

Ending war: the need for peace process support strategies



The foundations for sustainable peace are laid when those in conflict agree on how to resolve the issues that have divided them and how they will live together peacefully in the future. While external actors can play a decisive role in providing constructive support, too often mixed or contradictory policies undermine the prospects for conflict resolution. This brief argues that external actors should give greater priority to supporting peace processes, placing them at the centre of a shared international strategy for countries in conflict.

A peace process support strategy should marshal the multilateral political will and resources needed to support parties to negotiate and implement a viable agreement and to build public support. The strategy should be a central facet of a government or international organization's overall policy toward the conflict-affected country or region. As such, there is a need to:

1. *Give greater priority to supporting peace processes* with increased political will and policy coherence, both within a government and multilaterally.
2. *Work toward sustainable outcomes* through inclusive settlements that pave the way toward more responsive and accountable governance.
3. *Improve the quality of support* to peace processes through capacity building, mediation support and appropriate technical and financial resources.

What do we mean by 'peace process'?

A peace process encompasses initiatives intended to help reach and implement a negotiated agreement to end an armed conflict and create the basis for a new political settlement. In addition to formal negotiations, peace processes include efforts to help belligerents and non-combatants to reframe the conflict, increase understanding and improve relationships. Diverse types of interventions can be used to generate conditions conducive to a peace process, including putting pressure on the belligerents, offering incentives to make peace, or increasing security through peacekeeping operations.

Why prioritize peace processes?

Sustainable peace cannot be achieved through the exercise of force alone. However difficult, peace processes are an essential means to address conflict. As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate, those willing to achieve their goals 'by any means necessary' can sustain violent struggle against even the most powerful armed forces in the world. In the period since the mid-1990s, more wars have ended through negotiated agreement than through military victory for the first time in history. Even in cases where it ends the war, a military-only solution may exacerbate the underlying causes of conflict and fragility and pose risks for future instability.

There are also negative consequences when conflicts remain unresolved, even if fighting is minimal. Such conflicts can rapidly escalate into renewed hostility, as the confrontation over Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008 illustrated. Alternatively, a freeze in fighting can leave the conflict intact with the maintenance of stability dependent on outsiders, as in Cyprus and Kosovo. Unresolved conflicts in places such as Kashmir and Nagorny Karabakh indicate the ongoing risks and costs even when battlefield deaths are minimal.

There are, however, design faults that undermine the durability of some peace processes. Many agreements break down within five years, with the belligerents returning to war. In other cases, such as those in Israel-Palestine and Sri Lanka, initially promising processes collapse long before final agreement is reached.

While there are no simple solutions to the challenges posed by intractable conflict, these failings indicate a need for more effective processes leading to more durable agreements. Peace processes must be strategically designed, well supported and skilfully implemented. Peacemaking is, however, a comparatively neglected dimension of international conflict response. Most attention and resources currently go towards peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding. While they can aid security and help to rebuild, they do not generally end a war or address its causes.

"Despite its proven cost-effectiveness, the practice of mediation has received remarkably little attention or support. Instead our efforts have been concentrated on the more costly tasks of dealing with the shattered remnants of devastated lives, communities and institutions of state, while the daunting challenge of reconstruction has absorbed resources that could have gone into early dispute resolution."

– Report of the UN Secretary-General on enhancing mediation, 2009

Peace process support strategies

International responses to specific conflicts are shaped by a range of contending priorities, including economic interests, counter-terrorism or humanitarian concerns. External actors are often divided on objectives and approaches. Too often the response is uncoordinated or even counter-productive, with actors working at cross-purposes. Competing agendas risk sending confusing signals to the conflict parties and may undermine the peace process.

This brief emerges out of discussions within Conciliation Resources and wider circles on how best to respond to the challenges posed by contemporary conflicts. It was prepared by Catherine Barnes with contributions from CR staff Andy Carl, Elizabeth Drew, Kristian Herbolzheimer, Cynthia Petrigh, Alexander Ramsbotham. We would like to thank Luc Chounet-Cambas, Helen Lewis and Teresa Whitfield for their comments on the draft as well as participants in the initial workshop to develop this concept.

A flexible and responsive peace process support strategy can help to align various policy objectives into a coherent approach. While every relevant government needs to craft such an approach within its own policymaking processes, a peace process support strategy should ideally be developed and promoted multilaterally. This may call for countries with close ties to the various belligerents to synchronize the influence they can exert, just as the respective allies of the main Tajik parties did when they hosted rounds of talks in the Tajikistan peace process. It can also include 'group of friends' mechanisms of states and institutions with an interest in promoting peace.

Such a strategy needs to be geared toward helping those in conflict address the challenges inherent in most war-to-peace transitions – and must be revised as parties get to different phases in their engagement. External actors can help to create conditions that encourage parties to come to the table, stay at the table, reach agreements and implement them. They can encourage parties to secure wider public support and increase confidence that long-standing grievances will be meaningfully addressed and lives will be improved.

Encourage negotiation

A peace process support strategy can aim to create conditions conducive for peacemaking by helping the parties to see that they are more likely to achieve their goals through a negotiated agreement. This might include the use of incentives and sanctions that change the parties' strategic calculus. It also involves seizing the opportunities to encourage parties to re-evaluate their strategy that may arise through a change in context, such as a shift in the balance of power, internal changes, or wider geopolitical shifts. Such opportunities may be lost, however, if the parties do not believe negotiations are a viable alternative to armed engagement. External actors can help to lay the foundations for a viable peace process by supporting communication channels and spaces for informal and constructive dialogue. They can also help to foster alternatives by generating new ideas, principles and formulas to address key conflict issues that increase confidence in the possibility of a mutually acceptable resolution.

Using leverage effectively

External actors often use a variety of sanctions and incentives to try to influence parties to a conflict but they are rarely deployed within a broader strategy for peace process support. Measures need to be linked to the parties' motives; if not, they will have minimal influence. Sometimes measures exacerbate the conflict, particularly if they are not designed to encourage their target's decision to negotiate peace. For example, the US's decision to deny a visa to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) representatives to attend a 2003 preparatory donor conference in Washington because they were a proscribed terrorist group increased the LTTE's suspicions about how they would be treated in internationally-supported peace negotiations with the Sri Lankan government. Sometimes, key actors do not make the links between different policies to harness the inherent incentives that could be decisive for peacemaking. In Cyprus, the failure to link EU accession to reunification in 2004 led to a missed opportunity to encourage conflict resolution. At key moments in both Cyprus and Sri Lanka, other policy goals took precedence over the objective of strengthening a party's

commitment to the peace negotiations. While there are always likely to be difficult trade-offs, it is important to take a long view on whether increasing the prospects of peace should take precedence, remembering that it could be key to enabling a range of other policy goals.

Increasing effectiveness

Peace processes are much more than simply finding a way to silence the guns – difficult as this challenge can be. If negotiations are conceived only as a means to reach agreement on ending a war, too often the results are a recycling of power within the same basic structures leaving the underlying causes largely untouched. As we have seen in such places as South Africa and Northern Ireland, peace processes occur in a moment of flux that can open the door to more profound change. A peace process can present an opportunity that can be seized to develop a more peaceful future by addressing the issues generating conflict, reforming state institutions and key policies, as well as forging a sound basis for future relationships between those involved in the conflict. As such, peace negotiations can help set the trajectory toward more resilient states and responsive governments. While external actors cannot 'fix' these situations, they can support the parties' capacities to negotiate agreements, address the underlying causes, and repair relationships damaged by years of hostility. They can also skilfully wield their influence and resources to shore up parties' commitment throughout the process and help to deliver implementation of the agreement.

No 'quick fixes'

Effective strategies for supporting peace processes should work towards a longer time horizon. Too often external actors are so eager for an agreement to end the fighting that they encourage compromises that create serious difficulties in the medium to long-term, as was seen in the Darfur Peace Agreement of 2005. Many of the most effective processes move from initial and typically secret contact and steps aimed at building confidence, to reaching agreements on de-escalating the hostilities, to an interim agreement on transitional governance, to some form of more inclusive constitutional reform process that addresses underlying causes. Such processes typically take many years. Planning and resource commitments need to anticipate this timeframe.

'Owning' the process

The text of an agreement is not a substitute for political will. The durability of an agreement may increase if those in conflict feel that they have devised their own solutions and are responsible for implementing them. This often means that those in conflict need to negotiate an agreement directly, rather than the agreement being drafted by external actors who then pressure the parties to sign it. This is difficult and time consuming. Yet it may result in greater commitment by those who have to live with the agreement – in part because they understand why the provisions in the agreement are the best possible outcome in the circumstances and have greater trust in their counterparts. A self-negotiated agreement, albeit with a mediator's assistance, may be less reliant on external actors to administer and enforce it, as has happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Comprehensive and inclusive processes

The complexity of a conflict situation may require a comprehensive response. It may require a negotiation structure capable of addressing a number of interconnected conflicts within the state or region or efforts to maintain a strong interface with other processes. Substantively, a comprehensive negotiation agenda deals with the multiple causes of conflict and addresses the needs and rights of the wider society as well as those of the belligerents.

Comprehensiveness is often linked to inclusiveness. Groups who are a part of a process are more likely to support it. By ensuring that their own interests and needs are addressed, they are more likely to accept the terms of agreement. There are different dimensions of inclusiveness: (a) engaging all belligerent groups (or at least giving them the choice to participate); and (b) involving the main political and social groups affected by the conflict, including women, youth, displaced people and marginalized communities.

Inclusiveness does not necessarily mean that everyone needs to sit together at the same table at the same time; nor does it obviate the need for secret talks between key leaders at crucial moments in the process. Inclusiveness may require a process structure based on multi-party negotiation and possibly multi-level (local, national, regional) consultation and dialogue. There are diverse modalities to facilitate such inclusiveness, such as parallel but interlinked forums or sequential processes involving different sets of actors.

Inclusiveness can be an important part of a strategy to prevent 'spoiling'. Peace processes can be more robust if those with influence and a strong social base consider themselves to be inside. The refusal of those using violence to participate in an inclusive process tends to de-legitimize their violence in the eyes of the wider public and to deepen the commitment of those inside and bind them to the negotiation process. Furthermore, if agreements are implemented as planned, those inside tend to become the strongest supporters as most of their goals are addressed through the institutions created by the agreement.

Inclusiveness should extend beyond the decision-making elites to provide mechanisms for public participation, as occurred in processes as diverse as Bougainville, Guatemala and South Africa. These mechanisms may be the best way to ensure that the perspectives, needs and rights of women, young people, displaced people and marginalized groups are reflected in the agreement. Strategies should also aim to cultivate public support for the process and the agreement. This may involve skilful communication strategies, time for consultation with constituencies and initiatives to work directly with these constituencies to build their support for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Better resources for peacemaking

Dialogue, negotiation and mediation require a tiny fraction of the budgets allocated to fighting wars, international peace operations and reconstruction. Yet too often there are inadequate resources and skills to develop and deliver an effective strategic approach.

Enhance institutional capacities

Effective peacemaking requires better bilateral and multilateral policies and strategies as well as resources to deliver them effectively, including specialist knowledge and skills. The 2009 UN Secretary-General's report on mediation points out that little attention and resources have been devoted to developing the mediation capacity within the UN system. There is an urgent need to strengthen the capacities of international institutions to offer best practice support for peace process design, confidence-building and mediation. Implementation of the report's recommendations is an important starting point.

Similarly, only a few governments have prioritized developing specialist capacities to support peace processes. Yet making a successful contribution to a multilateral effort requires knowledgeable staff to ensure that effective policies and programmes underpin these efforts. Building this capacity requires professional development, systems to retain comparative learning from peacemaking efforts and to disseminate best practice, and the political will to act on this knowledge.

Support national and local capacities

Ultimately it is the ability of those in conflict to resolve their differences that is decisive in a negotiated war-to-peace transition. External actors can make important contributions by helping them to build negotiation skills and to address capacity asymmetries between the parties. Leaders may be more inclined to choose to negotiate if they believe negotiations might deliver the desired results. In turn, the negotiations are more likely to be successful when the parties have an effective strategy and skilled negotiators, capable of attaining their interests through peaceful means. Cultivating these capacities is in everyone's interests in the long run. If one side is at a serious disadvantage in terms of their skills and knowledge, the likelihood of anyone coming away from the table satisfied decreases.

Even prior to the emergence of sustained political negotiations, external actors can provide support to governments, armed groups, political parties and civil society actors to prepare them for effective participation in peace processes. They can provide training and capacity building in analysing the conflict and potential solutions to it, policy formulation and negotiation. This is an investment for both the peace process and for later democratic participation in policy processes and 'good politics' after the settlement.

Conciliation Resources is an independent peacebuilding charity with over 15 years of experience working internationally to prevent and resolve violent conflict. Our practical and policy work is informed by the experiences of people living in countries affected or threatened by war. We work with partners in the Caucasus, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, Guinea, India, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Southern Sudan and Uganda. Our efforts to influence peacemaking policy and share the lessons learned include the publication series *Accord: an international review of peace initiatives*.

Designing a peace process support strategy



Supporting effective peace processes

The following set of questions suggests some of the many issues that may be addressed in strategies to support peace processes to resolve conflict.

Getting to the table: given priority?

- **Encouraging the decision to negotiate:** Do policies and strategies toward conflict-affected countries include the explicit aim of helping to create conditions in which parties will choose to negotiate?
- **Leverage and facilitation:** How could a package of incentives and/or sanctions be combined with other, more facilitative measures (such as a skilful and acceptable mediator or better capacities through training, technical advice or study visits) increase the parties' confidence in achieving their goals through a negotiated process?
- **Preparing parties:** Do the conflict parties need technical support to articulate their negotiation strategy and to develop skills and confidence in their ability to negotiate (and later implement) a good agreement? Do fragmented groups need support to reconcile and develop a common platform before they can enter into negotiations with a common adversary?
- **Confidence building:** Do the policies, programmes and statements of external actors help to generate an atmosphere conducive to engagement? Do they indicate that the legitimate interests of all relevant parties will be taken seriously? Are the parties encouraged or assisted to take steps to increase their counterparts' confidence in their good faith in seeking a negotiated solution to the conflict?

Process design: comprehensive enough?

- **Interlocking conflict system:** Is there a strategy to address inter-connected conflicts within a state or within a region? Does the negotiation structure create a comprehensive framework to address the system as a whole, and does it promote a coherent interface with parallel or consecutive negotiating processes?
- **Scope:** If the process begins with fairly limited objectives (such as a ceasefire or arrangements for a transitional government), does it provide for follow-on processes – such as a constituent assembly – to address underlying issues and involve more social and political groups?
- **Negotiating agenda:** Do the items on the negotiation agenda target issues that have generated fault lines in the state and society and are root causes of conflict? Does it include issues of concern to ordinary people (such as land reform or justice for victims)? Are gender concerns incorporated into the negotiating agenda?
- **Public engagement:** Are there efforts to build public confidence in the process? Are there mechanisms to enable constructive public debate and opportunities to feed into negotiations that involve changes to the state structure, constitutional arrangements or core public policies?
- **Negotiated decision-making:** Does the process help to establish a pattern of dialogue, debate and negotiation as the basis for political decision-making and establish functioning working relationships between the parties?

Participation: inclusive enough?

- **Belligerent groups:** How will the process enable the appropriate participation of all the belligerent forces?
- **Political and social groups:** Are there opportunities for political parties (including opposition groups) and key social groups to participate and feed into the peace negotiations and shape agreements?
- **Marginalized stakeholders:** Is the process designed in ways that enable meaningful engagement of women, youth, minorities and indigenous people, and those displaced by the conflict?

Peace agreements: roadmap for a sustainable future?

- **Ownership:** Do the parties feel they have been the principal negotiators of the agreement and feel primary responsibility for implementing it?
- **Implementation:** Does the agreement envision procedures for implementing the provisions? Does it specify procedural mechanisms to address disputes that may arise? Does it envision carefully sequenced incentives for the parties to implement the most difficult provisions? Does it include clear 'sunset clauses' to trigger the end of transitional measures?
- **Legal status:** How will provisions on substantive reforms become legally enforceable? If constitutional reform or major legislation is required, how will this be conducted? If there is a referendum, how can public support be garnered?

External actors: strategic supporters?

- **Engaging external supporters and allies:** Are the external supporters and allies of the belligerent parties willing to encourage them to negotiate and to reach and then implement an agreement? Are there effective communication channels between these external actors to help them synchronize their influence?
- **Strategy coherence – combined effect and sequencing:** What are the different measures and strategies currently in place? What is their combined effect on the respective parties and on their conflict dynamic? What needs to change to generate more effective influence and synergy? How can measures be sequenced to best effect – or at least to ensure that the timing does not undermine initiatives aimed at long-term resolution?
- **Strategic complementarity:** Are there workable mechanisms among external stakeholders and intermediaries to give priority to peacemaking initiatives and harmonize influence? Are there appropriate forums to develop and refine joint strategies?

Cover photo: Alvaro de Soto (right, centre) consulting with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (left, front) during a Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East, July 2006.

Source: UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras