

# osloFORUM2016

## Adapting to a new conflict landscape



Authored by Paul Dziatkowiec, Christina Buchhold, Elodie Convergne,  
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Meeting  
**report**

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Humanitarian  
Dialogue

  
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# Improving the mediation of armed conflict

## A global series of mediation retreats

The Oslo Forum is the leading international network of conflict mediation practitioners. Co-hosted by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) and the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Oslo Forum regularly convenes conflict mediators, peacemakers, high level decision-makers and key peace process actors in a series of informal and discreet retreats.

The Oslo Forum features an annual global event in Oslo and is complemented by regional retreats in Africa and Asia. The aim is to improve conflict mediation practice through facilitating open exchange and reflection across institutional and conceptual divides, providing informal networking opportunities that encourage coordination and cooperation when needed, and allowing space for conflict parties to advance their negotiations.

## Sharing experiences and insights

Mediation is increasingly seen as an effective means of resolving armed conflicts and the growing number of actors involved testifies to its emergence as a distinct field of international diplomacy. The pressured working environment of mediation rarely provides opportunities for reflection. Given the immense challenges in bringing about sustainable negotiated solutions to violent conflict, mediators benefit from looking beyond their own particular experiences for inspiration, lessons and support.

The uniquely informal and discreet retreats of the Oslo Forum series facilitate a frank and open exchange of insights by those working at the highest level to bring warring parties together. By convening key actors from the United Nations, regional organisations and governments, as well as private organisations and prominent peacemakers, the retreats also provide a unique networking opportunity.

## Where politics meets practice

Participation is by invitation only. Sessions are closed-door discussions, and they adhere to the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution. They are designed to stimulate informed exchanges

with provocative inputs from a range of different speakers, including conflict party representatives, war correspondents, outstanding analysts, thinkers and experts on specific issues.

Participants have included **Jimmy Carter**, former President of the United States; **Kofi Annan**, former Secretary-General of the United Nations; **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi**, State Counsellor of Myanmar; **Juan Manuel Santos**, President of Colombia; **Catherine Ashton**, former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; **Lakhdar Brahimi**, former Joint Special Representative for Syria of the United Nations and the League of Arab States; **Martti Ahtisaari**, former President of Finland; **Thabo Mbeki**, former President of South Africa; **Olusegun Obasanjo**, former President of Nigeria; **Mohammad Khatami**, former President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; **Gerry Adams**, President of Sinn Féin; and **Fatou Bensouda**, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The Oslo Forum is proud to have hosted several Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

The retreats refrain from making public recommendations, aiming instead to advance conflict mediation practice.

# Adapting to a new conflict landscape



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The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a private diplomacy organisation founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence. Its mission is to help prevent, mitigate, and resolve armed conflict through dialogue and mediation.

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## The Oslo Forum 2016 – an overview

The fourteenth Oslo Forum (14–15 June 2016) convened one hundred of the world's leading peacemakers, conflict actors and decision-makers. They included John Kerry, United States Secretary of State; Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; Mohammad Javad Zarif, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran; Micheline Calmy-Rey, former President of Switzerland; Bertie Ahern, former Prime Minister of Ireland; Fatou Bensouda, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court; and Børge Brende, Foreign Minister of Norway. 43 nationalities were represented.

The overarching theme of the Forum was 'Adapting to a new conflict landscape', reflecting the emergent challenges mediators face in responding to war. Increasingly, conflicts trace their roots to sectarian tensions, geopolitical upheaval and regional rivalries, which give rise to unconventional scenarios for peacemakers, such as the seizure of territory by extremist groups, state collapse, and challenges to the principle of state sovereignty. Peacemakers must keep refining their tools to respond to these new demands.

Key actors involved in the implementation of the **Libyan Political Agreement (LPA)** reflected on its main achievements and outstanding challenges. While the LPA had enabled the formation of a Government of National Accord (GNA) to manage Libya's transition, considerable work lay ahead to secure the GNA's legitimacy and extend its authority throughout the country, and to establish a unified military structure that could respond effectively to the Islamic State (IS) menace.

Attendees also considered the **prospects for peace in Afghanistan**. The merits of engaging with the Taliban were debated at length, with the optimists seeing an opportunity in the acknowledgement

by some Taliban adherents that it could not rule alone, and that a military solution is no longer feasible.

This year's **Oslo Debate** explored whether, amid the global turmoil, mediation is becoming ineffective. Those arguing in the affirmative contended that mediation has had a poor record of late, as evidenced by failures in Syria and elsewhere. Conflicts have come to resemble mutual enterprises in which armed groups benefit more from fighting than from winning or losing; thus financial

incentives, rather than mediation, are more likely to determine outcomes. Others countered that life-saving deals continue to be made at local levels, even in Syria, and that most conflicts still end through political agreements. Moreover, relative to other policy responses like military intervention, mediation is cheap whether it succeeds or fails – thus it is almost always worth trying.

Participants assessed the significant progress that had been made to negotiate an end to **Colombia's civil war**. Recent months saw agreement on several delicate issues, including transitional justice. One remaining challenge would be to secure democratic legitimisation of the peace process – which suffered a setback in the October referendum that narrowly failed to win popular approval for the peace agreement.

Meanwhile, **Syria** remains a black stain on the world's conscience. Despite five years of bloody stalemate, the protagonists continue to be encouraged by outsiders engaged in proxy conflict. Few positives could be gleaned from the chaos, though some progress has been made in negotiating partial, local-level agreements. If there is hope, it lies in two of Syria's most resilient assets – its civil society and private sector – which ought to be better harnessed to neutralise the war economy and incentivise peace.

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H.E. Ms Micheline Calmy-Rey (top middle)  
Professor Scott Atran (right)



The discussion on **ceasefires** allowed practitioners to exchange comparative lessons, including from the Philippines and Ukraine. Key takeaways included the need for collaboration between local commanders and communities, and the importance of joint problem-solving between conflict parties. In a separate session on **confidence-building measures**, mediators shared creative ideas for reviving stalled negotiations.

One thread that permeated many of the discussions was the **growth of violent extremism**. Extremist groups, a growing force in conflicts, have become adept at selling a simple message to disaffected youth: that by joining the cause, they will find the sense of belonging and meaning that they lack at home. To respond effectively to conflicts inspired by religious extremism, mediators must find meaningful ways to engage in contests over beliefs and values, rather than solely material interests.

Another exchange focused on **Yemen's peace talks**, which had produced a roadmap to improve security and create a more stable political climate. Separately, participants assessed regional and international efforts to address festering tensions in **Burundi**.

In an otherwise relatively gloomy peacemaking landscape, **Cyprus** offers a rare glimmer of hope. While challenges still lie ahead there, the prevailing political climate is arguably more propitious to a deal now than it has been for many years.

Over two engrossing days, the collective experience assembled at the Forum enabled a rare opportunity to reflect on the state of peacemaking, test assumptions, learn lessons and draw inspiration from successes. Participants shared some innovative ideas for addressing the challenges they face in the field, which – against a generally bleak backdrop – offers some hope for improving the international response to armed conflict.

## Ending the war in Syria: small steps towards a possible solution?

Despite five years of stalemate and failure on the battlefield, the conflict parties in Syria have not yet given up on military victory. They continue to be encouraged by outside powers engaging in proxy conflict, which has escalated the conflict and drawn in the region. Meanwhile, the muddled international response has only inflamed the situation.

While acknowledging that a comprehensive peace settlement is still far over the horizon, some speakers argued in favour of maintaining the framework of the Geneva process, which calls for a ceasefire, transitional government, new constitution and nationwide elections. One view presented in the discussion was that, instead of focusing on the fate of the president, the process should address institutional reforms more broadly, as well as the democratic deficit and lack of economic opportunities at the root of the conflict.

Some contributors felt that the insurgents currently represented in the dialogue process have limited clout on the ground, and that space should be created for relevant Syrian militias, minorities and civil society organisations to get more involved. Great powers and regional actors have a central role to play too, of course, and the formation of the International Syria Support Group is intended to promote their more constructive engagement. However, international actors need to remain wary of the motivations of the conflict parties they sponsor, who have become skilled in the art of manipulating outside powers.

While talks on Syria's final status stutter, there is some progress being made in the negotiation of partial agreements at the local level. This reflects the ongoing process of decentralisation (from big cities to the provinces) that the war set in motion, which has

become most evident in the Kurdish and southern regions. As both the regime and opposition groups seem more amenable to accepting the status quo in these relatively 'quiet' areas, one effective strategy may be to pacify them in the hope that this generates momentum elsewhere. These 'zones of calm' could then serve as stepping stones toward a broader peace process. In addition, they may provide the space necessary for Syrians to introduce alternative narratives and discuss broader national issues.

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Unquestionably, one of Syria's greatest remaining assets, and its hope for the future, is the resilience of its people. Among others, the private sector has impressively shown how it can continue to function through the toughest of circumstances; and civil society has, against all odds, expanded organically to fill governance gaps and assist the most vulnerable. These strengths could be better harnessed to neutralise Syria's war economy, which has played a key role in sustaining the conflict. In its stead, the international community should consider ways to stimulate regional economic development, which could not only incentivise peace but also create more positive dynamics among Syrian communities.







*Mr Ian Martin, Mr Haile Menkerios (facing page)*

*Major General Kristin Lund (left)*

*H.E. Mr Bertie Ahern (top right)*

*Dr 'Funmi Olonisakin (bottom right)*



## Building castles in the sand: challenges of implementing the Libyan Political Agreement

Key actors involved in the implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) reflected on its main achievements, and the challenges to achieving long-term peace and stability in Libya.

The LPA, signed in December 2015, aimed to bring an end to the political and military conflict that had pitted Libya's two parliaments, governments and armies against one another. Under the LPA, a new system of institutions and procedures would manage Libya's ongoing transition. The LPA also established the Presidency Council (PC), a new executive authority with wide-ranging powers, as the international community's official counterpart. In turn, the PC had proposed a Government of National Accord (GNA) to manage Libya's transition.

The GNA, which draws its legitimacy from the international community (including the UN, African Union, League of Arab States, and Western powers), is slowly establishing itself in Tripoli. However, its authority does not extend far beyond the capital, and its legal foundations are shaky. Notably, the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR), the designated legislative chamber under the LPA, has not yet formally endorsed the GNA. One speaker likened the GNA to an ambulance with no licence plate, without which the GNA cannot legally function, and in turn the LPA can be only partially implemented.

To avoid political paralysis, it is vital to move ahead with the LPA and to empower the GNA. Preventing fragmentation will also require paying due regard to the east of the country, notably the need to rebuild Benghazi. If Tripoli remains the predominant focus of most stakeholders, the east will inevitably continue to drift away. Tribes in the east feel increasingly alienated from the rest of the country, and must be brought into the nation-building process.



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Establishing a unified military structure is a similarly urgent priority; if the army is allowed to remain fragmented, Libya could relapse into civil war. The Islamic State (IS) has exploited the political and security vacuum in Libya; as it tries to consolidate its gains on the ground, a quick and effective response by a united national army will be important. One contributor suggested that the fight against IS could in fact unite Libyans by building a common military front against a hostile threat.

The deficiencies described above have created a climate in which terrorism can thrive. Libya today is exporting terrorism to its immediate neighbours, and risks infecting Europe with similar problems. As the country has never had strong institutions, the general sense among contributors was that international involvement will be key to strengthening and legitimising the GNA, and thereby assisting the nascent authorities to manage their problems. According to some, this would also require a continued foreign military presence in Libya, which would help ensure stability and combat the terrorist threat.



*Ambassador Richard G. Olson,  
H.E. Mr Hekmat Khalil Karzai  
(facing page)*

*Dr Fatou Bensouda (top left)*

*Ambassador Zamir Kabulov (bottom left)*

*Dr Jamal Benomar,*

*Professor Ghassan Salamé (right)*





## Implementing ceasefires: how to silence the guns

Participants shared comparative experiences of ceasefires in various armed conflicts around the world. The first case study examined the Philippines' experience of ceasefire negotiations, implementation and monitoring. That process offered a useful model of multi-layered but mutually reinforcing mechanisms, and complementarity between political and security measures. In the Philippines' context, the involvement of, and collaboration between, local commanders and populations had greatly contributed to building confidence in the ceasefire. Other key lessons included: i) the importance assigned by the government to the process, which made the ceasefire a top-down priority and set an example for other stakeholders; ii) close cooperation between the parties in law-enforcement operations, for example on dealing with spoilers; and iii) a strong focus on common problem solving, rather than just reporting violations.

Multiple ceasefire monitoring mechanisms were put in place in the Philippines over time, including local monitoring posts, a joint

monitoring mechanism, and an international monitoring team. Each measure responded to a specific emerging need – thus the process evolved to suit changing circumstances. Inclusiveness was also a key element of the Philippines' experience: local residents in affected areas were encouraged to play a role in monitoring and reporting violations; and, looking beyond the ceasefire itself, local development plans served as an important incentive by allowing communities to envisage the longer-term dividends of peace.

Regarding the Ukraine context, participants underlined some of the weaknesses of the Minsk ceasefire agreement of September 2014. These included the vagueness of some of the provisions (and resulting gaps), the lack of precision regarding areas covered by the agreement (notably due to the non-public nature of one of the annexes), and relatedly, the limited political cost of violations. Monitoring the ceasefire had proven to be particularly difficult in densely populated areas, where security risks to both civilians and monitors were grave.



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Limited-scale local ceasefires could mitigate some of these flaws by enabling humanitarian access to the most vulnerable pressure points, and restoring critical infrastructure such as water pipes, and gas and electricity equipment. However, enforcement remains exceedingly difficult and dangerous in eastern Ukraine, largely owing to the sides' inability and unwillingness to examine and investigate violations of the agreement, including those restricting the monitors' freedom of movement.

Zooming out from the specific case studies, participants agreed that as the nature of conflicts (including their causes, contexts, and

*Dr Marie-Louise Baricako; Lieutenant General (ret.) Nasser Khan Janjua; Mr Martin Kobler; Professor Ghassan Salamé, Mr Haile Menkerios; and Ms Sahar Ghanem, Dr Katia Papagianni (bottom left to right)*

protagonists) continues to evolve, so too must new tools be developed to implement ceasefires. The success of any ceasefire demands a strong understanding of the unique context of a given conflict, and a clear definition of the ceasefire's objectives. Importantly, some speakers stressed that military actors should be involved in both the negotiation and implementation phases, in order to avoid disconnects between political-level aspirations and military realities. Furthermore, negotiators must ensure that provisions are sensibly sequenced (to avoid later misunderstandings), and that linkages between political and security measures are understood and accepted by all sides. Getting these things right can help build the trust and provide the guarantees required to keep the parties on board.

Ultimately, successful implementation of ceasefires depends on three fundamentals: the will of the parties to stop the fighting, the political and military will to prevent its recurrence, and the existence of robust cooperative mechanisms to manage violations and other challenges.



## Colombia: clearing the last hurdles\*

In its peace negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Colombian government followed a 'strategy of prudence'. Among other things, this entailed running lengthy secret negotiations to strengthen the process before it was allowed to become public. Isolating the parties from the pressure of public opinion and the media helped to build trust between them. While the absence of mediation during this phase made the process challenging, it allowed FARC representatives to grow accustomed to negotiating peace as 'equals' with their government counterparts.

Talks started with land issues, then moved on to political participation and drugs, before a Sub-Commission on 'end of conflict issues' was established. In order to mitigate against the enabling factors of violence, the process addressed the root causes of the conflict such as rural development, political participation, drug cultivation and victims' concerns about justice, truth and reparation – all factors that had inflamed the conflict.

The fact that only Norway and Cuba served as guarantors in the first phase of the talks allowed for a lighter process, though the format was later expanded to include other countries, including Chile and Venezuela. While Norway and Cuba attended negotiation sessions, they intervened only in cases of serious disagreement. In the eventual implementation phase, the support of major international actors will be critical to ensuring a durable peace dividend.

The issue of justice was one of the most difficult challenges during the negotiations. The compromise was to address the issue through a combination of judicial and extra-judicial mechanisms that would consider truth, justice, reparations and non-repetition, and would address all crimes committed during the conflict by



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all parties. As part of this approach, tribunals would be established to prosecute the most serious crimes.

Another remaining challenge would be to secure democratic legitimization of the peace process and increase popular participation. While some measures had been taken in the latter regard (for example, victims of the conflict were flown to Cuba to present their experiences and offer suggestions), some speakers felt that these were insufficient. There were still concerns within Colombian society that the agreement was the product of a top-down approach, and some citizens felt distant from the process. In anticipation of the need to generate public support, a decision was taken early

in the negotiations to hold a referendum once a peace agreement was signed. While risky (some influential figures, notably former President Uribe, were actively campaigning against the agreement), this strategy would allow for greater public ownership. Popular support for the deal would be key to its successful implementation.

\* **Note:** this discussion took place prior to the referendum on 2 October, which narrowly failed to secure popular approval of the Colombia peace agreement. A revised agreement was signed on 24 November.



*Secretary Teresita Quintos Deles (facing page)*

*Dr William Ury (top right)*

*Ms Lyse Doucet (bottom right)*

*Professor John Paul Lederach, Ms Ja Nan Lahtaw (left)*



## Afghanistan: what prospects for peace with the Taliban?

Participants considered the prospects for peace in Afghanistan, and assessed the recent efforts of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG, comprising the governments of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and the United States) to revive stalled peace talks between the government and the Taliban.

Fifteen years of fighting have shown that a military solution to the conflict is unfeasible. With that in mind, the QCG has pushed to prepare for a new peace process that is Afghan-led and -owned – with the notable absence (currently) of the Taliban from the negotiations. The framing principles of the envisaged peace process are sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity of Afghanistan.

Engaging with the Taliban presents serious challenges in the short-term, as the group has enunciated numerous demands and preconditions for negotiations. Its position is that a political dialogue cannot start before all international military personnel have left the country. For this reason, the Taliban rejects direct talks with the Afghan government and insists on first negotiating with the US over the withdrawal. The Taliban has also demanded amendments to the Afghan constitution, and called for the release of Taliban prisoners and the removal of members' names from the UN security blacklist.

A number of contributors maintained that in the medium-term, engagement with the Taliban makes good sense. The Taliban has, after all, acknowledged that it cannot rule alone, and a minority of its members already accepts that a military solution is unrealistic. (In that context, it is important to note that the Taliban comprises different factions – thus its positions should not be assumed to be uniform.) According to some speakers, there is already adequate space (and need) now to explore possible channels and identify confidence-building measures between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Some points of consensus are already emerging between the Afghan government, the Taliban, and regional actors. They agree on the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, a constitutional system, and the role of Islam in the state. In addition, there is consensus in the region that the return of an unelected Islamic emirate would be undesirable, and that an Afghanistan free of international terrorism is in the regional interest.

A few participants contended that a negotiated settlement could address many of the issues that the Taliban has put on the table. One speaker emphasised the value of creating an incentivising mindset. As a first step, the international community should make

clear that if the Taliban expects to share power, it has to participate in the peace process. Already the group appears to have accepted that administering Afghanistan will require considerable international support. (Some participants went further, arguing that the international community should not only help strengthen Afghanistan's institutions, but also continue to support its military forces.)

The slightly dissenting view was that negotiations with the Taliban are of secondary importance to Afghanistan at this time; stability in the political, economic and security

spheres should be considered the most pressing concerns. In addition, the ruling elites are still deeply fragmented; they must first unite if they are to negotiate with the Taliban from a position of strength.

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*Dr Fatou Bensouda,  
Ms Ngozi Amu (top)  
Ms Sahar Ghanem,  
Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri (bottom)*





## The Oslo Debate

*Motion: 'In an increasingly complex conflict landscape, is mediation becoming ineffective?'*

In the context of increasing armed conflict, mediators have been challenged to reassess the effectiveness of their methods. Is mediation still the most effective tool with which to solve the pressing conflicts of our time? The key arguments in favour of the motion (that is, that mediation is becoming ineffective) are shaded in blue below; those against are shaded in pink.

Mediation has had a poor record in recent years. Despite numerous attempts at launching peace processes, conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and countless other places rages on.

The vast bulk of armed conflicts end through negotiated agreements. We rarely hear about successes, because the media home in on the failures. But there are good news stories too, even in the darkest of contexts. For example, the success of some civil society groups and humanitarian actors in negotiating (admittedly limited) access to besieged areas in Syria shows that even in cases where mediation fails to settle a conflict, mediators can still secure important, lifesaving wins.

Mediation is based on an outdated view of conflict as a struggle between armed groups with legitimate grievances. But today's conflicts are more like mutual enterprises or predatory social conditions, in which armed groups benefit more from fighting than from winning or losing. It's the financial incentive, not the mediation, which determines whether a conflict ends.

While financial incentives might legitimise the continuation of war, conflicts erupt over legitimate grievances. People take up arms when their interests are ignored and they have no other avenue to pursue political change. Mediation is a useful tool, as it provides a forum for increasing mutual understanding and considering the protagonists' respective interests, with a view to finding common ground.

Armed groups generally comprise marginalised actors who could never achieve their ambitions in a peaceful context. They consider violence a form of political mobilisation. Mediation only legitimises their attempts to gain political control through fighting; peace processes bring armed fighters to the table, while excluding other relevant actors including the victims of vio-



*Ambassador Shukria Barakzai,  
Mr Espen Barth Eide,  
Ms Meredith Preston McGhie,  
Dr Katia Papagianni (bottom right to left)*



lence. In turn, peace agreements divide the pie among armed groups, thus cementing their power after the conflict. Mediation therefore does little to address the problems of the suffering population.

Yes, in certain circumstances – for example Dayton – mediators choose to settle for a process that divides the spoils, when that helps to avert further bloodshed. But mediators are increasingly aware that the inclusion of civil society and other stakeholders is critical to ensuring sustainable peace. The mediation field has evolved over the past two decades and mediation processes have become more inclusive. By consulting with civil society, mediators can inform projects that address human rights violations, unemployment or other root causes of conflict.

Mediation is not enough to address the root causes of conflict. More relevant conflict resolution strategies focus on creating alternative livelihoods and de-incentivising the war economy. And frankly, sometimes military intervention works better.

Mediation might not provide quick fixes, but it is often the most effective response available. One of the most common alternatives – military intervention – has a poor success rate. There are only a handful of cases in which force has decisively ended a conflict and brought sustainable peace. Strategies like this are also extremely costly. In contrast, mediation is cheap, whether it succeeds or fails – thus it's always worth trying.

Conflicts have become increasingly complex, with a proliferation of actors, motives and interests at multiple levels: local, regional and international. Syria is a case in point. The more complex and layered they become, the exponentially more negligible the odds of arresting them through negotiations. It is simple maths.

The involvement of regional and international actors is by no means a 'new' feature of conflicts. If these cases were simple, they would not need mediation. Interests, positions and alliances become blurred, and only dialogue can clarify where the common ground is. One cannot dispute, though, that the more actors get involved, the less likely a military victory becomes.

## Yemen: what opportunities for seeking peace?

The latest round of peace talks on the Yemen conflict began in April 2016 in Kuwait. They brought together Ansar Allah (otherwise known as the Houthis) and the internationally recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The talks followed UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which called, among other things, for the withdrawal of militias and armed groups from territories seized since 2014. The roadmap emerging from the Kuwait talks provides for the implementation of security arrangements specified in Resolution 2216 and the establishment of a national unity government that would ensure the delivery of basic services and manage the recovery of the Yemeni economy.

Participants recognised the constructive progress made in Kuwait, which they hoped would put an end to Yemen's conflict. Some speakers cautioned, though, that an eventual agreement would not, by itself, guarantee sustainable peace. Yemen's history is replete with unimplemented agreements. Even if an agreement were to be reached between Hadi's government and Ansar Allah, the militias and tribal leaders in the south of the country may feel excluded and refuse to respect the deal. Some participants contended that the army's loyalty to former President Saleh would also be an obstacle to stability in Yemen. Inviting the Houthis, an armed movement, to participate in a political process was also a risk, as it may signal to other groups that violence can achieve change at the national level.

Meanwhile, the fragmentation and proliferation of armed groups continues throughout the country, particularly the south. Their competition for power there has precluded them from forging a united front. However, despite their lack of coherence, the international community could not avoid addressing their demands for independence.

On the issue of inclusiveness, discussants warned that if the Kuwaiti process were to involve only the usual, traditional powers, it would not reflect the real struggle of Yemen's citizens. To arrive at constructive and lasting solutions, smaller political parties, women, and youth should be involved in the transition, as well as in debates about the constitution, the future state, and the development of an electoral roadmap.

Participants agreed that the earlier National Dialogue Conference (NDC, 2013–14) had laid down a strong marker for inclusiveness. However, the NDC had focused too much on abstract principles, and failed to address some of the urgent problems facing the country. Several positive recommendations had emerged but, despite this, the NDC did not prevent Yemen from relapsing into conflict. The transitional process launched in 2011 should have addressed the issues at the heart of the military conflict; but instead, what had started as a minor conflict in the north had been allowed to escalate and spread to other parts of the country.

Several attendees expressed doubts that the recent agreement reached in Kuwait would transform Yemen into a stable, well-governed state. Much more would have to be done to build a politically viable system, and to restore the population's basic living standards. Above all, stabilising the economy would be key to addressing Yemen's most pressing need – to avert further humanitarian crisis.

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agreements.”



*Ambassador Shyam Saran (background)*

*Mr Jeffrey Mapendere (bottom left)*

*Ms Hiroute Guebre Sellassie (top right)*



## Burundi: challenges to conflict prevention

Although the underlying reasons for Burundi's crisis were disputed during this discussion, there was general consensus on the need for all protagonists to engage in an unconditional dialogue. Their tendency to defer to formulaic positions, rather than think creatively about compromise, could not resolve the conflict.

There was some disagreement as to the scale of the current crisis: while one participant lamented that the country and its surrounding region had failed to prevent a crisis that continued to claim casualties daily, another countered that the situation was under control, and that those who had provoked the latest instability simply needed to be brought to justice – which would allow the country to refocus on more important concerns, like poverty. The conversation continued to follow these fault lines – with one side stressing the urgency of the situation, which the other categorised as distorted by a manipulative international community and foreign media (which, according to one speaker, sought to artificially reopen ethnic divisions between Hutus and Tutsis).

Some in the audience argued that the international community had a duty to intervene when a government, like Burundi's, was unwilling or unable to fulfil its primary responsibility of guaranteeing the security, safety and welfare of its population. Importantly also, justice needed to be done. In that regard, participants clashed over the issue of accountability for crimes committed during the crisis; while several contributors condemned the failure to pursue peace and justice in parallel, another claimed that perpetrators from all sides were being pursued without discrimination.

Attendees debated whether the peacemaking efforts of the East African Community (EAC), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations had produced clear dividends. While the EAC

process seemed to be on the right path, it had commenced only around the time of the Forum and could not yet be assessed. The suggestion emerged of a secret channel that might help generate momentum in the talks – as opposed to an overly public process in which media and public scrutiny could limit the parties' flexibility and willingness to make concessions.

Some regret was expressed at the lack of a clear political position on the part of the EAC, which according to some made it difficult to apply the requisite pressure on the parties. In a similar vein, some speakers assessed that the unwillingness of the AU to follow through on the deployment of peacekeepers – as it had previously announced – had negatively affected the situation, as it had 'let the government off the hook'. Overall, there was a general sense that the various international efforts to resolve the Burundi crisis need better coordination in order to have a real impact.

“  
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”





*Ambassador Mona Juul (facing page)*

*H.E. Mr Nasir El-Rufai (bottom)*

*The Honourable Sergio Jaramillo Caro (top)*





## Peace by piece: making meaningful progress in intractable conflicts

Mediators involved in intractable conflicts face a range of obstacles. Repeated failures to advance a peace process can not only harden negotiating positions and reaffirm distrust, but also instil doubt about the effectiveness and credibility of the mediator and the process. Often, it is not only the conflict that becomes intractable, but also the mediation process itself. Each violation of agreements and breakdown of talks can devalue the currency of mediation.

When everything has been tried and nothing has worked, what can mediators do to rebuild trust between protagonists and their confidence in the mediation process? How can modest steps and confidence-building measures contribute to some form of measurable progress?

A useful strategy to re-energise a stalled process can be the redesign of its overall 'choreography'. Seemingly small and technical changes can help inch the protagonists out of deadlock. One

example is changing the venue of meetings: moving them to an isolated or distant location can help to build relationships between conflict parties who otherwise interact only on the battlefield or in a formal setting. Once they are physically removed from the pressures of their own constituencies, protagonists may be more

“

Often, it is not only the conflict  
that becomes intractable, but also  
the mediation process itself.

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*H.E. Dr Mohammad Javad Zarif, H.E. Ms Federica Mogherini,  
H.E. Mr Børge Brende (top right)*

*Ambassador Geir O. Pedersen, Mr Anas Joudeh; H.E. Mr Nasir El-Rufai,  
Mr Erik Solheim; and Ms Sigrid Kaag, Ms Janine di Giovanni,  
Dr Marie-Louise Baricako (bottom left to right)*



likely to take risks and consider creative compromises. Alternatively, moving discussions back home – where parties feel more accountable to their people – can help to raise the pressure on parties to settle a deal, or to commit to promises they have already made.

Other techniques can include switching the mode of discussion (e.g. from shuttle diplomacy to direct meetings), or introducing new actors – for example, private peacemaking organisations – that can complement the official mediation process (e.g. through capacity building for selected conflict parties).

If, on the other hand, the problem can be traced back to distrust of the mediator, this may necessitate a ‘mediation’ between the mediator and the protagonists by an outside party, or – if all else fails – the selection of a new mediator.

Intractable conflicts are often rooted in grievances related to self- and group identity, rather than purely interest-based. Leaving the underlying questions of identity unaddressed can harm the pros-

pects of peace. A case in point is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where Israel’s periodic attempts to offer economic inducements without political concessions have tended to inflame rather than ease tensions.

Mediators have learned that simply rehashing the causes of a long-running conflict does little to generate momentum in a flagging peace process. Instead, careful fine-tuning of mediation tools, or, when necessary, shaking up a dialogue format, can help re-energise the parties. How mediators go about adjusting their strategy should, in any case, be informed by a careful analysis of the current conflict dynamics.





## Cyprus: light at the end of the tunnel?

Among the many conflicts discussed at the Forum, Cyprus offers a rare glimmer of hope. The prospects of reaching a peace agreement appear good, though its eventual ratification (by referendum) and implementation will present additional challenges down the line.

In the historical sense, Cyprus is in many ways a textbook conflict. After years of intercommunal conflict, Greek and Turkish Cypriots were divided during the partition of the island in 1974, producing two distinct conflict parties supported by Turkey and Greece respectively. The parties have avoided internal fragmentation, thus renegade armed groups are not part of the equation.

Cypriots live relatively comfortably with the status quo, which may lead some to challenge the need for political compromise. However, there is no question that the conflict remains an important societal concern. And now that a window of opportunity has presented itself for resolving it, the parties need to capitalise before it closes again. The prevailing political conditions are arguably more propitious to a deal than they have been for many years. For example, Turkey supports the process – though this position may change, depending on how its relations with the European Union (EU) evolve. In addition, the growing Islamisation of the Turkish government is causing more and more Turkish Cypriots, who are mostly secular, to favourably consider reunification. It helps also that there are no looming presidential elections, which means that leaders on both sides do not face rejection at the ballot box anytime soon.

While Greek Cypriots might have preferred a unitary state and Turkish Cypriots a confederation, their leaders agree on the broad outlines of a future federal state. Negotiations are based on the ‘nothing is agreed until everything is agreed’ principle, though broad consensus has emerged over more than two-thirds of the

core issues. For example, the parties agree that their respective citizens should automatically get citizenship of the new state; while those residing legally in the North without citizenship could remain there until the expiry of their work permits, after which the new federal authorities would decide their status.

Some challenges remain. Greek Cypriots represent 79% and Turkish Cypriots 21% of the island’s population, rendering it difficult to create a federation of two equal entities, or to choose between a majority vote and a rotating presidency. Further, as the partition displaced and dispossessed many, property settlement is a sensitive

problem, whose resolution will likely comprise a delicate balance between ownership rights and fair compensation. Negotiations over territorial exchange, security and guarantees also promise to be tough.

A key lesson from the failed Annan Plan of 2004 is that every word in the eventual agreement should be written by Cypriots rather than outsiders, so as to ensure local ownership. For now, the outlook for the process is promising. Both sides are committed to creating a state that is ready to integrate into the EU, which for its part strongly supports the process. This should act as a valuable incentive in the talks ahead.

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The prevailing political conditions are arguably more propitious to a deal now than they have been for many years.  
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*Professor Nahla Chahal (facing page)*

*The Honourable Murray McCully, Dr David Harland, Ms Alice Nderitu (left)*

*Dr Mo Ibrahim (top right)*

*Ms Karin Landgren (middle right)*

*Mr Nir Rosen, Dr Abdallah Al Dardari (bottom right)*



## Adapting to a new conflict landscape

Whether we count them in terms of battle deaths, number of conflicts, terrorist attacks or displaced persons, armed conflicts have been on the rise since 2010. They are also increasingly complex, as evidenced by the proliferation of armed actors and the emergence of a new set of transnational actors contesting the principle of state sovereignty. This changing landscape challenges not only how we look at war but also how we try to make peace.

Given these recent developments, the limits of traditional instruments for responding to conflict – including the use of force, sanctions and international norms – are increasingly apparent, as is their considerable cost. Military intervention has, in many instances, increased instability and inflamed rather than resolved conflicts. Traditional state-centric diplomacy has struggled to keep up with the proliferation of new conflict protagonists and the evolving nature of war. And peacekeeping has in some cases proven powerless to prevent conflict relapse, particularly in the face of terrorism.

“

The limits of traditional instruments for responding to conflict are increasingly apparent, as is their considerable cost.

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Forum participants discussed why the popularity of violent extremism has spread in recent years, to the extent that extremist groups influence many of today's armed conflicts. One contributor argued that groups like the Islamic State (IS) have sold disaffected youth a simple message: by joining their cause, they will find what they lack at home – a sense of belonging and meaning. In addition, religious extremism has appropriated some revolutionary qualities, and youth have been stirred by its purported mission





*Ambassador Shivshankar Menon,  
Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri  
(top facing page)*

*Mr Anas Joudeh, Professor Mary Kaldor  
(bottom middle)*



to 'save humanity'. Many have willingly given up homes, families and even their own lives. Groups like IS have challenged the dominant models of conflict analysis by appealing not to material interests but to a desire for rebellion, adventure, power and meaning.

Participants differed over whether mediators could effectively engage 'transcendental' movements inspired by 'sacred values' that are, by definition, not negotiable. Some speakers felt that mediation could have an impact only on the margins of such movements, among fighters and factions that are less ideologically motivated and more pragmatic. Others argued that, as in many other cases (for example the IRA, the FARC and the Taliban), the time would come when even IS would want an accommodation through dialogue. In that context, to remain effective, mediation needs to evolve. From a methodology that considers human interactions primarily through the lens of interests, mediation needs to develop ways of operating in a dynamic characterised more by beliefs and values.



## Oslo Forum 2016 agenda

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Tuesday  
June 2016

09.00 – 10.30	Opening plenary	
11.00 – 12.30  Two parallel roundtable sessions:	Option 1	Option 2
	Syria's future: exploring possible scenarios	Afghanistan: what prospects for peace with the Taliban?
12.30 – 14.15	Lunch	
13.00 – 14.00	Lunchtime lecture: The nexus between poor governance and conflict: what role for peacemakers?	
14.15 – 15.45  Two parallel sessions:	Option 1	Option 2
	Building castles in the sand: the challenges of implementing the Libyan Political Agreement	<i>Mediation laboratory</i> – Implementing ceasefires: how to silence the guns
16.15 – 17.30  Three parallel sessions:	Option 1	Option 2
	Yemen: what opportunities for seeking peace?	Burundi: challenges to conflict prevention
	Option 3	
	<i>Mediation laboratory</i> – War as diplomacy: what space does military intervention leave for mediation?	
18.00 – 19.00	The Oslo Debate: In an increasingly complex conflict landscape, is mediation becoming ineffective?	
19.30 – 21.30	Formal opening dinner	

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Wednesday

June 2016

08.30 – 09.30

Three situation reports:

Option 1

Sahel

Option 3

Lebanon

Option 2

Cyprus

09.45 – 10.45

Two parallel sessions:

Option 1

Colombia:  
clearing the last hurdles

Option 2

*Mediation laboratory –*  
Peace by piece: making meaningful  
progress in intractable conflicts

10.50 – 12.00

Keynote address by H.E. Mr John Kerry

12.00 – 14.30

Lunch

13.00 – 14.00

Lunchtime conversation:  
The promise and challenges of the International Criminal Court

14.30 – 15.45

Mediator's Studio

16.15 – 17.45

Closing plenary:  
Adapting to a new conflict landscape

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