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Formal and Quasi-Mediators in International Disputes: An Exploratory Analysis*

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The distinction is made between mediating services provided to ameliorate international conflicts and who provides the services. The services may be provided by a person, group, or organization playing the role of a mediator, or by a quasi-mediator, a social entity not so designated, who may even be a member of one of the adversaries. The paper examines the kind of contribution social units providing mediating services, but playing different roles, can and do make towards de-escalating international conflicts. The implications of this distinction are examined for various stages of conflict de-escalation: preparing for negotiations, starting them, conducting them, reaching mutual accommodative agreements and sustaining them. Evidence is drawn from cases of mediation conducted officially and non-officially, especially in the US–Soviet and Arab–Israeli conflicts. Certain kinds of mediating actions can be especially well provided by one kind of provider compared to another and the effectiveness of different actions also varies with the stage of the conflict in which the mediating service is conducted.

1. Introduction

Mediation is usually regarded as a set of activities that a mediator performs to facilitate settling a conflict. That concept is appropriate when we are discussing institutionalized mediator roles, as in collective bargaining in domestic labor disputes. In international affairs, however, the mediator roles are not as highly institutionalized (Bercovitch, 1984).

It is useful to distinguish between the variety of mediating services provided in international conflicts and those who perform the activities. Some mediating services are provided by a person or group designated as a mediator, but some are provided even by a representative of one side in the dispute. Ambassadors and negotiators often serve as intermediaries between the government they represent and their adversaries. Comparing their mediating actions with those undertaken by official mediators assists our understanding of each.

2. Failure and Success

Distinguishing between those who perform mediator activities and what the activities are, would help explain what it is about mediation that does and does not contribute to its success or failure. Assessing what makes a mediating effort successful is extremely difficult because the evidence that such an effort was or was not successful is nearly always obscure. Even if the mediating activity is followed by movement toward accommodation, it is difficult to credit such progress to the mediating effort. Failure is usually easier to recognize than success, but even failure is not easy to identify in actuality. Failure is always relative, depending on the goal that was sought and not attained. Various parties to a fight have different objectives and those objectives shift in the course of a conflict and its settlement.

Here, I focus on one set of developments that would generally be regarded as success. The developments are: further movement in the course of a conflict such that it moves from escalation to de-escalation; or negotiations that move toward an agreed upon settlement; or a settlement that contributes to an enduring resolution.

There is no consensus, however, that such developments are always to be considered successful. For example, some may think

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that a move toward a settlement between one set of parties which occurs at the expense of other important parties is not a success. Most observers would label the 1938 settlement reached in Munich, where representatives of Germany, Italy, France and the United Kingdom appeased Germany at the expense of Czechoslovakia, as a dreadful failure.

There is another problem in characterizing a particular outcome as a failure or success of mediation. The mediation may have been excellent, but the background circumstances were not suitable and the conflict did not move toward mutual accommodation. Conversely, the mediation may have been conducted clumsily, but the conflict moved toward resolution anyway, the times being ripe for such movement (Kriesberg, 1987).

I assess the efforts to mediate, considering the general conditions affecting movement toward conflict reduction. An agent providing particular mediating services should take into account those conditions and construct an appropriate set of services. Not doing so may well cause the conflict to escalate and persist in violence, constituting a failed mediation effort. The mediation is successful insofar as it contributed significantly, even essentially, to de-escalating movement, mutually acceptable agreement, or reconciliation, under the prevailing conditions.

3. *The Context of Mediation Activities*

To assess mediating activities it is necessary to take into account the background conditions surrounding a specific conflict and the effort to mediate it. Three sets of conditions are relevant for the appropriate timing for effective mediating activity (Kriesberg & Thorson, 1991). They are: (a) the international context, (b) the constituency support for de-escalation or escalation, and (c) the relations between the adversaries. I discuss aspects of each kind of condition, noting their relevance to mediating international conflicts.

3.1 *International Context*

Three features of the international context are especially relevant to mediating activities. First, the extent to which international

bodies are available for intermediary action has varied over time. Currently, there are a great many such bodies, including universal organizations such as the United Nations Security Council (Claude, 1971). In addition, regional organizations are available in many parts of the world to provide mediating services, for example the Organization of American States (Dreier, 1962). International bodies available for some kinds of mediation also include nongovernmental actors, for example, church-based organizations (Berman & Johnson, 1977).

Second, the world structure of alliances and superpowers gives some governments the appropriate status to provide mediating activities. This may be true for disputes among members of the same alliance or among parties who are not aligned with one of the major alliances.

Third, in considering possible mediation in a given dispute, we are selecting that dispute for our attention as the focal conflict. In actuality, each such fight is embedded in many others (Kriesberg, 1980). As those others increase or decrease in salience, the focal conflict is likely to decrease or increase in significance. Insofar as its salience declines as other fights become of greater importance for one or more of the adversaries, de-escalation is more likely to occur.

3.2 *Constituency*

Public pressure expressed through public opinion surveys, social movements or elections varies greatly in its impact on movement toward accommodation. Public pressure is generally more relevant for policies made over a period of years rather than in a brief time of days or weeks (Hughes, 1978). Its impact varies among countries with different government systems, since they differ in responsiveness to elections, public opinion and other manifestations of popular views.

The constituency affecting leaders' policies includes many elements in addition to the public. It includes various sub-elites executing policies, counter-elites presenting challenges, intellectuals offering alternatives, and media personnel transmitting information (Sanders, 1983).

The visibility of constituency support for

de-escalation contributes a great deal to the timing of de-escalating initiatives by adversaries and by potential mediators. For example, public support for a de-escalating move, contrary to prevailing government policy, often encourages the adversary to offer peace-making overtures. Such overtures, however, may be treated by the government of the recipient country as efforts to undermine its popular support and therefore resented and rejected. A mediator can take advantage of such opportunities without incurring the same risk.

3.3 Adversary Relations

A specific dispute is always only an aspect of the relationship between adversaries. Major adversaries have a variety of interactions, including other disputes as well as transactions based on complementary and common interests. The relative importance of these many aspects of the adversaries' relations affects the likelihood that any specific conflict can be reduced through various kinds of intermediary actions.

Parity of power is often stressed as a requisite for mutual accommodation and conflict resolution (Touval & Zartman, 1985). That is an important truth, but it is far from the whole truth. Power is always relative to what is being sought. It takes little power to induce an adversary to yield something that is unimportant to it and great power to induce yielding something it regards as vital. Power, then, is not independent of the goals for which it is being exercised. Furthermore, there are many forms of power and they are not obviously commensurate. Calibrating parity by counting military hardware is certainly inadequate. Even factoring in geopolitical considerations and military organization is not enough. Economic, ideological, social and cultural resources can provide non-coercive as well as coercive inducements.

Adversaries may be in contention with each other about a wide variety of matters. Variations in the issues in contention have significance for the possible contribution of various intermediary activities. For example, the adversaries may be contending about matters which are largely dissensual, where

they differ about the values each holds. On the other hand, they may differ about largely consensual matters, where they both value the same resources. Dissensual issues are often difficult for adversaries to recognize and fully appreciate and mediators can be especially helpful in communicating differences in values and world views.

Of particular interest in this paper is the course of the specific conflict between adversaries and the role of mediation at different stages of the conflict. I assume that for analytic purposes it is possible to treat a conflict as if it followed a course of emergence, escalation, de-escalation and settlement (Kriesberg, 1982). Of course, another conflict can emerge on the basis of the settlement of the old one. Each specific conflict may be part of other conflicts with longer and shorter cycles of changes. The sequence of stages is not to be applied rigidly; for example, conflict can begin to de-escalate and not reach a settlement before it escalates again. The point of noting a sequence is to emphasize that conflicts evolve and mediation is likely to take different forms at different stages of a conflict.

4. Kinds of Mediating Activities

Mediating activities vary in many ways (Moore, 1987; Mitchell & Webb, 1988). In this section, I identify major mediating strategies and techniques. In subsequent sections, I discuss who performs the activities and then the conflict stages at which they generally occur. In short, I consider *what* is done by *whom*, and *when*. In Table I, a wide variety of mediating activities are listed and examples identified.

Some mediating actions involve strategic choices, such as selecting the parties and the issues for de-escalating efforts. Thus, any person or group seeking to foster de-escalation must first consider: the parties among whom the de-escalation is to be sought. The parties to be included are never clear and uncontested. For example, in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which parties should be included in a de-escalating effort has always been a matter of choice and dispute (Gazit, 1983; Touval, 1982). Even in the Argentine-

Table I. Selected Mediation Cases by Mediating Activities and Stages of Conflicts

Mediating Activities	Stages of De-escalation			
	A. Preparing to De-escalate	B. Initiating Negotiations	C. Conducting Negotiations	D. Implementing Agreements
1. Selecting Issues		Eric Johnston re Jordan River development, 1953		
2. Selecting Parties	Cordovez (UN) re Afghanistan, 1983	Kissinger and bilateral shuttles, 1974, 1975	US re Israel-Lebanon, 1983	
3. Providing Good Offices	French Government re US-N. Vietnam			
4. Communicating Each Side's Views	AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE IN SE ASIA; <i>TRACK II</i> ; <i>DIALOGUE GROUPS</i>	<i>COUSINS RE US-USSR</i> , 1963	<i>Weizman at Camp</i> , 1978	
5. Reframing Conflict to Problem	<i>MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHOP</i> ; Haig in Middle East, 1981	<i>PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHOP</i>		
6. Suggesting New Options	AFSC RE MIDDLE EAST; DARTMOUTH CONFERENCES ¹	<i>Rapacki Plan</i> 1957; <i>Macmillan and Limited Test Ban</i> , 1959, 1962	PUGWASH 1960s; <i>Nitze and Kvitinsky 'walk in the woods'</i> ; Peru, UN and Haig re Argentina-UK, 1982; Jarring, Rogers re Israel-Egypt, 1969-70.	
7. Raising Costs of Failing to De-escalate			Carter at Camp David 1978	
8. Adding Resources for Settlement			Carter at Camp David 1978; Rogers re Egypt-Israel 1970	US Peace-keeping Forces in Sinai 1974; Syrian forces in Lebanon
9. Helping to Create Parity	US Government meets with PLO, 1988; US re Egypt-Israel 1973 war			
10. Building Trust and Credibility			<i>Weizman at Camp David</i> 1978	
11. Fostering Reconciliation	DIALOGUE GROUPS			
12. Legitimizing and Helping to Implement Proposal or Agreement	<i>US-SOVIET PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIALOGUE</i> , 1980s; US JEWS AND PLO DECEMBER, 1988; <i>COMMUNITY DIALOGUE GROUPS</i>		Carter and ceremonial signing of Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty	

Cases in CAPITAL LETTERS are examples of non-official mediating activities.

Cases in *italics* are examples of quasi-mediators.

United Kingdom conflict about the Falkland/Malvina Islands, the British and Argentinian governments may not be regarded as the only parties to the dispute; for example, the residents of the Islands may or may not be included in negotiations.

The choice of issues is also part of the mediating strategy, particularly in the pre-negotiation stage (Stein, 1989b). Does the effort entail many issues or a few, and does it concern peripheral or core matters in dispute? Of course, the issues selected for a de-escalating effort are related to the parties included or excluded from such efforts. The agenda setting also includes the number of issues to be included and linked for possible trade-offs.

In addition to such strategic choices, most attention in the field is given to mediating tactics. Many specific short-term actions or functions are traditionally performed as part of mediation. These include providing good offices, communicating each side's views to the others, suggesting new options, and providing legitimacy and visibility for some solutions.

Other actions are also performed, and are increasingly emphasized. These include reframing the conflict so that it comes to be seen as a problem to be solved (Burton, 1969, 1987a). Intermediary parties seeking to de-escalate a conflict can also contribute to that movement by adding resources so that one or another of the disputants can be compensated for at least some of the losses that a settlement would involve. This has frequently been the case in the US mediation of Israeli–Egyptian conflict. Resources can also be used, either added or withdrawn, so that parity between the adversaries is approached or so that the costs of not reaching a de-escalating agreement is increased.

5. *Providers of Mediating Services*

Usually, we think of persons or organizations who are formally designated as mediators as the ones providing mediating services. Mediators fulfill a social role, a role defined in terms of social conventions and expectations of those with whom they interact. There are many social conventions about

mediators and many variations of that role exist, for example in the propriety of being very active in offering options or intervention. Some of these variations are cultural and others situational. Certain roles are circumscribed by rules embodied in international law and treaty obligations. For example, the UN Secretary-General may not seek or receive instructions from any government (Bailey, 1962).

A mediator may be a government which is not regarded as a party to the conflict, or it may be an agent for an international governmental organization. Some mediating services also may be provided by non-official persons or groups who are not so clearly regarded as mediators; these include church officials, journalists and academics representing constituencies which are not one of the primary adversaries in the dispute (Berman & Johnson, 1977; Bendahmane & McDonald, 1987). In Table I, the variety of mediators is illustrated.

I stress, here, that some of these mediating activities are provided by members of one of the adversary parties. The members then are acting as quasi-mediators between their government and their government's adversary. When such a person or organization is serving only as a representative of the adversary party and when he or she is acting as a quasi-mediator is not always clear. Someone acting under instructions of the formal head of an adversary party is not acting as a quasi-mediator, but as an agent for the party. On the other hand, someone who is not in good communication with the leaders of his or her own community is not likely to serve as a quasi-mediator with the adversary community once negotiations are underway between official negotiators.

Quasi-mediators include factions or even parties within the governing coalitions ruling one of the adversaries. They also include persons who are not officials but who have close ties with officials and act as agents for them, conducting unofficial inquiries or testing responses to possible official proposals. For some mediating services, quasi-mediators may be non-official groups without close ties to any government officials. The growth of Track 2 diplomacy (non-official), of

people-to-people meetings, of dialogue groups, and of problem-solving workshops is illustrative.

Even officials representing one of the disputing parties may act as quasi-mediators and provide some mediating services for some of the time. For example, negotiating teams usually include members who vary in skills, interests, beliefs, and resources and contribute differently to the negotiations. In the 1978 Camp David negotiations between the Israeli and Egyptian delegations, for example, Israeli Minister of Defense Ezer Weizman performed important mediating services between President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin (Quandt, 1986; Weizman, 1981). He helped convey the trustworthiness of the Egyptians to the Israelis.

Another striking illustration of quasi-mediators providing mediating services is offered by the 'walk in the woods' proposal developed by Paul Nitze and Yuli Kvitsinski, the US and Soviet negotiators at the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces talks in Geneva (Talbot, 1984). Without instructions from above, the two negotiators developed a joint proposal and each presented it to his government. After deliberation, both governments rejected the proposal, and the negotiations failed at that time.

Persons and groups differ greatly in the resources they can bring to their mediating work. What is noted here are differences in resources likely to be associated with playing the activity may constitute an obstruction discerned by comparing the performance of mediating activities by formal mediators and quasi-mediators. They have varying abilities to offer compensations and guarantees, to provide legitimacy to options, and make suggestions that demand attention.

A member of one of the partisan groups generally has more credibility and is accorded more trustworthiness by his or her own colleagues than is a formal mediator. For example, although effective in many ways in his 1974–75 shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Egypt and Syria, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger came to be viewed as untrustworthy by some Israelis (Golan, 1976). On the other hand, a member of the partisan group would be less likely to be

viewed as trustworthy by his or her adversary than is a formal mediator.

A member of one of the adversary parties is more likely to get a proposal considered by her or his own colleagues than is a formal mediator. For example, the Nitze–Kvitsinski 'walk in the woods' proposal was not likely to have been considered if it had been developed by a formal mediator. In general, quasi-mediators are less constrained by the social role constructed for mediators.

6. *Conflict Stages and Mediating Activities*

Each kind of mediating activity can occur at every stage, but their specific content and form and their significance varies at different stages. In this section, I consider how mediators and quasi-mediators differ in the services they provide and in the effectiveness of those services. These differences are discussed in the context of four major stages of de-escalating efforts: preparation, initiation, negotiation, and implementation (Table I).

6.1 *Preparation*

At the stage of preparing to de-escalate, mediating activity includes exploring which parties are ready to discuss de-escalation and which can be excluded without undermining a possible agreement. Someone playing a formal mediator role is freer to explore alternative agendas and sets of partners than is a member of one of the adversary parties. Non-official mediators may be particularly free to explore and communicate views among possible de-escalation partners. One or more of the adversary parties may request an unofficial person or organization to conduct informal conversations in order to access the likelihood of various responses to a de-escalating initiative or effort.

The possibilities of failure and of success differ at each stage of the effort, with each kind of mediating activity, and with the agent providing the mediating service. The pre-negotiation stage is increasingly recognized as an important one (Stein, 1989b).

Quasi-mediators can play an important role in helping to develop constituency support for undertaking peace efforts (Saunders, 1985). International nongovern-

mental agencies, especially those focusing on relations between adversaries, can foster understandings and interpersonal relationships that are supportive of de-escalating initiatives and the reciprocation of such initiatives. The Dartmouth conference, involving US and Soviet citizens, is an example of such organizations.¹

6.2 *Initiation*

At the initiating stage, the mediating activity entails helping to undertake discussions among the parties to the de-escalation movement. Inadequate exploration and preparation may lead to initiating proposals and efforts which fail to open up de-escalating exchanges. Even the dramatic 1977 offer by President Sadat to go to Jerusalem might not have been responded to as quickly and clearly as it was were there no prior explorations conducted at the highest levels. Israeli officials who were not informed about some of the prior moves were skeptical of President Sadat's initiative (Stein, 1989b).

Quasi-mediators can be particularly helpful at this stage. Thus, Norman Cousins, as a private US citizen, was invited by Premier Khrushchev to visit him in Moscow in 1963. Cousins returned with the suggestion that President Kennedy make some kind of a gesture to reopen negotiations regarding a nuclear test ban (Cousins, 1972). The American University speech followed in June and the signing of the Partial Nuclear Weapons Test Ban followed shortly thereafter.

In the initiating stage, the proposed framing of the effort in terms of parties, issues and format may be inappropriate for the prevailing conditions and therefore fail. For example, the UN resolutions calling for a comprehensive peace conference and settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict have failed to lead to such a conference.

6.3 *Negotiation*

The primary mediating activity is facilitating the adversaries' negotiations. This includes giving legitimacy to offers and to options for settlement. A proposal made by one of the adversaries may be easier to accept if it can

be said to have been made by a mediator. One party in the negotiations may request that a mediator present a proposal, believing that the origin would increase its acceptability. In this case, the formal role of the mediator is crucial.

While negotiations are underway, mediating activity includes managing relations with the parties who are not directly involved in the negotiations. A quasi-mediator is especially useful for this function. Mediating activity might also include helping to take into account the interests and concerns of conflict parties not represented in the discussions. A formal mediator is much more likely than a quasi-mediator to provide this service and to do so effectively. For example, the concerns of Afghanistan refugees were represented to some extent by the formal UN mediator.

At the stage of conducting negotiations, intermediaries with great power and resources relative to the adversaries may try to impose a settlement and find that they are unable to do so. The hubris of mediators is dangerous, as is that of an apparently winning adversary. For example, in relation to the struggles in Lebanon, Syria has intervened, but has been unable to impose a settlement. The US government's mediation between the Lebanese and Israeli governments in 1983 also failed to forge an agreement which could be ratified and sustained, not taking Syrian interests adequately into account (Young, 1987; Khouri, 1985). Quasi-mediators are less likely to suffer the same kind of hubris.

6.4 *Implementation*

In implementing an agreement, mediating activities may include seeking to gain support for the settlement by the constituencies of the negotiating parties. A formal mediator offers legitimacy and credibility to an agreement. He or she also improves the likelihood of compliance to the agreement, since the adversaries have an obligation to the mediator.

The stage of implementing a de-escalating agreement is often inadequately considered in planning for and negotiating agreements. Powerful mediators can be important sus-

tainers, if not enforcers, of an agreement. Adversaries have an obligation to those helping to reach an agreement. Moreover, the mediators have an interest in sustaining one that they helped bring about, and may provide resources and services to do so. For example, the US government, in mediating various Israeli–Egyptian agreements, has frequently undertaken to provide monitoring and other services to ensure the fulfillment of an agreement. International governmental organizations (IGOs) are frequently useful intermediaries at this stage, for example by providing peace-keeping forces. Quasi-mediators, however, are less able to provide such services.

Quasi-mediators, from one or more of the adversary groups, can also help sustain an agreement. For example, they can provide independent verification, monitoring their own government.

7. *Conclusions*

Analyzing international mediation in terms of activities, actors, and stages of conflict de-escalation is useful. It offers a good basis for assessing what kinds of actions do contribute to movement toward mutual accommodation and what kind of actions do not. It draws attention to the wide variety of persons and groups who contribute to such movement. That recognition may be socially useful by indicating how many different kinds of people can contribute to peace-making. Furthermore, attention to mediating services provided by members of one or more of the adversaries suggests alternative ways to provide such services. This paper has been exploratory, indicating possible differences in the activities that formal and quasi-mediators can perform.

Intermediary activities have been discussed in relationship to the de-escalating movement: preparing for negotiations, starting them, conducting them, reaching mutual accommodative agreements, and sustaining them. Such movement is regarded here as success. Assessing whether or not any particular mediating behavior contributes to such movement is another matter. Such movement is never attribu-

table to a single cause or factor. Consequently no mediating activity can be the *sufficient* cause for the movement. However, it may be a *necessary* contributing factor. The activity may contribute to the movement, even without being necessary; it may do so by improving the quality or the speed of the de-escalating movement.

There are also varying degrees to which mediating efforts contribute to failure. A mediating activity may simply contribute nothing to the de-escalating movement; it is essentially irrelevant to the movement. Or, the activity may constitute an obstruction to the de-escalating movement, but not prevent it. Finally, the mediating activity may be one of the factors that impedes the de-escalating process from making progress; it may allow one party to appear to be seeking a settlement while it holds out for better terms in the future.

The contributions of mediating efforts to failure have several sources. I cite only a few here. The very fact that many different persons and groups are engaged in mediating activities may mean that they interfere with each other rather than complement and supplement each other. This has been suggested as being a difficulty in 1969–71, when UN Special Representative Jarring and US Secretary of State Rogers sought to mediate the conflict between the Israeli and Egyptian governments (Gazit, 1983; Touval, 1982).

Some persons or groups try to carry out certain activities for which they lack the resources. This may include acting as if they had the ability to impose a settlement. The hubris of mediators can be dangerous. This is illustrated in the failed mediation efforts of the Syrian government and the US government in regard to Lebanon (Young, 1987).

There are many ways to fail. Basically, failures result from one or more of the following: the application of an inappropriate strategy by an inappropriate person or group, given the circumstances and stage of the conflict.

Many conditions must be present if a mediation effort is to contribute to successful progress toward mutual accommodation.

Formal mediators have sometimes made vital contributions, as President Jimmy Carter did at Camp David in 1978. Quasi-mediators also have made important contributions, as did Ezer Weizman at those same negotiations. Quasi-mediators can be particularly effective in the early stages of de-escalating movements. Although lacking many of the resources available to those occupying the formal role of mediator, they can provide useful supplementary services or even essential ones, when no formal mediator is acceptable.

NOTE

1. The Dartmouth conferences began at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH, USA in 1960. The conferences have been meeting regularly, bringing together academicians, scientists, and writers from the United States and the Soviet Union. Problems facing government officials of both countries are explored, seeking initial approaches that government leaders might undertake to reduce the problems.

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