



CHAPTER 7

Adapting to Uncertainty: What Have We Learned from Mediation and Conflict Resolution in Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria

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INTRODUCTION

In the *Lost Art of Peacemaking*, David Harland traces the history of international mediation since the end of the Cold War. He recounts many of the great successes of international mediation but argues that since 2008 the number of successful mediations has declined (Harland 2018). He lists

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C. de Coning et al. (eds.), *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution*, Sustainable Development Goals Series,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92577-2_7

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a string of failures in Sri Lanka, Libya, Darfur, South Sudan, Yemen, and Syria and points out that the few successful mediations that were achieved over the last decade and a half were mostly mediated by non–United Nations-led efforts (see also Lehti 2020; Paffenholz 2021). Harland argues that a number of developments have significantly disrupted the international mediation space, including geopolitical rivalry, the atomization of conflict, and the internationalization of internal conflicts.

In this volume, we have argued that the developments Harland and others describe have disrupted the mainstream liberal peace approach to mediation. The underlying theory of change that informs the liberal peace approach is a deductive linear causal model, whereby the outcome is assumed to be more or less guaranteed if the liberal peace design is followed, that is, it is a determined-design model (Eriksen 2009). Since at least the 2008 financial crisis, the success of the liberal peace model has been under increasing pressure (Richmond 2015). The global consequences of the negative impact of the growth imperative on the environment; the growing inequality between the superrich and the rest of the world's population, which manifested both within liberal states and between the liberal club and the rest of the world; and the human suffering and chaos introduced by the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Syria all contributed to the rapid erosion of the global public trust in the moral superiority and functional efficacy of the liberal peace model. The combined effect of the rise of China and the increasing influence of a number of regional and middle powers, corporations, and nonstate actors with global impact, the reemergence of fascist populism in the West and violent extremism across its peripheries, and the disruptive effect of social media and other new technologies have introduced an unprecedented level of turbulence in an increasingly closely connected global system. While complexity is not new, these developments have accentuated the diversity of actors and variety of factors, and therefore have further increased the uncertainty and unpredictability that would be mediators have to take into account in any attempt to resolve a particular conflict.

With more analysts, policymakers, and practitioners advocating for a new twenty-first-century approach to mediation, it is now increasingly recognized that old methods designed for interstate disputes and subsequently adjusted to intra-state conflicts are insufficient to respond to today's complex transnational armed conflicts (Lehti 2019, 232; Paffenholz 2021). In this book, we have introduced the Adaptive Mediation approach that is specifically designed to cope with uncertainty

and that offers mediators an alternative to the linear, staged, normative, and individualistic liberal peace models of mediation (Bagshaw and Porter 2013). Adaptive Mediation is a facilitated process whereby the content of agreements emerges from among the parties to the conflict themselves, informed by the context within which the conflict is situated.

This book has attempted to deepen our understanding of the Adaptive Mediation approach and how it can be practiced by extracting empirical evidence from four diverse case studies—Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria—in an effort to generate insights into how mediators can apply adaptive mediation approaches to resolve and transform contemporary and future armed conflicts. In this concluding chapter, we take stock of what we have learned from the case studies about the concept and practice of Adaptive Mediation. It is important to note that we are retroactively applying the Adaptive Mediation approach to these cases. Adaptive Mediation is a new concept that was not consciously implemented in any of these four cases. However, we analyze these cases to see if there were elements of an Adaptive Mediation approach in the mediation styles applied and to identify lessons from those approaches and the results they have achieved.

The main research question the book attempted to address is how mediators can cope with and adapt to uncertainty and complexity in contemporary armed conflicts. In order to consider this question in a variety of cases, the case study authors have reflected on a number of other questions, including the following: What are the key characteristics of standard or alternative, and formal or informal, mediation practices in each of the cases? How did the mediators or parties to the conflict adapt or fail to adapt to uncertainty and complexity in each case? Which mediation best practices or lessons learned can we extract from the case studies?

Before we consider some of the key lessons that have emerged from the case studies, we present a brief recap of the Adaptive Mediation approach.

ADAPTIVE MEDIATION

The standard or mainstream mediation method that has emerged after the Cold War can be described as determined-designed thinking. It is based on the assumption that mediation experts have the agency to analyze a conflict, identify its root causes, and design solutions for the conflict based on international norms (liberal peace ideology) and best practices (lessons based on past successes and failures). Mediation in this context is

understood as a process through which the parties—relying on the information, analysis, best practices, and options presented by the expert mediators—are led through a facilitated process that ends with the parties agreeing on a version of the solutions presented to them, modestly adapted to reflect local realities and the most important interests of the parties. In practice, most of the limited solutions offered follow a standard range of options, and, as a result, most peace agreements reached over this period share, at their core, a similar logic: a transitional power-sharing period during which state institutions are developed or restored according to liberal peace norms, including in some cases a constitutional review process, followed by democratic elections.

The underlying theory of change of this determined-design model is that democracy leads to good governance, good governance leads to stability, and stability leads to peace and prosperity for all. Unfortunately, electoral politics can—without sufficiently developed formal and informal institutions to manage the tensions, conflict, and greed it generates—foster new waves of violent conflict and political systems in which one set of elites, often linked to whichever ethnic group happened to form the majority of the population, capture and corrupt the state to serve its own interests. As a result, electoral politics often generates violence and democracy has not always improved governance or resulted in stability. The result of these determined-design mediation processes, measured against the extent to which they led to a self-sustainable peace process, seems to be less than 50 percent over ten years (Collier et al. 2003).

The determined-design theory of change is flawed because social systems are empirically complex. Complex systems, including social systems, are highly dynamic, nonlinear, and emergent. This uncertainty is an intrinsic quality of complex adaptive systems, not a result of imperfect knowledge or inadequate analysis, planning, or implementation. This recognition has specific implications for the way we can plan and undertake mediation, one of which is the recognition that what has worked in one setting cannot be replicated in another. This irreproducibility is one of the core characteristics of complex systems.

The Adaptive Mediation approach provides us with a methodology for coping with this complexity, uncertainty, and irreproducibility. Firstly, it recognizes that a conflict analysis should not be developed by experts and presented to the parties to the conflict. Rather, it must emerge from collaborative engagement with the parties to the conflict and from an inductive iterative adaptive engagement with the context. Arriving at a shared

understanding of the conflict is the first building block of the adaptive mediation process and a prerequisite for a self-sustainable mediated settlement. Adaptive Mediation also recognizes that such an analysis needs to be an ongoing and iterative process. As the social dynamics that influence the conflict are continuously evolving, so should the analysis informing the mediation.

Secondly, based on such a shared understanding, the parties to the conflict should generate their own potential range of settlement options. This collaborative process builds confidence, educates each of the parties about their respective world views and underlying assumptions, and broadens the scope of potential solutions beyond the narrow range that parties typically enter a negotiation with. Generating future options can also be complemented with associated collaborative and inclusive processes such as national dialogues or other forms of popular consultation. The process of generating and considering options is an iterative adaptive process that utilizes repeated cycles of variety and selection to reduce and ultimately settle on a shared set of agreed future pathways.

Thirdly, Adaptive Mediation recognizes that a mediation process is not limited to one series of talks and one agreement but is instead a transition process that typically spans decades and includes negotiations and agreements on many aspects of the social contract. It thus takes a whole-of-system, relational, and spatial approach that is open-ended, fluid, and flexible. Agreements should thus include mechanisms that anticipate the need for ongoing conflict prevention and resolution.

Lastly, Adaptive Mediation is an approach that shifts the focus of mediation away from the mainstream idealization and fixation on the mediator, the mediation table, and the settlement agreement. Instead, it approaches mediation as a participatory, adaptive, and iterative facilitation process that accompanies a society on its journey from conflict to sustainable peace.

The core principles of the Adaptive Mediation approach can be summarized as follows:

1. A recognition that social systems are complex and thus highly dynamic and nonlinear. This means that their behavior is inherently uncertain and unpredictable.
2. In order to make sense of such complex conflict systems and to influence them—while recognizing that our agency to understand and influence such complex systems is limited—we need to employ an inductive adaptive theory of change that is based in discovery and learning through iterative cycles of experimentation and feedback.

3. As the ultimate aim is to achieve self-sustainable peace, and the aim of peace mediation is to generate self-sustainable peace agreements, the mediation process needs to enable the maximum participation of the parties themselves in the emergence of an agreement. This means the mediators need to limit their role to process facilitation and allow the content of the agreements to emerge from the self-organizing processes of the negotiations among the parties themselves.

Adaptive Mediation thus differs from the mainstream determined-design and directed-mediation model in that it is an approach that is specifically designed to cope with the uncertainty, unpredictability, and irreproducibility inherent in complex social change process. Adaptive Mediation is a process that is aimed at empowering the parties participating in the mediation to generate solutions themselves. For a peace agreement to be self-sustainable, it has to emerge from a collaborative process owned by the parties to the conflict and it has to emerge from an inductive iterative adaptive engagement with the context. The role of the mediator is limited to facilitating the process. Adaptive Mediation is especially concerned with enhancing the self-sustainability of peace agreements and in this context understand the role of the mediator as facilitating a process of emergent self-organization.

When this approach is applied to conflict analyses, planning, monitoring, and evaluation, the ability of mediation processes to navigate uncertainty and adapt to changing dynamics should be enhanced. In order for more resilient and more self-sustainable agreements to emerge, Adaptive Mediation requires mediators to apply a light touch that encourages greater interdependence among the parties and discourages dependence upon the mediator. As a result, utilizing an Adaptive Mediation approach should result in generating peace agreements that are more locally grounded, self-sustainable, and resilient to setbacks and shocks. In this concluding chapter, we assess the four case studies to see if Adaptive Mediation approaches have yielded these results.

Lehti (2019, 96) underlines that the term “adaptive” refers, in de Coning’s theory, on the one hand to resilient and self-organizing societies that are adaptive and on the other hand to the peacemakers’ approach. Peacemakers must adapt their actions to the ambiguity of complex conflicts and realize that all analytical methods are only provisional and part of a continuously iterative learning process. As a result, mediators and peace-builders recognize that there is not an absolute and correct solution to

complex problems, and that thinking of peace processes in terms of failure and success is meaningless. Lehti (2019, 97) highlights that adaptive peacebuilding opens a new perspective that is also relevant to mediation and dialogue. If mediators combine the conflict transformation approach with complexity thinking, this will offer fresh substance to what Bercovitch (2002) referred to as the basic essence of peace mediation: transforming the parties' perceptions and behavior.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM MEDIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN COLOMBIA, MOZAMBIQUE, THE PHILIPPINES, AND SYRIA?

When considering the four cases—Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria—and taking into account the research questions this volume aimed to address, three key comparative advantages of an Adaptive Mediation approach emerge. The main research question the book attempted to address is how mediators cope with, and adapt to, the uncertainty and complexity that is characteristic of most contemporary armed conflicts? In three of the four case studies—Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines—we have found that several core elements of the Adaptive Mediation approach were critical to the ability of the later mediation processes to generate peace agreements, compared with earlier attempts. And that, thus far, employing Adaptive Mediation approaches has also resulted in these agreements being more sustainable than previous agreements. In the case of Syria, we argue that the conditions prevented the mediators from being able to apply elements of the Adaptive Mediation approach. The three comparative advantages of an Adaptive Mediation approach that have emerged from the four case studies are as follows: first, the ability to cope with uncertainty; second, the value of limiting the role of the mediator to process facilitation; third, the importance of agreements emerging from the parties themselves.

The Role of Adaptive Capacity in Coping with Uncertainty in Mediation Processes

In order to cope with the uncertainty and unpredictability that is characteristic of highly dynamic and complex systems, mediators need to invest in enhancing the adaptive capacity of their mediation processes. By

strengthening the adaptive capacity and resilience of the mediation process, the mediators and parties to the conflict greatly enhance the likelihood that the peace process will be able to withstand, adapt, and even transform, despite the guaranteed setbacks and shocks they will experience, one example of such being the sudden death of one the lead negotiators in Mozambique.

In Colombia, 12 mediation processes addressed several armed conflicts between the Colombian government and twelve armed groups. The peace negotiations in the 1990s led to the demobilization of five armed groups, and in 2006 the right-wing militia, the AUC, agreed to cease its activities. More recently, the Colombian government and the FARC-EP insurgents reached a comprehensive peace agreement after almost four years of peace negotiations in Havana. The 12 mediation processes counted on external support but have been essentially a form of direct dialogue between both parties. In the peace negotiations with the FARC-EP, external support was first provided by Cuba, Norway, Venezuela, and Chile, and later by the US, the UN, Germany, and the European Union. International and national experts also played key roles as mediation advisors to the Colombian government. The later stage of the FARC mediation process welcomed civil society engagement with local voices being heard at the peace table for the first time in the history of mediation in Colombia. For three decades, the cumulative mediation experience acquired over these 12 peace process experiences contributed to the adaptiveness, pragmatism, and effectiveness of mediation initiatives in Colombia. The mediation process became more adaptive with time due to lessons learned from the past experiences. This enabled the mediation process between the government and the FARC to cope much better with uncertainty and unpredictability than the earlier processes had. For example, international and domestic mediators had to adapt to the different motivations of those actors motivated by ideology and those by new drivers of conflict like organized crime. The mediators also had to adapt their own style of mediation and give more room to the parties themselves, as will be discussed in the next two sections.

In Mozambique, the mediation process occurred in three stages with different mediators, mediation strategies, and mediation styles. The first stage (2013–2015) was led by five domestic mediators (four related to faith-based organization and one academic), but in this case, domestic solutions without external process facilitation resulted in significant deadlocks. The second stage (2015–2016) was led by high-level international

mediators employing standard determined-designed mediation strategies that reduced the agency and space of both conflicting parties and failed to produce an agreement. The third stage (2016–2019) was led by both conflict parties engaging in a direct dialogue facilitated by the Swiss ambassador to Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni, and his small mediation team. They learned from and addressed the failures and ineffectiveness of previous mediation initiatives, and as a result the final mediation process was much more adaptive and pragmatic in style. The mediators focused on process facilitation, stimulating self-organization among the parties, and national ownership of the peace process. This greatly enhanced the adaptive capacity of the process and enabled it to cope with various setbacks and unexpected developments. They did so by facilitating direct talks between the principals of the two main parties at critical tipping points in the process and by including representatives from both parties in the mediation team. This approach provided an enabling environment for both party leaders and Mozambicans from both sides of the conflict to work together and reach a peace agreement.

In the Philippines, a multilayered mediation process involved several third-party mediators, including states, regional organizations, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Gradually earning the trust of both parties, Malaysia had a key role in facilitating the mediation process. In 2009, the International Contact Group (ICG) also became a key enabler of the mediation process, employing hybrid mediation strategies that promoted vertical and horizontal relationships during the negotiations. The range of actors and relationships greatly enhanced the resilience and adaptive capacity of the process. The ICG also focused on enhancing the capacity of both parties and stimulating self-organization. After the ceasefires and two peace agreements were signed, insider mediation was provided by diverse groups within the Moro society organized under informal task forces. The mediation process in the Bangsamoro has been adaptive and pragmatic in nature. It started by relying on third-party international mediators trusted by all parties to generate consensus and nurture contextualized understandings on how to resolve the conflict. It then progressed to using insider mediators to increase the levels of interdependency and self-organization between the parties and within the Moro society.

In Syria, mediation efforts were first led by the Arab League and later by a number of UN Special Envoys of the secretary-general for Syria, namely Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi, Staffan de Mistura, and, more

recently, Geir O. Pedersen. Given the complexity and uncertainty of the Syrian context, the fragmentation of conflict parties, and the internationalization of the conflict, it was particularly challenging for mediators to develop a mediation strategy that accommodated the preferences of all stakeholders. Up to the point of finishing this book, great power rivalry prevented the parties from reaching any meaningful agreement to end the conflict. However, all the mediators made efforts to adapt their strategies to domestic and systemic constraints, including by focusing on more limited conflict management, for example local humanitarian ceasefires, rather than peace writ-large conflict resolution. With the UN mediation, the Syrian process became more inclusive over time, inviting civil society actors to participate directly or indirectly in the peace process. In addition, the mediation process also became increasingly pragmatic, for example, with the invitation of Iran to participate in the 2015–2016 Geneva talks. The focus, at times, on mitigation and on life-saving assistance and the protection of civilians, rather than achieving an overall peace agreement, revealed the adaptiveness and pragmatism of the mediation initiatives.

All the cases presented in this volume demonstrate how the conflicts in question were influenced by drivers at multiple levels, from local to global. In particular, the Colombia case revealed the degree to which there is variety between different local contexts in one country, and how mediation processes need to be adaptive to the specific needs of different regions, communities, and local contexts. At the other end of the scale, the Syria case demonstrated how international and regional power rivalries undermined the ability of the mediators to forge peace from the bottom-up. In all these cases, the adaptive capacity of the mediation teams, as well as the negotiation teams of the parties to the conflict, was crucial to their ability to adapt the agenda and process considerations of the talks to stay abreast of and co-evolve with new emerging developments.

The Link between Process Facilitation and Self-Sustainable Outcomes

The mediators and the parties involved in any particular conflict have a wide range of potential styles, ranging from directed-mediation to facilitation, that they can employ. It is not possible to predetermine which style will be optimal in each instance, but overall, for a mediation process to end in a self-sustainable agreement, the Adaptive Mediation approach holds there will have to be a progression toward the facilitation end of the scale.

This is because facilitation gives more agency to the parties, allowing them to develop more ownership of the outcome. This, in turn, ensures that the outcome emerges from the context rather than from the mediator. The choice of style will need to be adapted to the context, and in every context a variety of styles could conceivably be employed, depending on the specific state in which the conflict and mediation process is at any point. Employing a mediation style where the mediator plays a more active role in directing the discussion poses a greater risk that the parties may become trapped in tit-for-tat defections, but often parties start off at this end of the scale until a certain degree of confidence in the mediation process has been achieved.

In the four case studies explored in this book, despite the variety of conflict and mediation contexts, there was a general progression over time from directed-mediation in the earlier cases to process-facilitation in the later cases. In Colombia, the lessons learned from the initial mediation experiences showed how a more directed-mediation style limited the willingness of the parties to negotiate. The mediators dominated the agenda in earlier mediation initiatives and that limited the agency and space of the parties to establish a shared understanding of the problem and pathways for resolving it among themselves. This approach changed during the FARC-EP mediation process, particularly following the exploratory meetings of 2011 near the Colombian-Venezuelan border. Since then, the parties themselves led and steered the meetings throughout the Havana negotiations in 2012 and beyond. One of the key mediation practices at the later stage of the process was to facilitate a national dialogue that would converge into a national agenda. Civil society actors and armed conflict victims were very active in the peace talks for the first time in Colombia, and this contributed to the peace agreement reached in 2016.

In Mozambique, after initial failed mediation attempts by domestic mediators that favored more assertive mediation techniques encouraged by the hard-liner Guebuza administration, a new mediation process welcomed high-level international mediation and a large group of external mediators. However, they also employed directed-mediation techniques that excessively dominated the mediation agenda. In the end, the pathway to a successful agreement resulted instead from the facilitation of direct dialogue between the leaders of both parties, supported by an adaptive mediation model that was not constrained by external interests, predetermined international standards, or the history and examples of past negotiations.

In the Philippines, the “multilayered” mediation structure strengthened the interactions between the stakeholders through vertical and horizontal relationships. In general, external mediators privileged facilitation instead of directed-mediation techniques, providing technical, financial, and political support to the mediation process and promoting trust-building between both parties. This was combined at a later stage with insider mediation, which enhanced the self-organization of both parties to deal with subsequent shocks and uncertainty. The “Friends of Peace” group led by the Archbishop of Cotabato and the Insider Mediators Group comprised of various members of the civil society–supported track-two dialogue initiatives in the Bangsamoro. Through their continuous mediation efforts, a growing common understanding was achieved among the various parties to the peace process.

In Syria, the mediation context presented persistent domestic challenges, such as the fractured nature of the opposition, the unwillingness of the parties to engage in constructive negotiations, and systemic challenges, such as the military and political support given by regional and international actors and the excessive interference of great powers in the negotiation process. Despite these limitations, local and international mediators were at times able to negotiate temporary ceasefires to enable humanitarian access and assistance. At the more formal level, UN mediation efforts employed facilitation techniques to try to make the peace process more inclusive of civil society actors, including women. This enabled the creation of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in 2019 with the intent to pave the ground for a national dialogue and a new constitution.

From Adaptive Mediation to Conflict Resolution: The Importance of Agreements Emerging from the Parties Themselves

Those mediation processes that have been the most successful in adapting to changing circumstances are those that have invested in processes that stimulate institutional learning. Institutional learning in this context refers to a process whereby the mediation participants, that is, the parties to the conflict as well as the mediation team, generate knowledge on an ongoing basis from the process that can inform future action. Adaptation requires selection among possible future courses of action based on feedback on the outcomes of previous choices. The more actively the mediation process is geared toward seeking out and processing feedback, the more likely it is that the mediation process will not be overwhelmed by changes in its

environment; the more likely it is to be innovative, resilient, and to successfully arrive at a settlement agreement, and the more likely the agreement is to contain elements that will ensure that the implementation of the agreement is equally geared toward preventing and resolving future emerging conflicts.

In the case of Colombia, institutional learning was reflected in the creation of two significant bodies. The office of the High Commission for Peace gave confidence to the parties participating in the mediation process. It was an essential step in the aftermath of the previous peace process where former combatants were murdered after the signature of the peace agreement, as was the case with the Patriotic Union. For the first time, an institution (functioning like a ministry) had as its only mission the achievement of peace talks with belligerent groups. The second body created was the National Reincorporation Agency (NRA). Initially, this agency led the implementation of the National Plan for Reconciliation introduced by the government. Today, the NRA's mission includes the overall economic and social reintegration policy related to former combatants, regardless of their belligerent origin (guerrilla or paramilitary groups). The NRA has become a key institution to address the national policy of reintegration and to guide international cooperation needs based on their agenda. Both the High Commissioner and the NRA served to institutionalize organizational learning that facilitated ongoing adaptation, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.

In Mozambique, the Manzoni mediation team remained small and discreet. The soft skills of the mediators, such as discretion and humility, were a fundamental element in their mediation strategy, creating an environment of trust between the mediation team and the belligerent parties. The mediators were fully committed to a nationally owned peace process and made substantial efforts to travel to the RENAMO headquarters in the Gorongosa Mountains instead of suggesting meetings in the capital as happened in previous mediation stages. For the first time in history, President Nyusi and the RENAMO leader, Afonso Dhlakama, talked via phone, an event that would open doors for several in person meetings throughout the process. Subsequently, the mediators focused on encouraging direct communication between the two leaders, and this new mediation model quickly resulted in a ceasefire announced in December 2016. The same approach was effective even after Dhlakama unexpectedly passed away and Ossufo Momade became the RENAMO leader after a difficult transition. Momade met with Nyusi for the first time in the city of Beira

on July 11, 2018, and several rounds of direct talks took place until a new peace agreement was signed in August 2019. The choice to pursue direct dialogue was a result of institutional learning and an understanding that the peace process needed more Mozambican control and the direct involvement of the party leaders, so that an agreement could emerge from within instead of from outside mediation.

While the level of institutional learning and adaptation in the case of the Philippines changed according to the status of the peace process, a new and significant finding from this case study lies in the role that self-organization and capacity development of diverse stakeholders engaged in conflict resolution played. It helped to mitigate tensions among those directly involved as well as the vested interest groups that supported them. It also helped the parties to focus on reconciliation and on accommodating interests among them. They were able to build consensus and trust among themselves while obtaining positive mediation outcomes through vertical networks—Manila to Bangsamoro—and horizontal networks—within Bangsamoro. Even after the signing of the peace agreement, having a framework that relied on insider mediators provided valuable feedback to tackle future challenges emerging from the peacebuilding process in Mindanao.

In Syria, probably the most complex armed conflict today, the institutional learning process is ongoing, as states and international organizations attempt to find ways to contribute to peace negotiations and mitigate the negative impact of the armed conflict. The UN mediation effort has tried to moderate external and domestic constraints and increasingly focused on building trust and bridging divides. The third and fourth UN Special Envoys attempted to switch from focusing excessively on external leverage and instead attempted to incorporate context-specific solutions. However, at the time of writing, the UN mediation initiative and the Astana negotiations had not achieved significant progress toward a political solution. The effectiveness of future mediation initiatives will undoubtedly depend on the ability of the mediators to learn from past experience, adapt to changing circumstances, and develop context-specific pathways to bring the conflict to an end.

Findings and Recommendations

We have argued that a number of developments—including geopolitical rivalry, the atomization of conflict, and the internationalization of internal conflicts—have challenged the mainstream liberal peace approach to

mediation and that analysts, policymakers, and practitioners are increasingly calling for a new approach to mediation in the twenty-first century. We have characterized the liberal peace approach as employing a deductive linear causal theory of change, whereby the outcome is assumed to be more or less guaranteed if the liberal peace design is followed, which is why we have referred to it as a determined-design model. A number of developments, including especially the inability of the liberal peace approach to bring a peaceful end to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, to name a few, have contributed to the erosion of the global public trust in the moral superiority and functional efficacy of the liberal peace model. These and other developments discussed in this volume and chapter have introduced an unprecedented level of turbulence in an increasingly closely connected global system. While complexity is not new, these developments have further increased the uncertainty and unpredictability that would be mediators have to take into account in any attempt to resolve a particular conflict. The main research question the book attempted to answer was thus how mediators can cope and adapt to uncertainty and complexity in contemporary armed conflicts.

The golden thread throughout the book was that standard mediation strategies have become increasingly ineffective in such complex environments, requiring a shift from determined-designed mediation to adaptive mediation strategies. The book introduced the Adaptive Mediation approach, which is specifically designed to cope with uncertainty and offers mediators an alternative to the linear, staged, normative, and individualistic liberal peace model of mediation. Adaptive Mediation is a facilitated process whereby the content of agreements emerges inductively from among the parties to the conflict themselves, informed by the context within which the conflict is situated.

In this book, we analyzed four case studies of mediation in four distinct armed conflicts: Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria. These four cases demonstrated the extent to which mediation varies according to context, history, and process. For example, one common approach to mediation has been to wait until the parties to the conflict recognize for themselves that they are unable to achieve their gains through violence, that is, the ripeness principle introduced earlier in the book. While this principle seems to have been at work in at least three of the four cases considered in this volume, all three of these cases demonstrated how long this may take and how fragile and dynamic such calculations are. In contrast, the Syrian case demonstrates that in some cases this

ripeness may not occur at all, especially when a conflict is fueled and supported by external backers who use it as a proxy for their own rivalries. So, while ripeness is an important factor in how likely agreements reached will be self-sustainable, other considerations such as the harm caused by the ongoing conflict also motivate internal and external mediators and the United Nations Security Council—which has the ultimate responsibility for international peace and security—to make continuous attempts to persuade the parties to halt the conflict, if not from a political ripeness assessment, then at least on humanitarian grounds. We have chosen to include the Syrian case in this volume as a constant reminder of this imperative, and how incredibly difficult it can be to achieve mediated peace agreements in practice.

Some approaches tend to privilege negotiation and dialogue processes that involve multiple international stakeholders, as in the cases of Colombia, the Philippines, and, to some degree, Syria, but as the case of Mozambique has shown, sometimes mediation benefits from small teams that make the effort to gain the trust of the parties with discretion, humility, and perseverance. Three cases, Colombia, Mozambique, and the Philippines, also demonstrate the value of discreet mediation processes, in which the mediators remain largely in the background and parties to the conflict rightfully occupy the foreground. We have explained why, from a complex adaptive systems perspective, it is necessary for the parties themselves to self-organize and generate their own peace agreement, as a prerequisite for self-sustainable peace. These three cases show that a limited process facilitation approach to mediation can enable greater participation in, and ownership of, the emergence of a peace agreement by the parties and that this is a crucial factor that influences the likely self-sustainability of peace agreements.

The cases of Colombia, the Philippines, and Syria demonstrated that the involvement of women's and youth groups, local community leaders, and insider mediators constitutes an essential strategy to enhance national consensus and ownership. In all these cases, international organizations, bilateral partners, and international mediators played an important role in helping build local capacities and providing the resources required to sustain the mediation efforts. However, in each case, national and local actors were decisive at critical moments to move these processes along, and their close involvement throughout the process was crucial to the self-sustainability, adaptive capacity, and resilience of those processes where agreements were reached.

In some conflicts, like in the Syrian case, mediators may face structural challenges and domestic limitations. They may need to rely on foreign states and seek regional powers to help broker deals among the parties. However, the hypothesis presented by this book, and borne out by three of the four cases considered, is that the most effective mediation practices are those that allow and enable peace to emerge from within. In this context the book explored the Adaptive Mediation approach as an alternative to standard determined designed approaches. Adaptive Mediation enables the parties to generate solutions themselves, and the role of the mediator is limited to facilitating the process. The aim is to support and enable the process, but to do so without undermining the ability of the parties to arrive at a self-organized agreement, as that process is seen as critical for the implementation and self-sustainability of the agreement.

The three cases covered in this book that generated peace agreements—Colombia, Mozambique, and the Philippines—have highlighted three comparative advantages of the Adaptive Mediation approach, namely the ability to cope with uncertainty, the value of limiting the role of the mediator to process facilitation, and the importance of agreements emerging from the parties themselves.

In contrast to determined-design approaches, Adaptive Mediation recognizes that our ability to understand complex systems is inherently limited and time-bound. Complex social systems are dynamic, nonlinear, and emergent. This means that both the drivers and consequences of conflict are continuously evolving. An adaptive approach copes with this uncertainty by employing an iterative process that continuously generates new analyses, as well as regular reflection points where mediation teams reflect and make judgments regarding the changes they have identified and their implications for the mediation process. In Colombia, Mozambique, and the Philippines, those mediation processes that were able to continuously learn from, co-evolve with, and adapt to the fluid and changing political dynamics they were dealing were more effective at generating peace agreements, and those peace agreements, so far, have lasted longer and proved to be more self-sustainable than previous agreements.

All four cases studies in this book support the Adaptive Mediation hypothesis that when the aim is a self-sustainable peace agreement, mediators should limit their role to process facilitation, protect parties from external interests and agendas, foster inductive processes that maximize the capacity of the parties to self-organize, and help them generate agreements that are rooted in the local context. The Syrian case demonstrated

how external interference disrupted the ability of the parties to self-organize, especially at several critical potential tipping points, and how this undermined the ability of several highly experienced mediators, and the parties themselves, to find ways to settle on a pathway to end the conflict. In contrast, the mediation experiences in Colombia, Mozambique, and the Philippines have shown that the more the parties (or insider neutrals associated with them) participate in generating a shared conflict analysis, identifying options, and exploring pathways to agreements, the more likely the outcome is to reflect indigenous narratives and perspectives relevant to the context, rather than the assumptions, interests, and biases of the external mediators.

Adaptive Mediation regards the emergence of this self-organizing process among the parties participating in the conflict as a crucial precursor for self-sustainable peace. As many of the failed peace agreements discussed in this book have shown, if the parties are dependent on a mediator to generate agreement among themselves, they are also unlikely to find solutions themselves to emerging crises during the implementation phase. A core tenant of the Adaptive Mediation approach is thus that for peace agreements to be self-sustainable, they need to emerge from the parties themselves.

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