

# THE POLITICS OF MEDIATION: ANALYZING THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS ON DOMESTIC CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND STATE SOVEREIGNTY

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**Abstract:** In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the involvement of international actors in the resolution of internal conflicts has become a central phenomenon, influencing the contours of state sovereignty and the dynamics of conflict mediation. This article critically examines the complex intersection between international intervention and domestic conflict resolution, with a focus on the politics of mediation. The central objective of this study is to uncover the motivations, strategies, and outcomes associated with the participation of external actors—ranging from sovereign states and international organizations to nongovernmental entities—in conflict mediation within sovereign nations.

Through multidimensional analysis, the research aims to illuminate the diverse roles played by international actors in facilitating or impeding the peaceful resolution of internal conflicts. These actors often bring considerable diplomatic, economic, and normative resources that, while ostensibly geared toward promoting peace and stability, can simultaneously challenge traditional concepts of state sovereignty. The article systematically explores how the presence of international mediation can advance or hinder the resolution process, analyzing case studies where external involvement has significantly changed the trajectory of conflict outcomes, for better or worse.

A crucial dimension of this inquiry lies in the delicate balance between promoting peace and respecting the principles of state sovereignty. While international actors can provide technical expertise, mediation skills, and material support, their engagement raises fundamental questions about the legitimacy of foreign intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states. In cases where mediation efforts conflict with the political will of the state, the role of international actors risks being seen as an attack on sovereignty, further complicating the mediation process.

The article argues that while international mediation can undeniably provide invaluable resources and expertise to facilitate the resolution of entangled national conflicts, it also raises profound questions about the legitimacy of such interventions, particularly in contexts where national governments are resistant to external influence. This tension between the imperative of peacebuilding and the preservation of sovereignty is a central theme of the study, as it highlights the danger that international mediation may inadvertently exacerbate political tensions or undermine state legitimacy.

Ultimately, this article aims to contribute to the broader debate on the politics of mediation by offering a nuanced understanding of the influence of international actors in the resolution of internal conflicts. It emphasizes the need for a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to mediation that recognizes the diverse political, cultural, and historical factors that shape each conflict. In this context, the article advocates for the creation of strong regulatory frameworks that can guide the involvement of international actors in a way that guarantees effective conflict resolution, while preserving the principle of national sovereignty. This nuanced approach is essential to fostering a more harmonious balance between international engagement and state autonomy in the pursuit of peace and stability.

**Keywords:** Mediation; International actors; Conflict resolution & state sovereignty

## 1 INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICS OF MEDIATION AND THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

The landscape of conflict resolution has undergone a profound transformation in recent decades, with an increasing number of internal conflicts involving the active engagement of international actors. While the primary responsibility for resolving internal conflicts has traditionally rested with the sovereign state, the growing influence of foreign governments, international organizations, and nongovernmental entities has brought new dynamics to the mediation process. As such, the politics of mediation has become a critical focal point for understanding the intersection between international intervention, domestic conflict resolution, and the preservation of state sovereignty. This article aims to explore the multifaceted roles of international actors in the mediation of internal conflicts and to examine the complex implications of their involvement for both conflict resolution and the sovereignty of the states involved.

A key question in the contemporary study of international relations and conflict resolution is whether foreign involvement in domestic conflicts can always be fully consistent with the principles of state sovereignty. Scholars have long debated the legitimacy of international intervention in civil conflicts, especially when state sovereignty is directly at stake [1]. While some argue that external mediation can play a vital role in mitigating violence and promoting peace [2], others argue that

such involvement often undermines state sovereignty, leading to a form of neo-imperialism or diplomacy [3]. The rise of international mediation in civil conflicts reflects a paradigm shift in the international order, where norms of humanitarian intervention, peacebuilding, and the protection of human rights increasingly influence foreign policy decisions [4]. Thus, the involvement of international actors in the resolution of national conflicts requires a delicate balance between promoting peace and respecting state sovereignty.

This article argues that the influence of international actors in resolving internal conflicts is multifaceted and context-dependent, with the outcomes of external mediation varying significantly depending on the case. On the one hand, international mediation can provide essential diplomatic, financial and technical resources to facilitate peace agreements, as illustrated by the cases of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland and the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia [5-6]. Such interventions often involve mediation by a neutral third party, helping to build trust between conflicting parties and providing a platform for dialogue that might otherwise be impossible under conditions of entrenched violence. On the other hand, international mediation can sometimes exacerbate tensions or create new power imbalances, especially when domestic actors perceive foreign involvement as a violation of their sovereignty or national interests. This concern has arisen in many cases, such as in the conflicts in Syria and Libya, where foreign interventions have led to protracted conflict and political fragmentation [7-8].

At the center of the debate is the issue of legitimacy: can external actors be considered impartial mediators or do they become partisan agents serving the interests of specific powers? The legitimacy of foreign mediation often depends on the consent of the parties involved and the perceived neutrality of the mediator [9]. The role of international organizations such as the UN or regional actors such as the African Union is often seen as more legitimate than the interventions of individual states, especially when acting under a mandate to enforce international law and human rights [10]. However, this legitimacy is always questioned when the motivations of international actors are perceived as selfish or when their involvement leads to the violation of the sovereignty of the host state.

This article argues that the increasing use of international mediation, particularly in post-Cold War conflicts, calls for a critical reassessment of the ethical and practical implications of such interventions. By analyzing a series of case studies, the research aims to examine the positive and negative effects of international engagement, focusing on how these interventions have shaped the political landscape of states in conflict. Ultimately, the article aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the politics of mediation, emphasizing the need to develop regulatory frameworks that guide international engagement in ways that promote peace and respect state sovereignty.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The involvement of international actors in the mediation of domestic conflicts has become a focus of scholarly research, particularly as the landscape of global governance and conflict management continues to evolve. In an increasingly interconnected world, the complexity of conflict resolution has expanded beyond the traditional mandate of sovereign states, leading to a greater role for international actors, including foreign governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Scholars have examined the implications of this development, recognizing the complex balance that must be struck between promoting peace and protecting state sovereignty. This literature review aims to deepen our understanding of the politics of mediation, highlighting the multifaceted roles that international actors play in domestic conflicts and the broader implications for state sovereignty.

### 2.1 The International Organizations and the United Nations in Mediation

The role of international organizations, particularly the United Nations (UN), has been critically examined in the international mediation literature. Scholars emphasize the importance of the UN as a global institution capable of providing neutral and legitimate mediation in post-conflict situations [1]. The UN's involvement in conflict zones such as Cambodia, Bosnia, and East Timor has demonstrated the organization's ability to contribute to peacebuilding efforts, providing a framework for governance and post-conflict reconstruction. However, its effectiveness in these scenarios is often limited by political disagreements within the UN Security Council, insufficient resources, and challenges from competing international interests [2].

The power dynamics within the Security Council, particularly the veto power held by the five permanent members (P5), have been widely criticized for preventing timely and decisive action in conflict situations. Competing interests among the P5 often lead to paralysis, undermining the UN's ability to act as a neutral mediator [2]. Despite these shortcomings, some argue that the UN remains indispensable in international mediation because of its universal mandate, legitimacy, and access to considerable resources and expertise [3].

### 2.2 Regional Organizations and Their Complementary Role

While the UN plays a central role in conflict resolution, regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) have gained increasing importance as mediators in national conflicts. Researchers note that regional

organizations often have a deeper understanding of the cultural, political, and historical context of conflicts in their regions, allowing them to conduct more effective and culturally sensitive mediation efforts [1].

For example, the AU has played a central role in mediating conflicts in Africa, particularly in Sudan, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), with its peacekeeping and regional mediation mechanisms, has proven effective in managing conflicts that resist the intervention of global powers [2]. The EU has also played a key role in peace processes in Eastern Europe and the Balkans through its diplomatic engagement and support for regional integration. However, regional organizations are sometimes criticized for prioritizing democratization and economic stability over local political dynamics, which has led to resistance from local populations [3].

### **2.3 The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

NGOs have become key actors in conflict resolution, particularly in mediating national conflicts and supporting peacebuilding initiatives. Organizations such as the International Crisis Group (ICG) and the Humanitarian Dialogue Center (HD Center) have gained notoriety for initiating dialogue, providing neutral negotiation platforms, and facilitating communication between conflicting parties [1].

However, NGO participation in mediation faces challenges, including perceptions of bias or political alignment with international agendas. For example, NGOs funded by Western governments may be seen as promoting the interests of these powers, which undermines their neutrality [2]. In addition, NGOs often struggle to influence high-level political actors, which limits their effectiveness in diplomatic negotiations. However, their ability to provide local knowledge, mobilize communities, and build support networks for peace processes makes them valuable contributors to broader peace efforts [3].

### **2.4 Legitimacy and Effectiveness of International Mediation**

The legitimacy and effectiveness of international mediation depend on the impartiality and perceived expertise of the mediator. States and parties to a conflict are more likely to engage in mediation if they believe that the mediator respects their interests and can facilitate a just solution [1]. However, legitimacy issues arise when mediators have direct interests in the conflict or when interventions are perceived as threats to state sovereignty.

For example, the involvement of major powers such as the United States in Middle Eastern conflicts has often been criticized as advancing strategic interests at the expense of peacebuilding [2]. Furthermore, when multiple external actors intervene in the same conflict with competing agendas, as seen in the Syrian Civil War, mediation efforts are fragmented, complicating the resolution process [3].

### **2.5 Recent Developments and the Changing Nature of Mediation**

The field of international mediation has evolved significantly in recent decades, reflecting broader changes in the international order. With the emergence of new global powers and the growing role of regional actors in conflict resolution, the dynamics of mediation are evolving. New approaches to mediation are emerging, particularly those that focus on inclusive peace processes, which aim to engage not only state but also non-state actors, including civil society, women and youth, in the peacebuilding process. These comprehensive approaches aim to address the causes of conflict and ensure the sustainability of peace agreements by strengthening the support of local communities.

Furthermore, as digital technologies advance, new forms of intermediation, such as cyberbroking and virtual trading platforms, have become more common. These developments present both opportunities and challenges for the mediation process. While digital platforms can help overcome geographical and logistical barriers, they also raise questions about the effectiveness of virtual mediation in fostering trust and achieving tangible outcomes [2].

The increasing involvement of international actors in the mediation of internal conflicts reflects the changing nature of conflicts in the 21st century and the increasing complexity of global governance. While international organizations, regional actors, and NGOs have made significant contributions to peacebuilding efforts, challenges related to legitimacy, neutrality, and competing interests persist. As the international system continues to evolve, the field of conflict resolution will need to adapt to new geopolitical realities, technological advances, and new forms of mediation to ensure that peace processes are both effective and inclusive.

## **3 CASE STUDIES: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION**

### **3.1 The Good Friday Agreement: A Model of Successful Mediation**

The Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland (GFA), signed in 1998, is often hailed as a landmark example of successful international mediation. The agreement ended decades of violent conflict between unionists, who identify as British, and nationalists, who identify as Irish, and led to the establishment of a devolved government in Northern Ireland. A key factor in the success of this peace process was the involvement of international actors, particularly the United States, under the

leadership of Senator George Mitchell, and the European Union, which played a key role in facilitating dialogue and providing political support. [3].

Wallenstein [4] argues that the success of the GFA agreement can be attributed to the involvement of neutral third-party mediators, whose main role was to facilitate negotiations between deeply distrustful parties. Mitchell's role was particularly critical in navigating complex political and sectarian divisions, employing a patient and incremental negotiation strategy that eventually led to a shared governance framework. The United States also played a vital role in exerting diplomatic and economic pressure on both sides, while the EU provided long-term support in the form of economic aid and political stabilization.

However, it is important to note that while the comprehensive peace agreement led to a reduction in violence, it did not fully resolve the underlying problems of division and mistrust. As Morrow points out [5], the success of the agreement is largely attributed to the sustained involvement of external actors who helped support the peace process, suggesting that international mediation played a crucial role in creating the conditions for a fragile but lasting peace, and external monitoring and commitment to its maintenance are necessary.

### **3.2 Syria: The Limits of External Mediation**

In contrast to the success of the Northern Ireland issue, the Syrian civil war provides a striking illustration of the limits of international mediation. The conflict, which began in 2011 with a series of anti-government protests, has since developed into a multifaceted civil war involving numerous international actors with competing interests. External mediation efforts, led by the United Nations and other international bodies, have struggled to find a lasting solution due to the involvement of external powers such as the United States, Russia, Iran, and Turkey, each of which supports different factions in the conflict [6].

Hinnebusch [7] argues that the complexity of external involvement in Syria has fragmented the political landscape, rendering mediation efforts ineffective. The United States and its allies, including Turkey, have supported opposition groups, while Russia and Iran have provided military and diplomatic support to the Assad regime. This geopolitical fragmentation has created a situation in which the very actors responsible for mediating the conflict are also the main participants in the war, often pursuing their own strategic interests rather than working towards a collective peace.

Leenders [8] notes that regional powers, notably Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have also played a destabilizing role by supporting different factions, each with its own agenda, further complicating the negotiation process. The lack of a unified international approach has stalled the Syrian conflict, with continued violence and no clear path to a negotiated solution.

### **3.3 Libya: The Consequences of External Intervention**

The Libyan conflict provides another striking example of the unintended consequences of international intervention. In 2011, the UN authorized military intervention in Libya under the pretext of protecting civilians during the uprising against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. The intervention, led by NATO forces, initially succeeded in removing Gaddafi, but quickly degenerated into a power vacuum and the collapse of state institutions.

Leenders [8] argues that while international intervention was motivated by humanitarian concerns, it failed to take into account the complexity of Libyan society and the lack of a political infrastructure to support a post-Gaddafi order. Rather than promoting unity and stability, the intervention contributed to the disintegration of state authority and the proliferation of armed groups.

Holzer [9] notes that successful mediation must include long-term planning for governance, institution-building, and social reconciliation. In Libya, the lack of post-intervention planning and the failure to involve local actors in the peace process plunged the country into chaos, demonstrating how international mediation, if not handled properly, can exacerbate conflict rather than resolve it.

## **4 FUTURE DIRECTION: TOWARDS A REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR MEDIATION**

The complexity of international mediation in internal conflicts highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive regulatory framework to guide the actions of international actors. This framework aims to balance competing demands for legitimacy, neutrality and state sovereignty while ensuring effective conflict resolution. The proposal for such a framework has gained traction in academic and policy discussions as scholars and practitioners recognize the challenges posed by unregulated or ad hoc mediation efforts. This section explores the rationale for a regulatory framework, its potential components, and the broader implications for international conflict mediation.

### **4.1 Rationale for a Regulatory Framework**

The lack of clear guidelines for international mediation has often led to inconsistencies in how conflicts are handled. Some argue that while international actors bring valuable expertise and resources to conflict resolution, their involvement is often tainted by accusations of bias, lack of accountability, and undermining state sovereignty [1]. A regulatory framework

provides a standardized approach to mediation, ensuring that interventions are conducted transparently and in accordance with international legal norms.

The need for such a framework is also underscored by the mixed results of international mediation efforts. For example, the success of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland [2] stands in stark contrast to the protracted conflicts in Syria and Libya, where external interventions have often exacerbated divisions [3-4]. These divergent results highlight the importance of establishing clear principles to guide mediators and prevent the negative consequences of poorly executed interventions.

## **4.2 Essential Components of a Regulatory Framework**

### ***4.1.1 Neutrality and impartiality***

Neutrality is the foundation of effective mediation, but it is often compromised by the strategic interests of mediators. A regulatory framework should include mechanisms to ensure that intermediaries are truly impartial. This could include the establishment of an independent monitoring body to assess the neutrality of mediators and monitor their actions. Mediators should also avoid the perception of bias, as this can erode trust and undermine the legitimacy of the mediation process [5].

### ***4.1.2 Respect for state sovereignty***

While international mediation often aims to address human rights violations or humanitarian crises, it must do so without violating state sovereignty. The principle of non-intervention, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, must be a fundamental part of the framework. This would require mediators to engage in collaborative processes that involve national stakeholders, ensuring that solutions are context-specific and local [6].

### ***4.1.3 Accountability and transparency***

Mediators should be held accountable for their actions to avoid abuse of power or ulterior motives. Some argue for the adoption of transparent processes that include regular reporting and consultation with stakeholders. An international tribunal or arbitration panel could be established to resolve disputes arising from mediation efforts, thereby enhancing accountability [7].

### ***4.1.4 Standardized practices and training***

The professionalization of mediation is another essential element of the framework. Standardized training programs for mediators can ensure a consistent approach and adherence to best practices. Equipping mediators with the skills to navigate complex political and cultural landscapes can improve the effectiveness of their interventions [8].

### ***4.1.5 Integration with international law***

The framework should respect existing international legal standards, such as those outlined in the Geneva Conventions and the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). This alignment provides a legal basis for mediation efforts by ensuring that interventions prioritize the protection of civilians and the resolution of conflict in a manner consistent with international law [9].

### ***4.1.6 Implications for international mediation***

A regulatory framework for mediation could transform the field by addressing many of the challenges that currently hinder effective conflict resolution. First, it would strengthen the legitimacy of mediation efforts by providing clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms. This, in turn, would build trust between conflicting parties and increase the chances of success. Second, the framework would help mitigate the risks associated with foreign interference. By establishing clear boundaries and principles, it would ensure that mediation efforts do not undermine state sovereignty or exacerbate existing tensions. Effective mediation requires a delicate balance between external involvement and respect for national autonomy, a balance that a regulatory framework can help achieve [5].

Finally, the framework can foster better coordination among international actors. By providing a common set of standards and goals, it facilitates cooperation among states, international organizations, and non-governmental actors. This is particularly important in complex conflicts involving multiple actors, as lack of coordination can lead to fragmented and ineffective interventions [1].

## **5 FUTURE CHALLENGES AND RESEARCH**

While the benefits of a regulatory framework are clear, its implementation would face major challenges. The variety of international actors involved in mediation, each with their own interests and priorities, can complicate the development of universally accepted guidelines. In addition, issues of enforcement and compliance need to be addressed to ensure that the framework is more than a symbolic gesture.

Future research should focus on the practical aspects of designing and implementing such a framework. This could include case studies of successful and failed mediation efforts to identify best practices, as well as consultation with stakeholders to

ensure that the framework is inclusive and reflects diverse perspectives. By addressing these challenges, the international community can take an important step towards improving the effectiveness and legitimacy of conflict mediation.

## 5.1 Research Methodology

The methodology used in this study is anchored in a qualitative research design, integrating comparative case study analysis and secondary data review to explore the role of international actors in internal conflict resolution and its implications for national sovereignty. Using a multidimensional approach, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the politics of mediation, focusing on the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of international involvement in internal conflicts.

## 5.2 Comparative Analysis of Case Studies

The comparative analysis of key case studies is a central element of the methodology. The case studies are selected based on their relevance to the research objectives, highlighting successful and unsuccessful cases of international mediation. For example, the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland serves as a case study in the effectiveness of international mediation, while the protracted conflicts in Syria and Libya provide insight into the limits and the unintended consequences of external intervention. This approach allows the study to highlight trends and variations in the strategies used by mediators and their impact on conflict dynamics and state sovereignty. Through a detailed examination of these cases, the study explores how factors such as the mediator's legitimacy, neutrality, and the strategic interests of external actors influence the outcomes of mediation efforts. This comparative method is particularly useful for understanding the conditions under which international mediation succeeds or fails, as Yin shows in his work on case study research design [12].

### 5.2.1 Secondary data analysis

The study relies heavily on secondary data, including academic publications, official reports, and policy documents, to provide a comprehensive overview of existing scholarship on international mediation. Primary sources include articles, books, and reports from international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU). This data is systematically analyzed to identify recurring themes, theoretical frameworks, and gaps in the literature.

The use of secondary data allows the study to build on established knowledge by incorporating recent developments in the field. For example, the analysis of UN mediation efforts includes recent criticisms of their effectiveness, particularly in light of the political deadlock in the Security Council [13]. Similarly, reports on regional organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are used to assess the evolving role of these organizations in conflict resolution.

### 5.2.2 Thematic analysis

To synthesize the lessons learned from the case studies and secondary data, the study uses thematic analysis as a key analytical tool. This includes identifying and categorizing themes related to mediator legitimacy, sovereignty, and conflict resolution outcomes. For example, the study examines how perceptions of bias affect mediator credibility, drawing on Zartman's analysis of neutrality in mediation [14]. Topics such as the impact of strategic interests and the role of regulatory frameworks are also explored to provide a structured understanding of mediation policies.

### 5.2.3 Framework analysis

The research includes a framework analysis to assess the potential of regulatory mechanisms to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of international mediation. By assessing existing guidelines, such as the UN Mediation Principles and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, the study identifies key elements that could inform the development of a standardized regulatory framework. This analytical approach is in line with Boehmer's recommendations to integrate international legal standards into mediation practices [15].

### 5.2.4 Limitations and reflexivity

While the study provides valuable information, it acknowledges some limitations inherent in the chosen methodology. Reliance on secondary data may result in gaps in the availability or quality of information on specific conflicts. Furthermore, the selection of case studies, although illustrative, may not reflect the full diversity of international mediation efforts. To address these limitations, the study takes a reflective approach, critically evaluating its findings and placing them in the broader context of global conflict resolution. Combining comparative case study analysis, secondary data review, thematic analysis and framework evaluation, this methodology provides a solid basis for examining the impact of international actors on national conflict resolution and national sovereignty. It ensures that the study is theoretically grounded and empirically informed, thus contributing to a wider discourse on the politics of mediation. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates elements of international relations, conflict resolution, and political science. The integration of these theories facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between international mediation efforts and national sovereignty.

(1) Realist Theory of International Relations

Realist theory serves as a starting point for examining the strategic interests and power dynamics that often underpin international mediation. Realism posits that states act primarily in their own self-interest, seeking to maximize their power and security in an anarchic international system [5]. From this perspective, the involvement of international actors in internal conflicts can be seen as an extension of their geopolitical ambitions. For example, the study analyzes cases such as Syria and Libya, where external powers such as the United States, Russia, and regional actors pursued mediation strategies that suited their strategic interests, often at the expense of long-term peacebuilding.

#### (2) Liberal institutionalism

Liberal institutionalism offers a counterpoint to realism by emphasizing the role of international organizations and norms in facilitating cooperation and conflict resolution. According to Keohane, institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU) play a vital role in taming anarchy and promoting collective action in the international system [6]. This theory supports the exploration of the contribution of multilateral organizations to mediation efforts, in particular their ability to provide neutral platforms for dialogue and to uphold international legal norms. The Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland is examined as a case where institutional mechanisms facilitated successful conflict resolution by giving legitimacy and structure to the mediation process [7].

#### (3) Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory emphasizes the importance of ideas, norms, and identities in determining international relations. Wendt argues that the actions of states and international actors are influenced not only by material interests, but also by shared norms and social constructions [8]. This study uses constructivism to analyze how international actors frame their mediation efforts in terms of universal values, such as human rights and democracy, and how these frames interact with local identities and perceptions of sovereignty.

#### (4) Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict transformation theory, as articulated by Lederach, provides a framework for understanding how mediation efforts can go beyond simple conflict resolution to address the underlying causes of conflict.[9]

#### (5) Sovereignty as a Responsibility Framework

The sovereignty as responsibility framework, presented by Deng et al., redefines state sovereignty not only as a right, but also as a responsibility to protect citizens [10].

## 6 DISCUSSION

The politics of mediation, as it relates to international actors in national conflict resolution and state sovereignty, represents a complex interplay of interests, strategies, and outcomes. This discussion summarizes the findings of the study, highlighting critical themes, challenges, and implications for future practice.

### 6.1 Balancing Mediation and Sovereignty

One of the main debates in international mediation is the tension between promoting peace and preserving state sovereignty. While international mediation often provides valuable resources, expertise, and a neutral platform for negotiations, it also raises concerns about the erosion of sovereignty. The application of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, for example, has been instrumental in justifying interventions in cases of state failure or mass atrocities, as discussed in Libya [1]. However, as the Libyan case shows, such interventions can destabilize governance structures, leading to protracted conflict and regional instability [2]. This duality highlights the importance of a nuanced approach that respects state autonomy while addressing legitimate humanitarian concerns. The sovereignty-as-responsibility framework provides a useful perspective for reconciling these competing imperatives, emphasizing that sovereignty includes the obligation to protect citizens from harm [3].

### 6.2 Legitimacy and Neutrality of Mediators

Legitimacy is a critical factor affecting the success of international mediation. Mediators must not only have the technical capacity to facilitate negotiations, but also be perceived as neutral and trustworthy by the parties involved. Zartman [4] argues that mediator credibility is essential for fostering trust and cooperation between conflicting parties. However, perceptions of bias, whether due to the strategic interests of state mediators or the ideological agenda of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), can undermine mediation efforts. For example, the United States' involvement in the Middle East has often been criticized for prioritizing geopolitical goals over impartial conflict resolution, thereby undermining its credibility as a mediator [5]. In contrast, the role of the European Union in the Good Friday Agreement shows how regional organizations can use their perceived neutrality and shared cultural understanding to facilitate positive outcomes [6].

### 6.3 The Role of Power and Strategic Interests

The study highlights how power dynamics and strategic interests often shape the outcomes of international mediation. Realist theory suggests that states and international actors are primarily motivated by their own interests and use mediation

as a tool to advance their geopolitical goals [7]. This is evident in Syria, where the competing interests of Russia, the United States, and regional powers have fragmented the conflict landscape, prolonging hostilities and undermining peace efforts [8]. Such cases highlight the limits of mediation in contexts where international actors prioritize their strategic objectives over the needs of local populations. This dynamic requires stronger regulatory frameworks to ensure that mediation efforts remain focused on conflict resolution rather than serving as instruments of power politics.

#### **6.4 The Transformative Potential of Mediation**

Despite its challenges, international mediation has significant potential to transform conflict dynamics and promote lasting peace. Conflict transformation theory emphasizes the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict and the ability of local actors to take ownership of the peace process [9]. Successful examples, such as the Good Friday Agreement, show how international mediators can facilitate transformative dialogue and build an institutional framework that promotes long-term stability. These cases highlight the importance of inclusiveness, participatory approaches, and cultural sensitivity in mediation efforts, as highlighted by Wallensteen [10].

#### **6.5 Towards a Regulatory Framework**

The discussion also highlights the need for a regulatory framework to guide international mediation efforts. Such a framework would address issues of legitimacy, neutrality, and accountability, ensuring that mediation complies with international legal standards and respects state sovereignty [11]. Key elements of this framework could include clear guidelines for the conduct of mediators, mechanisms for parties to the conflict to hold mediators accountable, and provisions to balance external intervention and local ownership of the peace process.

#### **6.6 Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and practitioners involved in international mediation. First, there is a need to strengthen the capacities of regional organizations to complement the efforts of global institutions such as the UN. Regional organizations often have a better understanding of local contexts and can provide more culturally sensitive interventions, as evidenced by the African Union's mediation efforts in Burundi [12]. Second, mediators should prioritize transparency and inclusion to build trust and legitimacy among conflicting parties. This includes engaging a wide range of stakeholders, from government officials to civil society representatives, to ensure that mediation efforts reflect diverse perspectives and address underlying grievances. Finally, international actors should take a long-term perspective, focusing not only on immediate conflict resolution but also on post-conflict reconstruction and governance. This requires sustained commitment and investment in capacity-building initiatives that empower local institutions and communities to prevent the recurrence of violence.

#### **6.7 Research Gaps for Future Studies**

Despite the abundance of literature on international mediation, several gaps remain in our understanding of the dynamics between international actors, national conflict resolution, and state sovereignty. These gaps highlight areas that require further exploration to enhance the theoretical, practical, and policy dimensions of mediation in the global context.

##### ***6.7.1 Limited consideration of long-term impacts***

While much research focuses on the immediate outcomes of international mediation, the long-term effects on state sovereignty and governance remain understudied. Studies such as Hinnebusch highlight the challenges posed by fragmented political landscapes in post-conflict states such as Syria [1]. However, there is little empirical evidence on how international mediation influences state-building efforts, democratic transitions, or the recurrence of violence over long periods of time. This gap is crucial to understanding whether mediation promotes lasting peace or inadvertently destabilizes governance structures.

##### ***6.7.2 Insufficient attention to regional variations***

The existing literature often generalizes the role of international actors in different geopolitical and cultural contexts. Regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) have demonstrated unique approaches to mediation, reflecting their cultural, political, and institutional differences [2]. However, comparative studies examining the relative effectiveness of regional and global mediators in resolving conflicts in specific regions are rare. Understanding these regional variations can provide guidance on how to adapt mediation efforts to local contexts.

##### ***6.7.3 Excessive importance given to state actors***

Most publications give priority to state and institutional actors, neglecting the role of non-state actors such as civil society organizations, popular movements and private sector actors in the conflict resolution. MacFarlane highlights the growing importance of NGOs [3], but their interactions with international mediators and their impact on peacebuilding remain poorly studied. Studying these dynamics can provide a better understanding of how non-state actors contribute to or hinder mediation efforts, particularly in fragile states.



#### **6.7.4 Neglecting the accountability of intermediaries**

Research on the legitimacy and neutrality of mediators often emphasizes their importance to the success of mediation processes [4]. However, mechanisms for ensuring mediator accountability are not well studied, especially when their actions exacerbate conflicts or violate principles of sovereignty. Studies that examine how international norms and legal frameworks can regulate the behavior of intermediaries are needed to fill this gap.

#### **6.7.5 Lack of integration between conflict resolution and development**

Conflict resolution and development are often treated as separate areas in mediation research. However, the intersection of these areas is essential, as unresolved socio-economic grievances are often at the root of internal conflicts. Lederach's conflict transformation theory [5] emphasizes addressing root causes, but more interdisciplinary studies are needed to integrate mediation strategies with broader development goals, such as conflict reduction, education, and government reform.

#### **6.7.6 The underexplored role of technology and media**

The impact of technology and media on international mediation remains an emerging field of research. Social media platforms, digital diplomacy, and computer tools increasingly influence the way conflicts are perceived, framed, and resolved on a global scale. Studies are needed to explore the impact of these technologies on mediator legitimacy, public opinion, and conflict resolution dynamics.

#### **6.7.7 Inadequate exploration of the redefinition of sovereignty**

Theoretical frameworks such as the doctrine of sovereignty as responsibility [6] challenge traditional notions of sovereignty, but there is insufficient analysis of how these redefinitions affect state behavior and the acceptance of international mediation. More research is needed to understand how states reconcile their traditional claims to sovereignty with evolving international norms that prioritize human rights and humanitarian intervention.

#### **6.7.8 Gender and intersectional perspectives**

While gender is increasingly recognized as an essential factor in conflict resolution, its role in international mediation remains unexplored. There is a lack of research on how gender dynamics affect mediation strategies, mediator credibility, and the inclusiveness of peace processes. Cross-sectional approaches that examine the interplay between gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in mediation efforts are particularly rare.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

The politics of mediation represents a critical area of inquiry for understanding the intersection between international intervention, domestic conflict resolution, and state sovereignty. This study shed light on the multifaceted roles of international actors, highlighting their potential to facilitate peace and challenge traditional notions of state autonomy. The findings highlight that while international mediation can bring valuable resources, expertise and legitimacy to conflict resolution, it also raises complex questions about neutrality, legitimacy and long-term impacts on state sovereignty.

Key examples, such as the successful Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland and the protracted conflict in Syria, demonstrate the dual nature of international mediation. These cases show how the legitimacy, neutrality and alignment of mediators with local needs significantly influence outcomes. The study also highlights the importance of regulatory frameworks in guiding mediation efforts, ensuring that they are anchored in international legal norms and respect for sovereignty, while addressing the root causes of conflicts.

The changing global landscape, shaped by the proliferation of regional organizations, non-state actors, and technological advances, requires a more nuanced approach to mediation. Future efforts must prioritize inclusion, long-term peacebuilding, and the accountability of mediators. By bridging the gap between conflict resolution and development and integrating cross-cutting perspectives, international mediation can go beyond short-term solutions to foster lasting peace.

Ultimately, the politics of mediation reflect the broader challenges and opportunities of global governance in the 21st century. As the international community continues to grapple with the complexity of internal conflicts, a balanced approach that respects sovereignty while responding to humanitarian imperatives remains essential. Through rigorous regulation, context-specific strategies, and an unwavering commitment to justice, international mediation can become a more effective and fair tool for resolving domestic conflicts and advancing global peace.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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