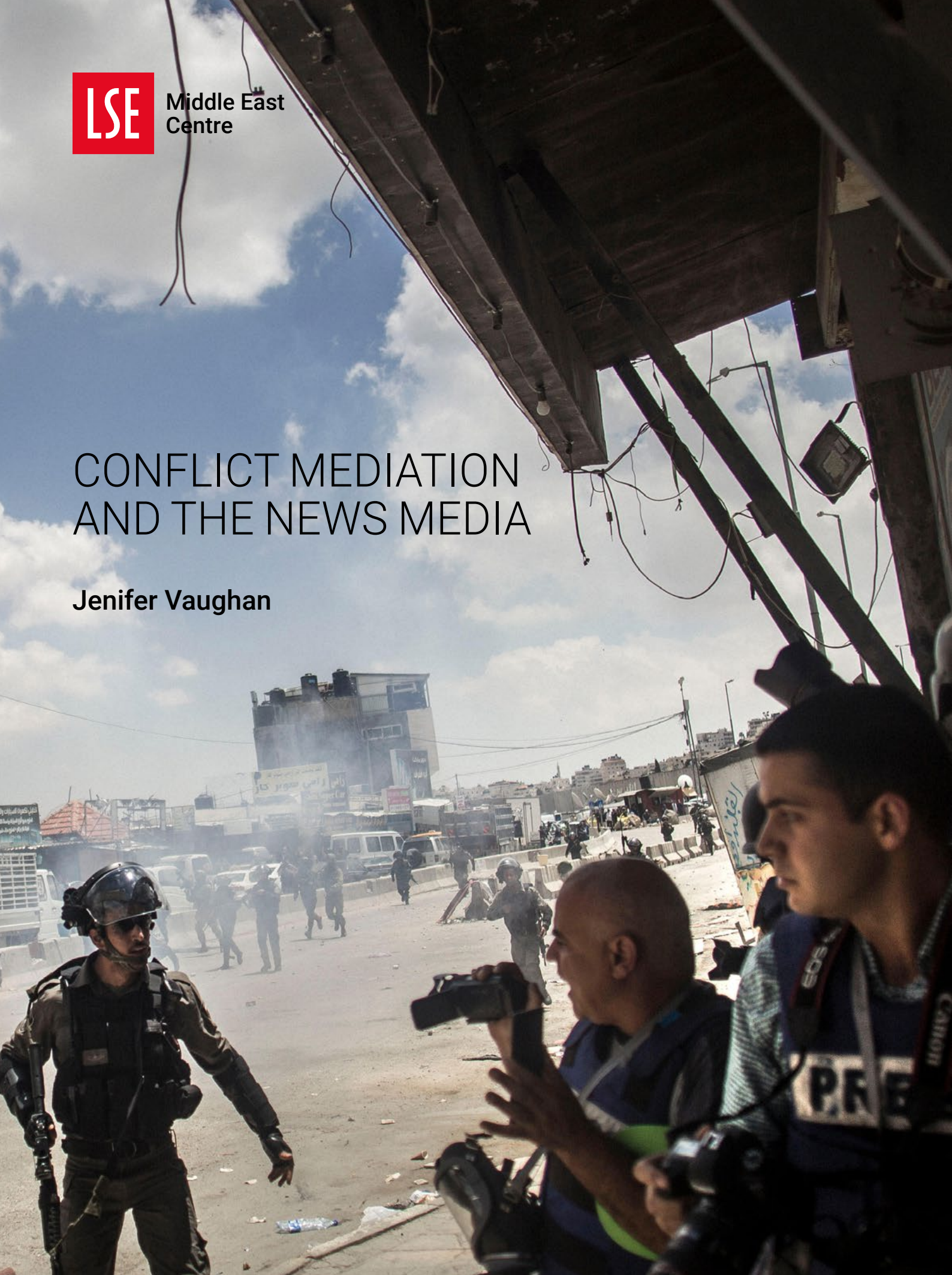# CONFLICT MEDIATION AND THE NEWS MEDIA

Jenifer Vaughan

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Conflict Mediation and the News Media

Jenifer Vaughan

About the Authors

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Abstract

There is a plethora of studies about the role that news media plays in conflict escalation, and studies about conflict mediation processes. However, there is comparatively less work that has focused on news media and conflict mediation; and the communication strategies that can be employed by mediators to encourage the media to frame the conflict in a manner that is more conducive to the mediator. Mediators need to learn to use news media more effectively. Drawing on interviews with 15 people with extensive experience, this paper outlines the variables that may affect a mediation process, mentions notable contradictions between the job of a media professional and that of a mediator; recalls some framing considerations; and notes the benefits and risks of some communication strategies.

Introduction

Conflict mediation is a dynamic process with multiple variables. News media is inevitably involved in covering mediation processes, and mediators follow the news to stay on top of events, as well as to gauge public opinion and reactions on the ground. While the media is an actor in conflict resolution irrespective of the mediator's approach,[1] mediators tend to give too little consideration to communication and media engagement.[2] There is always a game between the media and mediator; the media will try to manipulate the latter, and vice versa.[3] In order for a mediator to more effectively use news media, they need to consider communication strategies that can advance their aims.

Strategic Communication defined in the broadest sense, is 'the purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission.'[4] In mediation processes, strategic communications should at a minimum lend support to the process, namely the mission or mediator's mandate, while managing a variety of threats. The Brahimi Report in 2000 renewed focus on the vital importance of managing information in peace operations[5] with the report noting 'an effective public information and communications capacity in mission areas is an operational necessity.' Among other things, the report noted, effective communication can 'provide leverage in dealing with leaders of rival groups…' it can also help 'to dispel rumour, to counter disinformation and to secure the cooperation of local populations.'[6]

Core differences are evident between a mediator and a media entity reporting on a mediation process. The parties are usually known, with the mediator's participation often welcomed/requested by the latter.[7] A journalist, however, can initiate news coverage and decide who among the parties to interview.[8] The nature of the conversations with the conflict actors is also different: the mediator tries to manage discussions in a manner that does not further exacerbate the differences between them, whereas the reporter's main objective is to inform the public and to determine what is to be believed.[9]

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[1] Author interview with Lakhdar Brahimi, former Algerian Foreign Minister, conflict mediator and United Nations diplomat; expert in peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction.

[2] Eytan Gilboa, 'Media and Conflict Resolution: A Framework for Analysis,' *Marquette Law Review 87* 93/1 (2009), p. 88. Available at: https://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/mulr/vol93/iss1/9 (accessed January 25 2023).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Kirk Hallahan et al., 'Defining Strategic Communication', *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1/1 (2007), pp. 3–35. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241730557_Defining_Strategic_Communication (accessed 25 January 2023).

[5] 'On 1 January 2019, the UN Secretariat's new peace and security architecture came into effect. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) now jointly oversee eight new regional divisions, each managing a mix of peacekeeping operations, special political missions and non-mission settings.' Quoted in 'United Nations Peace and Security Pillar', *United Nations.* Available at: https://reform.un.org/news/peace-and-security-pillar (accessed 30 January 2023).

[6] 'The Brahimi Report: Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations', *United Nations.* Available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a_55_305_e_brahimi_report.pdf (accessed 30 January 2023).

[7] Carol Pauli, 'News Media as Mediators', *Texas A&M University* (2006), p. 721. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255727572 (accessed 20 February 2023).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., pp. 725, 730, 732.

Framing refers to the way in which information is framed and constructs people's perceptions and defines agendas.[10] Most people receive information about a conflict from the news; most do not witness the conflict directly or have the means to research it thoroughly.[11] The media tells people what is relevant about a particular event by giving certain facts and values more prominence.[12] Framing can 'distort, over-simplify, misinform and mislead.'[13] However, media can help resolve conflict;[14] by providing reliable information and advocating for human rights.

This paper is partially based on interviews with 15 people who have relevant practical experience in the field, including veteran Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, former French diplomat Jean-Marie Guéhenno, who also served as the United Nations' Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's former chief of staff and chief negotiator on Northern Ireland and CEO of Inter Mediate.

Conflict Mediation in Context: Variables to Consider

Many variables heavily influence how a conflict, and its mediation process are framed. While it is not always clear how, below I outline considerations that mediators and mediation teams should take into account.

Conflict Variables

Wars and conflicts cannot easily be boxed into typological groupings, though they tend to move through different phases[15] (pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict). This may include civil and interstate strife, with some exhibiting regional and internationalised dimensions.[16]

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[10] Teresa Joseph, 'Mediating War and Peace: Mass Media and International Conflict', *India Quarterly* 70/3 (2014), pp. 225–40. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/45072817 (accessed 31 January 2023).
[11] Keith Somerville, 'Framing Conflict and War – the Cold War and After,' *Ethical Journalism Network*, 24 March 2016. Available at: https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/framing-conflict-and-war-the-cold-war-and-after (accessed 31 January 2023).
[12] Ibid.
[13] Somerville, 'Framing Conflict and War'.
[14] 'The mass media have an important contribution to make to the strengthening of peace and international understanding and in countering.... incitement to war [...] In countering aggressive war...other violations of human rights which are inter alia spawned by prejudice and ignorance, the mass media, by disseminating information on the aims, aspirations, cultures and needs of all peoples, contribute to eliminate ignorance and misunderstanding between peoples, to make nationals of a country sensitive to the needs and desires of others...thereby promoting the formulation by States of the policies best able to promote the reduction of international tension and the peaceful and equitable settlement of international disputes.' Quoted in UNESCO, 'The Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, Apartheid and Incitement to War', *UNESCO*, 28 November 1978. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/declaration-fundamental-principles-concerning-contribution-mass-media (accessed 19 April 2023).
[15] Author interview with Jean-Marie Guéhenno, former French diplomat and UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000–8.
[16] Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the*

Often the national political structures of conflict actors will 'contrast sharply'[17] as states can be democracies, monarchies, autocracies, etc., which are all subject to different internal dynamics and pressures (e.g. economic priorities, political or military concerns and so on). Diaspora communities can also influence mediation efforts;[18] and advocacy groups can 'manipulate' coverage of the process.[19] Further, the absence of violence is not the same thing as 'stable peace.'[20]

Mediator Variables

Mediators work on behalf of international organisations – mandated for example by the UN Security Council, states or other actors – entities that often have different resources and political constraints. For different mediation processes, the mandates and mediators' sources of leverage can vary and are complex, with powerful states exhibiting 'resources and capabilities' as well as 'preferences and interests.'[21]

Mediation processes can be facilitative, formulative or power-based.[22] Further, the degree to which the mediation is 'demand-led' (when conflict actors have a vested interest for a mediated peace process and a desire for resolution) plays an essential role in the mediation's success.[23]

In mediation processes, the style of the mediators and their skills differ. Further, the level of media attention given to a negotiator/negotiation is somewhat dictated by the level of the mediator, i.e., head of state, foreign minister and so forth.[24] For instance, if a very important figure is involved, there will be greater media attention. If a senior official is replaced by a mediator who has not been in the room with presidents, the dynamics of the whole process changes, as does the quality of the communication – the news media is not as enamoured with junior actors.[25]

The mediator's ability to travel to conflict areas and engage with conflict actors also varies from one conflict to the other.[26]

Hardest Cases (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004), p. 107.

[17] Ibid., p. 145.

[18] Ibid., p. 180.

[19] Ibid., p. 153.

[20] Gilboa, p. 94.

[21] Crocker, Hampson and Aall. *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, p. 23.

[22] 'Basics of Mediation: Concepts and Definitions Fact Sheet Series: Peace Mediation and Mediation Support.' *German Federal Foreign Office*. Available at: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/Basics%20of%20Mediation.pdf (accessed 10 August 2022).

[23] Author interview with Jonathan Powell, Chief of Staff to Tony Blair from 1997 to 2007 and Chief British Government Negotiator on Northern Ireland during that time in office.

[24] Author interview with Vali Nasr, Majid Khadduri Professor of International Affairs and Middle East Studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, who previously served as Senior Advisor to US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke between 2009 and 2011.

[25] Ibid.

[26] For example, the UN (and others) do not engage with Security Council listed-terrorist groups, like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which de-facto rules areas in Syria's northwest, making it difficult and near impossible for mediators to travel there and engage.

Audience Variables

Mediators need to be acutely aware of who cares about a conflict or conflict mediation and why,[27] as well as how best to use the news media to communicate in such situations. The concerned public needs to be in a position to back peace efforts.[28] Occasionally, war-affected populations no longer back continued conflict. It is essential for mediators, amongst others, to capitalise on these mindset shifts when they occur, 'by impressing upon those who control the guns that their own constituents are looking to them for leadership to find a political solution.'[29]

Evidence seems to suggest that news media pays attention to what engages with their respective domestic audiences.[30] When it comes to the most powerful international media outlets, their audiences of focus are those in North America and Europe, and for the latter to be engaged, they need to have a 'point of identification in the conflict.'[31]

Who the mediator works on behalf of correlates to a degree with the audience they need to cater to or consider. For instance, a representative working for the UN on Afghanistan only, will have that one goal as part of their job, though for one representing the United States, Russia or China, attention to Afghanistan may be part of a larger objective.[32] However, for a UN representative, trying to use the media to further the organisation's interests can be more challenging, depending on circumstances, as opposed to addressing a national audience,[33] and particularly if the mediator is an international civil servant who says or does anything publicly that offends a major power or actor in the conflict. It may be challenging for them to sustain their role as mediator. Indeed, mediators can be restrained by this significant need to avoid offending any of the parties.[34]

It is necessary also for mediators to familiarise themselves with how a process is perceived – 'and is playing in the media and among interest groups back home.'[35] However, the degree to which public opinion and the news media matter in relation to mediation depends on the nature of the state[36] and the power base of the conflict actors.[37]

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[27] Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, p. 107.

[28] Ibid., p. 105.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Andrew Puddephatt, 'Voices of War: Conflict and the Role of the Media,' *International Media Support* (2006), p. 6. Available at: https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ims-voices-of-war-2006.pdf (accessed 1 August 2022).

[31] Ibid., p. 6.

[32] Author interview with Lakhdar Brahimi.

[33] Author interview with Jeffrey Feltman, former Under-Secretary-General for political affairs at the United Nations; and former US foreign service officer with more than 25 years of experience.

[34] Author interview with Colum Lynch, award-winning foreign policy and US national security journalist who served as senior diplomatic reporter for Foreign Policy Magazine; previously was the UN correspondent for the Washington Post, from 1999 to 2010.

[35] Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, p. 153.

[36] Author interview with Steve Erlanger, multiple Pulitzer-prize winning journalist who currently serves as chief diplomatic correspondent in Europe for *The New York Times*.

[37] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.

Media Variables

While it is generally believed that news media have an impact on their audiences, research on media efficacy suffers from ambiguities. The results of media interventions are unpredictable; they are 'neither straightforward nor self-evident.'[38] News media environments are varied and complex. For example, there are government[39] or quasi-government media monopolies;[40] large media conglomerates, whereby their use of propaganda differs, as well as the extent to which governments control communication, through mechanisms such as penal codes[41] and legal frameworks that restrict freedom of the press.[42] Communication infrastructure in a conflict environment may be limited or advanced, and may also suffer from war-related damage.[43]

The interests and motivations of media outlets and journalists are wide ranging.[44] Mediators have to contend with traditional media, including print, television and radio, as well as new interest-based media that provide near unlimited space for discussions – the accuracy of which can be challenging to confirm in real time.[45] Communication methods differ also depending on the country and region. Communication technology continues to change the media landscape. It is a challenge 'to manage the volume of information and to recognize misinformation and disinformation.'[46] In an information environment, some players 'enabled by digital technology and social media, weaponize information to sow confusion, feed hate, incite violence and prolong conflict.'[47]

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[38] Susan Abbott, Amelia Arsenault and Sheldon Himelfarb, 'Evaluating Media Interventions in Conflict Countries,' *United States Institute of Peace*, 6 October 2011. Available at: https://www.usip.org/publications/2011/10/evaluating-media-interventions-conflict-countries (accessed 1 August 2022).

[39] '[There is] more explicit bias toward official interpretations of events and securitisation of the "enemy" when media is run by the state'. Quoted in Teresa Joseph, 'Mediating War and Peace: Mass Media and International Conflict', p. 229.

[40] 'Turkish mainstream media, once a more lively clash of ideas, has become a tight chain of command of government-approved headlines, front pages and topics of TV debate... Directions to newsrooms often come from officials in the government's Directorate of Communications, which handles media relations, more than a dozen industry insiders told Reuters.' Quoted in Jonathan Spicer, 'Insiders Reveal How Erdogan Tamed Turkey's Newsrooms', *Reuters*, 31 August 2022. Available at https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/turkey-erdogan-media/ (accessed 19 April 2023).

[41] For example, in Syria, Law No. 20 of 2022, the articles of which are vaguely defined, issued by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on 18 April 2022, expanded the penal code redefining cybercrimes, suppressing even further already limited freedom of expression. The law covers defamation, harassment, as well as 'crimes against decency or modesty, and crimes against the Constitution and undermining prestige', and allows for more severe penalties.

[42] 'World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022', *UNESCO*. Available at: https://www.unesco.org/reports/world-media-trends/2021/en (accessed 14 June 2022).

[43] For example, according to 'Freedom of the Net 2020 Syria', *Freedom House*. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/country/syria/freedom-net/2020 (accessed 19 April 2023), the telecommunications infrastructure in Syria is one of the least developed in the Middle East, and it has suffered further from war-related damage.

[44] Puddephatt, 'Voices of War', p. 10.

[45] Gilboa, 'Media and Conflict Resolution', pp. 98–9.

[46] Author interview with Tarja Halonen, Finnish politician, 11th president of Finland, and the first woman to hold the position, from 2000 to 2012.

[47] 'Report: Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression During Armed Conflicts', *OHCHR*. Available at: https://srfreedex.org/report-disinformation-and-freedom-of-opinion-and-expression-during-armed-conflicts (accessed 4 October 2022).

A polluted media environment can complicate the mediation process. 'When people cannot trust the sources of information, it is impossible for communities to build a shared understanding of facts and without that understanding, there can be no common basis for constructive exchanges to enable mediation and reconciliation.'[48]

While social media use has grown exponentially, for those living in conflict areas, legacy media remain the most frequent news source.[49]

Noting all these variables, a common characteristic in mediation processes is the need for secrecy to protect the process and a common trait in news media, conveying information.

Media and the Mediator

With or without the mediators' active engagement, media outlets have a presence in conflict resolution, and mediators follow the news to get information and assess public opinion.

Confidentiality

There are fundamental contradictions between the needs of a mediation process and what a journalist requires; a core characteristic of a mediation process is confidentiality.

In his analysis of the Middle East peace process, Gadi Wolfsfeld noted, 'a peace process is complicated; journalists demand simplicity. A peace process takes time to unfold and develop; journalists demand immediate results. Most of the peace process is marked by dull, tedious negotiations; journalists require drama... Many of the significant developments within a peace process must take place in secret behind closed doors; journalists demand information and action.'[50] Journalists are always searching for what is transpiring behind closed doors and any angle that seems to shed more light on the situation is the basis for a new story.[51]

Norwegian diplomat Jan Egeland noted the benefits that secrecy provides in a mediation process, namely that it avoids a hostile press. He recalled that when delegates working on mediation between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (resulting in the Oslo Accords in 1993) arrived in Washington, the press would 'confront them with the more hostile comments made by the opposing side, thus leading to even more aggressive responses.'[52]

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[48] 'Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression During Armed Conflicts', *UN General Assembly*, 12 August 2022. Available at: https://srfreedex.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/A77-288_English.pdf (accessed 19 April 2023). In this report, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Khan, notes that 'in protracted and frozen conflict situations such as Nagorno-Karabakh or the State of Palestine, disinformation, propaganda and distorted narratives from various parties in the conflict area and outside have hindered conflict resolution and peace processes for decades.'

[49] Ibid., p. 10.

[50] Paul Dixon, *Performing the Northern Ireland Peace Process: In Defence of Politics* (London: Birbeck College University of London, 2018), p. 24.

[51] Author interview with Colum Lynch.

[52] Crocker, Hampson and Aall, *Herding Cats*, p. 538.

Egeland recalled that the small size of the negotiating team helped maintain secrecy, noting that a news leak prior to an agreement reached in Oslo, might result in 'disastrous repercussions at home.'[53] Further, as noted by Neill Lochery, the secrecy allowed the parties to avoid 'public posturing for domestic audiences,' that had 'marred' public discussions prior.[54]

However, times have changed since the Oslo Accords, and it is hard to imagine nowadays a mediation process that is able to maintain absolute secrecy.

Often a new mediation team 'will mount a highly visible consultative process, orchestrated so as to highlight the freshness of the new approach';[55] and much of the mediation work is somewhat evident to the public.[56] However, if negotiations happen under the 'glare of the media,' it makes it 'more difficult for the two sides to manage the negotiations.'[57]

For a mediator, it is important to protect the confidence of those that he or she engages with because it enables them to be more candid with the mediator, particularly in informal settings.[58] Interlocutors must have a high level of trust with the mediator, whereby they are able to provide them with information that they would not share with anyone else.[59] A mediator must stick to the same level of confidentiality that they request of their interlocutors.[60] If a mediator uses the media to some extent as leverage, then their interlocutor understands that whatever they say could be used against them.[61]

Sometimes the level of secrecy and confidentiality is not up for the mediator to decide. Distinguished conflict mediator Lakhdar Brahimi, who mediated during the 2001 Bonn Conference in Germany (which created the structure for the post-Taliban government in Afghanistan) was able to maintain a high-level of confidentiality by convening the parties in an isolated area, with a near media blackout.[62] Yet, when Brahimi was designated as the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General to Iraq in 2004, following the US invasion, he inherited a more chaotic media landscape.[63]

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[53] Ibid., p. 539.

[54] Crocker, Hampson and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, p. 107.

[55] Ibid., p. 116.

[56] Sven M.G. Koopmans, *Negotiating Peace: A Guide to the Practice, Politics, and Law of International Mediation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 155.

[57] Author interview with Vali Nasr.

[58] Author interview with Dennis Ross, who served several US presidents, playing an instrumental role in shaping US involvement in the Middle East peace process. Ross also worked closely with US Secretaries of State James Baker, Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Author interview with Jean-Marie Guéhenno.

[61] Author interview with Dennis Ross.

[62] Author interview with Lakhdar Brahimi and Ahmad Fawzi, broadcast journalist, press secretary, United Nations spokesperson, including for Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi, and strategic communication advisor.

[63] Ibid.

Trying to impose a media blackout can also result in rumours about the reasons behind it, and other actors may speak to the media as a result.[64] Confidentiality can only be a temporary strategy; a mediator will, at some point need to provide information about the choices that will be laid out and the potential results of such decisions.[65] As an example, Powell noted that Colombia's discussion – led by President Juan Manuel Santos – with the Farc guerrilla movement took place in secret for years. Santos believed that it would be possible to make more progress that way, but then he had to find a way to make the talks public, and do this in an appropriate manner.[66]

While mediators are careful to maintain trust and protect the integrity of the process, they can find it useful to engage with the media, to a varying degree, to help frame the narrative. Providing truthful and up-to-date information on a conflict mediation process should be a fundamental part of any communication strategy.[67] There needs to be credibility and consistency in a mediator's approach with the press;[68] and a level of honesty that acknowledges that success is not guaranteed.[69]

Some believe it is the mediator's responsibility to proactively engage with the media as it helps contextualise the process and shape the narrative for the press.[70,71] A proactive approach is all the more important when the press is fixated on 'divisions and controversy than on positive developments.'[72]

Conveyor of Information

In both foreign and domestic policy, the media is always a source of information and an instrument in negotiations.[73] Further cooperation between mediators and journalists, broadly speaking, could better support conflict resolution efforts.[74] For example, media can fill information voids.[75]

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[64] Author interview with Ahmad Fawzi.
[65] Andrew Puddephatt, 'Voices of War', p. 10.
[66] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.
[67] Author interview with Lakhdar Brahimi and Ahmad Fawzi.
[68] Author interview with Ahmad Fawzi.
[69] Author interview with Frederic Hof, former special advisor for transition in Syria at the US State Department.
[70] Koopmans, Negotiating Peace, p. 156.
[71] Fawzi, Ahmad.
[72] Koopmans, *Negotiating Peace*, p. 156.
[73] Author interview with Joe Lockhart, White House Press Secretary under US President Bill Clinton from 1998 to 2000.
[74] Author interview with Janine DiGiovanni, multi-award-winning journalist and Executive Director of The Reckoning Project.
[75] For example, Jennifer Rankin reported in *The Guardian* on 11 October 2022 that EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell recently lamented that the EU's diplomatic network provided less information than newspapers, 'sometimes, I knew more of what was happening somewhere by reading the newspapers than reading your reports'. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/11/eu-foreign-policy-chief-josep-borrell-says-diplomats-are-slow-ineffective-and-patronising (accessed 11 October 2022).

Journalists have a great deal to offer mediators as they 'have on the ground experience. They are often first responders, they are often the first people on the scene...of an atrocity, or (are a) witness' to one.[76] Mediation and conflict reporters often communicate with all sides in the conflict, including those that mediators or interlocutors are not conventionally allowed to engage with, such as terrorists.[77] As such, journalists' work contributes to the mediation process by providing a communications link.[78] Mediation is about finding out what the conflict actors and key players want and trying to reach a middle ground, and it is difficult for a mediator to do that if they are not talking to all players.[79] However, it is not the journalists' responsibility to mediate between the conflict parties, nor to negotiate their disputes.

The media can be a particularly useful conveyer of information in mediation processes where interlocutors might not be directly engaged with one or more parties. For example, in discussions related to the US and Iran,[80] providing an authoritative voice to the media could provide clarity – letting the Iranians know what the Americans are thinking.[81]

Jeffrey Feltman, the UN's under-secretary for political affairs at the time, accompanied UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012 when meeting with Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, whom Feltman could not meet when he was previously serving as a US official. Feltman noted that what struck him as he listened were 'the many gaps in knowledge that we in the United States had about Iran, our attempts to try to analyse the motivations behind the supreme leader...without the benefit of a local presence, of a long-term diplomatic relation that we would have with other countries. We had gaps in our knowledge, without question.'[82] The supreme leader's misconceptions regarding the US were even more substantial. 'I left the meeting quite frightened' Feltman said, because he thought that if the Ayatollah's 'understanding is so poor of the United States, what decisions might he take, what miscalculations might he make about US intentions.'[83]

Media can also play a 'positive role when a well-argued point or new perspective is presented, or a complicated issue is expressed in new wording. This may provide new ways of looking at the issue.'[84] A mediator can also 'bring new or under-reported issues or perspectives to the media's attention.'[85]

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[76] Author interview with Janine DiGiovanni.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Pauli, 'News Media as Mediators.' pp. 719–20.

[79] Author interview with Janine DiGiovanni.

[80] Author interview with Jeffrey Feltman.

[81] Ibid.

[82] 'The Mediator's Studio Episode 7, Season 2 Jeffrey Feltman on the risk of accidental war,' *Center for Humanitarian Dialogue*, 4 March 2021. Available at: https://hdcentre.org/podcasts/jeffrey-feltman-on-the-risk-of-accidental-war-2 (accessed 1 July 2022).

[83] Ibid.

[84] Author email with Tarja Halonen.

[85] Koopmans, *Negotiating Peace*, p. 157.

Authoritarian actors also use the media as they need 'to know what they need to argue against. The free press is a great aid to authoritarians, not that their own press is free, but to know what are the arguments that they need to counter,' said Steve Erlanger, *The New York Times* chief diplomatic correspondent in Europe. Very sophisticated propaganda assumes that people know the other side of the story.[86]

If a mediation process is in the public domain, mediators could more proactively implement an outreach strategy, although they will likely always have to remain discreet about some of the substantive points raised, or details about the participants involved.

Clearly, once information is released in today's world, it cannot be retracted, and one cannot control the speed at which it travels.[87] Once something is said or revealed by a mediator, the information can be used by others, including conflict actors; 'you open a theater' of discussion.[88] However, the counter argument to saying nothing or saying very little is that other players are going to 'play the game',[89] whereby the mediator is at risk of leaving a void in the narrative space that can be filled by other actors.[90]

Framing: Considerations

News media dictates what conflict and conflict aspects get covered; how much airtime or front-page coverage a conflict receives; who speaks about the conflict in the media, i.e., the main or auxiliary players in the conflict, aid agencies, terrorists, or civilians impacted.

The media can frame a matter in a way that makes it more intractable.[91] Media can act as a weapon of violence, spreading hate and false information.[92] Media can also assign and employ stereotypes and labels that are dehumanising.[93]

Even the most neutral and knowledgeable journalists cannot provide a complete picture of the conflict dynamics; and even the most professional news organisations frame their stories in a way that is 'derived from deep-seated values within the organisations and held by the journalists themselves or by the societies in which they live and work.'[94] Media also have a propensity to reflect centres of power.[95] Further, not all news outlets are responsible or professional, and can be outright propagandic.

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[86] Author interview with Steve Erlanger.

[87] Author interview with Jean-Marie Guéhenno.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Author interview with Hanan Ashrawi.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.; Ashrawi agreed with this statement broadly, and specifically in reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[94] Somerville, 'Framing Conflict and War – the Cold War and After.'

[95] As Teresa Joseph notes in 'Mediating War and Peace: Mass Media and International Conflict' it is 'only in cases where consensus begins to disappear that the media is forced to reflect public debate', which is what happened around the US intervention in Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. p. 227; Joseph also notes Wolfsfeld's (2001) work which argues that elite consensus is also key; the more elites agree, the greater the likelihood that the news media will be supportive of government policies.

Causality

The way the media presents relational dynamics can affect a mediation process, i.e., how it understands and presents causality.[96] 'The causality issue is significant because people forget the context.' In speaking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hanan Ashrawi, who served in the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, noted that media can lead an audience to assume that there are two equal parties, neighbours with a degree of parity, whereby 'one side attacks the other, full stop.'[97] The reality being that one, Israel, is a military power, and for decades Israeli policy in the occupied Palestinian territories has been constricting Palestinians in a variety of ways. [98]

In public discussions, 'it is important to ensure that the analysis of the causes of a conflict is thorough. The nature of conflicts has changed, and today's crises are often complex and prolonged. Re-evaluating the contexts and circumstances is sometimes needed and in this, the media has a vital role.'[99]

Weight and Speed of Information

Journalists can also find themselves identifying with one conflict party over another 'simply because the weight of information they are receiving is so one-sided.'[100] Ashrawi noted that for a long time (and continuing through the present day) Israel has a greater control over the media airspace, which has led to the Palestinians being presented through the eyes of Israelis.[101] This has resulted in the use of tropes, demonisation, and the propping up of anti-Palestinian stereotypes.[102] The Israelis are often quicker to present their version of an event that has taken place, which the media picks up.[103] The Palestinians have to struggle to explain their reality.[104]

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[96] Author interview with Hanan Ashrawi.

[97] Ibid.

[98] 'Israel's policies and practices constitute a matrix of control and domination: control of the land and domination of the people. Israel's matrix of control and domination has undermined the Palestinian economy, leading to its evisceration, as well as to asymmetric dependency on Israel'. Quoted in 'Palestine Under Occupation III: Mapping Israel's Policies and Practices and their Economic Repercussions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory', *ESCWA*. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/palestine-under-occupation-iii-mapping-israels-policies-and-practices-and-their-economic-repercussions-occupied-palestinian-territory (accessed 17 February 2023).

[99] Author email with Tarja Halonen.

[100] Gilboa, 'Media and International Conflict', *Bar Ilan University*, p. 598. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292661930_Media_and_international_conflict (accessed June 30, 2022).

[101] Author interview with Hanan Ashrawi.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid. See also 'Connection Interrupted: Israel's Control of the Palestinian ICT Infrastructure and Its Impact on Digital Rights', *7amleh, The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media*. Available at: https://7amleh.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Report_7amleh_English_final.pdf (accessed 19 April 2023) about the information and communications technology sector in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Terminology

Communication is needed to define the situation and the enemy; the terminology used by the players is important as both sides read what the other side shares.[105] The language and the phrasing should not be overlooked.[106] If among the most important issues at the negotiating table are respect and trust, respectful language used in the media is very important.[107] Media can arouse feelings of like and dislike; 'well-crafted messages' can reshape and transform perspectives.[108] How one publicly categorises the other side and the negotiations are key.[109]

In 2014, Powell, who was also appointed as special envoy to Libya, said that when the mediation process was underway, it was clear that a military ceasefire was needed, but the process also needed 'people to stop saying really, really awful things about each other.'[110] Language informs thinking and bringing the public along via the media in any attempt to neutralise conflict-related language is important.

Framing: Strategies

While the goal is not to negotiate by megaphone, one cannot completely refrain from speaking to the press.[111] Public comments can also become a distraction for the mediation process; one party is spending their whole time focused on what the other said publicly, and the vice versa.[112] Finding the right balance is difficult.

Declarations

To help control the framing, a mediator can use a declaration of principles or a framework to serve 'as a lighthouse and series of guideposts to those seeking to navigate through the typically intricate and abstruse details of the deal.'[113] Journalism and news media 'play an essential role in the societal construction of reality…Through the type of news coverage chosen, they can give an impetus either to the escalation or to the de-escalation of conflicts.'[114] Framing is essential; it molds public opinion.[115] The media assists in laying out the purview of the public conversation; it lays out the parameters and limits the 'range of ideas from which we can choose.'[116]

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[105] Author interview with Vali Nasr.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Bratic and Schirch, 'Why and When to Use the Media', p. 14.
[109] Author interview with Vali Nasr.
[110] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Crocker, Hampson and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, p. 116.
[114] Wilhelm Kempf, 'Peace Journalism: A Tightrope Walk Between Advocacy Journalism and Constructive Conflict Coverage', *Conflict & Communication Online 6*, 2 (2007), p. 4. Available at: https://regener-online.de/journalcco/2007_2/pdf/kempf.pdf (accessed 1 July 2022).
[115] Teresa Joseph, 'Mediating War and Peace: Mass Media and International Conflict', *India Quarterly*, 70/3 (2014), pp. 225–40. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/45072817 (accessed 10 February 2023).
[116] Bratic and Schirch, 'Why and When to Use the Media', p. 14.

For example, in March 2012, Kofi Annan, then joint UN and Arab League Envoy to Syria, submitted a six-point peace plan to the UN Security Council, a blueprint to stop and resolve the Syrian crisis. In addition to the mediation roadmap it provided, it focused the attention of the media on Annan's publicly stated priorities; it provided a structure for the public debate. If a mediation narrative is always fluid, one can lose control.[117] A communication plan needs to consider all the aspects of the mediation process, including military operations, humanitarian needs, civil society actors, etc.[118] But the right balance needs to be struck in what a mediator says publicly; a mediator needs to refrain from setting aims or expectations so high that they could never been achieved.[119] Once a mediator creates benchmarks and expectations, he or she can 'be trapped by those benchmarks.'[120]

Coordination

Coordinating public statements following diplomatic or other engagements so that they are complementary can be a useful framing exercise, and when it works, it is a good tactic.[121] When it does not, it can also be a useful learning opportunity for a mediator[122] – learning from what an interlocutor has not included.

It is good practice, in general, for a mediator not to surprise the parties by saying something that has not been previously agreed.[123] 'The communiques are instructive to negotiators.'[124] Conflict mediation meetings readouts are seen as an obligation, as part of the public diplomacy.[125] 'What each party chooses to emphasize tells you a lot about their own politics.'[126]

Framing the negotiations after an agreement is equally important. 'You need to be able to explain the script (of a mediation process) to your own side, but you need to do so in a way that doesn't undermine the agreement to the other side.'[127] Powell noted that in the negotiations which led to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and a power-sharing Assembly led by Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin in 2007, scripts were written for both the DUP and Sinn Féin, so they would not say 'something that would contradict what the other side said.'[128]

Creating Pressure Communication by mediators is imperative for pressuring the other side, and for creating support for the mediation.[129] The whole time one is 'battling for the steering wheel in negotiations.'[130]

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[117] Author interview with Ahmad Fawzi.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.
[120] Author interview with Jean-Marie Guéhenno.
[121] Author interview with Jeffrey Feltman.
[122] Author interview with Jeffrey Feltman and Dennis Ross.
[123] Author interview with Jean-Marie Guéhenno.
[124] Author interview with Joe Lockhart.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.
[128] Ibid. Powell noted further that he realised during the Northern Ireland talks, the 'only way you can get to a successful agreement is when the parties realise they don't just have to sell the agreement to their own side, they have to sell it to both sides'.
[129] Author interview with Vali Nasr.
[130] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.

For example, Vali Nasr noted that the US in public comments on Iranian-related conflict points (including in relation to the nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) has used language of 'carrots and sticks', which the Iranians view as derogatory.[131] In conflict mediation, one side may be communicating as it needs to create the domestic space for what they are doing, but the other side could view that tactic as pressure.[132]

What is transpiring in the public domain, like competitions for building pressure and creative leverage, can be 'divorced from what is happening inside the room', an occurrence which can also give greater control to decision makers who are not part of the process.[133] Further, 'public statements to the home audiences of the parties tend to be closely watched by the two sides but are hard for mediators to shape and interpret across the negotiating table.'[134]

A mediator can opt to publicly reprimand conflict actors as a means of shaming or shocking them back to their senses;[135] they can frame a party as the reason negotiations failed. 'Basically, this means speaking over the heads of official or formal parties to their constituents, the public, and other interested parties.'[136] Former US Secretary of State James Baker noted that in negotiations, 'one of our strongest points of leverage, with respect to all parties, was the threat to, as I found myself saying all too often, lay the dead cat on their doorstop. No one wanted to accept blame for scuttling the process.'[137] When it comes to such tactics, it must be said that during any negotiations, there is not a monolithic view of how best to handle such issues;[138] and most actors do not have the type of leverage that the US has. However, publicly putting the blame on the 'guilty' party in a mediation process is challenging because as soon as one does it, they lose credibility and undermine the talks in progress.[139]

Leaks

Leaks inevitably happen and mediators must be prepared. Indeed, actors involved in mediation sometimes leak information to the media to either put pressure on the other party, to defend their actions, or to distort news announcing their victory, even when they have not won.[140] Yet overall, one of the main reasons behind an actor's decision to leak information is to get attention, their points across, as well as to remind interlocutors that there are other points of view when theirs is not the dominant one.[141] From a mediator's perspective, leaks can be difficult to control. In some situations, however, mediators themselves could use leaks as a trial balloon.

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[131] Author interview with Vali Nasr.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Chester, Hampson and Aall, *Herding Cats,* p. 159
[135] Crocker, Hampson and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, p. 122.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Chester, Hampson and Aall, *Herding Cats*, p. 188.
[138] Author interview with Joe Lockhart.
[139] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.
[140] Author interview with Steve Erlanger.
[141] Ibid.

Of course, leaks from any one side, including the mediator's, can be harmful in a mediation process.[142] A balance of compromises is needed in any agreement, and if someone leaks to the media a compromise one side has made without revealing what the party might have gained in the negotiations, it might not ever be possible to sell the compromise.[143] Leaks can make it difficult for parties to make the necessary concessions. [144]

Leaks can be hard to control as well. If one is leaking to 'force someone's hand' the outcome may not always be what the leaker intended.[145] Leaks that demonstrate 'the self-importance of the people leaking' are 'very destructive because obviously they're not leaking for any purpose that contributes to the negotiations succeeding.'[146]

Leaks also 'raise an issue of how much the other government is actually in control.'[147] For example, hypothetically, if a leak related to Iran makes its way into the public domain, an interlocutor might find themself wondering if it were 'deliberately coming out of the White House' or from an alternative source. 'If you are sitting in Iran and you are trying to understand this' without direct American channels and without a US Embassy in Tehran, you might begin to wonder if US President Joe Biden is not in total control; you might think: should we follow up on a deal with a president that he has not even convinced his own people of it, and he is 'being sabotaged from within.'[148]

The tactic of leaking a story deliberately to reporters to gauge public reaction to a mediation process or development is called a 'trial balloon,' - it generally speaking can be an extremely useful tool.[149] It is a way through which the mediator can signal that they are seriously considering a negotiation point. If a mediator is adamant on implementing a point, they will need to begin informing people.[150] If the intended audience responds positively to a trial balloon, it is easier to follow through with the idea. If feedback is negative, the reverse can be true.[151]

The usefulness of and ability to use trial balloons however depends on the mediators and who they represent. For example, it could be challenging for a UN mediator, facilitating multiple interests, to attempt to float trial balloons – it could be 'appreciated by some and rejected by the others...(and) shot down,' and then the mediator has been burned.[152]

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[142] Author interview with Lakhdar Brahimi.
[143] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Author interview with Vali Nasr.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Author interview with Jeffrey Feltman.
[150] Author interview with Vali Nasr.
[151] Author interview with Frederic Hof, who spearheaded US-mediated discussions from 2009 to 2011 related to Syrian-Israeli peace, and noted that had the talks progressed, he could envision circumstances in which strategic leaks could have been deployed.
[152] Author interview with Andrew Gilmour, former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, who also served as Director for Political, Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Human Rights affairs in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General from 2012 to 2016.

Showing Up

Sometimes in order to affect a mediation process or the way it is perceived, a mediator must attempt to inject himself or herself forcefully into a process and or appear very publicly in places where not wanted. [153]

For example, the UN has moral authority, and must publicly showcase this.[154] The authority of the Secretary-General, who serves as the chief administrative officer of the UN with the responsibility of mediating conflicts, should be exercised or it can degenerate; the less the Secretary-General publicly asserts the power of his good offices,[155] the more the UN can risk becoming irrelevant.[156]

For example, when Israel informed the UN that it would not allow a UN plane to land at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport, Annan decided to get on the plane regardless. 'If Israel stopped the Secretary-General's plane, it would be their problem.'[157] Annan also used the media to put pressure on Israeli and Palestinian players to attend a summit in Sharm el-Sheikh in 2000. Yasser Arafat did not want to attend, and Annan 'upped the pressure by telling reporters that (he) expected Arafat to be in Sharm,'[158] and Arafat did attend.

Andrew Gilmour, former UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, was among more than 200 former senior UN officials who wrote to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres urging him to play a larger role in mediating for peace in Ukraine; 'What we and the broader public want to see, though, is a political UN presence and public engagement, in addition to the UN's notable humanitarian response to the Ukraine crisis,' the letter reads.[159]

Annan really wanted to be a leading figure – and to be 'seen' as one – at the negotiating table, Gilmour stated.[160] It behooves the UN Secretary-General to use his good offices and sometimes push himself into conflict spaces where he is not wanted in an effort not only to change the course of mediation, but also importantly to redirect public focus on the discussions between conflicting parties.[161]

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[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid.

[155] For more on 'Good Offices' see 'The Secretary-General & Mediation', *United Nations Peacemaker*. Available at: https://peacemaker.un.org/peacemaking-mandate/secretary-general (accessed 3 April 2023), which notes 'The good offices and mediation roles of the Secretary-General in the prevention and the peaceful settlement of disputes derive from the Charter and have been developed through extensive practice. These roles can be set in motion at the Secretary-General's own initiative, in response to a request from one or more of the parties to a dispute, or as a result of a request from the Security Council or the General Assembly.'

[156] Author interview with Andrew Gilmour.

[157] Kofi Annan and Nader Mousavizadeh, *Interventions: A Life in War and Peace* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 268.

[158] Ibid., p. 269.

[159] As also reported in Patrick Wintour, 'António Guterres Urged to Take Lead in Securing Peace in Ukraine or Risk Future of UN', *The Guardia*n, 22 April 2002. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/19/antonio-guterres-urged-to-take-lead-in-securing-peace-in-ukraine-or-risk-future-of-un (accessed 14 February 2023).

[160] Author interview with Andrew Gilmour.

[161] Gilmour also added further that Dag Hammarskjöld was publicly pushing Egyptian President Abdel Nasser and Israeli President Ben-Gurion during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Kurt Waldheim, after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, 'was ringing up' Henry Kissinger and suggesting a course of action. UN Secretary-

Performance/Optics

As a journalist who has covered the UN extensively noted, conflict-mediation related diplomacy around the UN system is often performative because there is limited action that can happen in the Security Council due to the disunity within it[162] – and because of competing political dynamics and veto powers wielded by permanent members of the Security Council.[163] However, performativity can be important.[164] There is a struggle 'around the world now for hearts and minds from countries in the developing world as to how they're going to view responsibility,' particularly in light of the Russian-Ukrainian war,[165] and the world food crisis, the journalist noted.[166]

Winning the battle of narratives is meaningful and does have real consequences on a country's standings, how the world views a conflict for example between Russia and Ukraine, and to the degree that a UN member state, in this case, was willing, or not willing to put pressure on Russia; that matters, the journalist noted.[167] In early 2022, the US was still suffering from a serious lack of credibility at the UN after the Iraq war and the intelligence failure, and they managed to regain some of that in the way that they manoeuvred during the Ukraine negotiations at the UN.[168]

Mediators need to think carefully about the public image that they are projecting through media, as they often do not.[169] Negotiations are political and sometimes people think negotiations are above petty politics – that negotiations are 'antiseptic and above politics,' but they are not; negotiations are 'all about politics and therefore you have to think of it like politics.'[170] With former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, it was not only her words that mattered, but her 'quips, her frown – even just her arched eyebrows all carry weight.'[171]

General U Thant was visibly active during the Sinai crisis of May 1967. Pèrez de Cuèllar 'knew he was looking ridiculous' as he headed off to Baghdad in 1991 in a last attempt to get Saddam Hussein to pull out of Kuwait; 'he knew with a high probability that he would be made to look like an idiot, but he thought it was worth any attempt'. If you are the Secretary-General 'no one is going to hold it against you if you try and fail', but the Secretary-General has to try and the public has to see the Secretary-General trying.

[162] Author interview with Colum Lynch.

[163] Five permanent members – China, France, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States – have veto power.

[164] Author interview with Colum Lynch.

[165] In remarks on 24 February 2023 to the Security Council, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has said the 'Russian invasion of Ukraine is a blatant violation of the United Nations Charter and international law'. Quoted in 'Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council - on Ukraine', *United Nations Secretary General*. Available at: https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2023-02-24/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-ukraine (accessed 8 April 2023).

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid. Lynch noted further that the US was 'very early out of the gate warning, despite enormous skepticism, that Russia had made a decision to move ahead militarily' and the US was 'banging the drum on this line every day at the UN.' The messaging and performance of the US at the UN 'helped the Americans in terms of restoring some broader public confidence in the veracity of American intelligence'.

[169] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Kati Marton, *The Chancellor: The Remarkable Odyssey of Angela Merkel* (London: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2021), p. 125.

In negotiations, it is better when everything is done from a position of strength. A mediator never wants to look like he or she is 'conceding things out of weakness,' and one of the ways mediators achieve this is through theatrics and image.[172] Former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's public presentation 'was a big part or her persona.'[173]

Moreover, a mediator must consider how they are publicly perceived, and how their interactions are interpreted – especially if they are seen in proximity to their interlocutors. For example, no mediator wants to 'look like [they're] hugging a terrorist.'[174] Powell noted that in the Northern Ireland negotiations, when he first met Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, he chose a small room and made sure that it was not possible to film the meeting from the outside through the windows to avoid having complicating pictures in the media.[175]

How conflict players appeared publicly was also an issue in the Northern Irish negotiations. In the final stages of the negotiations in 2007, Adams and Unionist leader Ian Paisley were to meet for the first time and agreed to have the meeting televised. They agreed on what they would say, but how the two would sit in relation to each other became an issue. Adams wanted to appear as Paisley's equal and wanted to sit next to him; Paisley did not want to appear overly friendly and therefore wanted to sit opposite Adams.[176] In order to accommodate both, a diamond-shaped table was designed so the two could be sitting next to and opposite each other. Both men knew the importance of their media appearance;[177] images speak.[178]

An elected official appearing 'too friendly' with the head of an opposition movement, or a party viewed as problematic could prove challenging for such an official. [179] A mediator or interlocutor appearing publicly with a conflict actor can also provide legitimacy to a group that is deeply searching for it.[180]

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[172] Author interview with Joe Lockhart.
[173] Marton, *The Chancellor*, p. 130.
[174] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.
[178] For example, Martin Gurri, Craig Denny and Aaron Harms, 'Our Visual Persuasion Gap', *Parameters Spring 2010* 40/1 (2010). Available at: https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2511&context=parameters (accessed 2 June 2022), it is noted that a visual image is experienced 'more viscerally than text, and human beings are far less skilled at guarding their judgments against this style of persuasion'.
[179] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.
[180] For example, a person the author spoke to who did not want to be named to protect the discussions, noted that talks between the government of Pakistan and the Pakistani Taliban gave the impression that the strength of the Taliban was such that they could negotiate with a state, lending support to the Taliban, and essentially undermining the voice of civilians.

Conclusion

Control of a narrative in a mediation process will always be limited. 'Poorly designed media interventions, no matter how well intentioned, may exacerbate tensions and undermine peacebuilding efforts.'[181] Mediators and actors in peace processes need to know where they want the process to go, how to push people in that direction, and part of this work is about communication.[182] It is necessary for the mediator to follow a media strategy during negotiations.[183]

While media engagements always carry an element of risk, it is an important part of mediation processes, especially in their initial stages. Devising a media outreach strategy that takes into consideration many variables from the start could help mediators shape public opinion and mitigate any harm resulting from negative news coverage, and shape public debate to help create incentives for the de-escalation of political tensions between actors.

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[181] Susan Abbott, Amelia Arsenault and Sheldon Himelfarb, 'Evaluating Media Interventions in Conflict Countries,' *United States Institute of Peace*, 6 October 2011. Available at: https://www.usip.org/publications/2011/10/evaluating-media-interventions-conflict-countries (accessed 2 June 2022).
[182] Author interview with Steve Erlanger.
[183] Author interview with Jonathan Powell.

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