



The Roles and Contributions of States in Peace Mediation

Fact Sheet Series: Peace Mediation and Mediation Support

States as mediators

The most visible role played by states in the field of peace mediation is as an official third party. States as mediators offer genuine opportunities to help resolve conflicts, particularly in situations in which they are able, to the greatest extent possible, to preserve their impartiality¹ vis-à-vis the conflict parties. There is an increased likelihood that states will enjoy the necessary trust of all parties involved, especially in contexts in which, for historical, geopolitical or cultural reasons, potential mediating states maintain positive relations with conflict parties. In contrast to non-state or non-governmental actors, there are particular factors that explain why states can assume an important role in mediation processes. A country's political or economic clout, its networks and access to high-ranking diplomatic circles via its representatives, its ability to bring together relevant actors (convening power) and its capacity to facilitate travel formalities (e.g. visas) for conflict actors are just a few examples of the advantages offered by states as mediators.

However, states can be restricted in their mediation activities on account of their multilateral and international law obligations.² For instance, it can be difficult or even impossible for states to get in contact with certain non-state actors or those classified as terrorist groups via official channels. One option in such a situation is to take a collaborative approach and work through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or with states that do not maintain lists of terrorist groups. While membership of alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) can entail certain restrictions for states as mediators, it can also offer advantages and opportunities for cooperation.³

This fact sheet is part of a series of fact sheets on peace mediation. It provides a structured overview of methods, actors, challenges and options in the field of peace mediation.

This fact sheet examines the different roles that states can play in the field of peace mediation as well as the contributions they can make.

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States as process supporters (mediation support)

Besides the role of mediator, states, as individual actors or as members of multilateral organisations, can play a supporting role in peace processes through the use of diplomatic instruments (for more information, see Fact Sheet 'Basics of Mediation: Concepts and Definitions'). For example, so-called good offices⁴ are offered by Special Representatives of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), by Special Representatives from the EU and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and by special envoys from individual states. In parallel to the negotiating process as such, states exert influence on conflict parties with respect to their negotiating positions or create political or economic incentives for negotiating parties in a coordinated manner. They can also have a more direct impact on the process and, for example, advocate for greater inclusivity, with structured inclusion of civil society, women, youth or groups that are potential disturbers/spoilers⁵ or influential business representatives.

Characteristics	Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> States particularly become involved in their close neighbourhood, as they have an interest in a stable environment or wish to pursue other geopolitical ambitions. Smaller states are more often perceived as being impartial, even though they also pursue normative and strategic interests. Larger states often have greater scope for exerting their influence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> States may have a particular affinity to specific conflict actors for historical, geopolitical or cultural reasons. State representatives are well connected and have access to high-ranking diplomatic circles. States often have great potential to bring together relevant actors (convening power). States are able to facilitate travel formalities for conflict actors. Some states possess considerable financial resources and important expertise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> States have their own interests and are often partial. It is difficult for states to make contact with certain non-state actors. States may be restricted in their mediation activities owing to the principles underlying the international order (e.g. territorial integrity) and their membership of international organisations.

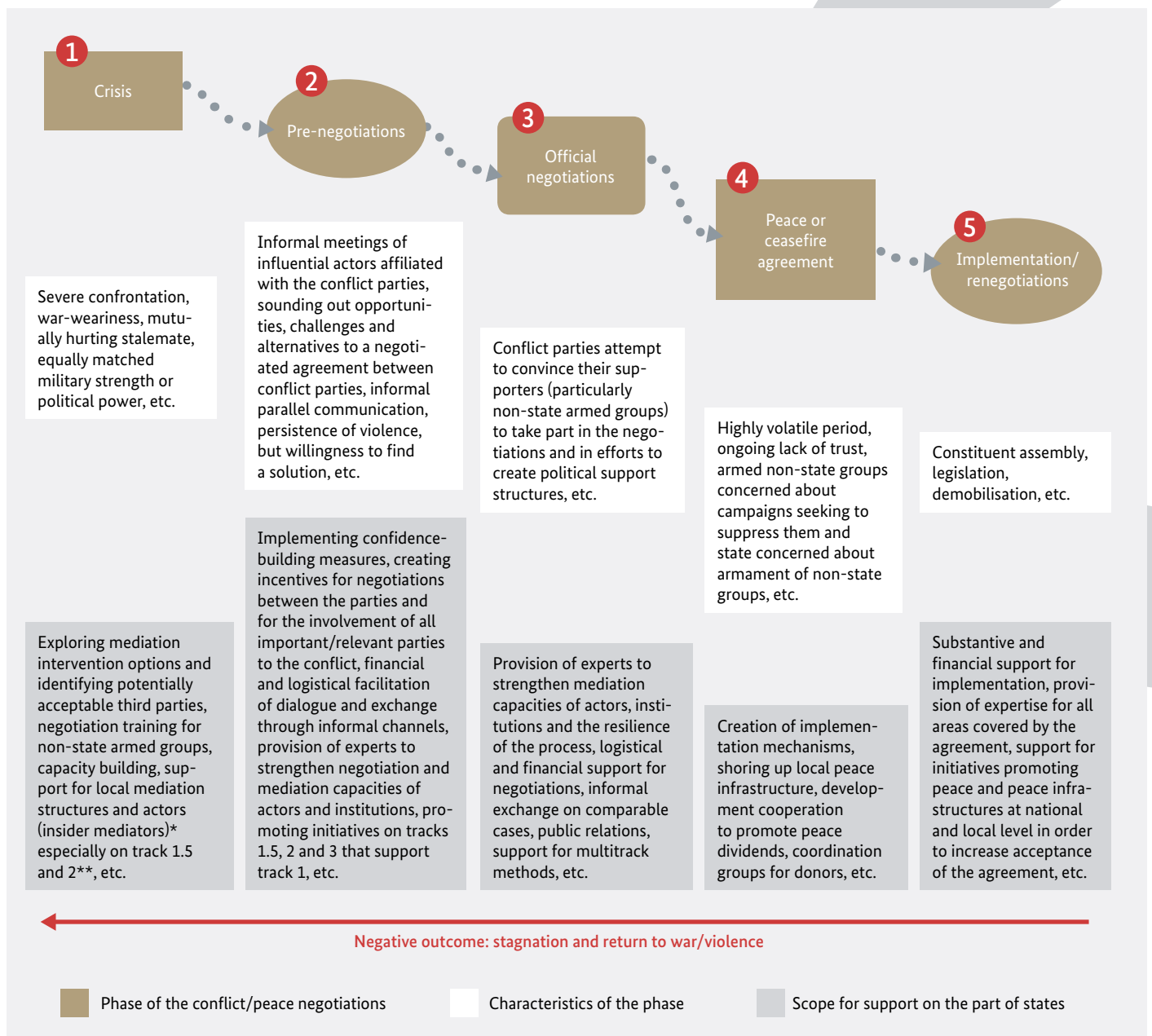
Mason, Simon and Sguaitamatti, Damiano (2011). Mapping Mediators Center. A comparison of third parties and implications for Switzerland. Zurich: Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich.

This process support by states can take place in various diplomatic and (more or less) institutionalised formats that facilitate dialogue and coordination. Examples include the Troika – composed of the US, Norway and the UK – in the case of mediation efforts in South Sudan which were led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as well as the International Contact Group on the Central African Republic, consisting of states such as the US, France, Turkey, the Republic of the Congo, Sudan and multilateral actors including the UN, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the African Union (AU).

The following diagram illustrates the options for process support in the various phases of a negotiation process. In all of these phases, states can provide practical support, for example by seconding experts to advise the mediation team on process design and on thematic issues such as power sharing and security sector reform (SSR), disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of soldiers (DDR), transitional justice, resource management, decentralisation and federalism. As peace processes do not proceed linearly, the sequencing of these measures may vary.

Alongside processes, states can also support actors at the international, regional, national or local level that are involved in a mediation process. The skills can be enhanced through targeted process support and capacity-building, including training in communication, negotiation, mediation and process design. States can also help to build up and strengthen institutional mediation and mediation support structures in a targeted way.⁶

Phases of the negotiation process



* For more information about the roles and contributions of other third parties, including insider mediators, see Fact Sheet 'The Roles and Contributions of Multilateral and Non-State Actors in Peace Mediation'.

** For more information on the different tracks, see Fact Sheet 'Basics of Mediation: Concepts and Definitions'.

Adapted from: Vimalarajah, Luxshi (2012). Mapping German Development Cooperation in Peace Negotiations and Mediation. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

Coordination and networking at the international and national level

States work together in Groups of Friends of Mediation, for instance in the framework of the UN, OSCE and EU. These groups can help to establish mediation politically and normatively as an instrument for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. For example, the UN Friends of Mediation has played a pivotal role in the development and sponsoring of draft resolutions on mediation in the UN General Assembly. States can also support the capacities of international organisations like the Mediation Support Unit of the UN or the AU. Other formats include the Oslo Forum, which is the world's most important forum for exchange between mediators.

States can help to embed peace mediation in foreign policy at the national level, for example, by coordinating and supporting national actors, providing personnel, expertise, knowledge and financial resources, and by developing political action plans and national strategies. In Switzerland, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is pursuing the Mediation Support Project together with the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich and the NGO swisspeace, providing training and advice for diplomats, ministries, NGOs, UN employees, mediators and conflict parties. The Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs established the post of Special Representative on Mediation in 2011 and has also set up a national Mediation Coordination Group.

The role and importance of peace mediation in Germany's foreign policy agenda has grown over the last years. Since 2014, the German Federal Foreign Office is closely cooperating with the Initiative Mediation Support Germany (IMSD) to strengthen capacities of German staff officials and decision-makers in the area of peace mediation and mediation support and to promote a stronger embedding of peace mediation as a foreign policy tool.

References

- 1 Besides impartiality, definitions such as multi-partiality or omni-partiality are used by practitioners, putting a stronger emphasis on the ability of mediators to understand the interests and concerns of all the key actors involved.
- 2 For further details see Fact Sheet "Normativer Bezugsrahmen und völkerrechtliche Grundlagen der Friedensmediation", July 2017
- 3 Mason, Simon and Sguaitamatti, Damiano (2011). Mapping Mediators. A comparison of third parties and implications for Switzerland. Zurich: Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, p. 21 et seq.
- 4 The definition of good offices captures the support of states or international entities in providing, organising or establishing contact or negotiations between the disputing parties, with the goal of a peaceful conflict settlement. For further details see Greig Michael J, Diehl Paul F (2012). International Mediation. Cambridge: Polity.
- 5 Spoilers are conflict actors that seek to jeopardise efforts to achieve peace for various personal reasons or for profit, power or their own interests. The tendency in this discourse is to refer to such individuals not as spoilers, but as "hard to reach" in order to avoid any negative categorisation.
- 6 For further details see Fact Sheet "Basics of Mediation: Concepts and Definitions", published in February 2017.

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