold the potential to contain conflicts and eventually perhaps also open the door to more substantive discussions to address their resolution.

Mediators have found ways to work around obstacles presented by proscription – from local dialogue to humanitarian mediation and engagement by private mediation organisations. Looking ahead, further potential innovations include introducing the flexibility to allow for the lifting or suspension of sanctions on proscribed groups that no longer pose an international threat or show willingness to join and commit to political processes.

## Factors affecting mediation with proscribed armed groups

Internal and international factors affect possibilities for mediation with armed groups proscribed under the 1267 sanctions regime.

### Internal factors

Proscribed armed groups' strategies, organisational structures, and resistance to the international order can constitute significant obstacles to successful mediation. Groups listed for their association with Al-Qaeda or ISIS generally oppose international law, which they see as a Western system that targets them, and take issue with the international state system underpinning it. They are also suspicious of external actors, including humanitarian organisations and foreign states. Moreover, groups function within interconnected networks of militants,



making it challenging to discern their level of autonomy – from highly localised groups with minimal interaction with Al-Qaeda or ISIS core leaders, to groups that are deeply intertwined with them. Some groups govern large populations, like Al-Shabaab in Somalia or Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in north-east Nigeria, differing significantly from smaller, more clandestine insurgents like Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) or ISIS-M in the north of Mozambique, which have more opaque structures and leaderships.

However, as many listed groups have grown into larger organisations, some have also evolved politically. Some groups have, on occasion, exhibited a degree of accommodation toward the local population. For instance, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) has in the past hinted at the possibility of negotiation with the Malian government, even though the feasibility of a political compromise remains uncertain. Additionally, there have been sporadic attempts at negotiations with Al-Shabaab and, in a more promising scenario, the former Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has openly engaged in humanitarian negotiations and sought to gain international legitimacy.

## **SANCTION REGIMES CREATE SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION, IMPEDING MEDIATION EFFORTS BY THIRD PARTIES AND PRESENTING NUMEROUS OBSTACLES TO NEGOTIATIONS.**

### **International factors**

Sanction regimes such as the 1267 Security Council regime create significant obstacles to conflict resolution, impeding mediation efforts by third parties and presenting numerous obstacles to negotiations. The legal requirements are typically narrow in scope, primarily emphasising travel bans, funding restrictions, and financial sanctions. But their practical consequences are much broader, especially the political stigma and the 'chilling effect' of proscription that makes mediators reluctant to engage with listed groups for fear of breaching sanctions or sustaining reputational damage. Even UN officials, who enjoy official immunity, feel their interaction with listed groups may come under scrutiny, for example being perceived as legitimising non-state armed groups, potentially undermining anti-terrorism efforts or denting international unity.

In the international community, there is also a prevailing assumption that engaging these groups is simply not feasible owing to the distinctive nature of their ideological commitments and transnational interconnections, setting them apart from insurgents fighting for social redistribution or forms of self-determination.

Both humanitarian organisations and mediators remain fearful of being accused of providing material support to 'terrorists'. US legislation, for instance, criminalises the provision of 'material support' to those identified as foreign terrorist groups. The 2001 Patriot Act expanded the legal definition of 'material support' to include 'expert advice or assistance', 'training' and 'services', even when offered for wholly peaceable ends, an approach upheld by the Supreme Court in 2010.

More recently, however, the UN has introduced some reforms. UN Security Council resolution 2664 (2022) reinforced humanitarian exemptions to UN sanctions regimes, deciding that humanitarian activities in areas controlled by listed groups would not violate asset freezes. The resolution noted that this would also apply to the 1267 Al-Qaeda-ISIS sanctions regime for an initial period of two years.

In 2017, the UN prepared an internal *aide mémoire* on 'Engaging with non-state armed groups for political purposes' highlighting the benefits and drawbacks of such engagement, noting that it can improve understanding of armed groups, facilitate humanitarian coordination, and potentially help political processes. At the same time, the document also recognised that political engagement may not always be advisable or feasible and must be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

## **Adapting mediation approaches for proscribed groups**

Mediators have developed a range of strategies for engagement with proscribed armed groups, usually operating beneath the threshold of formal political negotiations. Mediators' objectives range from humanitarian access to regions controlled by proscribed groups, to facilitating negotiations for local and national ceasefires, or prisoner exchanges. Few engagements have resulted in formal peace processes. The peace deal signed between the US and the Taliban in early 2020 stands out as a 'problematic exception', followed as it was by the withdrawal of the US, the military takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, and collapse of political negotiations among Afghans.

### **Local negotiations**

As discussed elsewhere in this volume, one of the most significant shifts in mediation has been recognition of the importance of local dialogue and mediation processes. Local communities engage in direct negotiations with armed groups, including proscribed groups, who control their area. Negotiations may be led by local figures of authority such as religious leaders, scholars, and businesspeople, and allow the community to resist some of the groups' demands. In Northern Mali, for example, communities have, through religious dialogue, countered the content of some of the edicts imposed by

JNIM; in parts of Somalia, they have used local Islamic jurisprudence to oppose Al-Shabaab's insistence that women wear the facial veil. Talking with armed groups is risky. Communities have faced particular challenges with armed groups that have large numbers of foreign fighters, for example in parts of Afghanistan and Syria, as they tend to be more ideologically motivated and less responsive to local priorities.

## Humanitarian mediation

Humanitarian organisations have had to adapt their approach to gain a better understanding of non-state armed groups and avoid being targeted by them. Large humanitarian organisations have created specialised offices to gather knowledge, build networks with actors close to armed groups, and negotiate security guarantees and conditions for their work directly or indirectly. In early 2022 the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs established a dedicated Humanitarian Negotiations Unit for this purpose. Mediation to achieve political change can occur within humanitarian networks, relying on trust established in humanitarian interactions. But some humanitarian organisations express concern about the negative repercussions for their work and credibility if political engagement were to go awry.

The ICRC interacts with armed groups, including listed groups, to gain humanitarian access, but also to try to promote international humanitarian law (IHL). One ICRC strategy is to work with credible religious interlocutors to promote rules common to both Islamic law and IHL. The ICRC, for example, encouraged the establishment of a madrasa – an independent entity comprising religious scholars respected by the militants – in the Sahel to promote the protection of humanitarian workers by presenting fatwa on specific issues.

## Private mediation

As noted elsewhere in this publication (see article by Teresa Whitfield on p.49), the emergence of private mediation organisations in contexts where proscription limits official engagement has been a significant innovation in the mediation field. These organisations use their expertise to engage in dialogue with proscribed groups by establishing trust, addressing local issues, and in some instances gradually scaling up their efforts towards more substantive negotiations. Private mediators also assist states and UN offices by conveying messages and exploring options for engagement that minimise negative political repercussions.

Private mediation organisations may work with trusted individuals who are close to or have links with militants, such as religious scholars and local communities, particularly during the initial phase of contact and exchange of messages. They can provide expertise to help proscribed armed groups navigate the complexities

of conflict resolution processes – for example, in Syria, working with the former Al-Qaeda franchise previously called the Nusra Front (now HTS), which has expressed a desire to engage with the international community.

## Flexibility in sanctions regimes as a pathway into mediation

While the primary leverage of terrorist listing is as a 'stick', to deter armed groups from certain actions, the 'carrot' of delisting groups from sanctions regimes is more controversial. No group associated with the 1267 sanctions regime has ever been delisted. However, there are viable paths toward potentially delisting certain groups, especially those that have distanced themselves from Al-Qaeda and ISIS. If engagement advances, shifting the narrative surrounding these groups could also be productive.

### **NO GROUP ASSOCIATED WITH THE 1267 SANCTIONS REGIME HAS EVER BEEN DELISTED.**

The first possible innovation would be to remove armed groups from the list if they no longer pose an international threat. One significant reform was the 2009 establishment of the Office of the Ombudsperson to the ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, responsible for reviewing cases of listed individuals or entities that are no longer affiliated with these groups and delisting them. Although no armed groups have been delisted, it offers opportunities for listed groups to have their cases considered. Delisted groups would most likely remain on other state proscription lists, but delisting by the UN would send a signal that change is possible.

States could directly negotiate criteria for the conditional suspension of anti-terrorism regimes or some of their components with specific groups.

This and other changes could be taken forward in accordance with the UN Secretary-General's recommendation, in his policy paper on 'A New Agenda for Peace' (July 2023), that sanctions 'be regularly adjusted to ongoing political dynamics'. States could directly negotiate criteria for the conditional suspension of anti-terrorism regimes or some of their components with specific groups. This would strengthen their political leverage by offering conditional reciprocity for the groups' adherence to specific demands – and could always be reversed if necessary. It should also be possible to extend 'carve-outs' similar to those introduced through UNSC resolution 2664 for providers of humanitarian assistance to organisations involved in mediation. This would reduce risks, operational costs and the chilling effects currently in place when mediators consider engagement with listed groups.



Members of the HTS alliance, led by Al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate, parade with their flags and those of the Taliban's declared 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' through the rebel-held northwestern city of Idlib, Syria, 20 August 2021. © Omar Haj Kadour/ AFP via Getty Images

Beyond the legal issues associated with proscription, obstacles to mediation are often entwined with political stigma. Parts of this stems from the 'terrorist' label (used not by the UN but by many states including the US and UK) which contributes to the vilification of the group concerned and any engagement with it. Altering the language within specific contexts involving governments and armed groups could help reduce tensions and facilitate a path to dialogue. While many other factors were of course involved, experience in the peace process between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) between 2012 and 2016 illustrates the benefit of what Sophie Haspeslagh terms a 'linguistic ceasefire' as a means of de-vilification of the enemy and initiating negotiations. Here, the Colombian government acknowledged the existence of an armed conflict and moved away from the labelling of the insurgent movement as just 'terrorists'.

A number of groups proscribed by the UN find themselves today in radically changed situations. The focus of larger groups overseeing civilians has shifted away from transnational attacks and towards the establishment of local authority. Conditional changes in anti-terrorism regimes to facilitate engagement and encourage behavioural change could improve the well-being of civilians living in the areas these groups control. Testimonies from third parties who have interacted with groups such as HTS in Syria and JNIM in the Sahel suggest that they can act with pragmatism and adhere to short-term agreements, although it is open to question

to what extent this represents genuine change or tactical concession. Meanwhile, the weakening of the core leadership of both Al-Qaeda and ISIS might present an opportunity to try to engage some of their affiliates.

## Persistence through adversity

It is a difficult period to make progress in mediating with proscribed armed groups. Military responses to militant armed groups are gaining a new momentum, with the effective replacement of French forces by the Russian private military company the Wagner group in the Sahel, a renewed offensive against Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Whatever short-term victories are achieved, sustainable solutions ultimately require political processes, and windows for negotiation may re-open in the future.

Given the obstacles to conventional political negotiations, it is necessary to think creatively and explore areas of potential compromise. Listed groups are not solely security threats to be neutralised; some are political actors with distinct projects and a degree of popular support. Sanctions can do more than punish and deter; if used flexibly they can also encourage the transformation of some of these groups.

Currently, this flexibility is not in evidence, and concrete measures to support delisting are blocked. But, given the number of civilians living under the jurisdiction of proscribed armed groups, this is an avenue that needs serious exploration.

# LESSONS FOR PEACEMAKERS FROM ENGAGEMENT WITH CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS IN THE AMERICAS

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**Latin American and Caribbean countries are embroiled in a crisis of armed violence: home to a mere eight per cent of the world's population but 29 per cent of its homicides, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The lion's share of these deaths is linked to armed organisations ranging from gangs to drug traffickers, paramilitaries, and insurgents, most of which have not traditionally fallen within the purview of peacemaking and peacebuilding.**

It is common to approach engagement with these organisations by distinguishing between 'political' and 'criminal' groups, but this dichotomy is, in many respects, false, or at least an over-simplification of organisations whose motivations, histories and ways of sustaining themselves span a complex spectrum of political, socio-cultural, economic and criminal activity.

**DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN 'POLITICAL' AND 'CRIMINAL' GROUPS IS IN MANY RESPECTS FALSE, OR AT LEAST AN OVER-SIMPLIFICATION.**

For decades, the predominant approach to tackling armed organisations cast as 'criminal' has been through law enforcement and criminal justice. Failures to produce sustainable solutions have often been seized upon to demand ever more hardline measures. In El Salvador, most notably, President Nayib Bukele has jettisoned the rule of law and incarcerated one in every fifty adults in the name of security. His 'war on gangs' has found huge support, and across the region a growing number of politicians aspire to copy him.

Experience over the last 20 years suggests that dialogue, negotiation and mediation with criminal organisations can reduce crime and violence. But peacemaking with criminal organisations is fraught with challenges. The scale and nature of criminal violence generates intense trauma among its victims and widespread abhorrence of its perpetrators, and thus a reluctance to acknowledge any scope for engagement. A mixed track record has demonstrated that enabling negotiations requires legal frameworks that provide protection for mediators, assurance for the individuals and criminal organisations involved, and an agreed approach to justice. It also requires concerted political and social efforts to build consensus on the approach, promote reconciliation between criminal actors and communities, rehumanise

members of these organisations as a step towards reintegrating them, and the delivery of government services that respond to the needs of affected populations.

Reducing violence and the influence of criminal actors depends on devising sustainable alternatives to illicit economies, as well as strategies to ensure that an organisation that relinquishes a particular niche within a criminal market will not be immediately replaced by another. But addressing incentives of other kinds – the interests of an organisation’s members in gaining status, dignity and legitimacy in society, for example – is also critically important. There will, however, be limits on the potential for peacemaking with large or transnational criminal organisations that wield economic power that is not subject to domestic dynamics. The conduct of these organisations would need to be addressed in the context of broader international efforts, including new approaches to the ‘war on drugs’ and the transformation of illicit economies.

## ‘Total peace’ in context

The ambitious policy for ‘total peace’ in Colombia launched by President Gustavo Petro to address the onslaught of armed violence assailing the country is the region’s most prominent laboratory for urban peace processes and negotiation with criminal actors. The logic of ‘total peace’ is born of the understanding that to end cycles of violence the government must engage with all the relevant organisations at the same time to prevent vacuums of power and the recycling of armed actors into new groups.

‘Total peace’ faces many challenges and considerable domestic hostility, but it has redefined the security conversation within Colombia and beyond by directly confronting the failure of hard security policies alone to reduce violence, and pursuing an alternative path that combines negotiation with broader political reforms to address its root causes. How the experiment turns out will have repercussions across the region, as governments seek either to adopt some of its elements or retrench into *mano dura* (iron-fist) policies.

After assuming power in August 2022, Petro’s government moved quickly to reinstate negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN), a leftist insurgency with an estimated 6,000 members in arms. In 2016, some months before signing a peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the government of Juan Manuel Santos had reached a framework agreement with the ELN, but the talks were soon suspended. The ELN can leverage its organisational capabilities to *escalate* but also to *de-escalate* armed violence. Its leaders serve as interlocutors with whom to negotiate reductions in violence, as well as develop broader agendas for peace, including the demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration of its members.

Meanwhile, the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC), an armed organisation participating in multiple markets, including drugs and mining, several of whose leaders have a background in insurgent groups, is estimated to have as many as 4,000 members and up to 7,000 collaborators belonging to smaller affiliated groups operating in three-quarters of Colombia’s 32 departments. The Office of Envigado is a federation of several hundred neighbourhood gangs in the city of Medellín, to mention but the two largest among several dozen Colombian armed organisations cast as ‘criminal’.

Traditional approaches to peacemaking would suggest that the ELN’s political *raison d’être* fundamentally differentiates it from that of criminal armed organisations like the AGC or the Office of Envigado, rendering it suitable to a negotiated settlement. However, the clarity of this distinction neglects the socio-economic drivers that contribute to the persistence of many of those groups labelled as criminal as well as their capacities for territorial control and political influence. It also obfuscates the illicit economies that have sustained the ELN’s armed struggle.

The fundamental strategic premise for peacemaking approaches with any of these armed organisations is more similar than is generally recognised – in particular that the degree of centralised control of violence affords the opportunity to broker deals with them as *collectives*, rather than seeking to tackle each one of their members as individuals – be they guerrillas or paramilitaries, transnational drug traffickers or corner gangs. The organisations will approach negotiations with a mix of interests and motivations, and the political, legal and economic challenges in conducting them will vary. However, mediation and negotiation with such organisations is already widespread across the continent, from Los Angeles to São Paulo, though poorly understood and too frequently dismissed out of hand.

## Getting the politics right

Peacemaking with armed criminal organisations can take many forms: there may be attempts to reduce violence between armed organisations, or negotiations between armed organisations and the state to end criminal activity. Some deals are directly negotiated, while others are mediated by state and non-governmental actors, domestic or foreign.

El Salvador is emblematic of both the success and the failure of peacemaking with criminal organisations. In 2012, the government of President Mauricio Funes mediated an initially secret truce between the country’s three dominant gangs, securing a spectacular, instant homicide reduction (as discussed in *Accord 25*). However, the government proved unable to cultivate a longer-term political project to make the gains in violence reduction sustainable. Indeed, Funes publicly distanced himself

Members of the Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatrucha gangs attend a press conference at Quezaltepeque prison, El Salvador, at which leaders of both gangs declared the city of Quezaltepeque a peace zone for gang-related violence, 31 January 2013. © Juan Carlos/AFP via Getty Images



from the process even as he instructed his government to take it forward, undermining the support of an already sceptical Salvadoran public. Even so, the truce largely held into 2014, before the gangs proceeded to leverage their capacity to regulate violence to give El Salvador the highest homicide rate in the world in 2015.

Ecuador, too, experimented with peacemaking with criminal actors. In 2005 the police chief of Guayaquil mediated a gang truce. In contrast to El Salvador, this opportunity was seized to expand the process to the national level, broaden its scope well beyond homicide reduction, and include more gangs. Although initially reluctant, upon coming to power in 2007 President Rafael Correa ordered state institutions, including the police, to support the complex process, which was eventually referred to in shorthand as 'legalisation.' They did so by promoting the economic, social, and political conditions necessary to bring the gangs out of the shadows, offering livelihood opportunities to their members. The state was able to successfully mediate inter-gang conflicts by providing safety for participating gangs and programmes for social inclusion, employment, and educational opportunities.

The political effervescence of Correa's transformational politics and an economic boom enabled a holistic approach to security and development to be supported by generous state funding over several years. As Brotherton and Gude discuss in their 2018 paper, 'Social inclusion from below', rather than trying to *eliminate* the gangs, the process sought to *change* them as part of a broader transformation towards a more inclusionary state and society, a process they describe as 'collective desistance'.

Over the ten years from 2008 to 2017, the homicide rate in Ecuador dropped by 68 per cent – the most significant and sustained reduction in gang violence in the Americas in recent history. Armed violence began rising in 2018 and has recently spun entirely out of control, largely driven by organisations that were not part of the earlier process, changes in cocaine routes, neglect and corruption in the prison system and the police, and measures of extreme austerity which have weakened the state.

El Salvador and Ecuador both underline the importance of state support for such processes as well as a broad political consensus to ensure the sustainability of violence reduction gains beyond the term in office of a particular political leader. Criminal actors are not monolithic, and their actions and responses are conditioned by the political context.

## Pathways to legality for criminal organisations and their members

Peacemaking with criminal organisations requires purpose-built legal frameworks to provide cover for those engaged in mediation and peace support, as well as to provide pathways to legality for the organisations and their members.

Around the world, various armed organisations are regularly stamped as 'criminal', if not 'terrorist' entities, entailing potential legal hazards for anyone who seeks to engage with them. In an egregious example, the chief mediator in the 2012–14 Salvadoran gang truce was eventually convicted to thirteen years in prison for his

efforts, while two dozen public servants involved were prosecuted but ultimately acquitted. The president and minister of justice and public security authorised the mediation process but failed to push for the necessary legal safeguards to protect the people charged with implementing their policies.

Ecuador, by contrast, not only decriminalised gang membership, but granted several gangs legal status as cultural associations and provided incentives for the organisations to transform and promote prosocial behaviours among their members – which they did.

In Colombia, Petro's government has prioritised the development of a legal framework for its strategy for 'total peace'. The strategy was first formally enshrined in the Law of Total Peace (Ley 2272) adopted in November 2022. It involves pursuing a conventional process of internationally supported peace negotiations with the ELN as well as – more controversially – talks with dissident factions of the FARC that did not demobilise following the 2016 peace accord. 'Conversations' or 'socio-legal dialogues' with several other armed organisations are also under way, ranging from major transnational criminal enterprises to minor neighbourhood gangs.

In addition to the Ley 2272, the government is developing a legal framework that would allow for an eventual reintegration. Clear legal framing would hold out the promise of a future on the right side of the law for those who demobilise, as well as truth, accountability, and a measure of justice for victims and communities. It would also help to overcome fears that dialogue with criminal actors is rife with backroom dealings by providing conditions for a public reconciliation process.

## Humanising security

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to sustainable violence reduction through engagement with criminal organisations is the moral panic it induces. The difficulty of humanising such highly stigmatised actors means that peacemakers have to pay particular attention to efforts to build support, or at least acceptance, within society.

**PERHAPS THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE TO SUSTAINABLE VIOLENCE REDUCTION THROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS IS THE MORAL PANIC IT INDUCES.**

Two areas stand out as especially important. First, the need to engage with communities, both to cultivate local peace and reconciliation processes by preparing communities to integrate those who demobilise and to develop locally resonant and holistic alternatives for security. As Jenny Pearce and Alexandra Abello Colak

have argued, 'a large-scale rethink of the security paradigm' is required. For this to take root, the active involvement of 'those who experience these phenomena most intensely' is needed to build a sustainable alternative that might 'counter the entrenchment of authoritarian views among citizens propelled by repressive responses that continue to be recycled without positive impacts on security'.

Second is the need to leverage religious capital. Religious leaders regularly serve as mediators or guarantors of dialogue with criminal organisations. Religious leaders frequently proselytise among these organisations' members in prisons and in the communities to which they will return, and have influence and authority with criminal actors. They can play an important role in helping to usher in a paradigm shift around security, recasting and humanising the perpetrators of violence and reimagining relationships with them.

## Mediating security

In the face of the unappealing alternatives of failing law-enforcement and criminal justice strategies, or the authoritarian tactics possible in a small country such as El Salvador, a transformative, holistic framework that embeds peacemaking within a broader political and socio-economic strategy offers potential for engaging criminal organisations of varying degrees of sophistication, lowering the levels of violence assailing communities, and moving towards a more sustainable peace.

Such processes will be both extraordinarily challenging and vulnerable to political and social shifts; they will also continue to raise many questions. For example, under what circumstances will it be possible to substitute legitimate livelihood alternatives for the illicit rent-seeking strategies of members of organised criminal entities? And what kinds of structures at the local or community level will be needed to help sustain their transformation? Can such approaches have lasting purchase on criminal structures with strong connections to the state, or transnational networks with access to more lucrative economic opportunities than any government policy could replicate?

Innovative practice across the region, including in Colombia, where Petro's pursuit of 'total peace' has met considerable resistance, will not easily deliver the results desired. However, against a growing understanding of the limitations of other approaches to the region's profound security challenges, the lessons that can already be derived from what has worked, and what hasn't, can usefully be applied to ongoing practice in the region, and beyond. Sadly, the number of conflicts across the world in which peace is impeded by powerful criminal actors and entrenched illicit economies means that the experience of the Americas will resonate far beyond the region's shores.

# MEDIATING WORLDVIEW COLLISIONS IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

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**Many of our most persistent and intense violent conflicts have an evident worldview dimension; the parties, or significant subgroups within them, make meaning and orient to the world very differently. What is less evident to many is that each of the common approaches to mediation of these conflicts is itself grounded in a particular worldview with embedded assumptions about why and how parties experience conflict, the building blocks available to construct a resolution of it, and the proper design goals and methods for assembling those building blocks. As a result, misalignments among the mediator's and the parties' worldview(s) may complicate efforts to resolve the conflict, contributing to the perception and reality of its intractability.**

The conflict among Israelis and Palestinians, for example, has been subject to numerous, concerted mediation efforts, yet Hamas's 7 October 2023 attack and Israel's military response are deeply painful reminders that it remains unresolved. Many proposals have been made for resolution of the 'permanent status' issues left unaddressed by the Oslo Accords and other points of contention, including new issues (like water) and some issues that were supposedly resolved earlier, but no comprehensive set of terms acceptable to the parties has yet emerged. Those leading mediation efforts mostly seem to have wished to sidestep or have been unable to contend with the extent of worldview diversity within each community.

Influential groups within each community embrace diverse normative visions that constrain some possibilities for resolving the conflict while pointing to others that have been overlooked or insufficiently

explored. For example, it is difficult to see how a division of the land that purports to establish permanent borders could ever be acceptable to those Jewish and Muslim religious nationalists who regard their custody of it to be divinely ordained, much as that arrangement seems sensible to those mediators who have sought a full and final resolution of all claims in keeping with their modern liberal worldview, which tends to regard national borders as fixed and to favour finality in legal arrangements. Perhaps some agreement regarding each community's long-term, provisional use of separate portions of the territory (possibly subject to periodic renewal) nonetheless might prove acceptable to all concerned.

Religion is not always a primary feature of conflicts with a neglected worldview dimension, as it is in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Current tensions between the United States and China on a range of issues (e.g. human rights, Taiwan, and industrial policy) stem, in part, from differing worldviews that offer competing conceptions of the self in relation to others, with one country (China) placing relatively more emphasis on familial and social connections and obligations and the other (the United States) placing relatively more emphasis on the interests and preferences of the individual apart from familial and social concerns, among other differences. Worldview conflict also occurs within states, threatening their stability (as seen in the United States when Congress was stormed by supporters of President Donald Trump in January 2021) and sometimes also complicating international conflicts and efforts to resolve them (as we see within both Israeli and Palestinian society, for example, where divisions between religious nationalist, liberal-secularist, and other factions complicate behind-the-table negotiations, constraining opportunities for negotiation between Israelis and Palestinians across the table).



## **MEDIATORS MUST ACCEPT THE REALITY OF MORAL PLURALISM, ACTIVELY ENGAGE WITH MEDIATION CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY WORLDVIEW DIVERSITY, AND INNOVATE TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES.**

Evidence of worldview diversity – the fact that different groups sincerely embrace different visions of the world and how best to live – and the conflict it can generate is hard to miss. Worldview conflict is not going away anytime soon, if ever. I believe mediators must accept the reality of moral pluralism, actively engage with mediation challenges presented by worldview diversity, and innovate to address the challenges.

The diversification of mediators and mediation approaches in terms of gender, political and cultural orientation, and other important developments in mediation theory and practice in recent decades help increase awareness and acceptance of moral pluralism and our potential to respond to it productively. The field has yet to meet the reality of differing worldviews head-on, however, and efforts to mediate many of the most intractable conflicts are unlikely to succeed until we accept this reality and become more proficient at mediating across worldviews.

### **The necessity of peace mediation across worldviews**

Broadly speaking, a worldview is a way of life; a way of orienting to the universe and one's experience within it. Our worldviews are a bit like the air through which we move, and that we breathe, usually without even noticing it. One's worldview may evolve over time, or even be abandoned entirely; but change, if it occurs, tends to happen slowly. Our brains are wired to privilege information that confirms our existing beliefs and to interpret ambiguous information in ways that support them.

We are much more likely to expand or flex our worldview to accommodate previously unseen or rejected data and perspectives, rather than revise it fundamentally. The ways in which we conceive of our personal and social needs and how they can and should be met are influenced by the worldview we hold and share with other members of the group(s) to which we belong, so deviating from shared beliefs and social norms can be costly even if one questions them privately.

Worldview conflict emerges when values, norms, and beliefs that are core to one worldview cannot easily be reconciled with those of another worldview, and when these differences in normative orientation have practical implications. Worldview conflict can

be extraordinarily intense and stubborn, because (religious and/or secular) sacred values – values core to individual and group identities – are threatened. Threats to these values feel existential, and some people will sacrifice everything to defend them.

Our deepest values and the things that symbolise them are not easily compromised. Negotiating as if they are tradeable can escalate conflict. Much as we might like to wish away worldview differences, or to proceed as if others' worldviews can be altered easily or as if material concessions can induce others to compromise their core values, these hopes are unrealistic. We must instead accept the reality and persistence of differing worldviews and adapt our mediation approaches accordingly to be more effective as mediators.

### **Mediation challenges and innovations**

None of our prevailing theories of conflict and its transformation adequately account for the reality of worldview diversity – how it contributes to conflict and complicates efforts to transform it. The predominant approach, interest-based bargaining, seeks to maximise joint value in utilitarian terms, but interest-based mediators struggle when parties' divergent deontological commitments and constraints (ideas of morality and duty based on sets of rules and principles) are core drivers of a conflict. Needs-based approaches focus mediators on conflict parties' unmet physical, psychological, and social needs, with the goal of finding ways to meet them through the resolution of conflict. In worldview conflict, however, each party seeks to satisfy these basic human needs in ways that align with its unique worldview, including its normative constraints. Needs-based approaches to mediation seldom attend sufficiently to parties' discordant meaning-making and normative orientations and possibilities for working within them separately but in parallel.

A mediator using interest-based bargaining methods, which are grounded in a modern worldview and utilitarian moral theory, might perceive a worldview conflict to be more challenging for the reasons indicated in the first column of the following chart and be inclined to respond to these challenges as indicated in the second column. The basic obstacle negotiators face in worldview conflicts is that they explicitly or implicitly expect others to change their worldview or compromise their core values to accommodate one's own worldview. This simply will not work.

Mediators must help parties bypass this obstacle by helping them seek a realistic, mutually agreeable outcome that works in multiple worldviews. The third column in the following chart illustrates how an interest-based mediator could adapt her approach to help parties achieve this goal.

CHALLENGE	COMMON INTEREST-BASED RESPONSE	WORLDVIEW-ATTUNED RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some of the parties' core values are very different, and so some interests conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask parties to consider options that offer joint material gains but violate or strain normative commitments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help parties explore meaning and values along with interests</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The parties' respective best alternatives to a negotiated agreement (BATNA) do not seem to create much negotiation leverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stress, nonetheless, the costs each party will incur if the other party resorts to its BATNA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help each party understand that its own BATNA likely is not the other party's worst alternative and that the other party also is willing to make costly sacrifices to defend sacred values</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The parties are unable to find mutually agreeable options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus parties on options that fit the mediator's worldview (for example, options that offer ample joint material gains)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help parties generate options that work within all worldviews</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The parties embrace different standards of legitimacy (reference norms to justify an agreement)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Search for a non-existent shared standard by which parties can legitimise an agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help each party determine how best to justify the outcome on its own terms</li> </ul>

## MEDIATORS MUST HELP PARTIES TO SEEK A REALISTIC, MUTUALLY AGREEABLE OUTCOME THAT WORKS IN MULTIPLE WORLDVIEWS.

The worldview-attuned responses above can be seen as adaptations designed to address misalignments between the standard assumptions and prescriptions of interest-based bargaining and the special challenges presented by worldview conflict. (Similar adaptations could be made to needs-based and other mediation practices.) For example, drawing again from the Israeli-Palestinian context, the 2000 Camp David Summit era proposal made by Israeli legal scholar Ruth Lapidoth and Jordan's King Hussein that the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount complex be subject to divine sovereignty, rather than the sovereignty of one nation, was an attempt to generate an option on that issue that might work in multiple worldviews (even though some stakeholders ultimately did not favour it).

Mediating worldview collisions typically presents many more challenges than those noted above, and each demands its own innovative response. These challenges include integrating into the process more hawkish stakeholders who may contest an eventual agreement if not effectively engaged; managing both the process and expectations about substantive outcomes in ways that mitigate risk for participants, who may be perceived

by members of their own communities as willing to negotiate on issues many consider non-negotiable; supporting adaptive learning about how worldviews influence the conflict and possibilities for its resolution, particularly with respect to value collisions within stakeholder groups that impede resolution of the conflict; and obtaining broad commitment to proposed outcomes within multiple, disparate worldview communities. It is also often important to designate an (external and/or inside) mediator or team of co-mediators who inhabit, or are very familiar with, the parties' respective worldviews. Whether or not this occurs, it is imperative that each mediator is aware of their own worldview and how it tends to influence their approach to mediation.

For example, I am involved in a project in the Israeli-Palestinian context in which secular-political, religious Zionist, and Muslim nationalist actors who have little prior history of engagement meet and conduct joint research to understand how their disparate worldviews influence the conflict, both constraining possibilities for its resolution and presenting opportunities to resolve issues that are not apparent when the conflict is viewed through a single worldview lens. This initiative is exceptionally durable and productive. The participants have worked together in the aftermath of Hamas's 7 October 2023 attack and Israel's military response to try to deescalate the situation, facilitate humanitarian relief, secure release of captives, and transform the tragedy into a new push for a just and lasting peace.

Efforts like these require process innovations designed to address the special challenges identified above and others that arise when different normative frameworks collide. From a process perspective, for example, mediators may need to deviate from informal norms of symmetry in mediation practice. Intra-party work that is necessary on one side of the table may bear little resemblance to the intra-party work that is necessary on the other side of the table due to differences in the make-up of each community and differing social norms within them. On substance, for example, mediators may need to help parties devise 'safe experiments' to test, and ultimately promote, public acceptance of options generated at the negotiation table that may be perceived as violating existing social taboos. One way to do this is to identify a respected scholar or cleric to publish an article arguing that a new approach – even one that deviates from a longstanding norm – is consistent with cherished values and warranted and acceptable under the circumstances.

Addressing the challenges of mediating worldview collisions is more easily said than done. Intra-party work is especially important when mediating worldview conflict (and is one of the primary activities in the project just mentioned). The worldviews and associated norms around which communities cohere are not static, but parties are likely to be cautious about adjusting them sufficiently to permit an agreement to emerge at the table. Mediating worldview collisions effectively requires patient, skillful effort to support change away from the table, behind the scenes.

## Looking forward

Mediators must develop greater fluency in and capacity to work within and across disparate worldviews to mediate worldview collisions effectively. The most significant impediment to progress in this direction may be the extent to which many mediators today (often relatively unreflectively) are embedded in and rigidly adhere to a liberal worldview and associated institutions and practices that, in theory, emerged to mediate among competing worldviews. The two most prevalent approaches to mediation – those premised upon interest-based bargaining and needs-based theories – both arose in the West from work in the social sciences begun in the mid-twentieth century, reflecting a modern, liberal, and largely positivist worldview.

## MANY MEDIATORS WILL NEED TO EXAMINE AND ADJUST THEIR OWN WORLDVIEWS TO MEDIATE WORLDVIEW COLLISIONS MORE EFFECTIVELY.

Many who embrace these approaches today are not sufficiently cognisant or accepting of the reality of moral pluralism. They do not fully appreciate that others who embrace a different worldview (traditional, religious, post-modern, or otherwise) see the liberal worldview as competing with their own. Many mediators will need to examine and adjust their own worldviews to mediate worldview collisions more effectively.

In sum, mediating worldview collisions in violent conflict more effectively will require the following major adjustments to current practice:

- Mediators must accept the reality of moral pluralism, actively engage with the mediation challenges posed by worldview diversity, and innovate to meet the challenges.
- Mediators must become more aware of their own worldviews and how they influence their approaches to mediation.
- Mediators must help parties overcome worldview differences by helping them find a realistic, mutually acceptable outcome that works within multiple worldviews.
- Mediators must focus much more on bridging differences away from the table (intra-party negotiation) to achieve agreement across the table (inter-party negotiation).

## ISLAMIC PEACEMAKING

**Abbas Aroua** is a medical and health physicist by training, and adjunct professor at the Lausanne Faculty of Medicine. He is the founding director of Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva (CPI), dedicated since 2002 to the prevention of violence, conflict transformation and peace promotion in societies involving Muslims – building on local capacities to empower people, promote dialogue and offer safe mediation spaces. CPI works in North Africa, West Asia, the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, West Africa and the Swahili Coast of East Africa. Abbas has authored books and research papers on public health and peacebuilding.

### An edited interview with Abbas Aroua, Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva

There is growing interest in peace mediation among Muslim states, multilateral bodies and civil society. Insights from my own experience in peacemaking with the Cordoba Peace Institute (CPI) and more broadly have shown me how traditional Islamic mediation principles and practice can contribute to resolving contemporary conflict challenges.

**QUR'ĀNIC PEACEMAKING CONCEPTS CAN RESONATE WITH MUSLIM SOCIETIES WHERE CONCEPTS SUCH AS HUMAN RIGHTS, HUMANITARIAN ACTION, CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION, EXTREMISM AND MODERATION MAY BE LESS FAMILIAR.**

Concepts and language that are widely accepted in Muslim societies help ensure peacemaking practice is inclusive and locally embedded. Qur'ānic peacemaking concepts such as *karama* (human dignity), *'amal al-khayr* (charity work), *islāhu thātil-bayn* (bond mending), *ghuluw* (zealotry) and *wasatiya* (centrism) can resonate with Muslim societies, where concepts such as human rights, humanitarian action, conflict transformation, extremism and moderation may be less familiar.

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Participants at a CPI workshop in Casablanca, Morocco discuss developments in the Middle East and North Africa in the first year of the 'Arab Spring', 3 May 2012. © Cordoba Peace Institute - Geneva

In Islam, peacemaking is highly regarded and is seen the duty of any private citizen – not restricted to ‘formal’ mediators. In the Islamic tradition, conflict refers to broken relationships between two or more parties, where the parties are not necessarily bad in themselves. Peace mediation is correspondingly understood in terms of ‘bond mending’ (*islāhu thātil-bayn*), whereby the broken relationship between the parties can be restored. The Qur’ān praises the righteous who engage in ‘mending the bonds between people,’ (II:224 and IV:114) while the Prophet also highlighted bond mending as ‘more valuable than fasting, praying, and almsgiving’. Peace mediation is regarded as an act of charity, and peace mediators eligible for *zakat* (religious mandatory almsgiving). Mediation is a religious duty for every Muslim man and woman; it is even more so an obligation for Islamic scholars, who are considered as the heirs of the prophets.

Muslim women are actively working for peace across a wide range of Islamic contexts. Famous examples include Dekha Ibrahim Abdi of Kenya, who was awarded the Right Livelihood Award in 2007 as someone whose ‘religious and spiritual identity as a Muslim formed a strong foundation for her peace work’; and Moroccan peace practitioner Houda Abadi, who straddles modern and traditional approaches in her work. Ferdaous Bouhleh has been engaged in peacemaking in the Sahel for many years to help establish a sustainable dialogue with armed groups in Mali, and has succeeded in gaining trust and respect of the most radical religious and tribal leaders in the region. She told us ‘women should be recognised and accepted as peace mediators because of their competences and skills and not because they fit into a gender quota’.

Religious scholars are key to peacemaking in Islamic societies – both ‘moderate’ and more ‘radical’ scholars. CPI has recently been involved with the Fiqhi Pathways initiative, which in a number of different contexts is facilitating frank and respectful Islamic jurisprudential exchanges between scholars close to armed groups, and other prominent credible Islamic scholars who are respected and trusted in these contexts. Exchanges focus on matters related to the conduct of hostilities, governance and attitudes to dialogue, and aim to broaden knowledge, generate options, and provide alternative interpretations of religious texts, taking into account the local and international context.

In practice there are many synergies between Islamic and secular approaches to peacemaking. For example, CPI supported a two-year initiative to promote social cohesion in the Middle East and North Africa, involving participants from across the ideological spectrum and with some deep differences among them. The initiative

**IN PRACTICE THERE ARE MANY SYNERGIES BETWEEN ISLAMIC AND SECULAR APPROACHES TO PEACEMAKING.**

used the contemporary theoretical peacemaking tool of ‘overlapping consensus’ to find areas of agreement among the diverse participants on principles of justice, as well as methods from the traditional Islamic model of the Medina Charter, which is believed to have formalised the leading role of the prophet Muhammad in the community of Medina. The process led to the signature by the participants of a *Memorandum towards a common action space*.

Peacemakers today should take advantage of the fact that peace mediation is a civil obligation as well as a religious duty in Islam in order to engage all stakeholders in peace processes, using where possible locally owned concepts and language, and local peace resources – including Islamic scholars and women.

# INNOVATION IN RESPONSE TO RESISTANCE

## Women's inclusion in peace mediation

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**Human history has always evolved in back-and-forth steps. Major breakthroughs and innovations typically have to overcome resistance from those who want to preserve the status quo. Innovative thinking, especially during times of crisis, has helped our survival and development.**

Inclusion in peace processes is an innovative practice that has progressed considerably over the last two decades, building on years of global struggle for gender equality and minority rights. Research shows the positive impact of women's inclusion on the durability and quality of peace, and that it can catalyse other innovations in peace mediation. Lessons learned from expanding women's inclusion have further helped to inspire the participation of young people and other excluded groups. And in Libya, for example, restriction on women's participation as a result of Covid-19 and due to cultural practices curtailing women's mobility helped stimulate the expansion of digital methods for inclusion (as Julie Hawke describes on p.102).

### **THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING BACKLASH AGAINST WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN PEACE AND POLITICAL TALKS AND PROCESSES.**

Important gains have been made and the number of women included in peace processes has slightly increased. But this has not always translated into the substantive changes needed for more inclusive outcomes, and tokenistic inclusion is still pervasive. There has also been a growing backlash against women's inclusion in peace and political talks and processes, highlighted in traumatic developments in Afghanistan and Sudan. Resistance to women's

inclusion takes place at every stage of a peace process: from preventing women's participation in negotiations, to resisting the codification of articles supporting gender equality, and delaying implementation of gender-specific provisions in a peace agreement.

This article briefly considers why resistance to women's inclusion in peace processes persists, what the types of resistance are, and what innovations have been – or could be – adopted in response. Overcoming obstacles to women's inclusion needs to start with understanding what is motivating resistance, because different resistance behaviours need to be met with different responses.

### **Implicit, explicit and coercive resistance**

Types of resistance behaviour to women's inclusion vary on a spectrum ranging from *implicit* resistance (unintentional acts due to unconscious bias), through *explicit* and *manipulative* resistance (intentional resistance short of the threat or use of violence), to *coercive* resistance (involving the threat or use of violence). Interviews conducted by the author in 2021–22 with women negotiators, mediators and facilitators revealed patterns of resistance behaviour across different conflict contexts.

A recurrent example of *implicit* resistance is where women involved in negotiations are assumed by male negotiators and colleagues to be in secondary, supportive or administrative roles. Such biases are not necessarily intentional, but the mere presence of women in settings predominantly associated with men can automatically activate certain gender stereotypes. Women find this experience frustrating, but this type of resistance can usually be rectified through constructive dialogue and awareness raising.



Director of the Afghan Women's Network Mary Akrami, Afghan civil society and women's rights activist Laila Jafari, and Member of the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of the Afghan assembly) Fawzia Koofi attend the Intra Afghan Dialogue talks in the Qatari capital Doha, 7 July 2019. © Karim Jaafar/AFP via Getty Images

*Explicit* resistance includes intentional behaviour like foot-dragging, sabotage, false compliance, and verbal opposition and insult. In one case from my research, for example, a woman mediator was directly confronted by a tribal leader who told her: 'We were expecting a man. What are you doing here?' In instances of false compliance, resistance is more subtle and manipulative. During the Intra-Afghan talks in Doha, for example, Afghan women delegates' participation was curbed through spontaneous scheduling of late-hour meetings in a place that women found difficult to access. Incorporating transparent decision-making rules and procedures into process design can help address this type of resistance. And while this may risk restricting spontaneity in peace talks, spontaneity currently often comes at the expense of women's inclusion.

When the reaction to women's participation is *coercive* or violent, the priority is to protect women's physical well-being. Out of 30 women interviewed, seven mentioned an incident of a threat or use of violence experienced either by themselves or other women participating in the same process. One high-level woman negotiator reported a social media campaign that claimed that as a woman she would be a 'weak negotiator that would easily give away key interests' and was thus a 'traitor'. The campaign called for 'killing and raping' her. Equating women negotiators with weakness is yet another example of knee-jerk, stereotypical responses that emanate from patriarchal 'legitimising myths' (a term Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto use for the 'values, attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for the social practices that keep the hierarchical group status in a social system').

Elsewhere, 17 women who participated in the Libyan political dialogue in 2020 were threatened on social media or had fake social media accounts created in their names. As Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine underline, any initiative that promotes women's inclusion needs to safeguard women's protection as an integral element of the participation agenda.

## Depth of resistance

Resistance also varies in terms of depth. Resistance can be driven by comparatively 'shallow' circumstantial factors such as lack of appropriate resources for women mediators. In a Nigerian example, male rather than women facilitators were deployed to a remote, rural area because of poor sanitation, lack of lighting on roads at night, and the difficulties in meeting childcare needs. Women habitually experience exclusion due to such structural inequalities even if this is not the intention of their colleagues. Women may also be allocated limited places in consultative bodies or committees during a peace process, which, if badly handled, can contribute to competition among them – for example, between younger and older generations of women with different priorities, interests and approaches. Ways to tackle shallower obstacles include increasing resources to support mediation, or promoting problem-solving dialogue among women when participation is limited.

Other forms of resistance may be more deeply embedded in culture, ideology, and identity – and be more systematic, institutionalised, and stubborn. Here, efforts to advance gender inclusion can be seen as threatening. In deeply patriarchal societies in which

men are dominant historically, materially, socially and politically, attempts to change the hierarchy are likely to be seen as a challenge to men's identity and superior status. The primary motivation of the privileged group is commonly to maintain exclusive access to economic, political, and social power and resources, and male-dominated elites tend to resist efforts to expand inclusion – of women or other marginalised groups.

Furthermore, resistance to inclusion may be masked by collective narratives and ideologies to justify the abiding hierarchy, such as protecting 'culture and traditions', 'the family', or 'the nation' against 'foreign values'. Resistance to inclusion may be also defended by subordinate groups – including women – in the name of 'protecting traditions'. Identity-based resistance is often very difficult to overcome as this requires long-term cultural and social change.

## **STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME RESISTANCE TO WOMEN'S INCLUSION NEED TO BE TAILORED TO THE TYPE OF RESISTANCE BEHAVIOUR IN QUESTION.**

### **Innovations to tackle resistance to women's inclusion**

Strategies to overcome resistance to women's inclusion need to be tailored to the type of resistance behaviour in question. Women negotiators and mediators across different contexts have come up with many innovative approaches, sometimes confrontational or competitive, at other times collaborative or problem-solving.

Confrontational and competitive approaches include: organising non-violent action to overcome resistance to their participation; establishing alternative channels for information gathering in peace negotiations; pushing back against people who oppose women's involvement, verbally and in other ways; and allying with influential and supportive insiders to increase leverage in talks, including with supportive men in positions of power.

Collaborative and problem-solving approaches include: lobbying for transparent selection criteria or quotas for participation in negotiation and mediation processes; leveraging women's technical expertise to be included in talks; advocating clear procedures and rules for decision making in participatory spaces like committees and national dialogues; using effective communication and dialogue skills to persuade resistant groups; building trust with conflict parties, including by taking risks that other mediators might not be prepared to take; or building strong networks, coalitions and alliances with supporters of inclusion, such as other women or sympathetic international actors.

Collaborative approaches are often respectful of local priorities and sensitivities – such as using counter-arguments from within local traditions, or using skills in reframing language to achieve more broadly acceptable formulations on potentially sensitive topics. Use of humour and carefully targeted preparation and capacity-building have also been found helpful to anticipate and deflect resistance.

Approaches like quotas, lobbying, alliance – and capacity-building, and non-violent mobilisation are well-established. Building trust with conflict parties by taking unexpected risks is an example of a more innovative strategy. Examples from my research include a Croat woman negotiator who crossed a forbidden checkpoint into a Serbian-controlled area unexpectedly, and a Ugandan mediator who ventured into a jungle alone to meet with the head of an armed group. The exceptional initiative of these unarmed women determined to pursue peace at considerable risk to their lives had a real impact, and in both cases the parties requested that the women be involved in subsequent peace talks. The strategic implications of approaches that involve very high levels of risk are unclear, but the positive outcome of these individual acts of bravery and ingenuity bears further investigation.

Another little-known approach comes from women who have set up alternative, informal channels to obtain important information about peace talks that they would otherwise not obtain. Women in Northern Ireland relied on other influential women in politics who were informed about the process, while women in Sudan drew on social media networks. In these and other cases, women have created their own systems to make sure they keep informed about what was going on in negotiations.

An untested idea to overcome resistance is to embed a high-level 'inclusion ombudsperson' in a mediation team, with whom women and others could share relevant complaints confidentially and explore solutions. This role could potentially overlap with a gender adviser. While this has not yet been tried in a peace process, there are comparable roles in organisations in other fields. In the meantime, systematic evaluation of the ideas and practices brought forward by women negotiators and mediators to overcome resistance discussed in this article could help inform much needed further innovation in the future.

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## WOMEN AND MEDIATION IN AFGHANISTAN: INNOVATING FOR INFLUENCE

*Habiba Sarabi is a pharmacist, politician, and reformer of the post-Taliban era in Afghanistan. She served as Minister of Women's Affairs from 2002–04 and was appointed as governor of Bamiyan Province in 2005 – the first woman ever to be a provincial governor. Habiba joined Zalmay Rasul's ticket as vice president in the 2014 presidential elections and served as Adviser on women and youth to Abdullah Abdullah, the Chief Executive of Afghanistan. She was appointed Deputy to the Afghanistan High Peace Council in 2016, and was a member of the Afghan Government peace negotiation team with the Taliban. Currently, Habiba is a member of the steering committee of the Women's Forum on Afghanistan.*

### **An edited interview with Dr Habiba Sarabi**

In Afghanistan, we suffered war for more than four decades. When the Taliban got strong enough to challenge the government, especially after 2010, different countries wanted to mediate. President Hamid Karzai established the High Peace Council. But it was unable to mediate with the Taliban, partly because of interference from other countries like Pakistan. And in 2011 the Taliban in Pakistan assassinated the chair of the High Peace Council, Burhanuddin Rabbani. Different countries wanted to mediate – Germany, Norway and some others during Karzai's time in office. Later, Uzbekistan, Russia, and then Qatar all wanted to mediate the process.

Civil society also tried to do mediation. But the government wanted to have its own strategy, its own road map, its own way forward. In the middle, I felt that the UN mission, UNAMA, from the beginning did not play its role in mediation role very firmly. During the Qatar talks in 2020, Qatar claimed that it was facilitator, not mediator, of negotiations between Taliban and Afghan government, and that the two sides should talk and resolve their problems. We felt that the facilitation did not work, so we requested UNAMA to bring a mediator between the two parties. But the US was also involved, and the UN was too slow – and in the end, as you know, in 2021 the Government of Afghanistan collapsed.

### **Afghan women and peacemaking**

Women are a part of a society; half of the society cannot be ignored. We have to be present to talk about ourselves, to talk about our own difficulties, to talk about our own problems, our own challenges. Several women's organisations worked alongside the High Peace Council, especially after Afghanistan adopted its first National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2015. They had funding from different countries and donor agencies and worked especially on peacebuilding and peace education in the rural areas and lobbied to bring more women into the peace process. There was not enough coordination between these organisations on how they could combine their efforts and the government did not take the efforts of women or other civil society actors seriously. But some actors started to push the High Peace Council on this, including UNAMA, Finland, Canada and Sweden – it was mostly countries with feminist foreign policies involved in pushing women into the peace process.

As a result, in 2016 I was appointed as deputy chairperson of the High Peace Council, and six other women joined the High Peace Council executive body. In that position I felt respected, but respect is one thing and support is something else. When I wanted to initiate something, for example the Mothers of Peace, an initiative that involved a network of women from the local and provincial levels, we did not get the necessary support from the High Peace Council or president's office.

*continued...*



Habiba Sarabi during her time as Governor of Bamiyan Province, Afghanistan, 2009. © Veronique de Viguerie/ Edit by Getty Images

During the negotiations in Qatar, we met further resistance. When it came for the negotiating team to be chosen, there was a lot of pressure for it to be inclusive. The government and the president encouraged political parties to nominate women, but all of them nominated men; two of them – Atta Muhammad Nur and Marshal [Abdul Rashid] Dostum – nominated their sons. In the end the president chose four women for a bigger 21-person delegation. There was just one woman out of five members of the Contact Group created to facilitate negotiations in a smaller format with the Taliban’s Contact Group – all men of course.

In some respects, we did not meet resistance from male colleagues in our delegation; in Qatar we were told that we were the ‘stars of our team’ because we were very involved, very active. But the Taliban played a kind of trick. Their tactic was to tell us that they had changed. There was an Intra-Afghan Dialogue during June 2019, with 11 women out of 35 delegates. Some of women would talk with Taliban during the lunches: they went to their table intentionally and asked about women’s rights, and questions relating to clothes, the hijab. And the Taliban were very positive, especially of course Stanikzai [Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the head of the Taliban delegation, now Afghanistan’s Deputy Foreign Minister]. He said, ‘no, no, there is not a problem about clothes, and under Islamic law, you can study up to a high level’. The only thing issue for them was that a woman could never be president or chief justice. And during the talks too, most of them were very respectful, especially in the smaller meetings with the Contact Group.

However, when it came to the plenary session, it became more unpleasant. For example, they had some kind of shawl and they covered their faces so as not to see the women. Or when a woman started saying something, they started speaking themselves, with their lips moving. Even in the lobby of the hotel, some would turn their faces and did not want to talk to women. Before that, there had been a lot of talk, especially from our US allies, about how the Taliban had changed, that they now agreed with women’s education, and blah, blah... but when we were in the plenary session and saw their reaction to us it showed us their real mindset. They had not changed.

**THERE HAD BEEN A LOT OF TALK ABOUT HOW THE TALIBAN HAD CHANGED, THAT THEY NOW AGREED WITH WOMEN’S EDUCATION, AND BLAH, BLAH ... BUT WHEN WE WERE IN THE PLENARY SESSION AND SAW THEIR REACTION TO US, IT SHOWED US THEIR REAL MINDSET. THEY HAD NOT CHANGED.**

In response, we concluded that however and whenever they reacted to us, we had to impose ourselves, and show our reality. Whenever there was a meeting, even the smaller, backchannel meetings, we tried to be there. But it was very difficult. In meetings we did get into, we talked. We had different ideas and wanted to be engaged.

### **Where next for peacemaking in Afghanistan?**

Now things are very hard. The Taliban leader thinks he represents God, and he knows everything. We cannot work with that. We have to think about rights, education and the future. Rights are universal, but they cannot be implemented uniformly in different countries and communities. In today’s Afghanistan, there is no education for women. And women are facing different sorts of violence from Taliban and other people. There are no investigations, there is no protection for women inside Afghanistan.

**WOMEN STILL RESIST THE TALIBAN. THERE ARE SEVERAL DIFFERENT MOVEMENTS BUT IT IS NOT EASY – THE TALIBAN SEARCH FOR PEOPLE WHO PUT VIDEOS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, THEN TRY TO FIND THEM, AND HARASS OR DETAIN THEM.**

I don’t see possibilities for change coming quickly, but I believe in the resistance of people, especially women. Despite facing violence, women still resist the Taliban. It is different from the first era of Taliban power. Back then there was no internet, no social media, no publications – even the international community was silent on Afghanistan. Now there are several different movements, in a kind of network, many connected on WhatsApp groups. But it is not easy – the Taliban search for people who put videos on Facebook, Twitter (now called X) or other social media, then try to find them, and harass or detain them.

All women of Afghanistan are looking to continued pressure from the international community. Support from Western countries is important and can help impact the UN, but the involvement of Muslim-majority countries – Indonesia, Qatar and others have been supportive – is also needed. They can put pressure on the Taliban on the basis of Islamic values, and one day facilitate mediation. The Taliban are not yet ready for this, but if there is evolution inside, with support from outside, mediation of some kind should happen, shaped by both women and men.

# INNOVATING FOR INCLUSION IN AFRICAN MEDIATION

## From aspiration to actuality

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**Africa's approach to mediation has become more inclusive over the past two decades. Impetus for this shift has come from within Africa: driven by the practice and activism of civil society, women and young people demanding to be heard; anchored in the evolution of continental norms such as the move from 'non-interference' to 'non-indifference' and the promotion of 'African solutions'; and embodied in the African Union's (AU) 'roadmap' for inclusive and sustainable development, Agenda 2063, and the 2019 Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security.**

African policymakers, practitioners and peacebuilders have pioneered more inclusive strategies and 'multi-track' mediation at continental and subregional levels as ways to enhance the legitimacy of mediation processes, apply pressure on the negotiating parties, and broaden implementation of agreements reached.

Africans have also played active and impactful roles in championing inclusivity around the world. Namibia, holding the presidency of the UN Security Council, played a critical role in developing UNSC Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, while the AU and the continent's regional economic communities (RECs) frequently invoke UNSCR Resolution 1325 and its successor resolutions at the UN to encourage women's participation in peace processes. African youth leaders contributed to global efforts such as the five-year action plan for youth-inclusive peace processes, 'We are in this together', developed under the auspices of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security in 2022.

However, 'track one' negotiations between the conflict parties remain predominantly the preserve of older men, typically current or former heads of state, and the small teams of (generally male) advisers they bring with them. Among other problems, this model has limited the development of sustained in-house mediation support capacity in either the AU or the RECs. More needs to be done to ensure implementation of Africa's far-sighted normative framework for inclusion, drawing on the innovative practices that women have brought to the continent's peacemaking, and for the growing demands from the continent's young people (Africa's median age is 19) to be included in the decisions that will shape their future.

## Institutionalising inclusivity in African mediation

The AU, RECs, and African states have adapted policies and established mechanisms to facilitate mediation inclusivity – pushed and supported by civil society organisations. For instance, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) and the AU co-produced the AU's *Handbook on mediation*, which includes guidelines on promoting women's participation in mediation.

The AU, RECs and African governments have established formal structures for women to access mediation processes, notably in 2017 when the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise) was created as a subsidiary body of the AU's Panel of the Wise. FemWise sought to institutionalise a network of women to conduct preventive diplomacy and mediation at different levels.

By 2021, FemWise numbered 465 members across 50 countries. High-profile members have included Former AU Commission Chair Nkozana Dlamini-Zuma, former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and former President of Malawi Joyce Banda. Despite this impressive reach and membership, FemWise's rate of deployment has nonetheless been disappointing. During 2022 it provided support to peace processes in Chad and Sudan; it has also worked with RECs to create a network of sub-regional and national chapters. But for the most part its engagements have been restricted to community-level mediation, and its reach has not yet translated consistently into senior appointments and positioning.

A notable exception was the appointment of former South African Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka as one of the three mediators supporting negotiations to end the Tigray-Ethiopia conflict in November 2022. Neither delegation at these talks included a single woman negotiator, however.

Meanwhile, the region has also tried to institutionalise pathways for young women and men to access mediation initiatives. The Economic Community of West African States created the West Africa Youth Council, the East African Community a Youth Ambassadors Program, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) a Youth Forum for Peace. More recently, the AU in 2022 launched the Network of African Youth on Conflict Prevention and Mediation (WiseYouth).

## Inclusive mediation in practice

Progress in inclusivity in African mediation has evolved from practice, reflecting the commitment and innovation of key mediators and communities. Mediation processes in Kenya and South Sudan illustrate progress and challenges, while, as is discussed in more detail below, analysis of a new dataset reveals that consideration of youth issues, though still a struggle, is consistently better in African peace efforts than elsewhere.

### Kenya

The 2008 Kenya National Dialogue Reconciliation (KNDR) was brokered by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the head of the AU Panel of Eminent African Personalities. Nearly six weeks of negotiations resulted in Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga signing a power-sharing agreement and launching a constitutional review process that would pave the way for Kenya to vote in favour of a new constitution in 2010. The KNDR was marked by the comparatively high level of women's participation, with 25 per cent of the (admittedly small) mediation teams being women. Female representation ranged from former Mozambique First Lady Graça Machel's presence as a member of the AU Panel, to female senior advisers deployed by the AU and UN, as well as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

Annan was described by one adviser as using 'inclusion as leverage', a significant innovation. As his adviser Meredith Preston-McGhie recalled, Annan 'made an early determination that he would enable the people to set the narrative of what had happened in the conflict and not just rely on the political parties'. He set aside four days for consultations with a diverse array of Kenyans – elders, youth, smaller political parties, business leaders, and civil society, with dedicated time to talk to women. Machel led a process in which diverse women came together to develop understanding between them and formulate proposals.

Meanwhile, the Kenya Women's Consultative Group (KWCG) broadened women's participation by providing a pathway between women's organisations and the mediation team, holding consultative sessions with women's organisations across the country and lobbying the mediation team to incorporate gender into the negotiations. The KWCG's efforts enabled the group to achieve the status of a semi-official consultative body and helped inform the gender provisions of the agreements reached, for example a gender quota in implementation commissions. It was notable that the voices advancing women's perspectives at the table included those of men as well as women.

### South Sudan

In South Sudan, extensive efforts by women, young people and wider civil society increased the diversity of representation in the negotiations that led to the 2018 Revitalised Agreement of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (RARCSS) and contributed to a more inclusive peace process and outcomes. IGAD had launched the High-Level Revitalisation Forum (HLRF) in June 2017 to revive the collapsed 2015 peace agreement. Efforts to promote women's participation drew on a history of multi-level advocacy, including the work of the Women's Bloc of South Sudan, which had secured a seat in the earlier IGAD-led process. But they received new impetus at the IGAD High-Level Independent Experts Meeting held in August 2017, when the four women among the 22 delegates pressed for enhanced levels of women's participation. In 2018, 25 per cent of the delegates who signed the Revitalised Agreement were women.

Significantly, this group also pushed for the creation of the South Sudan Women's Coalition (SSWC). Representing 40 organisations, the SSWC sought to bolster the legitimacy of high-level female negotiators by securing buy-in from grassroots and other organisations. In the ensuing process, it worked alongside the South Sudan Civil Society Forum and the South Sudan Coalition of Youth Organisations to insist that all were formally represented as delegates of the HLRF rather than observers, and to coordinate positions and alliance-building.



Consolidating positions in the negotiations was not without challenges. A roundtable discussion in December 2018 among many of the South Sudanese women leaders who had been involved in the process recalled that women had faced challenges penetrating its patriarchal culture, as well in engaging in a rapidly evolving process with limited technical preparation. As in other contexts, the women's groups had to address significant ethnic, political and socio-economic divisions among themselves as well as in broader civil society participation, while also navigating the risks of political 'capture' of their processes by some of the parties. However, they were for the most part able to align their advocacy – devising, for example, a process of agreeing and then announcing 'red lines' and 'green lines' to facilitate the promotion of their positions – and to act as an information conduit between the high-level talks and a variety of constituencies outside the HLRF. The SSWC facilitated the development of the South Sudan Women Position on the Promotion of Durable Peace and Reconciliation in 2017 and contributed to the gender mainstreaming of the agreement, including by securing seats in monitoring bodies and technical committees.

Young South Sudanese made notable contributions to broadening both participation and public engagement in the process, including by their adroit use of social media – an important innovation at the time. Ana Ta'ban ('I am tired' in Arabic), an artist collective group, was at the forefront of these efforts, and collaborated with the National Youth Union (NYU) and the Youth Organizations Coalition (YOC) in the #SouthSudanIsWatching campaigns to create entry points for youth groups

to influence the HLRF. The 'E-Delegates Forum', which involved 30-minute Facebook livestreams with a delegate in the HLRF, was the flagship initiative in this campaign. Additionally, #SouthSudanIsWatching used social media campaigns, photojournalism, radio programmes and art festivals to share information and draw attention to the youth perspectives.

## Youth inclusion – still an uphill struggle

Youth organisations trying to access African mediation processes have faced an uphill struggle and have generally found most traction at the sub-national and local level. It is notable, for example, that youth involvement in the process leading to the Nakuru County Peace Accord in Kenya in August 2012 (as described by Irena Grizelj, Michael Frank Alar and Ayak Chol Deng Alok in *Accord 29*), remains a key example in the canon of youth participation.

Other peace initiatives pushed by young people include those of the Interfaith Platform of Central African Youth (PIJCA) in the Central African Republic since 2014. The PIJCA, representing over 40 groups and 2,000 members, has been active in 4th district, once the epicentre of violence in the capital Bangui. It negotiated with armed groups to allow humanitarian assistance and peacekeepers to reach conflict-affected communities. It also reached out to armed groups to participate in peace processes, organised interfaith dialogues, and provided financial support to young ex-combatants.

Unfortunately, instances where youth mobilisation results in concrete outcomes – such as the Kafanchan Peace Declaration signed in Nigeria in 2016, where each of the 29 delegations including a youth representative – remain the exception rather than the norm.

Indeed, a new dataset from Asli Ozecelik and Daniel Odin Shaw confirms that the incorporation of youth perspectives in peace agreements remains 'marginal' – appearing explicitly in just 12 per cent of agreements concluded in 70 peace processes worldwide between 1990 and 2022. The data does, however, show an upward trend in references to youth since 2010, with a marked prevalence in Africa: 84 per cent of the local agreements that refer to youth were reached in five African countries: Central African Republic, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, and South Sudan.

**AFRICA HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS. THE NORMS, STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS ESTABLISHED HAVE NOT YET LIVED UP TO THEIR POTENTIAL, HOWEVER.**

## Moving forwards: realising aspirations

Since the 2000s, Africa has made significant progress in institutionalising its policy framework for inclusive peace processes, and in demonstrating the potential of multi-track mediation. The norms, structures and mechanisms established have not yet lived up to their potential, however. Experience has shown that, to be more impactful, institutional frameworks for inclusion need to be married with grassroots mobilisation and pressure, as well as proactive and innovative engagement by mediators and negotiators. For the region to continue to build on past innovative practice, the AU and regional African bodies should extend their approach to the high-level appointments of lead mediators to include some of the continent's pre-eminent women and take steps to ensure that all its mediators are afforded expert assistance, including from women and youth representatives and advisers.

Lessons learned from inclusive, multi-track processes, such as the contributions of the women and youth coalitions in South Sudan, should inform future mediation efforts as well as the updating and operationalisation of mediation guidelines. These could clarify how lead mediators can effectively incorporate existing structures and resources, such as FemWise and WiseYouth, and emphasise processes – and outcomes – that are inclusive of diverse communities affected by conflict. Given the demographic profile of the continent, they should recognise the contributions to be made by its greatest resource: the young women and men determined to mobilise for a better tomorrow.

Innovative practice in Kenya and South Sudan was able to achieve important successes in bringing different voices and interests into peace talks – informal coalitions, grassroots networks, women and young people – using tactics like information exchanges, consultative dialogues and digital activism. As FemWise and WiseYouth look ahead, it is imperative that they build capacity on how to leverage digital activism to promote inclusion – an area of great potential, as Julie Hawke explores on p.102. The two networks should focus on developing robust communication strategies that engage women and young people effectively in digital spaces. FemWise does post sporadic updates on its Facebook and Twitter (now called X), while WiseYouth has, as yet, no notable online presence. Despite discussions dating back to 2019, as of late 2023 FemWise still does not have an interactive website or mobile application. Effective presence in digital spaces would allow FemWise and WiseYouth to act as resource centres, provide online training materials and other information and facilitate communication across the region.

## INCLUSIVE MEDIATION IN SUDAN: THE PAST NEED NOT BE PROLOGUE

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**Sudan's pro-democracy activists have faced oppression, systematic targeting, massacres and coups. From mid-April 2023, they have faced the impacts of a national war between their main oppressors, Generals Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemedti' of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), respectively. This long-anticipated rupture in the security forces was precipitated by the failure to reconcile the irreconcilable – the ambitions of the generals, their civilian junior partners and foreign backers – following the coup in 2021. A common denominator across various phases of political upheaval and transition has been the exclusion of Sudan's civil society.**

### Repeating pattern of societal exclusion

The die was cast for societal exclusion when Omer al-Bashir, Sudan's long-time dictator, was removed from power following intense and sustained protests in 2018–19, which involved a much broader swathe of society than Sudan's revolution-dense history had ever seen. Bashir's security committee quickly rebranded itself as the Transitional Military Council (TMC), and fashioned a power-sharing deal creating a military–civilian Sovereignty Council, led by Generals Burhan and Hemedti, alongside a hamstrung civilian cabinet. This largely ignored the 'street' in negotiations and decision making. Even after their bloody 2021 *autogolpe* (self-coup), the TMC remained the primary interlocutors in diplomatic and negotiation efforts, with grassroots pro-democracy protesters largely side-lined.

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Sudanese protesters rally to denounce the overnight detentions of members of the government by the army, Khartoum, Sudan, 25 October 2021. © AFP via Getty Images

Sudan's current war is perhaps the generals' biggest gambit to quell the enduring momentum of revolutionary power. But, in response, and in characteristic fashion, the key pillars of the revolution, the neighbourhood Resistance Committees and the professional associations and unions, have innovated. They have rallied to engage in efforts to end the war as well as provide support and services to ordinary citizens caught in the crossfire.

To avert state collapse, several mediation platforms have emerged, including the joint Saudi-US ceasefire platform in Jeddah, as well as a tug of war between the African Union and regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). To varying degrees, these, as before, have failed to adequately engage civilian non-elites, including those at the forefront of the on-the-ground response. This comes despite the glaring reality that these groups, chiefly the Resistance Committees, were right all along: appeasing the generals in a power-sharing deal and enabling them to enrich themselves – not holding them to account on transitional justice and human rights abuses – holds all of Sudan hostage. While understanding the challenges involved, the protesters' demands haven't changed: they want the SAF to return to the barracks and to undergo reform, and the RSF to be disbanded.

## Maximalist mediation

The Resistance Committees' maximalist approach to political change has frustrated mediators and international stakeholders, who are wedded to more conventional methods whereby representatives of a position or party agree around a table a deal in which one (often the unarmed) side makes a greater compromise.

### **CURRENT MEDIATION ORTHODOXIES HAVEN'T ADAPTED ENOUGH TO ENGAGE NON-VIOLENT, GRASSROOTS PRO-DEMOCRACY GROUPS, WHOSE MEANINGFUL INCLUSION IS A PREREQUISITE OF LASTING AND CIVIC PEACE.**

Current mediation orthodoxies haven't adapted enough to engage non-violent, grassroots pro-democracy groups, whose meaningful inclusion is a prerequisite of lasting and civic peace. Some efforts have been made to reach out to Resistance Committees and other grassroots pro-democracy groups, yet most current practice tries to shoe-horn them into existing mediation frameworks that have terms and modalities already set up, rendering these groups little more than a legitimising presence.

This is illogical: mediation modalities must shift to recognise and incorporate amorphous street positions as the point of departure, not an afterthought. The many civilian initiatives to stop the war need to be gathered in a platform that would use two tried and tested methodologies: broad-based elite processes, such as the 2019 Declaration for Freedom and Change process that united Sudanese to bring down Bashir; and the Resistance Committees' inclusive and consensus-driven drafting process for revolutionary charters, which streamlined public positions following the 2021 coup into a *co-created minimum agenda*. An agenda established in this way would help create trust and consensus on immediate concerns such as the protection of civilians and ensuring humanitarian access, as well as on longer-term political concerns such as constitutional reforms.

### **MEDIATION MODALITIES MUST SHIFT TO RECOGNISE AND INCORPORATE AMORPHOUS STREET POSITIONS AS THE POINT OF DEPARTURE, NOT AN AFTERTHOUGHT**

The beginnings of this are already in place, as are efforts to align the initiatives. But currently they do not encompass many representatives outside of elite echo chambers. A concerted effort to break from the ills of former processes needs to be prioritised, and the Resistance Committees' collective positions given due consideration. This would help meet mediation structures half-way, making amorphous groups far more legible to mediators, and reducing the militarisation of mediation that has resulted from orthodox models.

In order to fully break with past mediation failures, Sudanese elites and the international community must imagine new political systems, even those which they do not yet fully understand and cannot control, but which may yet produce the desired sustainable, civilian-led outcomes.



## INSIDER NETWORKS FOR PEACE IN SOMALIA

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Since the collapse of the military government in 1991, Somalia has experienced a wide range of clashes and disputes. Somali society is organised according to numerous major and minor clans, as well as sub-clans, which have a complex web of relationships with each other. Competition over water, grazing land, and other natural resources can often lead to disputes, between clans or within an individual clan, particularly for pastoralist communities. These disputes are exacerbated by the acute climate emergency in the Horn of Africa, as resources become increasingly scarce, leading to often violent conflict over the land still available for grazing of herds or the distribution of aid after the effects of severe weather events.

Somali communities have a traditional legal framework called *Xeer*, which predates the modern legal system and serves as a customary law governing social norms, disputes, and agreements among Somali communities. It is an unwritten code of conduct that has been passed down through generations and provides a foundation for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Under the *Xeer* system, a process called 'Diya' (blood money) must be followed in cases of assault, murder, or injury to ensure that the victim's family is compensated adequately. This approach is supposed to promote harmony and social cohesion. However, while the *Xeer* system has sustained Somali society in times of crisis and political turmoil, it also has its shortcomings, such as the exclusion of women, youth and minorities, and inconsistencies in its interpretation and application.

Given the limitations of the traditional system and the clear motivation and interest of women and youth to play a more active role in resolving and preventing conflicts, the Berghof Foundation established the Insider Peacebuilders Network (IPN) as an innovative approach to fostering peace and unity among different communities and clans in Hirshabelle State and Galmudug State. The IPN is comprised of members of various sectors of society, including traditional elders, religious leaders, women, youth, poets, and representatives from marginalised clans. This diverse network of more than 100 individuals expands perspectives on mediation and conflict resolution beyond traditional elders, leading to ideas for resolving conflict that are more inclusive. Allowing for the insight of those individuals in Somali society who are often excluded from such processes leads to more sustainable solutions.

**ALLOWING FOR THE INSIGHT OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS IN SOMALI SOCIETY WHO ARE OFTEN EXCLUDED FROM SUCH PROCESSES LEADS TO MORE SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS.**

Members of the IPN have undergone capacity development in mediation, conflict resolution, trauma healing and mental health and psychosocial support, as well as community policing, and the nexus between climate change and conflict. Workshops on climate security give the IPN members the skills to analyse and respond to conflicts with a climate-sensitive lens. The IPN is primarily based in five districts of Hirshabelle State – Jowhar, Balcad, Beledweyne, Adele and Bulaburte – and five districts of Galmudug State – Adado, Dhusamareb, Galkayo, Abudwaq, and Hobyo. Prominent traditional elders who previously managed disputes exclusively have embraced the IPN as a collaborative effort that brings together various community sectors to better resolve conflict. The IPN also works closely with the government authorities in each of the districts, jointly defining priorities.

The members of the IPN carry out initiatives that range from women's workshops on peace to youth football tournaments to a production of a television drama. Most recently, they have provided space for community members to discuss the role that climate change and environmental degradation may play in exacerbating conflicts in their communities and encouraged collective brainstorming on possible ways forward.

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In one example, the Mandhere and Daysamase villages near Jowhar were involved in a violent conflict over agricultural land near the Jowhar River. As the rains in Somalia become increasingly erratic and infrequent, land near the river has become more valuable and therefore contested. The local IPN members reached out to the traditional elders of both villages, urging them to cease hostilities and engage with one another peacefully to resolve their differences. With the support of the Jowhar district administration, they facilitated a four-day dialogue, which allowed the community members a space to hear each other's perspectives. The IPN youth members in Jowhar subsequently offered training to 30 elders in the communities to support them to build relationships between the communities, foster collaboration and increase understanding about the effect of climate change on the villages and the need to work together. One of the participants, an older man, mentioned how the training brought them closer as neighbours and brothers, reinforcing their commitment to peace and communication.

## COLOMBIA: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT THE HEART OF PEACE TALKS

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***Philipp Lustenberger** is the Special Envoy for the Peace Process in Colombia of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. See p.12 for his full biography.*

Public participation is a central element of the peace process in Colombia. For decades, many social sectors, in a country with immense geographic and social diversity, have demanded active inclusion. President Gustavo Petro's government has adopted a holistic approach to peace, termed '*Paz Total*' ('total peace'). This embraces the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), talks with all remaining non-state armed groups and urban criminal structures, as well as the reform of social, drug and security policies. Yet Petro, the country's first left-wing president, faces a complex situation, with uncertain parliamentary majorities and multiple armed groups disputing control over populations, illegal economies and territories.

Talks between the government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group, a cornerstone of the wider peace process, are guided by the negotiation roadmap laid out in the Mexico Agreement of February 2023 – the '*New Dialogue Agenda*'. Participation is central to the parties' ambition for a major national pact on economic, political and social transformations. The first three agenda items suggest a two-year process to gather support from all political and social sectors: first, a participation model is to be designed through consultations; second, a participatory assessment will identify the root causes of the conflict; and, finally, policies and development plans will be adopted to address these causes and enable the overcoming of the conflict.

As part of the initial negotiation setup, the parties have devised some innovations. Petro named a pluralistic delegation of 14 members – six women and eight men – including social leaders, business representatives and environmental activists, as well as a political opponent. In agreement with the government, the ELN appointed a so-called '*Gestoria de Paz*' which currently consists of four of its members released from prison, working freely in Colombia for the benefit of the peace process. The parties have also decided to negotiate under the principle of rolling implementation, meaning that partial agreements, especially in relation to the situation in conflict-affected regions, are implemented as the talks move along.

On 9 June 2023, the parties signed an agreement on public participation. A National Participation Committee with over 80 members drawn from 30 social and political sectors, about 40 per cent of whom are women, is tasked with designing a model for participation. Holding sectoral and regional consultations, the committee has to submit a proposal to the negotiating table within six months. The committee was

*continued...*

inaugurated on 3 August 2023 during a mass event in Bogota, and its reception, so far, has been positive. In parallel, the parties are implementing a ceasefire with the explicit purpose of creating a climate in which active and inclusive participation is possible.

Through broad consultations, members of the public will discuss how they want to participate, laying the basis for broad societal buy-in for the peace talks and the ensuing transformations. The committee faces an enormous task. While Colombia has a lot of experience with participatory exercises, it faces broad scepticism about their legitimacy and efficacy. Civil society actors have argued that participation spaces have not been sufficiently inclusive, that the government has not taken proposals generated through participation into account in its policies, and, when state institutions have considered them, there has been a lack of effective implementation.

**COLOMBIANS, WHETHER THEY PARTICIPATE DIRECTLY OR NOT, WILL HAVE TO FEEL THAT THEIR VIEWS AND INTERESTS ARE REPRESENTED AND THAT THE ENSUING PROPOSALS HAVE BROAD LEGITIMACY.**

Will this ambitious participation process be different? The National Participation Committee includes a broad representation of society – an important prerequisite. Yet, the committee will have to devise methodologies to build common ground among diverse participants, rather than, as has often been the case in the past, just gathering a multiplicity of proposals. Colombians, whether they participate directly or not, will have to feel that their views and interests are represented and that the ensuing proposals have broad legitimacy. This will require communicating and explaining the proceedings in innovative ways.

For the ELN, public participation has been a central demand. President Petro shares this view, and so the two parties have put participation at the heart of the peace talks. They are bound to face many political, methodological and security challenges. Tensions within the committee and between societal representatives and the negotiating parties will be inevitable. Success will depend on the disposition of a broad sample of Colombian society to participate actively and find shared solutions, as well as on the capacity of the Colombian state to deliver on the promise of real change in people's lives.



Colombian President Gustavo Petro gives a speech during a ceremony to begin a six-month ceasefire as part of a process to begin a permanent peace between the ELN and the government in Bogota, Colombia, 3 August 2023.

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## **SECTION 4**

# **Mediating with and on technology**

# MEDIATING WITH AND ON TECHNOLOGY

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**A volume on innovations in mediation would be amiss without a section addressing the potential and risks of digital technologies. Technology and innovation are entwined, both because technological advances are the result of innovative industry, and because technological advances very often catalyse the need for innovation in processes and practices. Digital technologies in turn are now inextricable from mediation, being intrinsic too to how wars are being fought and peace needs to be made.**

A decade ago, in the adjacent fields of peacebuilding and humanitarian response, interest in digital technologies sparked a new wave of innovations. Many of these were premised on the idea that new technologies were democratising access to information and communication tools, enabling a multiplicity of actors to make use of their potential to increase their impact. Enhanced data management held out the possibility of delivering better understanding, and communications and networking platforms of delivering greater participation and inclusion. While many actors participating in this initial wave of 'digital peacebuilding and humanitarian response' were aware of the risks that came along with these opportunities, the underlying premise was that new technologies were a tool of great potential. What mattered was how we chose to use them.

The mediation field entered the digital debate somewhat later but adopted a similar framing. The 2019 Digital Mediation Toolkit was a collaboration between the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue to assess opportunities and risks related to the use of digital technologies in mediation. The toolkit is foundational in setting out four areas where mediators might innovate their practice using digital technologies: conflict analysis, engagement with parties, inclusivity, and strategic communications.

This framework encourages practitioners to balance the risks and opportunities of (otherwise neutral) technology tools. In recent years this framing has been challenged by increasing concerns about how the design and affordances of digital technologies, especially digital media platforms, are impacting conflict dynamics. As misinformation, hate speech and polarisation manifested on these platforms in ways that directly impacted the work of peacebuilders, humanitarians and mediators, organisations with strong digital practices, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, warned that these new technologies were not just neutral tools with risks to be managed, but new conflict landscapes to be understood, mitigated, and at times mediated.

Experience and work on the implications of digital technologies for mediation accelerated rapidly under Covid-19, incorporating this more nuanced approach and considering the new conflict drivers that emerge as technologies become ubiquitous in conflict contexts. The Libyan peace process that unfolded in 2020–21, as reflected in articles by Govinda Clayton, Sean Kane and Maude Morrison on p.95, and by Julie Hawke on p.102, was a neat summary of this new understanding of the reasons mediators need to adapt and innovate in respect of digital technologies. It demonstrated that digital technologies offer new opportunities for mediation, but also create new spaces and dynamics that require mediation. The Libya ceasefire agreement that resulted from UN-led negotiations in 2020 is the first in UN history to include a clause that explicitly mentions behaviour on social media.

Beyond Libya, the pandemic was pivotal in forcing many mediators to consider the pros and cons of digital technologies. What started as remedial for the impossibility of in-person meeting became an asset in itself, even when social distancing was no longer required. Concurrently, as more of our lives have moved online, many mediators are becoming aware of the prevalence of harmful digital behaviours that may be relevant at the negotiating table.



A Kenyan social media influencer browses online posts ahead of the 2022 Kenyan general election. Mediators are frequently called on to address the conflict-escalating potential of social media, even as they may be seeking to harness the power it offers for the benefit of peace. © Tony Karumba/AFP via Getty Images

The mediation field is still coming to grips with what cyber warfare or cyber risks to peace really entail. Harmful digital behaviours that may be relevant to negotiations need to inform the conflict analysis that underpins the engagement of a mediation team, but some of them may also be mediatable. As Clayton, Kane and Morrison describe, a number of social media agreements have been brokered, and clauses covering digital technologies are making their way into broader peace agreements. In a significant contribution to the field, they introduce process design questions for mediators to consider when managing the digital dimensions of conflict.

In a timely example of the adaption of existing practice to new contexts, Camino Kavanagh on p.100 describes how confidence-building measures (CBMs) originally conceived during the Cold War to ease East-West tensions have become a core feature of international and regional security discussions on information and communication technologies (ICTs) and cyberspace. Looking forwards, experts are considering how cyber-related CBMs can also be applied in internal conflicts.

While digital tools are unsafe and may be inaccessible in some circumstances, especially for women, they are, as Hawke demonstrates, nonetheless able to address concrete barriers that otherwise hinder participation, such as geographic distance, language needs, limited access to information, low literacy, and siloed networks. Case examples now available suggest that digital inclusion is creating new standards of practice in dialogue and mediation and helping foster greater participation in peace processes, particularly by women, youth, and marginalised groups.

Among positive examples, Sadraki Yabre describes on p.105 how a geographic information systems (GIS) location app, the 'Mine Alert System', in Burkina Faso has been used to share information and prevent and mitigate conflicts between artisanal miners, local communications and industrial corporations.

The complex impacts of social media on violent and non-violent mobilisation in Nigeria, analysed by Medinat Malefakis, are illustrative of its multiple ramifications in other contexts, as well as the mixed trajectory of government attempts to curtail its use. Mediators are frequently called on to address the conflict-escalating potential of social media and questions relating to its use by conflict parties. But they may also be seeking to harness the communicative power it offers for the benefit of peace, or to engage directly in the mediation of its use. Bringing an insider's perspective, Ravi Iyer on p.110 draws on his experience within a social media company to advise on how peacemakers could and should do more to work with such companies to limit harm.

In a final contribution to this section, Martin Wählisch speculates on p.112 on what AI may hold for the future of mediation. While international attention is focused on the need to regulate the risks offered by AI, its capacity to process and analyse vast amounts of data can help mediators' understanding of complex conflict dynamics and inform the strategies they pursue. A calibrated approach to the exploration of its potential for mediation would encourage innovation but advance incrementally, informed by continuous evaluation.

Digital technologies affect not only how we communicate and who we connect with, but also how we understand the world around us, and ultimately ourselves. From Colombia, to Ukraine, to Yemen, people find ways to stay connected online. We can no longer consider the digital ecosystem a separate category, outside of our 'normal' offline lives. In a recent paper on post-digital peacebuilding, Andreas Hirlbinger calls this the 'normalcy of the digital condition'. The articles in this section highlight through theory and experience that the field of mediation needs to be digital by default, considering opportunities and managing risks, just as it considers all other aspects of human interaction and power dynamics that impact the prospects of peace.

# INCLUDING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN PEACE AGREEMENTS

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**Sean Kane** is Team Leader of the UN Mediation Support Unit, where he oversees the provision of mediation advice to UN entities and external partners. He has served with UN missions in Afghanistan and Iraq and supported the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria during the Intra-Syrian Negotiations. Sean has also worked for private mediation NGOs, including for HD in Libya and with the United States Institute of Peace. He has published on several mediation topics and holds a Masters of Advanced Studies in Peace Mediation from ETH Zurich University. His contribution to this *Accord* volume is made in his personal capacity.

**Maude Morrison** heads the social media and conflict mediation team at HD. She supports HD teams across the globe to mitigate online harms in conflict zones and to address the challenges presented by social media during peace processes. Previously, Maude was Deputy Director at Build Up where she focused on the intersection of technology and conflict and worked on projects in Myanmar, Syria and the Sahel region. Maude has lived and worked in Myanmar and Lebanon and is now based in Paris. She holds a bachelor's degree from Oxford University and a master's degree from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

**Digital technologies play an increasingly significant role in armed conflict. In response, conflict parties and mediators have begun integrating digital technologies into negotiation processes. A number of 'social media peace agreements' have been brokered, as well as a number of clauses covering digital technologies in broader peace agreements. These early agreements demonstrate the utility and possibility of negotiating restraint in the online space.**

However, despite these developments, most mediators still have limited experience in facilitating negotiations over how peace agreements can seek to restrict harmful uses of digital technologies. To address this gap, we discuss five crucial process design questions for mediators to consider when managing the digital dimensions of conflict.

## **When should digital technologies be integrated into a peace process?**

The centrality of digital technologies in any peace process will depend on their prevalence and impact in the conflict.

Integrating the digital dimension into conflict analysis is now increasingly essential. Such analysis should determine how digital technologies are being deployed, by whom and with what effect, including how gender dynamics intersect with access and usage of these technologies (see Table 1 for descriptions and examples).

### **ANALYSIS SHOULD DETERMINE HOW DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ARE BEING DEPLOYED, BY WHOM AND WITH WHAT EFFECT, INCLUDING HOW GENDER DYNAMICS INTERSECT.**

When analysis suggests that digital technologies represent an important facet of the conflict, mediators might proactively explore with conflict parties how to incorporate digital technologies into the negotiating agenda. As the use of digital technologies in conflict grows, with what the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has recognised as a correspondingly 'dramatic impact' on civilian populations, conflict parties or other stakeholders may themselves increasingly call for this. In 2022, for example, alarmed by the humanitarian impact of a multi-year internet shutdown

in Tigray for millions of people, civil society groups urged the African Union to address the shutdown in peace talks between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front.

Nonetheless, there may be cases where despite the prevalence of digital technologies in a conflict, the opportunities for mediation on digital issues are limited. For example, there may be less scope for negotiation if there is significant asymmetry in digital capabilities between the parties (for example only one party controls the tools necessary to engage in some of the digital behaviours described in Table 1). Analysis should thus determine both the scope of digital issues and their ripeness for mediation.

## Dedicated or integrated agreements?

Where conflict parties are willing to negotiate on digital issues, they must decide whether these issues should be addressed in the form of a dedicated agreement, protocol or annex, or rather as clauses within a wider agreement.

Dedicated digital agreements provide an opportunity for greater detail and nuance, and the opportunity to address a wider spectrum of digital behaviours. For

example, in Nigeria’s 2023 elections, a Code of Conduct on social media was signed between parties, candidates and influencers in Kaduna State, outlining a range of problematic digital behaviours (for example, harassment, political disinformation, and inauthentic accounts).

However, standalone agreements can lead to the side-lining of digital issues and commitments, as they might not be negotiated or implemented as part of the broader process. This could be particularly problematic if the parties’ leaders do not fully understand and own the resulting agreement.

An alternative is to integrate digital clauses into broader agreements. This has the advantage of giving digital issues greater visibility and (in principle) according them equal importance to other issues. However, it limits the amount of detail possible and may not enable the full range of problematic digital behaviours to be addressed. In such cases, mediators could encourage relevant clauses to include concrete implementation mechanisms, providing a mandate to continue the negotiating process. For example, the 2020 Libya ceasefire agreement calls on parties to ‘halt the currently rampant media escalation and hate speech’ on ‘websites’ and establishes an implementation sub-committee.

**TABLE 1: USES OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN CONFLICT**

	WHAT?	WHY?	WHERE?
Offensive cyber operations	Digital, human, and organisational resources used to gain unauthorised access to an adversary’s digital services or networks.	Denying an adversary access to the network or service, degrading or temporarily disrupting its functioning, erasing or extracting and releasing sensitive data (‘hack and leak’), or damaging critical physical infrastructure.	Georgia (2008), Israel-Palestine (2019), Nagorny-Karabakh (2020), Ukraine [see p.97].
Network control	Exploiting control and management of telecommunications and digital networks to gain advantage over an adversary.	Internet and mobile shutdowns or bandwidth-throttling to limit protests, political organisation, online fundraising, access to social media sites, the use of digital services by armed groups for encrypted military communications and weapons systems targeting, doxing (the sharing of personal or identifying information online with malicious intent) or digital surveillance.	Cameroon (2017–18), Ethiopia (2020–22), Myanmar (since 2021), Sudan (periodically since 2019), Yemen (periodically since 2014).
Influence and manipulation	Using digital networks and social media platforms for information operations to disrupt adversaries’ decision making or influence domestic and international audiences.	Spread of hate speech, disinformation and otherwise harmful or partisan narratives to pursue political or strategic objectives, or to undermine peace talks, for example information campaigns to reduce their legitimacy or targeting and harassing peace negotiators (in particular women).	Ethiopia (2020–22), Libya Political Dialogue Forum (2020–21), Sudan (2023).



## Digital technologies and ceasefires

If conflict parties decide to integrate digital technologies into broader agreements, they may do so in various ways: as part of political prevention efforts (such as electoral codes of conduct), a ceasefire (aiming to stop or control violence), or a more comprehensive peace agreement.

Given the growing convergence between digital technologies and warfighting, negotiated restraints on certain digital behaviours may become a more frequent feature of ceasefires. Indeed, during the past decade simple provisions related to harmful social media use have emerged in national and local ceasefires (Kenya, Libya, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen), and local internet shutdowns have been ended following ceasefires in northern Ethiopia and Myanmar (Rakhine).

In addition, the military use of cyber operations witnessed in inter-state wars such as Ukraine has led to growing discussion of how this might feature in a future ceasefire agreement. A consistent theme emerging from practitioner guidance on ceasefires is the need for precision around prohibited behaviour and incident management mechanisms, and it would thus make sense to include specific uses of digital technologies where they might directly or indirectly threaten the stability of a broader ceasefire regime.

### Which type of clause: principles, practices or processes?

Regardless of the type of agreement within which digital technologies are included, the clauses they contain may fall into one of three categories: *principles*, *practices* or *processes*.

**1. Principles** are general aspirational statements intended to signal an acknowledgment of the significance of the digital realm. They serve to reaffirm or commit to upholding existing legal obligations, rights or emerging norms related to the responsible use of digital technologies – without necessarily detailing specific actions or accompanying monitoring and verification (M&V). For example, parties may agree to:

- Adhere to existing obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and international human rights law relating to cyber operations.
- Recognise access to the internet as part of the right to information on which people's lives, well-being, and security depend during conflict and/or as a key enabler of other political, economic, and social rights.
- In light of the heightened risks posed in conflict by disinformation and other forms of information manipulation, recognise a safe, constructive, and responsible social media space as a public good.

**2. Practices** are detailed commitments to prohibit or encourage specific types of digital behaviours. This requires precise definitions of prohibited or permitted tactics and may have associated M&V mechanisms. Parties could:

- Commit to responsible social media use or to refrain from certain social media behaviour. For example, political parties in Thailand ahead of 2023 elections

agreed to refrain from the 'creation or dissemination of false information or content' and the 'deployment of networks of coordinated accounts... to systematically disseminate harmful information or content with malicious and manipulative intent'.

- Draw from elements of the voluntary norms negotiated by the Group of Governmental Experts at the UN related to the responsible use of digital technologies by states. For instance, parties could agree to refrain from using information and communication technologies (ICTs) or physical means to target critical information infrastructure essential to the delivery of public and humanitarian services.


**3. Processes** are measures to monitor, coordinate, information share or ensure implementation or action to be taken by signatories. Parties could, for example, establish information-sharing mechanisms to reduce or manage incidents while building confidence. Parties could:

- Draw upon a set of confidence-building measures developed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe that focus on information-sharing, voluntary cooperation, and establishment of communication channels to reduce the risks of misperception, escalation, and conflict during cyber incidents.
- Establish a monitoring and dialogue body that commits to regular meetings, reports and to engage with social media platform administrators in the event of violations, like that contained in the social media peace agreement facilitated by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) in Nigeria's Plateau State in 2021 (see article by Medinat Malefakis on p.107).

Table 2 presents a non-comprehensive list of the type of clauses that might fall under each category.

**TABLE 2: DIGITAL CLAUSES IN PEACE AGREEMENTS**

	PRINCIPLES	PRACTICES	PROCESSES
Offensive cyber operations	<p>Commit to existing obligations under international law in respect of cyber operations</p> <p>Endorse UN or relevant regional norms on the responsible use of digital technologies</p>	<p>Refrain from, and/or publicly discourage ‘hactivists’ from, engaging in offensive cyber operations (including denial of service attacks) that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are likely to cause, injury, death, or physical damage</li> <li>• target civilians or civilian infrastructure, essential government services, availability of the internet</li> <li>• distribute information obtained through hacking</li> </ul>	<p>Create joint information sharing bodies to manage incidents, when possible inclusive of representatives of civil society from groups targeted by cyber incidents.</p> <p>Introduce monitoring and/or verification mechanisms on digital issues</p> <p>Agree to external observers or providing access to third-party digital technology experts</p> <p>Agree to raise awareness of the agreement, including with technology companies</p> <p>Agree to publicly condemn violations of the agreement</p>
Network control	<p>Recognise access to the internet and communications networks as part of the right to information on which people’s well-being depends during conflict and as a key enabler of other rights</p> <p>Commit to a universally available and accessible internet</p> <p>Commit to respect for and promotion of the right to privacy</p>	<p>End internet and mobile network shutdowns, service-throttling or blocking of access to web sites or social media platforms</p> <p>Refrain from doxing of key actors and/or the public</p> <p>Refrain from using hacking tools to conduct covert and/or indiscriminate surveillance of political actors, civil society, women’s groups, others targeted for their identity, or the public</p>	
Influence and manipulation	<p>Commit to uphold the right to freedom of opinion and expression online</p> <p>Recognise a safe, constructive, and responsible social media space as a public good to be promoted in times of conflict</p> <p>Recognise access to diverse, verifiable sources of information online as a fundamental human right</p>	<p>Avoid disseminating content, including disinformation or manipulated media, that creates an imminent risk of discrimination or violence, including sexual or gender-based violence</p> <p>Refrain from online harassment of specific individuals, such as women peacebuilders</p> <p>Refrain from using the following tactics to spread disinformation or engage in harassment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fake/anonymous accounts</li> <li>• coordinated networks or teams of actors</li> <li>• impersonation accounts (for example of participants in peace talks)</li> <li>• paid advertisements</li> </ul>	



Political parties, candidates and influencers in Kaduna State, Nigeria agree a code of conduct on social media in order to address problematic digital behaviours during Nigeria's 2023 elections.  
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## How to monitor, verify and attribute agreements covering digital technologies?

Attribution of responsibility for the use of certain digital technologies – especially offensive cyber operations – is difficult. The anonymity and lack of geographic boundaries in the digital space makes it hard to determine who is responsible for a cyber incident or influence operation and if those responsible were under the direction of a conflict party. That said, digital forensic techniques are evolving and certain types of technical attribution are now feasible. As such, mediators may work with parties to:

- Focus initially on what can be monitored, such as the social media behaviour on official accounts.
- Design monitoring approaches focused on information sharing and liaison mechanisms. This can help parties create dispute resolution mechanisms to prevent unwanted escalation from digital incidents.
- Adopt differentiated monitoring approaches for different digital behaviours. For example, the commitments of conflict parties to end internet shutdowns are relatively easy to monitor, because control is in the hands of the government. Internet traffic can also be relatively easily tracked through open-source sites.
- Promote inclusive process design to enable the participation of populations harmed by digital technology use. This could help cultivate constituencies pressuring for the implementation

of technology-related provisions – even if they cannot be easily monitored. For example, initial evidence gathered by Access Now indicates that women are particularly harmed by shutdowns, possibly meaning that women's groups may become powerful advocates for ending them.

- Partner with researchers, platforms, and organisations with experience in attributing responsibility for cyberattacks or developing traceable methods for proxy actors operating across a coordinated network on social media.

## How should the mediation process engage with the private sector on digital technology use?

Social media platforms, telecommunications companies and other network operators are an inextricable part of the digital landscape, making them important actors to engage with. Key stakeholders in the mediation process will need to carefully consider the potential reputational and other risks of engaging with these and other private companies during the negotiation and implementation process. Mediators should carefully discuss with the parties what roles may be necessary for the private sector to achieve their mutually agreed objectives. Such objectives might include: cyber incident response, restoration of internet or mobile services, devoting resources to monitor hate speech, or removal of inauthentic networks.

Mediators and parties could engage with social media companies to address overlaps and inconsistencies between prohibitions on certain social media behaviours in peace agreements and the platforms' content moderation and terms of service policies.

## **MEDIATORS AND CONFLICT PARTIES OFTEN LACK THE NECESSARY TECHNICAL EXPERTISE TO ADDRESS DIGITAL ISSUES.**

Platforms can play a crucial role in implementing provisions related to content that risks imminent violence, as is being trialled through the establishment of trusted partner links between Meta and social media agreement monitoring bodies established by HD. Even in cases where overlap is limited, platforms can assist in investigating problematic behaviour, providing data access, and exploring alternative mechanisms beyond content removal to support implementation efforts. The stakeholders may also consider involving other private sector actors, such as digital marketing agencies, if their information campaigns significantly contribute to exacerbating the conflict. Indeed, mediators and conflict parties often lack the necessary technical expertise to address digital issues. Recruiting or partnering with dedicated experts from qualified bodies (such as academic centres or computer emergency response teams) can help to build the necessary technical capacity to negotiate digital issues.

## **CONFLICT ANALYSIS SHOULD ROUTINELY EXPLORE THE DIGITAL DIMENSION OF CONFLICTS, AND PROCESSES BE DESIGNED TO EFFECTIVELY INCORPORATE RELEVANT DIGITAL BEHAVIOURS.**

### **Adapting mediation to the digital age**

The role of digital technologies in conflict is likely to increase. Mediators will need to respond to this challenge. Integrating new content does not require wholesale changes to the logic or design of mediation. But new expertise and resourcing is likely to be required, either within mediation teams or through strategic partnerships and engagement with outside experts and the private sector. Conflict analysis should routinely explore the digital dimension of conflicts, and processes be designed to effectively incorporate relevant digital behaviours in a conflict. This is likely to mean clauses on principles, practices and processes relevant to digital technologies more often feature in both standalone agreements, and as separate clauses in a range of broader ceasefire and peace agreements.

Recognising the influence of the digital age and adapting processes accordingly is crucial for mediation to respond to new conflict dynamics and remain an effective means of addressing contemporary conflicts.

## **CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES: DRAWING FROM THE PAST TO MANAGE THE NEW**

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The United Nations Secretary-General has called these 'dangerous times', stressing the importance of building trust across actors and agendas, including where the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and cyberspace are concerned. The latter is particularly important given our dependency on ICTs, their vulnerability to exploitation, and growing evidence of their use by parties directly and indirectly involved in all kinds of conflicts.

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Confidence-building measures (CBMs) are increasingly discussed as tools that can help mitigate the kinds of behaviours and effects that make these dangerous times. They were conceived during the Cold War to address military concerns and ease East-West tensions. While avoiding surprise attack and arms control were the aim of some of these earlier efforts, dialogue, transparency and cooperation around technical matters came to be viewed as key to building a basis of trust for broader political agreements, and for keeping channels of communication open.

In the post-Cold War years, CBMs became a popular tool in the conflict management toolbox, edging their way outside the narrow realm of arms control and inter-state relations. Multiple actors began using the frame of CBMs to build trust, lower the risks of misunderstanding and escalation between conflict parties in all kinds of contexts, including armed conflict, and to provide early warning indicators of potential conflict situations. Track 1.5, track two and track three dialogues have also served important confidence-building purposes, building bridges between actors across countries and regions and allowing for frank discussion below the threshold of formal politics and policy.

**CBMS HAVE BECOME A CORE FEATURE OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL SECURITY DISCUSSIONS ON ICTS/CYBERSPACE.**

More recently, CBMs have become a core feature of international and regional security discussions on ICTs/cyberspace, including the work of the UN Groups of Governmental Experts and the Open-Ended Working Groups on ICTs and international security. The CBMs complement other recommendations and measures on international law, norms and capacity building agreed by UN member states that together constitute an emerging framework for responsible state behaviour where ICTs and cyberspace are concerned.

One such CBM involves establishing single points of contact (PoC) to enhance information sharing on cyber-related threats and to enable more effective and timely management of ICT/cyber-related incidents. For instance, if the energy or health infrastructure of a given country is hit by a cyberattack and it is suspected that the attack emanated from a certain country, the PoC from the affected state can notify the PoC in the other state and request that it take the necessary measures to bring an end to such activity. PoCs can also request assistance from other states in such circumstances, including to re-establish the affected services. These cooperative measures reflect the spirit of one of the norms agreed at the UN, often referred to as the due diligence norm.

Regional organisations have agreed on similar CBMs. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), for one, has agreed on 16 measures ranging from basic transparency measures (exchanges on policy, doctrine, etc) to the establishment of PoCs and secure and trusted platforms for crisis communications. While under significant strain in recent years, the OSCE informal working group on CBMs continues to use them to build capacity, raise awareness and facilitate exchanges between participating states. Other regional organisations have established similar processes, tailored to their respective contexts. Some states have applied CBMs such as communications 'hotlines' at bilateral level, while non-state actors use track two formats to address complex issues such as internet shutdowns, bulk collection and mass surveillance.

Experts are considering how cyber-related CBMs can be applied in non-inter-state contexts. This includes civil conflicts in which the parties rely significantly on cyber and other ICT capabilities to advance their aims, and where their continued use presents harms to the population and risks to a ceasefire arrangement or broader peace negotiations. Within a mediation process, the latter could include working with the parties to agree on a protocol or code of conduct outlining unacceptable social media behaviours (e.g. influence operations); to agree that critical information infrastructure (e.g., telecommunications towers, terrestrial and subsea cables, data centres) should not be targeted through physical or cyber means; and to agree on establishing single PoCs and related protocols to deal with any such incidents, should they emerge.

# DIGITAL INCLUSION IN PEACEMAKING

## Practice, promise and perils

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**Technology holds particular promise as a means to reach the goal of inclusion in mediation and peace processes. Digital tools are able to address concrete barriers that otherwise hinder participation, such as geographic distance, language needs, limited access to information, low literacy, and siloed networks. Minimising these barriers, while also addressing political obstacles or objections, peacemakers can use technology to create inclusive processes that offer more equitable access and paths of participation to marginalised or otherwise excluded groups.**

Yet digital tools also come with barriers of their own, creating new forms of harm and exclusion or threatening centralised or representative systems of power. It is therefore important to approach the use of technology with a critical lens, acknowledging and addressing such barriers in order to maximise technology's strategic potential. This article explores the goal of inclusion through digital means, outlining the practice, promise, and latent perils of employing technology to further inclusion in dialogue and mediation processes.

### Digital innovations in mediation practice

The benefits and challenges of using digital tools no longer need to be discussed in the abstract. A growing number of initiatives have used digital technologies alone or to complement offline processes through different levels of engagement, whether grassroots, political, or in-between. A focus on tools and processes that directly engage or otherwise include the perspectives of more people allows exploration of how digital tools are being used in practice, and what impact they are having on the field.

Broadly, the use of digital technologies for peacemaking can be categorised and understood within three primary functions – data, communication, and connection. Digital tools can be used to gather, analyse and disseminate data; to amplify and diversify important messages; and to connect actors in ways that enable coordination or collaboration between them.

Mediation and peacebuilding teams are using new data sources and methods for conflict analysis and agreement monitoring, including online opinion polling, participatory action research, social media listening, and GIS (geographic information systems). Since 2018, UNDP Lebanon has used Facebook and Twitter (now called X) data to support regular monitoring of how tensions are discussed on social media, contributing to their situational awareness for conflict programming. Also in 2018, USAID partnered with various actors in Myanmar to develop a virtual mapping of women's expertise and influence, primarily relating to policy issues in the formal political dialogue. The project provided donors and implementing partners with better information about whom to include in negotiations, training, and other initiatives. Meanwhile, in 2020–21, the UN DPPA Innovation Cell partnered with the software company Remesh to launch a series of artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled 'digital dialogues' for UN missions with citizens, first in Yemen and then in Libya. Facilitators were able to use sophisticated polling and open-ended questions to engage up to 1,000 people in each dialogue and gain qualitative insights into the participants' opinions, which then informed the UN missions' respective peace efforts.

There are also opportunities to share information, manage rumours, amplify messages and supportive messages, and build capacity and opportunity for participation and engagement. Mediation teams have used transparent meeting reporting, public Q&A

sessions, online training, social media campaigns and partnerships. The Colombian Truth Commission (2018–22) created an expansive digital platform to be hosted in perpetuity to share data, historical accounts, testimonies, cultural productions, and more related to the peace accord and its legacy.

Finally, mediation teams are connecting stakeholders remotely in new ways for dialogue, consultation and collaboration. In 2021, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), working in support of the UN-led political process, held e-dialogues about Libya and shared perspectives from the country's regions with political stakeholders and members of parliament. These complemented in-person meetings that had been held before pandemic restrictions and laid the groundwork for meetings that would follow. During the 2020–21 peace talks, the acting head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) recognised that 75 unelected representatives were making major decisions for the country, and convened virtual sub-track meetings for women, youth, and municipalities. Rapporteurs conveyed their findings into the political dialogue. In another example from 2020, swisspeace designed negotiations between different actors in Syria, in support of UN-led efforts, using a hybrid combination of offline and online events, and ultimately transitioned from a fully physical to a fully digital process. The goal was to reach people who could not participate offline because of their political opinions, gender, or class. In March 2021, in partnership with the Office of the Special Envoy for the Secretary General in Yemen (OSESGY), Build Up held ten focus group consultations over WhatsApp with 93 women from different governorates across the country.

These examples speak to the strategic use of digital tools by mediators and peacebuilders to further inclusion in ways acceptable to conflict parties. However, this also belies their ability to also *not use* inclusion. In other words, the power to decide who is and isn't at the table with the use, or not, of digital tools fundamentally remains the same.

The instrumentalisation of technology for inclusion overlooks another important area of practice in which digital technology also decentralises organising power in ways that allow for grassroots and resistance movements to define inclusion on their own terms. By facilitating low-cost and efficient means of organisation and advocacy, digital tools have created new possibilities and norms for challenging established structures of power. During the 2019 anti-government protests, Sudanese women set up women-only Facebook groups to circulate relevant information. The groups became safe spaces for women to raise their voices, and later played an important part in mobilising protests. In Afghanistan, #MyRedLine was a Twitter hashtag used by women to share their red lines for peace talks on

Twitter. Launched in 2019 by Farahnaz Forotan, those who participated sought to communicate to the then Afghan authorities that they would not accept peace at the expense of the rights, freedoms, and happiness of women. In Burundi, the Conflict Alert and Prevention Centre (CENAP) challenged the exclusion of young people from discussions about Burundi's future by building an online dashboard to allow young people with little statistics training to analyse data visually, draw their own conclusions, and present them to policymakers. Such efforts can act as a leveller of power imbalances present in mediation and dialogue processes, amplifying the voices of those previously unheard.

## From niche impact to emerging norm

Assessing the impact of a single intervention within a complex process is always difficult. Of note is that the majority of the examples shared above were ultimately a part of 'failed' processes, in that they did not reach durable settlements. Digital inclusion isn't a panacea, of course. And indeed, whether and how inclusion itself leads to better peacemaking is a much larger question. The impact question to be asked is whether the integration of digital tools within a broader strategy of inclusion makes *inclusion* better. To that, there would seem to be a clear case to make for the benefits of such integration.

### IF WE KNOW DIGITAL TOOLS HELP OVERCOME BARRIERS TO INCLUSION, WHY ARE THEY NOT MORE FREQUENTLY ENGAGED?

The examples suggest that digital inclusion is creating new standards of practice in dialogue and mediation and helping foster greater participation in peace processes, particularly by women, young people, and marginalised groups. The ability to create these new opportunities raises the question, 'why not?' If we know digital tools help overcome barriers to inclusion, why are they not more frequently engaged? Why does the practice of digital inclusion still feel niche?

As offline and online worlds continue to flatten, influence and impact each other, we need to think about how to further integrate digital tools effectively and ethically into peace efforts. This requires considering a range of practical and operational questions, among them how to ensure equitable access to digital resources, how to anticipate and address potential barriers to digital inclusion, and who should be responsible for leading digital inclusion efforts in dialogue and mediation. It also requires looking at how local communities are shaping and implementing digital practice, and how their experiences can advance digital inclusion efforts in peace processes.

## Risks and good practices for using digital tools for inclusion in dialogue and mediation

Emerging practice has highlighted a series of challenges and risks associated with digital inclusion. This section outlines four key risks and accompanying strategies for their mitigation.

### ***Risk: limited digital access and digital divides reflecting differences in gender, economic status and location are further compounded***

Mediators already use various means to encourage broad participation and ownership in a process. Working to ensure that connectivity, literacy, and access do not limit participation involves making sure stakeholders have access to resources, the necessary skills to use them, and the opportunity to participate actively online. Gaps may be closed by the provision of data packages, equipment, meeting spaces, translation, and/or training if needed, noting that the use of photo, voice, and video can overcome literacy challenges. When the choice is available to use a popular pre-existing platform rather than a new app or website that requires additional learning and access, it is a good practice to adapt existing tools. Human-centred design provides an important framework. It underlines the importance of involving individuals with relevant identities from the outset, and making sure design teams themselves are inclusive and representative of those who will be engaging with the outputs. Human-centred design also promotes testing and iterating processes, tools, and mechanisms based on feedback from diverse participants to arrive at solutions responsive to the needs of people using them.

### ***Risk: not ensuring digital safety and security, including not protecting against surveillance***

Mediators are used to putting the safety and security of participants in a process at the forefront of their efforts. Safety in online spaces is equally important and can be harder to achieve with certainty. Mediators should practise safe data management protocols and use encryption for messaging and protected conferencing settings when possible. They also can suggest process rules for limiting identifying public communications, as part of a collaborative effort to respect and protect the privacy of all participants. Because there are limits to these strategies, mediators will also need to make participants aware of the limits to anonymity and the risks of unexpected visibility in order to gain informed consent for their participation or communications.

We know that women and gender minorities face particularly high levels of abuse and threats online. Participants should be consulted on what their avenues for safety or recourse are, if any, should they be unduly exposed.

### ***Risk: expectations and power dynamics***

Ambitions to translate priorities into substantive decisions or changes often remain aspirational. While mediators and facilitators already understand the importance of managing expectations, a gap in expectations can be amplified by the perception of technology as an easy solution for inclusive participation. Remaining honest about the capabilities and limitations of technological tools and approaches is therefore important. At the same time, the introduction of digital tools can – whether intentionally or not – challenge existing power hierarchies and create real or perceived threats. Mediators must consider and navigate the potential implications of technology-induced shifts in power dynamics, ensuring that the push for digital engagement does not marginalise certain segments of the community or exacerbate distrust. Mitigation strategies may involve being transparent about potential pitfalls and working collaboratively with stakeholders to foster a digital environment that serves the interests and needs of those involved. They should underscore the value and limitations of digital inclusion, with emphasis on the enhancement of communication and connection rather than the technology itself.

### ***Risk: a lack of trust***

This is often at the forefront of the objections to digital inclusion among mediators, for whom building relations of trust is always a priority. And with good reason. There are significant challenges to building trust between people via tech-mediated communication, and in the tech-mediated process itself. Participants are rightfully wary of data manipulation and abuse.

In digital spaces, trust is eroded by disinformation and behaviours that incentivise sharing attention-grabbing content. These challenges affect trust in online processes, as digital communication disrupts established norms and processes of traditional dialogue and mediation. Mediators and facilitators must contend with the perceived loss of control, overwhelming speed and volume of digital communication, and differing cultural views on online confidentiality and sensitivity. To help transform these dynamics, there are several things that those leading digital processes can do. They can incorporate group and direct-line communication channels to enable backchannelling and communication among participants when necessary. Creating an 'online



communication code of conduct' among participants can help. They should also take steps to ensure that the workings of any technology or process are transparent and understandable, preventing the perception of a 'black box' of unfamiliar tech tools. Once provided with clear explanations of the technology and the process, participants can make informed decisions about how they engage with it.

### **IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF INTERACTIONS A DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT OFFERS, AND HOW THESE CAN ENHANCE THE PROCESS OVERALL.**

Hybrid processes are both pragmatic and beneficial for trust-building. A mix of offline alternatives to online processes and digital alternatives to offline dialogue forums can be complementary, maximising the value of each approach. At a minimum, mediation teams should shift away from narrowly thinking about an online component as a simple mirror of an offline meeting. Instead, it is important to consider the different kinds of interactions a digital engagement offers, and how these can enhance the process overall.

## **Digital tools integral to mediation strategy**

Innovation is a vital and long-practised component of peacemaking in addressing the complex challenges facing societies affected by conflict. New innovations and technologies will continue to have an impact. Generative AI, data processing, augmented reality, computational propaganda, and citizen-targeted cyber warfare represent only a handful of the emerging technologies that are or could significantly affect conflicts or peace processes. Looking ahead to the likely future developments in digital technologies, lessons can be taken forward from current practice.

A mediation or peace process strategy for inclusion should automatically include consideration of how it can be supported by digital tools for data, communication, and/or connection. The integration of digital tools increases inclusion by overcoming distinct barriers to participation. There are risks, but they reflect existing challenges and are surmountable. Using digital technologies can enable dialogue and mediation practitioners to engage more deeply with communities, enhance collaboration and connection, and ensure that individuals and groups have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

## **MEDIATING CONFLICT BETWEEN GOLD MINERS IN BURKINA FASO: A GIS-BASED APPROACH TO LOW CONNECTIVITY**

*Sadraki Yabre is the founder of G-AiD, an organisation based in Burkina Faso working to promote peace linked to the exploitation of natural resources. Sadraki developed AlertMine, a geospatial application used to prevent and mitigate conflict between groups in Burkina Faso's mining sector. He has held leadership roles on satellite data and geospatial technologies initiatives such as SERVIR West Africa and the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security, and Africa (GMES Africa) Support Programme. Previously, he worked for the Burkina Mining Company and for Alliance for Responsible Mining and Artisanal Gold Council, NGOs advocating for responsible mining. He holds a bachelor's degree from University Joseph KI-Zerbo, a master's degree from the Pan-African Institute for Development, and is currently undertaking a PhD in climate change and water resources.*

Gold mining in Burkina Faso sparks a range of conflicts, some of which escalate into extreme violence. The frequent clashes between artisanal miners and industrial companies often result in the loss of human lives. A GIS (geographic information systems) app introduced by the Ouagadougou-based organisation G-AiD has helped encourage dialogue and prevent and mitigate conflicts.

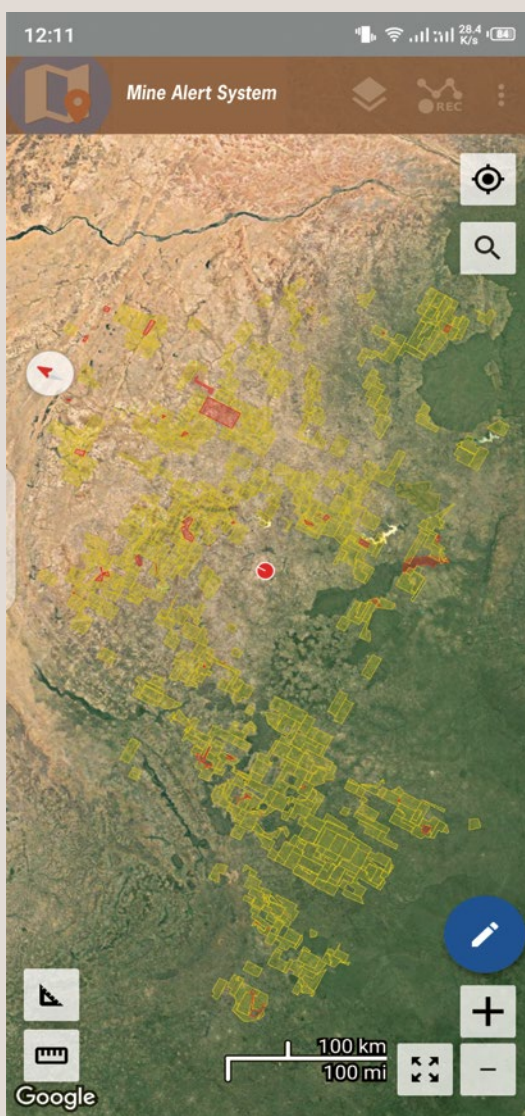
The coexistence of the two kinds of miners has become increasingly fragile. Artisanal miners deplore that they are being stripped of their land and gold, while foreign industrial mining companies reap all the profits. Artisanal miners feel victimised and marginalised as they are excluded from the consultation process when mining permits are granted. They also face continuous threats. Forceful evictions are frequent, under the pretext that artisanal miners have encroached on mining company territory. While databases defining the boundaries of mining areas exist, they are often not provided as evidence.

*continued...*

This atmosphere of insecurity leads to confrontations between the two miner groups. Some disadvantaged artisanal mining communities also resort to acts of terrorism, with the stated aim of resisting the state and the powerful entities that deprive them of their rightful resources.

To address the pressing challenges to coexistence within Burkina Faso's mining sector, in 2020 the G-AiD put in place the *Mine Alert System*. This is a GIS-based geolocation app that provides alert and demarcation on mining sites and permit boundaries. By giving open access to comprehensive national databases with information about mining and its geographical boundaries on mobile phones, it aims to prevent and mitigate conflicts between artisanal miners, local communities, and industrial corporations. It allows each stakeholder to be informed about their limits of intervention based on their precise location in the field. Once installed, it can be used offline with geolocation on.

**THE MINE ALERT SYSTEM PROMOTES A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF MINERS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES, HELPING AVERT DISPUTES FROM CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS OR FALSE CLAIMS.**



A screenshot of the AlertMine app. The polygons indicate the areas where mining companies are licensed to operate. In the yellow areas relations between mining companies and artisanal miners are mostly cooperative; in the red areas, tensions are high between the two parties on access and rights. © Sadraki Yabre

With a mobile phone application, G-AiD thus fills a gap in the physical world, where the boundaries of permit areas are not marked. This system promotes a clear understanding of miners' rights and responsibilities, helping avert disputes from conflicting interpretations or false claims.

The *Mine Alert System* has gained widespread support from stakeholders beyond the artisanal miners, many of whom attest to its efficacy and value. One explained, 'Thanks to the tool, we no longer venture into the field to gather information. Instead, we use our phones to verify the situation beforehand. The stress from unexpected surprises on-site has gone away, as we are now warned ahead of time.' An NGO representative working on artisanal mining sites added that, 'It enables us to proactively connect with actors already present on the ground, allowing us to familiarise ourselves with the prevailing dynamics before physically visiting the location.'

The involvement of the various stakeholders was key to deciding on the usefulness of the tool. Then, the mining administration, represented by the mining registry (DGCM) and national agency that supervises artisanal and semi-mechanised mining (ANEEMAS), consistently brought in their expectations during the tool's development phase. There are efforts under way to update the tool with data from artisanal mining sites that have not yet been included, ensuring comprehensive coverage.

The Mine Alert System has proven effective in reducing tensions and contributing to more peaceful coexistence within Burkina Faso's mining industry. In fact, when a miner intends to develop an activity at a given site, they first consult the tool to judge whether or not it is a sensible choice, and then decide on the appropriate level of investment. The experience has shown the benefits of harnessing technology to foster transparency, information, and respect for others' rights, and is reminiscent of other experiments in civilian crowdsourced reporting, such as civilian ceasefire monitoring. It could be drawn upon to help prevent and mediate conflicts in other contexts where establishing the facts on the ground would help counter insecurity, victimisation, and the potential escalation of violence.

# SOCIAL MEDIA AND VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT MOBILISATION IN NIGERIA

## What role for mediation?

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**Inter-communal conflict, insecurity, insurgency and state-instigated violence are common in Nigeria. Today, social media plays many roles in these phenomena, influencing and instigating violent conflict even as it presents opportunities to those seeking to bring about peace.**

Social media is not only highly accessible, requiring only a mobile phone and a platform account, but is also relatively anonymous, and so has a wide appeal among diverse actors for many reasons. It is a powerful tool for citizen-led social activism such as the #ENDSARS protests against police brutality in October 2020. But as Velomahanina Razakamaharavo has observed, writing on the implications of emerging technologies on peace and security in Africa, 'despite their so-called decentralised, emancipatory, and empowering aspects, social media allow and facilitate the exploitation of vulnerabilities and very often target what is anchored within people: feelings, identities, the historical past, attachment to loved ones, anger, and frustration'.

Nigeria's inter-communal conflicts have been inflamed by online hate speech, while armed groups such as Boko Haram have used it to propagate disinformation. As catalysts for mobilisation of good or ill, social media companies have come into confrontation with the Nigerian government, which has sometimes responded with internet shutdowns and bans, actions that are themselves inherently political and play further into conflict dynamics.

This article looks at social media as catalyst for violent conflict, but also as a potential tool for analysis and engagement by mediators and peacemakers working with communities and conflict parties.

## Violent and non-violent mobilisation

In Nigeria, social media platforms have increasingly become the locus of struggles between the authority of the state and the mobilising power of non-state networks, whether violent insurgents or non-violent citizens exercising their democratic rights. Two contrasting examples of violent and non-violent mobilisation are Boko Haram's use of social media and the #ENDSARS campaign.

Boko Haram has used mainstream media since 2009, contacting journalists to publish its written and recorded propaganda. But in 2014 it began systematic use of social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter (now called X), Telegram and Facebook. Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which began as a Boko Haram faction, even opened its own Arabic Twitter account @Al Urwah al-Wuthqa. Broadly speaking, Boko Haram and ISWAP use social media to claim responsibility for attacks, or dispute information shared by the Nigerian military. Boko Haram has used social media to update cell members, sympathisers and supporters on its strategy. It also employs social media to spread propaganda about life in captured territories, chronicling the application of Sharia law and its vision of an Islamic dynasty where women dress in hijabs, offenders are flogged or beheaded, and captured soldiers are shot. All of these are aimed at demonstrating its dominance in captured territories and instilling fear in the Nigerian population. These groups also use social media to build connections with international networks of Islamist extremists.

Protesters gather in Lagos for the one year anniversary of #EndSars, a protest movement against police brutality, on 20 October 2021. Social media helped to establish #EndSars as the most important youth-led movement Nigeria had seen in a long time. © Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP via Getty Images



During the #ENDSARS protests in October 2020, social media and digital technologies assumed an unprecedented role, helping establish it as the most important youth-led movement Nigeria had seen in a long time. A video of an attack by the Nigerian police unit, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), on a male victim sparked online and offline protests against police brutality and garnered over 28 million tweets with the #ENDSARS hashtag in the first weekend it circulated. When the protests moved to the streets, Twitter was used to map the locations where people would converge, for example at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos. Information on the movements of law enforcement agents was also shared by protesters on social media. A 'tight fist' emoji draped in the colours of Nigeria's flag circulated on Twitter and remains a key symbol of the #ENDSARS movement. Social media also provided an invaluable record of the offences committed by the police. When protesters were beaten and teargassed by the police, videos and photos posted to social media contradicted the government's denials.

Social media was used to draw the attention of international celebrities, politicians, diplomats, media corporations and others, embarrassing the Nigerian government into paying attention to the protesters and their demands. At one point, social media was one of the only sources of information about the protests as the traditional media was not reporting on them. Social media was used by organisations such as the Feminist Coalition to crowdfund about US\$400,000 for the protesters for food, water, legal representation and

medical services. Importantly, social media obscured the ethnic, religious, class and social divides among protesters. In a country whose politics is characterised by identity-based alliances, #ENDSARS protesters bridged societal divisions to present a united front against police brutality.

## Government responses

The Nigerian government has reacted strongly to the catalysing impacts of social media and has attempted to regulate its use through legislation such as the upgraded Defamatory and Offensive Publications Act (1966), the Cyber Crimes Prohibition and Prevention Act (2015), and the Anti-Social Media Bill of 2019.

During and after the #EndSARS protests, the government used social media to target protest leaders and supporters, imposing international travel bans on some, and freezing financial assets of others. Social media platforms' (real and perceived) non-neutrality exacerbated tensions in some instances. Twitter, for example, facilitated funding and created the logo for the #EndSARS protests, while Instagram took down certain posts of protesters. Twitter was banned for seven months in Nigeria between June 2021 and January 2022 following the platform's deletion of a tweet by President Muhammadu Buhari that had been reported by Twitter users as violating rules of the site. However, it is widely believed that the platform's wider role during the protests was a bigger factor in the ban.

In response to the use of social media by Boko Haram, the Nigerian government shut down internet access in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states, which Boko Haram reacted to by bombing telecommunications base stations. More Boko Haram attacks followed when telecom providers began to help trace calls linked to insurgent activities in the BAY states. Social media has also been appropriated by the government as a 'comeback and retort' tool, as both the government and its military apparatus employed platform pages to debunk Boko Haram's victory claims, counter the insurgents' propaganda, and position the Nigerian government as winning its war on terrorism.

## Social media as a tool and subject for peacemaking

While social media is a complicating factor for mediators in many respects, its impact on violent and non-violent mobilisation in Nigeria also demonstrates both its potential utility to mediation and the need to mediate its use in conflict resolution processes. To date, neither of these dimensions has been fully explored.

One of the most obvious benefits of social media is the opportunity it presents to gain a more nuanced understanding of how a conflict is unfolding. Through analysis of echo chamber trends and hashtags, mediators can assess the boiling points of online exchanges, intergroup and community-based tensions, heightened emotional vulnerabilities, the use of hate speech fake news, and seek to 'buffer' them before they develop into offline chaos – for instance mediators could identify inconsistencies in narratives or point out the circulation of incorrect or fake news.

### **MEDIATORS NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE DISTINCT PARAMETERS OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN WHICH THEY ARE WORKING AND HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MOBILISES IN SUCH CONFLICT SETTINGS.**

To do this effectively, mediators need to understand the distinct parameters of the social media ecosystem in which they are working and how social media mobilises in such conflict settings. In Nigeria, social media analysis would include exploring the saturation and popularity of various social media platforms in different regions and demographic distributions of the country. Millions of people across Nigeria still do not have access to social media due to electricity, illiteracy or 'data poverty'. But, across the country, the vibrancy of 'X', as a tool for political expression is second to none, while Facebook, which has been found to host

much unverified and unsubstantiated information, is particularly popular with middle-aged and elderly users. Other factors include levels of digital literacy, the gender distribution of social media users, patriarchal, conservative and hegemonic hierarchies surrounding societal interactions, language, cultural norms, power distribution, gerontocratic tendencies (which played a prominent role in the #EndSARS protests), as well as indices like income distribution.

Meanwhile, social media analytics can both deepen understanding of conflict actors and redirect the focus of public conversation. In the case of Boko Haram, for example, in addition to informing analysis of the insurgent group's internal dynamics, social media has given a platform to actors that have well-established links with it and in communities where Boko Haram recruits, with the potential to serve as opinion shapers and influencers for changing terrorist narratives. Twitter and other networks have also helped broaden the conversation from an exclusive focus on Boko Haram's atrocities, to the human rights abuses and extra judicial killings also committed by the Nigerian military. Video footage of killings, beatings and maiming perpetrated by security forces against suspected Boko Haram extremists became widespread on social media networks. Some of the victims were communities directly affected by Boko Haram, and who constituted important stakeholders in ensuing mediation engagements with the armed group.

## Mediating social media in Plateau State

The Nigerian government could have made better use of social media to understand what needed mediation, and it also missed an opportunity to mediate or regulate the use of social media. Codes of conduct offer one means to do this when social mobilisation or conflict are fuelled by interactions on social media. In July 2021, for example, the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) supported three ethnic communities (Bache, Irigwe and Fulani) in Plateau State to reach the first social media agreement of its kind on how to tackle online hate speech, images of violence and misinformation at their source. The conflict which prompted this initiative had been catalysed by online rumour sharing, misinformation, spread of violence-inducing graphic images, as well the use of inflammatory derogatory language among conflict actors.

The three groups had been involved in a decade-long conflict that had spilled over to the online space through younger generations. HD brought together ten youths who are active social media users and micro-influencers from the three ethnic communities to discuss the impact of social media on conflict in their community.

Over the course of three months, this group held weekly dialogue sessions to discuss the link between online and offline conflict in Bassa. Key online harms discussed included hate speech, sharing unconfirmed reports about attacks, and posting gory images and videos. After each session, participants discussed concrete actions they could take to reduce these harms. HD also created a Facebook group for the wider community in Bassa to follow updates from the dialogue and engage them in the process, asking for inputs on how to minimise social media risks to conflict and sharing videos of the dialogue sessions. The suggested solutions that dialogue participants raised, along with inputs from the Facebook group, helped form the final agreement. An in-person drafting process with the signatories over several days helped ensure that all parties agreed with the text of the final agreement, which included clauses on violent content, unconfirmed reports, hate speech, inciting content, viral content, and fake accounts.

Following the agreement's signing, the parties established a monitoring body to ensure that it was adhered to. It found that repeat violations most commonly came from the two most influential signatories in the Bache and Irigwe groups. These two signatories were also official publicity officers for their communities, tasked with sharing reports and statements related to the conflict situation. Their communities expected statements of anger and strong condemnation. However, HD's training in conflict-sensitive messaging, along with Facebook comments from other signatories reminding them of their responsibilities resulted in a change of tone and a reduction in online tension.

Mediating social media use is preferable to internet shutdowns, as the Nigerian government did in the case of Twitter, or other acts of internet censorship which might further alienate conflict parties. As the experience in Plateau State demonstrates, conflict actors can come together and agree on positive commitments to peace.

## HOW MEDIATORS AND PEACEBUILDERS SHOULD WORK WITH SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES: MOVING FROM REACTIVE MODERATION TO PROACTIVE PREVENTION

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Conflict, like most of our social lives, has increasingly moved online and mediators and peacebuilders have reacted to this new world by partnering with platforms to remove harmful content and actors from their ecosystems. This is important work, but it can feel endless as each day brings a new set of harms to address. As Maria Ressa noted in an address to UNESCO in 2023, content moderation can feel like cleaning a glass of water from a dirty river and then dumping the clean water back into the river, rather than dealing with the factory polluting the water upstream. Having worked at a platform on a variety of crisis response efforts, I can tell you that you can learn a lot about how to fix the factory by examining the pollution it creates. But it requires asking that broader question, about what is creating the pollution, rather than focusing solely on cleaning up as much as you can.

**PEACEBUILDERS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN HELPING PLATFORMS NOT ONLY ADDRESS HARMFUL CONTENT AND ACTORS, BUT ALSO IN MAKING THEIR PLATFORMS MORE ROBUST AGAINST THOSE ACTORS IN THE FIRST PLACE.**

Peacebuilders have an important role to play in helping platforms not only address harmful content and actors, but also in making their platforms more robust against those actors in the first place. Emillie de Keulenaar's recent analysis of YouTube videos on the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan found that searches about the conflict often led to videos containing inflammatory content. While one could attempt to find policy violations within those videos, conflict actors often can divide people without the need to violate policies.

*continued...*

Rather than attempting to penalise these particular videos and actors, it is more impactful to think of the prominent placement of these videos as a 'bug', which YouTube recommendation engineers should fix holistically, rather than dealing with individual pieces of content. In this way, you can prevent the next actors from gaming the algorithm, rather than simply removing today's examples of harmful content.

Content moderation will never address all the drivers of violence. In one example I worked on in Ethiopia, social media posts suggesting that the arrest of an opposition figure (Jawar Mohammed) was imminent were reported to trigger violence, even as such speech would be considered important to protect in many contexts. Inciting fear of oppression, not hate, is a tactic that is often used on social media across conflicts by divisive actors seeking to consolidate power by perpetuating conflict. Unfortunately, there is no reasonable and legitimate way to disentangle unjust from just expressions of fear.

**INCITING FEAR OF OPPRESSION, NOT HATE, IS A TACTIC THAT IS OFTEN USED ON SOCIAL MEDIA ACROSS CONFLICTS BY DIVISIVE ACTORS.**

Such tactics work because human beings pay attention to fear for evolutionary reasons. Algorithms that measure attention, via clicks, shares, and time spent, learn that fear grabs attention and then incentivise this content. The open nature of these platforms means that conflict actors can manipulate algorithms by manufacturing engagement and dominating an information space. The result is that divisive conflict actors find platforms to be useful for perpetuating conflict and even neutral actors feel pulled toward divisive content in order to draw attention to their messaging and compete for attention. Fortunately, the physics of such online phenomena have become known, such that platforms have reformed *some* of those incentives, by reducing optimisations toward comments and shares for political content and by adding some limits to virality and reach in sensitive contexts. However, these changes certainly do not address all issues and may not be particularly robust, especially in international contexts. Some changes rely on the technical ability to identify what is or is not political content, for example, which is a classification task that will necessarily be limited by language and cultural understanding. Failure is inevitable and platforms need local expertise to help fix emerging issues.

Divisive actors will always be able to spread their messaging to those who seek out that content. That is a reality of online life that is inescapable. However, such content does not have to be pushed by platforms (e.g. among the most popular videos on YouTube) with the resulting warping of incentives for more neutral conflict actors. When such content is being pushed, having concrete cases to anchor on can help engineers treat these cases like 'bugs' that can be solved both by removing content and most importantly, by understanding why that content was being incentivised in the first place. Perhaps a political content classifier needs to be retrained with better culturally relevant examples. Perhaps a signal like 'time spent' is being used inappropriately within an algorithm, leading to the spread of sensational and dangerous claims. Perhaps a small group of users is willfully spreading content in ways that should be rate limited (i.e. capping how often someone can repeat an action within a certain timeframe). By pointing out specific examples of harmful content and understanding why that content is spreading, one can more proactively make a system more robust against future campaigns of divisiveness.

Mediators and peacebuilders should continue to do crisis response with platforms as trusted partners. But they should also be active partners in addressing the systems that perpetuate harmful content, not just reacting to harmful content and removing individual cases. In doing so, they can help platforms address emerging risk and can help develop new product levers that may help not only their efforts, but the efforts of their allies in peacebuilding across the world.

# AI AND THE FUTURE OF MEDIATION

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**Revolutionary technological progress in artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the dynamics of human-machine interaction and the role of technology in contemporary societies. Amidst the profound implications for global security, AI is certain to exert an influence on peace mediation, a field characterised by person-to-person communication. While the precise nature of this evolution remains uncertain, given the rapid pace of technological advancements and the concerns of conflict resolution practitioners about digital modes of engagement, this article contemplates the potential for AI to transform the realm of peace mediation, along with the associated challenges.**

## AI and its potential

Recent advancements in AI, including publicly available tools like OpenAI, ChatGPT and Google Bard, have captivated public attention with their remarkable capabilities and transformative potential. As AI reshapes industries and influences decision-making processes, it also holds immense potential as a tool for mediation. Although online dispute resolution has existed for decades, the advent of next-generation AI-powered mediation could mark a substantial leap forward in creating negotiations facilitated by digital third parties that closely mimic human interactions.

AI can serve as a tool for mediators but will not replace them. At best, AI can help process and analyse vast amounts of data, including historical conflict data, socio-political dynamics and cultural nuances, giving mediators a greater understanding of complex conflict dynamics and supporting them in formulating more effective strategies. AI-powered algorithms can also

be drawn on to support foresight — helping simulate different scenarios and the prediction of outcomes and allowing mediators and conflict parties to make better informed decisions. Generative AI-based trend foresight tools for market intelligence are booming in the private sector and are beginning to be applied in the public sector as well.

## AI CAN SERVE AS A TOOL FOR MEDIATORS BUT WILL NOT REPLACE THEM.

In heavily text-based diplomatic negotiations or processes such as national dialogues, AI could give mediators the capability to extract positions and identify common ground from within the extensive texts of reports, verbatim records, and other data sources. By automatically identifying key themes, stances, and areas of convergence, AI could not only accelerate information processing but also assist mediators in reframing perspectives and establishing mutual understanding. Among others, the Innovation Cell of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has been experimenting with such novel approaches, following the rollout of AI-assisted consultations in Yemen, Libya, and elsewhere, as described by Julie Hawke in this volume (see p.102).

AI can also sift through social media conversations to detect topics of social discussion and help analyse public opinion at scale. AI-powered transcription systems (such as the online speech-to-text transcription function in YouTube, among other available applications) can transcribe discussions on radio or television call-in shows to get a sense of public discourse. Soon, applications of this kind will be more intuitive and user-friendly for non-technology experts in mediation support teams.





An illustration rethinking peace negotiations, as part of the UN Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs' Futuring Peace initiative. © 2022 DPPA Innovation

AI-charged multilingual translation capabilities could help overcome communication barriers between conflict parties through more accurate interpretation services, especially for uncommon dialects and colloquial speech that have not yet been covered by mainstream translation providers. Although most Large Language Models have been trained in English, there have been efforts to extend them to less resourced languages to avoid the risk that they become cultural assimilators. Meta's 'No Language Left Behind' initiative is trained on over 200 languages; Google has its '1,000 Languages Initiative' to make sure AI becomes more linguistically inclusive.

Faster and more precise AI-powered translation software includes new features such as emotion detection and body language analysis. Research by the Universities of Manchester and of Helsinki published in May 2023 indicated that ChatGPT can outperform humans in emotional awareness tasks. Although state-of-the-art applications are still not free of error, more sophisticated systems are just around the corner; mediators should watch out for them and consider how they can help improve their support efforts.

In the not-so-distant future, one could even imagine that personalised conflict resolution chatbots or virtual agents could serve a mediation function themselves, providing a safe and neutral space for parties to express their concerns and interests. Acting as a more objective counterpart than humans (who bring emotional baggage), it is imaginable that these digital assistants could independently lead discussions, ask relevant questions, offer potential solutions, or serve as a virtual sparring partner. Scholars from Glasgow, Tel Aviv and Yale Universities have for several years been experimenting with social robots to support post-traumatic stress disorder diagnosis and treatment. Georgia Tech scholars have been working on a robot mediator for fixing delicate patient-caregiver relationships. Different companies have built AI-bots to listen carefully to customer complaints. Such digital helpers, sent out to collect views from conflict parties or the public through interactive conversations, could soon be a reality.

**ENHANCED BY DIGITAL TOOLS, THE FUTURE WILL PROBABLY REMAIN HUMANLY ORDINARY AND IMPERFECT, AND INTER-HUMAN CONNECTIONS WON'T BE EASILY DISPLACED BY MACHINES.**

### Challenges of 'cybertopia'

AI might lead to new challenges for mediation. For tech enthusiasts, 'Cybertopia' offers hope for unprecedented opportunities to better collect information, make sense of data and broaden mutual understanding through digital means. For cyber-doubters and cynics, however, any attempt to introduce digital means for engagement risks reducing the role of human responsibility and is a potential seed for new human-made problems. And indeed, despite the myriad of technological revolutions we have witnessed, history has shown that, however enhanced by digital tools, the future will probably remain humanly ordinary and imperfect, and inter-human connections won't be easily displaced by machines.

Institutional cultures and unwillingness to use modern technology in social decision-making processes will impede the more widespread use of AI in peace processes. We do not lack the technology to put it to good use in support of mediation efforts, but the integration of AI into peace processes is not without its challenges and risks. A calibrated approach is therefore necessary — one that not only fosters innovation but also involves careful evaluation, rigorous safeguards, and a readiness to integrate technology incrementally in a way that is sensitive to the nuances of conflict resolution.

Cost is another factor that will keep machines away from the negotiation table. Even if digital applications have become more affordable, AI-powered systems are enormously computer-power hungry, and hence costly. Dedicated budgets will be needed: to resource internal capacities in mediation support entities to scale technology and overcome resistance; to build tailored applications that serve a purpose instead of picking a commercial application not made for peace mediation; and to maintain digital applications whose innovation glamour wears off quickly after the first, second and third use but need further finetuning to improve. Moreover, measures will be needed to counter the digital divide by which certain populations lack access to technology or digital literacy, exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering inclusivity in peace processes. Technology development transfers, such as supported by the UN Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, will be needed to level the playing field in the arena of peace mediation.

Finally, AI governance issues, ethical considerations and gender dimensions need to be addressed to retain transparency, accountability and fairness in tech-informed mediation processes. The potential for AI to promote peace is clear, yet its deployment must be handled with utmost care to avoid exacerbating biases and inequalities. Confidentiality, especially concerning the sensitive training data AI models require, presents a complex challenge. Security is also critical, as systems must be robust enough to withstand potential breaches and manipulations that could undermine the integrity of a mediation process. Generative AI models, which can produce content or solutions autonomously, run the risk of internalising and magnifying biases present in their training datasets. The discourse on AI implementation in peace processes must address the safeguards and quality controls necessary to ensure AI supports efforts towards more just and peaceful societies without inadvertently causing harm.

**ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH AI IMPLEMENTATION IN PEACE MEDIATION WILL REQUIRE A BALANCED APPROACH THAT VALUES HUMAN JUDGMENT AND ETHICS WHILE LEVERAGING AI'S CAPABILITIES FOR EFFICIENCY AND PRECISION.**



Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya Stephanie Williams participates in an AI-powered chat to engage in a digital dialogue with 1,000 Libyans on the political, security, and economic situation in the country, 17 January 2021. © UNSMIL

## What lies beyond

In conclusion, as we navigate the evolving landscape of AI in peace mediation and beyond, it is essential to consider the interplay between its advantages and disadvantages. Bridging the gap between AI enthusiasts and sceptics presents an opportunity for collective growth and innovation. Addressing the challenges and risks associated with AI implementation in peace mediation will require a balanced approach that values human judgment and ethics while leveraging AI's capabilities for efficiency and precision.

The future of the relationship between humans and AI should be characterised by synergy and cooperation, where AI serves as a valuable tool to enhance human decision-making rather than replace it entirely. As we move forward, fostering harmonious collaboration between human expertise and AI-driven insights will be the key to harnessing the full potential of this groundbreaking technology while safeguarding against its pitfalls. In taking this path, we can envision a future where AI augments our capacity for peace mediation and empowers us to address global conflicts with greater wisdom and effectiveness.

In the more distant future, some decades from now, conflicts will persist. Alongside these conflicts, there will be a cadre of mediators and their teams who will step in to facilitate dialogue and help shape peace settlements between conflicting parties. Quantum computers supercharged by collective wisdom and best practice in human conflict resolution might take over as assistants. But while machines will be useful helpers, the longing for human-to-human connection will remain.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Adaptation and innovation in peace mediation

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**This is an alarming moment for international peace and security, and a sobering one for the international peacemaking community. It is all too easy to point to failure, divisions, and the rapid advance of global threats, and see only centrifugal forces driving us further apart, and further away from effective mediation to support conflict parties and other impacted communities in efforts to arrive at negotiated solutions and political settlements.**

Yet the urgency of the human suffering caused by the acceleration and persistence of armed conflict allows no room for despair, no possibility of turning away. Rather, as the articles across this *Accord* volume demonstrate, the history and practice of adaptation and innovation in mediation offer lessons to be learned and applied, but also ideas of what can be done, and done better, even at this difficult time. The following recommendations are introduced in this spirit.

## 10 ways to adapt and innovate mediation policy and practice

### Mediation *strategy and process*

#### 1. Prioritise mediation and the pursuit of political solutions as primary objectives in strategies to tackle armed conflict.

##### Why prioritise mediation?

Negotiating political solutions to prevent and resolve armed conflict is always hard and often contentious. Supporting negotiations may not be an easy policy choice at a moment when war is on the rise amidst polarised geopolitics. But the human costs of disregarding or deferring attempts to reach political solutions are unacceptable. Most conflicts are internationalised, and the roles of external states and organisations matter.

Peacemaking is cost effective, but it needs sufficient and consistent financing. As wars in Ukraine and the Middle East drain budgets, funding for mediation is declining and the gap between needs and resources widening. Inconsistent or restricted funding limits opportunities and undermines activities essential for effective mediation, including the taking of calculated risks, long-term engagements to build relationships, and efforts to establish connections between different initiatives.

##### How to prioritise mediation – states and multilateral organisations should:

- Commit to the peaceful settlement of disputes as the priority in a conflict theatre, and not just one among a number of potential policy ambitions.
- Exert political courage and capital to back peace processes, and provide sufficient resources.
- Be prepared to take calculated political risks, and exercise patience and imagination to create and sustain appropriate space for dialogue.
- States should guarantee greater and more reliable financing for mediation capacity – for the UN, regional organisations, their own envoys and teams, and private and local mediators, women and men – and set a minimum percentage of GDP to bolster falling levels of funding on peace and conflict prevention in fragile contexts.

## 2. Pursue mediation and political solutions *below* and *beyond* the state – the state should not be the only locus for conflict resolution.

### Why mediate below and beyond the state?

Internal and internationalised conflicts are fragmented and interwoven with transnational threats such as the climate emergency and organised crime. Peacemaking cannot default to the state as the locus of every political solution, but must look below and beyond it.

### How to mediate below and beyond the state – mediators should:

- Develop nuanced, gendered and localised analysis of the social, political and economic conditions and actors that generate violence and might help to reduce it.
- Support climate-informed mediation at different levels – local, national and regional – as the impacts of the climate emergency in conflict contexts accelerate, and new climate policies, investments, rights and laws themselves fuel conflict.
- Facilitate ‘intra-party’ dialogue among fragmented groups – conflict parties, opposition groups, women’s organisations and others with different perspectives – to help build coherent positions and prepare for and engage in negotiations.
- Prepare for more negotiations around blockades, sanctions and extreme protectionism, as these escalate in and around both inter- and intra-state conflict.
- Recognise the impacts of organised crime on conflict and peacemaking, acknowledging the complex interplay of criminal and political agendas and developing strategies to address them where circumstances allow.

## 3. Redefine ‘success’ in mediation as achieving specific or localised gains that make people safer, reduce violence and support momentum towards sustainable peace.

### Why redefine success in mediation?

Fragmented conflict and geopolitical contestation mean that peace processes focused on achieving a comprehensive peace agreement will be the exception.

Mediators will need to be pragmatic, recognising the limits but also the value of what it is possible to achieve, and adjust not only their expectations but also their training and preparation accordingly. Not all challenges have fixes, but it is possible to recognise major needs and opportunities and identify priorities for smart engagement and investment.

### How to redefine success in mediation – policymakers and mediators should:

- Embrace opportunities for incremental or local mediation processes, ceasefire agreements and monitoring mechanisms that temper violence and save or improve civilian lives.
- Recognise that seemingly small successes can make important contributions to change, such as the establishment of participatory mechanisms to broaden contributions to peace, or the mediation of behaviours relating to the use of digital technologies.
- Support the positive evolution of iterative and non-linear peace processes – including by investing in the reorientation of training to prepare mediators and their teams for today’s realities, and developing approaches to iterative process design that can build progress over time.
- Support conflict parties to develop adaptive frameworks to answer the questions facing society in a progressively inclusive manner, and in the process ensure that international development assistance and financial aid are integrated into peace processes equitably.
- Different mediation initiatives may be able to increase their cumulative impact as part of what Christine Bell terms ‘multimediation,’ including by experimenting with ways to enhance complementarity.

## Mediation partnerships and principles

### 4. Commit to partnerships between diverse mediators in order to support peace processes effectively, balance skills and interests, avoid competition and maximise collective impact.

#### Why commit to mediation partnerships?

Mediation is increasingly crowded, involving more diverse mediators and other external actors with different interests and influence. Internationalised civil wars in which regional states may be fuelling or sustaining conflicts are particularly challenging. Collaboration is not easy amid different mediators’ sometimes contrasting ambitions and approaches. But working in partnership is essential for effective peace processes.

There is no single partnership model. In different circumstances, groups of friends, international contact groups, high-level panels, guarantors, and other forms of partnership – from the UN to regional organisations, states, and private, non-state and local mediators – have all been engaged in support of conflict parties or a peace process, with a range of impacts.

### How to commit to mediation partnerships – mediators should:

- Adapt the configuration of partnerships to respond to the needs of conflict parties and the process, recalling the importance of national ownership and focusing on leadership, structures inclusive (enough) of the different interests involved, sufficient consensus on direction of travel, and mediation approaches tailored to the context.
- Use leadership to build conceptual clarity on how a process can move forward. Examples include:
  - in the post-referendum negotiations in Sudan, the African Union’s High-Level Implementation Panel helped the parties articulate a common vision of ‘two viable states at peace with each other’
  - under the lead of Germany and the UN, in 2020 the Berlin International Conference for Libya consolidated disparate states and organisations with interests or engagement in the Libyan crisis around an agreed trajectory for peace, including a ceasefire, arms embargo and return to a UN-led political process
- Explore ways to include external actors in negotiation frameworks to advance the resolution of internationalised civil wars, with a first priority being to secure agreement on curtailing military assistance and the withdrawal of foreign forces.
- Partnerships between official and unofficial mediators can foster creative ideas and combine different sources of legitimacy, capacities and relationships with conflict parties, local communities and other influential constituencies. Such ‘hybrid’ partnerships may be formally constructed in an International Contact Group (as in Mindanao), or developed more organically, as in strategic support to the UN, regional organisations or state mediators by private mediation organisations and NGOs.
- Where multiple NGO mediators are engaged in a conflict context they should explore mechanisms to enable exchange of information and approaches (with due regard to requirements of confidentiality); if a lead mediator is present, clarity in the assignation of supporting tracks and processes can help. Careful mapping of mediation efforts at a country level may inform coordination of roles and actions.
- Governments of states that conduct or fund mediation have a responsibility to encourage coordination and complementarity in their own initiatives and those they support.

### 5. Build consensus among diverse mediators around core peacemaking values and principles – but acknowledge that there will often be different worldviews that need to be managed carefully.

#### Why build consensus?

Stark divisions between the West, Russia and China, and a shift of global power and influence towards the South and East, contribute to a competitive environment for peacemaking. While the fragile consensus behind the liberal vision of peacemaking has broken down, values that prioritise peace over violence will always need to underpin mediation.

Mediators need greater self-awareness and the fluency and capacity to work within and across distinct worldviews – recognising unconscious bias and supporting conflict parties to reach mutually acceptable agreements that may not always align with their own ambitions.

#### How to build consensus – states, multilateral organisations and other mediators should:

- Reaffirm consensus where possible – on sovereignty, consent, and national ownership, as well as foundational documents such as the UN Charter, the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the Helsinki Accords, and agreed norms of international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Lead or support efforts to reach agreement on a baseline of ambitions and principles for a peace process.
- Support initiatives to build trust among mediators, even when they have different goals, such as joint analysis and engagements, and exchanges of information, perspectives and resources (for example technical expertise, staff swaps and study visits).
- States in particular should avoid actions that lead to accusations of double standards, and assiduously uphold the universal values and legal framework they demand of others in foreign policy interventions, including mediation.

## 6. Defend impartiality as a mediation ‘fundamental’ – accepting that this may need to be balanced among diverse mediators in a peace process.

### Why defend impartiality?

Amidst rising polarisation and the erosion of long-held norms of diplomatic exchange, the impartiality required for mediators to work with all conflict parties is difficult to safeguard but nonetheless essential. It is particularly complex when multiple mediators are involved, bringing different views on engaging with some conflict parties.

Regional and global powers may have political or economic interests at stake, and leverage and relationships to draw upon. In some situations, individual mediators will not be perceived as impartial: their involvement can be helpfully complemented by that of other mediators with a distinct set of relationships with the conflict parties.

### How to defend impartiality

- Continuous demonstration of the impartiality of the UN Secretariat – including through the performance of its senior officials – can help reinforce the organisation’s unique and necessary convening power. The breadth of the UN’s political, humanitarian and other capacities means that, although buffeted by divisions among its member states, it retains the potential to respond creatively to complex peace and security challenges (as its role in the Black Sea Grain Initiative demonstrated) and has important peacemaking contributions to make in partnership with or in support of others.
- Ensuring impartiality – whether on the part of the UN, regional organisations, individual states, private or insider mediators – even in processes where heavy economic or political leverage is in play can enable third parties supporting negotiations to talk to all conflict parties, gain trust by engaging with them in a fair and transparent manner, and help identify areas of agreement.
- Combinations of different mediators can balance perceptions of a lack of impartiality held by a party to a conflict – as was demonstrated in the African Union-led negotiations on Tigray in Ethiopia. Partnerships assembled out of expediency or for transactional agreements must remain committed to following through and implementing the agreements reached.

## Mediation approaches and tools

## 7. Support engagement with ‘hard-to-reach’ armed groups as a policy imperative, facilitating pathways and reducing barriers to mediation.

### Why engage with hard-to-reach armed groups?

Many non-state armed groups are hard to reach – for security, legal and other reasons associated with terrorism or criminality and related stigma. But non-state armed groups control territory, impact livelihoods, disrupt the state’s monopoly on the use of force, and in some circumstances derive legitimacy from their capacity for service delivery. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that in 2023 at least 195 million people lived in areas controlled or contested by them. Engagement is therefore imperative.

Mediation with non-state armed groups takes different forms and routes, but is most frequently conducted by humanitarian organisations and non-governmental mediators – the latter sometimes serving as confidential channels for governments reluctant to engage themselves. Although many such engagements are shrouded in discretion, it is important to develop more robust knowledge of best practice to help push this critical area of peacemaking forwards.

### How to engage with hard-to-reach armed groups – pathways to enabling engagement include:

- Greater flexibility in the proscription and de-listing of armed groups in UN and other sanctions regimes, offering ‘carrots’ as well as ‘sticks’, including by negotiating criteria for suspending sanctions; once achieved, timely follow-through on promised relief from sanctions across the public and private sectors is essential.
- The UN Security Council could consider extending humanitarian ‘carve-outs’ from sanctions regimes to mediation activities, building on the exception introduced through UNSC resolution 2664 in December 2022 for humanitarian assistance; where available, exemptions should in any case be applied to enable sanctioned parties and individuals to participate in talks.
- Adapting language used by governments and third parties in peace processes to reduce tensions and facilitate a path to dialogue, as in the ‘linguistic ceasefire’ coined by Sophie Haspeslagh to describe how, between 2012 and 2016, the Colombian government moved away from labelling the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as ‘terrorists’ as part of a strategy to advance peace talks.

- Developing a legal framework to safeguard dialogue with groups identified by governments as criminal – learning lessons from the ongoing pursuit of ‘total peace’ in Colombia.

## **8. Encourage and enable inclusion in mediation processes, emphasising its tactical and strategic value in generating momentum and achieving sustainable outcomes.**

### **Why encourage and enable inclusion in mediation processes?**

Mediators should emphasise the strategic benefits of inclusion of non-military stakeholders, and draw on the rich body of innovative practice – notably to further the meaningful participation of women in peace processes and to respond to demands by young people to be heard and included in decision making.

Strategies for inclusion need to find mechanisms to enable the participation of dissenting popular movements. These may be instrumental in driving political processes but later excluded from negotiations and decision making, or they may lack structures and procedures that lend themselves to conventional forms of representation in peace processes (as was, for example, the case of the Resistance Committees in Sudan). Failure to incorporate dissenting movements compromises prospects for sustainable peace and positive change.

Innovation in digital technologies is helping foster increased participation in peace processes by women, young people and marginalised groups, and enabling grassroots movements to define inclusion on their terms. Efforts to integrate digital tools into mediation strategies ethically and effectively need to be deepened and broadened.

### **How to encourage and enable inclusion in mediation processes – mediators and their teams should:**

- Work with conflict parties to adapt and innovate to support modalities for the inclusion of non-military stakeholders appropriate to their own context. They can draw on rich experience, including meetings with victims by the Colombian government and the FARC during their negotiations in Havana in 2014, townhall and other forms of consultations adopted in Libya, or the different tactics, mechanisms and advisory bodies used to engage with women and civil society in Kenya, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere.
- Draw on prior experience in furthering the meaningful participation of women, including:
  - as mediators, in negotiating delegations and mediation teams, or in consultation mechanisms

- convening women peacebuilders early to engage them on critical issues
- supporting women’s direct engagement with the warring parties, where safe and appropriate
- ensuring that mediation teams apply gender-responsive conflict analysis systematically, and that all involved receive gendered briefing material on each item on the agenda
- including gender and inclusion advisers, men as well as women, in all mediation teams
- Ensure that digital inclusion initiatives complement but not replace in-person participation. Different segments of a community can be marginalised by the barriers and risks associated with in-person and digital participation, respectively. Hybrid processes help build trust, providing opportunities for both in-person contact to foster empathy and connections and digital contact to enable sustained participation.
- Fully integrate digital inclusion initiatives into peace processes, and not embark on them as a box-ticking exercise. They should be motivated by a desire to broaden participation and an understanding of their contribution to the peace effort, not by a wish to ‘do something digital’.

## **9. Upskill mediators to keep pace with rapidly changing conflict issues, and to adapt peace processes, talks and agreements to prevent and resolve them.**

### **Why upskill mediators?**

Mediators need to develop and deepen their understanding of evolving issues that affect why and how conflict parties fight. This will include gendered analysis of the impacts of climate change in exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and differences and weakening coping mechanisms; the capacity of social media, misinformation and disinformation to shape and distort narratives; the emergence of cyberattacks and the prevalence of government measures to shut down digital communications; developments in artificial intelligence; and the impacts of infectious diseases such as Covid-19 on armed conflict.

Mediators need to be ready to support conflict parties in negotiating emerging issues. As Govinda Clayton *et al* set out their article addressing the inclusion of digital technologies in peace agreements, this will require them to understand the risks that may require mediation, and then to develop appropriate processes to address them.

### How to upskill mediators:

- The speed and scope of change mean that new resources and expertise are needed both within mediation teams and through partnership with outside experts and the private sector.
- Climate experts, data scientists, digital mediation/peacebuilding experts and epidemiologists may become common fixtures of mediation support teams, while others such as environmental agencies and actors, social media companies, software manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies can be consulted.
- Mediation teams should – as a UN practice note (2022) on the subject advises – strive to recognise where the effects of climate change represent a conflict factor and where climate action might serve as an entry point. Independent technical expertise (for example on water, land or pastoralism) can complement local knowledge, help parties develop mutually beneficial proposals, and advise on the availability of additional resources.
- Mediation teams need capacity for in-country assessment of the digital environment, digital behaviours of the conflict parties, digital risks and the development of appropriate ethical and risk frameworks, including with regard to how digital engagement will affect relationship-building and the implications of digital-related issues for the overall mediation strategy.
- Mediators will need to carefully assess how and when they involve social media platforms, telecommunications companies and other digital technology counterparts in the private sector that are an inextricable part of the new landscape of conflict. They should discuss with conflict parties and local constituencies how the peace process might benefit from help in investigating problematic digital behaviour, cyber incident response, or the removal of inauthentic networks.
- Skills in mediating economic dimensions of conflict – from global economic competition and the disruption of maritime traffic to the impact of illicit economies – will also need resourcing: they remain an area of relative weakness within the mediation community.
- Other emerging issues represent new fields for human competition and thus will be subjects of mediation themselves. They include climate financing, the regulation of emerging technologies and weapons, and exploration and the use of outer space. Such issues will require substantive knowledge distinct from, or in addition to, that required for the mediation of armed conflicts.

## 10. Do no harm to prospects for peace amid mediation adaptation and innovation.

### Why do no harm to prospects for peace?

This is a minimum obligation for any action or engagement on conflict, including mediation, and needs extra vigilance in a time of dramatic global change.

The mediation field is rife with hazard. It is rich with diversity; engaging at multiple levels with multiple actors, many of them heavily armed and violent; committed to the pursuit of peaceful outcomes, consent and national ownership and sovereignty; informed by hard-won knowledge and skills developed over a period of decades. But it is also inherently anarchic, competitive, and in some respects opportunistic. The rapid development of new mediation skills, approaches and partnerships intensifies risks.

### How to do no harm to prospects for peace – six key principles emerge from this *Accord* publication:

- As third parties supporting negotiations to forge peace from conflict, mediators must not put those with whom they engage, or support, in danger.
- Mediators have a collective responsibility not to worsen divisions between conflict parties, exacerbate or entrench power inequality relating to gender, identity or age, or obstruct pathways to advance inclusion.
- Mediators should engage on the basis of their comparative advantages with respect to other mediators, and coordinate with or support others in the best interests of the peace process.
- While applying new skills, mediators must not lose sight of the root causes driving conflicts, of their core objectives, or of best practice built over many decades of engagement.
- Mediators should always be wary of the potential for unintended harm, and have the courage to reverse course as needed.
- International mediators must use their own resources judiciously, promote and strengthen local partners and communities, and, perhaps most fundamentally, conduct themselves in ways that increase trust and hope in the benefits of dialogue, engagement and political paths to peace.



# Further reading

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

BuildUp. Digital Process Design & Facilitation for Mediation  
<https://howtobuildup.org/community-learning/courses/digital-process-design-facilitation-for-mediation>

BuildUp. Digital Inclusion and Women in Peace Processes  
<https://howtobuildup.org/community-learning/courses/digital-inclusion-and-women-in-peace-processes>

BuildUp. Social Media Analysis Toolkit for Mediators and Peacebuilders  
<https://howtobuildup.org/rise/social-media-toolkit>

Build Up. Digital Peacebuilding 101: introducing technology for peacebuilding  
<https://howtobuildup.org/community-learning/courses/digital-peacebuilding-101-introducing-technology-for-peacebuilding/>

ConnexUs. Digital Peacebuilders Guide  
<https://cnxus.org/digital-peacebuilders-guide>

Swisspeace. Digital peacebuilding toolkit  
<https://miro.com/app/board/uXjV00yD9cc=?moveToWidget=3458764527395536171&cot=14>)

UN Peacemaker: Digital Technologies and Mediation Toolkit  
<https://peacemaker.un.org/digitaltoolkit>

# Accord series

[www.c-r.org/accord](http://www.c-r.org/accord)

## INSIGHT

### INSIGHT ISSUE 4 (2018)

#### Borderlands and peace processes

Accord Insight 4 looks at peacebuilding in borderlands and how peace and transition processes address the interests of borderland communities.

### INSIGHT ISSUE 3 (2016)

#### Reconciliation and peace processes

Accord Insight 3 examines reconciliation in peace processes. Case studies from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Colombia, Mindanao (Philippines) and Northern Ireland offer insights from initiatives to transform relationships horizontally, among communities, and vertically, between society and the state.

### INSIGHT ISSUE 2 (2015)

#### Local engagement with armed groups

This second Accord Insight publication looks at the interactions between armed groups and local populations. Case studies from Colombia, northern Uganda, Syria and Northern Ireland document the experiences of communities who have organised to influence the behaviour of armed groups – often in advance of more formal negotiations and in situations of intense violence and embedded conflict.

### INSIGHT ISSUE 1 (2013)

#### Women building peace

Most peace agreements do not address the specific concerns of women, and women are still excluded from political processes. The first Accord Insight presents nine articles and new analysis drawn from the Accord series from 1998 to 2010, which examine the roles women have played in addressing violence and building peace – from Bougainville and Sierra Leone to Aceh and Northern Ireland.

## ACCORD

### ISSUE 29 (2020)

#### Pioneering peace pathways

Accord 29 reflects on how societies and conflict parties try to move from fighting to talking, and how policymakers and peace practitioners can accompany and support them effectively.

### ISSUE 28 (2019)

#### Inclusion in peace processes

There is a broad global consensus that inclusion matters in peace processes. Now, we need to better understand what this means in practice. This Accord explores who should be involved in a peace process, the challenges this creates and how these can be overcome.

### ISSUE 27 (2018)

#### Incremental peace in Afghanistan

Accord 27 suggests a new, phased approach to peace in Afghanistan: short-term, to achieve a reduction of violence; and long-term, to achieve a more broadly inclusive social contract.

### ISSUE 26 (2017)

#### Two steps forward, one step back: The Nepal peace process

Accord 26 includes over 30 articles and interviews from Nepali and international experts focusing on the progress of inclusion and the function of power, and how peace and political negotiations in various forms and forums have facilitated transition from negative to positive peace.

### ISSUE 25 (2014)

#### Legitimacy and peace processes: from coercion to consent

Accord 25 focuses on the practical ways that legitimacy can contribute to building more sustainable peace: national dialogue; constitutional reform; local governance; and transforming coercive actors.

### ISSUE 24 (2012)

#### Reconciliation, reform and resilience: positive peace for Lebanon

Accord 24 includes more than 30 articles and interviews on peacebuilding in Lebanon: from diverse perspectives and from inside and outside the country. Together they show that the Lebanese are not passive victims of a violent fate determined beyond their country's borders. Many are actively pursuing opportunities for change.

### **ISSUE 23 (2012)**

#### **Consolidating peace: Liberia and Sierra Leone**

A decade after the official end of wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Accord 23 draws on respective societies' experiences and insights to ask what headway has been made to consolidate peace, what challenges lie ahead and what lessons can be learnt. It argues that policy needs to focus on people, on repairing relationships and promoting inclusion, and that traditional mechanisms can play a crucial role.

### **ISSUE 22 (2011)**

#### **Paix sans frontières: building peace across borders**

War does not respect political or territorial boundaries. This twenty-second *Accord* publication, looks at how peacebuilding strategies and capacity can 'think outside the state': *beyond* it, through regional engagement, and *below* it, through cross-border community or trade networks.

### **ISSUE 21 (2010)**

#### **Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking**

Accord 21 contains over 30 articles including interviews with Somali elders and senior diplomats with the African Union, the UN and IGAD, and contributions from Somali and international peacemaking practitioners, academics, involved parties, civil society and women's organisations.

### **ISSUE 20 (2008)**

#### **Reconfiguring politics: the Indonesia-Aceh peace process**

In 2005, the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) agreed a settlement ending 30 years of armed conflict. Accord 20 explores how that agreement was reached and subsequent challenges to its implementation.

### **ISSUE 19 (2008)**

#### **Powers of persuasion: incentives, sanctions and conditionality in peacemaking**

International policymakers frequently use incentives, sanctions and conditionality as tools to influence intra-state conflicts. Using a range of case studies, Accord 19 asks whether and how these tools can constructively influence conflict parties' engagement in peacemaking initiatives.

### **ISSUE 18 (2006)**

#### **Peace by piece: addressing Sudan's conflicts**

This Accord publication reviews the peace process that led to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan. It also explores questions that remain to be tackled, arguing that future Sudanese initiatives must be more inclusive and better coordinated.

### **ISSUE 17 (2005)**

#### **The limits of leadership elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process**

Since the 1994 ceasefire, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorny Karabakh has remained deadlocked. Accord 17 explores the dynamics of polarisation, the obstacles to a sustainable agreement and the challenge of overcoming resistance to compromise.

### **ISSUE 16 (2005)**

#### **Choosing to engage: armed groups and peace processes**

Non-state armed groups, key actors in many internal armed conflicts, have participated in peace processes across the world. Accord 16 draws on these experiences to explore the case for engaging with armed groups, and the different options, roles and challenges for such engagement.

### **ISSUE 15 (2004)**

#### **From military peace to social justice? The Angolan peace process**

The Luena Memorandum of 2002 brought an end to Angola's 27-year civil war. Accord 15 reviews the history of peacemaking efforts in Angola, and analyses challenges that remain if the absence of violence is to develop into a sustainable and just peace.

### **ISSUE 14 (2004)**

#### **Alternatives to war: Colombia's peace processes**

This Accord publication provides an overview of more than 25 years of peace initiatives with Colombia's guerrilla and paramilitary groups. It includes analysis of civil society efforts at local, regional and national levels and identifies the necessary elements of a new model of conflict resolution.

### **ISSUE 13 (2002)**

#### **Owning the process: public participation in peacemaking**

This first thematic Accord publication documents mechanisms for public participation in peacemaking. It features extended studies looking at how people were empowered to participate in political processes in Guatemala, Mali and South Africa. It also contains shorter pieces from Colombia, Northern Ireland and the Philippines.

### **ISSUE 12 (2002)**

#### **Weaving consensus: the Papua New Guinea – Bougainville peace process**

This Accord publication documents efforts leading to the Bougainville Peace Agreement of 2001. It describes an indigenous process that drew on the strengths of Melanesian traditions, as well as innovative roles played by international third parties.

### **ISSUE 11 (2002)**

#### **Protracted conflict, elusive peace: initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda**

While a meaningful peace process in northern Uganda remains elusive, Accord 11 documents significant peacemaking initiatives undertaken by internal and external actors and analyses their impact on the dynamics of the conflict.

### **ISSUE 10 (2001)**

#### **Politics of compromise: the Tajikistan peace process**

This publication describes the aspirations of the parties to the conflict in Tajikistan. It documents the negotiation process leading to the General Agreement of June 1997, looking at the role of the international community, led by the UN, and of local civil society.

### **ISSUE 9 (2000)**

#### **Paying the price: the Sierra Leone peace process**

The Lomé Peace Agreement of July 1999 sought to bring an end to armed conflict in Sierra Leone: one of the most brutal civil wars of recent times. Accord 9 explores the Lomé process and earlier attempts to resolve the conflict, and draws lessons for Sierra Leone's transition.

### **ISSUE 8 (1999)**

#### **Striking a balance: the Northern Ireland peace process**

This publication examines the factors that led to the negotiations resulting in the 1998 *Belfast Agreement*. It describes the complex underlying forces and the development of an environment for peace. (2003: Supplement Issue – see online index).

### **ISSUE 7 (1999)**

#### **A question of sovereignty: the Georgia-Abkhazia peace process**

This publication explores the background and issues at the heart of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, providing a unique insight into a political stalemate and pointing towards possible avenues out of deadlock.

### **ISSUE 6 (1999)**

#### **Compromising on autonomy: Mindanao in transition**

The GRP-MNLF 1996 Peace Agreement was a milestone, as all previous peacemaking attempts over 24 years had failed. Accord 6 analyses elements of peacemaking in Mindanao and examines the challenges of implementation. (2003: Supplement Issue – see online index).

### **ISSUE 5 (1998)**

#### **Safeguarding peace: Cambodia's constitutional challenge**

This publication documents issues around the signing of the 1991 Paris agreements that officially ended Cambodia's long war, and the subsequent violent collapse of the country's governing coalition in July 1997.

### **ISSUE 4 (1998)**

#### **Demanding sacrifice: war and negotiation in Sri Lanka**

This publication documents the cycles of ethnic/national conflict that have blighted Sri Lanka since 1983. It analyses negotiations and other peace initiatives, and outlines fundamental concerns that need to be confronted in future peacemaking efforts.

### **ISSUE 3 (1998)**

#### **The Mozambican peace process in perspective**

This publication documents the diverse initiatives that drove the parties to a negotiated settlement of the conflict in Mozambique. It further illustrates the impact on the country of changing regional and international political dynamics.

### **ISSUE 2 (1997)**

#### **Negotiating rights: the Guatemalan peace process**

The signing of the peace agreement in 1996 brought an end to 36 years of civil war in Guatemala. Accord 2 analyses issues of impunity, indigenous rights, political participation and land reform.

### **ISSUE 1 (1996)**

#### **The Liberian peace process 1990–1996**

This first Accord publication documents the lengthy and fractious Liberian peace process and provides insight into why thirteen individual peace accords collapsed in half as many years.

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