



**PeaceRep**  
Peace and Conflict  
Resolution Evidence  
Platform

RESEARCH REPORT



## Situating the Contribution of the Political Market Framework to Peace Processes

Alex de Waal, Benjamin Spatz and Aditya Sarkar



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



WORLD PEACE  
FOUNDATION

Authors: Alex de Waal, Benjamin Spatz and Aditya Sarkar

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform  
School of Law, Old College, The University of Edinburgh  
South Bridge, Edinburgh EH8 9YL

Tel. +44 (0)131 651 4566

Fax. +44 (0)131 650 2005

E-mail: [peacerep@ed.ac.uk](mailto:peacerep@ed.ac.uk)

[PeaceRep.org](http://PeaceRep.org)

Twitter: [@Peace\\_Rep\\_](https://twitter.com/Peace_Rep_)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceRepResearch>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/peacerep/>

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/peace\\_rep\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/peace_rep_/)

This research is an output from the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep), funded by UK Aid from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) for the benefit of developing countries. The information and views set out in this publication are those of the authors. Nothing herein constitutes the views of FCDO. Any use of this work should acknowledge the authors and the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform.

#### About the authors:

Dr. Benjamin J. Spatz is Senior Lecturer at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business and a researcher with the World Peace Foundation at the Fletcher School, Tufts University. His expertise centers on the political economy of conflict, corruption and illicit finance, and conflict management. As a recognized expert in sanctions, he was previously appointed to the United Nations Security Council Panel of Experts on Liberia. In 2023 he is on leave to serve as Expert Policy Advisor in the U.S. Treasury Department as a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow; the views expressed are his own and do not reflect those of the U.S. Government.

Aditya Sarkar is a Ph.D student at the Fletcher School, Tufts University and an independent researcher. He has advised the Governments of Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia on developing National Employment Policies and similar issues, and has worked with the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, and the Open Society Foundations. Aditya is qualified as a lawyer in India and in England and Wales. He is a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and the National Law School of India University in Bangalore, India. Aditya's research focuses on the political economy of transactional political systems and its connections to labour and migration/displacement.

Professor Alex de Waal is Director of the World Peace Foundation at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, with a world-renowned expertise on global famine, pandemics, and the political economy of the Horn of Africa. Professor de Waal is Research Director for Political Marketplace research within the Conflict and Civicness Research group at LSE and contributes to CPAID research at the Firoz Lalji Centre for Africa. Professor de Waal is one of the foremost experts on Sudan, South Sudan and the Horn of Africa with particular reference to humanitarian crisis and response, conflict, mediation and peacebuilding. He has served with the African Union mediation team on Darfur and as an advisor to the African Union High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan.

Design: Smith Design Agency

Cover images: All images may be subject to copyright. Getty Images ©2022

# Contents

Overview	01
<hr/>	
The Political Market Framework, Politics and Armed Conflict	03
<hr/>	
The Political Market Framework and Peacemaking	11
<hr/>	
The Political Market Framework as a Toolkit for Mediators	21
<hr/>	
Conclusions	32
<hr/>	

## Overview <sup>1</sup>

The political marketplace framework (PMF) is a lens for analyzing the logic of transactional politics in the contemporary era. It plays three roles: as a theory of the practice of politics including armed conflict, as a critique of peacemaking practice, and as a toolkit or set of diagnostic lenses for the practitioner. This paper summarizes the theory, the critique and outlines the diagnostic lenses that the framework brings to bear.

The PMF is a theory of political practice. Its central claim is that there is a specific, contemporary form of transactional politics that resembles a market — indeed in key respects it is a market. Political marketplaces are found in many fragile and conflict-affected countries in Africa and the Greater Middle East (e.g. Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen).<sup>2</sup> The informal rules of politics in these countries are set by those who command violence and control money. Conflict resolution in political marketplaces is neither liberal nor in conformity with customary norms. For the leading actors in a political marketplace, 'peace' is neither an end to political violence nor the creation of a safe environment for citizens to conduct their lives without fear. Rather it is specific reconfigurations of violence, so that it is not the primary instrument for political transactions between them, and it is a political deal that gives them external legitimacy, such that subsequent violence does not count as 'armed conflict' and threaten that legitimacy.

Second, the PMF is also a critique of the practice of peacemaking. Most contemporary peacemaking practice is rooted in liberal norms and principles which are not only traduced by domestic political actors in conflict-affected countries, but also are being abandoned by world powers retreating from multilateralism. The PMF brings its transactional theory of political practice, to bear on conflict resolution, and the political economies that emerge where such politics trumps institutionalized political forms. A central concept here is the non-formalized political unsettlement which refers to the strategies used by the parties in a peace process to co-exist without violence, without definitively resolving their differences.

Third, the PMF is a toolkit. We envision the PMF as a set of diagnostic lenses for actors seeking to challenge its logic in pursuit of peace, democracy, human rights, and other public goods. This paper provides some of the lenses that will be useful for practitioners, analyzing concepts from the classic mediation/conflict resolution literature and comparing them with the relevant concepts in the PMF. This covers building confidence and managing information; the nature of the conflict parties, including concepts of coalitions and spoilers; matters of timing, including the mutual hurting stalemate and ripeness as against turbulence, material incentives in peacemaking, and two- and three-level games.

## The Political Market Framework, Politics and Armed Conflict

The moral underpinning of the PMF is that the contemporary trend towards transactional, monetized politics is unwelcome and indeed jeopardizes democracy, human rights, human welfare, social cohesion, and peace. We are particularly dismayed at the weakening of multilateral norms, principles and institutions. This paper will not explore the theory of the PMF in depth but rather situate it in the praxis of peacemaking.<sup>3</sup> This requires, first, a succinct overview of the PMF's theory of politics, of armed conflict, and of peacemaking.

### The PMF Theory of Politics

The main western tradition of political philosophy treats politics as applied ethics. Political science theory is concerned primarily with state-formation and state practice. International relations theory takes states as unitary actors (Fearon 1998). A smaller number of theorists have followed in the footsteps of Niccolo Machiavelli and seen politics as a matter of practice, bringing the quotidian skills of political practitioners — 'real politics' — into focus (Geuss 2008). Political ethnography is the academic coalface of this tradition, seeking to explain the informal norms and institutions of power as they actually function. Adrian Leftwich usefully frames this (2006, p. 3): 'politics has two fundamental levels. The first concerns the rules of the game, that is the procedures and processes which underpin and structure political life, which distribute power and authorize its use in particular ways. The second concerns the games within the rules, that is the "normal" contestations over policy and power.' Leftwich's 'normal' contestations are 'real politics' that is always conducted through bargaining, which necessarily entails a transactional logic, in which material inducement, coercion, information and communication are crucial. Any such system of bargaining is rule-based. But the nature of those rules can differ and indeed can be changed. We can make a basic distinction between political systems (typically but not always states) in which those rules of political conduct are regulated by formal institutions, and those in which the logics of transactional politics trump those regulatory systems.

Institutionalist theories of political order identify formal institutionalized systems as superior — more powerful on all metrics — than systems built on informal rules, such as patronage, charisma, religious authority or brute force (North, Wallis and Weingast 2009; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). They were, implicitly, the end-point of history. Much recent scholarship on the authoritarian turn in politics across the globe identifies, explicitly or implicitly, a regression from institutionalized political rules to more primitive transactional rules, noting that in some places, transactional rules were always dominant but often hidden.

The PMF operates on the assumption that rational bureaucratic states are neither the standard nor the end-point of history, arguing instead that the commodification of the quanta of power within a market system may characterize the emergent era. The same holds for the institutionalized multilateral order. While we are seeing a retreat from liberal and democratic values, we are not witnessing a regression to older forms of governance, but rather a modernized, marketized form of governance. In institutional democracies this happens when corporations capture legislatures, judiciaries and the media and rewrite the formal rules of politics. In transactional systems this happens when political power is stolen or purchased. The political market is not the only logic at play, operating alongside identity politics, norms of civicism and the use of coercion, but it changes the rules of 'real politics' in a manner that is readily discernible.

Multilateralism in general and peacemaking in particular is an effort to transfer certain 'rules of the game' from domestic politics to the international realm, supplanting the anarchic international system described (and sometimes lauded) by the realist school of international relations scholarship. Multilateral rules are typically liberal. The last generation of peacemaking has been informed by liberal norms and principles, with authoritarians paying lip service to those values and practices and liberals hoping that formal if insincere avowal is the first step towards internalizing the norms (cf. Sikkink 2017; de Waal 2007). But just as rule-making in many western democracies has been captured by corporate interests, so too multilateral rulemaking is now largely driven by authoritarians and corporate-captured post-democratic states. These diverse actors don't necessarily agree on what the new rules should be, but they do agree on what they shouldn't be — liberal.

For the purposes of this paper, we are concerned with political marketplaces in countries with the following conditions (de Waal 2015, pp. 19-24): (a) political finance is in the hands of individuals who have political, military or economic interests distinct from the state; (b) control over the means of coercion is dispersed or contested; (c) political disputes are not resolved by formal institutional rules and procedures; and (d) these countries are integrated into the global order in a subordinate position. We are especially concerned with multilateral peacemaking in these countries.

We can distinguish two main forms of political marketplace in these countries. The first is rudimentary political markets (bazaars) in which traders deal on a retail basis using cash, and the price of loyalty and political services conforms with supply and demand. These are monetized versions of patron-client politics with straightforward forms of reward, coercion and communication. These tend to be found at the peripheries of large states or in states without a recognized government — i.e. where the writ of state authority doesn't run. The second form is advanced political markets which are hybrids in which the formal regulation of power — typically sovereign authority recognized within the international political and financial system — contributes to oligopolistic or monopolistic practices of power. In turn this brings more complex forms of material inducement, coercion and communication. In these systems, marketized political transactions occur alongside institutions, and usually override them.

We can readily identify the basic goals and rules governing the behavior of individual political actors in these political marketplaces.

The goal is to gain and maintain political power. Power itself is a commodity that is openly bought, sold, and traded. There are two principal transactions that political entrepreneurs use to gain and maintain power: violence and 'cash violence' (i.e., the ability to grant or withhold material rewards or access to material rewards, including cash bribes, non-cash bribes, contracts, formal and informal licenses to operate/predate in certain areas, etc.) (Spatz 2020; Sarkar et al. 2021). Loyalties, too, are traded. Thus, alliances are fluid — elite members can compete one moment and collude the next, or indeed can do both simultaneously in different arenas of competition.



The systems are not geographically contained within state borders; political markets have sub-national elements and are embedded in regional and global political economies. The core business is to secure discretionary cash or its non-cash equivalent: the ability to grant or withhold access to material rewards (e.g. non-cash bribes, contracts, formal and informal licenses to operate/predate in certain areas, etc.). These discretionary funds are the 'political budget,' which is key to an actor's to their ability to buy, sell, and trade political power. Members of the elite — individuals with power to make decisions that affect populations — are the main actors. Elite bargaining — interactions among elite to determine allocations of power and resources — is the bedrock of these systems.

The rules of the game can be summarized in four guiding principles.

1. Transactional politics trump institutional governance: transactions — or elite deals — dominate formal institutions, rules-based governance mechanisms, laws, and regulations; short term gain (or survival) trumps long term planning.
2. Follow the political money: violence, which requires finance to control and manage, and material reward structure elite dealings as they pursue political power. The crucial concept here is the political budget: the funds available to a political actor to spend on political services and allegiances, without needing to account for it.
3. Everything is political: war, peace, repression, and corruption, as well as development and public policy, should be viewed through the prism of elite-level political dealing.
4. It's an elite game. Distasteful though it may be, elites dominate and instrumentalize populations and public policy. It's a form of 'limited access order' (North, Wallis and Weingast 2009).

In adapted form, these rules also apply to peacemakers. This paper will briefly touch upon how multilateral rules are being rewritten by authoritarian and post-democratic governments, but the same processes are at work.

## The PMF and Armed Conflict

In theory, a political marketplace should optimize the level of violence, and that optimum should be low. This is because violence is risky and unpredictable, and transactions are more efficient when they are based solely on the laws of supply and demand. Buying and selling political allegiances should be more efficient than stealing it. In practice, this is not the case. Political marketplaces are violent and are commonly characterized by exclusivist identity politics (Kaldor and de Waal 2020). In a political marketplace, violence has various uses. It is a signal of power and determination. (Note that readiness to take casualties signifies resolve more than ability to inflict them.) It is a means of acquiring material assets. It is a means of depriving the adversary of material assets. For a dominant or monopolistic player, the threat of violence amounts to making an offer that cannot be refused — the fusion of kleptocracy and gangsterism. Insofar as identity-based political and military organization arises in a political marketplace, violence is useful for mobilizing solidarities, inflaming fears, enforcing group boundaries, and forging narratives.

As the uses of violence vary, so too do the costs. The market price of a militia or political thugs can fluctuate daily and be determined by a variety of factors including number of armed actors available for hire, available arms, relationships between actors (including identity-based connections), and the risks these actors face, etc. Being able to effectively wield violence in a political marketplace requires not only a sufficient political budget, but also knowing the cost of violence and connections to actors available for hire.

Empirically, the PMF has distinguished between two 'ideal types' of armed conflict: 'Schmittian' and 'Hobbesian' (de Waal 2014; 2016).<sup>4</sup> A 'Schmittian' conflict has clearly-identifiable friends and enemies, arraigned on two sides, contesting over state authority. One will win and the other will lose, or they will come to an agreement or a stalemate. A 'Hobbesian' conflict resembles a state of generalized insecurity in which all may fight all. Note that Hobbes defined 'warre' as a state of no authority, not as constant fighting, and he compared it to inclement weather in which there is always a chance of rain. These conflicts have multiple armed actors that coalesce, fragment and shift alliances, and typically do not have a clear ending. They are characterized by multiple tactical deals, and hence an impression of active peacemaking. But instead of victory, defeat, peace agreement or stalemate there is a situation of 'no war, no peace' (Richards 2005) or 'interwar' (Debos 2016). This is characteristic of a peripheral political bazaar.

Most armed conflicts in the countries of concern are hybrids between 'Schmittian' and 'Hobbesian.' At the height of hostilities, a war may consist of two grand alliances of forces — a coalition of rebels against a coalition of pro-government forces, with varying levels of formalization. But maintaining the cohesion of these alliances requires an extraordinary level of material and political mobilization. Whatever the outcome of the intense combat, it will be difficult to sustain alliances on this scale. The rebel coalition may fragment as groups are bought off by the government side or they turn against one another. New armed groups will emerge. Some of the pro-government units may defect or mutiny. In its military mobilization strategy, the government faces the double challenges of defeating rebels and limiting the dangers posed by its own allies. A characteristic of political marketplaces is the classic Machiavellian quandary: the ruler wants a strong army, but also an army not strong enough to displace him.

A 'Schmittian' conflict may emerge within a political marketplace, but is unlikely to be sustained for long, because neither side has the level of institutionalization or resources to sustain a high level of warfighting. It requires massive mobilization, almost inevitably on ethnic lines, to organize a 'Schmittian' war. The period of intense, focused fighting will subside into lower intensity but more generalized insecurity. An example is South Sudan: intense war in 2013-14 was followed by generalized multi-sided conflict.

A 'Schmittian' war can take place in a more institutionalized state but the conflict will so damage the institutions that the outcome is a 'Hobbesian' conflict. An example is Somalia after its defeat in the war against Ethiopia in 1978. The ending of the war in Tigray in 2022 is likely to have a comparable outcome for the Ethiopian state. In such cases, if the belligerents enter a peace process, they will have been fighting with a 'Schmittian' mindset but the implementation of any agreement will resemble bargaining in a political marketplace, and likely a 'Hobbesian' peace that is identical to a low-intensity 'Hobbesian' state of 'warre.'

## The PMF and 'Peace'

The PMF collapses the distinction between 'war' and 'peace'. As mentioned, in terms of metrics of violence, a peripheral political marketplace can be an 'interwar' or a situation suspended between war and peace. For the political actors, however, the terms 'war' and 'peace' are situational and instrumental — that is, intrinsically political.

'Peace' in a political market means different things for different actors. For ordinary people, peace is personal safety and confidence in being able to live a normal life (Firchow and Mac Ginty 2017). For the leaders of belligerent parties, what matters is political significance and labelling. Whether or not there is an objective lower level of violence and an improvement in 'everyday indicators' of peace is largely immaterial, what counts is who uses violence, for what purpose, and what it is called. A peace agreement is a political act and its label as heralding 'peace' serves political functions. One function may be a security pact between the two former enemies so that they can ally against another, no longer using violence as an instrument for their ongoing bargaining. A peace deal can have an outward-facing function, serving to legitimize the two belligerents before a third party, such as the US or United Nations, so that they can gain recognition and other political benefits, or have sanctions or other threats removed.

After a peace deal, violence may continue, but typically in different places, against different people, and in different forms — or at least, under a different label. The violence of peace may consist in one or more of the following:

- ▶ Peace enforcement operations against groups labeled as renegades, terrorists or criminals;
- ▶ Repression of media, civil society and other groups that are critical of the agreement or may pose a threat to it;
- ▶ Threats of return to violence, made openly or implicitly, if the interests of signatories to the deal are not satisfied;
- ▶ Forcible disarmament of armed groups or armed civilians that are not party to the agreement;

- ▶ Ostensibly non-political violence such as land-grabbing and forced displacement by armed units associated with political elites in pursuit of commercial objectives;
- ▶ Re-hatting of armed units as police, gendarmes, border guards, etc., and their redeployment to 'law enforcement' operations, which may include the replacement of existing police or the extension of coercive governmental authority to areas previously beyond the reach of those instruments;
- ▶ Criminal violence not associated with members of the governing coalition, including banditry, organized crime and petty crime by armed men formerly serving in army or militia;
- ▶ Formation of private security firms (formal or informal) and recruitment of former combatants (individuals or units) for mercenary operations, including in other countries;
- ▶ Intimate partner violence including SGBV and other forms of domestic and neighborhood violence including self-harm by demobilized combatants.

Wars rarely have neat endings. Armed conflict in the political marketplace normally has particularly imperfect endings, morphing into other forms of violence. Scholars and practitioners should be especially attentive to this.

## Mediation in Sudan and South Sudan: A Disaggregated Approach

The PMF was formulated in part as a critique of state-building theory and practice (de Waal 2015, 2023). That critique will not be repeated here. However, many of the assumptions of the state-building framework, such as the primacy of formal institutions, compatibility between state-building and neo-liberal economics, and the Weberian state as the default end-point of state formation processes, also inform the peacemaking field, and most obviously, the framework of peacebuilding. Drawing upon anthropology, scholars have critiqued the statebuilding literature for its disregard of the local and traditional (Boege et al. 2009). Similar critiques have been mounted of liberal peacemaking (Mac Ginty 2008). The PMF acknowledges these critiques but argues that in political marketplaces, conflict resolution has unique, distinguishing features.

### The Normative Frame of Peacemaking

Peacemaking is a deeply normative exercise and any analysis of peacemaking is inescapably driven by norms, even while the analyst seeks the maximum objectivity and rigor. The enduring debates in the field of conflict resolution are colored by ethical values. For example, should the mediator's goal be the most effective end to organized violence or should it be the creation of a legitimate political order? (Williams 2021) And, it follows, should those represented in peace negotiations be those with the guns, or should others — civil society, women — be included? (Arnault 2014; de Waal 2017; Hirblinger and Landau 2021) Should we aim at managing conflicts or transforming them? (Lederach 1995; Jeong 1999) The questions are empirically and philosophically complex. Those who advocate for greater inclusion and higher normative standards in peacemaking argue that legitimacy leads to more robust and effective outcomes; those who advocate elite pacts or formalized military triumphs imply (rarely in academic discourse but often in political rhetoric) that legitimacy derives from the exercise of sovereign power. Just as justifications for war draw on variants of the 'might is right' argument, justifications for ending it may utilize the same moral vocabularies.

Peacemaking is also a field in which practice is prior to theory (Babbitt and Hampson 2011). In a rare exercise in the comparative analysis of organized conflict resolution efforts, Roger Mac Ginty and Alpaslan Özerdem (2019, p. 1) usefully define a peace process:

*'A peace process is an attempt to reach a negotiated outcome in a violent conflict. It is not an attempt to reach a peace of rainbows and unicorns. Instead, it is a calculated attempt by the parties to a conflict to recalibrate the conflict in order to lower the conflict costs. Often it is a way to end the most overt forms of violence and channel the conflict into political contestation. Most peace processes can be regarded as conflict management as opposed to conflict transformation.'*

In Özerdem and Mac Ginty's volume, contributors provide conflict analyses and narratives of resolution efforts. The eighteen cases range from Northern Ireland to Somaliland, by way of Aceh, Sri Lanka, Columbia and Liberia. The diversity of the conflicts themselves and the wide range of kinds of peace efforts makes systematic comparison intrinsically difficult. This is emblematic of a field in which theorization stretches from questions of global hegemonic power relations to the personal qualities of mediators.<sup>5</sup> The exercise is also limited by well-established biases in the conflict resolution literature. One such bias is the time frame of these analyses: they tend to focus on a single specific iteration of negotiation towards an agreement, downplaying the longer-term trends of repeated iterations of negotiation and conflict.<sup>6</sup> Another is 'success bias,' the disproportionate focus of the literature on negotiated settlements that have succeeded (Duursma 2014). Finally, there is a 'formal document bias', an emphasis on the agreement document as a conclusion of the parties' negotiation over conflictive issues. This glosses over the volatile and constant renegotiation among parties, which may be related to changing political and economic contexts.

Henry Carey and Onur Sen (2020) have attempted a more ambitious comparative analysis, with reference to six theoretical paradigms (realist, liberal, constructivist, cosmopolitan, critical theory and local) and one atheoretical one (the policy paradigm). They argue for a hybrid approach that combines elements of all of the above. Notably absent from the paradigms, however, is a theory of politics as such. This is one of the reasons why some contemporary peacemakers are oddly at a loss when it comes to articulating a theory of peacemaking that isn't founded on liberal values.

### Incentives to Seek Mediation

Empirical research suggests that 'conflict parties are rational actors, who make cost-benefit analyses, and are primarily driven by self-interest' (Duursma 2014)<sup>7</sup> But beyond that, there is divergence on how this is understood in relation to systemic constraints and incentives on individuals in different types of political systems.

Conflict parties only seek out mediation, and allow in mediators, when they believe it is more efficacious than other alternatives open to them. This likely indicates three things. First, that the status quo is shifting in ways that at least some find uncomfortable and potentially uncertain. Second, the negotiating elite perceive that whatever other political strategies and tactics they have at their disposal those are unlikely to allow them to achieve their objectives. Third, that the external actors can be manipulated or are inescapable. This might mean that a party to the conflict believes they can manipulate the external actors to benefit them singularly at the expense of their competitors. In other cases, the external intervention might create incentives for conflict parties to work together — temporarily — to secure a better arrangement while waiting out the external intervention.<sup>8</sup>

An important variant is 'coercive mediation' where an external party engaged in the conflict in support of one side imposes itself as a mediator, regardless of the wishes of the domestic parties (Duursma forthcoming). This is a clear case of a mediator with bias, itself a player in the same political marketplace, that will use threats and rewards to secure its preferred outcome. Its entry changes the calculus of the (domestic) belligerents. The outcome may be an end to the war, or the reconfiguration of political violence so that an end to the war can be declared.

One of the features of contemporary conflicts is that they are transnational. External actors are deeply involved as protagonists if not direct belligerents. A review of African conflict data finds that a majority of armed conflicts involve external actors in direct (usually covert) support, and moreover that patterns of peacemaking and deployment of peace missions follows similar patterns to earlier direct involvement (Twagiramungu et al. 2019). Given that African subregional organizations and increasingly the African Union bend their peacemaking practices to the interests of their more powerful member states, it is unsurprising to see the politics of African peace diverging from the principled multilateral approach of the African Union towards an interest-based, transactional approach.



On its face, these realities seem consistent with both the traditional mediation view and the PMF. The differences become more apparent when paired with the below —that stable peace agreements are not neither necessary end points, the most desired goal among the parties, or, if agreed, reflective of political settlements.

### **Comprehensive and Partial Deals in Political Markets**

The PMF makes two generic predictions about political settlements to resolve conflicts: that their scope and success depends on expanding political budgets, and that they don't necessarily enable an escape from the logic of monetized, violent transactional politics.

The first claim is that expanding political budgets allow for a comprehensive deal, either formalized or informal, leading to a 'payroll peace' or a 'rent allocation peace' that can be continued in the future. Note that this is not the same claim that a 'peace dividend' will consolidate a peace agreement. That latter argument refers to inflows of resources, typically from aid and private sector investment, that contribute to economic reconstruction and development. The focus of the PMF is on the resources specifically available for political spending. It's when funds for political budgets are flush that elites can be bought into a big tent. Some sources of revenue, most conspicuously oil and minerals, are highly fungible into political budgets. Aid funds and taxes on local production are much less so. Security cooperation assistance, illicit trading, grand corruption (for example in construction contracts) and fees extracted at roadblocks and ports, are all intermediate.

At a macro-level, the PMF distinguishes between 'bull' versus 'bear' political markets, depending on whether overall political budgets are rising or declining. The working assumption is that an increase in political revenues within a state allows for expansive purchases of loyalty by those controlling those funds, something that is key for maintaining an agreement over time. It's easy to see how a political bull market allows for peacemaking.

Jan Pospisil's (2023) analysis of peace agreements in oil producing conflict-affected states provides some pointers to this. He finds that when oil revenues are high — and by extension, political budgets are flush — there is a trend towards comprehensive peace agreements. When oil prices are low, the trend is towards more limited agreements such as ceasefires.

In a bear market, there are two main options for the political business manager.

- ▶ Find new sources of political revenue from existing economic activities or find other ways of renting loyalty. This might entail selling land or timber, making arms deals that have big corrupt payouts, licensing pillage, or going into partnership with major companies to exchange commercial favors for payouts. It's not uncommon to see the implementation of a peace agreement being followed by an increase in corruption of this kind.
- ▶ Cut partial deals. These can be pacts between a subset of political actors to exclude others, enlarging their share of a fixed or shrinking political pie by cutting out rivals. Or these can be temporary, tactical deals to manage circumstances that arise, for example international pressure for a ceasefire associated with humanitarian aid delivery.

The PMF's second main claim is that the rules of the political game are sticky. It is not only that the signatory parties to an agreement in a political marketplace are, by definition, accomplished practitioners of transactional politics, but the context in which the political market continues to operate are unchanged. The meat of an agreement is the specifics on power-sharing, wealth-sharing and security arrangements, and these will need to be renegotiated during the post-agreement implementation phase as conditions in the political market change. They may need to be renegotiated many times, on each occasion producing a document with a new title, such as an 'implementation matrix'. As a result, and stretching Leftwich's analogy — the rules of the game remain the same even when the players change. Note that the mediator needs to be attentive to monetized transactions and also to ongoing violence and threat of violence.

Promises of conflict transformation through democratization, inclusivity, transitional justice, anti-corruption efforts, commissions for re-visiting land ownership, compensation and restitution payments, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) are no more than promises. If those aspects of an agreement are to be implemented, it will require cutting against the grain of real politics.

## Peace Processes are Unlikely to Transform Political Marketplaces

External interventions are unlikely to fundamentally change the nature of politics in political marketplaces, and peace processes are no exception. These are contexts where political unsettlement and ungovernance prevail — models of political organization where legal and bureaucratic structures and frameworks keep issues in suspense by design— and where formal, legal institutions are substantively absent. A peace deal in a political marketplace changes the nature of organized violence rather than eliminating it.

The characteristic outcome of a peace process in a political market is a non-formalized political unsettlement. This draws on the concept of the 'formalized political unsettlement' articulated by Christine Bell and Jan Pospisil (2017). This refers to the stratagems used by the parties in a peace process to find ways of living together without violence without having to find definitive political resolution to their conflicts. Various techniques of public law are used to formalize this lack of political settlement. In a political marketplace, those public law mechanisms are weak and overruled by transactional interests, so the political unsettlement rests solely on informal understandings and calculations of interest and power. This is the difference between, on the one hand, Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and on the other, Sudan and South Sudan. In the latter cases, even where formal institutions of government resemble their counterparts in institutionalized political systems ('isomorphic mimicry', as described by Larson, Ajak and Pritchett 2013), they are subordinate to the logic of the political marketplace.

In this context, a principal danger of peacemaking orthodoxy is the assumption that a peace agreement is an end in and of itself and that the formal peace deal will map one-to-one onto the often less formal political settlements — the deals among members of the elite on distributions of power. Rather, peace agreements—and peace processes more broadly — should be understood in the context of ongoing intra-elite bargaining relationships, which can shape and be shaped by formal peace processes (Verweijen 2016; Boswell et al. 2019). Beyond this, a peace agreement may — or may not — reflect an underlying political pact. Indeed, a peace agreement which is widely lauded by international policymakers may, in fact, disguise the 'actual' political bargain which (a) begins to take shape prior to the formal peace deal and (b) is then manifested in prevarication and continual renegotiation by parties during the implementation of the peace deal.

An agreement may also be accompanied by a shift in the form and target of violence, and possibly a short-term increase in violence in order to establish the new configuration of dominant actors in the political market.

During the period in which the liberal order was consolidating, it was valid to assume that aspirational norms would, in due course, become political facts, and that empirical and ethical tensions over normative practices such as inclusion and gender equity would be resolved over time (de Waal 2017). As the liberal order erodes, due to internal weaknesses and external challenges, proponents of alternative models grow in confidence. There are three emerging trends in peacemaking: 'stabilization,' illiberal peacemaking and populist peacemaking.

### **'Stabilization' and Conflict Resolution**

When it became clear that the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq were not proceeding as smoothly as anticipated, the UK and US stepped back from ambitious frameworks for state-building. A more limited approach also influenced policies elsewhere including support for peacemaking.

The 2016 DFID Building Stability Framework describes long-term stability as a condition where 'communities, states and regions are able to develop, and manage conflict and change peacefully' (DFID 2016; 2019). It identifies the trade-offs that may need to be made to align real power with fairer, more inclusive and legitimate conflict resolution practices. Its focus on 'thinking politically' and deal-making sought to balance a realistic appraisal of the constraints of circumstance with the norms informing humanitarian action, service delivery and peacebuilding. The PMF as diagnostic lens is consistent with and complementary to this approach.

The US framework for stabilization, as contained in the 2019 Global Fragility Act, differs from the UK's in that it works from the top down (US DoS 2020). While it incorporates language about inclusivity and locally and nationally led peacemaking, the overriding concern is how to manage the US's declining capacity to drive political outcomes, while preserving US commercial, security and political interests in fragile and conflict affected states. The policy was formulated during the Trump Administration, and the 2022 Prologue, issued under President Biden (US DoS 2022) is substantially similar under a veneer of more liberal language and a commitment to multilateralism.

The crucial point is that the US strategy does not differentiate between continuity and stability: what condition is it intending to stabilize? Insofar as there is a new post-statebuilding doctrine, it will emerge through practice. Early indications are that it aims at unambitious maintenance of the status quo, which implies keeping political marketplaces as they are insofar as they do not affect perceived core US interests.

### Illiberal Peacemaking

A second emerging trend is illiberal peacemaking. The first contemporary instance of this was Sri Lanka, which came as a shock to the liberal peace consensus (Spencer 2010). Syria has been another example (Abboud 2021). India is a practitioner of this (Sundar and Sundar 2014). The rise of middle powers in the Middle East and Africa is associated with the spread of illiberal peace practices (Peter and Rice 2022), some of them — such as the Pretoria agreement for a cessation of hostilities between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front — dressed up as 'African solutions' (Concerned Pan-African Scholars 2022). These cases have in common that the peace accord legitimizes the militarily dominant power as an authoritarian regime with illiberal norms. Mediating conflicts with the Taliban in Afghanistan may entail, among other things, setting aside principles of gender equity. Mediating conflicts in which one party is committing crimes against humanity may entail uncomfortable compromises on accountability.

In some instances, overwhelming force has been used to batter an adversary into submission, at which point the weaker party faced the choice between annihilation and accepting a peace accord that forfeited its political agenda. In others the use of force is supplemented by material inducements to members of the capitulating elite in the form of political offices and opportunities for crony capitalism as well as some public goods such as infrastructure projects or humanitarian aid to sweeten the pill. In some cases, peacemakers have been accomplices, in various degrees, to such imposed endings. Some have been unwitting facilitators insofar as they kept alive the hope of a negotiated settlement after realistic chances have faded (e.g. Sri Lanka). Others have deliberately stalled on peace talks in order to give opportunity for a military solution (Ethiopia).

## Populist Peacemaking

A third trend is 'populist peacemaking,' characterized by a 'rejection of "peacemaking elites" and their established rules and practices, including international norms, a refutation of context-specific knowledge, and a clean-slate approach that disregards past peacemaking attempts and alienates other international mediators.' (Landau and Lehrs 2022) This is a relatively new and as yet under-studied phenomenon. Populist peacemaking is accompanied by aggrandized rhetoric and celebrity-style performances. The claim of peace is what matters not the reality for the affected people. Donald Trump's diplomacy is an example. The coups de theatre that won the Nobel Prize for Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed are another. While these peacemaking attempts may capture the spotlight, they seem unlikely to actually end conflict dynamics in these countries. They may not last longer than the news cycle. Populist peacemaking efforts may be a cover for other political or commercial deals. They are a dramatic illustration of the axiom that 'peace' is achieved in the political marketplace when the dominant actors no longer consider the conflict a political problem.

## The Twilight of Principled Multilateral Peacemaking?

Each of these trends downgrades the vision of peacemaking as principled multilateralism, instead elevating the skills of 'real politics' above the practices of peacemakers informed by the ideals of justice, inclusivity and conflict transformation. In a review of Paul Williams' *Lawyering Peace*, Christine Bell (2023) asks whether the book should be seen as 'tool kit or requiem?' She concludes,

*'A more profound question, however, haunts the book. Is the practice of resolving intrastate conflict becoming redundant, in a new resurgence of geopolitical conflict? Is it a practice that — much like the League of Nations experiment with resolving nationalities conflicts in the interwar years — that is currently being swept away by an emerging new set of conflict dynamics?'*

This question is particularly pertinent in Africa, where the African Union developed a set of norms, principles and institutions for conflict prevention, management and resolution, embedded within a broader architecture of rights, governance and democracy (World Peace Foundation 2016). That was proven to be a short-lived experiment, subverted from outside and within in favor of a politics of peace and security driven by interests with only the barest nod to principles.

If these dismal conjectures are even partly correct, the PMF lens is going to be ever-more appropriate. According to the PMF, a peace agreement, rather than being the agreed draft of a national constitution or a relational agreement that binds the parties together to work toward a common future, should be seen instead as a transactional bargain in a marketplace, good for only as long as those particular conditions in the market are present. It is a redrawing of the boundaries of political access and a redesignation of what violence is legitimate state activity, what is 'criminal', and what counts as 'armed conflict' or 'war.' This conclusion transfers to the multilateral context of mediation: a peace agreement must also serve the interests of the mediator. It follows that any commitment to an institutional formula for democracy, accountability, or inclusion is subject to the political interests of the key actors in the political market, including mediators themselves. We should therefore be looking to flexible, renegotiable 'relational contracts' as the best aspiration for peacemaking (Johnstone 2011; Duijzentkunst and Dawkins 2015).

## The Political Market Framework as a Toolkit for Mediators

The PMF provides a diagnostic lens for bringing into focus a logic of transactional politics, helping us understand what is important in a peace deal for the most powerful actors, and how that peace deal is situated in ongoing political processes. It draws upon the concepts and metrics commonly used by political and security actors themselves, to enable peacemakers to assess the material basis and transactional logic of conflict resolution. The fundamental premise is that mediation must be situated within 'real politics.' This section takes concepts from the mediation and conflict resolution literature and examines how each should be revisited within the PMF. It contrasts 'classic mediation theory' (with apologies in advance to practitioners who are well-aware of this as a caricature) with the analysis of the PMF.

### Conflict Analysis

The PMF generates questions that are distinct from standard conflict analysis tools. Rojan Bolling (2015a, 2015b) examined 88 conflict and fragility analysis frameworks used by national and international organizations and a handful of NGO coalitions. Overwhelmingly the governmental and inter-governmental frameworks focus at the national level (under-representing local and international factors) and use national-level data for politics, economics, security, environmental and social factors, and (very occasionally) cultural factors. The leading example is the World Bank Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Team (2005). The NGO frameworks are much more sensitive to local factors including considerations of gender and generational differences. An excellent example is the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (2015). These frameworks all provide important contextual information and guide the analyst in research. However, none of these contain a theory of politics as a practice. It is difficult to use these tools to develop an understanding of the dynamics of transactional relationships and how these will shift as circumstances change.

At the contextual level, the PMF conflict analysis asks:

- ▶ Is the political system a rudimentary political marketplace, an advanced political marketplace, or not a political marketplace at all?
- ▶ Is the political marketplace deregulated, oligopolistic (rivalrous or collusive) or monopolistic? Is this likely to shift if an agreement is reached?



- ▶ Is the conflict and the conflict resolution being conducted in political bull or bear market?
- ▶ Is the conflict 'Schmittian', 'Hobbesian' or a hybrid of the two? Is it likely to shift during the negotiation and implementation phases?
- ▶ What forms of violence continue, what will escalate and decrease, and how will these be labelled, after certain conflict parties sign an agreement?

The answers to these questions allow the mediator to dig deeper into the details of how political bargaining functions, and how a mediator will change the belligerent parties' interactions with one another, and with other actors (local, national and international).

### Trust and Information

In established mediation theory, mediators provide a means to overcome information asymmetry, build trust, and reach compromise between parties. According to this, one of the principal roles assumed by the mediator is to be a means of building trust between conflict parties and a source of information. It is assumed that the parties fear the worst about the other, and one reason for this is their lack of familiarity with one another.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, negotiation failures are often attributed to a lack of information-sharing between parties that make it impossible to reach a deal, thus necessitating the presence of a mediator who can meet privately with each party to learn their interests, positions, and needs and then strategically reveal these to the other side (Beardsley 2006). The mediator is at the center of the information web with insight into each party, thus giving them the leverage to bring together a deal (Walter 2009, Savun 2009). Overcoming information asymmetry and building trust between parties are typically considered important steps toward encouraging the conflict parties to make the compromises necessary to reach a peace agreement.

*In the PMF, mediators provide a means for the parties to reposition themselves or to reconfigure the political marketplace.*

In a political market, the leaders of conflicting parties know one another well, having been part of the same political system during their careers, often serving together in the same governments and having made alliances and cut deals in the past. They do not lack mutual understanding — on the contrary, they understand one another all too well. The trust that is relevant in this situation is one's assessment of the other's ability to discern and act upon his or her interests, rather than trust in the personal integrity of the other. Additionally or alternatively, they may trust the capacity of a coercive mediator to provide credible enforcement.

The PMF assumes a continuous cycle of contestation, often using violence and cash violence, or threat of both. Selective information sharing is a natural part of the constant bargaining and negotiating that sustains this cycle. Trust, in the sense of confidence in the other party's integrity and fidelity, plays a minor role in a political market, where arrangements are contingent on the state of the market and depend on political budgets, the price of loyalty, and other changeable elements. They may, however, have confidence in the other's political skills, investment in reputation. However, usually, they expect other political actors to defect when conditions change.

For the mediator, two questions are particularly pertinent:

- ▶ Who controls information, communication and convening? Those with better intelligence, communication networks and convening power are at an advantage. Each of these elements needs assessment, and the imbalances between conflict parties, and between them and an external mediator, will be crucial to the kind of deal that can be struck. Note especially in this context that peace talks are a forum for convening actors. Who decides the participation (including observers) and the level of openness (what information is shared, and whether those who are not formal delegates can be in the vicinity) is crucial. Note that the formalities of the mediations may disguise the underlying transactional dynamics, especially if the parties have agreed to a formula to satisfy the mediators' need for keeping up appearances, for example by including civil society groups without significant power. In such cases the 'real' discussions may be conducted outside the official peace talks.

- ▶ How are political deals formalized into contracts and with what implications? The essence of a rudimentary political market is that deals are one-time rather than long-term. However, if a deal is publicly announced, certified in law or in constitutional arrangements, or is incorporated in an internationally-mediated peace agreement, it is more costly to break it in comparison to ones that are secret, informal, or purely domestic.

### Unit of Analysis: Coalitions and spoilers vs. political firms and entrepreneurs

Traditional mediation literature uses the terms 'coalitions' and 'spoilers.' This analysis labels and locates conflict parties according to their positions and interests on issues addressed in a peace process and resulting agreement. In the influential 'spoiler management' argument put forth by Stedman, when the peace deal is negotiated, leaders and parties whose issue interests are deemed incongruent with the deal are labeled 'total, greedy or limited' spoilers (Stedman 1997). The concept of spoiler is essentially normative.

The key takeaway from the 'spoiler management' approach is that for an agreement to materialize, the conflict parties need to form a coalition around issue-based interests, and the spoilers must be either induced or rendered irrelevant. However, whether this succeeds in bringing about sustainable peace has been hotly debated. Kelly Greenhill and Solomon Major in their 'Perils of Profiling' (2007) warned that it is the opportunity structure and the relative power of parties which determine the behaviors of conflict parties. In other words, there are no permanent 'spoilers' or 'coalitions', as these positions fluctuate with the change in circumstances. This insight chimes with the observations that underpin the PMF.

The PMF uses the terms 'political firms' and 'entrepreneurs.' It emphasizes the organizational cohesion of conflict parties as key determinants of the solidity of an agreement. Coalitions by themselves do not contribute to stable peace in the PMF, as what appears to be a coalition could in fact be a cluster of parties aligned by circumstance and motivated by monetary incentives, a factor which could easily fluctuate. The PMF therefore does not abstractly label groups as 'coalitions' but instead dissects the political firms within them as per their loyalty levels and analyzes the availability of funds (a 'political budget') to hold them together. The PMF has no concept of 'spoiler': it is no more than a political actor pursuing their interest, which may include hanging on and sustaining a conflict until the political configuration is more favorable (see the next section).

In this regard, a quick-fix coalition-building measure consisting of inducements, commonly employed in traditional mediation efforts, could be detrimental to the purposes of building a stronger alliance between political firms resulting in a durable agreement. Political firms may be induced into a loose alliance, only to observe opportunities to renegotiate a better deal in the future, which results in defections, renegotiation of the terms of the deal and recurrence of violence.

### Timing: How to Analyze Critical Moments

Traditional conflict resolution and mediation approaches — either explicitly or implicitly — are centered around the notions of the mutual hurting stalemate, mutual enticing opportunity, and ripeness (Zartman 2008). When neither party to a conflict (there is a general assumption of two contesting parties) can unilaterally escalate to achieve its aims, they are in a mutual hurting stalemate. This means that the parties perceive that they have poor alternatives. Their best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA) is weak and thus a deal-option becomes more attractive than a no-deal option. 'Ripeness is only a condition, necessary but not sufficient for the initiation of negotiations. It is not self-fulfilling or self-implementing. It must be seized, either directly by the parties or, if not, through the persuasion of a mediator' or any third party pursuing a conflict management agenda (Zartman 2008, p. 23). A mutual enticing opportunity is an alternative that is perceived to be more appealing than a painful, conflictual course of action.

These two concepts both assume that conflict parties, through a rational-choice, cost-benefit framework, will seek to resolve conflicts when presented with a situation that is uncomfortable and costly, and where they believe their unilateral victory is not possible. To limit pain and implicitly maximize gain, they will see an exit that leads to a more appealing future. When these conditions are present the conflict is 'ripe', and parties will genuinely seek to resolve conflicts — find a 'way out'. The subjective element is key. 'It is the perception of the objective condition, not the condition itself that makes for a mutually-hurting stalemate (MHS). If the parties do not recognize 'clear evidence' (in someone else's view) that they are in an impasse, a MHS has not (yet) occurred, and if they do perceive themselves to be in such a situation, no matter how flimsy the "evidence" the MHS is present' (Zartman 2008, p. 23).

The role of the mediator is therefore to seize upon such ripe moments, or to interpret the situation in a manner so that the parties interpret them accordingly. To do this effectively, there is a prior analytical task: to understand the system for what it actually is and match that with what is achievable given the limited tools of the mediator. This is more readily apparent in retrospect, as O'Kane points out: 'The idea that ripeness is a necessary condition for conflict resolution provides a perfect excuse for the failure to resolve a conflict — it was not ripe — and to accusations that the theory is tautological.' (O'Kane 2006).

The PMF makes a different set of assumptions about how the political system operates, and how actors within it. In a PM, the members of the political elite operate in a state of turbulence, namely continual reconfiguration within the parameters of the market. This is created in part by their own market behavior and in turn shapes their behavior; they are constantly evaluating at the margin to see if they can get a better deal and will do whatever they can in the service of gaining and/or maintaining political power. They understand and assume turbulence, with its implication that no condition is permanent. In these systems ripeness may never arise — or at least it begins to mean something slightly different — since actors always anticipate changes rather than conflict dynamics that are assumed to be stepwise, linear, and often somewhat static in the view of much mediation theory.

The turbulence of the political market means that elite bargaining and second-guessing is constant and the terms of any given deal are always subject to change, and even when they are not, the actors are monitoring developments to see when and how that change will occur. Consequently, the elite bargains are unstable, always in danger of coming undone. An apparent stalemate is contingent on the current configuration, which will change, and actors will rarely if ever have subjective confidence in a stalemate. Conflict is part of the system, in which enemies are made from circumstance, not from radical enmity (Debos 2016). Understanding the basis and structure for these elite interactions is a necessary step in order to understand how these systems can be shaped by external involvement, particularly by mediation efforts.

There may, however, be a mutually-enticing opportunity in a political 'bull' market. For example, a major inflow of resources that is readily fungible into political spending creates an attractive option of buying in rivals. In fact, this may be the most important critical moment for any peace process. It is a particular kind of carrot.

## Material Incentives

The conventional formula is that conflict parties' incentives can be shaped by carrots and sticks. There is a large literature on the economics of peacebuilding, and a rather smaller one on economic incentives in peace processes, most of it framed by the opposing questions of providing aid and imposing sanctions (Griffiths and Barnes 2015). The focus is the efficacy or otherwise of donor tools. 'Wealth sharing' is one of the standard pillars of a comprehensive peace agreement. Paul Williams (2022) has a chapter on 'natural resources' but not on the logic of wealth sharing as such. His focus is on rights to resources in the formal texts of agreements rather than on the overall distribution of material benefits.

The PMF approach is different. The micro-politics of the political market explores how targeted rewards or sanctions play a role in political market management. The macro-politics explores the scale of the overall inflow of political money and who controls it. This is the analytical heart of understanding a rudimentary political market (or bazaar), where the concepts of political budget and the price of loyalty are fully applicable.

### The key questions are:

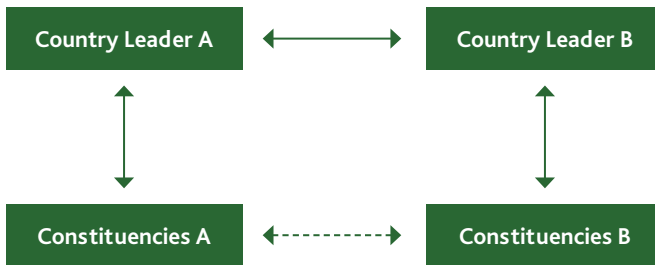
- ▶ Is the overall envelope of resources increasing or not? In a 'boom' market, there is more political money to go around and more opportunity to reward followers with jobs. A 'payroll peace' is possible. In a static or 'bear' market, any deal between two or more parties will be at the expense of others or will be a short-term tactical agreement.
- ▶ What is the source of revenue, and how does that inflow translate into political funds? Public money or commercial income must be diverted or laundered to become a discretionary political budget. The lower the level of scrutiny, the easier this is. Income from smuggling, organized crime and extortion, and gifts from corporations or foreign governments can readily fill political coffers. Centralized revenue from oil sales, sweeteners and offsets from arms purchases, and state construction contracts can also do so. Revenues from domestic taxes or aid programs require the cooption of a bureaucracy.

- ▶ Who controls the sources of expanding political revenue and who is constrained by stagnant or declining revenue? For example, if income from hydrocarbons and state security assistance is increasing, actors within the government system will benefit relative to those outside. If the income is from cross-border smuggling or artisanal minerals, actors that control the borders or the production sites will benefit relative to others.
- ▶ How sticky are the prices of loyalty, both up and down? It is intuitive to assume that clients will be ready to provide when the price goes up but will be reluctant to concede a lower price if the market is squeezed. The freedom of political maneuver for those with expanding budgets will therefore be greater than those with declining budgets.
- ▶ How readily can different political actors utilize violence as an alternative or complement to cash? This will depend on both material factors (control over armed units) and non-material ones (likelihood of negative reputational effects domestically and internationally).

### Two- and Three-Level Games

One area of convergence between conventional approaches and the PMF is with the concept of the 'two-level game', which is widely discussed in negotiation and mediation literature. The two-level game is a metaphor proposed by Robert Putnam (1988) that recognizes that central decision-makers must simultaneously reconcile their domestic and international obligations and imperatives by negotiating both externally with the opposition and internally with potential supporters. Going beyond Putnam, some of these constituents may hold a veto over any concessions made (Mo 1995) and may also negotiate with one another. The two-level game creates political complications during negotiations, and mediators that step into these situations must be adept operators. Putnam's recognition that political actors are conducting parallel bargaining aligns with the assumptions of the PMF as well as empirical observations of peacemaking processes in relevant countries.

### Putnam's Two-Level Game

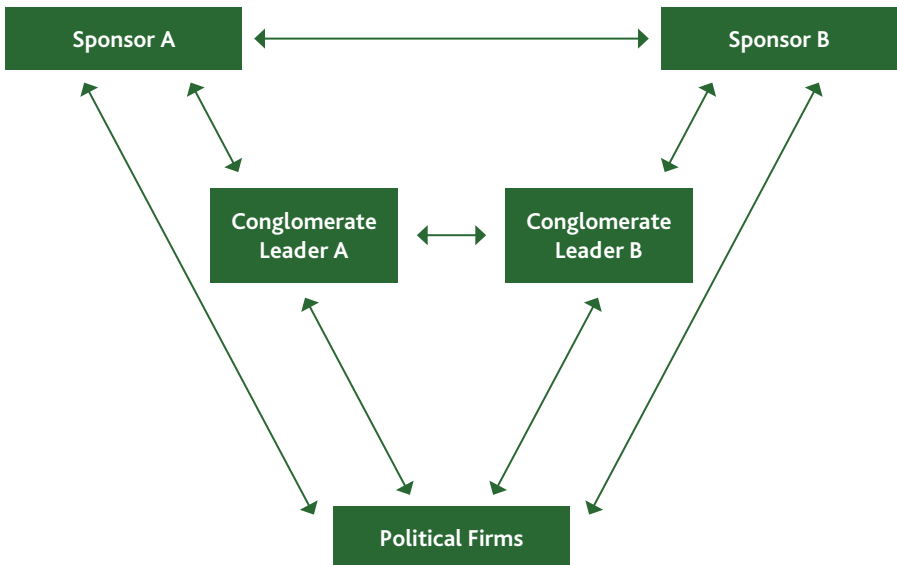


The transnational nature of the PMF requires that Putnam's analysis be taken one step further. The two-level game becomes a three-level game (or indeed a game with four or more levels). The leaders of negotiating parties are also bargaining with international sponsors, that provide much of their political budget and are a source of international legitimacy. Those sponsors may include mediators, neutral or coercive. Sponsors may also include commercial actors and (in the Nigerian case and its terminology) 'godfathers', who may be domestic actors, international ones, or a mixture of the two. Putnam also notes that a player who is dissatisfied with the negotiated outcome can upset the game board (1988, p.434). In a three-level game, the potential number of actors able to upset the board is even higher.

An international mediator is typically supported by a group of 'friends' or 'partners' that provide expertise, guidance, funds and (most importantly) leverage (Whitfield 2010). To the negotiating parties, they are actors at this third level — assimilated to the category of 'sponsors' along with foreign providers of finance, arms, and diplomatic cover.



### The PMF's Three-Level Game



Note also that many state or multilateral mediators are also indirect or direct parties to the conflict. Considering the mediator (and 'friends' of the mediation) as sponsors is relevant to the question of why political actors request mediation. An international peace process is in itself a new arena in which information can be gathered and exchanged, communications (public and private) will occur, and actors can be convened. In a rudimentary political marketplace the peace talks will themselves become a political bazaar, which may be what the key actors either want, or want to avoid.

A peace process can also confer legitimacy on parties, an opportunity for neglected actors to gain profile and international access, and for poor actors to gain small amounts of cash-in-hand. Mediation can also further the interests of the mediators themselves.

### **Outcomes: Anticipating ongoing violence**

Under the PMF, a peace deal should be seen as a political pact that involves a commitment to ending certain sorts of violence. It is not a commitment to end violence as such. A mediator should be attentive to the ways in which a political pact can sustain, displace, legitimize and in some circumstances even escalate violence. Some of the post-agreement manifestations of violence have been listed above; these can be political (against non-signatory parties or communities), kleptocratic, criminal, or can shift violence to the societal-personal realm. Additionally, any political actor is likely to anticipate that the deal will need to be renegotiated at best, and will break down at worst, as circumstances change. Actors will want to retain the capacity to return to organized violence and are likely to make threats to do so. If a peace agreement involves significant distortions to the value of political assets, or is reliant on a third party with a limited enforcement capacity, then the danger of renewed violence is particularly high.

The conventional post-conflict assessment assumes the good will of the signatories to implement their formal commitments, at least the most important ones. It regards post-agreement violence as regrettable regressions requiring remedial action. The PMF analysis assumes that as conditions in the political market change, violence will recur, albeit probably in a different form. As noted, both a 'successful' and a failed implementation of the agreement are likely to involve violence, albeit in different forms. A PMF analysis of a post-agreement political marketplace will assist in identifying those points of risk and vulnerability.

Using the PMF to analyze peace agreement allows us to identify which 'rules of the game' are being consolidated, and which are not. Adding the lens of the (non)formalized political unsettlement, this enables the mediator and peacebuilder to assess the likely long-term impact of the agreement, specifically which elements will be institutionalized and which will be subject to ongoing transactional bargaining, and with what import.

## Conclusions

We envision the PMF as a set of diagnostic lenses for actors seeking to challenge its logic in pursuit of peace, democracy, human rights, and other public goods. Mediators can be among those actors. The diagnostic tools can also, of course, be used by actors in the political market to help them identify where power can be bought most cheaply for the best returns. We are relatively unworried by this possibility, as most effective operators are already using a version of this toolkit. We see our exercise as a means of putting civil society and peacemakers on a better analytical par with conflict parties.

The logic of the PM does not always prevail. During the era in which liberal peacemaking was ascendant, its norms and practices had a discernible impact on the outcomes of peace processes. Roger Mac Ginty, Madhav Joshi and SungYong Lee (2019) found that when liberal peace provisions, such as inclusivity, and included in peace agreements, they are more robust. In his analysis of the norm of inclusion in peace processes, de Waal concluded (2017, p. 181) that, 'The interesting and non-trivial fact is that inclusion has become nearly synonymous with legitimacy. The democratic and consultative variant of legitimacy has prevailed over the others: it is now hegemonic. Politicians who oppose inclusion must nonetheless pay lip service to it, the tribute that political vice pays to the dominant norm.'

Six years later, those norms are at best under threat, and at worst being unravelled. The response of civil society actors, principled multilateral organizations and their like-minded allies has not yet matched the challenge. The PMF lens can help us understand why and how this unravelling can better be resisted.

## Bibliography

- Abbound, Samer. "Making Peace to Sustain War: The Astana Process and Syria's Illiberal Peace." *Peacebuilding* 9, no. 3 (2021): 326–343.
- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. New York: Crown, 2012.
- Arnault, Jean.. "Legitimacy and Peace Processes: International Norms and Local Realities." *Accord* 25 (2014): 21–25.
- Babbitt, Eileen, and Fen Osler Hampson. "Conflict Resolution as a Field of Inquiry: Practice Informing Theory." *International Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (2011): 46–57.
- Bart L Smit Duijzenkunst, and Sophia LR Dawkins. "Arbitrary Peace? Consent Management in International Arbitration." *European Journal of International Law* 26, no. 1 (2015): 139–168.
- Beardsley, Kyle. "Peacekeeping and the Contagion of Armed Conflict." *Journal of Politics* 73, no. 4 (2011): 1051–1064.
- Beardsley, Kyle C., David M. Quinn, Bidisha Biswas, and Jonathan Wilkenfeld. "Mediation Style and Crisis Outcomes." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 1 (2006): 58–86.
- Bell, Christine, and Jan Pospisil. "Navigating Inclusion in Transitions from Conflict: The Formalized Political Unsettlement." *Journal of International Development* 29, no. 5 (2017): 576–593.
- Bell, Christine, How to End Wars: Lawyering Peace in a Changing World, *Lawfare*, January 2023, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/how-end-wars-lawyering-peace-changing-world>
- Boege, Volker M. Anne Brown & Kevin P. Clements, 'Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States,' *Peace Review*, 21:1, (2009) 13-21.
- Bolling, Rojan, 'A comprehensive overview of conflict and fragility,' *The Broker*, 2015. <https://www.thebrokeronline.eu/a-comprehensive-overview-of-conflict-and-fragility-d68/>
- Bolling, Rojan, 2015b. 'List of Frameworks for Conflict Analysis,' *The Broker*, 2015. <https://www.thebrokeronline.eu/list-of-frameworks-for-conflict-analysis-d1/>
- Boswell, Alan, Nanaho Yamanaka, Aditya Sarkar and Alex de Waal. "The security arena in South Sudan: a political marketplace study." *London: London School of Economics and Political Science and Somerville, MA: World Peace Foundation, 2019.*
- Carey, Henry F., and Onur Sen. "Bridging the Conceptual and Theoretical Divides on Peace and Peacebuilding." In Henry Carey (ed) *Peacebuilding Paradigms: The Impact of Theoretical Diversity on Implementing Sustainable Peace*, 1–28. Cambridge: *Cambridge University Press*, 2020.

- Christine Bell, 'Lawyering Peace in the Future: Tool Kit or Requiem?' *Lawfare blog*, 4 January 2023.
- Concerned Pan-African Scholars, 'Assessing the Peace Accord for Tigray', November 2022.
- Debos, Marielle. *Living by the Gun in Chad: Combatants, Impunity and State Formation*. Zed, 2016.
- de Waal, Alex "Violence and Peacemaking in the Political Marketplace." *Legitimacy and Peace Processes: From coercion to consent*, Conciliation Resources, *Accord no. 25* 2014. 17-21.
- de Waal, Alex, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, war and the business of power*, Cambridge, Polity, 2015.
- de Waal, Alex. "Sudan: Patterns of Violence and Imperfect Endings." In Bridget Conley (ed.) *How Mass Atrocities End*, 121-149. *Cambridge University Press*, 2016.
- de Waal, Alex. 'Inclusion in Peacemaking: From Moral Claim to Political Fact,' in *The Fabric of Peace in Africa: Looking Beyond the State*, ed. Pamela Aall and Chester A. Crocker, 165-186. Waterloo, ON: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2017.
- de Waal, Alex. 'Revisiting the "Real Politics of the Horn of Africa",' Somerville MA, *World Peace Foundation*, 2023.
- DFID, *The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation: A guide for policy makers and practitioners*, London, 2016.
- Duursma, Allard. "A Current Literature Review of International Mediation." *International Journal of Conflict Management* 25, no. 1 (2014): 81-98.
- Duursma, Allard. "The Curse of Coercive Mediation" *International Studies Quarterly*, forthcoming.
- Emmanuel, Nikolas. "Peace Incentives: Economic Aid and Peace Processes in Africa." *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 5, no. 2 (2015): 1-32.
- Fearon, James D. "Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations." *Annual Review of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (1998): 289-313.
- Firchow, Pamina, Roger Mac Ginty, *Measuring Peace: Comparability, Commensurability, and Complementarity Using Bottom-Up Indicators*, *International Studies Review*, 19.1, (2017), 6-27
- Geuss, Raymond. *Philosophy and Real Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, 2015. *Conflict Analysis Framework: Field guidelines and procedures*, The Hague. <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Conflict-Analysis-Framework-Field-Guidelines-and-Procedures-2016.pdf>

- Greenhill, Kelly M., and Solomon Major. "The Perils of Profiling Civil War Spoilers and the Collapse of Intrastate Peace Accords." *International Security* 31, no. 3 (2006): 7–40.
- Greig, J. Michael, and Patrick M. Regan. "When Do They Say Yes? An Analysis of the Willingness to Offer and Accept Mediation in Civil Wars." *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2008): 759–81.
- Griffiths, Aaron and Catherine Barnes. "Incentives and sanctions in peace processes." *Accord 19*. (2011).
- Hirblinger, Andreas T, and Dana M Landau. "Inclusive of Whom, and for What Purpose? Strategies of Inclusion in Peacemaking." In Catherine Turner and Martin Wäschlich (eds) *Rethinking Peace Mediation*, 115–138. Bristol: *Bristol University Press*, 2021.
- Jeong, Ho-Won (ed). "The New Agenda for Peace Research." *Routledge*, 2001.
- Johnstone, Ian. "Managing consent in contemporary peacekeeping operations." *International Peacekeeping* 18, no. 2 (2011): 168-182.
- Mo, Jongryn. "Domestic institutions and international bargaining: The role of agent veto in two-level games." *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 4 (1995): 914-924.
- Kaldor, Mary, *New and Old Wars: Organized violence in a global era (Third Edition)*, Stanford, 2012.
- Kaldor, Mary, and Alex de Waal. "Identity Formation and the Political Marketplace." *Conflict, Security & Development* 20, no. 5 (2020): 519–538.
- Kelman, Herbert C. "The Beginnings of Peace Psychology: A Personal Account." *Peace Psychology* 18.2. (2009) 1518.
- Kydd, Andrew H. "When Can Mediators Build Trust?" *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 3 (2006): 449–462.
- Larson, Greg, Peter Biar Ajak, and Lant Pritchett. *South Sudan's Capability Trap: Building a State with Disruptive Innovation*. Policy File. John F Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2013.
- Landau, Dana M, and Lior Lehrs. "Populist Peacemaking: Trump's Peace Initiatives in the Middle East and the Balkans." *International Affairs* 98, no. 6 (2022): 2001–2019.
- Lederach, John Paul. *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- Leftwich, Adrian, 'From Drivers of Change to the Politics of Development: Refining the analytical framework to understand the politics of the places where we work', *York: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre*. 2006. [Gsrdc.org/docs/open/doc104.pdf](https://gsrdc.org/docs/open/doc104.pdf)

- Gsrcd.org/docs/open/doc104.pdfLothe, Elisabeth. Maundi, Mohammed O.; I. William Zartman, Gilbert Khadiagala & Kwaku Nuamah, Getting In: Mediators' Entry into the Settlement of African Conflicts. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press. 2006.
- Mac Ginty, Roger. Traditional and Indigenous Approaches to Peacemaking. In: J. Darby, R. Mac Ginty, (eds) *Contemporary Peacemaking*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2008.
- Mac Ginty, Roger, Madhav Joshi, and SungYong Lee. "Liberal Peace Implementation and the Durability of Post-War Peace." *International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 4 (2019): 457–486.
- Makovsky, David. Making Peace with the PLO : the Rabin Government's Road to the Oslo Accord. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996.
- Mattes, Michaela, and Burcu Savun. "Fostering Peace After Civil War: Commitment Problems and Agreement Design." *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2009): 737–759.
- North, Douglass C., John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast. Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- O'Kane, Eamonn. "When Can Conflicts Be Resolved? A Critique of Ripeness." *Civil Wars* 8, no. 3-4 (2006): 268–284.
- Özerdem, Alpaslan, and Roger Mac Ginty (eds.): *Comparing Peace Processes*. London, Routledge, (2022): 81–86.
- Peter, Mateja and Rice Haley, 'Non-Western approaches to peacemaking and peacebuilding: State-of-the-art and an agenda for research.' University of Edinburgh, PeaceRep, 2022.
- Pospisil, Jan. 'The New Era of Turbulence. Peacemaking Trends in Post-Carbon; Times.' Somerville, MA: World Peace Foundation. 2023
- Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427–460.
- Richards, Paul, (ed). No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts. Oxford: James Currey, 2005.
- Rouhana, Nadim M, and Lisa Hajjar. Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict. Peace and Conflict, 2000.
- Salla, Michael E. Creating the 'Ripe Moment' in the East Timor Conflict. *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 4 (1997): 449–466.
- Sikkink, Kathryn, Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century, Princeton, 2017.

- Sarkar, Aditya, Benjamin J. Spatz, Alex de Waal, Christopher Newton, and Daniel Maxwell. "The Political Marketplace Framework and Mass Starvation: How Can Humanitarian Analysis, Early Warning and Response Be Improved?" *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 3.3 (2021) 43-55.
- Spatz, Benjamin, Alex de Waal, Aditya Sarkar; Can the World Go Green Without Destabilizing Oil-Pumping Nations? Somerville MA, World Peace Foundation
- Spatz, Benjamin "Carbon compacts, decarbonization, and peace in fragile states in Africa and the Middle East" Somerville MA, World Peace Foundation, 2020.
- Spencer J., Reflections on an Illiberal Peace: Stories from the East. In Goodhand J, Korf B, Spencer J, editors, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka: Caught in the Peace Trap? *Routledge*. 2010
- Stedman, Stephen John. Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes. *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5–51.
- Sundar, Aparna, and Nandini Sundar, eds. Civil wars in South Asia: State, sovereignty, development. SAGE Publications India, 2014.
- Touval, Saadia. Mediation in the Yugoslav Wars: The Critical Years, 1990-95. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Turner, Catherine, and Martin Wählisch. Rethinking Peace Mediation: Challenges of Contemporary Peacemaking Practice. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021.
- Twagiramungu, Noel, Allard Duursma, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe, and Alex de Waal. Re-Describing Transnational Conflict in Africa. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 57, no. 3 (2019): 377–91.
- United States Department of State, United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. Washington DC. 2020.
- United States Department of State, Prologue to the United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. Washington DC. 2022.
- Verweijen, Judith. "Stable Instability: Political settlements and armed groups in the Congo." Rift Valley institute. London, Nairobi; 2016.
- Williams, Paul R. Lawyering Peace. Cambridge, *Cambridge University Press*, 2021.
- Whitfield, Teresa. Working With Groups of Friends. *United States Institute of Peace*, 2010.
- World Bank, 2005, 'The Conflict Analysis Framework,' Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Team (CPR), *The World Bank*. <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-conflict-analysis-framework/>
- World Peace Foundation, 2016. African Politics, African Peace: A report presented to the African Union. Somerville, MA, World Peace Foundation. <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/african-politics-african-peace-research/>



Zartman, William. The timing of peace initiatives: Hurting stalemates and ripe moments. *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 1:1, (2001): 8-18

Zartman, William. The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments. In John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (eds.) *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-War Reconstruction*, 22-35, London, *Palgrave Macmillan*, 2008.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This paper draws extensively on research by Scott Hoag and Nanaho Yamanaka, 'Classic Mediation Literature and the Political Marketplace Framework,' World Peace Foundation, unpublished paper, 2019. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged. Comments by Jared Miller are also acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of countries that operate as political marketplaces, see Political Markets and Conflict Research at World Peace Foundation: <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/political-markets-justice-and-security-program/>.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed explanation of the PMF theory, see de Waal 2015 and Sarkar et al. 2021.

<sup>4</sup> This echoes Mary Kaldor's use of 'new war' as a Kantian 'ideal type' juxtaposed against Clausewitzian 'old war.' Kaldor 2012.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. The Center for Empathy in International Affairs, <https://www.centerforempathy.org/empathy-in-mediation/>.

<sup>6</sup> For example, refer to Salla 1997 on East Timor, Makovsky 1995 on the Oslo Accords, Touval 2002 on Yugoslavia. All of these analyses focus on the immediate lead up to mediation.

<sup>7</sup> There are broader correlations between conditions that are typically associated with the mutual hurting stalemate and the likelihood of mediation efforts, thus boosting arguments that conflict parties are driven by self-interest and pain. Specifically, mediation is more likely under the following four conditions: situations of high conflict intensity; when there is an ethnic dimension; when opponents have equal strength; when conflict is prolonged (Beardsley 2011). This is borne out in case data in Africa. Maundi et al. (2006) comparatively examine six African armed conflicts (Burundi, Rwanda, DRC, Sudan, Liberia and the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea) and confirm the general finding that pain and loss lead conflict parties to be ready for negotiations. Additionally, cross-national quantitative analyses show that conflict parties are most likely to reject offers of mediation at the earliest and latest stages of the civil war (Greig and Regan 2008). The thought is that 'the earliest and the latest phases of conflicts have unique characteristics that make parties hesitant to negotiate: in the early stages conflict parties generally believe a victory is possible, while in the later stages the parties perceive high sunk costs making them hesitant to accept any alternative other than victory' (Greig and Regan 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Manipulation of peace processes by belligerents seeking advantages is nothing new and mediators are well aware of it. The PMF provides a roadmap to better understand how manipulation might occur and to either mitigate negative effects or, at least, not be taken off guard.

<sup>9</sup> Studies have pointed to the role of trust-building, focusing on the social psychology of peace and analyzing reconciliation. See: Lederach 1995, Rouhana and Najjar, 2000, Kydd 2006, Kelman 2009.

## About Us

The World Peace Foundation, an operating foundation affiliated solely with the Fletcher School at Tufts University, aims to provide intellectual leadership on issues of peace, justice and security. We believe that innovative research and teaching are critical to the challenges of making peace around the world, and should go hand-in-hand with advocacy and practical engagement with the toughest issues. To respond to organized violence today, we not only need new instruments and tools—we need a new vision of peace. Our challenge is to reinvent peace.

<https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/>

PeaceRep is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

**PeaceRep.org**

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform | @Peace\_Rep\_ | [peacerep@ed.ac.uk](mailto:peacerep@ed.ac.uk)

University of Edinburgh, School of Law, Old College,  
South Bridge, EH8 9YL

PeaceRep is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), UK



PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform  
peacerep@ed.ac.uk | <https://peacerep.org> | @Peace\_Rep\_

University of Edinburgh, School of Law, Old College, South Bridge EH8 9YL

*PeaceRep is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), UK*