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Talking peace: International mediation in armed conflicts

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Abstract

Mediation, as a means to end armed conflicts, has gained prominence particularly in the past 25 years. This article reviews peace mediation research to date, with a particular focus on quantitative studies as well as on significant theoretical and conceptual works. The growing literature on international mediation has made considerable progress towards understanding the conditions under which mediation processes help bring armed conflicts to peaceful ends. Still, the field of international mediation faces a number of problems. In this article, we aim to identify findings on mediation frequency, strategies, bias, and coordination as well as on trends in defining success. Although previous research has generated important insights, there are still unresolved issues and discrepancies which future mediation research needs to explore. Many of the challenges that the field faces could be managed by giving greater attention to accumulative knowledge production, more disaggregated analysis, and a closer dialogue between policy and research.

Keywords

armed conflict, bargaining, data, mediation

Introduction

Mediation has developed into a significant tool for peacemaking in armed conflicts and has subsequently stimulated an expanding research area of central importance in international peace research. There have, however, been few attempts up to now to summarize what we already know about international mediation in armed conflicts based on systematic empirical studies.[1] This article aims to contribute to this end: it reviews the current state of international peace mediation research, with a particular focus on quantitative studies, as well as on significant theoretical and conceptual work. In so doing, it points to unresolved research puzzles and future challenges. In this article we therefore identify what we consider to be the main research debates, in particular those on mediation frequency, strategies, bias, coordination, and how to conceptualize 'success' in mediation. There are three reasons why such a review is necessary at this point in time. First, the study of international mediation has grown substantially in recent years, which means that it is timely to identify the state of the art in international mediation. Second, although the field has grown, it has not expanded in all directions, and the field therefore suffers from lacunas that urgently need to be addressed. Third, mediation research includes unresolved issues and discrepancies. It is hence important to emphasize that new research should build on previous insights to help accumulate knowledge.

The main research question that this article addresses is under what conditions international mediation may bring about peaceful change; in other words, when is mediation effective in transforming destructive conflicts into constructive pursuits? We claim that the overall body of literature that now exists on international mediation provides credible evidence of its effectiveness, although the particular conditions under which mediation is effective are still debated. The study of international mediation is therefore an important research endeavor. By comparison with other foreign policy tools – economic sanctions, intervention, peacekeeping, and development aid –

[1] One recent exception is Greig & Diehl (2012).

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international mediation has been scrutinized and explored to a far lesser extent. Mediation represents a type of engagement that is not passive. It does not require expensive resources as could be the case in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance or sanctions enforcement. If the international research community were able to develop better ways of understanding – that is, describing and explaining – the role of international mediation in the context of armed conflicts, then there would undoubtedly be great opportunities to develop and refine mediation uses.

This article moves from work that discusses mediation definitions to the efforts of creating datasets, and then proceeds to results from research on strategies, bias, coordination, and outcomes. The final section outlines research challenges.

Defining mediation

Since the field of mediation is wide (Wall & Dunne, 2012), this article is limited to systematic (mostly quantitative) research on mediation (1) in the context of *armed conflicts*, thus not including actions in disputes between labor and employers, nor in marriages, workplaces, or other relationships, nor within multilateral organizations and conferences; (2) between representatives of the *main conflicting actors* (and not Track Two efforts, which deal with mediation at the grassroots level [Davidson & Montville, 1981], or Track One-and-a-Half efforts, which usually deal with informal representatives of the parties); and (3) dealing with the *conflicting issues* (incompatibilities) or violent behavior, thus excluding mediation concerning related issues such as humanitarian consequences of armed conflicts.

Mediation has been defined in different ways. A common description is the operative one used by Bercovitch, Anagnoson & Wille (1991: 8): mediation is 'a process of conflict management where the disputants seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an individual, group, state or organization to settle their conflict or resolve their differences without resorting to physical violence or invoking the authority of the law'. This means that there is an 'outside' actor that is central, often described as a third party, who 'does not have authority to impose an outcome' (Wall, Stark & Standifer, 2001: 375). Others point to the fact that mediation is 'a voluntary process in which the parties retain control over the outcome (pure mediation), although it may include positive and negative inducements (mediation with muscle)' (Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1999: 21–22). The issue of 'mediation with muscle' is one of the disputes in the field (Princen, 1992). Beardsley (2011: 18) is explicit in stipulating 'third party reliance on nonviolent tactics', while others are satisfied with not specifying what type of 'help' or 'assistance' the third party is providing. This is well summarized by Zartman & Touval (2007: 438) when defining mediation as 'a mode of negotiation in which a third party helps the parties find a solution that they cannot find by themselves'. What is clear from this is that mediation is an activity geared towards resolving an ongoing dispute; that it is action by an autonomous, outside party (a third party); that it uses persuasion rather than coercion; and that it aims to reach a solution acceptable to the (primary) parties. Thus, mediation aims at conflict resolution and primarily achieves this through negotiations, by resorting to reason and logic and, ultimately, by appealing to the common wishes to end violence and prevent its recurrence.

There exists a discussion on whether 'mediation with muscle' is more effective than other types of mediation. It seems premature, however, to make use of violence by a third party an element of the definition. It is preferable to treat this as a separate dimension, and thus one may see more value in asking if peaceful mediation attempts are enhanced or undermined by the use of third-party military force. There is, as a matter of fact, a clear gap in research into such a specific question, although it should be possible to study the effects of mediation in combination with, for instance, the use of sanctions, threats of war crime prosecution or military force.

Mediation data

The field has witnessed the emergence of new data sources on mediation. With the help of mediation data, scholars may now respond to descriptive questions such as the frequency of, and trends in, mediation, as well as analytical questions on mediation practices and outcomes. Very early on, mediation and negotiation researchers realized the need for comparative information and statistical analysis for describing trends and facilitating systematic research. The seminal Correlates of War (COW) project contained no information on the ending of conflict as its focus was on systemic causes of major conflict. Thus, separate data collections were introduced, one of the first being the Conflict and Peace Databank (COPDAB), collecting information on daily events (visits, clashes, etc.) between and within states in the period 1948–78, in all including half a million such events (Azar, 1980). However, this did not specifically deal with mediation or even crisis management.

Two separately initiated projects led by Jacob Bercovitch and Michael Brecher were uniquely early in the field, with their focus on mediation and crisis management. Both have continued to be used and updated, and considerable statistical work has been based on these sources. Bercovitch focused on 'international disputes', and was concerned about conflict management; hence the dataset was named ICM for International Conflict Management (Bercovitch, Anagnoson & Wille, 1991; Bercovitch & Jackson, 1997). It contains 3,377 conflict management events from 1945 to 2000 in 309 international conflicts that posed a grave threat to international peace and security. Relating to this work, DeRouen, Bercovitch & Pospieszna (2011) developed a dataset specifically for civil war mediation (CWM), now covering 1946–2004 and largely applying Bercovitch's definitions. This is parallel to another project also concerned with internal armed conflict and mediation studies as well as prevention concerns, the MILC (Managing Intrastate Low-Intensity Conflict) data, building on the armed conflict data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). Although only covering 12 years (1993–2004) this project includes close to 3,500 preventive actions, many of which are classical mediation efforts, and it is presently being expanded (Melander, Möller & Öberg, 2009).

Brecher had interstate crises in mind, and data were collected accordingly and are consequently known as the International Crisis Behavior data (ICB, Brecher, 1993; Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 2000). In the latest version (2010) ICB includes 455 international crises and 1,000 crisis actors from 1918 to 2007. Another dataset focusing on interstate relations was developed by Derrick Frazier & William Dixon, building on the Correlates of War data on militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). This covers the period 1946–2000 with respect to what the authors term third-party intervention; hence this dataset is referred to as TPI (Frazier & Dixon, 2006). The dataset on diplomatic interventions developed by Patrick Regan and colleagues is also relevant here. It contains data on 438 diplomatic interventions in 68 intrastate conflicts (out of a total of 153 conflicts) from 1945 to 1999, where 352 of the interventions are mediation events, defined in line with Bercovitch, Anagnoson & Wille (1991) (Regan, Frank & Aydin, 2009).

Gartner & Melin (2009) compared some of the datasets and found that their use may lead to different results, not least with respect to the success of mediation. They urge researchers to be careful and preferably use several datasets when drawing conclusions. And this piece of advice will be heeded farther along in this article. Inferences based on several different datasets are thus seen to be more firmly anchored in present research. It should be noted that one important difference is that several datasets exclusively deal with interstate conflicts, whereas others only concern intrastate conflicts. Some actually cut across these distinctions, as they include conflicts that are deemed to be particularly important for international peace and security. In that sense MILC, CWM, and Regan's data may be the most compatible, and conclusions from them are directly applicable to civil war situations. As civil wars constitute the bulk of armed conflicts, this is an important factor to consider.

Frequency of mediation

Mediation research faces a new beginning with respect to the issue of internal wars, and the efforts that have gone into such research have dramatically increased over the past few decades.[2] The new data sources make it possible to give general responses to questions such as the frequency of mediation, its geographical variations, and changes over time.

First, mediated settlements have become increasingly common, especially since the end of World War II. However, during the Cold War period there was a noticeable lack of mediation or other third-party activity. From the 1990s, negotiated settlements became equally or even more common than military victories (Kreutz, 2010). Looking at conflict episodes since 1946, Kreutz reports that out of all terminations during the Cold War, peace agreements made up 8.4% and victories 58.2%. Since 1990 these shares have reversed to 18.4% and 13.6% respectively (Kreutz, 2010: 246). These conflicts are mainly intrastate, which is also consonant with the data collected by DeRouen and associates (DeRouen & Bercovitch, 2012). Greig & Diehl (2012) conclude that there were more mediation attempts during the 1990s (64%) than during the entire 1945–89 period, and this trend seems to remain (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2013).

There is also agreement that the frequency of mediation in conflicts in Africa is proportional to its share of armed conflicts in the world, whereas Europe 'seems to have received a disproportionate number of mediations' (DeRouen & Bercovitch, 2012: 68). Together with the Middle East these are conflict zones that are 'over-

[2] In a search on Web of Knowledge for this article on 'mediation in conflict' Anna Brandt found that there was only one relevant article in the five-year period of 1981–85 and one in 1986–90. Since then there is a dramatic increase: 19, 23, 25, and 59 for the most recent five-year period, 2006–10.

mediated', while the East-Asia/Pacific region is 'under-mediated', as stated by Greig & Diehl (2012: 44–45). This pattern has also been reported by other sources, notably by Bercovitch & Jackson (1997). Building on UCDP data, Melander, Möller & Öberg (2009) find that the Middle East attracts the greatest third-party involvement relative to the active number of conflict dyads (mostly due to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict). In all of these studies, Asia sees less international mediation activity than would be expected, something also noted by Wallensteen et al. (2009).

Second, there is agreement that there has been a shift in mediation efforts from interstate conflict to civil wars. Between 1945 and 1979, interstate conflicts received more mediation attempts compared to civil wars, even if civil wars in each decade were more frequent. In the 1980s this pattern began to change and the frequency of civil war mediation exceeded interstate conflict mediation. The same holds true for the 1990s. DeRouen & Bercovitch (2012) find that the frequency of mediation in civil wars rose dramatically in the early 1990s. It declined again in the early 2000s, but still remained well above the Cold War level.

Third, there is also a documented trend showing an increase in the number of actors involved in mediation. It may, in fact, mean a reduced role for international governmental organizations in third-party activity, at least in relative terms. Instead, regional organizations have enhanced their role (Pevehouse, 2002: 616; Hansen, Mitchell & Nemeth, 2008). Comparing the periods before and after 1980, the frequency of regional mediation has almost doubled. Obviously this shift remains understudied, as noted by Gartner (2011). As the total amount of mediation has increased, the absolute involvement may still be higher than before, as explained by Greig & Diehl: 'the decline in the relative share of total global mediation activity conducted by the UN is a function of the dramatic rise in the overall application of mediation, rather than a diminution of the provision of mediation by the UN' (Greig & Diehl, 2012: 68).

However, IGOs (international governmental organizations) are bodies constituted by states, and in many situations, states may prefer to act on their own (whether authorized by, say, the UN or not). Thus it is not surprising to find that states, and particularly major powers, have been the most frequent third parties. There was a decline in UN-led mediation efforts from 1956 onwards, when superpowers were directly in charge of such efforts (Bercovitch & Jackson, 1997). Greig & Diehl (2012) find that IGOs as well as states are the most frequent mediators (1945–99), the United States being the most typical state mediator actor and China being the major power least engaged in such a way. Representatives of medium-sized and small countries constitute important categories, as reported by two different studies. Combined, these governments are as much if not more involved than major powers (Regan, Frank & Aydin, 2009; DeRouen & Bercovitch, 2012). The patterns are similar with respect to low-intensity conflicts (Melander, Möller & Öberg, 2009).

There are also discussions about what is not conveyed by these numbers. Notably, states may be active first and later hand mediation over to other actors, like IGOs. These initiatives then often go to regional organizations, and only if mediation should fail at this level will they be brought to the UN (Bercovitch & Jackson, 1997). A trend has surfaced that regional organizations have taken a greater role in managing conflicts since the end of the Cold War (Frazier & Dixon, 2006). However, the issues may later arrive at the UN, which would thereby have to deal with the most difficult cases as a result of a selection effect. This means that the sequencing of mediation and the coordination of mediation have become relevant issues for mediation practice as well as for mediation research.

What are the conditions under which parties to a conflict accept third-party mediation? And why do third parties agree to act as third parties in the first place? There has been some discussion about these two intertwined decisionmaking processes. Greig & Regan (2008), for example, identify factors such as being a neighboring state to the country in conflict, prior involvement in the dispute, a shared defense pact, and a former colonial tie as increasing the chance that a state will agree to act as a mediator. According to Greig & Diehl (2012) we know considerably less about the disputants' choice of mediators, but mediators that are willing to broker an agreement fairly and mediators with leverage, that is, resources and influence, appear to be desirable. When it comes to variation between mediation in civil wars and international conflicts, Melin & Svensson (2009) find that mediation tends to be accepted only in the most serious cases of civil wars, while disputants in international conflicts are more willing to involve mediators. This variation derives from the higher political costs of accepting a mediator for a government facing civil war, since this may legitimize its opponent.

The frequency of mediation is relatively well studied. However, there are still important areas where more knowledge is needed. For one, previous research has predominately examined mediation in very general terms, without sufficiently distinguishing between different

types of mediation (e.g. agenda setting, facilitation, implementation). Also, different types of mediators may go into different kinds of situations, predisposing them to different mediation challenges. In addition, it seems logical that decisionmaking varies according to whether the mediator is a state, a regional organization, the UN or an individual. Actor-disaggregated analysis can therefore be a fruitful way for future mediation research. Moreover, there may well be a strategic interplay between different types of mediators in their decisions to involve themselves in a conflict situation. Finally, the obvious regional variations in international mediation lack a comprehensive and convincing explanation.

Strategies in mediation

A basic research problem has been to identify what the most effective strategy for mediators is. This question is indeed key, since by identifying the optimal strategy mediators will become more effective peacemakers. There is, however, no consensus among researchers and practitioners as to which strategy is used the most and which is most effective. Even the choice of terminology is a divisive issue. Touval & Zartman (1985) and Bercovitch (1992), for instance, distinguish between what they refer to as the formulative, facilitative, and manipulative types of mediation, a terminology used in some studies. Others have suggested that strategies should rather be described as 'forcing' or 'fostering' (Curran, Sebenius & Watkins, 2004; Svensson & Wallensteen, 2010), which provides categories that partly overlap with Touval, Zartman and Bercovitch, but are possibly easier to understand. Strategy issues also relate to the question of power (for instance, 'mediation with muscle' as mentioned previously) and the use of leverage by the mediator (or the powers that support the mediator). In fact, the mediator's style and power often become intertwined in the studies.

The most recent work by DeRouen & Bercovitch (2012) finds that the most frequent civil war mediation efforts are formulative (procedural), followed by facilitative (communicative), while manipulation (directive) has been used the least often. Gurses, Rost & McLeod (2008), examining the impact of mediation on the duration of peace after civil wars, conclude that the presence of mediation is associated with longer-lasting peace, while superpower mediation (that might be coercive towards belligerents) increased the probability of renewed fighting. Möller et al. (2011) find that facilitative and formulative strategies are more useful in territorial (secessionist) wars. Nathan (1999), drawing on results from peacemaking processes in African civil wars, suggests that international mediation becomes counterproductive when mediators try to pressure or threaten the warring parties, as this will make the mediators lose the parties' trust. Thus, a series of studies point to the greater utility of fostering rather than forcing strategies.

In contrast, Sisk (2009) argues that in order to counter provocative violence and potential or actual spoilers, there is a need for powerful peacemaking, using persuasion, pressure, and even military power. Very early on, Touval contended that 'the more powerful international actors are, the more effective they are as intermediaries' (Touval, 1975: 68). Mediators that can change or influence the conflict parties' resources to continue the war, or that can offer rewards for a peaceful settlement, will have the leverage necessary for mediation to be effective (Stedman, 1996: 358). As a consequence, great powers could be expected to be particularly effective (Crocker, 1992; Touval, 1992). Indeed, Gelpi (1999) finds that great-power mediation increases the chance for mediation success.

However, this has not led to a consensus that major powers or coercive strategies are optimal. Böhmelt (2010) finds that Track One (state-driven diplomacy) is likely to be the most effective as it has greater leverage and more resources, but it is when combining both official and unofficial tracks that mediation is most effective. In line with this, Svensson (2007) makes a case for a combination of mediators building on trust and power. One observation is therefore that the research field has generated important insights, but no comprehensive framework that could explain empirical results from systematic studies. A promising solution suggested by Bercovitch & Gartner (2006) is to distinguish between high- and low-intensity conflicts; they find that strategies that push the parties towards a settlement appear more effective in high-intensity conflicts, but less effective in low-intensity conflicts where, instead, procedural strategies seem more optimal. In addition, Wilkenfeld et al. (2005) and Beardsley et al. (2006) point to long-term consequences, not just the immediate ending of war, when assessing mediation. These studies address the relationship between mediation style and crisis outcome, observing that facilitative mediation was more conducive to reducing post-crisis tensions and commitment problems.[3] This is so, the authors argue, because facilitation

[3] Commitment problem is the bargaining challenge of time inconsistency: the fact that future power shifts or advantages to exploit a cooperative arrangement may hinder even benign actors to reach an accommodation in the present.

enables the parties to recognize agreements that are mutually preferable to conflict. Mediators tend to use manipulative strategies to achieve formal agreements and reduce overall crisis abatement. Beardsley (2008) shows that artificial incentives provided by mediators in general, and powerful mediators in particular, can hinder long-term stability, which could indicate that more powerful and hard strategies are ultimately counterproductive. Interestingly, this appears to suggest a different conclusion, namely that the most durable agreements may be those reached with as little outside help as possible.[4]

Three important research challenges emerge from the review of mediation strategies. First, there are obvious and contradictory propositions as to the strategies as well as the efficacy of outside mediator intervention. Thus, an important task is to harmonize the different findings by developing a more thorough understanding of the conditions under which the different mediation strategies are most effective. A conclusion could be that different strategies are effective in different phases of a conflict. The second question is one of sequencing (Heldt, 2009): the use of a particular mediation strategy rarely occurs in isolation. In the comparative study of several mediation efforts, mediator Jan Eliasson perceived the benefits of having 'drums in the background' (Svensson & Wallensteen, 2010: 80). Lastly, the empirical study of different mediation strategies is also affected by the fact that coercive strategies (such as forcing or manipulation) include the simultaneous use of softer strategies (such as fostering or facilitation). This therefore suggests that the forcing or manipulative element of a mediation endeavor is not necessarily to be credited for the occurrence of change.

Bias and mediation

The question of bias is central in mediation research for two major reasons. First, it undermines the true meaning of mediation. Some mediation scholars perceive full impartiality as a prerequisite for mediators. This is not an uncommon perception. For instance, Assefa (1987: 22) suggests that there is a general agreement that both neutrality towards the issue in dispute and 'independence from all parties to the conflict' are 'requisites for the successful mediator'. Similarly, Wehr (1979: 51) claims that strict neutrality is necessary, and that a mediator's credibility is contingent upon the absence of a 'commitment to any party in the conflict'. Ott (1972: 597), in his definition of mediation, goes as far as stating that the mediator should have no interest whatever in the dispute. And in line with this, Jackson (1952: 129) argues that 'it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a single mediator who was distrusted by one of the parties, to carry out any useful function'. Others, however, tend to not necessarily view mediation bias as an obstacle and claim that even mediators with a bias can achieve results. This latter view has found support in empirical studies, which show that biased mediators sometimes have more leverage than other mediators, and are therefore particularly well suited to act as third-party mediators despite their bias (Touval, 1975). Leverage, or in other words, the ability to influence the parties, is arguably a more important asset for mediators than their neutrality, and since links with one side can create possibilities for influence, bias and leverage are sometimes connected (Touval & Zartman, 2001; Zartman, 1995).

Recent debates on bias in mediation have focused on how it relates to bargaining problems. Kydd (2003) argues that unbiased mediators are not credible, as they will have strong incentives to portray the other side as peaceful, irrespective of it being true or not. They have, as it were, an inherent bias for peace and a strong interest in reducing or containing the conflict. According to Kydd's model, mediators with a bias for one actor, but holding information about the other side, are effective mediators as they can credibly convince 'their' side to make the necessary concessions to reach a negotiated solution to the conflict. Savun (2008) finds empirical support for Kydd's theory and his suggestion of a fundamental credibility issue with unbiased mediators. Similarly, Smith & Stam (2003: 127) argue that mediators motivated by a desire for peace will face a problem of credibility since they will be 'lying to hasten the end of the war ... thereby making the message uninformative and hence unbelievable'. By distinguishing between the third party's preference for avoiding war and the preference over different negotiated settlements, Rauchhaus (2006) argues that both interested mediators and mediators biased in favor of the side about to accept a concession, are likely to be effective peacemakers. Some empirical evidence exists that supports biased mediators. Melin (2011) shows that a third party biased towards one disputant is quicker to offer 'management services' than third parties biased towards both parties or unbiased third parties. Svensson (2007) proposes that in the study of civil wars, research on mediation needs to distinguish between rebel-biased and government-biased mediators. Since rebels often gain through peace processes, there can be a rebel-sided commitment problem, which government-biased mediators are particularly

[4] In later years, the ends of the internal conflicts in both South Africa and Nepal have been seen as examples of this.

equipped to mitigate. And government- and rebel-biased mediators also seem to be associated with different types of peace settlements (Svensson, 2009). Beber (2012) is more skeptical about biased mediators, suggesting that such mediators have not been the main drivers of change even in the mediation processes that are commonly mentioned as evidence of the effectiveness of biased mediation.

Two other propositions have emerged showing this same potential in other categories of mediators. First, Crescenzi et al. (2011), building on Kydd's model of biased mediation, put forward the idea that democracies are unbiased mediators with reputational concerns that can make them credible communicators of information. Second, Svensson & Lindgren (2013) suggest that *internal* mediators, that is, mediators from the same society as the belligerents, can be particularly effective in overcoming information failures that can occur between the conflict parties. They have added reputational costs to consider (in contrast to outsiders, they will remain in the conflict society after the actual mediation process), which makes them credible. Internal mediators are commonly called 'insider-partial', and have been identified as important domestic resources for peacemaking (Wehr & Lederach, 1991).

The issue of bias in mediation is still not resolved. As with mediation strategies, there is a need to examine the precise conditions under which biased and unbiased mediators can be effective peacemakers. This calls for a more disaggregated empirical analysis, for instance of different phases, societal levels or types of conflict situations. There is also room for theoretical development. As to the bargaining perspective, there are major unresolved issues: (a) how do mediators get access to private information from the conflicting actors (which is necessary for mediators to help mitigate the bargaining problem related to disincentives to reveal private information – information failure)?; and (b) why are some unbiased mediators successful, despite the theoretical expectation that they will not be credible information carriers due to their perceived incentives to bluff to achieve peace? From a rational choice perspective, the main causal mechanism linking biased mediators to mediation success is still not identified. Are biased mediators helping their side reach a beneficial agreement, or are they in fact forcing their side to make concessions, using their unique leverage over the side they support? And what is the relationship between these two seemingly contradictory mechanisms?

Mediation coordination

For practitioners the issue of several mediators engaged in the same conflict triggers particular concerns. This is what we call the coordination problem in mediation practice and research. It raises the question of who is actually leading the mediation efforts. Such a situation has been noted in studies, for instance by Crocker, Hampson & Aall (1999). Many of the datasets referenced above actually invite such a discussion, and there exist relevant findings for this purpose. For instance, Greig & Diehl (2012) observe that a majority (52%) of post-World War II mediation efforts were conducted by just one mediator. The authors also note that state mediators have a higher tendency to mediate alone compared to representatives from international organizations. They imply that mediators from international organizations will have broader, more diverse concerns for the efforts.

When it comes to origins of mediators in civil conflicts, at least half of the mediators normally come from the conflict's geographical region; this is true for all regions but the Middle East, which reflects the highly international character of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Regan, Frank & Aydin, 2009). It is also important to note the interests of the countries immediately surrounding a country at war. Their particular concern can be expressed by a regional organization taking a mediation initiative or through direct involvement in the negotiation process by neighboring states.

Thus, the fact that there is an increasing number of mediators makes the coordination problem more acute today than it may have been historically. Global and regional organizations will have their own interests, and so will major powers, regional and neighboring states, and nongovernmental organizations and local civil society actors. The diversity of actors may therefore become an important issue for practitioners and, thus, constitute a novel challenge for mediation research.

Beber (2010) has done some work on this aspect of mediation. His work starts from the observed strong correlation between the number of mediators and the more likely conflict settlement. However, unpacking this, he finds this relationship to be spurious. As an agreement comes closer, more actors get involved. This, he posits, is not a causal effect but rather one of other actors wanting to take credit or cement the agreement that appears to be on its way. This issue has been raised by Böhmelt (2012) and turned into a new line of inquiry. As mentioned, from the practitioner perspective this is a matter of the lead mediator: the person who has the ultimate responsibility for the mediation efforts has to be clear in order to avoid 'forum shopping' or 'mediator hopping'. In accounts from different cases, this is an obvious concern for mediators. The efforts of one can be undermined

by others, notably those with more particularistic ambitions. This was illustrated during the mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1994, when Russia acted on its own against the official mediator of the C/OSCE (Svensson & Wallensteen, 2010). As Böhmelt (2012) remarks, it may require a coalition among the mediators to coordinate action. Empirically, we can observe that international organizations tend to be clearer on coordination, by giving one person a mandate for a particular conflict or issue, thus avoiding diffuse signals.

The problem described here can, however, be even more complex, as some states will have their own concerns in relation to a specific conflict and thus advocate their own solution to it. This is true of major powers, but it also applies to regional actors with political ambitions in their neighborhood. This means that the mediation efforts become part of particular actors' foreign policies, blurring the message in such a way that it is not clear if the central concern is the 'best' interests of the warring parties or of the power driving or supporting the mediation efforts. As per the discussion of mediator bias, this may not preclude 'success', but it may affect, for instance, certain provisions as part of a settlement, and this, indeed, remains an area of concern. Additionally, there have been, up to now, few systematic studies of the mediators themselves and the way they perceive their work, and in particular of the issue of the coordination of mediation efforts. The UN has a number of mediators at work, mostly defined as Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG), and the EU also has its Special Representatives (EUSR) (Johansson et al., 2010; Peck, 2008). It has been noted that the EUSR has often taken a secondary role compared to the UN or major-power actors (Johansson et al., 2010).

Mediation research has largely focused on mediation action and neglected the institutional aspects of mediation. There is therefore a need to understand increasing institutionalization of mediation and how such institutional mechanisms help or hinder mediation. Moreover, the tensions between different third-party interests have not been systematically examined. For instance, how are conflicts between the mediators mediated? From both a research and a practice perspective, the inter-mediators mediation processes require further examination.

Mediation and outcomes

A perennial question afflicting mediation efforts, and consequently mediation research, concerns the criteria defining success. How do practitioners and researchers alike find indicators that can help describe a process and its outcome? The meaning of success is much disputed among scholars of international mediation (Kleiboer, 1996), and indicators vary substantially. Frei (1976: 69) uses the actual occurrence of mediation as a measure of mediation success. He defines mediation success 'as a situation in which both parties to the conflict formally or informally accept a mediator and a mediation attempt within five days after the first attempt'. It could be argued that this reflects an era of relatively few mediation attempts and that there were therefore higher expectations when they occurred. Another measure of mediation success has been used more frequently in this context: the ending of violent behavior (Regan & Aydin, 2006; Regan & Stam, 2000; Gelpi, 1999). Nathan (1999: 3) raises the requirements by defining mediation as successful 'when it leads to the termination of hostilities and the advent of democratic governance'. This definition clearly being geared towards intrastate conflict, a more general and frequently used measure of mediation success is the signing of peace agreements (Savun, 2008; Beardsley et al., 2006; Bercovitch, Anagnoson & Wille, 1991). If one considers a situation where the parties reach any type of agreement (from ceasefire to comprehensive settlement) as successful, then most mediation efforts (55%) fail, as they often do not result in such formalized outcomes. When using such a criterion, mediation during the Cold War, although less frequently used, tended to have a higher success rate than mediation efforts later on (Greig & Diehl, 2012). This may suggest that post-Cold War peace negotiations have tended to be more protracted and part of longer negotiation processes. For instance, Greig & Diehl (2012) note that further mediation attempts improve the success rate. Regan, Frank & Aydin (2009) find that over 57% of all mediation efforts result in a ceasefire and only 4% completely fail. Thus, the fact that mediation efforts may have been more protracted does not exclude the possibility that there can also be a number of faster processes.

A more comprehensive approach to this question is that applied in Beardsley (2008) and Beardsley et al. (2006), which examine both short-term and long-term stability after interstate crises. The authors find interesting discrepancies between these two types of mediation outcomes. Svensson (2009) suggests that peace agreements and other formal measures of success may be too broad and that outcomes need to be disaggregated into separate institutional peace arrangements, such as reaching an agreement on political or territorial power-sharing, third-party security guarantees, or justice provisions. A similar line of thought can be found in Gartner (2012). These studies point to a more long-term perspective on

mediation success, thus going beyond the actual ending of violent behavior. And this therefore leads to the question of the recurrence of conflict: do mediated solutions lead to a lower chance that conflict and war will recur compared to alternative ends to conflict, such as victory or agreements reached directly between the parties? There are data suggesting that this could indeed be the case. Building on the UCDP conflict termination data, Kreutz has calculated that in the 1990s, 9.5% of all victories restarted, compared to 40% of victories in the early 2000s, while for negotiated settlements, 46.1% of conflicts restarted in the first period but this share decreased to 21.0% in the second.[5] The sample is small, but the trend is still interesting, suggesting that there was some degree of learning from the obvious peacemaking failures of the 1990s which led to more lasting successes later.[6]

The possibility of a selection effect in the supply of mediation should also influence the overall evaluation of mediation and its success. And indeed, there are studies showing that mediators may only get involved in conflicts where belligerents are unable to solve their dispute by themselves. This then means that the initiation of mediation may signal a more intractable conflict. Studies of mediation must therefore address selection effects, something that also increasingly has been done (Bercovitch & Gartner, 2006; Gartner, 2011: 388). Given the fact that, on the one hand, the mediator operates in a situation that is stacked against any degree of success, and on the other that when the parties actually do agree, they may do so without the involvement of the mediator, the logically ensuing question could be to ask what added value mediators bring to the conflict resolution.

This, then, may lead us back to the issue of who the mediator is. Mediation by international organizations (UN and regional organizations) as well as by the USA is correlated with success. In a qualitative study on regional actors in Cambodia and Haiti, Nguyen (2002) found that the best outcome was achieved when the regional actor worked in close collaboration with the UN and major powers, thus illustrating the interplay between different mediators. For the conflicted parties an outcome supported by the UN or by the USA may have greater value than one concluded only between themselves. Additionally, Nguyen points to the legitimacy and the resources brought to achieve these agreements. It would therefore make sense for the parties to try to select the mediator or those mediators that not only are biased towards their own position but who also can bring resources that help end their conflict.

It is timely at this point in the article to raise a critical point that quantitative research has not been sufficiently anchored in the study of mediation process. As seen above, the absence of conflict behavior is commonly used as the main indicator of mediation success. Yet, if studies examine the end of conflict without distinguishing between *how* conflicts have ended, the analysis may very well be skewed. There is a qualitative difference between termination through military victory and termination after a negotiated settlement. If mediation facilitates the reaching of military victories – for instance, by providing breathing space for the re-armament of fighters – then the causal processes are not the same as when mediators facilitate negotiated settlements. Using conflict behavior termination to measure mediation success is therefore highly problematic, and mediation research needs to move forward by disaggregating conflict endings in order to detect actual causal processes.

Challenges to mediation research

This overview of mediation research demonstrates that progress has been achieved, as illustrated by theoretical developments, the existence of more data, and agreed-upon results useful for scholarship and practice. However, this particular field within peace research may be late in developing. Compared to areas such as causes of war, peacekeeping, and even peace agreements, there remain many unanswered questions, suggesting that mediation needs to feature higher on the peace research agenda. Although the number of publications, articles, books, and datasets on the theme has increased dramatically in the past decades, there is today still no consensus on the optimal conditions for successful mediation.

Let us specify some of the key issues that have not been addressed, together constituting a program for furthering mediation research. First, there is the question of the mediator's *mandate*: what is the mediator to do? The literature has focused on the mandate being to reach a peace agreement, but we have empirically noted that this is a rare achievement. The mandate may also say something else, and there is likely to be a range of aims. For instance, an international organization may be satisfied if there is a channel of contact, hoping that it may at some point in the future be useful for ending a war. Human rights proponents may expect not just an end

[5] This has specifically been calculated by Joakim Kreutz, Uppsala University, for this article, 1 March 2013, based on Kreutz (2010).

[6] Examples abound; for instance, Liberia saw a number of overturned agreements in the 1990s despite many international mediation efforts, but the agreement reached in 2003 was still standing ten years later.

to the war but also trials for war crimes and more transparent political systems. The mandate is therefore likely to color the strategies applied by a mediator. Also, the goals of mediation may be part of the problem. For many mediators the important issue could be to end ongoing carnage, while others may emphasize long-term stability. Some results may, in fact, point to a clash between the humanitarian imperative to stop violence and the peacebuilding approach for lasting humane conditions.

The mandate also affects a second issue needing more study: the institutional support and resources available to the mediation effort. Mediators permanently in place rather than entering the scene at particular moments may be more effective. However, mediation often means an engagement with regional interests and global actors. What, then, are the particular assets a mediator brings to the process, both in terms of incentives and insights? Institutional aspects, and not only actual mediation practice, need more attention.

We have furthermore observed the significance of other actors' activity, be they additional mediators, spoilers or entrenched actors with their own interests. This has, however, not been central within mediation research, but it certainly should be, as this is increasingly the reality in which many mediators find themselves. In addition, parallel international actions may affect the negotiation process, for instance, uses of sanctions, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and even possible military threats. These have not been regular elements in mediation data collections. However, combined international strategies may in fact be more effective than separate and isolated forms of action. An example is that mediation on issues such as humanitarian concerns is known to affect core issues in the conflict (Svensson & Wallensteen, 2010). In particular, there is an urgent need to disaggregate mediation data. Mediation practice is often geared towards fairly short-term effects, but researchers have traditionally operated with notions such as years without war, peace spells, and conflict months. Mediation research needs to collect increasingly more fine-grained data, as we have seen within research on violence during armed conflict (e.g. UCDP-GED; Sundberg & Melander, 2013). There are some moves in this direction (Gartner, 2012), and some early attempts (Mooradian & Druckman, 1999). What are the effects on mediation success, for instance, in the days immediately following a mediator proposition? Focusing attention on mediation events or mediation episodes may bring the field forward in a new way. In line with this, one may ask: which conflict elements does a mediator choose to emphasize and at what stage in the process? This relates to the question of sequencing mediation attempts and finding pathways that either lead to a step-by-step peace process or a bold peace conference approach. The datasets that already exist are not sufficiently penetrating to respond to such concerns. In fact, even though the bargaining paradigm has dominated recent research, its proponents have not generated corresponding data on key aspects, such as degrees of the conflict parties' commitment or access to information. The resort to case studies, which offers more detail, will, however, not lead to general conclusions of value for theory development as well as practical action. Thus, there is scope for considerable data development to empirically discover more general patterns.

Also, we find that the field is exclusively oriented toward state-based armed conflicts, that is, conflicts where at least one of the parties is a government and where violence is used. However, there is a high number of non-state conflicts (Pettersson & Themnér, 2012) and many conflicts with nonviolent action also resulting in mediation. This provides for varying conditions and differential impact of the mediation efforts that may help us understand mediation. To this belongs the significance of external events, including natural disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 (Kreutz, 2012).

Theoretical development in mediation studies has moved in stages, with a clear and present domination of bargaining theory. It has resulted in a number of inroads, not least bringing attention to the issue of selection effects. However, mediation research seems to remain remote from the world in which actual mediators find themselves. We therefore see a need for more bridge-building between practitioners and researchers to make this research useful in a world which is still full of significant conflicts of different types. After all, this is the basic rationale for peace research in the first place: to contribute to change toward a peaceful world.

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