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# Understanding Success and Failure of International Mediation

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This article presents and assesses the state of the art in research on the course and outcomes of international mediation. The review consists of three parts. First, the elusive notion of mediation success is addressed. Second, the key contextual and process factors thought to explain international mediation outcomes are discussed. The final part raises a number of problems with current theorizing, and a plea is made for a more fundamental reflection on the assumptions underlying present research. Using a heuristic adaptation of the metatheoretical framework developed by Burrell and Morgan, it is argued that four fundamentally different currents of thought about international conflict and its management may be discerned. These four proto-theories may help us to put into perspective current debates and contradictory findings, as well as generate a more coherent foundation for future research on the success and failure of mediation in international conflict.

International mediation—a form of conflict management in which a third party assists two or more contending parties to find a solution without resorting to force—has a much longer history in practice than in research. Used for hundreds of years, studies on intermediary intervention date mainly from the last 3 decades, starting with Young (1967), Burton (1969), and Stenelo (1972). In particular, the question of how to make international mediation successful has since occupied both students and practitioners in the field. Relying either on qualitative, in-depth case analysis or on large-scale quantitative comparative research, many analysts are after a "golden formula": to discover which factors contribute to successful mediation results. The purpose of this article is to present and assess the current state of the art.[1] Apart from literature on mediation in international politics, I shall also refer to relevant research on intergroup mediation at other social levels, because this has been an important source of ideas and hypotheses for international relations scholars working in this field (Rubin 1981a; Wall 1981; Bercovitch 1984; Mitchell and Webb 1988a).[2] Moreover, the trend toward internationalization of communal strife (Midlarsky 1992) makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between internal and external conflict, and subsequently between domestic and international mediation (Rupesinghe 1992).

1. This article is part of my Ph.D. project titled "Success and Failure of International Mediation: Multiple Realities of Third-Party Intervention in International Conflict."

2. Unfortunately, as far as I know, no empirical study exists that systematically compares mediation in both domains.

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Before turning to factors explaining international mediation outcomes, it is necessary first to address the dependent variable: when is an attempt at mediation considered successful? This will be done briefly in the next section. Secondly, the key independent variables will be discussed.[3] These are often grouped into contextual and process variables (Frei 1976; Raymond and Kegley 1985; Bercovitch 1992). There is consensus in the literature that contextual factors consist of variables concerning (1) the dispute, (2) the contending parties and their relationships, (3) the mediator, and (4) the international context. Process conditions focus on the nature of mediator activities, for example, the strategies mediators may employ. Because analysts in the field have rather contradictory claims and evidence concerning the independent variables, most of the sections will have a rather open-ended character. Moreover, the research results will be presented in a rather uncritical way. The critique will be saved for the final section, in which a number of problems with current theorizing on international mediation will be discussed. A plea is made for more fundamental reflection on the assumptions underlying present research. To do so, four different currents of thought about international mediation will be developed. This might help us to put into perspective current debates and contradictory findings, as well as generate a more coherent foundation for future research on the success and failure of third-party intervention in international conflict.

## THE ELUSIVE NOTION OF MEDIATION SUCCESS

No doubt the issue of assessing outcomes of international conflict management is a tricky one: evaluation criteria are often taken for granted, but as soon as one starts reflecting upon them, they seem to raise more questions than answers. This may be one of the reasons why conceptual and/or normative treatments of mediation results are so conspicuously rare in the existing literature. Analysts in the field seem to have dealt with the issue in three ways. First of all, in their attempts to reduce complexity, some have avoided defining mediation success and failure altogether (e.g., Assefa 1987). It goes without saying that this becomes particularly problematic in comparative research.

Second, some analysts have generated their *own* criteria for successful intermediary intervention. On the one hand, they have opted for highly simplified operationalizations to facilitate systematic analysis and measurement: success is "a situation in which both parties to the conflict formally or informally accept a mediator and a mediative attempt within five days after the first attempt" (Frei 1976, 69). The main disadvantage is that such criteria tend to be less suited to the complexities of international diplomacy. On the other hand, researchers have used broad definitions to retain flexibility: "By successful outcomes we mean producing a cease fire, a partial settlement or a full settlement" (Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille, 1991, 8; see also Kriesberg 1991, 19;

3. In presenting current research on international mediation, I will not always refer to the research methodology used by the analysts in the field. However, for further research, it is important to keep in mind the differences between data acquired by quantitative research and data gained by qualitative research.

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Susskind and Babbitt 1992, 31). However, such definitions leave much room for many different outcome assessments of one and the same mediation episode.

In trying to avoid these pitfalls, a third group of analysts has equated mediation success with effectiveness, taking the mediator's (or the parties') objectives as their starting point (Smith 1985; Touval and Zartman 1985, 14). Although this goal-based approach has been well established in evaluation research, so have a number of penetrating criticisms. Whose goals are to be taken into account? Given that goals are often vague, implicit, and liable to change, which of the stated goals are taken as crucial? How does one evaluate policies with primarily symbolic objectives?

At present, we seem to lack a widely agreed upon Archimedean point for evaluating attempts at international mediation. Success and failure are construed rather than discovered by the analyst: they are a matter of idiosyncratic values, interpretations, and labelling, like many other concepts in the social sciences. This is not problematic as long as embraced definitions and operationalizations of mediation results are embedded in a systematic normative and analytic perspective put forward by the analyst. Unfortunately, this is where current research falls short, causing the status of its empirical findings about the conditions favoring mediation success to remain ambiguous. I return to this issue in the next section and concluding section.

## EXPLAINING MEDIATION SUCCESS 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISPUTE

Mediation research focus on three characteristics of the dispute held to affect mediation outcomes: (a) conflict ripeness, (b) the level of conflict intensity, and (c) the nature of the issue(s) in conflict.

### CONFLICT RIPENESS

Analysts have frequently highlighted the importance of proper timing of mediation initiatives for achieving successful outcomes. It is assumed that conflicts pass through a life cycle that encompasses a number of distinguishable phases, and that certain stages are more amenable to outside intervention than others (Young 1967, 19-20). The hypothesis is that to be successful, mediation needs to be initiated at such "ripe moments." Conflicting views exist, however, about what constitutes or how to recognize such moments (Kleiboer 1994).

Some analysts believe that conflicts follow the logic of "clock time." The duration of conflict in terms of days, months, or years is linked to the persistence or change of attitudes of the adversaries toward the conflict. The "classical" position, which supports late entry, is based on the thesis that mediation is most fruitful when failure to reach an agreement is precipitating an emergency. A feeling of emergency will strongly increase the disputants' motivation to moderate their intransigence and revise their expectations (Northedge and Donelan 1971; Frei 1976; Rubin 1981b; Moore 1987; Koh 1990). Other analysts claim, however, that mediation needs to be initiated

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at an early stage, that is, well before the adversaries cross a threshold of violence and begin to inflict heavy losses on each other (Edmead 1971). At such an early, previolence stage, it is still possible to consider possibilities for settlement before the conflict has become too entrenched and the parties too inflexible in their attitudes. In his study of 257 attempts at intermediary intervention, Bercovitch finds that the longer a dispute lasts, the less amenable it is to mediation. However, there does seem to exist a minimum time period necessary before mediation can be successful. Mediation efforts initiated between 12 and 36 months have proven most successful (Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille 1991, 22).[4]

Other analysts repudiate the logic of clock time and instead focus on "social" or "event" time (Lauer 1981). Irrespective of days, months, or years, they assume a conflict to be ripe for resolution if certain events have taken place that affect the perceptions and attitudes of disputants. Zartman's (1983, 1985) and Haass's (1988, 1990) case studies demonstrate that the parties' assessment of the interactions *between* them is decisive. According to Zartman, a conflict is ripe for resolution when (1) a mutually hurting stalemate exists, marked by a recent or impending catastrophe (see also Modelski 1964, 143; Pruitt 1981a; Assefa 1987, 17, 195); (2) the efforts of both parties to impose unilateral solutions are blocked and bilateral solutions become conceivable, leading antagonists to believe that there is a workable alternative to combat; and (3) power relations have changed in such a way that a party that previously had the upper hand in the conflict starts slipping and the underdog starts rising. In contrast, Stedman (1991) asserts that developments *within* the contending parties are critical for the emergence of ripe moments. In his analysis of the mediation attempts in Zimbabwe, he shows that ripeness is a function of internal political changes within groups in conflict, such as the rise of new leaders, the emergence of a divided leadership, or a split in a government previously unified in its war aims.

## THE LEVEL OF INTENSITY

Although it remains ambiguous what is meant by the "intensity" of a conflict (the degree of threat or tension? the magnitude of violence? the number of fatalities?), it is a second characteristic of the dispute commonly presumed to affect mediation outcomes. Analysts strongly disagree about its impact, however. Some indicate that the greater the intensity, the more polarized the positions of the disputants will become, resulting in a greater inclination to reject any mediation effort. Instead they will try to "win" at all costs (Modelski 1964; Frei 1975; Brockner 1982). In his evaluation of intensity in terms of number of fatalities experienced by each adversary, Bercovitch (1991, 23) gains empirical support for the hypothesis that as the number of fatalities in a dispute increases, the likelihood that mediation will prove successful suffers a corresponding decline. Protracted and intense conflicts should therefore be managed in a different way.

4. However, the empirical evidence concerning the proper intervention time remains ambivalent. In another report, Bercovitch (1991: 13) shows that attempts undertaken between 1 and 3 months into a dispute show a greater chance of success.

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Other analysts argue instead that the greater the intensity of a conflict, the higher the likelihood that mediation will be both accepted and successful as a method of minimizing losses (Jackson 1952; Young 1967, 1968). In his case study of mediation in the Sudan Civil War, Assefa (1987, 194-5) finds that although the level of conflict intensity constantly increased rather than leveled off as war continued in Sudan, this did not prevent the attainment of a negotiated settlement. He concludes, therefore, that even intense conflicts should not be ruled out as candidates for mediation.

### THE NATURE OF THE ISSUE(S)

A final characteristic of the dispute thought to have an important bearing on the outcomes of mediation concerns the nature of the issue(s) in conflict. Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille (1991, 14), for example, distinguish between five types of conflict issues: (1) sovereignty issues involving adversaries with incompatible claims to a specific piece of territory; (2) ideology issues focusing on the nature of a political system, basic values, or beliefs; (3) security issues concerning frontiers, borders, and territories; (4) issues of self-determination and national selfhood in independence conflicts; and (5) a residual category of other types of conflict. Using their database, they find that disputes involving territorial or security issues are far more amenable to successful mediation than are issues of ideology or independence.

Evidently, many conflicts involve more than one set of issues, which renders it increasingly difficult to separate security/territorial issues from ideological/independence issues. The conflict in the Middle East is probably the most conspicuous example in this respect. To circumvent such problems, analysts frequently move to a higher level of abstraction. It is argued that some issues—such as disputes that arise from deep-rooted values or ideologies (Burton 1972a; Azar 1986)—are basically zero-sum, leaving no room for (assisted) negotiation. In contrast, more interest-related, possibly positive-sum issues would be more amenable to conflict management (Fisher 1978; Druckman 1993, 26-9).

However, some analysts assume that even if a conflicting issue seems to be completely zero-sum, it may be possible to redefine or fractionate it into negotiable subunits and to try to trade those off against one another (Fisher 1971, 141-2; Rubin 1981b, 30). Druckman, Broome, and Korper (1988) demonstrate that fractionating issues may be useful if interests are decoupled from values. However, when conflicting interests are derived directly from underlying value dissensus, disputes are difficult to resolve.

## EXPLAINING MEDIATION SUCCESS 2: PARTIES AND THEIR INTERRELATIONSHIP

Scholarly discussions about the parties engaged in mediation focus on six characteristics: (a) their identification, (b) their cohesiveness, (c) their type of regime, (d) their motivation to mediate, (e) their previous and ongoing relationships, and (f) the distribution of power between them.

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**IDENTIFICATION OF PARTIES**

In theory, it is generally agreed upon that mediation can only be successful if the parties in conflict are clearly identifiable in terms of group characteristics and boundaries. However, it is recognized that in practice, this is often problematic. Assefa (1987) observes that particularly in cases of "unscheduled" political violence like riots or civil wars, the corporate identity of at least one of the parties is often elusive. In these circumstances, there is, as Modelski (1964, 142) states, "no one to settle with."

An additional problem is that there are numerous historical examples of international mediation in which it is rather clear for an outsider who the disputants are, but in which the parties themselves are unwilling to identify and grant recognition to the other group as a legitimate participant whose needs, interests, and values they have to take seriously (Hare 1992, 58). Many authors have pointed to the position of the Palestinians in the Middle East as a prototype of this phenomenon (Gazit 1983; Touval 1982). Thus, although one might be able to broadly identify the disputants, they often may not act as an organized group, or are not recognized as such.

**COHESIVENESS: CONSTITUENCIES AND REPRESENTATIVES**

It is undisputed in the literature that the internal cohesiveness of adversaries is important for successful intermediary intervention, but analysts seem to have operationalized cohesiveness in two different ways. Some refer to the stability of the parties' internal power structure, for example, whether or not clear leaders or representatives exist who can authoritatively negotiate and secure the implementation of agreements reached (Assefa 1987, 13). Most often, however, cohesiveness is associated with the nature and number of domestic constituencies. Specifically, it has usually been equated with the existence of only one constituency. If cohesiveness is low (the presence of more than one constituency), it may be hard to identify parties in the first place. It is assumed that the presence of numerous constituencies within a state makes it harder for its potential representatives to engage in any meaningful form of conflict settlement, because the representatives will find it difficult to make concessions without losing face vis-à-vis any of the constituencies. This creates a need for negotiation and mediation to take place not only among the adversary parties but also among factions within the parties themselves. It has been demonstrated, for example, that in mediating the 1973 Middle East conflict, Kissinger had to win over only Sadat on the Egyptian side, whereas on the Israeli side, he had not only to convince the prime minister, but the cabinet, the political opposition, and the press as well (Kalb and Kalb 1974, 502; Rubin 1981b, 15). Also, it is presumed that leaders of such internally noncohesive parties are more aggressive and willing to provoke or escalate conflict with out-groups (see, for example, Bloomfield and Leiss 1969, 27; Rabbie and Visser 1972; Fisher 1989).

The existence of numerous constituencies may also provide for negotiators who are unwilling to compromise a convenient excuse for resisting any mediation efforts to produce movement (Kressel 1981, 231). The greater the number of such constituencies, the easier it is for negotiators to invoke them to justify intransigence. This is

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termed "blackmail of weakness" (Hoffman 1968, 4). The United States' efforts to mediate an agreement between Israel and Lebanon in 1982 on an Israeli withdrawal suffered from this phenomenon. Beleaguered by disunity, the Lebanese negotiator could credibly threaten the collapse of the country to avoid having to make concessions (Inbar 1991, 81). Thus, although the existence of numerous constituencies generally impedes representatives to be constructively involved in negotiations, in some cases, it may also be used as a tactical tool.

### TYPE OF REGIME

Regime types are usually distinguished in terms of democracies versus nondemocracies. Maoz and Abdolali (1989, 3-35), Russett (1993), and others have argued that although democratic states may be as prone to conflict as any other type of regime, they rarely fight among themselves. The three explanations advanced to account for this lack of war are democracies' political culture (shared norms that promote peaceful conflict resolution), structure (institutional constraints on high-level decision makers), and democratic leaders' perceptions and beliefs (Kegley and Hermann 1995).

This hypothesis has also found its way into the mediation literature, the idea being that intermediary intervention is more successful in conflicts between democracies. In his study of 206 dyadic disputes, Raymond (1994) concludes that joint democratic dyads have a greater inclination than other types of dyads to entrust third parties with judicial competence to settle their conflicts (see also Dixon 1993, 1994). Using their international conflict data set, Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille (1991, 10) distinguish between five regime types (monarchies, one-party states, military regimes, multiparty states, and a residual category) and show that multiparty states (the most democratic type of regime) were slightly more amenable to mediation than those involving other regime types: 35% of the mediation attempts involving multiparty states were successful compared to 6% of the efforts involving one-party-state dyads (see also Brecher 1993, 241-46).

How does one relate these findings to the seemingly contradictory findings described above under the cohesion variable? After all, democracy implies the existence of multiple political parties (comparable to constituencies) and, thus, noncohesiveness and lower amenability to successful mediation. The inference is spurious, however. One should not view internal cohesion as a structural feature of a political system (e.g., single versus multiple party) but should take instead the degree of legitimacy and freedom to maneuver that political leaders enjoy as its most important manifestation. This degree of legitimacy, in turn, can vary in both democratic and nondemocratic states. It follows that cohesion cannot be inferred automatically from regime type.

### MOTIVES TO ACCEPT MEDIATION

Willingness to address the conflict and accept the assistance of a mediator is often considered a necessary condition for mediation success (Rubin 1981b, 5). Several motives (interests) may lead parties in conflict to become willing to seek or accept

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mediation (Zartman 1985, 9-10). First of all, they may have the expectation that a certain mediator will help to produce a more favorable settlement to the conflict than would otherwise be possible. For example, disputants may believe that a mediator's involvement will constitute a guarantee for the implementation of the agreement, thus reducing the risk of violation by the adversary. They may also accept third-party intervention as a face-saving device to protect their domestic and international reputation when making major concessions. This motive played a large role in the Iranian acceptance of Algeria as a mediator in the conflict over the U.S. hostages held in Teheran in 1979 and 1980 (Christopher 1985; Sick 1985, 22).

Strategic and tactical considerations may provide another motive for the invitation or acceptance of mediation. For example, one or both of the parties may wish to gain some time, or to be relieved of the dilemma of having to choose between escalating its military efforts or making direct concessions to the adversary. Lieb (1985) shows that this may very well have been the case in the 1975 mediation between Iran and Iraq. Another strategic motive concerns the possibility that mediation will provide the occasion for improving relations with the mediator and the adversary. In her comparison of the structures, strategies, and tactics used by Kissinger and Carter in the Middle East, Stein (1985, 345) considers this a major contributing factor to the success of their mediation efforts.

## PREVIOUS AND ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARTIES

States interact in a variety of ways, including both disputes and transactions based on complementary and common interests. The relative importance of these different dimensions of the relations between states affects the likelihood that any specific conflict can be reduced by mediation (Mitchell 1981, 202). Both the history and the nature of the relationship are considered important in this respect: parties in an ongoing relationship are far more interested and willing to invest to preserve this relationship than are parties that have only a short-term relationship (Rubin 1981b, 38), and parties with a history of friendship or cooperation will also approach emerging conflicts more cooperatively (Deutsch 1973, 5). Bercovitch (1989, 290) supports both claims, although his research shows that "the parties' previous relationship can influence the *course* of a dispute but has only a slight impact on its *outcome*" (italics in original).

In contrast, Yamamoto (1990) argues that friendship can also impede serious negotiations. This may also very well hold true for mediation. She shows in the analysis of the U.S.-Canada free trade negotiation that friendship between the two neighboring countries proved to be more of a stumbling block than an advantage:

> Friendship produced overconfidence and a critical lack of planning on the part of the U.S. negotiating team. It encouraged the Canadian side to expect too much and accommodate too soon on some critical issues, factors that later would delay domestic approval of the treaty. Had the nations been enemies, an observer could speculate that the two sides might have approached the negotiations more warily and more formally, but probably better prepared. (p. 319)

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**BALANCE OF POWER**

Although many analysts assert that a (rough) power parity between the conflicting parties has an effect on the outcomes of international mediation, they hold diametrically opposed claims about the nature of such effects. Most of them argue that a balance of power between the disputants is crucial for successful mediation to come about (Young 1967, 43-4; Zartman 1981, 150; Kriesberg 1982, 274; Touval 1982, 9). They indicate that a marked power disparity will strengthen the stronger party's view of the mediator as a stumbling block toward the achievement of total victory. Such a disparity will reinforce the stronger party's unwillingness to accept mediation in the first place, or will enhance its reluctance to make any concessions or compromises during mediation essential for attaining successful results. Modelski (1964, 149) explains it as follows: "It goes strongly against the grain of human nature to seek a negotiated solution when one can be imposed merely by demanding it." Also, the stronger party may use the mediator as an instrument for facilitating surrender, as shown by Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille (1991, 11). For a mediator, power inequality between the disputants is an important source of role hindrance, because the mediator's goal is often to assist parties to compromise. The higher power party is bound to be sensitive to the implied premise upon which the mediator's activities will be based, namely that "as the party controlling more of the pie, [the higher power party] will nonetheless be asked to do less of the eating" (Kressel 1981, 230).

Other analysts doubt the importance of power parity or even consider it an impediment to mediation success. Deutsch (1973, 46) argues that mutual recognition of differential power and legitimacy is what matters in conflict management. The presence of a rather unambiguous power advantage by one of the parties makes the path of settlement more clear by indicating which disputant will be expected to make the greater concessions. The acceptance of mediation (and so its potential success) in a situation of power disparity depends in particular on the weaker party's acknowledgement of its position in the dispute and its subsequent willingness to make the greater concessions. Whether this happens often or not is, however, left unanswered by Deutsch. Others go even one step further by claiming that power parity may endanger successful mediation, because it stimulates competition that may lead to escalation and a showdown of force in an attempt by each party to upset the power balance (Organski 1960, 293; Wright 1965, 441-2).

## EXPLAINING MEDIATION SUCCESS 3: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEDIATOR

Mediators themselves also affect their chances of success. In particular, three mediator attributes are considered important in the literature: (a) (im)partiality, (b) leverage, and (c) status. These characteristics are usually held responsible for a mediator becoming accepted by the disputing parties, which, in turn, is seen as vital for the successful performance of his mediator functions (Susskind and Babbitt 1992, 35). Yet it is his acceptability to the disputants that distinguishes mediation from other

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forms of intermediary intervention in international conflict (Mitchell and Webb 1988b, 4). As will be seen, however, the relationship between mediator/mediation acceptability and success is more often postulated than empirically established.

## (IM)PARTIALITY AND MOTIVES

The issue of mediator impartiality has evoked intense debates among scholars of international mediation. Conceptually, some confusion exists because impartiality may refer to intention, consequence, or appearance (Kriesberg 1982). In addition, it is sometimes related to a mediator's attitudes toward the conflicting parties (Bjereld 1995), at other times, to a mediator's stake in the substance of issues in conflict (Princen 1992b), at yet other times, to both. Analysts agree, though, that impartiality is essentially a matter of perceptions of the parties in conflict (Touval 1975, 55; Yarrow 1978, 164; Bailey 1985, 209-10).[5]

The heart of the debate on impartiality lies not with conceptual issues, however, but with the effects of impartiality on the outcomes of mediation. Analysts who agree with the traditional thesis that mediator impartiality is a critical quality for successful mediation (Jackson 1952, 125-9; Young 1967, 81; Northedge and Donelan 1971, 299; Assefa 1987, 22; Miall 1992, 62; Hume 1994) seem to assume a chain of effects following from impartiality: mediator impartiality is crucial for disputants' confidence in the mediator, which, in turn, is a necessary condition for his gaining acceptability, which, in turn, is essential for mediation success to come about. A variant of this impartiality-confidence-acceptability-success thesis has been used, for example, to explain the successful mediation results of the World Council of Churches in the Sudan Civil War (Assefa 1988) and of the Vatican in the Beagle Channel dispute (Princen 1992b).

Other analysts claim, however, that a mediator need not be impartial to be successful (Touval 1975, 67; Kochan 1981, 133; Smith 1985, 371; Orme 1989, 60; Jabri 1990, 8). In their analysis of the *Esquipulas* peace process, a recent effort to resolve interstate conflict and promote regional integration in Central America, Wehr and Lederach (1991, 85-98) emphasize the significance of the trust-based mediator in these societies but argue that this is not related to impartiality. On the contrary, the type of mediator that emerges is known as the "insider-partial" as opposed to the "outsider-neutral": "A mediator from within the conflict, whose acceptability to conflictants is rooted not in distance from the conflict or objectivity regarding the issues, but rather in connectedness and trusted relationships with the conflict parties" (Wehr and Lederach 1991, 87). They do stress, however, that this type of mediator is more likely to originate in cultural settings where primary, face-to-face relations continue to characterize political, economic, and social exchange, and where tradition has been less eroded by modernity.

5. Often, the concepts impartiality and neutrality are used interchangeably. But there are analysts who consider them as separate dimensions of a mediator's *attitude* toward the disputants: impartiality is seen to refer to unbiased opinion or lack of preference in favor of one or more parties in conflict, whereas neutrality is considered to allude to the relationship between the mediator and the disputants (Moore 1987, 15). Following this distinction, impartiality seems to imply an unbiased stance of the mediator toward the disputants *during* the mediation process, whereas neutrality refers to the fact that there does not exist any strongly positive or negative relationship between a mediator and the parties *before* the mediation occurs.

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Others go one step further by arguing that mediator acceptability is neither contingent upon impartiality nor on trust in the mediator, but instead on a mediator's bias toward one of the parties (Touval and Zartman 1985, 15; Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille, 1991, 15). First, from the perspective of the disputing parties, a biased mediator may be an attractive option as long as the mediator has particularly strong ties to the party with greater control over the outcome of the conflict. Whatever partiality results from these ties is balanced by the mediator's greater capacity to influence that party. The party that does not have any relations with the mediator hopes or expects that the mediator will use his partiality to influence the adversary (Pruitt 1981b, 144). Many case studies of international mediation support this hypothesis: the Soviet Union's mediation efforts in the war between India and Pakistan (Perry Thornton 1985); Kissinger's mediation efforts in the Yom Kippur War in 1973 (Sheehan 1981, 52); Carter's intervention between the same parties in 1976 (Princen 1991, 62); Algerian mediation between Iran and the United States on the American hostages held in Iran in 1980 (Sick 1985, 26); and the U.S. mediation attempts in the Israeli-Lebanese negotiations in 1983 (Inbar 1991, 74). In all these cases, the mediator was accepted and considered successful despite his perceived alliance with one of the parties.

Second, from a mediator's perspective, it is more the exception than the rule to be partial concerning the parties and issues in international conflict. Mediators often empower weaker parties in the interest of an equitable settlement to end human misery (Groom and Webb 1987: 264-7; Wehr 1979, 37-8). However, in international politics, peacemaking is often intertwined with less altruistic self-interests of mediators. In particular, governmental intermediaries often have an axe to grind (Bailey 1985, 210). Touval and Zartman distinguish between "defensive" and "expansionist" motives (Touval and Zartman 1985, 8-9; Touval 1992, 232-3). Defensive motives may emerge when a conflict between two states threatens a mediator's interest. For example, a conflict between two neighboring states may upset a regional power balance or may provide opportunities for a rival power to increase its influence by intervening in the dispute (see Spiegel 1985). This is one of the reasons why the Organization of American States (OAS) nearly exclusively plays an intermediary role in Latin America: to reduce opportunities for external intervention and interference within the region (Sheman and Ford 1985). Partial mediators may also engage in mediation for expansionist motives: the desire to extend and increase their resources, influence, and power. This was the case when Egypt secretly intervened in the war between Iraq and Iran in 1974 (Lieb 1985, 80-1); it also prompted Kissinger's efforts in the Middle East conflict (Sheehan 1981, 48).

In the course of the debate about impartiality, some analysts who argue that mediator success is not contingent upon impartiality have examined whether other mediator characteristics, in particular leverage (see below), is a good predictor of more successful outcomes. They assume that a mediator engages in behavior that is designed to elicit information and exercise influence in order to reframe issues and persuade the parties. These tasks are best achieved not when a mediator is unbiased, but when he possesses resources that either or both parties value (Zartman and Touval 1985). Impartiality, in other words, is considered subordinate to the possession of leverage

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by a mediator. This idea has received empirical support from both Frei (1975, 78) and—more tentatively—from Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille (1991, 14-5).

**LEVERAGE**

Leverage is one of the most elusive elements of mediation. It makes for fuzzy conceptualizations, and research produces contradictory results concerning its importance for successful mediation outcomes. Few analysts bother to define leverage explicitly. Overall, it seems to refer to a mediator's ability to put pressure on one or both of the conflicting parties to accept a proposed settlement. This assumes a mediator has power and influence resources that can be brought to bear on the parties. It is not clear, however, which resources are crucial. Analysts distinguish between sticks (negative sanctions) and carrots (positive sanctions) (Touval and Zartman 1985, 13), and between material aspects (such as the possibility to withhold or supply economic aid) and immaterial aspects (the possibility to use moral or psychological pressure) (Princen 1992b, 167).

Absent systematic research on the impact of these various types of resources, there has been controversy in the literature as to how important leverage is for achieving successful mediation outcomes. According to some authors, leverage is a necessary condition for mediation success (Cot 1972, 12; Brookmire and Sistrunk 1980, 326; Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille 1991, 15; Touval 1992, 233). They have demonstrated in their empirical research that leverage is indispensable for persuading conflicting parties to make concessions or for ensuring disputants adhere to agreements. Kissinger's achievements in the Middle East are often used to illustrate the importance of being powerful (Pruitt 1981b, 142).

In contrast, Yarrow (1978) claims that in certain instances the mediator's lack of political power might facilitate success rather than hinder it. He argues that the credibility and sincerity of a mediator may be enhanced because of his nonpolitical nature and inability to "call down sanctions of any kind." Such a lack of power provides a mediator with possibilities "to permit an open and relaxed relationship between human beings" (Yarrow 1978, 256). Also, the possibilities of mediator acceptance may increase when the mediator is strategically weak. In her study of the Algerian mediation of the Iranian hostage crisis, Slim (1992) argues, for example, that small states are often accepted by most parties because of their nonthreatening stances:

> For the powerful party, a small state can provide a face-saver to whom capitulations can be made without threatening the public-bargaining posture of the powerful party. For the weaker party, a smaller state can provide a sympathetic ally who can understand what it means to negotiate from weakness. (p. 207)

Although analysts disagree about the impact of leverage, they do agree that mediation also runs various *risks* when mediators use (too much) leverage. First of all, the mediator's promise of compensation for concessions can get out of hand. Pruitt (1981b, 145) warns of long-run implications of high compensations: conflicting parties may become entirely dependent upon the mediator for further compensation in later negotiations. Also a tripartite negotiation system may develop in which much of the

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bargaining that takes place between the mediator and the two parties revolves around establishing a price to be paid by the mediator for each concession made by both parties (see also Fisher 1981, 113; Zartman 1981, 157). In this case, the mediator is continuously required to put pressure on the negotiators. If the mediator would later decide to take a more passive role, there often will be no progress. As Kissinger complained to friends after the Arab-Israeli peace talks: "When I ask [Israeli ambassador, author] Rabin to make concessions he says he can't because Israel is too weak. So I give him more arms, and he says he doesn't need to make concessions because Israel is strong" (Sheehan 1981, 89). Second, a mediated settlement that arises as a consequence of the (extreme) use of leverage may not last very long because the agreement is based on compliance with the mediator and not on internalization of the agreement-changed attitudes and perceptions (Kelman 1958). Likewise, Touval and Zartman (1985) emphasize that too strenuous a use of sticks can cause a party to withdraw its acceptance of a mediator or even to refuse to cooperate with any further mediation attempt at all: "Parties may decide that they can just as well do without carrots in their diet" (p. 13). Unfortunately, it remains vague in which situations these risks may become reality and, thus, when the use of leverage harms rather than facilitates the mediation process.

Overviewing both the discussion on (im)partiality and leverage, there may be a relationship between them. Although empirical evidence is lacking, various analysts emphasize that a *neutral* mediator's *lack* of leverage is important, whereas *partial* mediators need *possession* of leverage to create successful results. Assefa (1992, 104) seems to refer to this when he discusses the "trust-based" and the "power-based" perspectives on mediation, as does Princen (1992a) in his discussion about "neutral" and "principal" mediators. In many of the examples of partial mediation mentioned above, it was crucial that the mediator possessed enough leverage. On the other side of the spectrum, Slim (1992) claims that Algeria's success as a small mediating state without strategic power was particularly due to the fact that "the power of a small state as a mediator usually resides in its neutrality" (p. 207).

## STATUS

Another important factor enhancing a mediator's chances of success is his status. Status derives from his personal reputation, track records, and special expertise, but also from organizational factors. Two such organizational components of mediator status are distinguished in the literature: institutional and positional status. The institutional status of a mediator stems from the identity of a mediator's constituency. A mediator seldom acts as an individual, but usually as a spokesman or representative of a national state or a (non)governmental organization. The standing, legitimacy, and, in some cases, leverage of these "mediating bodies" determine the status of the representative who acts as a mediator (Rubin 1981b, 9-11). The positional status of the mediator depends on his standing within his own country or organization. He must have such a strong internal position that he can commit his government or executive to back up the things he says or does. For example, if a mediator promises compensation for concessions made by the adversaries, they must be able to count on him being able to commit his country/organization to deliver.

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Two different propositions about the relations between mediator status and successful mediation outcomes have been developed. The first one concerns the amount of status. Analysts assert that the higher the mediator's status, the greater the chances of success. In his analysis of the Zimbabwe settlement (1976-1979), Low (1985, 107) demonstrated that the second round of mediation in Rhodesia probably could not have been sustained had it not been for the personal involvement of high-status mediators, such as British Foreign Minister David Owen, United States Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young, and parliamentary leader Cledwyn Hughes.

The second proposition concerning mediator status focuses on the extent of rank equilibrium between mediator and representatives, that is, a mediator's relative status. It is assumed that for mediation to be successful, the status of the mediator and the status of the representatives of the conflicting parties must be attuned. If the status of the mediator is lower than the representatives of the parties, an attempt at mediation may not be taken seriously altogether. On the other hand, it may be as problematic when the mediator's status is higher than the status of the representatives of the disputants. Wolfers (1985, 185-6) saw this as the main obstacle when a consultative committee chaired by the emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, was created to try to find a settlement in the Nigeria-Biafra conflict in the mid-1960s. This committee clearly outranked the leaders of the delegations from the two parties in dispute. It proved impossible to settle the conflict as long as principal Yakubu Gowon of Nigeria and his counterpart Odumegwu Ojukwu of secessionist Biafra were not involved in the discussions.

## EXPLAINING MEDIATION SUCCESS 4: THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The international context in which any conflict takes place also affects the outcomes of mediation efforts. In particular, the impact of other parties and of other conflicts taking place simultaneously are deemed relevant in this respect. Economic and political pressure exercised by other (powerful) parties with a stake in the outcomes of the conflict may encourage but also frustrate conflict settlement efforts. Particularly, governments of countries in civil wars are put under pressure by their neighbors who are bothered by streams of refugees (Assefa 1987, 159). In several cases, nonmediating, yet influential external parties have succeeded in constraining one or both disputants to refrain from using violence. For example:

> By the fall of 1974, Saddam Hussein, then deputy chairman of the ruling Baath Party in Iraq, had committed himself publicly to total victory in the Kurdish dispute. Due to Soviet supplies, Iraq was stronger than ever. Hussein felt his political future rested on elimination of the Kurdish problem once and for all. He did not, however, anticipate pressure from Egypt urging a diplomatic solution. The considerable leverage Anwar Sadat was able to apply, against both Iran and Iraq, prevented Hussein from achieving a military solution (Susskind and Babbitt 1992, 32).

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But other parties may also hinder ongoing mediation processes. The fate of U.S. mediation efforts in Lebanon in 1982 may serve as an example here (Inbar 1991, 80-2). After 3 months of informal and 5 months of formal mediation, the United States brokered the May 1983 agreement between Israel and Lebanon. With the exception of Libya and Syria, which rejected it, and Jordan and Egypt, which welcomed the compromise agreement, the other Arab countries greeted the signing of the final document with silence or innocuous comments. This was perceived as a form of tacit support by the American government. However, the explicit Syrian rejection of the agreement turned out to be of decisive importance. The Syrians put together a coalition of Druse, Sunni, and Christian elements that refused to lend support to the agreement and undermined the authority of the government by continuous military challenges. The Lebanese government was unable to impose its control, and the peace processes failed, leaving Lebanon as divided as before the 1982 Israeli invasion.

A second aspect of the international context that might have an influence on mediation outcomes are other events or conflicts that take place at the same time (Kriesberg 1987, 380; 1991, 20). Kriesberg argues that insofar as a particular conflict's salience declines when other fights become of greater importance to one or more of the adversaries, de-escalation is more likely to occur. The mediation process in the conflict between the United States and Iran about the U.S. hostages in Teheran in 1979 illustrates this. At the time the Algerians began to take mediation initiatives, Iran also became heavily involved in the war with Iraq. That war was probably

> an obstacle to a settlement in the first two months of the mediation, since it distracted Iranian attention from the hostage crisis and delayed development of a formal position until the final days before the United States's election. Later, however, as the cost of the Iran-Iraq war began to mount, this conflict probably increased pressure on the Iranian clerics to find a settlement.(Sick 1985, 50)

## THE PROCESS: MEDIATOR ACTIVITIES

As discussed in the Introduction, the outcome of mediation is contingent upon both contextual and process variables, that is, the behavior or activities of the mediator. Mediator behavior can be viewed in terms of strategies and more specific tactics or techniques (Wall and Lynn 1993, 165-6). These are generally described on an ascending scale of mediator involvement, from passive to active. In the mediation literature, two classifications of mediator strategies are frequently used. The first typology has been developed by Kressel (1972, 13). He discerns three categories of strategies: (1) reflective behavior, (2) nondirective behavior, and (3) directive behavior.

Reflective strategies are the most passive category, entailing activities by which the mediator seeks to familiarize himself with the dispute and to establish the groundwork upon which his later actions will be built. Their purpose is to reduce the degree of complexity and uncertainty inherent in any international conflict, by producing knowledge and information about the conflicting issues and parties. The mediator tries to "achieve some convergence of expectations by reducing distortion, ignorance, misperception, or unrealistic intentions" (Bercovitch 1984, 98). Nondirective behavior is

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more proactive and involves efforts at increasing the chance that the disputants themselves, with a minimum of help from the mediator, will arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to their conflict. For example, the mediator may control publicity, the conflict management environment (e.g., by choosing a neutral location for mediation), and the resources (such as the number and identity of the parties) to affect the structure of the mediation. Finally, directive behavior involves strategies by which the mediator actively encourages a specific solution or seeks to manipulate the parties directly into ending the dispute. Directive behavior often takes the form of offering proposals or recommendations and exercising direct pressure.

The other well-known typology of mediator strategies has been postulated by Touval and Zartman (1985, 10-2). They also distinguish between three principal mediator roles and subsequent strategies: the mediator as "communicator," as "formulator," and as "manipulator." The communicator is a "passive conduit and repository" (p. 11) and serves as a channel of communication as contact breaks down between the parties in dispute. For example, the mediator may act as a go-between to carry information, proposals, or concessions back and forth between the conflicting parties. A more active role is played by the mediator as formulator. A formulator is capable of innovative thinking and helps the parties to redefine issues or to find a formula for the resolution of their conflict. The distinction between a communicator and a formulator is more analytical than real; in practice, these roles very much overlap. If these are still not enough to bring about reduction of conflict, the mediator may have to use his leverage to manipulate the parties into agreement. In these situations, the mediator acts as a manipulator.

Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille (1991, 16) empirically analyzed the relation between mediator strategies and mediation success and concluded that (1) more active mediation strategies are more effective in international mediation, and (2) active mediation strategies can affect and be responsive to a wider variety of dispute situations than less active strategies. Kochan (1981, 126), however, emphasizes that a premature use of active strategies is not without risks: it may ruin the mediator's credibility and acceptability. He argues that when conditions are not ripe for settlement (cases in which the parties are really too far apart, pressure to settle is lacking, or other political constraints impede a settlement), a mediator should refrain from active or aggressive tactics; when the conditions are ripe, however, a settlement may not occur unless the mediator engages in such tactics. This takes us full cycle, because it suggests that the effects of behavioral strategies are mediated by the context in which intervention takes place.

## CRITIQUE: TOWARD THEORY BUILDING IN INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION

Not surprisingly, no golden formulas for achieving mediation success have been found. Nevertheless, the boost in research on international mediation during the last two decades has, no doubt, made important advances in developing and/or testing hypotheses that might help to explain how success comes about. The many case studies have provided us with a broad menu of factors that may affect the outcomes of

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international mediation, and, in some instances, they have given us insights into the conditions under which these factors play a role. For example, they have demonstrated that different types of mediators may be successful in different types of conflict situations (Princen 1992a). The quantitative, large-sample analyses, especially the work by Bercovitch and his associates, have provided us with weights for a number of key variables thought to affect mediation outcomes.

Notwithstanding these achievements, there are a number of problems with current studies on international mediation as they stand. First of all, many international mediation studies are marred by conceptual confusion, both with respect to the dependent variable (how to measure success?) and the independent variables (i.e., when is a conflict ripe for resolution? when can a mediator be considered powerful?). In addition, even if analysts use the same definitions, they seem to refer essentially to quite different phenomena. This is also the reason why most discussions about the factors affecting mediation success have an open-ended character: analysts juxtapose different interpretations but do not really engage them.

Secondly, the borderlines between empirical evidence and conjecture are often blurred. Most of the research is presented as evidence but turns out to be based primarily on conjectures, opinions, and ad hoc observations. For example, the claim that a mediator's attributes increase his chances of gaining acceptance, which in turn increases the likelihood of mediation success, is plausible but at this point not yet empirically verified. Moreover, many case studies suffer from design problems: a single case is used simultaneously to derive and test hypotheses.

Third, and partly as a consequence of this, the sheer number of prerequisites for achieving mediation success is overwhelming (the 14 discussed here are only the ones that have gained most attention in research). One may take this as a matter of fact and conclude that international mediation is an overdetermined phenomenon. However, current research has yet to try to determine which factors are more important and why this might be so, that is, to reduce the scope of inquiry (and of policy recommendations) to a more limited number of powerful variables. At times, analysts have tried to assess the relative weight of different variables and have come up with various clusters but often without offering a deeper understanding of their significance (Bercovitch and Lamare 1993, 299-301).

The task at hand is more complex than it may seem, however. At first sight, one may simply propose that analysts should try to agree on some basic definitions of mediation success and achieve greater conceptual clarity on the measurement of independent variables. Moreover, one may advance that analysts should continue to amass data and test hypotheses in a methodologically sound manner to develop more robust causal theories indicating which combination of variables explains best mediation outcomes.

These suggestions will not do, however. The three difficulties of current research on international mediation mentioned above are, in fact, caused by a more fundamental problem: the absence of more explicitly articulated theories on international conflict and its management, of which mediation theory is a part. As Wall and Lynn (1993, 182) have pointed out, mediation research has "significantly surpassed theory building." The problem is not only that different definitions or operationalizations are

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employed but that the prevailing conceptualizations and explanatory frameworks are not based upon a (normative) theoretical founding necessary for evaluating and understanding mediation success. Consequently, mediation research has produced a wealth of correlations and facts, but it has not produced convincing explanations. For example, large-sample analysts who have claimed to "explain" mediation outcomes or to identify the importance of "determinants" of mediation success, that is, to develop causal links, actually have established only correlations between certain variables and mediation outcomes: Bercovitch, Anagnoson, and Wille's (1991, 15) statement that in 34 mediation attempts made by government leaders (powerful mediators), 32% were successful tells us nothing about *why* power may be an important precondition for mediation success. It can serve only as the basis for developing ad hoc hypotheses. Moreover, many mediation case studies are very descriptive, and their authors often seem to adhere to what has been called the "Rankian-Actonian tradition" (Handel 1978, 14): "let the facts speak for themselves." Systematic theory-driven comparative case studies are rare (see, however, Stedman 1991; Princen 1992a).

Hence, to meet the twofold challenge of mediation analysis—assessing and explaining mediation outcomes—we need to do more than search for shared definitions, amass data, and produce additional hypotheses. First, we need an improvement in the theories we use to define our concepts, to gather data, and to generate hypotheses. To do so requires an analysis of the foundations of mediation research. This leads us from the realm of facts and data to the realm of ideas and assumptions that analysts use when they collect and interpret "facts" about international mediation. Whether they are aware of it or not, analysts who study international mediation accept and use implicit or explicit notions of the "essence" of international politics, in particular conflict and conflict management. They also depart from certain types of assumptions about appropriate ways to study it. The former shape their understanding of conflict, their evaluation of it, and their basic views about the desirability, feasibility, and causal logic of international conflict management, specifically mediation. The latter determine the types of research designs they employ to analyze mediation, and by doing so, the possibilities and limitations of the interpretations they develop.

Often unarticulated, this mixture of normative foundations and empirical assertions forms the basis of more specific ideas about how to measure mediation success and how outcomes can be understood as they circumscribe what analysts will see, and how they interpret and evaluate what they see. By making explicit, comparing, and contrasting theoretical patterns in mediation analysis, we can see more clearly what each claims and emphasizes, as well as what each blurs and overlooks. This may help us understand the variety of judgments and explanations that observers and analysts form about attempts at mediation—and the sharp disagreements among them.

## A FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE RESEARCH: FOUR PROTOTHEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION

Exploring the underlying assumptions in research is a common approach in social science at large. In the field of international relations, the most well-known example

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of how different analytical frameworks based on different sets of assumptions lead to clearly distinct explanations of the same historical event is Allison's (1971) study of the Cuban missile crisis. Allison demonstrates that three different models of foreign policy making (the "rational actor" model, the "organizational process" model, and the "governmental politics" model) produce rather different explanations of what happened during those 13 days of tensions in October 1962, and why the crisis turned out the way it did. In his study, the three models have been selected more or less inductively, that is, based on an examination of the existing repertoire of approaches, and therefore condemned to incorporate rather than expose the limits and ambiguities of current theorizing. I would therefore propose a more deductive approach to generating theoretical frameworks. Specifically, I use a *meta*theoretical scheme that postulates systematically the core assumptions guiding the mediation theories that can be derived from it.

By using a heuristic adaptation of the metatheoretical framework developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and applying it to the international relations context, I argue that it is possible to discern four fundamentally different currents of thought about international conflict and its management. These vary along two dimensions: (1) assumptions about the nature and valuation of conflict (conflict as a challenge to order versus as an opportunity for social change) and (2) assumptions about the ontological status of conflict and its implications for theorizing about conflict (realist/objectivist versus nominalist/subjectivist epistemologies). The adapted Burrell and Morgan framework can be applied to classify different strands in theorizing on international relations relating to these key questions, allowing for a more systematic comparison between concepts and research on international mediation than is usually done.

In Figure 1, I shall briefly sketch the four perspectives, deducing them in terms of answers they provide to seven research questions concerning international mediation derived partly from the Burrell and Morgan (1979) dimensions and partly from the literature review:

1. What are the origins of international conflict?
2. How is international conflict evaluated?
3. How "manageable" is international conflict by means of mediation, and what is meant by mediation?
4. What are the likely identity and incentives of mediators?
5. Why do parties accept a particular mediator?
6. What is mediation success and what are its crucial preconditions?
7. What is the nature and function of theorizing about international conflict management?

A systematic elaboration of these questions from the four perspectives will allow for a comparison on their essential differences. The first perspective (box A) I regard as the conventional wisdom that has guided most of the published work on international mediation reviewed above. The three others constitute different types of normative and conceptual departures from the conventional view, and have been less often drawn upon by mediation analysts.

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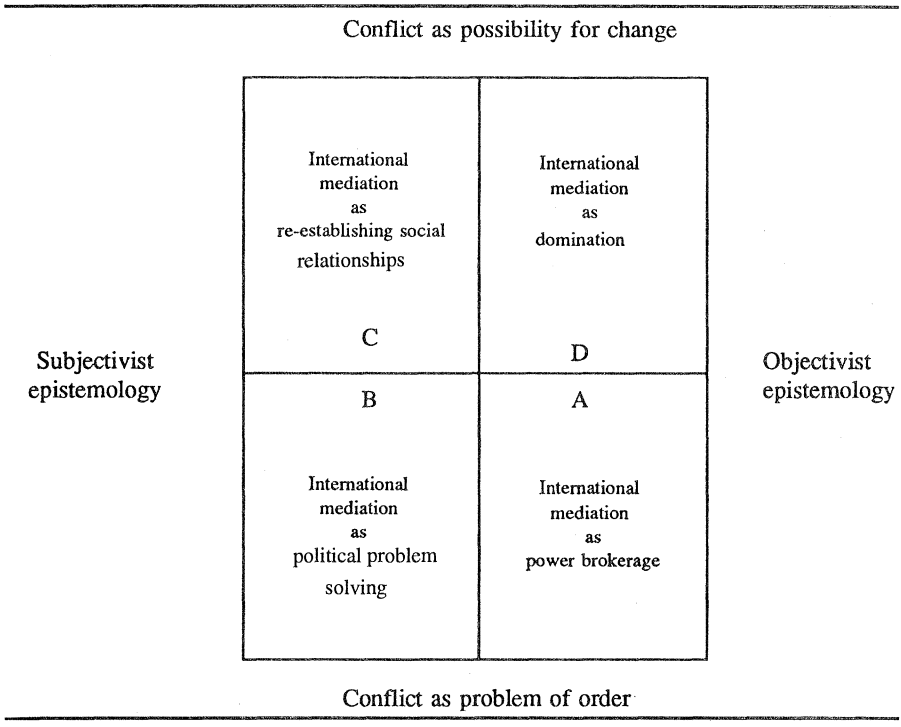


**Figure 1: Four Prototheories on International Mediation**

### A. MEDIATION AS POWER BROKERAGE

The most common way of looking at international mediation has been to treat it as a form of power brokerage, whose dynamics can be outlined in terms of an explanatory and predictive theory. This view stands squarely in the (neo)realist mainstream of theorizing about international politics (Waltz 1979; Keohane 1984, 1986; Krasner 1979; Gilpin 1984). Its main features relevant here include the following propositions:

1. International conflict is endemic to the anarchical international system that consists first and foremost of a large number of sovereign states and lacks an effective superordinate, central authority. International politics is characterized as a zero-sum game in which national interests continuously clash as a result of competition for scarce resources, in particular security.

2. As long as the inevitable competition between states takes place within the boundaries of conventional diplomacy, international conflict is not problematic. It becomes so when it escalates into a military confrontation between the states involved, especially one that has the potential of escalating into a confrontation between the major powers. Conflicts of the latter type are therefore to be kept in check, because they constitute a threat to the persistence of the international system as a whole.

3. Because of the endemic character of conflict, its underlying causes are not easily resolved. The maximum feasible form of conflict management by means of an

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intermediary is settlement. This occurs when states arrive at a negotiated compromise that reduces the intensity of the conflict below escalation thresholds. Mediation implies the restoration of some sort of power balance.

4. Major powers (or other status quo oriented actors supported by major powers) are the most likely candidates for a mediator role. They tend to intervene in a conflict to advance their national interests and/or to act as safeguards to the stability of the international system.

5. The parties in conflict are most likely to accept mediation when they feel it will help them reach a better settlement than they can achieve on their own; when it provides them with a face-saving way out of the conflict; or when they do not want to risk their relations with the mediator by declining his initiative. A crucial consideration in accepting mediation offers is a party's estimate of the mediator's power to persuade the other side to accept a compromise.

6. Mediators can assist parties in a variety of ways in reaching a settlement, but, ultimately, mediation success is determined in large measure by the combination of the resources available to them and the skill with which they use these (Zartman and Aurik 1991). From this perspective, it is less important that a mediator be neutral to the parties in conflict, and more important that he possess considerable leverage over them to get them to accept steps and proposals for a settlement that they might not otherwise have acceded to.

7. These propositions about international mediation form the core of a more comprehensive theory, which should ultimately be able to explain and predict patterns of international mediation across a range of cases. The task of the analyst is to identify and sharpen the general principles governing international mediation and to check their explanatory and predictive performance across a wide range of conflict situations. In the process of doing so, crucial contingency factors determining the success or failure of international mediation attempts can be identified.

### B. MEDIATION AS POLITICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

The second prototheory of international conflict management is grounded in a fundamentally different ontology of international conflict and epistemology of conflict analysis, yet it shares the realist perspective of international conflict as a threat to be averted or controlled by systematic efforts at conflict management, including mediation. It can be found in the work of international relations students inspired by political psychology (Kelman 1965; Jervis 1976; White 1984, 1986). The implications of this alternative set of assumptions for a theory of international conflict management can be sketched by revisiting the core propositions of the power brokerage school:

1. Conflict in international politics is contingent upon situation-specific and dynamic perceptions, drives, and decisions on the part of foreign policy actors, in particular foreign policy political and bureaucratic elites and institutions. When elites in different states distrust one another, and under- or overestimate the others' capabilities to exert coercion, an escalatory spiral of self-reinforcing misperceptions and conflictual actions may occur.

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2. Conflict and war threaten human well-being and prosperity on all sides of the dispute, particularly in the era of weapons of mass destruction. Both are to be prevented or mitigated as much as possible.

3. Because conflict is largely in the eye of the beholder, there is no prima facie reason why a complete resolution of conflict—taken to be a fundamental change of attitudes and behavior of parties resulting in a trust-based peaceful and stable interstate relationship—should be impossible (Fisher 1989). The key challenge to conflict management is to prevent conflict spirals from occurring, or to effectively transform them into spirals of de-escalation. Conflict resolution is therefore best viewed as the ultimate end of an incremental peacemaking process. In practice, the very *process* of sustaining and developing a dialogue is at least as important as its short-term results are in working toward the ultimate resolution of the conflict.

4. The role of the mediator could be played by any significant actor on the international scene. Its essence is to enhance the process of building trust between the opposing parties. It follows that the mediator's analytical and communication skills are of vital importance, as is his commitment to peace as a value in itself. At the same time, mediators should be acutely aware of the political environment in which they operate, and how this may affect the behavior of the parties. It might help if mediators possess certain leverage in getting parties to the table, yet mediators who are overtly partial will never be fully trusted by the parties.

5. Ideally, the mediator should be accepted simultaneously by all the parties in conflict. Given the internal fragmentation of parties in conflict, the feasibility of a central, coordinated approach to initiating mediation and seeking acceptance is low. Hence mediators often resort to a more piecemeal, informal strategy, designed to solicit cooperation from those influential actors and factions within the contending parties who have not completely committed themselves to the official policy of confrontation.

6. The crucial condition for achieving success in international mediation is to initiate and sustain productive communication between parties in the conflict by applying different techniques for reducing intergroup and interpersonal conflict, going way beyond the traditional forms of track-one diplomacy and drawing on experiences with mediation communities and organizations. The aim of such a "prenegotiation" strategy is to soften up key power holders to definitions of the conflict and solutions for it that they might not have considered seriously otherwise (Stein 1989).

7. Because conflict is socially constructed, knowledge about conflict needs to take the following into account: (a) the institutional context in which different stakeholders make sense of their situation, (b) the process of sense-making itself, and (c) its implications for the strategies and actions of stakeholders. Theorizing about international conflict should not seek to achieve a single, general, and parsimonious theory covering as wide a range of cases, but instead should seek to develop a contingent, multilevel yet systematic description and understanding of the dynamics of a particular case.

### C. MEDIATION AS REESTABLISHING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The third perspective on international conflict management shares the ontology of international conflict and epistemology of conflict analysis with the previous one.

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However, it differs fundamentally from both prototheories of international mediation presented above in that it regards international conflict as an opportunity for social change. This view corresponds with a critical theory perspective, in particular Burton's human needs approach on international politics (Burton 1972b, Hoffman 1987; Brown 1994):

1. The potential eruption of violent conflict is a feature of many relations that exist between social actors. Conflict arises when subgroups or identity groups come to perceive these relationships with other groups as illegitimate, in other words no longer accept them as beneficial in the fulfillment of their basic human needs for a distinctive identity, security, and effective participation in the larger social context (Azar et al. 1990: 271). International conflict is a spill-over from these domestic conflicts.

2. Because a status quo in which basic human needs are frustrated can never be a stable one, conflict itself, as a clash of diverging evaluations of relationships between actors, is not considered a problem of order. Rather it is a means by which man can achieve emancipation from a structure of illegitimate social relationships. However, when conflict becomes protracted and excessively violent, it may frustrate rather than facilitate this process of beneficial social change.

3. A distinction needs to be made between conflict settlement and conflict resolution. Settlement refers to a conflict management process in which one seeks to take away the negative, destructive consequences of violent conflictual behavior. Conflict resolution requires that the underlying causes of conflict are effectively addressed. In conflict resolution, one seeks to develop the capacity of the world society to become a self-regulating system capable of avoiding destructive conflict.[6]

4. A mediator should be a skillful actor with no stake in the conflict but with an ideological commitment to social change for a more humane world society. A mere commitment to peace and order is insufficient, because these cannot be achieved without more profound changes in the structure of society and the ways in which groups communicate and interact. In practice, however, many mediation efforts on the international scene are undertaken by powerful, status quo oriented third parties and thus, not surprisingly, more often than not meet with little success.

5. Many stakeholders in the conflict will reject a change-oriented mediator. Gaining acceptance as a mediator, then, involves a piecemeal approach similar to the one outlined in the second perspective. In addition, the mediator needs to play down his emancipatory agenda in the early stages of the process.

6. The willingness of actors to risk personal and communal suffering and destruction by initiating violent conflict suggests that if third-party intervention is to be successful, a deep understanding of the motivational dynamics driving them is needed. Mediators need to analyze the conflict in terms of the underlying needs, values, and fears of parties, and they should use different techniques designed to facilitate a more profound dialogue between parties. This should help them challenge the social structure in which their interests tend to become incompatible.

6. Conflict settlement is, however, not a necessary condition for resolution: even when the parties are still locked in hostilities, informal dialogues about underlying issues can be initiated and lead to fundamental breakthroughs. Because conflict is not inherent to any objective structure, it is, in principle, possible for a mediator to assist parties along three paths: (1) toward settlement, (2) toward resolution via settlement, and (3) toward resolution without settlement.

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7. International conflict is rooted in the dialectics between recurrent features of relationships and social structures, on the one hand, and highly contingent combinations of different actors' needs, perceptions, and dispositions, on the other. A proper understanding of these dialectics requires the analyst of international conflict to adopt an epistemology of reflexivity, combining technical, practical, and emancipatory knowledge interests. Theorizing about international conflict is not an end in itself; it should be oriented toward "the construction of a politics oriented toward the development of rational consensus between human beings—a return to the classical understanding of politics, to the development of an emancipatory politics in which the individual is subject and not object and in which constraints on human autonomy are removed" (Hoffman 1987, 236).

**D. MEDIATION AS DOMINATION**

In the final box of our model, international mediation is considered a form of domination, a tool used by rich and powerful states for preventing fundamental changes in the structure of the international system that some forms of conflict might enable. The fourth perspective on mediation draws upon structuralist thinking about international politics (Frank 1969; Galtung 1971; Wallerstein 1974). Its main features are captured in the following propositions:

1. International conflict is endemic to the current structure of the international capitalist system that, through its international division of labor, has led to institutionalized inequality and dependency between centers and peripheries, both within and between states. The economic structure of world society generates specific patterns of interests governing which groups dispute and which cooperate. Conflicts become manifest when deprived groups seek to set themselves free from exploitative relationships.

2. Conflict is a first and necessary impetus to foster structural change. However, not all forms of conflict serve this purpose. Manifest conflict between elites and masses within periphery states distracts energy and attention from the more important, mostly latent, conflict between center and periphery states within the world system. Only through the escalation of the latter type of conflict will it become possible to expose the exploitative nature of relationships within the international system, and become possible for attempts be made to change them.

3. Conflict resolution in terms of structural changes can be achieved only when peripheries can be moved to join forces to redress the balance of global economic power. At the same time, however, ruling classes and dominant states will not voluntarily agree to end their own privileged positions. This leads into a paradox of international conflict resolution: true resolution of international conflict is only possible through a global strategy of conflict escalation on the part of periphery groups and states. International mediation has no role to play in resolving this paradox, or in bringing about true resolution of the fundamental sources of international conflict. There exists no mediator independent of the center who has the overwhelming economic and political power required to force structural change and who is not committed to the preservation of the global status quo. In contrast, the existing practice of international mediation is one of domination: a practice initiated or supported by powers from the

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center to protect and maintain the international economic and political status quo. The scope of third-party intervention therefore remains limited to conflict settlement: it is used to reduce or suppress conflicts within or between the periphery states whenever these conflicts become too intense and costly to status quo powers.

4. Dominant powers are the most likely candidates for a role as mediator in conflict settlement. They will be motivated to become mediators or will endorse efforts by other parties (e.g., international organizations) primarily to protect their position in the capitalist world system.

5. In many cases, the parties in conflict (ruling classes versus deprived groups in the periphery states, or competing elites of different periphery states) have little choice but to accept the initiation of mediation efforts on the part of powerful status quo actors. In practice, they may obstruct the settlement process when they expect short-term gains from continued confrontation, but they will try to avoid compromising their relationship with the mediator.

6. The crucial condition that enables status quo mediators to achieve their aims is power to manipulate parties into accepting a particular settlement. Mediation effectiveness is determined in large measure by the combination of the economic, political, and military resources available to the mediator and the skill with which he uses these.

7. Conflict is rooted in the structure of the international system. The job of conflict analysis is to develop a general explanatory theory that has the capacity not only to explain past instances of conflict but to predict the incidence and outcomes of future ones.

In this article, I could provide only a thumbnail sketch of the four perspectives and could not illustrate their heuristic potential in empirical research (for an example, see Kleiboer and 't Hart 1995). Yet let me conclude by pointing out a number of ways in which this kind of approach may help us cut through the confusion about the roots of mediation success in international politics.

First, it helps us specify the dependent variable. The four approaches provide distinct views about the nature, scope, and limits of international mediation. Each approach generates a particular set of expectations about what mediation might at best achieve and thus provides analysts with coherent standards for assessing mediation outcomes.

Second, different independent variables mentioned in the first part of this article play different roles in the four prototheories, suggesting that underlying assumptions select the empirical evidence the analysts seek to acquire. For example, whereas the power brokerage model will focus much more on mediator leverage as a crucial factor and search for empirical evidence about its sources and impact, the reestablishing social relationships model will emphasize the role of neutrality and probably direct research more toward instances of nongovernmental mediation. Similarly, some theories—particularly the mediation as domination model—call attention to system-level variables with great potential explanatory leverage not previously studied.

Third, modelling mediation theory in this way provides a powerful incentive for more theory-driven empirical research, thus alleviating one of the main problems found in the existing literature. Let me mention a few examples of the kinds of studies

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that might be done. From a model D perspective, mediation appears to be irrelevant for determining the course and outcomes of most types of international conflict. This position could easily be tested in a comparative study of mediated and nonmediated conflicts involving various configurations of actors deemed relevant by the structuralist perspective. A similar comparative study could be done to investigate model B's and model C's insistence that the poor track record of international mediation may be an artifact of analysts' bias toward studying mediation only during critical, "hot" conflict phases. From a model B (or C) perspective, one might get a different picture if one would extend the time horizon and looked more seriously at the potential of pre-escalation, preventive mediation, and conflict management, as well as at the long-term impact of third-party efforts. Again, this theoretically grounded claim can be investigated empirically.

Finally, the multimodel approach to mediation analysis is also advantageous from the perspective of the policy relevance of research findings. By comparing and contrasting different ways of understanding conflict episodes and assessing the prospects for mediation success, mediators and other stakeholders in these conflicts may be offered a richer, more cognitively complex menu of policy options. The mere inclusion of model D as an institutionalized form of devil's advocacy about the utility of mediation as a tool for conflict resolution increases the burden of the argument on those promoting its use. Furthermore, the important differences between models A, B, and C when it comes to setting standards and developing strategies for achieving mediation success assure that even if the hurdle of model D heresy is passed, would-be mediators need to think deeply and clearly when, where, and how to jump into the maze of an intractable international conflict.

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