

# THE IMPORTANCE OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Prepared by **Dr Gabriel Alier Riak\* (PhD) & Dut Bol Ayuel Bill**  
*Upper Nile University, South Sudan*

*\*Corresponding Author: -*

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Third-party interventions into ongoing civil wars are complex attempts to manipulate the preferences of warring parties, and thus conflict outcomes. These attempts to alter the course of a conflict can include providing materiel, intelligence, and money to change the structure of the relationship among combatants, or alternatively, providing information through mediation and other diplomatic initiatives to change the information that they hold about their adversary. Both approaches can have conflict management goals, although mediation has a much more direct link to a goal of containing violence and making peace. Conceptually, however, the two approaches to intervention could work in unison.

## **2.1.1 Information, Structural Change, and External Intervention**

External actors operate in a hostile environment where information asymmetries about relative capabilities and preferences matter, and some form of a security dilemma exists. In this respect, any potentially successful intervention has to manipulate the structure of the relationship between the warring parties and the information they have about the other's preferences and capabilities. For the most part, military or economic interventions only manipulate the former, and possibly help to confuse the latter. Empirical studies of civil war interventions generally focus on manipulating structures.

The structure of the relationship between the warring parties can be manipulated through outside interventions by 1) changing the incentives for fighting or the military and economic ability to fight, and by 2) preventing or minimizing accidental flare-ups (Fortna, 2004). Manipulating information may, however, influence calculations about when and how to agree to a negotiated outcome.

Information is critical to the termination of civil conflict. Withholding or misrepresenting private information can make reaching a stable and mutually agreeable negotiated settlement difficult. For example, one side's estimate of its ability to win on the battlefield, tolerance of the costs of fighting, reservation points, and possible compromises would all be held closely. Additionally, revealing a lack of resolve would send a signal of weakness, as would betraying a conciliatory bargaining position. Asymmetric information and the risk of revealing the 'true' value of a peaceful settlement can make bilateral negotiations difficult at best. Furthermore, there are often cultural barriers, ethnic or religious cleavages or histories of entrenched animosities that make credible information critical but scarce. In this environment, facilitating communication and building trust between opponents are instrumental to making peace possible.

Parties in a civil war, moreover, face a security dilemma unlike most others in global affairs—what Walter (2002) sees as the inability to make a credible commitment to demobilize and disarm. The commitment to disarmament is central to civil war termination because a stable society cannot exist with two or more competing centers of authority (Tilly, 1978). Disarmament needs to be a negotiated outcome, if it is not the result of military victory.

A relatively recent contribution to the study of mediation generally and the management of civil wars specifically has examined formally the conditions under which mediator bias, mediator preferences, and mediator 'honesty' influence the effectiveness of the mediator (Kydd, 2003; Svensson, 2007). The ideas that come out of these formal treatments, however, have not been subjected to systematic empirical verification. That is, the effect of mediator bias—which in one form is an attribute that is assumed to be anathema to successful mediation (Bercovitch, 1997), and in another an attribute that might facilitate successful outcomes (Kydd, 2003)—has not been tested against data. Given the theoretical and policy importance of these diametrically opposed ideas about the role of mediator bias, testing is important.

To aid testing of broad models of civil war outcomes, the effect of bias on mediation, or external actors and post-conflict stability, we introduce a dataset on diplomatic forms of intervention into civil wars. These new data will help forge a link in our understanding of conflict management, and help solidify what we know about UN peacekeeping, military or economic interventions, and how security guarantees and peace agreements materialize and are implemented.

## **2.1.2 Data on Diplomatic Interventions**

Knowledge is limited about diplomatic efforts to end civil war, in large part because we have not had access to systematic data with which to test when it might be effective. Studies of international conflict have long argued that external parties use a combination of carrots and sticks to end conflict (e.g. Singer, 1963). However, previous datasets

have tended to code characteristics of the conflict (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000; Fearon & Laitin, 2003) or aspects of interventions targeted at the structure of the relationship among combatants (Regan, 1996; 2002). The data we describe below provides a way to examine the effects of external interventions that incorporate diplomatic initiatives, alone or in combination with military or economic efforts.

We focus primarily on mediation because it forms the bulk of external diplomatic efforts in the post-World War II period. Other forms of diplomatic efforts include international forums, recalling ambassadors, or arbitration. In relative terms, there are but only a few occurrences of these other diplomatic tools when compared to the frequency of mediation.

Conceptually, we view diplomatic initiatives as attempts by outside parties to transform a conflict by enhancing communication between warring parties and providing information about the conflict that can help generate movement toward negotiated outcomes. In addition, the outside party(ies) can tie information to explicit carrots or sticks by linking diplomacy to possible economic or military interventions. We code data on four specific forms of diplomatic interventions: 1) mediation, 2) international forums, 3) the recall of ambassadors, and 4) explicit offers to mediate by third parties that were not accepted by both sides. In addition, we code requests for diplomatic intervention by one of the warring parties that were not accepted. Data were derived from public sources such as the New York Times, Keeping's Contemporary Archives, Facts on File, and case-specific historical treatments.

For an operational definition of mediation, international forum, or offers to mediate, we rely on the work of Bercovitch (1997) where mediation is a non-coercive, nonviolent, and, ultimately, non-binding form of intervention. Mediators enter into a conflict to affect, change, modify, or influence the outcome. The mediator can represent a state or a non-state actor. Other forms of external diplomacy include: an international forum is a formally organized meeting of the representatives from several countries, where the outcome is non-binding; the recall of an ambassador (or the ranking representative in the country) occurs when the intervening government calls home the ranking diplomat and the recall is explicitly tied to the behavior of the state in its internal conflict; and offers to mediate represent an explicit offer from a third party that was not accepted by at least one of the warring parties. They are recorded on the date of the offer.

Third-party mediation is unique because participation relies on the voluntary agreement by all parties. Before starting they have generally agreed to the format, the location, and the range of issues to be discussed. Mediators first work to convince warring parties to try to settle their differences at the negotiation table and then they work to maximize communication and minimize distrust between the civil war parties. This transmission of information is critical to understanding how outside interventions can affect the outcome of civil conflicts. A critical and unique characteristic of mediation is that mediators both initiate and facilitate peaceful bargaining: the mediator helps provide information that both sides see as credible and that gives both sides sufficient grounds to move toward a compromise outcome and possibly sign and implement a peace agreement.

## REFERENCE

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