

DISCUSSION PAPER 25-002

A Pivotal Partner: Renewing the US Role in Global Peacemaking

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USIP convened an expert panel of scholars and researchers over a four-month period in 2023–24 to explore lessons learned from the management of conflicts in prior periods of global turbulence. This is the third paper in a three-part series from the convenings and considers the expert panel's deliberations on the implications for US policy and practice. The series was designed and managed by the Learning, Evaluation, and Research team at USIP's Center for Thematic Excellence.

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OVERVIEW

Experts convened in the Peacemaking in a Turbulent World (PTW) project widely agreed: the United States has historically been an essential or pivotal partner in global peacemaking efforts, using both its diplomatic and military force. Both for its own national interest and a more peaceful world, the United States should renew and reinvest in that peacemaking role.

The United States has played an active role in peacemaking in the past and continues to do so despite changes to the playing field. Among these changes is the resurgence of interstate war, and fractured conflict parties have added to the complexity of mediation and other third-party peacemaking efforts.

In prior periods and in the present, the United States has been an adroit peacemaker, using its diplomatic skills, leverage (both incentives and deterrence), and military prowess to induce parties to come to terms and implement agreements. However, the Global War on Terrorism privileged the use of force to address conflict.

In renewing its commitment to peacemaking through both diplomatic and military power, the United States should focus on understanding how to “stop the killing” and help to negotiate cease-fires, as well as long-term reconstruction and postconflict statebuilding. US diplomatic efforts to mediate and support peacemaking processes by other states and multilateral partners involve both ethical and operational dilemmas and trade-offs, limiting the utility and effectiveness of blanket or all-encompassing strategies and policies. This discussion paper presents some of the insights and recommendations from the expert group on renewing and reinvesting in the US role for peacemaking in a turbulent world.

INTRODUCTION: PEACEMAKING IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Opinion polling of the US public by the Pew Research Center in April 2024 revealed that ending wars abroad is not commonly stated as a principal foreign-policy objective, and highlighted declining support, broadly, for the United Nations (UN).¹ Instead, the public is more concerned with countering terrorism, curbing illegal drug flows and cross-border migration, and the global spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Among foreign conflicts that the US public is concerned about ending, the most commonly mentioned is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (29 percent of the 3,776 respondents). Polling by Pew underscores that the US public, like its political leadership, is deeply divided along ideological and partisan lines on US foreign policy priorities, especially in relation to the most injurious conflicts in Ukraine and Israel/Palestine. Respondents on both sides of the partisan divide have reservations about the amount of military aid being provided to allies in these conflicts (although they are divided on which allies should be supported).²

Experts on the PTW panel, however, have argued that the United States needs to have a much more strategic, long-term, and less reactive approach to achieving the most urgent foreign-policy objectives. Threats such as violent extremism, the “push” factors in migration that create pressures for vulnerable civilians to flee, and “ungoverned” territory that produces global humanitarian crises are the symptoms of the underlying problems of armed conflict around the world. For the United States to be more effective, more strategically self-interested, and more secure at home, foreign-policy efforts should strongly prioritize peacemaking: preventing new wars from occurring, bringing conflicts to an end, and preventing the recurrence of conflict through peacebuilding, as well as

¹ Jacob Poushter and Laura Clancy, “What Are Americans’ Top Foreign Policy Priorities?,” Pew Research Center Report, April 23, 2024, www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/04/23/what-are-americans-top-foreign-policy-priorities.

² Jordan Lippert, “How Americans View the Conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Hamas, and China and Taiwan,” Pew Research Center Short Reads, February 16, 2024, www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/16/how-americans-view-the-conflicts-between-russia-and-ukraine-israel-and-hamas-and-china-and-taiwan/.

strengthening democratic legitimacy, human rights performance, and capacity to deliver security and prosperity of all countries in the international system.

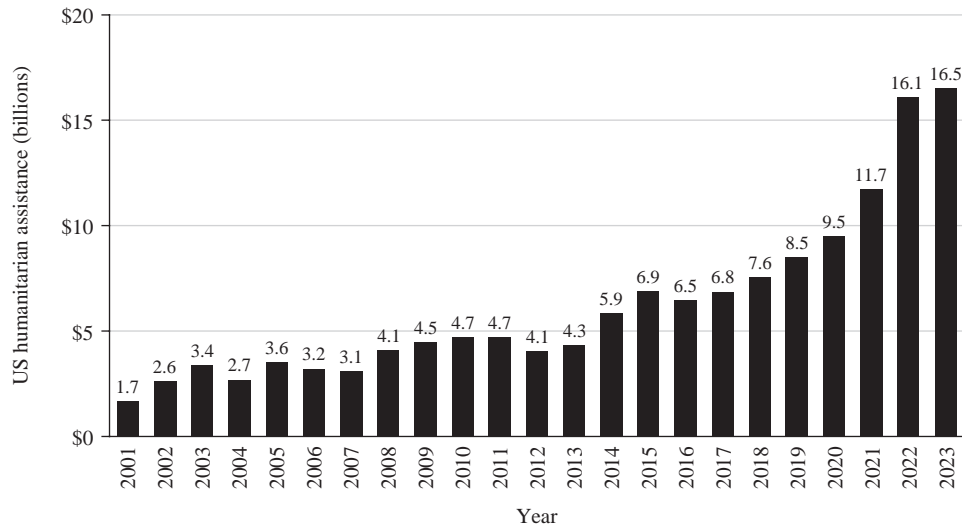
In prior periods of global turbulence, such as the 1990s, the United States was a pivotal partner in the peacemaking efforts that led to a steady decline in armed conflicts globally. Today's turbulent global era presents new challenges to prior periods of global turbulence. The United States is a typically pivotal player in peace negotiations to stem atrocities and to allow for humanitarian assistance and postwar stabilization and recovery. Geopolitical competition undermines global solidarity and a common purpose to stem wars through the collective mechanism of the UN Security Council. This has left the United States to engage anew as a global state-based mediator in concert with other like-minded and motivated states, and, in some instances such as the African Union (AU), through and with regional organizations and regionally pivotal states, such as Kenya and Nigeria.

In today's most costly and dangerous conflicts, such as Gaza, Sudan, and Ukraine, experts affirm that US engagement is most effective through “coalitions of the willing” of motivated states, multilateral organizations with mediation mandates (such as the UN and regional organizations), and support for informal or private mediators. A Georgetown University expert study group convened by the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy found that in order to play a pivotal, multiplier role in international peace and security, the United States “must leverage its diplomatic resources, unique intelligence resources, and economic power to build a more resilient world and use multilateral fora as the primary medium of issue convergence with necessary partners on a range of global issues.”³

Mediation scholars and practice specialists expressed concern that the US role in responding to armed conflicts has evolved such that there is a pronounced misprioritization of resources, diplomacy, and contributions to the UN by way of symptom relief (e.g., humanitarian action). In turn, experts argue that there is insufficient strategic focus and prioritization in the containment of

³ Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, *The Ripple Effect: A US Diplomatic Strategy for a Changing World Order* (Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, 2023), <https://isd.georgetown.edu/2023/08/18/new-isd-working-group-report-the-ripple-effect-a-u-s-diplomatic-strategy-for-a-changing-world-order/>.

Figure 1. US humanitarian assistance, 2001–2023



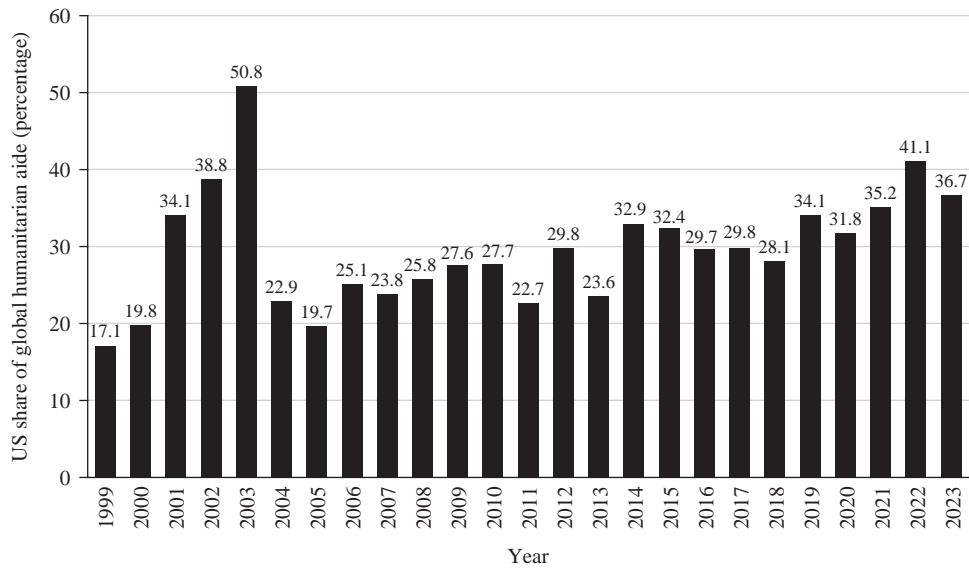
Source: ForeignAssistance.gov

conflict in a manner that can address conflict root causes, underlying pathologies, and relationships among belligerents.

- With a world on fire with conflicts and peacemaking in crisis, the United States has prioritized humanitarian assistance, bearing an increasing direct cost of conflict. Figure 1 shows the burgeoning costs of humanitarian assistance, which tracks in concert with the global trends in armed conflict considered by the expert panel. As figure 2 shows, the United States bears an oversized burden in providing humanitarian assistance, wields exceptional power in military, financial, and diplomatic spheres, supports efforts of informal and civil society peacemaking, and is essential in providing the credible commitment that reluctant parties need to exchange the present power they possess on the battlefield with the uncertainty of a solely political role to be potentially gained in a peace agreement.

Experts expressed concern about the unintended consequences of humanitarian assistance. Under certain conditions, such assistance may extend or prolong conflicts when resources are

Figure 2. US share of global humanitarian aid, 1999–2023



Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Financial Tracking Service.

diverted to protagonists and affect protagonists’ incentives to seek a negotiated outcome instead of continuing to fight.⁴

THE UNITED STATES IS PIVOTAL IN PEACEMAKING, THEN AND NOW

Conflict termination through peace agreements in protracted conflicts was then, and should be now, a critical long-term, strategic aim of US national security and foreign policy. Rather than addressing the symptoms of conflicts through security assistance to allies and humanitarian assistance to affected civilians, the United States should further renew and reinvest as a pivotal partner in global peacemaking efforts.

The United States continues to play the role of powerful peacemaking partner—often, critical to the successful conclusion of such processes in peace agreements—in conflicts in Africa, Asia,

⁴ Neil Narang, “Assisting Uncertainty: How Humanitarian Aid Can Inadvertently Prolong Civil War,” *International Studies Quarterly* 59 (2015): 184–95; and Reed M. Wood and Emily Molfino, “Aiding Victims, Abetting Violence: The Influence of Humanitarian Aid on Violence Patterns During Civil Conflict,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, no. 3 (2016): 186–203.

Latin America, and the Middle East. In the Middle East, the US role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which it is directly mediating together with Egypt and Qatar, is but one of several processes of peacemaking in which the United States has played an indirect or direct role. Often, as in Colombia in 2016 or Kenya in 2010, this influence occurs behind the scenes.

Since the waning days of the Cold War in the 1980s, the United States emerged as a pivotal partner in efforts to “stop the killing” and bring to a sustainable end the mostly intrastate conflicts of that era. From the late 1980s onward, with mediation in southwest Africa leading to the independence of Namibia, and into the 1990s with particular effectiveness in direct mediation such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Northern Ireland, and through critical support for peace processes in South Africa, the United States facilitated and mediated negotiations to reach peace accords. Despite continued sociopolitical conflict, these accords have helped to maintain the peace in different settings.⁵ That role continues, and is heightened, amid new global polarization and increasing geopolitical tension in the wake of Russia’s breach of international norms by attempting to seize more territory from Ukraine.

Expert panel members referenced nearly a dozen cases of US engagement in peacemaking that contributed to sustainable peace agreements in the post-Cold War era. The United States is powerfully placed to wield leverage globally in a manner that balances incentives and the application of, or relief from, coercive measures. From Angola to Bosnia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, Northern Ireland, and South Africa, for example, the United States has often played—through diplomacy, development assistance, and economic levers—a pivotal partnership role in bringing long-running civil wars to peace agreements.⁶

During this same period, the United States has also significantly supported the evolution of policy, capabilities, and effectiveness of UN peacekeeping in Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia, contexts which tested the limits and

⁵ Princeton Lyman, *Partner to History: The US Role in South Africa’s Transition to Democracy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002).

⁶ See Stephen R. Weissman, “The United States Has Supported Successful Mediation in 11 Vicious Conflicts since 1990: Could Ukraine Make It an Even Dozen?,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, April 27, 2022, <https://thebulletin.org/2022/04/the-united-states-has-supported-successful-mediation-in-11-vicious-conflicts-since-1990-could-ukraine-make-it-an-even-dozen/>.

potential of peacekeeping as an effective instrument.⁷ Research shows peacekeeping in this period was a critical instrument in providing the needed credible commitment of parties in conflict to sustain peace over time.⁸ Conflicts such as the second civil war in Liberia (1999–2003), which was accompanied by atrocities such as forced child soldier recruitment, witnessed comprehensive peacekeeping operations that created the conditions for greater stability, transitional justice, and progress on the root causes of poverty, exclusion, and ethnic mobilization.

After much experience, evaluation, and introspection, practitioners in peacekeeping have learned a critical lesson: absent progress on the political track, peacekeeping as an instrument cannot be effective in addressing conflicts' root causes; there is a fundamental need to think and act politically.⁹ In contexts such as the Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan, experts have found that a lack of a core political settlement undermines peacekeeping efforts, creates “mission creep” of expanding obligations and expansive mandates, and, in some instances, may work against the motives of local actors to cooperate.

What is different about contemporary contexts, experts assert, is the relative lack of success in recent years of international mediation more broadly, including US efforts. Today's often protracted conflicts have seen recurring cycles of violence that appear resistant to such active measures by external players. Experts of US policy in response to jihadist threats point to the problematic evolution of US prioritization of militarized tactical responses of counterterrorism in contexts such as Afghanistan and Iraq. In their view, these responses have undermined US leadership roles and diplomatic efforts as a peacemaking broker among local factions, in comparison to prior periods.

The Global Fragility Act of 2019 (HR 2116) recognizes the national-security implications of conflicts and identifies the conditions for US engagement together with strategic objectives, agency- and country-specific priorities, and tools, laws, and initiatives on specific concerns. Among the focus areas of US policy and practice are the advancement of women in peace negotiations,

⁷ William J. Durch, ed., *UN Peacekeeping, American Policy and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1996).

⁸ Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices after Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁹ Jean-Marie Guéhenno, *The Fog of Peace: A Memoir of International Peacekeeping in the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2015).

prevention of atrocities and improvement of early warning, principles and effectiveness of stabilization assistance, and the relationship of these strategies and tools to counterterrorism.¹⁰ The Biden-Harris administration’s National Security Strategy of 2022 underscored the threats emanating from conflict zones, asserting that “protracted conflicts, growing fragility, a resurgence of authoritarianism, and ever-more frequent climate shocks threaten people’s lives and livelihoods and global stability.”¹¹

Experts are concerned, however, that internal polarization within the United States has diminished the US role globally at the same time that middle-level powers have become more assertive together with rising powers, like China, which have a global reach.¹² Thus, some experts contend that the United States is approached much more warily by allies and protagonists in conflicts, and, in light of global polarization dynamics, undermining perceptions of its impartiality among the conflict parties and long-term reliability as a mediator. So, too, polarization within the United States has weakened key security institutions that give collective power to international mediation. NATO, for example, played an arguably essential role in backstopping peacemaking in the Balkans in the turbulent post–Cold War period.

THE UNITED STATES THRIVES AS A QUIET MEDIATOR

Experts find that the United States thrives most when it engages as a context-specific, smart mediator: when it adopts a cautious, focused approach with clear priorities, deep knowledge of the context, awareness of the ways in which parties use violence as a “beyond-the-table” tactic, and careful weighing of the options around peace-process design, sequencing, outcomes, and implementation needs for credible commitments.¹³

¹⁰ US Department of State, “United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability,” 2020.

¹¹ The White House, “National Security Strategy: October 2022,” 19, www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.

¹² For an analysis of these dynamics in the Darfur crisis of the late 2000s, see Harriet Martin, “Power in Mediation: Does Size Matter?,” *Oslo Forum*, 2007, 36–42.

¹³ See Kristine Höglund, *Peace Negotiations in the Shadow of Violence* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2011).

In situations such as Kenya’s political crisis in 2007–08, or in support of the Colombia peace process, the United States has engaged effectively in the background as an enabler of the peace processes, providing diplomatic assurances to the parties, wielding financial support for the process and gathering pledges of bilateral assistance for the implementation, and implementing sanctions policies, considered more fully below.

One specialist termed the overall US approach in support of Colombia’s landmark peace agreement as a “skilled light touch” approach to backstopping the mediation efforts of Cuba and Norway. Experts debated, however, the extent to which generalizations can be made from the Colombia experience, and whether the success of the process in ending Latin America’s longest-running civil war had more to do with the specific conflict conditions, such as ripeness and conflict exhaustion, as opposed to deft strategic planning and the tactical choices of the mediation process.

- Experts discussed and debated to what extent assumptions about strategic interactions in peace processes are fit for contemporary conflicts. Many of the key understandings that inform policymaking, experts find, are derived from old-style Cold War deterrence thinking, and may be incorrectly applied to current contexts. Early negotiation research on peacemaking from a strategic logic perspective has been applied to analysis of key issues, such as ripeness or the conditions amenable to negotiation.
- Experts point to research findings that have improved on these earlier models of negotiation and seek to apply strategic logic thinking to peace processes. Thus, experts point to the limits of drawing lessons learned from the past based on concepts, models, and approaches that may have limited utility in the modern context. They also worry about the potential that failure to question assumptions by policymakers may lead to policy failures.¹⁴ Among the recommendations is to broaden the scope of scenario planning, for example, through traditional approaches, such as decision trees, and newer approaches that use applications to pathway and social network analysis.

¹⁴ For an example of this argument, see Joseph Stieb, “History Has No Lessons for You: A Warning for Policymakers,” *War on the Rocks* (blog), February 6, 2024.

Among these, and perhaps among the most important, is the question that continues to feature in debates on military assistance in conflict settings, such as military support for Ukraine. While the ostensible purpose may be to allow Ukraine to defend its territory and to prevent territorial loss, at least one other logic of the assistance is to further the reality and perception of a “mutually hurting stalemate,” creating favorable conditions for eventual negotiation and contributing to the perceptions of conflict exhaustion within Russia and that the conflict is “unwinnable.”

Among the critical issues on which further strategic thinking is needed is “deal closing,” as many peace processes in recent years appear to edge close to an agreement only to be spoiled in the final stretch by defecting protagonists. Further, conflicts with fractured and fragmented protagonists, for example, may require approaches of multilevel and multiform mediation rather than the long-accepted emphasis on national elite-level negotiations toward a political settlement. Rather than a peace agreement, some contexts need a new social contract, often from the bottom up.¹⁵ Some experts find that high-level elite pacts, while perhaps essential to end a war, may over time work against long-term aims of a sustainable peace grounded in local as well as national dynamics.

- Experts considered how peacemaking presents various dilemmas, and how the tough choices they necessitate limit the extent that broad policy can be developed. Among the most common dilemmas seen across case-by-case assessments of peace processes are those of inclusion, sequencing, and models, as well as scenarios related to negotiation process design.
- Experts contemplated how to focus on and prioritize the local and subnational level, engaging with nonstate armed groups and community-level drivers of extremism and radicalization. These efforts are aided by US capabilities through geolocated conflict assessment, remote sensing, and analysis of communication and narratives of local armed groups. Experts point to localized and subregional conflict assessment as one of the most promising, future applications

¹⁵ Erin McCandless, “Forging Resilient Social Contracts and Sustaining Peace: Summary of Findings of New Comparative Research,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 14, no. 1 (2019): 90–95.

of artificial intelligence to peacemaking, along with the development of alternatives and scenarios through path dependency or path analysis.

- Experts argue that the turn to special political missions by the UN and the deployment of joint UN-regional organization political missions—in South Sudan, for example—has been an overall positive development for peacemaking. They cite three principal reasons for this view: First, the older model of a personalized approach through a special envoy remains and has value; however, such envoys are better supported through UN organizational resources such as the Mediation Support Unit and they may be better positioned to engage across a wider range of issue areas in a more holistic approach through mission organization and staffing.

Second, special political missions may achieve more effective engagement at the intersection of diplomacy and security-related interventions including the deployment of military observation capabilities. On the other hand, experts report that special political missions often lack a response to noncompliance by the parties, whereas previously more comprehensive peace operations with strong Chapter 7 UN Security Council mandates were better able to provide credible commitments. Thus, there is a call by some experts for the UN to return to its original focus on improving peacekeeping effectiveness.

Finally, in engaging the UN, experts contend that in the long run there is little substitute for the effectiveness and capacity of UN specialized agencies and organizations in working within countries to prepare the conditions for peace processes, to engage in the critical issues of inclusivity in governance and constitution-making and reform, and to provide “off-ramps” to violence for armed actors through capacities in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. The United States, which has historically played a leadership role in support of UN specialized agencies, should renew and reinforce the role of the UN as an in-country actor in conflict settings. This is an essential element of US country-specific strategies such as the 10 partner countries assisted through the Global Fragility Act.

US FINANCIAL POWER IN PEACEMAKING

Some of the most challenging contemporary conflicts in which the United States has substantially engaged are those involving extensive natural resource extraction by conflict parties, and the concomitant financial flows that accompany them. In the background, or at the forefront, of many conflicts is control of land, mineral and energy resources, and water and agricultural resources, including forests.

Thus, understanding the nature of these economies and addressing the financial incentives of capital accumulation within conflicts, what some have described as “trajectories of accumulation,” must be part and parcel of an informed US strategy. While mediation efforts have historically been based on an understanding of a “mutually hurting stalemate” which might set the stage for progress in peace negotiations, in many contexts today there is a “mutually profitable stalemate” by which conflict parties thrive economically and have little incentive to pursue or accept a political settlement. US diplomatic efforts to mediate and support peacemaking processes by other states and multilateral partners involve both ethical and operational dilemmas and trade-offs, limiting the utility and effectiveness of blanket or all-encompassing strategies and policies.

- Mediators need a clearer understanding of who local protagonists are and how they may be profiting from conflict to better wield coercive leverage or support financial inducements and anti-corruption strategies. Experts argue that it is often easier for conflict protagonists to game the financial and cross-border support aspects of conflict continuation. This ability to evade or withstand punitive measures such as sanctions is a critical challenge that affects the effectiveness of US efforts to contribute to or provide the key linchpin measures that are integral to peace processes.
- Among all the incentives and potential sanctions available to mediators and peacemakers in peace processes, the most pivotal in virtually all conflict settings is the United States’ expertise, institutional capacity, and leverage in the world’s financial system to impose targeted financial sanctions. From a peacemaking perspective, little could be more important than

sanctions as an instrument to affect, isolate, or weaken a target for the purposes of affecting their positions apropos the peace negotiations.

The effectiveness of sanctions appears to depend on several critical factors. These factors include (1) the ability of belligerent groups to continue waging conflict through illicit markets or through sanctions evasion in cooperation with external patron states; (2) the consistency and credibility of the threat and the effects of calibrated sanctions and the potential for future sanctions; and (3) the extent to which the sanctions address key choke or pressure points in financial flows, or, in more simple terms, how clever they are in applying maximum pressure to a target. Research on the effectiveness of UN sanctions on peace processes found that sanctions can be used to communicate to protagonists that they are being labeled and considered spoilers. In this regard, the threat of sanctions may well be a strong lever in peace negotiations. Research has identified further how sanctions may be employed to weaken a party in conflict or to drive a wedge between recalcitrant regimes and decrease the coherence of a spoiler faction within a regime.¹⁶

- At the same time, other observers have highlighted concerns about US sanctions policy and practice in relation to conflict settings, identifying potential collateral effects of such efforts that can frustrate peacemaking efforts, such as reinforcing incentives to engage illicitly. A common complaint is that such sanctions are easier to impose than to remove. Thus, a critical lever for peacemakers, assuring permission for the removal of US sanctions, does not come easily due to legal constraints, the role of private companies, and nongovernmental organizations that worry about reputational issues and compliance with the legal and regulatory aspects of sanctions.¹⁷

¹⁶ Thomas Biersteker and Zuzana Hudáková, “UN Sanctions and Peace Negotiations: Possibilities for Complementarity,” Geneva Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, *Oslo Forum Papers* No. 004, January 2015.

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, “Sanctions, Peacemaking, and Reform: Recommendations for US Policymakers,” Crisis Group United States Report No. 8, August 28, 2023.

Experts agree that sanctions are critical levers in many peace processes, but, overall, they can be problematically sticky, imprecise as an instrument, and insufficiently flexible for mediators to effectively wield as an inducement to exchange fighting for an uncertain peace. Some experts also point to the lack of understanding of the long-term effects of sanctions in perpetuating fragility, citing the long history of sanctions in Haiti as partly explicative of the country’s near-total economic decline that fuels the crippling gangsterism and corruption that drives recurring cycles of violence.

ENGAGING WITH MULTILATERAL PARTNERS

Amid the paralysis of global geopolitics and the decline of UN peacemaking effectiveness, the United States has developed “mini-lateral” or smaller coalition engagements with states, regional organizations, and other multilateral institutions to advance peacemaking in contemporary conflicts. The nature and extent of the US role, and the constellation of partners engaged, appear to experts to vary in each instance and, at times, with little consistency of approach. For example, countries in the BRICS configuration (Brazil, China, and South Africa, particularly) have been more active in seeking to mediate conflicts. Many of the countries either joining BRICS or affiliating, such as Nigeria, have at times engaged in regional and global mediation. South African president Cyril Ramaphosa’s June 2023 effort to mediate in the Ukraine conflict, together with representatives of Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville, Egypt, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia, fell flat in part as it came at a moment of US allegations of South Africa’s support for Russia in the conflict, including claims of arms shipments.¹⁸

- With geopolitical tensions, the locus of peacemaking has shifted in part to regional organizations, particularly in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, even as regional organizations with prior peacemaking successes, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), are currently paralyzed by Russian tensions with the West.

¹⁸ Barbara Plett Usher, “Why South Africa’s Cyril Ramaphosa Is Leaning Ukraine Peace Mission,” BBC, June 16, 2023, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65916196.

In Africa, the role of the AU in the peace agreement process in Ethiopia's Tigray region capped a significant achievement for the organization's response to a civil war in a country that hosts its very own secretariat. Despite significant regional entanglements and rivalries, the AU was able to manage relations with key neighboring states, engage in bilateral negotiations with the Ethiopian government and rebel forces, and work with regional powers such as South Africa to align regional interests toward a settlement. Although some protagonists sought a longer peace process to resolve the underlying territorial and sovereignty issues, the conditions proved most ripe for an immediate ceasefire that deferred these larger political issues.¹⁹

Experts in Europe have lamented the decline in the OSCE's peacemaking efforts and the mediation paralysis that has struck the organization since the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.²⁰ In this context, the peace process leadership appears to have shifted toward Switzerland, which previously hosted negotiations and agreed to a request of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy to convene a much larger peace summit of a significant number of states in June 2024.²¹ Direct Russian participation did not materialize, even as Switzerland sought to keep the door open to inclusion and subsequent negotiation. There is wide agreement about the critical role of China in the ongoing diplomacy over a formula and process for peace negotiations in Ukraine, such that negotiations are a multilateral, multiple-level playing field.

Experts emphasize the need for and importance of multitrack diplomacy on peace in Ukraine, and the need to focus on issues of justice, resolution of the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment of Russian president Vladimir Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, the Russian commissioner for children's rights, for the unlawful deportation of children from the occupied areas of Ukraine. Experts evaluate the role of ICC indictments in peace processes, with some finding that such indictments offer leverage, while others suggest they leave protagonists with little negotiating

¹⁹ Abel Abate Demissie, "Navigating the Regionalization of Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict: How Regional and International Actors Can Help Consolidate Peace," Chatham House research paper, September 8, 2022, www.chathamhouse.org/2023/09/navigating-regionalization-ethiopias-tigray-conflict/02-mediation-efforts-and-role-regional.

²⁰ See the interview with former OSCE official Fred Tanner, "The Quest for Peace in Ukraine," Geneva Policy Outlook, February 5, 2024, www.genevapolicyoutlook.ch/the-quest-for-peace-in-ukraine/.

²¹ Simon Bradley, "All You Need to Know about the Ukraine Peace Summit in Switzerland," Swissinfo.ch (FDFA), April 10, 2024; and the WLMAP is the subject of the documentary *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, directed by Gini Reticker, 2008, www.imdb.com/title/tt1202203/.

flexibility and may prolong peace settlements. In the evolving and uncertain future of Ukraine peace negotiations, it is likely too early to tell.

In some historical instances, though, ICC indictments have been ostensibly beneficial to peacemaking; in bringing Liberia’s second civil war to an end, the 2003 indictment of former Liberian president Charles Taylor removed a “big man” which allowed for the eventual clinching of a peace agreement to end the war by way of peace talks in Accra. In this case, the international indictment allowed a women-led peace movement, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace (WLMAP), to succeed in pressing the warring factions to accept a peace agreement in response to their demands to stop the war through mass action.²²

Finally, the expert panel discussed two important points regarding the US-UN relationship going forward. First, it may well be in the United States’ interest to advocate for reform of the UN Security Council, an observation which is echoed in the “Ripple Effect” report on new directions in US foreign policy. While there is no shortage of alternatives for, for example, weighted voting as a way to circumvent the Cold War–era and historically path-dependent Russia veto in the UN Security Council, experts tend to agree that the problem is one of a lack of an acceptable process for reform and the divergent interests of countries such as Brazil and Germany versus a larger group of states that might include, for example, Poland or Pakistan.²³

Second, the United States must continue to stay engaged to support the at-times mission-critical role of the expertise within the UN Secretariat and mechanisms such as the Mediation Support Unit and Standby Team of Experts within the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs as an essential knowledge repository of both the technical and political process lessons learned in peacemaking.

²² The role of women in the Accra negotiations is described in the Global Nonviolent Action Database, Swarthmore College, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/liberian-women-act-end-civil-war-2003>.

²³ For analysis, see Peter Wallensteen, “Representing the World: A Security Council for the 21st Century,” in Peter Wallensteen, *Peter Wallensteen: A Pioneer in Making Peace Researchable* (New York: Springer, 2021): 239–51.

ENGAGING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS: THE GLOBAL FRAGILITY ACT

Experts find that civil society support in successful prior peace processes was the essential feature that led to more sustainable peace agreements. Such extensive engagement by civil society is not a major feature of current conflict contexts and this frustrates official US and multilateral efforts to secure negotiated peace agreements.

- A central asset of the United States is its ability to support multiple tracks of mediation that involve soft-power approaches that back US civil society organization support for peace processes and, through development assistance, local actors in conflict contexts who are engaged.

Experts argue that a critical power of the United States lies in its ability to wield soft power, or resource support, to those with the localized capacity to create the underlying social basis for peace negotiations and to undermine the elite-level disputes that fuel conflicts. The adoption of the Global Fragility Act in 2019 was a major step in the evolution of US policy toward a more holistic approach that gives meaning to the United States' interest in selective engagements when its pivotal role can be most effective. In 2023, the Biden administration, in compliance with the act, submitted its 10-year plan for stabilization and peacemaking in four of 10 priority countries—Haiti, Libya, Mozambique, and Papua New Guinea—and a regional plan for coastal West Africa. Adopted with bipartisan support, the act grew out of a coalition of some 100 US organizations engaged in peacebuilding, humanitarian relief, and development, as well as faith-based charities aiming to redefine the US approach to conflict and fragility, constituting a critical turning point toward a more effective US policy.²⁴

In peacemaking, experts argue that much of the US power to further peace negotiations comes from its ability to support organizations with high levels of experience, competency, and a track

²⁴ See Susanna P. Campbell, “Implementing the Global Fragility Act: From Policy to Strategy,” Mercy Corps, April 2020; and Corinne Graff, “What’s the State of Play on the Global Fragility Act?,” U.S. Institute of Peace Analysis, March 29, 2023.

record of advancing US interests through development and security-related assistance. Experts particularly find that in prior periods such as the 1990s, the United States was more deeply involved in supporting two-track and multitrack diplomacy efforts, and that there should be renewed investments in this soft-power tool.

Experts find there are significant opportunities for enhancing US capabilities for effective use of knowledge in backstopping peacemaking efforts. Two areas are particularly ripe for development: innovative approaches to remote monitoring of ceasefire violation coding and data collection of a wider range of violations; second, because enforcement mechanisms remain insufficient, intelligence insights can be better harnessed to invoke self- or internal-enforcement mechanisms by conflict parties.²⁵

Experts point to the initiatives of the US strategy on fragility as indicative of the right types of US efforts that aid peacemaking more broadly. For example, the focus on women, peace, and security is grounded not only in normative considerations of the role that women can play in peace processes, but on the demonstrative, evidence-based role that associates progress in women's rights, participation, and security as the basis for local-level societal peace. Further implementation and advancement of the June 2019 Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security is warranted.

Overall, experts are generally in consensus that greater localized evidence-based knowledge and information are critical to success in peacemaking efforts, and that the United States needs to continuously improve its capabilities for highly localized and informed conflict assessment.²⁶

RENEWING THE US ROLE

More effective policies and operational strategies for peacemaking are urgently required. Armed conflicts have increased, intensified, and, through atrocities and gross violations of human rights,

²⁵ Aly Verjee, "Monitoring Cease-fires Is Getting Harder: Greater Innovation is Required," Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Oslo Forum Peacemaker Prize, 2019.

²⁶ Corinne Graff, "What Afghanistan Teaches Us about Evidence-Based Policy," US Institute of Peace Analysis, December 2, 2021, www.usip.org/publications/2021/12/what-afghanistan-teaches-us-about-evidence-based-policy.

threaten the rules-based international order. Experts find that the United States must further renew and reinvest in policies and approaches to peacemaking or continue to bear inordinate costs for providing unending, and increasingly costly, humanitarian relief. Despite pledges of “never again,” conflict atrocities will continue to occur and pose threats to US national security.

While the Global Fragility Act is a landmark framework for achieving a less reactive, smarter, and more holistic approach to conflicts that get at the political and economic drivers of instability, such efforts may have limited value in stemming the humanitarian costs of conflict and in preventing further atrocities in the absence of overarching peace agreements.

- More work is needed on understanding the dynamics of and developing coherent strategies and policy options for addressing internationalized intrastate conflicts, especially those with significant foreign fighters and backers of external protagonists.²⁷ Among the major issues on which further knowledge, policy analysis, and practical options are needed include negotiating foreign troop withdrawals, and curtailing outside military assistance to the parties when they are used as proxies.

In situations such as Sudan, where these dynamics have contributed to obstacles for peacemaking efforts, regional approaches appear required if the complexities of internationalized intrastate conflicts are to be effectively addressed. While the examples of Sudan and Syria point to the challenges of negotiating peace in regional conflict complexes, historical cases indicate that the United States can be successful in leading mediation in such complicated, internationalized intrastate conflicts. In the late 1980s, as the Cold War came to an end, US diplomacy was central to the 1998 peace accords in Angola’s civil war (1976–88) that led to the independence of Namibia.²⁸

In response to the public’s leading concerns about addressing threats to its safety appearing in the form of internationally inspired terrorism, targeted efforts are needed to end the conflicts

²⁷ For analysis, see Sean William Kane, “Making Peace When the Whole World Has Come to Fight: The Mediation of Internationalized Civil Wars,” *International Peacekeeping* 29, no. 2 (2022): 177–203.

²⁸ Chester A. Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992).

globally which create the conditions for radicalization, proliferation of extremist groups, and development of such groups' capacity to conduct terrorist operations. Peacemaking appears an essential element of the "prevention architecture" for counterterrorism, reducing the heavy burden on the United States as both a contributor and target of this turbulent era.

CONCLUSION: RECENTERING PEACEMAKING IN US FOREIGN POLICY

This discussion paper underscores the pivotal role that the United States has played, continues to play, and must now adapt and carry forward as a changing peacemaking environment and a different era of turbulence unfolds. The United States not only has a long history as a mediator, but it has also been the largest financial supporter of humanitarian relief efforts through the UN and independently. Peacemaking bears direct consequences to several domestic issues and concerns of relevance to the US public. Accordingly, recentering peacemaking in US foreign policy is a critical outcome of the PTW expert discussion. Key lessons learned from this paper highlight the following recommendations for the United States.

- The United States needs to be cognizant of the unintended consequences of prolonging conflict through humanitarian assistance and, in some instances, through its approach to security assistance. The military, political, and economic tracks of peacemaking are intricately related and should be carefully calibrated toward a strategic end. Experts emphasize that, at the end of the day, US interests are best served by sustainable political agreements that demilitarize conflicts. Furthermore, progress on the political track is both inherent in and instrumental to the US national-security interest of limiting militarization, the need for costly security assistance, and contributions to humanitarian assistance.
- The United States must carefully choose and consider partnerships for peacemaking. Some experts contend that the United States must work to reassure allies and conflict parties about its long-term reliability. The United States does not have to always take the lead in a peace process

but can make a critical difference in supporting the process, employing a “skilled light touch” approach.

- One of the most important findings of scholars on peace agreements and the processes by which they are negotiated and mediated is the importance of first, as a strategic priority, identifying the preferred outcome dimensions that can best lead to sustained peace in a context. Only with this critical first-order understanding in place is it then appropriate to map out a peace process to realize the aim. “Putting the outcome dimension first” is the notion that strategic decisions should be made to identify the range of possible and preferred outcomes, and to develop policies that can help produce a favored outcome in which peace can be best sustained over time. Critically, for example, experts find that there is the need to consider short-, medium-, and long-term security frameworks for peace agreement implementation that typically involves multistep political transitions. Thus, long-term strategy is required for successful short-term decision-making.
- Successful third-party efforts may entail multilevel and multiform approaches rather than national elite-level efforts. It is also important to work at the local and subnational levels, engaging with all multilateral and local stakeholders, including nonstate armed groups and extremist actors.

