

MEDIATING INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS

Muzaffer Ercan YILMAZ*

ABSTRACT

This article provides a descriptive analysis of how international mediation, as a conflict resolution strategy, works in situations of international conflict. Starting with a brief discussion on conditions affecting the acceptance and success of mediation, the study explains the actual working process of mediation step by step, talking about various roles of mediators, in this regard. Several suggestions are also made to overcome many shortcomings of international mediation in concluding the study.

Keywords: *International Mediation, International Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Management, Third-Party Intervention.*

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, uluslararası çatışmalarda bir uyuşmazlık çözüm stratejisi olarak uluslararası arabuluculuğun nasıl işlediğine dair betimleyici bir analiz ortaya koymaktadır. Arabuluculuğa uygun şartlara ilişkin kısa bir tartışma ile başlayan çalışma, uluslararası arabuluculuk sürecinin işleyişini detaylı bir biçimde özetlemekte ve bu bağlamda süreç genelinde arabulucuların farklı rollerine değinmektedir. Uluslararası arabuluculuğun bazı zayıf yönlerine de işaret eden çalışma, söz konusu zayıf yönlerin nasıl giderilebileceğine dair bir takım önerilerle son bulmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Uluslararası Arabuluculuk, Uluslararası Uyuşmazlık, Uyuşmazlık Çözümü, Uyuşmazlık Yönetimi, Üçüncü Parti Müdahalesi.*

Introduction

International conflicts are often the subject of mediation. We do not know how common mediation was in earlier history, but studies of modern international relations reveal that it has been a frequent occurrence since the Congress of

* Doç. Dr., Balıkesir Üniversitesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü (muzaffer_ercan@yahoo.com)
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Vienna of 1915. It remains so in the post-Cold War era. Although the end of the Cold War has resulted in many changes in international politics, it has neither reduced the incidence of international conflicts, nor the tendency to submit them to mediation.

As it is present in human relations, conflict is also an undeniable fact of international relations. The term conflict can be defined, in a generic sense, as an expressed struggle between two or more parties over resources, power or values (Coser, 1967). By extension, the term international conflict can be defined to refer to such inter-state struggles, as well as intra-state ones that are affected by the involvement of external parties. Indeed, when external parties provide political, economic and military assistance or asylum and bases for actors involved in domestic struggles, intra-state conflicts inevitably assume an international dimension.

Mediation, on the other hand, is a form of third-party intervention in a situation of conflict aimed at restoring peace between or among the parties. Peace, here, can be defined as both negative and positive peace. Negative peace simply refers to the absence of physical violence. Positive peace is not limited with lack of physical violence. It also involves harmony and cooperation among actors (Rapoport, 1992). Positive peace, thus, refers to such a stable situation that mediators, in handling international conflicts, eventually want to achieve.

Mediation differs from other types of third-party intervention in that it is not related to use of force. Its aim is to bring a conflict to a settlement acceptable to both sides on a voluntary basis (Moore, 2003: 17-18). Mediation is also a political process with no advance commitment from the parties to accept the mediator's ideas of formulas. In this regard, it differs from arbitration that employs judicial procedure and issues a verdict that the parties have committed themselves beforehand to accept (See, Silverman, 2008). Mediation can be best thought of as a dialogue or negotiation with the involvement of a third-party. It is, therefore, an extension of the negotiation process, extending the bargaining into a new format, and using a mediator who can contribute new variables and dynamics to the interaction of disputants.

The purpose of this article is to provide a descriptive analysis of how international mediation works in situations of international conflict. Starting with a brief discussion on certain conditions affecting the acceptance and success of mediation, the study explains the actual working process in detail, talking about

various roles of mediators as well. Several suggestions are also made to overcome many shortcomings of international mediation in concluding the study.

Situations Suitable for Mediation

Mediation activities in international conflicts can be, and historically have been, carried out by a wide variety of mediators, ranging from individuals, such as, United States Secretary of State or King of Jordan, to such organizations as the United Nations, International Committee of Red Cross, and non-governmental organizations, in general (See, Zartman and Touval, 1985; Sisk, 2009). Such a heterogeneous collection of mediators raises questions about factors contributing to the acceptance of mediation, as well as success of the mediation process.

The Question of Timing

First of all, to accomplish their purposes, mediators must be made acceptable to conflicting parties. Yet mediators often meet initial rejection from the parties, who unilaterally tend to think that they would eventually be victorious. Hence, almost all mediators or mediating bodies first confront a crucial problem of timing. That is, when to intervene?

The simplest answer to this question would be that mediators must somehow convince the parties in conflict of the value of their services. Yet this may not be as easy as it sounds. Most analysts and practitioners of mediation have argued that simple convincing usually does not work. In order for the parties to become really “convinced”, their conflict must be “ripe”.

The term “ripeness” was coined in conflict resolution literature by I. William Zartman and it basically refers to the condition of a “mutually hurting stalemate”. A mutually hurting stalemate begins when one side realizes that it is unable to achieve its aims, resolve the problem, or win the conflict by itself; it is completed when the other side reaches the same conclusion. Each party, then, begins to feel uncomfortable in the costly dead end that it has reached. Both sides must view this plateau not as a momentary resting ground, but as a flat, unpleasant terrain stretching into the future, providing no later possibilities for decisive escalation or graceful escape (Zartman and Touval, 1996: 452-453). As a result, losing hope for victory and wanting to avoid further costs, the parties start to look

for a convenient third-party that could make them settled. At this point, the conflict is considered ripe for a third-party intervention.

Mediation plays upon the parties' perception of having reached an intolerable situation. In fact, without this perception, mediator must depend on persuading the parties that breaking out of their deadlock is impossible. Hence, deadlock cannot be seen as a temporary stalemate, to be easily resolved in one's favor by a little effort. Rather, each party must recognize its opponent's strength, as well as the cost of staying in the stalemate.

For the mediator, this means cultivating each side's perception that its unilateral policy option is a more expensive, less likely way of achieving an acceptable outcome than the policy of negotiation. A plateau is, thus, as much a matter of perception as of reality for the parties and as much a subject of persuasion as of timing for the mediator. Successful exploitation of a plateau shifts both sides from a combative mentality to a conciliatory mentality (Zartman and Touval, 1996: 453).

The Qualities of Mediators

Personal qualities also matter. If mediators are to be accepted and successfully handle the mediation process, they must have certain qualities, which can be summarized as follows:

First of all, a mediator should have a low level of direct interest in the eventual outcome of the conflict. In other words, the aim of the mediator should not clash, or directly clash, with the aim of the parties.

The intervention of mediators is often legitimized by the goal of conflict reduction. In reality, however, the desire to prevent conflict and make peace as the only motive is hardly the case. Especially nation-states frequently use mediation as a foreign policy instrument. For example, in some cases, a conflict may threaten to escalate and draw in additional parties. States fearing such escalation and expansion may seek to reduce the conflict to avoid becoming involved in hostilities. In some others, states may intervene a conflict to increase their influence on the parties. They may hope to win the gratitude of one or both conflicting parties, and this gratitude is reserved to be used for a later purpose. States may also be motivated by the desire to preserve the status quo, as a serious

conflict between two or more states has a potential to upset a regional balance or provide opportunities for a rival power to increase its influence.

The motives of international organizations are somewhat more complex than those of states. Keeping peace or building peace is the main reason for most international organizations and is, therefore, enshrined in their character (Vedder, 2007). However, inter-governmental organizations are subject to the particular policies and interests of their member-states. For instance, the United Nations was frequently paralyzed by the Cold War clashes and hence engaged in peacemaking much less than its charter suggested (Yılmaz, 2005a: 16-17). Regional organizations were not hindered by the Cold War to the same extent as the United Nations, but since mediation necessities agreement among the organizations' most influential members, regional organizations were not as actively engaged in peacemaking as they might have been either.

As a result, mediators' often-claimed aim of conflict reduction is mostly intertwined with other motives, perhaps best described within the context of self-interest or power politics. Yet the important point here is that while third-parties may seek some benefits out of their intervention, and this can be natural, in a way, their action ought not to threaten any immediate interests of the parties in conflict. Otherwise, the parties may fear exploitation and refuse third-party intervention. In order for them to accept outside help, they must convince that the relevant third-party has no direct stake in the conflict in providing assistance.

Acceptance of mediation depends on the parties' expectation of attractive outcomes for themselves as well. The most obvious expectation, in this respect, is that mediation will produce an outcome more favorable than the outcome gained by continued conflict; that is, a way out. The parties in conflict also hope that mediation will produce a settlement when direct negotiation is not possible, or will provide a more favorable settlement than can be achieved by direct negotiation. Although the adversary may not have a similar assessment, it may cooperate with the mediator if it feels that rejection would cause even greater harm.

Conflicting parties may also accept mediation in the hope that the mediator will reduce some of the risks entailed in making concessions and the cost incurred in conflict, protecting, thus, their image and reputation as they move toward a compromise. Besides, they may believe that a mediator's involvement implies a guarantee for the final agreement, hence reducing the danger of being violated. Consequently, the acceptance of mediation is based on such cost-benefit

calculations. Thus, third-parties must be capable of serving the expectations and needs of the parties in conflict.

Finally, to be welcomed by the parties and to successfully handle the mediation process, mediators should possess basic mediation skills and assume a variety of roles, including -but not limited to- the followings:

- The opener of communication channels, initiating communication or facilitating better communication if the parties are already negotiating.
- The trainer, educating unskilled or unprepared negotiators in the bargaining process.
- The resource expander, providing procedural assistance to the parties and linking them to outside experts and resources that may enable them to enlarge acceptable resolution options.
- The problem explorer, enabling the parties to examine their issues from a variety of viewpoints, calling for specific exercises and thought processes which might move them from conflictive thinking to creative design as well.
- The legitimizer, helping the parties to recognize the rights and interests of others to be involved in negotiations.
- The leader, taking the initiative to move the negotiations forward by procedural or substantive suggestions (See, Bowling and Hoffman, 2004; Bercovitch and Gartner; 2009).

How Does The Mediation Process Work?

Once a mediator has gained a commitment to mediate, s/he must first collect relevant data about the conflict and the parties involved in it. This task is typically conducted before the parties get together and negotiations begin. Data collection enables the mediator to identify key issues, as well as relational problems, if exist, between the parties. Operating from an accurate information base, the mediator can also prevent, during the mediation process, unnecessary conflicts resulting from miscommunication or misperception.

Mediators use several procedures to collect data, which typically include direct observation, review of secondary sources, and interviewing with relevant people (See, Amster, 2008). These procedures are used either individually or in combination to provide more accurate or complete information about a given conflict. It should be also noted that in many international conflicts, conflicting

parties are easy to identify and the mediator can easily determine from whom to collect data. Yet in many conflicts in which there are multiple disputants and the parties are not highly visible, the mediator must identify relevant parties to collect data.

The following step is the interpretation of data. There is no single procedure used by mediators to interpret information about a conflict. Most mediators begin to dissect and analyze a conflict by dividing the unrealistic causes from those that are realistic. Unrealistic causes of conflict usually include misperceptions not based on objective reality, miscommunication, strong emotions, and confusion over data. Realistic causes, on the other hand, include actual competing substantive or psychological interests. By dividing the causes of conflict into realistic and unrealistic categories, mediators make it possible to first address unrealistic problems and then focus on realistic causes of conflict.

After data is collected and analyzed, the task that remains before any direct intervention is the design of a mediation plan. A mediation plan is a sequence of procedural steps initiated by the intervenor that will assist negotiators in exploring and reaching an agreement. The plan's detail depends on the type and complexity of the conflict, as well as mediator's preferences. Some mediators prefer a more deliberative planning process that allows them to consider all the options and formulate a comprehensive strategy. Others prefer to design the plan as the issues and dynamics unfold. Obviously, there is no one right way to design a mediation plan. Mediators should select the process with which they are most comfortable or which is best suited to a particular situation.

Although mediation planning can occur throughout a conflict, the mediator should especially be an active planner in the beginning of intervention. Having a good plan from the beginning enables mediators to successfully handle the conflict and to have control over the mediation process.

Following the stages of data collection, analysis of the conflict, and planning, the actual mediation process can start. The mediators who intervene international conflicts basically use two modes to accomplish their purposes, *communication* and *formulation*, in that order.

When conflict has made direct contact between the parties impossible, thereby preventing them from talking to each other and from making concession without appearing weak or losing face, the mediator can serve as communicator.

In this situation, it simply acts as a conduit, opening contacts and carrying messages. This role is essentially passive, with no substantive contribution by the mediator.

Yet mediators should play a more active role in dealing with strong emotions and building trust between the parties. At the start of negotiations, disputants typically feel angry, hurt, frustrated, and distrustful. For rational discussions on substantive issues to occur, the impact of negative emotions must be managed and minimized by mediators.

Mediators can respond to strong emotions in basically two ways:

- (1) By creating opportunities for parties to express their emotions.
- (2) By suppressing their emotions.

If one party or both parties need a psychological release for repressed emotions and are unable to focus on substantive issues until such psychological release occurs, the mediator can pursue strategies for venting emotions. This can be best done in caucuses, as venting emotions has a potential to jeopardize negotiations in joint sessions. A caucus is a private meeting, mostly in a separate location, between the mediator and one of the conflicting parties (See, Moore, 1987). In the absence of the other side, the party can express his or her emotions to the mediator freely, whereby psychological release can be attained this way.

In some situations, however, emotional expression may be counterproductive and may lead to unnecessary escalation. Particularly when there is a history of violence or when one or more parties have a low degree of impulse control, it may be preferable for mediators to structure negotiations in order to limit emotional expression. This may include explicit guidelines about how parties will communicate, rules that limit communication between disputants and encourage them to talk only to or through the mediator, and physical separation of the parties so that they have few or no face-to-face interactions. In the last model, the mediator performs a type of shuttle diplomacy and conveys messages between the parties.

Trust between negotiators, on the other hand, is usually built incrementally over time. Through a succession of promises and congruent actions that reinforce the belief that commitments will be carried out, negotiators gradually build a relationship of trust. Mediators may help negotiators in building a trusting

relationship by encouraging them to make a variety of moves designed to increase credibility. Some of the moves include encouraging negotiators to:

- Make consistently congruent statements that are clear and do not contradict previous statements.
- Perform symbolic actions that demonstrate good faith in negotiating, such as negotiating at a time or place that is convenient for the other party, making minor concessions that indicate a willingness to negotiate.
- Ask for help, hence acknowledging the need for assistance from the other party.
- Avoid making threats.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the other side's concerns from time to time (Moore, 2003: 179-180).

Although all these moves should be carried out by the parties, the mediator can be a catalyst for them.

Mediators can also make specific interventions that may build trust between parties and change their perceptions. Some of these moves may include identifying disputants' personal points in common (such as geographical or educational background, or intellectual, recreational or religious concerns), creating situations in which the parties must perform a joint task, translating one party's perceptions to the other, facilitating a discussion of their perceptions of each other, and verbally rewarding the parties for their cooperation (Fisher, 1978).

If the parties in conflict begin to communicate successfully and some degree of trust is built between them with the help of the mediator, negotiation can start on particular issues in depth. In identifying and framing issues, mediators should be careful to state the problem clearly and in a manner that favors neither side, nor makes one party blameworthy. Ideally, the mediator should depersonalize issues and put them outside the relationship between the disputants. The parties can then focus on their issues in a more objective manner.

This second mode of mediation requires the mediator to enter into the substance of the negotiation. Since a conflict may not only impede communications between parties, but be so encompassing that it prevents them

from conceiving ways out of the dispute, the parties need a mediator as formulator too. In this regard, the main functions of a mediator typically include:

- Providing ideas or possible solutions, especially when the parties are deadlocked.
- Initiating proposals which originate from one or other party, but which could not be advanced for fear of revealing weakness or uncertainty.
- De-committing the parties by providing some formula by which they can gracefully abandon previous positions to which public acts and statements have heavily committed them.
- Acting as a substitute source of ideas or proposals (See, Stitt, 2004).

A mediator's suggestions for achieving a solution may have several advantages over moves initiated by disputant themselves.

First, there is much research to suggest that suggestions by an impartial third-party may be more readily trusted and accepted by disputants than those suggested by a party with substantive concerns in the conflict's outcome.

In the same way, the mediator's suggestions may be accorded more credibility. The parties may be more willing to try a procedure, since they tend to believe the mediator would not make a poor suggestion.

Also, the mediator can take some responsibility for the success or failure of a negotiation procedure. Parties in conflict are often reluctant to initiate new methods because they might have to bear the ill will of the other side. Yet the mediator, by sharing the responsibility, takes the burden on himself or herself and removes the party from the risk of blame.

Lastly, the mediator may be of assistance, since he or she expends the time and energy to identify the appropriate procedure. Usually, conflicting parties develop a procedure that would suit their needs if given necessary time and resources, but these are not always available. The mediator can accelerate the transition and avoid the accumulation of negative experiences that may result from a struggle over procedure through providing a viable process for option generation.

Resolution options must satisfy the substantive, as well as psychological interests of the parties. The degree to which interests are met determines how

strong the agreement will be. Roger Fisher identifies some of the basic characteristics of strong agreements. To Fisher, strong agreements are those that include a mutually acceptable solution, that include all the details in their final form, and that provide for the termination of the conflict without the requirement of future conditional performance (Fisher, 1978).

Naturally, mediators want the parties to reach the strongest agreement possible, but this may not always be possible. Sometimes, a solution that partially settles issues, that is provisional, and that elaborates general principles may be preferable to no solution at all.

In fact, when the parties reach a negotiated agreement, the duty of a mediator does not stop there. Ideally, mediators should monitor the implications of the agreement and take necessary measures to sustain it so that they can ensure its survival and durability.

In the final analysis, a negotiated peace agreement is an imperfect road map to the future. It shows the direction the parties must move if they are to consolidate the peace, but it mostly does not tell them how to get there, except in general terms. New problems can emerge, which should be accommodated within the framework of the settlement. Also, there are frequently major unresolved issues at the time an agreement is reached. These issues remain the subject of subsequent negotiations. Further, the act of signing an agreement does not mean that the parties necessarily wish to fulfill all of their commitments under the agreement. Thus, the risk of sliding back into confrontation is usually high in the early stages of the peace process. Even after a modicum of trust is built up between the parties, it can be undermined by perceived violations or failures of compliance.

Hence, one of the key functions of mediators is to foster trust between warring factions by monitoring compliance and holding them accountable to their negotiated commitments. As needed, mediators should play their traditional mediation role for continuing negotiations over intractable issues left out of the agreement as well (See, Bercovitch and Jackson, 2009).

Major Challenges for Mediation

In pursuing the goal of stopping violence and resolving a conflict, mediators are often confronted by many serious challenges. Some of the major ones can be summarized as follows.

First, mediators usually face a dilemma as to whether they should facilitate an attainable settlement that may violate international norms or hold out for one that is consistent with principles of justice adopted by the international community. It is possible that promoting a settlement that is perhaps attainable, but inconsistent with international norms, might cause serious long-term injury to international peace and security. So should mediators work for terms that seem attainable in spite of their corrosive long-term effects? Viewing norms as merely tentative and conditional propositions is destructive to order. Yet eschewing settlements that do not conform to established norms is also destructive to peace and order. Although this dilemma is not new, it has become particularly pressing for international mediators in recent years.

Second, there is a need to find alternative means of regulating and resolving violent international conflicts, especially violent ethnic conflicts that have dominated the post-Cold War era as the principal sources of current conflicts (See, Yılmaz, 2007). Such alternative means would include creative approaches to de-escalating potential violence, shifting to nonviolent means once violence has actually erupted, and addressing post-violence trauma. In the international arena, research and interventions in preventive diplomacy, and the development of peace accord systems that utilize mediation on the ground are significant new steps toward control of violent conflicts (See, Cahill, 2000; Ramcharan, 2008). Yet certainly more work needs to be done to explore the roles of mediators in such contexts.

Third, research is also needed on what have come to be called “intractable conflicts”. These are conflicts where trust, respect, cognitive empathy, and understanding between parties are so lacking that disputants are unable to move toward discussion of, or agreement on, any substantive issues that divide them. They are locked into a cycle of negative intimacy that, without assistance, they appear to be unable to break out of. Until new procedures are developed to break this type and cycle of negative conflict, many disputes will remain unmanageable. This topic is especially a critical research focus and area of experimentation.

Finally, more financial and institutional support is needed for international mediators if they work effectively in handling situations of international conflict. Lack of adequate resources often seriously limit the potentials of mediators, as mediation activities require not just time, but a lot of expenses. Easing this issue necessitates some degree of institutionalization as well, but unfortunately most mediation activities at the international level have been, and still are, performed virtually on an *ad-hoc* basis.

Nurturing Peace

Despite these challenges, nonetheless, it is an ethical duty for mediators to pursue positive peace between the parties as much as possible with available resources. Thus, the roles of mediators do not stop when a negotiated agreement is reached, since the act of signing a peace agreement between political elites does not automatically create the result that fighting groups immediately lay down their arms and return to civilian life. Most of the time, mutual hostilities among ordinary people remain unchanged in the aftermath of negotiated agreements. These undermine the acceptance, as well as implementation, of peace at the societal level. Therefore, reaching peace between formal negotiators is an important step, but it is not enough for a durable, larger peace. The publics in conflict, too, should be prepared to that end.

This, indeed, constitutes the most challenging area for mediators. In transforming hostile relationships harming the parties at large, multi-tracked intervention strategies should be utilized.

One strategy, in this regard, would be promoting common goals and interdependence between hostile groups. Having and working on common goals would enhance bonds between the groups in conflict in a number of ways. One would be reducing the salience of group boundaries; that is, people who are working toward common goals are in some sense members of the same group, and thus are not so likely to be antagonistic towards one another. Another would be by a reinforcement mechanism; as the two parties work together, each of them rewards the other and produces a sense of gratitude and warmth in the other. Pursuing common goals also means that each party sees itself as working on behalf of the other, a view that is likely to foster positive attitudes (Pruitt et al., 2004: 136-137).

Another strategy would be designing, or re-designing, the system of education for peace. Formal education is one way that national culture and historical enmities are transmitted from generation to generation. Yet education is a tool that can also be used to foster intellectual and moral qualities, such as critical thinking, openness, skepticism, objectivity, and respect for cultural differences. Education of that sort is usually called peace education (See, Harris and Morrison, 2003). Peace education would be a powerful weapon in the hands of any peace builder, for the whole process of child raising may have a critical impact on attitudes and beliefs in later life. In addition, if the hostile attitudes and perceptions of one generation are not passed on to the next, then the younger generation might be able to deal with inter-group problems in a more constructive manner.

Mediators should also cope with stereotypes and try to build trust between adversary groups. In almost all violent international conflicts, the parties develop a distrust of one another in the form of negative images. Due to these images, they see and acknowledge negative aspects of each other that fit or support the stereotype, and ignore other aspects that do not fit (See, Yılmaz, 2005b). This trend, in turn, inhibits the search for a peaceful solution or the acceptance of a negotiated agreement reached at the formal level. Therefore, establishing trust between conflicting publics often emerges as an important pre-requisite of constructive inter-communal dialogue.

In his classical study, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1979), Gordon W. Allport sets out several ways that prejudice can be reduced at the community level. To Allport, some of the main strategies include contact and acquaintance programs (i.e., mutually-arranged festivals, community conferences, etc.), positive action by the mass media, and exhortation by local community leaders or opinion makers, such as politicians, academics, writers, and so on.

A significant way to overcome relational issues would also be “track-two diplomacy”. One of the pioneers of track-two diplomacy, both as a theorist and as a practitioner, Joseph V. Montville, defines the term as “an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations aiming to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict (Montville, 1990: 162)”. The approach is derived from the seminal work of John Burton and Herbert C. Kelman (Burton, 1969, 1979, 1984; Kelman, 1972). It is rooted in the social-psychological

assumption that contact and mutual communication is necessary to normalize hostile relationships.

The paradigmatic application of track-two diplomacy is represented by problem-solving workshops, arranged and facilitated by, ideally, psychologically-sensitive third-parties. Problem-solving workshops are intensive, private, and non-binding meetings between politically influential (but unofficial) representatives of conflicting parties (i.e., Greek and Turkish Cypriots or Israelis and Palestinians) drawn from the mainstream of their respective communities.

Problem-solving workshops provide a setting in which brainstorming and idea-exchanges can occur. Informal discussions create an opportunity for participants to examine the root causes of, and the underlying human needs in, conflict, and to identify obstacles to better relationships. Furthermore, by allowing face-to-face communication, problem-solving workshops may help participants arrest the dehumanization process, overcome psychological barriers, and focus on relation building. As a result, reason, rather than emotion, would become the dynamic factor of their future interaction. Best of all, any changes at the level of individuals in the form of new insights and ideas, resulting from the micro-level process of workshops, can then be fed back into the political debate and decision making in hostile communities, hence becoming vehicles for change at the macro level (See, Kelman, 1996; Diamond and McDonald, 1996).

As a matter of fact, many practical applications of track-two diplomacy confirm that the approach makes a contribution to the overall peace process. For instance, Herbert C. Kelman, who conducted a significant number of problem-solving workshops between the Israelis and Palestinians before the historic Oslo Accords in 1993, observed that the workshops allowed the participants to gain insights into the perspective of the other party, to create a new climate of trust, and to develop greater awareness of how the other party may have changed (Kelman, 1990). To some conflict analysts, the Oslo Accords were, indeed, made possible by the cumulative results of intensive problem-solving workshops carried out over a period of years (Babbitt and d'Estree, 1996: 521).

Similarly, Edward E. Azar, who also organized several workshop exercises around the Lebanese and Sri Lankan conflicts, claimed that the workshops allowed the parties to discover their common needs and values, to establish informal networks, and to widen their agendas towards a mutually acceptable solution (Azar, 1990).

The utility of track-two diplomacy was also observed by “The Center for Multi-Track Diplomacy”, a Washington D.C.-based non-governmental organization, in re-humanizing the relationship between the parties in conflict, in analyzing the problem in a freer way, and in generating a wide range of alternatives for resolution (Diamond and McDonald, 1996; McDonald, 2002).

Concluding Remarks

As the above arguments attest, while international conflict is an omnipresent phenomenon of international interactions, mediation is a significant way of third-party intervention that can minimize destructive consequences of international conflict and make an important contribution to the process of peaceful resolution.

It is a welcoming development that the use of mediation has grown tremendously in the post-Cold War era in conjunction with the growth of international cooperation. Yet for international mediation to achieve even broader utilization as a means of international conflict resolution, several developments need to occur.

First, politicians and publics need to be informed about the mediation process and its benefits. Non-governmental organizations and the United Nations special agencies can be particularly helpful, in this respect. Despite its increasing use, mediation is still underutilized, not because of its lack of applicability, but because those involved in conflict are often not aware of mediation’s benefits.

Second, mediation itself requires more research to become a more effective tool of international conflict resolution. Research is especially needed on how mediators enable parties to manage intense emotional multiparty conflicts, imbalances of power, and cultural variations in the mediation process.

Third, international mediation must somehow become institutionalized. Mediation, at the international level, has long been conducted basically on an *ad-hoc* basis. For greater success, professional mediation services should be readily available. Particularly the United Nations can take action to that end as the main guardian of international peace and security. Although the United Nations has been relatively successful in keeping violent conflicts around the globe calm by deploying peacekeeping forces for over six decades, very few initiatives to

promote professional international mediation services have so far taken place. This should be an area of priority in which future reform efforts of the organization must go.

Finally, funding must be developed to promote the growth of international mediation organizations. Funding can come from governmental agencies, the business sector, foundations, as well as individuals believing in, and working for, global peace. The stronger the budget, the more likely the mediation services can be successful in coping with international conflicts, as interventions, especially multi-tracked interventions, mostly require high amounts of expense.

In conclusion, people around the world today are in need of effective means to manage and resolve their conflicts. Mediation has been proven itself in the past, as well as at present, to be a helpful tool in accomplishing this goal in a variety of situations of international conflict. Mediation can function even better as a conflict resolution strategy if international actors increasingly believe in its utility and give sincere supports to overcome its weaknesses.

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