



## Focus #4: Peace Processes

Third-party mediation can facilitate peace processes but entails risks if coercion is used. According to ripeness theory (Zartman, 2000), opposing sides in a civil war will not even consider compromise until locked in a *mutually hurting stalemate*, meaning they are suffering and unable to escalate to victory. After such a stalemate is reached, non-coercive mediation may persuade the sides that negotiation offers the possibility of a mutually beneficial peace agreement. Prior to a stalemate, mediators can use coercion to forge peace, but this may inadvertently escalate violence.

### Interactive Problem-Solving

Non-coercive mediation ideally involves *interactive problem-solving* (Kelman, 2001). For example, a mediator may host informal dialogue between influential but unofficial representatives of the conflicting parties – such as community leaders, parliamentarians, ex-officials, journalists, and academics. Bringing opposing sides together in an intimate setting can help overcome mutual demonization that inhibits compromise. Confidentiality is also key, so participants can brainstorm potential solutions that might harm their reputations if publicized. Participants then return to their communities where they can influence officials to consider a formal deal. For official peace talks,

### Key Points

- A mediator can succeed without coercion, but only if the opposing sides already have exhausted attempts at escalation so they are open to a negotiated peace.
- Absent such a military stalemate, mediation can work only by using coercion, but this risks triggering a violent backlash that could harm civilians, so it should be attempted only if the mediator also is willing to deploy a protective force.
- Spoilers may reject a peace deal out of fear or greed, which mediators can address using a combination of security guarantees, inducements, and sanctions.

many experts advocate broad inclusion of traditionally neglected or victimized groups including women and youth (U.S. Government, 2019; UN Security Council, 2015). In practice, however, mediators may confine initial participation to armed faction representatives, in hopes of simplifying negotiations to expedite an end to violence. In that case, inclusion should be broadened during implementation, such as when drafting a new constitution.

## Muscular Mediation

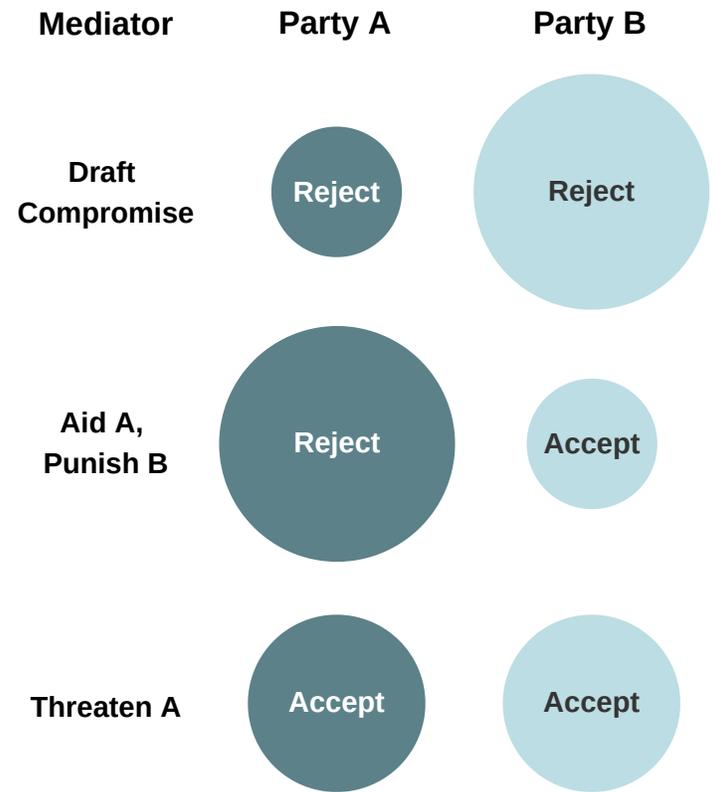
International coercion to facilitate a peace agreement has been dubbed *muscular mediation*, comprising three steps (Kuperman, 2008, 2021). First, the mediator proposes a peace agreement entailing mutual compromise, but both sides may reject it because they still hope to achieve a better outcome on the battlefield. Next, the mediator coerces the stronger side by reducing its relative power until it accepts the deal. Such coercion may include sanctions, military aid to the weaker side, or direct military intervention. Finally, the mediator coerces the other side, by threatening to reverse its recent gains, until it too accepts the deal (Figure 1).

Ideally, muscular mediation pushes both sides towards a deal that ends violence. However, if poorly designed, it may backfire by incentivizing violent escalation, including against civilians. Such unintended consequences are especially likely if the mediator threatens the vital interests of an armed faction but is unwilling to deploy sufficient peacekeepers to protect against a violent backlash. If the mediator lacks political will for such preventive deployment, it should avoid coercion.

## Spoilers

Even when negotiations achieve an agreement, peace processes can still be threatened by *spoilers* who oppose the deal and seek to block its implementation (Zahar, 2003). Spoilers may arise because the mediator excluded them from negotiations, or because they chose not to negotiate or splintered from a party that did. The spoilers either do not like the terms of an agreement, or they fear the opposing side will violate it. Accordingly, they may seek to change the deal to obtain greater concessions, or to kill it entirely.

Figure 1. Muscular Mediation



Source: Based on Kuperman (2021).

Note: Circle area represents relative strength of the opposing sides A and B, who either reject or accept the mediator's proposed compromise.

A mediator can pursue at least four strategies to address spoilers: (1) provide a *security guarantee* to alleviate concerns about cheating; (2) reward parties who comply with the deal, and sanction those who do not; (3) utilize a *departing-train strategy*, portraying the peace deal as unstoppable so that spoilers feel they must join quickly to share its rewards; or (4) threaten to halt mediation, but only if the mediator is confident the spoilers are bluffing and would prefer the peace deal to renewed war, because otherwise this tactic could escalate violence.