

MEDIATING PEACE IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD ORDER

INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION: THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF
EMERGING POWERS

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Abstract

In a changing world order, norms and practices of peace mediation — broadly defined as a means of assisting negotiations to prevent, manage, or end violent conflicts — are evolving. Alongside peace initiatives undertaken by the UN, regional bodies, and traditional Western mediators, there is a growing body of practice, developed by emerging powers, in assisting negotiations between conflict parties, especially in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. This paper examines the role and impact of four emerging powers — China, Qatar, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates — in international peace mediation. It investigates the policies, motivations, practices, comparative advantages, and constraints of their mediation work as well as the implications for international peacemaking efforts.

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Key Findings

- International peace mediation currently takes place in a fragmented and variable multi-stakeholder arena. Alongside traditional Western mediators, the UN, and regional groupings, emerging powers — such as China, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — have become prominent actors in attempts to manage or resolve conflicts. Due to their growing economic and political influence, shifting geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics, and technological advances, this trend is likely to continue.
- Like their Western counterparts, emerging powers bring their own complex motives when engaging in international peace mediation. Driven by economic and commercial interests, security and stability concerns, geopolitical and strategic alignments and, reputational stakes, their motivations share similarities with those of Western mediators.
- While agreeing with certain aspects of the liberal peace architecture, non-Western states demonstrate distinct approaches to mediation. Rather than prioritising democracy, human rights, and gender equality, they seek stability through humanitarian and development aid as well as the protection of economic interests and strategic imperatives. They tend to understand “inclusiveness” in peace processes as the involvement of all armed groups, rather than including civil society actors, women, or young people.
- The results of peace mediation efforts by China, Qatar, Turkey, and the UAE have been mixed. Crisis de-escalation, for example, has been successful (e.g. by promoting ceasefire agreements, or the resumption of diplomatic relations between opposing countries), as has addressing issue-specific concerns to mitigate the impact of conflicts (e.g. by ensuring food security or negotiating hostage and prisoner-of-war releases). However, neither the structural drivers of conflict nor possible resolutions are as robustly addressed by these states.
- Emerging powers can bring in significant strengths, including diplomatic and political influence, good relations with opposing actors, the direct involvement of senior leaders, and substantial financial resources. In an era of rapid innovation and technological advances, it is significant that wealthy states like the UAE and Qatar have made important commitments to harnessing technologies for peace and security, including the application of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the field of mediation.
- There are also risks and challenges associated with the increasingly complex and diverse peace mediation arena. Strategic competition, different visions of peace, and ideological divergences — both between Western and non-Western actors as well as between emerging powers — can hinder peaceful solutions to conflicts.
- Countries affected by conflict have been caught in the middle of interregional rivalries between Turkey, Qatar, and the UAE. These states have long been engaged in an ideological struggle that has led them to back opposing groups (for example, in Libya and Somalia). This has created a paradox in which partisan

external actors can simultaneously hinder peace as parties to a conflict while also engaging in peacemaking as putative mediators.

- The countries examined in this paper do not have robust mediation support structures. As a result, mediation is often heavily personalised rather than being solidly embedded in institutions. All four countries examined demonstrate weak capacities for post-agreement monitoring, implementation, and evaluation.

Recommendations

- There is a pressing need to develop adaptive systems that consider both the changing nature and complexities of contemporary conflicts and the evolving international peace mediation architecture.
- Western and non-Western mediators need to find better ways of working together. Improved communication, coordination, coherence, and complementarity between UN-facilitated processes and initiatives by both Western and non-Western mediators may offer new opportunities for conflict mediation, building on the different capacities of the actors involved.
- Emerging powers should, at a minimum, reduce competition (and conflict) between themselves, as this is detrimental to peace efforts, and improve communication and coordination, for example through forums of information exchange and dialogue. Ideally, they should explore innovative collaborations that would strengthen international peace mediation and conflict resolution

efforts, especially in Africa and the Middle East.

- All four countries examined in this paper should increase their international capabilities and professionalism in peace mediation. Their peace efforts would be more effective if they established standing mediation support structures to sustain and improve operational support for ongoing mediation processes and post-agreement monitoring, implementation, and evaluation.
- Further research is needed on: how the increasing role of emerging powers as mediators impacts specific conflict environments (such as in Sudan, Palestine, and Ukraine) and the threat of even larger conflicts; the dynamics between multiple non-Western and Western mediators, how their mediation approaches interact in specific conflict and post-conflict environments, and the extent to which their peace efforts may be combined.

I. Introduction

Conflict and violence across the world are on the rise. Global Peace Index data show increased levels of conflict in seventy-nine countries and conflict deaths at the highest level this century, while more countries are participating in external conflicts (IEP, 2023). In many contexts, local- and national-level conflicts have become entangled with growing competition and contestation over the global governance order, which hampers conflict resolution efforts, especially within the UN Security Council. While threats emanating from the internationalisation of conflicts, radicalisation, and terrorism are more imminent, a set of existential risks — including the climate emergency, the threat of nuclear weapons, and out-of-control AI — exert further pressure on the complexity and unpredictability of the conflict landscape.

Against this backdrop, an analysis of international peace mediation — broadly defined here as a means of assisting negotiations to prevent, manage, or end violent conflicts — reveals the increasing fragmentation of the mediation space and the potential for congestion (Badanjak & Peter, 2024). The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Sudan, and Ukraine demonstrate the evolution taking place in the complex and variable multi-stakeholder arena of international peace mediation. While Western approaches to mediation predicated on liberal peacebuilding face an increasing trust deficit, especially in the Global South, new perspectives have emerged to respond to the changing nature of armed conflicts. Alongside the UN, regional groupings of states, individual Western nations, and civil society organisations with long-standing experience in mediation, several emerging powers with different conceptions of peace have come to the fore as key third party

mediators.

This publication aims to contribute to the scholarship and policy analysis on conflict mediation in the 2020s. It offers an overview and assessment of international peace mediation approaches by a group of non-Western actors — namely China, Qatar, Turkey and the UAE — by exploring the following questions:

- What motivates emerging powers to engage in international peace mediation?
- What ideas and methods are they introducing in their approaches to mediation?
- How are these approaches practised in different conflict environments and what impact do they have on shaping conflict outcomes?
- What are the strengths and limitations of non-Western peace mediators?
- What are the implications of emerging powers' peace mediation efforts for Western mediation and global peacemaking?

The publication is not an exhaustive reflection on the role of emerging powers in mediation, their specific goals and approaches. I acknowledge the important mediation role played by other non-Western countries, including regional heavyweights in the Middle East, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and large countries in Africa, in particular South Africa, Ethiopia and Nigeria. Rather, it aims to promote a better understanding of the approaches of countries that stand out for having played, especially in recent years, a more prominent role in addressing conflicts worldwide. In so doing, the publication emphasises the need for adaptation, coordination and

complementarity in a field that has become increasingly complex and crowded.

In Section II, this paper offers an overview of definitions and roles in international peace mediation. Section III outlines how four individual emerging powers — China, Qatar, Turkey and the UAE — engage in peace mediation, with an assessment of their strengths and limitations. Section IV reflects on the impact of peace mediation activities by the examined countries, with recommendations related to capacity-building, inclusiveness, and cooperation among emerging powers. Section V investigates the implications for Western mediation and global peacemaking that emanate from the growing role of diverse non-Western mediators, recommending synergies that might enhance international cooperation in the field of mediation.

The research draws from a vast array of official documents, scholarly writings, expert publications, and media reports. It builds upon background papers and discussions held at the second Austrian Forum for Peace, titled “Towards a Climate of Peace,” which was held in Schlaining on 1–4 July 2024. Moreover, primary data was acquired through four semi-structured interviews with civil society experts. To stimulate free and candid discussions and to protect confidentiality, the names of some of the interviewees and their institutions have been withheld.

II. Definitions and Roles in International Peace Mediation

An analysis of the role and impact of the growing number of actors engaged in international peace mediation should start with a clear understanding of concepts and definitions of mediation in the contemporary

world. The UN describes peace mediation as third-party involvement in a voluntary and peaceful process “whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage, or resolve a conflict by helping them develop mutually acceptable agreements” (UN, 2012).

While mediation can take place at the international, national, or local level, this analysis focuses on international peace mediation. This generally signifies that either the mediator or at least one of the conflict parties belongs to a different nationality or that the conflict has significance and importance for international peace and security.

Peace mediation can cover a variety of activities, from community-level dialogues to ceasefire negotiations, the development of peace plans, and summit meetings between leaders of conflict parties. A range of communication and interactions among individuals, institutions, and communities operating at different levels may be needed to advance the goal of the peaceful settlement of disputes. These include: official government-to-government interactions between high-level officials and diplomats (Track 1, or official government diplomacy); informal interactions that include a mix of government officials — who participate in an unofficial capacity — and non-governmental experts (Track 1.5, or “back channel” diplomacy); activities bringing together only unofficial representatives of the conflicting sides, with no government participation (Track 2, or Non-state actors diplomacy); and people-to-people diplomacy, usually undertaken by individual and private groups, which is focused at the grassroots level (Track 3). Alongside these different levels of engagement, a third-party mediator can engage in a range of different roles, bringing

different capabilities and skills into the mediation process.

EU terminology distinguishes between different mediation roles in three stages of involvement in peace mediation (EU Council, 2020): pre-negotiation, negotiation, and implementation of agreements. While these reflect the wealth of knowledge and expertise of the EU and its member states in this field, they also provide useful parameters for the roles of different external actors, including non-Western countries, helping to define and categorise how they do mediation.

Pre-negotiation mediation. A common, non-directive role used to address intra- and inter-state conflicts, which focuses on facilitating a dialogue space where the parties can communicate and constructively engage. In this case, peace efforts are aimed particularly at creating platforms for dialogue among representatives of opposing parties, which in turn can contribute to mutual understanding, confidence-building, and the search for common ground, rendering more formal mediation and reconciliation possible. The consent of the opposing parties for efforts aimed at facilitating dialogue in pre-negotiation mediation is seen as essential.

Leading mediation. External mediators can engage as third parties in helping to resolve a conflict, liaising with the top leadership and the most senior-level representatives of conflict parties and making substantial recommendations or suggestions to resolve a conflict. Would-be mediators can engage in this directive role when invited to do so.

Co-leading mediation. This approach underscores the importance of drawing on the relationships and mediation capacities that different actors may have in structuring a mediation process and proposing solutions.

In this case, mediation is a collective process that can benefit from partnerships at bilateral or multilateral levels. Co-leading arrangements may involve intergovernmental bodies such as the UN or regional organisations to strengthen the multilateral dimension of the process, facilitate coordination, or bring in local ownership.

Leveraging mediation/power-based mediation. A strong third-party actor can decide to use its political, diplomatic, and/or economic weight to provide leverage to mediation processes and reach an agreement. The conflict parties are encouraged to agree through a combination of threats and rewards in the form of political or economic incentives. In this case, the mediator is usually accepted by the opposing parties, not because of its neutrality but because of its ability to unblock the process and produce an acceptable solution.

Providing mediation support. Mediation support refers to activities provided by experts that assist and improve the implementation of processes led by mediators. They include: capacity building for mediators, training to enhance practical mediation skills, logistical support, guidance on thematic and geographical issues, conflict analysis, networking and engaging with conflict parties, and evaluating mediation processes.

Coordinating mediation. The mediation process may involve multi-track approaches by multiple actors who have an interest or willingness to curb escalating conflicts. The need to avoid competition and ensure coordinated approaches calls for one actor that is well-placed and experienced in aligning the mediation agendas and that can contribute to a more complementary and cohesive process. Adequate coordination is also important at different stages of the

peacemaking cycle when non-state actors — such as NGOs, high-profile individuals, and special envoys of regional and international organisations — may assume specific roles and there is a need to link Track 1, 2, and 3 dialogues.

Supporting mediation at informal levels.

In addition to mediation undertaken at formal and official levels, success in peace mediation is also contingent upon supporting informal peace-support activities at national and grassroots levels, before and after the signing of an official peace agreement. Alongside the resources needed to sustain Track 1 mediation, there is also a need to support “the extended mediation community” (EU Council, 2020), including insider mediators (key individuals or institutions from the local context), NGOs, and think tanks, which, by assisting with their expertise and relations in building consensus and resolving old or emerging disputes, provide a crucial contribution to the peace mediation activities of outside actors.

Supporting mediation outcomes. States can perform multiple roles in accompanying a given peace process and ensuring its sustainability to support mediation process outcomes. These may vary from ensuring an environment for continued dialogue to promoting an inclusive process that gives a voice to all the actors who are key to conflict resolution and from verifying the implementation of agreements — such as such ceasefires or cessation of hostilities — to assuming a guarantor-like role.

III. Mediation Engagements

Alongside Western actors with a long-standing tradition of promoting peace as part of their foreign policies, several emerging

powers have shown an increased capacity and willingness over the past two decades to engage in international peace mediation efforts. In this section, this paper will provide a comparative perspective of the motivations, influences, and approaches of four such countries, namely China, Qatar, Turkey, and the UAE. While the landscape of emerging mediators is much broader, these four increasingly consequential actors engaged in mediation deserve special attention because of their experience, their current high-profile engagement, and the likelihood of an increased mediation role for them in the future.

China

For decades, China has followed a non-interventionist approach in its foreign policy, refusing to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries. However, the search for natural resources, new markets, and investment opportunities has led to an increase in Chinese investment — both private and state-directed — in environments affected by fragility and conflict. This has gradually incentivised China to engage in the peace and security initiatives it previously shunned. Moreover, amid mounting geopolitical tensions and a crisis of the post-1945 system of global governance, China has in recent years sought a more significant role in the global governance system, adopting new doctrines and policy frameworks that inform its peace interventions in countries of instability and conflict. Often, these overlap with increasing Sino-US geopolitical rivalry. Such frameworks purportedly aim to better safeguard peace and prosperity while simultaneously strengthening Chinese power and interests (Mariani, 2024). The Global Security Initiative (GSI) — launched at the April 2022 Boao Forum for Asia and further elaborated on in a February 2023 white paper

(MOFA PRC, 2023) — has become an important feature in China’s official presentation of its vision, role, and impact on global security, in which peace mediation is a key element. Under the GSI, China is committed to actively carrying out mediation diplomacy and promoting the “political settlement of international and regional hotspot issues” (ibid.). After presenting the GSI in 2022 and adopting the Law on Foreign Relations in 2023 (MoJ PRC, 2023) — which calls for putting the GSI into action — China has made proactive efforts to seek out peace facilitation roles (CIIS, 2024).

Motivations

China’s engagement in international peace mediation needs to be understood in the context of its geoeconomic and geopolitical concerns, access to natural resources and markets (Carson et al., 2020; Call & de Coning, 2017) — often in countries prone to instability and conflict — national security concerns, especially in border regions (Adhikari, 2021), and growing aspiration for a more significant role in the global governance system (Mariani, 2024). China is in a multi-year process of adapting old pillars of foreign policy — particularly those of non-interference and state sovereignty — with the need to ensure the safety of its assets and nationals overseas, avoid the dangers of conflict spill-over, especially for conflicts in its neighbourhood, and respond to pressure from the international community to play a more active role in the management and prevention of conflict. These motivations intersect with calculations of global power politics and China’s outreach to the Global South, which enhance China’s position within a changing global order. This is manifesting in greater diplomatic activism by China in handling prominent peace and security-related problems as well as promoting de-

escalation and conflict resolution in conflict-affected regions, including the Middle East and Ukraine.

Modalities, Tools, and Mechanisms

Previous analyses have highlighted that in its engagement in conflict-affected and fragile contexts, China articulates a particular vision of peace that revolves around economic development as the crucial precondition of a sustainable internal peace (Mariani, 2022). This vision, which also informs China’s role as mediator, particularly in intra-state conflicts, challenges the validity and applicability of Western liberal conceptions of peace in so far as economic development takes much higher priority over good governance, democracy, or respect for human rights.

As a relative “newcomer” to international peace mediation, China currently shuns the full spectrum of mediation engagements, including the design and promotion of comprehensive peace plans. As Sun argues, the role of China is “more facilitatory than mediatory” (Sun, 2024). The GSI outlines the characteristics of China’s mediation practice. These emphasise China’s role in supporting countries to “overcome differences and resolve hotspots” (MOFA PRC, 2023) through facilitating dialogue and peace talks. In diverse conflict settings, the main characterising feature of China’s mediation has been the provision of “good offices” to bring opposing parties together, initiate dialogue, and, possibly, ease the path towards a reduction of violence, for example through ceasefires.

To advance the goals of its peace interventions, China relies on official government-to-government interactions between senior officials and diplomats. Here, China’s special envoys and ambassadors

play the most visible roles. Their mandates have mainly centred around a restricted number of mediation and dialogue-related roles: maintaining close contact with leaders of the conflict parties; facilitating a dialogue space; supporting stabilisation and conciliation processes; and contributing to negotiation and implementation of peace and ceasefire agreements. Beyond the official roles and functions of Chinese embassies and other diplomatic representatives, there are currently no signs of China embarking on a process of professionalisation of its mediation efforts or relying on local communities, women, or young people for close connections to developments on the ground.

Mediation Activities

Despite its principled aversion to involvement in other countries' internal matters, China has begun gradually engaging in peace efforts in countries affected by conflict over the past twenty years. Through shuttle diplomacy and facilitative mediation in different contexts — including Afghanistan, DR Congo, Mali, Myanmar, Sudan, and South Sudan — China's diplomacy has shown its abilities to open spaces for dialogue and talks.

China started experimenting with deeper involvement in a conflict context in 2007 in Sudan. In response to international criticism and calls to boycott the Beijing Olympic Games, China appointed Ambassador Liu Gujin in May 2007 as a special envoy for Darfur, creating a focal point for Chinese participation in international interactions and meetings on Darfur. Through its diplomatic engagement, China eventually played an important role in persuading the government in Khartoum to accept a United Nations/African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)

(Sultan, H.E.M. & Sun, D., 2020; Large, 2009). The experience gained in Sudan paved the way for China's future peacemaking role in South Sudan, which became in some respects a testing ground for building up experience, capabilities, and confidence in mediation (Logo & Mariani, 2022). Working under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa, China has found it easy to justify its mediation activities in South Sudan, emphasising IGAD's leading role and the need for "African solutions for African problems." Although China has not been directly involved in peace negotiations, it has played a supportive role due to its close association and influence on the South Sudanese warring factions as well as its contacts with Western diplomats and African mediators (ibid). As pointed out by the International Crisis Group, China has been able to shape actions in South Sudan undertaken by the UN Security Council (ICG, 2017). In 2015, it sent an infantry battalion to the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) — the first Chinese combat troops to ever be deployed in a UN peace operation (UNMISS, 2015) — and became a member of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), the oversight body of the 2015 peace agreement. After the signing of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018, China joined the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC), which oversees the implementation of the Revitalised Peace Agreement.

Myanmar offers a clear example of a country where a combination of geographical proximity, more immediate national security concerns (Adhikari, 2021), and major economic and strategic interests at stake provide high incentives for China's engagement in conflict management. In no other country has China

been so directly involved for such a long time in an internal peace process. Over the past two decades, officials in Beijing and the Yunnan province have quietly convened peace talks, engaging in conflict management efforts in the extremely complex political environment of Myanmar. They have tried to find a balance between their support to ethnic armed organisations (EOs) along the Chinese border and the central government in the capital in Naypyidaw, facilitating talks between the Government of Myanmar and rebel groups, such as the Kachin Independence Organisation (Sun, 2013). China was dissatisfied with the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, which ended a period of good relations under the administration of Aung San Suu Kyi, fuelled instability near its borders, and upended China's strategic and economic plans related to the Belt and Road Initiative (ICG, 2024). Since then, the Yunnan provincial government and Beijing have been deeply engaged in conflict management by adopting a two-pronged approach whereby China is engaged both with northern EOs — providing support to those EOs that meet certain Chinese objectives — or alternatively having high-level engagement with the military regime, helping to stabilise the situation and avoiding the collapse of the regime (Tower, 2022) while refusing to normalise relations with the military junta (ICG, 2024). China has utilised both formal and informal channels, including the shuttle diplomacy of China's special envoy Deng Xijun, who in June 2023 brokered peace talks between regime officials and three EOs. After a major rebel offensive in northeastern Myanmar in late 2023 — to which China reportedly gave its tacit support (ICG) — in December 2023 China brought the parties together to discuss a ceasefire. It hosted a meeting in the Chinese city of Kunming, which was mediated by China's special envoy to Myanmar (ibid).

China's strategy of cooperation with multiple opposing actors in Myanmar has been criticised for prioritising strategic and economic interests that overlook local needs and bolster elite control of the state (Adhikari, 2021). Other experts have pointed out that China has placed itself in a position where, if the military regime is successful in pushing out the opposition and provides some stability, China will be able to capitalise on the situation because the junta will be isolated from the international community and China will be the only partner it could turn to for its economic survival. If the dominance of the junta does not materialise, then the EOs, which are close allies of China, will be more powerful in the North and China will have key partners to work with across the border to advance its interests (Tower, 2022). However, given China's close relationships to EOs along the Chinese border and the military junta in Naypyidaw, maintained alongside ties with the pro-democracy movement, Chinese support and involvement are crucial to the long-term prospects of mitigating the violence associated with Myanmar's subnational conflicts and the civil war that followed the 2021 military coup. With much more leverage than any other external actor on the opposing parties in Myanmar, China remains the natural candidate for mediating and providing guarantees to ceasefires and long-term peace deals.

The Middle East, where China has expanded its economic and strategic presence, has also become a key region for China's promotion of its global security blueprint (Mariani, 2024). In the GSI, China casts itself as an honest broker ready to serve as a guarantor and provider of stability in the Middle East. It calls for a "new security framework in the Middle East" (MOFA PRC, 2022) and commits to support Middle Eastern countries' efforts to "strengthen dialogue and

improve their relations" (ibid.). Zhou highlights that by intervening as an "engaged stakeholder" in Middle Eastern security dilemmas, China attempts to reconcile neutrality and leverage, exogenous and endogenous peace efforts, and passive and positive approaches to peace (Zhou, 2024). In March 2023, under China's auspices, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore diplomatic relations (Embassy of the PRC, 2023), which had been severed for seven years. The Chinese Foreign Ministry hailed China's mediation as "a new example of political settlement of hotspot issues" (MOFA PRC, 2024). Although China found positive conditions that were conducive to the reconciliation between the two sides (Burton, 2023; e-Haider, 2023) — not least due to previous rounds of dialogue facilitated by Iraq and Oman (Embassy of the PRC, 2023) — the Chinese initiative was significant. For the first time, China decided to intervene directly in the political rivalries between Gulf states, facilitating a rapprochement between the region's two arch-rivals that could de-escalate tensions and have important implications for peace and security in the region. The surprise attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing wars in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, however, have challenged China's diplomatic ambitions and strategies in the Middle East. While officially supporting the Palestinian cause for emancipation through a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine and condemning Israeli military actions in Gaza for being "beyond the scope of self-defense" (Chen, 2023), China has also been wary not to undermine its economic ties with Israel (Elmali, 2023). On 28 November 2023, China submitted a position paper to the UN on resolving the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict (UN, 2023). It offered five broad proposals: a comprehensive ceasefire and an end of the fighting; effective civilian protection; ensuring humanitarian

assistance; enhancing diplomatic mediation; and securing a resolution of the conflict by revitalising the political prospects of a two-state solution. China also reiterated its previous call for a UN-led "more broad-based, authoritative and effective international peace conference" (ibid) that would facilitate the implementation of the two-state solution. In a more direct foray into Middle East diplomacy, in July 2024 China hosted Palestinian unity talks with representatives of fourteen Palestinian organizations, including the Islamist militant group Hamas and its rival Fatah. The talks were chaired by Wang Yi — member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Minister of Foreign Affairs — who called for a lasting ceasefire in Gaza, joint efforts towards post-conflict governance and reconstruction, and progress towards a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict (MOFA PRC, 2024). The talks resulted in the signing of the "Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Strengthening Palestinian National Unity", which presses for the formation of a Palestinian unity government overseeing the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip and eventually holding elections. While some analysts downplay the impact of China's efforts to reconcile opposing Palestinian factions (Barron et al., 2024), others see it as "a new approach that benefits Israel-Palestine conflict resolution" (Interview one).

China's crisis diplomacy and mediation history offer precedents and options for a potential mediation role to end the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. The protracted conflict and rising geopolitical tensions have exposed the limitations of traditional Western actors to mediate a peaceful solution, prompting calls for China to use its unique leverage on Russia to end Russia's war of aggression (EC, 2024). On 24 February 2023, the Chinese Foreign

Ministry published a position paper titled “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis” (MOFA PRC, 2023), establishing itself as a potential peace broker between Russia and Ukraine. The document outlines in twelve points China’s stance on the war while making proposals to deescalate the conflict and reach a ceasefire. The release of China’s position paper was accompanied by the shuttle diplomacy during the first half of 2023 of its top diplomat Wang Yi and Li Hui, China’s Special Representative on Eurasian Affairs — who visited Moscow, Kyiv, and several European capitals to discuss the Chinese proposals (Mariani, 2024). Despite the complexity of concerns and interests that push China to maintain its strategic relationship with Russia while professing neutrality and seeking de-escalation, its proposals have signalled that China seeks to play a role in facilitating a political solution to the conflict, mitigating the impacts of the war, and providing resources for post-conflict reconstruction (Mariani, 2024). In so doing, as elaborated in previous analyses (*ibid.*), it is arguably paving the way for a future role in the geopolitical agreement that will end the war. It remains to be seen what practical deliverables China can offer to a resolution of the conflict in Ukraine. Its absence at the Ukraine peace summit that was held in Switzerland in June 2024 was notable. However, in advance of the conference in Switzerland, China along with Brazil issued a six-point proposal for peace negotiations that includes a call for a peace conference “at an appropriate time” with the participation of all parties and discussion of all peace plans (Government of Brazil, 2024).

Strengths and Limits

As China’s global influence grows, it seeks greater participation in international affairs beyond a rhetoric basis, including

in conflict management processes. When China intervenes as a peacemaker, it brings leverage to mediation efforts. This derives from its notable assets: economic power that translates into diplomatic and political influence; good relations with multiple opposing actors in the regions where it operates; and the comparative advantage of lacking “religious, political, historical and colonial baggage” (Chaziza, 2018), in contrast to Western powers. Therefore, China often appears well-positioned to mediate dialogue and participate substantively in conflict resolution.

However, despite the foreign policy adjustments of the last two decades, China’s traditional aversion to becoming involved in the domestic politics of other countries remains important. It has yet to accumulate the necessary resources and capabilities to act as a full-spectrum mediator. China’s efforts are hindered by a lack of expertise alongside a shortage of field capacity and first-hand information. There are, for example, only a few Middle East and Africa experts in China. There are no specialised peace mediators, while peace studies do not exist as a discipline at universities. There is no hub for dedicated mediation advisors with geographic and thematic expertise who can support mediation and facilitation efforts, assess and identify entry points for China mediation, and design and implement China’s mediation engagements on a needs basis. Moreover, Chinese officials cannot draw from the expertise of civil society actors who, in the case of Western engagement in mediation, can open space for mediation, build the capacity of mediation stakeholders, and support local mechanisms for mediation and dialogue. Unlike the EU, China does not promote insider mediation by investing in the capacity-building of insider mediators and thus cannot draw on their unparalleled

access in high-intensity conflicts where other actors cannot engage. Unsurprisingly, given these limitations, China shows a high level of risk aversion, which makes it reluctant to engage in full mediation roles, preferring instead to merely facilitate peace dialogues.

Continued exposure to security risks that threaten China's economic interests alongside improvements in the quality and level of China's foreign affairs work gives China cause to play a more active role in shaping the outcomes of conflicts in different contexts and deepen its mediation activities worldwide. But to develop its full potential as an active contributor to the international peace and security architecture, China needs to invest more systematically in the field of international peace mediation, develop peace mediation support structures, and prepare a new generation of mediators.

Qatar

In less than three decades, there has been a dramatic evolution in Qatar's international role. Qatar has been able to attain a degree of international significance that in many respects is inconsistent with its young statehood, small size and population, modest military force, and unfavourable regional environment (Mesfin, 2016). However, since the late 1990s, conflict mediation has been a key element of Qatari foreign policy. Qatar has increasingly been involved in peacemaking initiatives in numerous conflict environments where it has cultivated an image for itself as a leading actor in mediation and conflict resolution (Kamrava, 2011; Barakat, 2014), "settling crises and disputes that great powerhouses remained unable to resolve" (QNA, 2024). Mediation is enshrined in the country's constitution, which provides the highest normative foundation for Qatar's policies and practices in this field. Article 7 of

the 2003 constitution states that "The foreign policy of the State is based on the principle of strengthening international peace and security by means of encouraging peaceful resolution of international disputes" (State of Qatar, 2003). Barakat highlights a distinct "Qatari way" of doing mediation (Barakat, 2024), with specific features that distinguish the motivations and modalities of Qatar's engagement in mediation from that of other countries.

Motivations

There is a spectrum of underlying motives for Qatar's engagement in peace mediation that are often closely interconnected. Scholarship has put Qatar's motivations to mediate in the context of "protective measures" (Alqashouti, 2021) and the ontological insecurity of a small state that seeks stability in a region where bigger and stronger states (Israel, Iran, and Saudi Arabia) often oppose each other (Barakat, 2024; Kamrava, 2011). By strengthening its international image and role as global mediator, Qatar can gain influence, enhance its national power and state brand, and secure itself from larger regional or global opponents (Kamrava, 2011; Barakat, 2012; Mesfin, 2016). Qatar's security vulnerabilities came to the fore in 2017 when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, opposed to Qatar's ties with Iran and Islamist groups in the region, imposed a de facto embargo against Qatar that lasted until 2021. Qatar never accepted the conditions that its neighbours demanded for ending the blockade, including closing the Al Jazeera media network, curbing relations with Iran, and closing a Turkish military base on its soil (Manson, 2017). However, the episode stressed the necessity for Qatar as a small nation to cultivate international partnerships and diplomatic relations, including via its mediation work, in order to

dissuade or mitigate the actions of possible opponents. Regional stability and national security inevitably intertwine with economic interests (Mladenov, 2024; Barakat, 2024). As one of the world's biggest exporters of liquified natural gas (LNG) (Statista, 2024), Qatar has a strategic economic interest in ensuring that conflicts do not impede its natural gas and crude oil exports, which generate most of its revenues. Qatari officials and international scholars also highlight religious and cultural motivations for Qatar to act as a peacemaker. These are rooted in Quranic teachings and have arguably contributed to the emergence of mediation as a key element of Qatari foreign policy (Interview One; Barakat, 2024; Barakat, 2014; Freer, 2022).

Modalities, Tools, and Mechanisms

Qatar has involved itself in international mediation as a facilitator of peace talks and as a leading or co-leading actor in formal mediation. For Kamrava, Qatar pushes forward its mediation efforts through a “two-pronged approach” based on intense personal diplomacy by state leaders and promises of significant financial investments once the conflict is settled (Kamrava, 2011). Qatar's mediation activities are state-driven. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Amiri Diwan — the sovereign body and administrative office of the Emir — alongside its advisers, including the National Security Adviser, lead Qatar's mediation efforts (Barakat, 2024). The publicity with which Qatar's mediation initiatives are announced and discussions and negotiations are reported are testimony to their importance for the country's international image. Qatar usually invests considerable resources in countries where it plays a mediation role. It has emerged, for example, as one of the biggest investors in Lebanon (Cornish & Kerr, 2019) and Sudan (QNA, 2020).

One of the leading global media networks, Al Jazeera, which is partly funded by the Qatari government and is headquartered in Doha, is an important tool for Qatar's mediation work, especially because of the popularity of the media organisation and its ability to generate global attention. While Al Jazeera is independent, it provides Qatari officials with opportunities to present their mediation efforts in press releases and interviews. These, alongside analyses, documentaries, talk shows, and digital platforms, increase the international visibility and positive appeal of mediation initiatives among a large global audience of more than 430 million people in over 150 countries (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Qatar does not have a dedicated mediation support structure. However, since 2016 it has initiated a process of professionalisation of its mediation efforts, including training for young diplomats to equip them with practical knowledge and skills for effective mediation and conflict resolution (Qatar News Agency, 2024). It has also established new positions, such as the Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Counterterrorism and Mediation in Conflict Resolution, who acts officially as Qatar's chief mediator and coordinates mediation efforts with other agencies (Freer, 2022; Barakat, 2024). Moreover, institutions such as the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, which offers master's degrees in Conflict Management and Humanitarian Action (CMHA) (Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, 2024), and the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (QNA, 2024), which trains young diplomats, are contributing to the development of Qatar's professionalisation in the field of mediation.

Mediation Activities

Over the past twenty years, Qatar has played a mediating role in numerous conflicts and regional and international disputes (MOFA of Qatar, 2022). Previous analyses have highlighted three phases of Qatar's involvement in conflict mediation. In the first phase, from the mid-2000s until the early 2010s, Qatar showed an unprecedented and high-profile involvement as a leading peacemaker in the Middle East and Northeast Africa, creating an international reputation as a mediator (Milton et al., 2023). In 2008, Qatar played a mediation role between the government of Lebanon and Hezbollah forces. At a summit held in Doha in May 2008, under the aegis of the Qatari Emir and Prime Minister, Lebanese politicians agreed on the appointment of a new president as well as a power-sharing arrangement that would give Hezbollah positions in the new government (UNSC, 2008). The agreement successfully averted a new civil war in Lebanon. In Sudan, starting in 2008, the shuttle diplomacy of then Qatari Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ahmad bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud led to Track 1 and Track 2 peace negotiations in Doha (Kamrava, 2011) and the signing in 2011 of a peace agreement between the Sudanese government and Darfurian rebel groups (Doha Document, 2011). Qatar accompanied its mediation work with promises to finance large-scale development projects in case of successful peace talks (Alarabeed, 2023). In Yemen, between 2007–2010, Qatar mediated between the government and Houthi rebels. Mediation efforts were accompanied by promises of significant contributions to the country's reconstruction in case of a peace agreement. A peace treaty signed in Doha in February 2008 was, however, short-lived. Months later, fighting resumed, and in 2010 Qatar embarked on a new mediation effort with the involvement of both the Emir and

the Prime Minister, which led to the signing of a new truce agreement in August 2010. This agreement also did not last long. Yemen provides a typical example of the difficulty to reconcile not only warring factions but also the very divergent positions of external actors and putative mediators. Saudi Arabia has traditionally been wary, if not in disagreement, with Qatari mediation efforts in Yemen, which it perceives as benefiting Iran (Kamrava, 2011). Eventually, the internal crisis pushed the country deeper into war.

In the second phase, from the mid-2010s until the late 2010s, Qatar's international mediation role diminished. This was mainly due to its involvement in the Arab Spring and its foreign policy shift of moving away from mediation and embracing a more ideological and interventionist role in the Middle East (Barakat, 2024; Ulrichsen, 2014; Milton et al., 2023). Qatar's support for popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, including in Egypt, Libya, and Syria (Ulrichsen, 2014; Hammond, 2013) and the perception that it had a close relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood was met with fierce criticism from fellow Arab governments that accused Qatar of bolstering Islamist groups intent on overthrowing the region's reigning regimes. The dispute led to the so-called Gulf Crisis between 2017 and 2021 and the de facto blockade imposed on Qatar. In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt simultaneously severed their diplomatic ties with Qatar and banned Qatar-registered aircraft and Qatari ships from utilising their territory. Qatar itself became a "conflict party" in a regional dispute mediated by other actors, mainly the US, Kuwait, and Oman (Fraihat, 2020). However, even in this difficult phase, Qatar's mediation efforts were highly significant. From 2018 to 2020, Qatar received widespread attention for facilitating talks between the US and

the Taliban, including providing a venue for confidential dialogue and offering technical and political support to Taliban leaders travelling to Doha (Milton et al. 2023). These efforts resulted in the Doha Agreement of February 2020 between the Taliban and the US that brought an end to the 2001–2021 war in Afghanistan, although the Afghan Government was not a party to the agreement and was never involved in the main negotiations.

The third phase, from 2020 onwards, marked a renewed high-profile role for Qatar in conflict mediation across various political crises and conflict-affected regions. It shows how an important mediation actor has adapted its approaches in response to the shock of a diplomatic crisis and a three-and-a-half-year travel and commercial blockade (Milton et al., 2023). In this new phase, Qatar has engaged in notable mediation efforts between Somalia and Kenya as well as in Chad, Libya, and, more recently, in the war in Gaza. In 2021, Qatar's Special Envoy for Counterterrorism and Mediation in Conflict Resolution mediated between Somalia and Kenya (Custers, 2021), brokering the resumption of full diplomatic relations between the two countries (MOFA of Qatar, 2021). Following months of negotiations mediated by Qatar, in August 2022, over forty Chadian signatories signed the Doha Agreement, ending hostilities between the government and rebel signatories¹ and paving the way for a national dialogue, constitutional reform, and national elections to transfer power from a military junta to a civilian government (Doha Agreement, 2022; Milton et al., 2023). Analysts have pointed out that the Doha Agreement for Chad "is the most active and intensive mediation work that Qatar has played in recent years" and

"one of the largest peacemaking processes ever hosted by Qatar" (Milton et al., 2023). In 2022, Qatar played a third-party mediation role in Libya. Following military clashes in Tripoli in August 2022, which threatened a return to outright civil war, Qatar engaged in crisis diplomacy. In Doha, it hosted high-level delegations of the two rival administrations of Libya — the Tripoli- and Tobruk-based governments. The talks led to a new political proposal for parliamentary elections to be held before presidential elections. While not resolving the political crisis in Libya, Qatar's intervention was instrumental in averting a large-scale open conflict and paved the way for a "relatively calm period" (Milton et al., 2023). Significantly, it marked a renewed perception of Qatar as a neutral mediator in a key post-Arab Spring context, when this reputation had previously been damaged because of Qatari support for anti-Gaddafi forces in Libya after 2011 and subsequently for the Tripoli-based government (Milton et al., 2023).

In the war in Gaza that erupted in October 2023, Qatar has emerged as a key negotiator. It has tried to secure a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas as well as the release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza. In November 2023, mediation efforts by Qatar, in cooperation with Egypt and the US, secured a seven-day pause in hostilities, resulting in the release of 105 Israeli hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinian detainees (Al-Mughrabi et al., 2023). The truce also allowed an increase in the delivery of humanitarian convoys and relief aid entering the Gaza Strip. In January 2024, Qatar, with French assistance, facilitated a negotiation between Hamas and Israel to enable the delivery of medication to Israeli hostages in return for humanitarian and medical aid for vulnerable civilians in Gaza (Irish et al., 2024). The results of such efforts are testament to the

¹ The main rebel group, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), did not sign the deal despite Qatar mediators' efforts.

importance of mediation in mitigating the impact of ongoing conflicts, even in the absence of any immediate prospects for peace. While the escalating conflict in Gaza and the region has undermined attempts by Qatar, Egypt, and the US to secure a sustainable ceasefire and there has been criticism of Qatar's relations with Hamas (FDD, 2023), Qatar's mediation remains important in seeking an end to the war in Gaza and avoiding a regional conflagration in the Middle East.

Strengths and Limits

The mobilisation of the full range of Qatar's mediation toolbox — a long-standing position of neutrality, effective diplomatic skills to maintain relations across ideological boundaries, a personal commitment and direct involvement by the state's most senior leaders, and an ability to deploy vast financial resources for long-term investments and development projects — give significant leverage to Qatar's mediation. The lack of historical and political baggage that weighs down on other regional mediators, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, also benefits Qatar's mediation efforts (Barakat, 2024). Qatar has come under scrutiny and criticism for providing financial support and hosting the political offices of Islamist actors like Hamas and the Taliban. But its ability to interact with powerful non-state actors who are shunned by the West as terrorist organisations has also given leverage to Qatar's mediation efforts. It has enabled Qatar to maintain open lines of communication between conflict parties that are often bitter enemies, as demonstrated in mediated negotiations between the US and the Taliban and, more recently, between Israel and Hamas.

Qatar's vast wealth has allowed it to promote and finance the use of new technologies in peacemaking, emphasising the

rapid development of technology as a tool for peace mediators. Beyond digital solutions and remote communication software that have already proved to be effective in complex diplomacy — for example during the COVID-19 pandemic when travel restrictions prevented mediators from travelling for in-person meetings — there is an emerging set of tools in conflict resolution that rely increasingly on AI (Pietromarchi, 2024). These were discussed at a web summit that took place in Doha in February 2024. Geographic information systems (GIS) — a computer-based tool that stores, analyses, and visualises data for geographic positions on the Earth's surface — can produce maps to monitor ceasefire agreements. Technological advances in the field of virtual reality (VR) can create immersive environments that provide mediators with a deeper understanding of the local context in faraway regions affected by conflict. AI tools can analyse large volumes of data far quicker than humans and provide insights in real time into public sentiment and discern emerging threats to peace processes. While new technologies carry their own risks, especially with the use of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWS) on the battlefield, they are also bound to play an increasingly important role as tools of peace, rather than war (Höne, 2022). Qatar is throwing its weight behind efforts to advance peacebuilding through such technologies. The Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA) have developed a partnership to explore new technologies for conflict prevention, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. At the third "E-Analytics and Innovation Lab," which was held in Doha in January 2023, political analysts, communication specialists, and computer engineers gathered to discuss the application of big data analysis, social media mining, geospatial remote sensing, AI, and natural language processing in support

of political and peace processes worldwide (QCRI, 2023).

Kamrava highlights that Qatar's biggest strength in mediation — namely the personalised nature of its engagement that avails itself of the direct involvement of the highest state figures including the Emir and other key policy makers — is also a weakness. While the engagement of high-ranking leaders and officials can be extremely effective in steering complex foreign policy issues, getting conflict parties to the negotiating table, and moving the process forward, the personalisation of mediation can also be a liability when it is the only, or principal, way of fostering peace. Successful mediation also relies on support structures that allow for on-the-ground implementation, follow-up, and monitoring progress. Qatar's small size and personnel limitations for a range of high-profile diplomatic initiatives in different regional contexts push its endeavours to the limit (Kamrava, 2011).

The important role of Qatari diplomacy in international mediation efforts can hardly be understated. Qatar has carved for itself an image as a powerful and experienced mediator, with a proven track record in promoting peace and stability in its region and beyond. There are plenty of examples of successful interventions by Qatar in diffusing conflicts, using leverage, and waving the promise of the benefits of peace. Those successes, however, have not necessarily meant finding durable solutions to resolve conflicts (Kamrava, 2011). Conflict resolution — ever more difficult in the fragmented and complex nature of contemporary conflicts — requires different approaches, skills, and resources, including on-the-ground presence and knowledge, long-term engagement by negotiating teams, an ability to address the root causes of the conflict, and sustained

power projection to enforce the terms of initial peace negotiations and reduce the risk of conflict relapse. These go well beyond what Qatar has on offer. Despite intense diplomatic work and significant investments in countries such as Lebanon, Sudan, and Yemen, the absence of a meaningful resolution to the complex roots of these conflicts translated, sooner or later, into a return to armed violence.

Turkey

Scholarship has examined the dramatic shifts that have occurred in Turkey's foreign policy over the past decade. The country has moved from a so-called "Zero Problems" (MOFA of Turkey, 2013) foreign policy doctrine to cultivate and maintain good neighbourly relations to a more assertive foreign policy, whereby Turkey pursues a combination of political, military, and diplomatic means to secure its strategic objectives (van Heukelingen & Deen, 2022). This trend, which has been visible since the Arab Spring uprisings — particularly after the failed coup d'état of 15 July 2016 — has led Turkey on occasions to become involved, including militarily, in countries such as Libya and Syria. However, Günay points out that the outcome of the Arab Spring revolutions has forced Turkey to scale back its role and ambitions in the region. From serving as the Arab Spring harbinger of popular Islamist transformation in the Middle East, Turkey has more recently opted for a more conciliatory approach vis-à-vis regional opponents like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (Interview with Cengiz Günay, 2024). Açıkalın posits that amid geopolitical competition, Turkey has pursued strategic autonomy through "transactionalism" in its interactions with Western partners, multiple and flexible alignments, and closer ties with non-Western powers like Russia and China (Açıkalın, 2024).

Against this backdrop, mediation has become a key element of Turkey's foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlights that as method of conflict resolution, mediation has implications for achieving "peace, stability and prosperity" in Turkey's neighbourhood and beyond (MOFA of Turkey, 2024).

Motivations

The existing literature offers a broad range of underlying motives for Turkey's engagement in conflict management, including its proactive role in mediation. Açıkalın puts Turkey's mediation efforts in the context of the country's efforts to maximise political and economic interests, including by establishing new trade and energy routes, while deepening and broadening Turkey's role as a regional leader and a contributor to global peace (Açıkalın, 2024). Internal stability and national security concerns have also been highlighted as key motivations, as demonstrated by Turkey's engagement in Syria, where the cross-border influx of millions of refugees and the fight against Kurdish forces — which Turkey considers terrorist groups (Yaşar, 2021) — denote a compelling internal/external security nexus (Peter & Rice, 2022). More critical analyses have tied Turkey's foreign interventions in locations such as Somalia and Libya to efforts aimed at deflecting public attention from domestic challenges (Carson et al., 2020; van Heukelingen & Deen, 2022; Harchaoui, 2020).

Modalities, Tools, and Mechanisms

Turkey's mediation engagements have accumulated over time and its experience has concomitantly increased. According to the Foreign Ministry, Turkey "plays a pioneering role at the global level in raising awareness and creating capacity for mediation" (MOFA of Turkey, 2024). Turkey engages in a range

of mediation roles that can be ranked in four categories: direct involvement as a mediator, or facilitator between parties in conflict; diplomatic initiatives within international organisations, in particular the UN, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); capacity building or mediation support endeavours; and awareness-raising and outreach events. Scholars have noted that Turkey has a broad definition of mediation that alongside truces, cessation of hostilities, or peace treaties, aims for less ambitious objectives, including de-escalation, the release of hostages and prisoners (Beriker, 2016; Parlar Dal, 2018; Sofos, 2023).

Mediation Activities

Over the past twenty years, Turkey has been involved in several peace processes in different regions. An extensive overview compiled by Sofos (Sofos, 2023), which draws from previous studies by Beriker and Parlar Dal (Beriker, 2016; Parlar Dal, 2018) alongside official government sources (MOFA of Turkey, 2024), highlights Turkey's peace engagements. These include: endeavours to advance internal reconciliation in Iraq, Lebanon, and Kyrgyzstan; trilateral dialogues among Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey, and Serbia as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey and Croatia (Presidency of Turkey, 2019) to promote peace and stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina; Pakistan-Afghanistan-Turkey Trilateral Summits (PATTS), which aim to improve Pakistan-Afghanistan relations (Shah & Li, 2020) and peace and security in Afghanistan (MOFA of Turkey, 2024); efforts to resolve the stalemate over the Iranian nuclear programme by mediating between Iran and the international community represented by the P5+1; mediation activities in Somalia between the Federal Government of Somalia

and the Federal States of the country, particularly Somaliland and Puntland (Beriker, 2016; Sofos, 2023); support to the peace process between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) (MOFA of Turkey, 2024); and efforts to facilitate dialogue between Ukraine and Russia (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Turkey's engagement in conflict management, including mediation, has been particularly visible in its immediate neighbourhood. In Syria, along a path of competition and cooperation with neighbouring powers, Turkey's involvement has been driven by its own security interests. In December 2016, Turkey became part of the Astana process, which fits Turkey's broad definition of mediation insofar as it aims to find a solution to the Syrian crisis and ensure a ceasefire (Özcan, 2022). Initiated by Russia with the aim of coordinating relations between Iran, Russia, and Turkey, the most prominent countries involved on the ground in Syria, the Astana process proposed a new framework for peace negotiations in Syria based on the concept of "de-escalation" (Sosnowski 2020) — shoring up local ceasefires and establishing four "de-escalation zones" across the country — while shifting diplomatic efforts from political transition to constitutional reform. Although the Syrian government used the opportunity and time to revise its strategies and retake from the opposition groups three out of the four de-escalation zones, the initiative established limits to the interventions of Iran, Russia, and Turkey in the Syrian conflict, gradually normalising their military presence on the ground and contributing to avoid any open confrontation between the three powers (Belhadj Klaz & Mariani, 2022). The Astana process, which initially ran parallel to the Geneva Process led by the UN, gradually sidelined the UN's mediation role in Syria.

As a result, until a major offensive by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham rebels in late November 2024, a military status quo and an "illiberal peace" (Abboud, 2021) prevailed in Syria for four years. During this period, the key external actors — Iran, Russia, and Turkey — managed to overcome their differences and armed violence subsided (Interview with Cengiz Günay, 2024), while political and social grievances, along with the root causes of the conflict, were largely ignored.

In Libya — where in 2020 Turkey provided military assistance to the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) against forces of the rival government in Tobruk supported by the UAE and Russian mercenaries (Harchaoui, 2020) — Turkey has also engaged in diplomatic efforts to find a political solution. The interventions and military presence in Libya by Turkey and Russia and the entente that the two powers had previously found in Syria raised expectations about a possible "Astanaization" (Hellmüller & Salaymeh, 2023) of the peace process in Libya. After Russia hosted diplomatic negotiations on Libya in 2020 and both Russia and Turkey called for a ceasefire (Al Jazeera, 2020), there were speculations that they would create a parallel process to that led by the UN in order to secure their interests in Libya, seek de-escalation and avoid open confrontation, and achieve a rough balance of power between the two rival Libyan camps. However, aspirations by Russia and Turkey to take a leading role in the Libyan negotiations did not materialise. Libya's national reconciliation process remained in the hands of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), while both Turkey and Russia showed less leverage over the opposing parties in Libya (Harchaoui & Mariani, 2022) than in Syria.

The most recent and high-profile

mediation engagement by Turkey is the mediation between Ukraine and Russia that led to the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2022. The deal, which was brokered by the UN and Turkey, allowed the export of Ukrainian grain via the Black Sea of nearly 33 million tonnes of grain and other foodstuffs to forty-five countries (UN, 2023). Although the initiative was not renewed after the expiration of its third term on 17 July 2023, for one year it stabilized global food prices and brought relief to developing countries reliant on Ukrainian exports (UN, 2023). It showed that in the absence of a holistic peace process and the conditions to pursue a comprehensive, just, and durable peace, innovative approaches to mediation directed towards specific issues — related, for example, to humanitarian and economic concerns — can be effective in mitigating the impacts of a conflict (Whitfield, 2024). This has implications for Turkey's involvement in other contexts, for example in Libya, where a new economic-centred mediation approach may also have an intrinsic peace-promotion value (Harchaoui & Mariani, 2022).

According to Turkey's Deputy Foreign Minister Burak Akçapar, after 2010, Turkish diplomacy's role within international organisations to promote mediation as a conflict resolution method has been more intense than actual mediation in the field (Akçapar, 2021; Sofos, 2023). In 2010, Turkey and Finland jointly launched at the UN the "Mediation for Peace Initiative" with the aim of enhancing "the prominence of mediation in preventive diplomacy in conflict resolution and to ensure the allocation of additional resources for mediation efforts" (MOFA of Turkey, 2024). Turkey and Finland then became co-chairs of the "Group of Friends of Mediation," which currently consists of fifty-two Member States, the UN, and eight regional organizations and other inter-

national organizations (UN, 2024), meeting annually at a ministerial level in the margins of the UN General Assembly. The Group played an important role in the adoption by the UN General Assembly in 2011 of resolution UNGA 65/283 on "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution" that was instrumental to the release a year later of the UN's "Guidance for Effective Mediation" (UN, 2012), which outlines key "fundamentals" in mediation efforts.

Building on the initiative at the UN, in 2014, Turkey, alongside Finland and the then Swiss Presidency of the OSCE, formed a "Group of Friends of Mediation" within the OSCE. In addition to providing a platform for sharing experiences, the Group aims to raise awareness among OSCE members of the importance of mediation as an effective tool for conflict resolution and to positively contribute to increase the role of mediation within the OSCE. At a meeting of the Group that was held in Vienna in October 2021, participants discussed the significance of mediation in the OSCE region and how to increase the efficiency of the OSCE in this field (MOFA of Turkey, 2023).

In its mediation support activities, Turkey has also given priority to building the mediation capacity of the OIC, as in Turkey's view "The majority of conflicts worldwide take place within the OIC geography" (MOFA of Turkey, 2023). Since 2018, Turkey has submitted several resolutions on "Strengthening the Mediation Capacity of the OIC" (ibid), which were then adopted by the Councils of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of the OIC. These have laid the foundations for an OIC Contact Group on Mediation (OIC, 2018), which is tasked with building the OIC's capabilities in resolving disputes. The Group has been working on developing OIC

guidelines on culturally- and locally-sensitive mediation practices as well as the creation of a roster of specialists, mediators, and special representatives of the OIC (MOFA of Turkey, 2023). In line with a resolution by the OIC CFM mandating the organisation of training courses on mediation (Dabur, 2019), in 2018 Turkey launched the Mediation for Peace Certificate Programme for junior diplomats from the OIC Secretariat and OIC Member States (MOFA of Turkey, 2023). To date, dozens of junior diplomats have reportedly participated in the Certificate Programme (ibid).

Turkey also hosts awareness-raising and outreach activities such as the “İstanbul Mediation Conferences” under the auspices of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. These are events designed to gather international governmental and civil society actors focussing on mediation to enhance interactions, understanding, and cooperation on international mediation efforts. They are also meant to contribute to the objectives of the Turkey/Finland “Mediation for Peace Initiative”, launched in 2010. The first Istanbul Mediation Conference was held in 2012 under the theme “Enhancing Peace Through Mediation: New Actors, Fresh Approaches, Bold Initiatives” (MOFA of Turkey, 2012). The most recent İstanbul Mediation Conference — the eighth to-date — was held in March 2022. Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, the conference highlighted the importance of the peaceful resolution of conflicts under the title of “Spotlight on Mediation in a Changing Peace Landscape” (MOFA of Turkey, 2022). By merging theory and practice, discussions among policymakers, diplomats, practitioners, and academics focused on lessons learned in mediation processes and the value of including women and youth in peace mediation processes, among other topics. In 2017, Turkey initiated

another conference series for OIC member states. To-date, four such conferences have been held, the first three in Turkey and the latest in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in June 2022 (OIC, 2022).

Strengths and Limits

Turkey possesses a wealth of expertise in mediation through its experience in different regions affected by conflict and instability. Turkey’s geographic advantage of being at the intersection of Europe and Asia gives it a symbolic and practical role to serve as a “bridge-builder” (Açıkalın, 2024) in international affairs, including by creating new trade and energy routes and mediating regional conflicts. The projection of an image as a “custodian of Islamic culture” (Sofos, 2022) without colonial baggage, together with the development of religious networks (ibid.), have assisted Turkey’s interventions in a variety of countries and regions, including Libya, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel. Turkey’s negotiating abilities can also rely on a complex assortment of diplomatic, financial and political tools as well as a certain level of flexibility in ensuring that the parties remain on board the mediating process. For example, despite its preference for a unitary state solution in Somalia, in 2014 Turkey opened a consulate in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, as an incentive for Somaliland to remain engaged in the mediation process, thus demonstrating an ability to engage strategically in mediation. Although Turkey does not have a formal mediation support structure, its international mediation efforts benefit from Turkish presence on the ground, including through aid and trade as well as the work of organisations such as the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), the Turkish Red Crescent, and the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) (Sofos, 2023).

Turkey also faces constraints in its peace mediation efforts. Turkey's understanding of peace often lies in conflict containment, rather than conflict resolution, which affects its ability to operate on the full spectrum of mediation. Moreover, the ideological dimension of Turkey's foreign policy — especially its "support of like-minded Sunni political partners in the Middle East and Africa" (Sofos, 2023) and its approach vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue that makes it prefer unitary state solutions — calls into question its role as an impartial actor. Another challenge is that in its foreign policy, the current Turkish government prefers interactions at the level of heads-of-state, or senior government officials, with a personalist approach (Öztürk & Reilly, 2022), which does not fully capitalise on the talent, expertise, or local knowledge of frontline officials and aid organizations. There are also limitations to Turkey due to the availability of financial resources that accompany mediation and facilitation processes (Interview with Cengiz Günay). Unlike its ally Qatar and its competitor UAE, Turkey does not have a very prosperous economy and cannot engage in so-called "chequebook diplomacy" to offer particularly large economic aid and investments as inducements that increase the attractiveness of mediation deals. Nor does it have significant resources to expend on facilitation activities.

It is not surprising that there are countries turning to Turkey for mediation. Turkey is at the intersection of several geographical, political, and cultural environments. It is a member of NATO and other multilateral organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It can draw on its geostrategic position — between Europe and Asia, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean —

as well as trade, cultural, and religious links with countries in Eurasia and Africa to play a significant role in international peace efforts. It has the potential to engage successfully in mediation processes, particularly in the multilateral domain, or as a co-leader in collective mediation processes, that draw on the relationships and mediation capacities of different actors. The success of Turkey's future peace interventions is contingent upon the continued adaptation of its foreign policy to the geopolitical realities of the post-Arab Spring period, as well as the strengthening of its mediation capacity and finding greater convergence with the interests and goals of other powers in the region.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Since the Arab Spring, the UAE has become far more assertive in regional and global affairs. Able to compete with major regional powers like Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, the UAE has intervened, including militarily, in countries affected by conflict and instability while seeking a bigger role in the international peacemaking/peacebuilding space through conflict mediation. According to the UAE's 1971 Constitution, the foreign policy of the UAE is "directed towards supporting the Arab and Islamic causes and interests and towards establishing closer friendship and co-operation with all the nations and peoples on the basis of the principles of the charter of the United Nations Organization and international ideals" (UAE Constitution, 1971). But beyond Arab and Islamic causes, the UAE has emerged as a consequential regional power with geostrategic goals, such as control of the maritime space between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, and political and security priorities, in particular the fight against political Islam at home and abroad (Steinberg, 2020). The UAE's engagement in "regional and global changes

and challenges” (Gökalp, 2020) has benefited from diplomatic dexterity and a distinct policy approach centred on “minilateralism” (Ereli, 2024). Through this method, the UAE has developed close collaboration with unique groupings of countries, such as the I2U2 partnership (India, Israel, the UAE, and the US), the Negev Forum (Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, the UAE and the US), and the tri-lateral cooperation initiative between France, India, and the UAE.

Motivations

Several factors drive the UAE’s engagement in mediation and broader conflict management. First are efforts to garner international recognition, prestige, and visibility as part of both federal state consolidation and national unification, which for a relatively young state like the UAE are political projects still in progress. Second, as an integral and strategic component of the country’s foreign policy, international mediation serves the economic interests (Mladenov, 2024) and investment strategies (Freer, 2022) of the Emirates and advances their geostrategic influence. Third, military and security interests may also influence the UAE’s involvement in mediation, as for example in the Horn of Africa, where the UAE has established military outposts (Ardemagni, 2024). Fourth, the desire to bolster secular nationalist groups — instead of religious parties that are viewed with suspicion (Freer, 2022) — has led to a more interventionist approach in foreign and security policy, both in terms of military involvement and mediation attempts. In particular, the Arab Spring pro-democracy uprisings that spread across the Middle East and North Africa in the early 2010s sent shockwaves through monarchies like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which saw in the growing influence of Islamist groups and public demands for democratic governance a

serious threat to political stability. Contrary to actions taken by Qatar, the UAE stood against the revolutionary movement and directed its foreign policy towards confronting the “threat” emanating from political Islam. While the UAE Constitution’s emphasis on supporting Arab and Islamic causes informs the trajectory of Emirati mediation practices, these are not founded on the primacy of religious motives. As Roberts posits “the UAE is striving to forge an entirely novel concept decoupling religious power from authority” (Robert, 2020). Across North and East Africa and the Middle East, the UAE’s preferred partners are authoritarian governments opposed to political Islam and committed to combating the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements (Steinberg, 2020).

Modalities, Tools, and Mechanisms

At the end of 2023, hailing the UAE’s engagement in mediation and conflict prevention, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that “The UAE will continue to enhance its position on the world stage and support efforts to resolve conflicts between countries through dialogue, and promote global peace, stability, tolerance and coexistence” (MOFA of the UAE, 2023). The UAE’s practice shows that the country has engaged in international mediation as a leading or co-leading actor, using the political, diplomatic, and economic abilities at its disposal to give leverage to mediation processes. Mladenov posits that the UAE has been able to push forward its mediation and conflict resolution style of fostering relationships drawing from traditional cultural elements, such as the concepts of “Sulh” that stresses reconciliation (Mladenov, 2024) and the “Majlis”— a secure and trustworthy gathering place for building trust and relationships before attempting to resolve disputes (ibid.). A foreign policy of

overlapping alliances and close connections with both Global North and Global South countries (Ahmed, 2024; Mladenov, 2024) has also been advantageous to Emirati mediation efforts. Similarly to the methods used by Qatar, Emirati peace diplomacy has directly involved state leaders, including Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi (WAM, 2018; Siddiqui, 2020), and the use of economic aid and investment to accompany mediation efforts and promote conflict resolution.

Previous analyses have also highlighted the use of distinctive tools and mechanisms in Emirati mediation efforts. These vary from undertaking shuttle diplomacy and seeking areas of common ground between parties in conflict through discreet, quiet, and consensus-driven diplomacy (Mladenov, 2024) to hosting peace talks and providing secure platforms for dialogue (Ahmed, 2024). The provision of significant humanitarian aid and investments in economic development are also seen as important in alleviating suffering, building trust, and enhancing stability in countries affected by conflict (ibid.), thus supporting mediation process outcomes.

Mediation Activities

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the UAE started to emerge as an external actor engaged in conflict-affected regions. The UAE's armed forces participated in multilateral peace efforts, including international peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Kosovo (Gulf News, 2012; Gardner, 2020), before supporting the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) (ibid.). Particularly since the mid-2010s, Emirati efforts in international peace mediation have also increased, underscoring the UAE's ambitions and growing influence on the global stage.

In 2018, the UAE, together with Saudi Arabia, mediated a peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea (Butt, 2021; Mahmood, 2020) that formally ended the border conflict between the two countries, which agreed to restore full diplomatic relations and open their borders for persons, goods, and services. Mindful of the strategic importance of normalised relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the UAE used its economic might to pave the way towards the renewal of Ethiopian–Eritrean ties. This included commitments to invest in Eritrean education, healthcare, physical infrastructure, agriculture, and manufacturing (Mumbere, 2019) and a pledge of three billion USD in aid and investments to Ethiopia (AfricaNews, 2019; Stigant & Knopf, 2018). The peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea was also followed by the announcement of a UAE project to build an oil pipeline from Eritrea's port city of Assab to Ethiopia's capital Addis (Embassy of Ethiopia, 2018; Obulutsa & Fick, 2018).

In 2021, the UAE became involved in South Asian geopolitics brokering — after months of secret talks — an India-Pakistan ceasefire (Sen, 2021; Rej, 2021). Against the backdrop of a particularly contentious time between India and Pakistan, with the Emirati government seeking to balance close economic and strategic ties with both countries, the UAE reportedly played a key role in securing peace between India and Pakistan (Ahmed, 2024; Ibish, 2021; ICG, 2018). In addition to facilitating back-channel talks, hosting secret meetings between intelligence officials, and encouraging dialogue at the highest levels of government (ibid), there were also high-level visits to Pakistan and India with the aim of strengthening economic relations as well as regional and global peace and stability (MOFA of the UAE, 2021; Government of India, 2022). Ahmed also highlights the importance of

Track 2 diplomacy facilitated by the UAE, which has brought together influential, albeit unofficial, representatives from both sides for discussions that have contributed to build trust and deeper understanding and have created opportunities for more official negotiations (Ahmed, 2024). While the ceasefire along the Line of Control in the disputed region of Kashmir is fragile (Clary, 2024), it has held for more than three years, providing a stabilizing effect in the turbulent relationship between India and Pakistan.

More recently, the UAE has positioned itself as a neutral mediator in the protracted Russia-Ukraine war. By leveraging through discreet and quiet diplomacy (Mladenov, 2024) its good relations with both Russia and Ukraine, the UAE has promoted diplomatic talks and de-escalation while supporting humanitarian initiatives such as prisoners' swaps. As of October 2024, the UAE has mediated nine prisoners' exchanges, with the release of 2,184 captives (MOFA UAE, 2024). Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the largest exchange of captives between Russia and Ukraine took place in January 2024, when the UAE mediated the release of 478 captives (Vock, 2024). The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs has emphasized that the success of its mediation efforts reflects the "cooperative and friendly relations" that the UAE shares with both Russia and Ukraine (MOFA UAE, 2024), which are aided by interactions at the highest levels with the opposing parties.

Strengths and Limits

In international peace mediation, the UAE shares many of the strengths of its neighbouring Gulf state Qatar. It has good relations with major powers and the ability to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes, as underscored by its facilitation of prisoners'

exchanges between Russia and Ukraine, despite the absence of any peace talks. Its initiatives benefit from diplomatic agility, negotiating expertise, and the flexibility to decide when and where to become involved in mediation (Freer, 2022), without fearing any internal opposition. Moreover, the personal involvement in peace talks by its most senior rulers enables the UAE to engage with top decision-makers in different regional contexts. The ability to leverage the state's enormous wealth allows Emirati mediators to constructively incentivise opposing actors to accept compromises that may be outside their original purviews.

Another significant strength lies in the fact that the Emirates are at the forefront of technological advancements, with, for example, an AI sector that is considered to be among the world's most advanced (U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council, 2024). In 2017, after announcing the UAE Strategy for Artificial Intelligence — an ambitious vision to position the country as a global leader in AI technology by 2031 — the UAE appointed a Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence (AI Office, 2022). The UAE's leadership in mobilising, financing, and promoting new technologies has important implications for the future of peacemaking and adds more influence and capabilities to the country's mediation efforts. The Emirates have played an important role in promoting high-profile UN debates on the risks and benefits for peace of new technologies. In May 2021, the UAE co-hosted a UN panel discussion on the potential of new technologies like AI to transform peacemaking, mediation, and peacebuilding and make deliveries of humanitarian aid more effective (PMUAE, 2021). Later, in August 2021, at a UN Security Council debate on technology and peacekeeping, the UAE highlighted that new technological tools are crucial to the success of UN peace operations.

It outlined how technologies like Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and Unmanned Aircraft Vehicles (UAVs) can be used in UN peace operations for intelligence-gathering and monitoring (PMUAE, 2021).

Despite undeniable strengths, there are also challenges and constraints to the UAE's mediation efforts. Previous studies have highlighted the drawbacks of the personalistic and under-institutionalised nature of the Emirates' engagement in mediation (Freer, 2022), which, quite similarly to the weaknesses found in Qatar's approaches, carry reputational risks — especially if mediation fails — and limit the UAE's capability to affect long-term conflict resolution. Some scholars have pointed out the limited influence of the UAE over non-state actors, including militias and groups that are labelled as “terrorist”, which may undermine efforts towards inclusive peace processes or the implementation of peace agreements (Ahmed, 2024). Then there are the challenges posed by a potentially overburdened diplomatic corps that faces increased demands for the UAE's mediation (ibid). For this author, however, the greatest challenge to Emirati mediation lies in managing the complexities of economic and geopolitical interests that press the Gulf state to engage, including militarily, in conflict environments while seeking de-escalation and negotiated settlements as a responsible international actor. Despite the UAE's diplomatic achievements in the mediation arena, a “militaristic approach to foreign policy” (Freer, 2022) — in particular in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea-Mediterranean regions (Ardemagni, 2024) — dictated by efforts to counter Sunni political Islam and the Shia Iranian influence in the Middle East and Africa (Al Mezaini, 2017) is often at odds with the UAE's professed image as a neutral mediator committed to promoting

stability and peace. Alongside high levels of military expenditure (Wezeman & Kuimova, 2019), there is evidence that the UAE has been involved militarily in the conflicts in Libya (Badi, 2022; Gardner, 2020) and Yemen (Laub, 2018; Knights, 2019; Gardner, 2020; Mokdad, 2021), where it sided with local armed groups and, indirectly, became a party to internationalised armed conflicts. More recently, the UAE has faced accusations of providing military aid to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) — the paramilitary group which is at war with Sudan's armed forces (Walsh et al., 2023; Shah & Cornish, 2024) — despite being a member of the Quad, a diplomatic grouping composed of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK, and the US that is trying to broker an end to the conflict.

In some conflict-affected contexts, Emirati mediation has shown success. Elsewhere, the UAE's militaristic approach may suit the more immediate economic and strategic aims of the Gulf state and its ideological competition with neighbouring countries, but it also risks inadvertently exacerbating local conflict dynamics and complicating efforts to find long-term peace solutions. As the UAE's presence and impact in regions affected by conflict continues to expand, there will be increased demands for it to strike the appropriate balance between, on one hand, pursuing political, economic, and ideological interests and, on the other, ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of its peace efforts.

IV. The Impact of Emerging Mediation Powers

At the heart of the analysis of the impact of mediation efforts by emerging powers is a key consequential question: are they contributing to peace? Assessing the

impact of mediation efforts by emerging countries depends on the intentions and goals of their interventions. There is evidence that in different contexts they have leveraged their influence, showing themselves to have comparative advantages in relation to traditional mediators and making useful contributions to reducing the level of violence and mitigating the impacts of conflicts. Therefore, if conflict reduction, crisis de-escalation, or issue-specific concerns are the main goals of mediation initiatives, the countries examined in this publication have a successful record. In complex conflict settings, if minimalist approaches concentrating on conflict management can ensure a modicum of peace or address specific concerns — for example, ensuring food security through the Black Sea grain deal, preventing fighting near nuclear power plants, the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, or exchanges of prisoners of wars held by Russia and Ukraine — they can bring tangible benefits. However, evaluating peace engagement success strictly in terms of stabilisation and other immediate peace and issue-specific outcomes provides only a narrow view of the impact achieved. If successful mediation is measured in terms of sustainability, resolving the underlying causes of conflicts, and fostering conditions for lasting peace, then the record of emerging powers leaves much scope for improvement. Without addressing the underlying causes of violence in the post-conflict period — including sharp inequalities, economic decline, or a lack of basic good governance and justice — ceasefires and peace agreements cannot prevent conflict recurrence, as illustrated by the experiences of countries like Afghanistan, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, and Yemen.

International peace mediation, in its different forms, is a highly-specialised activity

requiring knowledge and a high-degree of professionalism as well as sustained political, financial, and administrative support. While highly centralised decision-making and the personalistic nature of mediation — which is typical of the mediation style of some of the countries examined in this paper — may be advantageous when promoting peace initiatives, the sustainability of peace engagement requires professional skills, solid dialogue infrastructure, and mechanisms to advise and support mediators. A wide range of guidance, policy, and practice materials by the UN (UN, 2012; UN DPA & UNEP, 2015; UN DPA, 2017; UN DPPA, 2022; UN DPPA, 2022; UN DPPA-OHCHR, 2023) and regional groupings (EEAS, 2023; EEAS, 2020), which advise on the design and effective management of mediation processes and the fundamental principles that underpin them, has enhanced internationally the knowledge base, skills, and competences in mediation (Whitfield, 2024). Moreover, the countries examined in this paper are well-aware of the importance of enhancing skills and developing networks and capabilities, and some have initiated processes of professionalisation of their mediation work. However, progress towards a more systematic approach to adequately respond to the evolving mediation demands of a complex and evolving conflict landscape remains modest (Liaga et al., 2024). The countries examined in this paper would benefit from setting up standing mediation support structures that provide data collection and analysis, policy advice, and capacity building in mediation, post-agreement monitoring, implementation, and evaluation. Such structures would also act as a focal point for information exchange and communication with other mediators (Lehmann-Larsen, 2014).

Inclusiveness is one of the fundamental principles that underpin mediation. A wide

range of official UN documents highlight that the sustainability of peace mediation efforts requires inclusiveness, whereby all sides of a conflict have an opportunity to participate in the process. If this premise is met, there is usually faith in the process itself. However, the countries studied in this paper tend to understand inclusiveness — simplistically — as the involvement of all armed groups in a peace process. They all show insufficient engagement in leveraging local agency, including civil society actors, women, and young people, in peace processes. There is one crucial element in the mediation toolbox that is often inadequate in the practices of traditional Western mediators and even weaker in the methods applied by emerging powers: the role of women. As emphasised in key UN guidance documents and reiterated more recently in the UN “Pact for the Future,” women play a crucial role as agents of peace and their “full, equal, safe and meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels of peace and security,” including mediation, is key to achieve sustainable peace (UN, 2024). However, all too often, due to persisting stereotypes, women are the largest group of stakeholders regularly excluded from participating in and mediating peace processes, which are almost exclusively male activities. Advancing the inclusion and meaningful participation of women leaders, gender experts, and women-led organizations in mediation is key to the design of effective responses that draw on a broader set of mediation skills and a more comprehensive understanding of substantive issues, therefore making peace settlements more sustainable.

Another concern relates to the strategic competition and ideological divergences between emerging mediators. This may weaken consensus on the means and goals of mediation and undermine the conditions for sustainable peace. Previous

analyses have highlighted the geostrategic competition pitting Turkey and Qatar against the so-called “Saudi-Emirati axis” (Altunışık, 2020). Other scholars have pointed out the need for small and relatively young states like Qatar and the UAE that have much in common but have divergent positions on political Islam “to distinguish themselves abroad” (Freer, 2022) and promote their own “brand” (ibid). Competition has been playing out in the Middle East, as well as in the Horn of Africa (ICG, 2019; Carson et al., 2020), where divergent conflict management efforts by Turkey and Qatar on one side and the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt on the other have ultimately been detrimental to long-term peace and stability. Somalia, with its congestion of external actors (Sofos, 2023), is a case study. Here, while Turkey and Qatar have cultivated a close relationship with the Federal Government in Mogadishu, the UAE, uncomfortable with the influence of Turkey and Qatar over Somalia, has since 2017 developed close contacts, including military and security cooperation, with the federal states of Somaliland, Puntland, and Jubaland (Ramani, 2021; Freer, 2021; Steinberg, 2020). In Libya, the military, economic, and political interference of Western and non-Western powers after the fall of Gaddafi has turned into a proxy conflict between Turkey and Qatar on one hand and Egypt, the UAE, and Russia on the other. In the Syrian civil war, while initially Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE were united in condemning the Assad regime and backing insurgents, they later followed different paths. Turkey and Qatar continued to support militias like the Free Syrian Army and Islamist groups (Yüksel, 2019), while Saudi Arabia and the UAE viewed some of these groups with suspicion and, by backing other groups, tried to ensure that Islamist forces would not dominate the insurgency (Perry et al., 2023). Differences re-emerged in 2021-22 when the UAE and other Arab

states started to press to end Assad's isolation — in 2022, President Assad traveled to the UAE for his first visit to an Arab state since the Syrian war — and to re-admit Syria in the Arab League, while Qatar opposed the normalisation of relations with Syria without a political solution to the conflict (Lewis & El Safety, 2023). Since the signing of the "al-Ula Declaration" in January 2021, through which Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and non-GCC member state Egypt restored diplomatic relations with Qatar, frayed relationships have been replaced by "positive competition" (Interview One), and there has been progress towards greater intra-Gulf cooperation in the fields of economic investment and trade. However, it remains to be seen whether a consolidation of efforts will extend to the area of peace mediation and contribute to innovative collaborations, which would be a force multiplier in international peace mediation efforts, especially in Africa and the Middle East. If collaboration and cooperation — the best-case scenario — is unattainable, at least improving communication and co-ordination among Qatar, Turkey, and the UAE, for example through forums of information exchange and dialogue, would help to downplay divergences, build confidence, and defuse tensions.

As highlighted in UN mediation guidance, impartiality is an essential characteristic of a peace mediator (UN, 2012). Accordingly, a mediator's close relationship with one or more of the main conflict protagonists puts into question its ability to maintain a balanced and impartial approach and play an effective mediation role. It would appear particularly challenging for a third actor to effectively mediate in a conflict in which the demands of the opposing parties are antithetical and the putative mediator has vested interests and close ties with one or more conflict actors. This is, for example, the

case of China's attempts to play a mediation role in the war in Ukraine and its facilitation of peace talks in Myanmar as well as mediation by the UAE and Turkey in Libya, where they backed opposite sides during the 2019-2020 civil war. These concerns, however, often fail to recognise the interests that a "partisan mediator" may have to end, or de-escalate, a conflict and the benefits it can bring to peacemaking efforts. The lack of impartiality, real or perceived, does not necessarily hinder a country's ability to resolve a conflict, or mitigate its impacts, as long as the putative mediator has leverage over one or more of the conflict parties. There are examples in recent history of Western states who have successfully brokered peace deals even if they were partial to one side or directly invested in the outcome. For example, the US' crucial role in brokering the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina typifies a case in which a powerful external actor can simultaneously intervene militarily in a conflict and then engage in mediation. Similarly, the US' involvement in the Oslo Accords of 1993 and then the Hebron Protocol of 1997 offer examples of mediation attempts by the US to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite its pro-Israel stance and perceptions of bias. This creates a paradox in which partisan external actors can turn conflicts on and off. In different phases of their interventions in conflict, they can either hinder peace by mere inaction or coercive means, like the use of military force, or promote peaceful solutions through mediation. This transition usually happens when third party actors realise that their partisan approaches to the conflict are not yielding the expected results. As the protracted conflict becomes more detrimental to their interests, external actors may develop a more honest approach about their objectives and interests in ending the conflict, reach convergence with other

external actors, and finally deploy their full capacities to act as peace brokers.

V. Implications for Western agency and global peacemaking

The growing role of emerging mediation powers has important implications for regional peace dynamics as well as for Western agency and global peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. It brings both challenges and opportunities.

While there are important differences among the heterogeneous group of non-Western powers engaged in mediation, they share one remarkable commonality: unlike Western countries, they follow a peacebuilding approach that is not based on liberal values. Instead of prioritising human rights, democracy, and gender equality as key guiding principles, their engagement favours stability, strong state authority, and development, rather than inclusiveness. It is often informed by “power mediation” that derives from the economic and/or military capabilities at their disposal and a more transactional, rather than normative, approach to mediation (Ehrmann & Haron, 2024; Call & de Coning, 2017). As such, they represent a challenge to the policies and engagement of Western mediators. However, it would be erroneous to characterise the emerging international peace mediation landscape as a contest for the promotion of democracy/human rights or authoritarianism. While there is no concurrence on the liberal vision of peacemaking, non-Western countries accept elements of the liberal peace order and engage both within and outside of regional and international institutions that champion multilateralism, common values, and liberal peace. Crucially, there remains con-

sensus around values that prioritise peace over violence. Therefore, despite important differences when it comes to the fundamental principles that underpin mediation, the approaches of Western and non-Western countries are not necessarily dichotomous (Peter & Rice, 2022).

In fragmented contexts, where there are interlinkages between local, national, transnational, and geopolitical factors (Bell, 2024), mediation by multiple actors may address more effectively the complexities of a multidimensional conflict system, while the inclusion of various third parties may increase the international legitimacy of the process (Vuković, 2019). By combining elements of transformative and transactional approaches, different mediators can leverage complementary strengths and comparative advantages — including skills, expertise, experience, and financial means — to address different aspects of a conflict system. This process is not unheard of; Western and non-Western mediators sometimes cooperate. In recent months, Qatar, Egypt, and the US have been involved together in efforts to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Saudi Arabia and the US have brokered talks aimed at halting fighting in Sudan. However, more effective linkages, coordination, coherence, and complementarity are needed between UN-facilitated processes, initiatives by traditional Western mediators, and non-Western actors that are increasingly involved in international mediation. The UN’s new “Pact for the Future” and calls to “bring multilateralism back from the brink” (UN, 2024) may offer opportunities to rebuild trust between the Global South and North, and forge a new consensus by incorporating divergent approaches in the design and implementation of peace mediation activities. While mediation adaptation is a long-term process, a good starting point would be more

effective communication between Western and non-Western mediators on the merits and challenges of their mediation practices. This would help to build trust, learn from each other, and promote improved coordination, collaboration, and cooperation (Ehrmann & Haron, 2024).

VI. Conclusions

In the changing context of contemporary conflicts, with growing geopolitical rivalry entangled with security vulnerabilities and local level conflicts, international peace mediation has evolved. It now takes place in an intricate and variable multi-stakeholder arena where emerging powers — including China, Qatar, Turkey, and the UAE — play a significant role. Given their economic and political influence, the changing geopolitical and geoeconomic landscapes, and technological advances, the trend towards the participation of these countries in mediation and, more broadly, conflict management and resolution processes is bound to increase. We will likely see in the future fewer UN-led and Western-led mediation processes and greater engagement, both in terms of frequency and scope, by emerging powers, including the countries examined in this paper.

The multiplicity of peace mediators is not inherently negative. While emerging powers' approaches differ from liberal peace models, especially regarding democracy, human rights, and gender equality, the countries examined in this paper operate within and outside of the liberal peacebuilding consensus that informs the work of regional and global institutions, in particular the UN. Thus, Western and non-Western approaches should not be seen as dichotomous. As contemporary conflicts become more complex, mediation is an increasingly challenging task for a

single mediator. Different tools, expertise, and capacities from a range of actors may be needed at different levels and phases of a peace process. In this context, the rise of new mediators that use new approaches and resources — including new technologies — and that can leverage their diplomatic, political, and economic strengths to facilitate dialogue and resolve conflicts brings in both quantitative and qualitative changes to international peacemaking. But amid rising geopolitical competition and complex regional power dynamics, multiparty mediation also faces challenges. In complex conflict environments, where external would-be mediators may have divergent interests and even compete against each other, there is a risk that different approaches and fragmented mediation processes undermine efforts to resolve conflicts. Countering fragmentation and competition requires adaptation and creativity to create the conditions for multiple actors, at a minimum, to communicate effectively on the means and goals of doing mediation and, at best, to leverage and coordinate their capabilities to promote sustainable peace solutions.

As mediation in an increasingly fragmented landscape remains an indispensable tool of conflict resolution, further research is needed on the challenges and opportunities of mediation and the needs for its adaptation and innovation. Future studies should enhance comparative understandings of non-Western models of mediation and their impact in areas of conflict. They should also examine the dynamics between multiple non-Western and Western mediators and the extent to which, in specific contexts, constructive new avenues for coordination and collaboration may foster much-needed partnerships.

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