

## Conflict mediation on the rise

# Talk talk

By **Ko Colijn**

Collecting data on conflict resolution trends began in the 1960s with the early empirical research by the Correlates of War Project. However, little international follow up on the study was done until the surprisingly optimistic findings of the Human Security Report appeared in 2005. The study reported a decline in armed conflict and war fatalities, and its findings increased interest in conflict resolution research.

The *Peace Process Yearbook 2007* (PPY) is one result of this renewed interest in conflict resolution research. In its second edition, the PPY presents a comprehensive analysis of recent and ongoing worldwide conflicts. Some of these conflicts end on the battlefield, while others are resolved at the negotiation table. Some negotiations have stalled, and some are making progress.

The Geneva Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (the HD Centre) compiled the findings of the PPY into the concise and accessible *Charting the Roads to Peace* report. The report focuses on the degree of success conflict negotiation has achieved worldwide. The promising news is that negotiation has been attempted in more conflicts worldwide in recent years, and has been more successful. Professional mediators and other peace process envoys cannot ignore such statistics.

International organizations, states or non-government organizations conduct conflict negotiation through mediation. The use of mediation in conflict had been on the rise during the Cold War, but then dipped sharply between 1996 and 2000. Since then, it has risen steadily. By 2006, mediation was used in nearly 60% of all armed conflicts worldwide.

Mediation can occur in less intrusive or more interventionist form. Facilitating negotiations between warring parties appears to be more successful than either bringing in concrete proposals or manipulating adversaries into finding peaceful solutions.

States serve as conflict mediators in more than 60% of cases. Although the UN is involved in more mediations than any other single mediator, the combined mediatory involvement of United States, Norway and to a lesser extent Russia, Italy and the UK is much larger. But this does not mean that states 'do better' in mediation than international or non-government organizations. 'If success is counted as including any progress from a ceasefire to a full settlement', the Geneva group reports, 'regional organizations are significantly better than states, the UN and NGOs'. Regional organizations include the European Union and the African Union. Many would declare mediation to be the best, most preferred path



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to ending or preventing armed confrontations, even though 50-60% of all mediations fail. Given the overall mediation rate of 60%, one can therefore conclude that some 25-30% of global armed conflict situations are improved through negotiations.

Indeed, statistics tell a positive story. Since 1990, more wars have ended than have begun, and more than ever before, negotiations have helped end wars. Negotiations have in fact ended more wars than has military victory.

There is some reason for caution. Evidence indicates that wars ended through negotiation flare up again more often than those concluded by military victory. In fact, wars ended through negotiation last three times longer and are nearly twice as likely to resume within five years.

Nor are negotiated settlements to war equal to military victories. Case study research shows that parties defeated in war lack the motivation to resume fighting. That might very well explain the 'success rate' of the military solution. Clear victories endure. Conflicts that end at the negotiation table are generally between military equals. In such cases, parties involved in the war may view 'settlement' as a rational outcome – or as a mere pause in their skirmishing.

Still, I believe that Edward Luttwak's advice to 'give war a chance' is flawed. Mediation is not guaranteed to work, but doing nothing cannot be the answer. Wars that are not ended by either negotiation or military defeat also recur. Fighting resumes within five years in more than 50% of such wars.

Mediation is on the rise globally. Unfortunately, so is the rate of recurring war. There is a real need for sufficient postwar stabilization capacity. The issue requires a commitment to growing security assistance and reconstruction efforts. The more peace we have, the more resources we need to protect it. ■

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