

GPSG Working Paper #17

Mediating Among the Elites and the Grassroots

A Research Design on Differential Community Support for Peace Settlements in Cyprus and Northern Ireland



Joana Amaral

PhD Candidate

*School of Politics and International Relations
University of Kent*

Abstract

Grassroots support for peace settlements is a crucial dimension of mediation success that lacks a cohesive theoretical grounding drawn from empirical research. If a mediation process is to be fully successful it needs to take into account if the agreement negotiated between the parties' leaderships is going to be supported by the communities they represent. This research design proposes to begin to fill this gap by investigating how mediation strategy impacted on the differential community support across the Annan Plan and Good Friday Agreement (GFA) peace settlement referendums. While the Annan Plan was rejected due to the low 24% Greek Cypriot "yes" vote, 65% of Turkish Cypriots actually voted for its implementation. On the other hand, although the GFA was accepted with a high 96% vote from the Nationalist community, the 53% Unionist community vote is, comparatively, less supportive. How can mediation processes be effective in gathering high levels of public support across the communities? Capable of generating widely supported peace processes and settlements, elite mediation can be recognized as crucial to societal transformation and resolution in conflict settings.

Keywords: *Annan Plan, Good Friday Agreement, Grassroots, Leadership, Mediation, Peace Settlement, Referendums*

Author Bio: *Joana Amaral* holds an MA in International Relations from the University of Minho, Portugal, and is currently a PhD Candidate in International Relations at the University of Kent (UK) and a visiting PhD researcher at the Centre for Conflict Studies at the University of Marburg (Germany). During the course of her ongoing research, she has also been an intern at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Cyprus Centre and a Visiting Research Associate at the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice at Queen's University Belfast.

Introduction

The Good Friday Agreement (GFA), mediated by United States Senator George Mitchell, was accepted by 71% of the people in Northern Ireland in May 1998. In April 2004, in the separate and simultaneous referendums in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, the United Nations mediated Annan Plan was rejected by 66 per cent of island's voters. However, analysing the GFA and the Annan Plan referendums' overall results is misleading. Looking into the GFA referendum results in greater detail, while there is an estimated very high support of 96% from the Nationalist community, the estimated 53% vote from the Unionist community is comparatively less supportive (Melaugh and McKenna 1998). Therefore, while the great majority of the Nationalist community desired the implementation of the agreement, only roughly half of the Unionists community shared it. In Cyprus, looking into the overall result is also misleading since 65% of the Turkish Cypriot community actually voted in favour of the implementation of the Annan Plan, being overturned by the low Greek Cypriot 24% per cent vote in favour of the plan (Lordos 2009).

If a mediation process is to be fully successful, it needs to take into account whether the agreement negotiated between the leaderships is going to be supported by the communities they represent. In mediation theory this dimension of success has not been accounted for. The mediation literature has extensively studied how mediators can draft acceptable agreements that balance the trade-off of concessions between disputants, or how agreements can be designed to provide post-conflict stability and successful implementation. However, these analyses are made assuming symmetry between the leaderships' and the communities' positions and interests, one which has been increasingly unveiled by public opinion polling and referendums. Mediation success has been regarded as the success of the elite's negotiations process in getting the parties to agree on a settlement or in keeping the parties at the negotiations table and away from fighting.

Conflict resolution theorists have been highlighting the need for instruments used to manage and resolve conflict to aim at establishing a long-lasting peace and, to this end, to involve the wider and underlying grassroots in reconciliation processes. In this sense, and especially when implementation of peace agreements negotiated at high-level mediation processes is dependent upon their democratic acceptance by the people in referendums, a deeper understanding of the conditions that generate community support for the agreements reached at mediated high-level negotiations can be enlightening. How can mediation processes be effective in gathering high levels of public support for peace settlements?

High-level Mediation and the Representation Problem

Conflict resolution approaches view high-level mediation as an instrument that can, at best, manage conflict but not resolve it. The use of mediation in conflicts where ethnicity marks the dividing line between disputants is regarded as counterproductive because the process of diplomatic negotiation that mediation entails assumes that ethnicity is deeply rooted in society when, in fact, the disputants may not represent the whole society (Kaldor 2000, 7; Fisher 2001). To conflict resolution experts identity conflicts are based on the universal need for identities to be recognized rather than one about short-supply of resources. The source of resolution lays with the communities and effectively happens when options which meet the parties' requirements to resolving the conflict are found and effectively communicated from unofficial to official facilitation, ultimately not mediation, instances (Burton 1987). In contrast, conflict management perspectives consider that the identity element does not render mediation inappropriate for intrastate conflict management since

the issues to be addressed are those political and economic, tangible and negotiable issues that lay at the source of conflict. Politics can be ethnically defined in intrastate conflict, but ethnicity is not the primary source of conflict but rather a difference that is created and exploited by leaderships to serve the real underlying causes of conflict (Faber 2000; Bercovitch and DeRouen 2004). The relationship between grassroots and leaderships is at the core of the contrasting perspectives.

Conflict mediation brings together disputants who tend to claim their convictions as being those of their wider constituencies, just as they claimed to have waged war based on the same premise (Kriesberg and Dayton 2012). This perspective, i.e. that it is a mistake to view the parties in a negotiation process as unitary actors or decision-makers, is not new in mediation literature (Ikle 1964). However, only relatively recently have authors started to pay attention to the ways through which negotiators' behaviour is influenced by the political context and society in which they are embedded (Haass 1991; Stedman 1991). The debate in the literature in terms of how mediation can produce peace agreements that are more conducive to post-conflict stability and long-lasting conflict resolution is the one in which this strand of diplomacy is recognized to have a peacebuilding capacity (Sisk 2003), especially when able to generate a multi-level political engagement around the peace process (Byrne 2006; Papagianni 2010). Importantly, referendums have been found to be crucial to reducing democratic deficits and encouraging civic engagement with political life in conflict settings (Lee and MacGuinty 2012), and an active civil society to be fundamental to peace settlement implementation and durable peace (Nisson 2011). However, in the mediation literature there is still no consistent knowledge of what strategies mediators can follow to both gather grassroots support and take advantage of their influence upon elites to aid negotiations towards widely supported and sustainable peace settlements.

If there is not necessarily a correspondence between the negotiators' positions and those of the communities they represent, there is not also one between the agreement provisions and the preferences, interests or positions of the communities. Looking at the differential referendum results among the communities in Cyprus and Northern Ireland, the turnouts are counter-intuitive and puzzling. The highest supportive turnout comes from the Nationalist community when, in fact, the GFA does not allow for Northern Ireland to unite with the Republic of Ireland. In addition, although it satisfies the Unionist demand that Northern Ireland remain part of the United Kingdom, the Unionist community's support is lower.

Adding to this puzzle are the Cypriot cases. Rauf Denktash, the Turkish Cypriot negotiator and President of the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, opposed the Annan Plan during the referendum. However, the Annan Plan still received a high rate of support from the Turkish Cypriot community. Also, the reason stated at exit polls for the "no" vote among Greek Cypriots was "security", mainly the desire for the complete withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island (Lordos 2009), the reason argued by President Papadopoulos - the Greek Cypriot leading negotiator - on national television when calling on a "resounding" no vote to the Annan Plan before the referendum. Were Greek Cypriots truly informed about the provisions of the Plan or were they led by their leadership to believe security provisions were unsatisfying?

Comparing his experience in Northern Ireland with Cyprus, Irwin (2003) suggests that in both cases there was a tendency for political leaders to inaccurately portray the peoples' views and positions at the negotiations table - as being more hardened than what they really were. The main problem posed to both peace processes, the author states, is the vested interests of elites that benefit from the *status quo*, since the "silent majority" of the population are open to integration and reconciliation. He further argues that public opinion

research helped secure the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland by stimulating the political parties to generate problem-solving and public diplomacy programs, while in Cyprus the failure in implementing this technique, or in implementing it in a way conducive to finding common-ground, contributed to the rejection of the Annan Plan (Irwin 2005).

MacGinty (2000) suggests that it was among Nationalists and, especially Republicans, that the peace process ushered greater change and transformation in Northern Ireland. The inclusion of Sinn Féin in the negotiations led, on the one hand, to a moderation of republican extreme positions, away from the use of force and the zero-sum objective of a united Ireland or nothing, while Gerry Adams' exploitation of the peace process for political propaganda collaterally contributed to the Catholic communities' confidence. In parallel, civic and entrepreneurial dynamism enhanced Nationalist will to engage with the peace process. This in turn led to a Nationalist sense of ownership of the peace process; a perception shared by Unionists who came to regard provisions of the agreement as Republican victories and one which is believed to be harming the implementation process. However, why was the peace process not as effective in building confidence and ownership among Unionists? Answers are still lacking on how mediation processes generate support among the majoritarian ethnic communities, which usually ensue a greater sense of loss in power-sharing arrangements.

If engagement with the grassroots is associated with the creation of support for the GFA, it is referred in the literature as a cause for the failure of the Annan Plan in Cyprus. While allowing the public a very limited influence upon the negotiations process, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General, Álvaro De Soto's divergence from a facilitator's role into a decision-maker of agreement provisions allowed the political leaders to appear unaccountable towards their electorates for the choices they made at the negotiations table. This, in turn, allowed Papadopoulos and Christofias (the leader of the Progressive Party of the Working People or communist AKEL) to cross the UN intermediaries and withdraw their support for the Plan three days before the referendum (Lordos 2009). However, the arguments made in the literature are not parsimonious and do not account for how the same mediation context leads to the Turkish Cypriot high support. Why was there a high support from the Turkish Cypriot community if Denktash also appeared unaccountable for the mediation outcome and also opposed the Annan Plan? Can a greater level of engagement of the community with the negotiations process explain the result?

To what extent do the differences in the mediation strategies and techniques explain the different levels of support for the Annan Plan and the Good Friday Agreement peace settlements?

H1: Support for mediated peace agreements is higher when the mediation strategies applied engage the community's grassroots with the mediation process.

What is hypothesised here is that the mediation strategies employed in Northern Ireland and Cyprus were effective in involving the Nationalist and Turkish Cypriot communities with the negotiations process and, to a lesser degree, the Unionists and Greek Cypriot communities. It aims at ascertaining the validity of a hypothesised causal chain in which, when this pressure from mediation is effective, leaders face pressure from grassroots that favours compromise and become more accountable for the peace settlement which, ultimately, favours support for the peace settlement and contributes to transforming the communities' relationship on the ground. An analysis of the GFA and the Annan Plan provisions and the positions of the leaderships, which traces the process of negotiation and

the strategies and techniques that were used in the mediation, will allow for an understanding of how and why leaderships were constrained during the negotiations process by their constituencies and, if and how, they relate to implemented mediation strategies and, ultimately, to explain higher or lower levels of support in the referendum.

Conclusion

Many variables influence and can explain why people in conflict settings decide to vote yes or no upon a peace settlement referendum. However, the contribution that this project aims to make is to demonstrate that high-level mediation can, in caring for the support the agreement might get from the public, increase its potential as a conflict resolution instrument. The objective underlying the research is to infer what can be done at the high-level mediation process to increase the level of public support to the agreements achieved. Framing the case studies into four different cases corresponding to the differing levels of support for the GFA and the Annan Plan into Nationalist, Unionist, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot will allow an exploration of the whole range of values on the study variable:

- Case with *highest* value: Nationalist support for the GFA;
- Case with *high* value: Turkish Cypriot support for the Annan Plan;
- Case with *middle* value: Unionist support for the GFA;
- Case with *low* value: Greek Cypriot support for the Annan Plan.

Unlike research undertaken until now, this approach is expected to provide more nuanced findings and explanations on the impact of mediation strategy on each of the communities' support for the peace settlements. Existing explanations do not account for how strategies impacted political leaderships and their communities differently. Towards filling this gap, this research will demonstrate, first, that support for peace settlements in the Annan Plan and GFA referendums was higher in the communities where a greater grassroots engagement with the elite negotiations was encouraged by mediation strategy, by also increasing leaderships' accountability for the peace settlement. Secondly, it will demonstrate that mediation strategies had an impact on the communities' perceptions of the costs and benefits of the settlement and on civil society mobilization in support for the peace settlement during the referendums.

Finally, this research will inform conflict literature on the utility of high-level mediation to conflict resolution and bridge more extreme opinions on how high-level mediation can contribute to reconciliation objectives, if the process takes into account not only the positions and interests of the political leaderships, but also involves the grassroots. Potentially the greater the degree of overall support, across the communities involved, the greater the prospects for successful implementation and the establishment of a sustainable peace.

References

- Bercovitch, Jacob and Karl DeRouen Jr. (2004). "Mediation in Internationalized Ethnic Conflicts: Assessing the Determinants of a Successful Process", *Armed Forces and Society*, 2:30, 147-170.
- Byrne, Sean J. (2006). "Consociational and Civic Society Approaches to Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland", *Journal of Peace Research*, 38:3, 327-362.
- Burton, John W. (1987). "Track Two: An Alternative to Power Politics", in John W. McDonald Jr. And Diane Bendahmane (eds) *Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy*. Washington: Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, 65-72.
- Faber, Mient Jan (2000). "Cold Wars and Frozen Conflicts: The European Experience", in M. Kaldor (ed) *Global Insecurity: Restructuring the Global Military Sector, Volume III*. London and New York: Pinter, 53-94.
- Haass, Richard N. (1991). "Ripeness, De-Escalation, and Arms Control", in Louis Kriesberg and Stuart J. Thorson (eds) *Timing the De-Escalation of International Conflicts*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 83-98.
- Ikle, Fred (1964). *How Nations Negotiate*. New York: Kraus Reprint.
- Irwin, Colin (2003). "Devolution and the State of the Northern Ireland Peace Process", *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 2:3-4, 71-91.
- Irwin, Colin (2005). "Public Opinion and the Politics of Peace Research: Northern Ireland, Balkans, Israel, Palestine, Cyprus, Muslim World and the 'War on Terror'". Paper presented at the WAPOR 58th Annual Conference, Cannes, France, September 15-17.
- Kaldor, Mary (ed). (2000). Introduction to *Global Insecurity: Restructuring the Global Military Sector, Volume III*. London and New York: Pinter, 1-23.
- Kriesberg, Louis and Bruce W. Dayton. (2012). *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution*. Plymouth: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lee, Sung Yong and Roger MacGinty (2012) "Context and Postconflict Referendums", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 18:1, 43-64.
- Lordos, Alexandros (2009). "From Secret Diplomacy to Public Diplomacy: How the Annan Plan Referendum Failure Earned the Cypriot Public a Seat at the Negotiating Table", in Andrekos Varnava and Hubert Faustman (eds) *Reunifying Cyprus: The Annan Plan and Beyond*". New York: L.B. Tauris, 163-179.
- MacGinty, Roger (2000). "Irish Republicanism and the Peace Process: From Revolution to Reform", in Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen (eds) *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 124-138.
- Melaugh, Martin and Fionnuala McKenna (1998) *Results of the Referenda in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland, Friday 22 May 1998*. CAIN Web site. Accessed 11 March 2013, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/ref1998.htm>

Papagianni, Katia (2010). "Mediation, Political Engagement and Peacebuilding", *Global Governance*, 16, 243-263.

Sisk, Timothy D. (2003). "Power-Sharing After Civil Wars: Matching Problems to Solutions", in John Darby and Roger MacGinty (eds), *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 139-150.

Stedman, Stephen John (1991). *Peacemaking in Civil Wars: International Mediation in Zimbabwe, 1974-1980*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Email: joanavamaral@gmail.com

© Joana Amaral, 2014