

Review of: "The Failure of Diplomatic Mediations in the Syrian Conflict – A Comparative Analysis"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The paper does a great job in elucidating the main factors that prevented successful mediation in the Syrian conflict early on during its initial phase. It adopts a comparative lens, focusing on two external interventions – the mediation efforts of the League of Arab States and the early UN missions led by Kofi Annan and the Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi. In doing so, it adopts the theoretical framework proposed by Zartman et al (2016).

I enjoyed reading this well-written paper. At the same time, I should note that I am interested in how international mediation works. I have included the Syrian conflict as a case study in my syllabi on American Foreign Policy and International Relations at Rutgers University (NJ). Of course, at that time, few scholars (including myself) could have imagined that the conflict would last for more than a decade and that the Assad regime would be so resilient. In this sense, the paper is extremely relevant as it sheds light on the early attempts at mediation and reflects on the causes behind two unsuccessful mediation attempts.

One general remark concerns the theoretical framework. Researchers have proposed various frameworks and identified dozens of causes that may impact the success/failure of mediation. So far, scholars have not agreed on an overall theoretical model. The third-party intervention framework developed by Bercovitch and Simpson (2010) is one such approach trying to incorporate all the relevant factors explaining mediation success. The author may want to justify why the factors identified by Zartman et al (2016) are more important than some of the causes in Bercovitch and Simpson (2010). It is also important to keep in mind that each factor may interact with another cause and have a cumulative effect. As I have shown in a recent paper based on the cases of the conflicts in Transnistria and Donbas, leverage and bias may interact with clientelism and produce mediation failure. The articles below may be helpful in identifying additional causes:

Jacob Bercovitch and Leah Simpson. 2010. "International Mediation and the Question of Failed Peace Agreements: Improving Conflict Management and Implementation." *Peace & Change* 35: 68–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2009.00613.x>

Ion Marandici. 2023. "Structural bias, polarized mediation and conflict resolution failure: a comparative examination of the disputes in Transnistria and Donbas." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 23:1, 89-113, DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2022.2101188 (accepted version here: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4426771)

Another comment concerns the methods and case selection part. As the author points out, this is, indeed, a complex conflict that involves numerous local and external actors at different levels with various agendas. I would encourage the

author to extend the timeframe and include all mediation efforts undertaken by external actors in Syria since the start of the conflict until now. Such a methodological step would offer us deeper insights into why the conflict was not resolved after the early mediation attempts analyzed in the paper. The paper could then be published in a peer-reviewed journal covering conflict resolution topics such as *Peacebuilding*.

In all, I want to commend the author for undertaking such a difficult task, picking a complex case and contributing to the scholarship on mediation.